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Musical rhetoric in integrated-media composition

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Abstract

Rhetorical analyses of popular music in film can guide composition teachers to develop an anticipatory pedagogy for transforming ready-made musical materials into coherent and persuasive psychologically interactive, integrated-media compositions. This essay offers an analysis of The Rolling Stones' "You Can't Always Get What You Want" as the thesis of Lawrence Kasdan's *The Big Chill* and an examination of a student-produced digital video homage to David Fincher's *Fight Club* that employs The Ronettes' "Be My Baby" as a vehicle for its argument. Scholarly attention to visual rhetoric has helped composition teachers and theorists envision new possibilities for composing in new media. Careful consideration of musical rhetoric may enable us to hear new possibilities for integrated-media composition as well.
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> We make our lives in identifications with the texts around us every day. Many of these texts are music, yet we continue to think of them as background, perhaps absent from consciousness, perhaps entertaining, perhaps annoying, but in all cases ultimately innocuous. (Kassabian, 2001, p. 14)

> To establish a balanced rhetorical approach, then, we must offer students experiences both in the analytic process of critique, which scrutinizes conventional expectations and power relations, and in the transformative process of design, which can change power relations by creating a new vision of knowledge. (Hocks, 2003, pp. 644–645).

1. Introduction

Lev Manovich (2001) suggested that "cinema is now becoming the cultural interface, a toolbox for all cultural communication, overtaking the printed word [. . .]. In short, what was cinema is now the human-computer interface" (p. 86). If this is true, then we should follow

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Mary Hocks' advice and scrutinize conventional expectations and power relations within cinema, or film, in order to create a new transformative process of computer-based integrated-media design and a new vision of knowledge. We can examine critically how sound is used to legitimate rhetorical ends in professional integrated-media models so that we may help students design their own aurally attuned integrated-media compositions. In this article, I will concentrate on one type of sound: music. Specifically, I will look at and listen to popular songs that are used in two films. First, I will analyze the rhetorical appeals elicited by a single piece of music in *The Big Chill*. Then, I will examine a student-produced integrated-media composition: an adaptation of *Fight Club* (Fincher, 1999) that features The Ronettes' 1963 hit single, "Be My Baby" (Barry, Greenwich, & Spector, 1963), to forward its message. In examining these two integrated-media compositions, I hope to expose a variety of aurally rhetorical devices available to both integrated-media critique and design. Joseph Janangelo (1998) wrote, "we may wish to develop a receptive, discerning, and anticipatory pedagogy so that, when our students do speak to us through new kinds of texts, we stand a reasonable chance of hearing and responding helpfully to whatever it is they have to say" (p. 41). My aim is to begin to develop an anticipatory pedagogy for composing *with* music. Manovich asks us to consider the "myth of interactivity" and the physical and psychological pedagogical ends that interactive new media attempt to serve (pp. 55–61). Consequently, I will explore how the musical elements in integrated-media compositions ask audiences to interact with the rhetorical products they yield.

I'm sure you have noticed my use of the term *integrated media* where you may otherwise expect to read the term multimedia. Multimedia is a term that seems to have a strong foothold as a means for talking about filmic compositions like digital video projects and Web-based projects that integrate sound, text, and still or moving images. However, I prefer the term *integrated media* to refer to filmic works because filmmakers integrate media, most often to yield a product that coalesces in a single medium—for instance digital video, film, or the Internet. I also feel that integrated media calls to our attention the individual modes and senses being addressed by multimodal and multisensory media. I realize that my preference for this term also situate me as both a linguist and a compositionist because the adjective integrated is derived from the verb *to integrate*, spotlighting the process of creating the product more than the product itself. And yet it identifies the product as well, possibly more accurately than the potentially misleading *multimedia*. In other words, multiple media come together to form a medium, not media. In the world of fine art, a multimedia work may combine pieces of cloth, paint, and crayon: These discrete elements remain discrete even as they are combined. However, when a filmmaker integrates speaking, music, text, and photography in a digital video production, these elements fuse within the final medium: digital video.

I should also explain that in this discussion I will occasionally use the term *soundtrack* to refer to the music of a film. My use of the term is decidedly metonymic. The soundtrack in a film usually consists of at least three main aural elements: dialogue, sound effects, and music (Buhler, 2001, p. 53). Thus, films with no musical score may have a soundtrack. What is important to our discussion is to remember that all elements of a film are selected by the filmmaker: the writer or composer who has integrated the various media. Just as a filmmaker selects a musical composer to score a film or selects ready-made songs to compile a musical score, the filmmaker also selects the other information that we will or will not hear. We may hear

two characters talking in a crowded restaurant but not hear any other noise that would surely be there, for example, other restaurant patrons, background Muzak, or wait-staff explaining the daily specials. The filmmaker selects, interprets, and focuses what we hear just as carefully as she, or in the case of most Hollywood films *he*, selects what we will see and how we will see it. However, critical analyses of film seem to look, not listen, for meaning. For instance, David Neumeyer and James Buhler write about music in film yet concede that "the soundtrack (music, dialogue, and effects) is subordinate to the imagetrack in narrative film" (2001, p. 36). My aim here is to begin to question this assumption and to turn our attention to the soundtrack as a semantic partner of the imagetrack, not a subordinate.

I can think of no better way to argue for the rhetorical prominence of the soundtrack than to recommend editing a few minutes of digital video. I encourage you and your students to get your hands dirty—to wrestle with the complex and rewarding demands of integrating sound with their visual and verbal rhetoric. I will discuss only the use of ready-made music in film, not original music scored specifically for film. Many composition students, both musicians and non-musicians, have already begun putting ready-made musical works to rhetorical use in their work, a practice that brings up some new concerns—critical, functional, rhetorical, and legal—for both composition students and instructors. While this discussion will attend to critical and rhetorical concerns, I do not mean to suggest that functional and legal issues are in any way less important. Quite the contrary. As Stuart Selber (2004) urged, functional literacy empowers digital media composers to be "alert to the limitations of technology and the circumstances in which human awareness is required" (p. 477). When we create digital video projects, we nearly always find that we must attend to the selection, placement (both physical and rhetorical), and editing of music. The resulting functional awareness enriches our critical analyses and the rhetoric we generate from critique of integrated-media compositions.

Furthermore, attending to copyright policy and managing what it means to publish and/or make a copy of a work constitutes its own form of functional literacy. Integrating music that is protected by copyright—and there is very little recorded music that is not—places some important restrictions on the ways that students may share their compositions. Lawrence Lessig (2004) discusses copyright law, property, public domain materials, permission, and the means of *defense* known as "fair use" in his book, *Free Culture*, which should be required reading for all teachers of integrated-media composition. Lessig's parallel project, Creative Commons, as well as the Internet Archive may provide students access to music that they may use, integrate, and share freely or with reasonable (mostly non-commercial) restriction. The music protected by copyright law, "Be My Baby," in the student-produced work I will discuss prevents me from sharing the student's film with you. However, the project provided a means for the student to develop both functional and rhetorical skills for integrating media. And the project continues to provide a vehicle for critical review of the student's argument and rhetorical choices.

I certainly encourage students and instructors to develop collaborative relationships with musical composers and/or to experiment with computer programs such as Apple's Garage-Band in order to develop integrated-media compositions with "original" musical soundtracks. However, as we will see in the two films discussed below, ready-made musical texts can offer a composer just as much room for creativity and metaphoric expression by way of the powerfully associative qualities of popular music. They empower a form of collaboration as well. Janangelo (1998) examined the truly multimediated collage art of Joseph Cornell

in order to "suggest a shaping strategy that can help authors transform ready-made material into coherent and persuasive nonsequential text" (p. 31). Janangelo intended his discussion to direct a pedagogy for "composing persuasive hypertexts." However, Manovich (2001) warned against confusing physical interactivity (the presence of hypertext links that take an audience to specific physical destinations) and psychological interactivity. He wrote, "The psychological processes of filling-in, hypothesis formation, recall, and identification, which are required for us to comprehend any text or image at all, are mistakenly identified with an objectively existing structure of interactive links" (p. 57). My focus throughout this discussion places shaping strategies for psychological interactivity as the primary goal for composing with ready-made musical works. By using ready-made musical works, non-musician composers can be empowered to communicate with music, even if they do not possess the abilities to make, record, or compose music.

I also do not discuss popular music from a musicological or semiotic frame. Discussing strategies for making meaning of works of music exclusively on their own terms removes music from the very integrated-media context I hope to observe. Rather, I consider how the works of popular music provide associative categories for making meaning within the contexts of other information. Music, like all forms of symbolic action, never truly stands alone. Brock Dethier (2003) suggested that music provides "a bridge between individuals, genres, time periods, and groups" (p. xvi). We encounter music in a variety of contexts. Those contexts shape the meanings we derive. Furthermore, those meanings have a tendency to adhere to the pieces of music and color future encounters with the same music in other contexts.

Filmmakers regularly exploit these sticky associations in ways that have been unavailable to authors of silently mediated texts. So I will now turn my focus toward developing an analytic process of critique that scrutinizes the conventional expectations associated with music that dwell in film contexts. If, as I have asserted, the musical soundtrack is not subordinate to the visual track, then we should expect that it should play a key rhetorical role in directing how audiences should filter meaning. For teachers of writing, there can be no rhetorical role more key than the thesis of any argument. So let's start listening there.

2. Music as thesis in *The Big Chill*

At the beginning of Lawrence Kasdan's 1983 hit, *The Big Chill*, a group of college friends come together to mourn the suicide of their peer, Alex. Alex left no suicide note. His friends, who have each become increasingly absorbed into their own concerns since college, struggle to understand what has happened to Alex and to themselves. We are not told specifically how old these friends are, but we are led to believe that the story takes place when the film was made, 1983. The music, plot, and the age of the characters suggest that their college years spanned the late 1960s. At the funeral, the preacher attempts to summarize the life of Alex, someone he admittedly did not know. His discussion of lost hope is specific to suicide but not specific to Alex. The preacher's discussion of suicide characterizes the instance of Alex's death (something unknown to Alex' friends), not Alex' life (something known to Alex' friends). Ultimately, the preacher's eulogy fails, perhaps because he did not know Alex. Next, Harold (Kevin Kline) attempts to make sense of his friend's life and death. Harold refers

to Alex's key role in holding the group of friends together but, again, provides no specific characterization of Alex. Harold is overcome by emotion and cannot finish; his eulogy also fails, perhaps because he knew Alex too well.

Then, Karen (JoBeth Williams) goes to the church organ to play an instrumental version of Alex's favorite song: The Rolling Stones' 1969 release, "You Can't Always Get What You Want" (Jagger & Richards, 1968, 1969). All of the friends smile. They appreciate the irony of the song: It is both appropriate to the Alex they knew and the time when they knew him and inappropriate to the church setting and their current lifestyles. The lyric suggested by the music—"You can't always get what you want"—succinctly captures the loss of hope that the preacher had tried to articulate, as well as the ironic conclusion that defines the ethos for the film—"But if you try sometimes, you just might find/You get what you need." This title could be the epitaph on Alex's tombstone; instead, it is the thesis for Kasdan's film.

As the song segues from Karen's diegetic (originating from the action on film) church-organ, instrumental version of the song to the non-diegetic (not originating from the action on film) original Rolling Stones' recording, we are transported, along with the characters in the film, to a place in history, a way of life, and an ideology that suddenly seems at odds with our current situations. The song provides a lens for us to focus our attentions on who Alex was, who the other characters in the film were when they knew Alex, who they've become, and who we, the audience, have become. The song is a filter for us to know and identify with the characters of the film. Like any filter, it allows some things "in" and keeps others "out." For Kenneth Burke (1966), terministic screens "filter" ideas by directing attention in discourse-specific ways (p. 45). Burke compared them to colored lenses on cameras that allow different views of the same object (p. 45). Screens separate things we want from things we don't want. A screen in a window allows light and air to pass through seemingly unimpeded while bugs and various other unwanted debris are filtered out. A terministic screen functions in much the same way—a terminology allows "relevant" information to pass through seemingly unimpeded while "irrelevant" information stays outside with the bugs and debris: where it belongs. The result is a cleaner, clearer, filtered version of the world. For Burke, language is a species of symbolic action. However, his term, *terministic screens*, filters for language even as it eschews other types of symbolic action. For our purposes, we need to filter for a larger variety of symbolic action; therefore, I suggest the term *symbolic screen*.

Symbolic screens are inevitable; we can't communicate without them. The best we can do is try to identify them and the ways that they filter our realities. Kasdan uses the Stones' song to set up the symbolic screen with which we should "view" his film. Through this lens we see what is important about Alex and his friends: the expectations, desires, and needs of their generation. We also don't see what is not important: Alex's story. Alex didn't need to leave a note to explain his suicide; the maxim made explicit in the song lyric tells us that we are meant to make a generalization that will apply to the entire audience. Alex's life (and death) is a metaphor for our lives.

However, the song alone doesn't necessarily tell us all of this. Burke says that "the normal person has a variety of feelings attached to the same object" (1968, p. 177). The song consists of symbolic objects: words. But, we can also think of the song itself as a symbolic object: It represents information not present in the lyrics or music. Many collections of words or symbols may have unique gestalt symbolism: For instance, "The Star Spangled Banner" conveys

symbolic references beyond the sum of its parts, as does the Bible. What makes these gestalt symbols so interesting, and so powerfully rhetorical, is that where the gestalt goes, so go its parts. By situating the song within the film, Kasdan asks us to consider the song on its own terms (a collection of notes that realize melody, harmony, instrumentation, lyrics, and style), but Kasdan also asks us to consider the song as a gestalt symbol (a cultural artifact that synec-dochically refers to its historic context and the viewer's personal, prior experiences with the song). Kasdan, likewise, asks us to consider the song in relation to the action going on in the film and as a part of the film soundtrack. If "You Can't Always Get What You Want" were not situated in this film, we would not necessarily make the associations specific to a generation of college students of the late 1960s as they try to come to terms with whom they've become over the ensuing years. In fashioning a context for us to *hear* the song, Kasdan has given us a lens to *see* his filtered, narrowed, and interpreted meaning for the song. The song, as Dethier (2003) has suggested, creates a "bridge" between us (the auditors); the characters, genres, time periods, and groups of people represented in the film; and Kasdan himself.

The song accomplishes what dialogue alone cannot. It summons an ethos for making mean-ing within the film. It is the key rhetorical element of the scene. What makes the song so clearly rhetorical is not that the characters identify with its symbolic reference but that *we* identify with the song—or that *we* don't. The song signals a defining dimension of the intended audience: If we recognize the instrumental version of the song well enough to make the ironic-yet-absent lyrical association, as the characters obviously do, then we are "in," and if not, then we are "out." The rhetoric of film, like all rhetoric, is always situated. Burke (1984) stated, "Any given situation derives its character from the entire framework of interpretation by which we judge it" (p. 35). In this scene, and throughout his film, Kasdan demands that audience members rely on the entire framework of interpretation available to them to judge the narrative.

We don't know Alex any more than the preacher does, yet we are invited to identify with Alex through the music. The song we hear creates an ethos within the film and bases its authority on our prior experiences and concerns. On that authority, Kasdan's audience may make sense of the actions, dilemmas, and feelings of the characters. On that authority his audience may *identify* with the point of the film in general and the scene specifically. Burke used *identification* as his key term for subsuming both art and argument, the poetic and the rhetorical, under the umbrella of *rhetoric* (1969b). Burke explained that Aristotle's key term for rhetoric, *persuasion*, is a type of identification. For Burke, all language use, indeed all symbolic action, is rhetorical. Kasdan's use of the song, a cultural symbol, is clearly rhetorical.

If, as I claim, the song is the thesis of the film, we should expect that it will function like any other thesis statement. Erika Lindemann (1995) wrote, "*Message* refers to what is being said *about* the topic or subject, about the context. In a writing course the term *thesis* refers to message, to experience that is filtered, narrowed, and interpreted by the writer" (p. 15). Lindemann's definition of thesis, like Burke's discussion of terministic screens, relies on the process of "filtering." Andrea Lunsford and John Ruszkiewicz defined thesis more traditionally as "a sentence that succinctly states a writer's main point" (2001, p. 377). They add, "Making a claim is an important early step in writing an argument, with the remainder of the process being involved in testing and refining that claim or thesis" (p. 31). Even in this more traditional definition, the thesis is a filter; it screens for evidence that best suits its purpose. A thesis is a rhetorical screen.

In *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*, Lindemann (1995) linked the terms *thesis* and *promise* by way of analogical extension: "When we write, we begin with a promise to our readers that the rest of the piece should keep" (p. 130). Andrea Lunsford (2003) aligned thesis both with promise (p. 63) and purpose: The argument should not only fulfill the promise of the author, but the author's main purpose(s) as well (p. 87). This indicates that the thesis provides a structure for developing the argument: It should state what the author will do and how the author will do it. Lindemann claimed, "In short essays, but in other kinds of discourse too, writers raise a reader's expectations early, generally in the first few sentences. Form is a way of fulfilling those expectations, of arranging material in ways a reader can follow" (p. 131).[1] These composition scholars give us several concepts to consider along with the thesis: message, topic/subject, context, promise, filtering/narrowing/interpreting, sentence, succinct, point, claim, purpose, expectations, and form. Obviously, much more is presented in a thesis statement than just a writer's point and the pattern of its articulation; an entire ethos for making meaning is suggested.

Michael Hyde (2004), building on the work of Martin Heidegger, wrote that ethos can be defined as "dwelling places" that "define the grounds, the abodes or habitats, where a person's ethics and moral character take form and develop" (p. xiii). Ethos is situated with us in the places where we dwell—the scenes that contain and shape our rhetorical acts. Through the thesis/promise statement, the Burkeian scene[2] is set for establishing what type of action is appropriate, what is not appropriate, what should be expected, and what should not. Those features are articulated by establishing the set of rules for conducting the "discussion."

Returning to Kasdan's thesis, we should be able to answer the following questions: Is Kasdan's thesis a sentence that succinctly states his main point? What does Kasdan promise to do? Does the rest of Kasdan's piece keep that promise? What form or structure will Kasdan's argument follow?

2.1. Is Kasdan's thesis a sentence that succinctly states his main point?

On one hand, the song's message boils down to the lyric of its chorus, which certainly is a sentence: "You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you just might find, you get what you need." Of course, if Kasdan only cared about the sentence, he could have had a character speak it during the eulogy. But Kasdan specifically has his two speakers fail to produce effective eulogies. Aristotle categorizes eulogies as epideictic rhetoric: the speech of praise or blame. For Aristotle, "an epideictic speaker excels at character portrayal" (Murphy & Katula, 1995, p. 104). It's ironic, indeed, that both attempts at epideictic speech fail to evoke Alex's character. The song accomplishes what the eulogies cannot, perhaps because its appeal is not merely linguistic and certainly is not merely literal. The song contextualizes and filters the sentence in a manner that is critical to Kasdan's thesis. Kasdan offers us an interpretation

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[1] Lindemann derives her statement from Kenneth Burke's *Counter-Statement*: "Form is the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite" (1995, p. 31), and "*Form* in literature is an arousing and fulfillment of desires" (p. 124).

[2] Burke states: "The scene is a fit 'container' for the act, expressing in fixed properties the same quality that the action expresses in terms of development" (1969a, p. 3).

of the sentence, one that we are to adopt as our perspective for the rest of the film. By using the song, Kasdan is able to play out several scenarios that further contextualize the thesis as the song continues to play. As the diegetic music segues to the non-diegetic music, the characters leave the funeral to go to the cemetery. They embrace and console one another, give us some clues about their inter-relationships and positions within the group hierarchy, and, importantly, situate themselves in the 1980s culture by showing us who they've become. Succinctly, we see their cars, learn what they do (or don't do) for a living, and learn whether they are single or married or divorced. These features contribute to the symbolic screen for assessing the thesis: They filter our attentions and introduce categories for evidence that will, and will not, be used to support the thesis.

A feature of sound is partially responsible for the effect of this thesis: its ability to create intertextual continuity. The music allows a common theme, in this case the thesis, to be audibly iterated as the various other visual and auditory information is presented. Joseph Janangelo (1998) criticized the intertextuality of hypertexts that link "ready-made texts" by way of juxtaposition instead of integration (p. 25). Kasdan employs the Stones' song, a ready-made text, to integrate audibly his various original scenarios. Music is especially effective in this role because, as Anahid Kassabian asserts in the epigraph, we are so accustomed to it being in the background of our lives: in our cars, in elevators, during our romantic interludes, while we work, as we shout above it during our conversations in bars, and in the films we watch. We all have soundtracks to our lives that situate us in a variety of ways. Kasdan focuses our attention on one very specific soundtrack to declare the ethos for his film. In doing so, he also limits the scope of his thesis to the action that transpires while the song plays. The end of the song signals the end of the thesis.

Another feature of the song promotes irony as a primary focus in Kasdan's thesis: its style or genre. Burke (1969a) referred to irony as "the strategic moment of reversal": "what goes forth as A returns as non-A" (p. 517). The characters' immediate reactions to Karen's music selection suggest that the song is inappropriate, or in Burkeian terms *impious*. They look at one another in obvious disbelief—rolling their eyes, shaking their heads, and smiling. In *Permanence and Change*, Burke (1984) discussed meaning in terms of piety (adherence to our orientations) and impiety (altering our orientations). Pious meanings are no more true, precise, or rational than impious meanings; they are simply more analogous to other meanings "determined by the particular kind of interest uppermost at the time" (p. 104). Any discussion of piety is inherently ethical, inherently situated. Piety locates us by adhering to our common assumptions given who and where we are.

Rock and Roll has always signified rebellion: impiety. Since the group's inception, the members of the Rolling Stones have usually been regarded as the "bad boys" of Rock and Roll, among the most impious of the impious. The Rock and Roll music of the 1960s provided the soundtrack to one of the most impious times in U.S. history when the young openly challenged most of the social and political conventions of "interest uppermost at the time." Religions and social conventions promote piety: They are ethical; they declare rules. The Rolling Stones' music was never meant to be played on a church organ—in a church nonetheless—during a funeral. After all, this is the group that in 1968 encouraged "Sympathy for the Devil." This music selection is immediately one of the most seemingly inappropriate, impious songs possible. Yet, the song effectively delivers Kasdan's point, which suggests not only a semantic

irony, but also an ethical irony. The Stones themselves played upon this irony most notably in the section of their original recording not included in *The Big Chill*, the introduction, sung by a boys' choir. The irony in 1969 was that the Stones brought the piety and temperance of the church to their song. The irony in 1983 is that the impiety and decadence of the Stones has come to church. The Rolling Stones have become the establishment right along with the generation of young rebels who now sit, middle-aged, in the pews of the church: all grown up, the new face of piety. A has returned as non-A. Even if this generation wants to cling to a sense of rebellion, they must recognize the piety of their impiety. If the Stones have indeed set the standard for impiety, then impiety has been standardized, and their standardization is rendered pious.

Burke's definition of irony suggests a voyage: What goes forth as A returns as non-A. Both the Stones' musical composition and Kasdan's choice of church organ introduction facilitate this ironic journey. The music starts out sounding not very Rock and Roll at all in terms of tempo, instrumentation, and attitude. The tempo is slow; the instrumentation begins with a single acoustic guitar and a melody played by a single French horn, and then Mick's voice sings the first verse to the acoustic guitar accompaniment. A single shaker is added to the mix to accentuate the first chorus—the thesis statement—which concludes with a swell of piano and organ during the final two bars ("but if you try sometimes, you might find") and a chorus of female vocalists to help Mick deliver the ironic tag line ("you get what you need"). With the word *need*, we are presented with a full rhythm section—drum set, bass guitar, and an electric guitar—to make the Rock and Roll transformation complete. The song ends sounding very Rock and Roll, albeit with an ironic reintroduction of the boys' choir to the mix, with bongo drums and a segue to cut-time, a musical turn that makes the tempo sound twice as fast. In the end, we hear a bit of the beginning and a bit of the middle all mixed together. Situated within the film, the song encourages us to adopt an ironic attitude to further filter the scene and helps us see that Kasdan's characters don't start out looking very much like who they were when they were in college, but they end up looking much more like their former selves.

As a sentence, the lyric invokes irony to make a general ethical appeal. Irony (A returns as non-A) shares much in common with metaphor (A is not B; however, A is B): Both rhetorical devices ask us to consider something in terms of something else—something it, by definition, is not. Within the song, the sentence acquires contextual information that assigns attributive categories of association to the sentence and shapes the general statement into a thesis statement specific to Kasdan's message. The sentence is a maxim, and as a maxim (a general truth) it presents a rather unarguable claim: not the stuff of strong theses. However, the song, situated within the film, filters/narrows/interprets the sentence to create a thesis statement by way of ironic juxtaposition, something the sentence, on its own, cannot accomplish.

2.2. *What does Kasdan promise to do? Does the rest of the piece keep that promise?*

Using the entire framework of interpretation available to us, we can begin to interpret that Kasdan's topic/subject deals with how the expectations of a generation have manifested themselves ironically over time. What is apparently in question is the transition from the characters' pre-career, youthful ideological expectations to their mid-career, middle-aged actualizations. Kasdan's purpose, therefore, is to redefine the apparent paradoxical relationship

between what we wanted (manifested in 1960s idealism) and what we need (manifested in 1980s consumerism). Kasdan directs our attention by asking us to consider the music of the 1960s in conjunction with topics made obvious in his thesis: the possessions, professions, and obsessions of the characters in his film as well as the members of his audience. Kasdan's point/message/claim is that we may not have what we thought we wanted in the 60s, but we have what we need—that on first glance, we may not look like who we were or who we said we would become but that we are who we need to be.

Kasdan promises to show us that, when viewed through the symbolic screens he has selected (the ethical dwelling place/scene of his argument), we are likely to see that A will return as non-A, that our lives will reflect a paradoxical and ironic pattern similar to those presented in his film. We can expect that Kasdan's evidence will follow the topics presented in his thesis (rhetorical screen). These three categories (possessions, professions, obsessions) subsume much of what is wanted by the characters and by the audience. We will consider these categories through the lens focusing on the valued relationships needed by the characters. We can expect to be surprised by what we find because we will realize a reversal of perspective—if we don't already see it, that is. Here, Burke's (1969b) rhetorical god-term, *identification*, does seem more appropriate, if less pious, than Aristotle's *persuasion*. Kasdan appears to be preaching to the choir, not soliciting converts. However, we can expect that Kasdan will ask us to consider the irony of many of the symbols of 1960s impiety that no longer alter our orientations; they adhere to our expectations, sometimes quite surprisingly.

Ultimately, Kasdan's thesis does keep its promise, at least to the characters. All of the characters begin to rethink what they want in terms of what they need. Karen says as much to Sam (Tom Berenger) when he initially turns down her romantic advances. Karen says, "Don't give me that shit. For 15 years you've acted like I'm the one you really *wanted*, and you've made sure that everybody knew it." Shortly thereafter, she realizes that she doesn't really want to leave her husband for Sam—that even though she doesn't have what she has wanted, she has gotten what she needs and now, ironically, wants. The same holds true for the rest of the characters; their possessions, professions, and obsessions no longer devour the lion's share of what they want. A returns as non-A. The success of Kasdan's film may suggest that his thesis keeps its promise for a large part of his audience as well.

2.3. What form or structure will Kasdan's argument follow?

The first thing Kasdan has promised is to deliver a film; therefore, Kasdan's context, among other things, is that of a film. Consequently, viewers can expect that Kasdan's point will be articulated in a manner appropriate to films. The form of film provides means for both arousing and satisfying our appetites, creating and fulfilling our expectations, by way of arranging material in ways we expect to be able to follow. We expect that the form of Kasdan's film will be entertaining. We expect that we will be asked to identify with at least some of the characters in the film. We can also expect information to be presented in aural form. For the most part, contemporary films are not silent: Sound is a pious element of contemporary films even if, as Kassabian (2001) claimed in the epigraph, it is largely "innocuous" (p. 14). By promising to deliver a film, Kasdan tells us that we can expect music may be one of the forms of sound available for our meaning making. In using the song to articulate his thesis, Kasdan tells us

explicitly that the music of the film will be responsible for carrying and shaping much of the meaning making in his film.

Filmmakers ask us to identify with them and the other members of their audiences through appeals conveyed via a number of media. We must look at all of the visual information and listen to all of the aural information to be able to see and hear a filmmaker's point. We must also recognize that it all matters—it all contributes to the meanings that we associate with, or assign to, the film. We derive meaning both logically and paralogically; language is only one of several vehicles for rhetorical appeal in cinema. We cannot read a film the way we read a book. To do so ignores many of the rhetorical appeals that shape the way we make meanings from the information presented to us. Any given situation in film derives its character from the entire framework of interpretation by which we judge it. Ethos in film is determined visually, aurally, and linguistically. Kasdan's soundtrack is not subordinate to his imagetrack.

The Big Chill has offered us a model for assessing a piece of ready-made music employed to convey the thesis statement of a film. More importantly, Kasdan's film exposes ways that music can work rhetorically when words alone fail. I will now examine how an undergraduate student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC–CH) determines *ethos* visually, aurally, and linguistically in a four-minute, digital video homage to David Fincher's (1999) *Fight Club*. Unlike Kasdan, the student does not use a song to forward just a thesis statement, but to contain the entire argument. Like Kasdan, the student makes use of the durative quality of music to integrate the evidence that supports the argument. It seems appropriate that I too should model my argument after Kasdan's; therefore, I will precede the student's integrated-media argument by reviewing two less successful, though more traditionally composed, scholarly arguments about *Fight Club*.

3. When words fail: seeing film through music

Henry Giroux (2001) criticized the "superficial gesture toward social critique" presented in *Fight Club* (p. 5). Giroux commented that "*Fight Club* has nothing to say about the structural violence of unemployment, job insecurity, cuts in public spending, or the destruction of institutions capable of defending social provisions and the public good" (p. 5). Giroux argued for a responsible "public pedagogy" in popular film that "offers an opportunity to engage and understand its politics of representation as part of a broader commentary on the intersection of consumerism, masculinity, violence, politics, and gender relations" (p. 6). Giroux complained that the "macho ebullience" of the film reflects a "pathology" central to the film, "its intensely misogynist representation of women, and its intimation that violence is the only means through which men can be cleansed of the disastrous effect that women have on shaping their identities" (p. 18). Given Giroux's interpretation of the film, one can hardly fault the logic of his plea. However, any interpretation, as Burke (1984) illustrated, is driven by oversimplification and analogical extension (p. 107). In the words of a familiar proverb, "When all you have is a hammer, all your problems start looking like nails." I certainly do not mean to imply that Giroux has only one theory in his analytical toolbox; however, the perspective he has selected seems more suited to his social agenda than to Fincher's film. Geoffrey Sirc (2001) responded, "To demand a better, more politically rigorous *Fight Club*, one that, as Henry Giroux suggests,

says something about unemployment, spending cuts, and corporate lay-offs—I can't fathom who would pay money for a feel-bad lesson like that" (p. 425). I can't fathom that Fincher could imagine it either; consequently, I don't believe that this is the film Fincher attempted, and thus failed, to make.

This is a film about misnaming the unnamed. Jack (Edward Norton) is misnamed. In fact, he is unnamed. Obviously, he must have a name. He has a job. He has credit cards. He makes flight reservations. However, we are never offered his name. When Marla Singer (Helena Bonham Carter), the film's female protagonist, asks what his name is, he doesn't tell her. When he speaks to Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) on the public phone after his apartment has exploded, he introduces himself as the "clever guy" from the airplane. He has business cards, and a desk, and a boss, but no name. The names he offers in his therapy sessions are as fabricated as the terminal illnesses he fakes in order to gain membership (e.g., Cornelius, Lenny, Bruce, Travis, and Rupert). The name "Jack" actually comes from an anatomy book that he reads—"I am Jack's medulla oblongata," "I am Jack's colon"—and subsequently refashions throughout the film: "I am Jack's smirking revenge," "I am Jack's wasted life," "I am Jack's inflamed sense of rejection." While the main character of the film is reluctant to offer his name, those of us who discuss him are apparently even more reluctant to allow him to be unnamed. And so, he becomes Jack, even if he is not Jack. A name is a symbol of identity. Jack and Tyler call out the names of famous people whom they would like to fight: William Shatner, Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln. These names identify specific people. In the anatomy book, the name Jack does not identify anyone specific. Jack is every-*man*. Thus, the central character of Fincher's film, as Jack, is unidentified. He is non-specific; the credits list him as Narrator. He does not want to divulge who he is. The only name he offers is Tyler Durden, the name he has chosen for his fictitious alter ego. Tyler Durden is the name that Jack wants to have. Tyler Durden is the rebellious, handsome stud that Jack wants to be. Yet, Tyler Durden is no more real than Cornelius' testicular cancer. Jack is hiding something—something unnamed and personal.

Thomas Peele named something that he claimed Jack is hiding. He (2001) asked, "What are we to make of a man who desires another man sexually but is not gay?" (p. 865). *Gay* is a name that Jack never selects for describing his pain in the film. There is no real evidence for naming Jack homosexual, or is there? Jack, apparently, has quite a bit of heterosexual sex with Marla throughout the film—albeit in his inhabitation of the personality of Tyler. However, Jack gives us plenty of reason to believe he has homosexual desires for Tyler. Peele illustrated the homoeroticism of Tyler's gun in Jack's mouth at the beginning and end of the film. Peele also referred to the more graphically homoerotic descriptions in Chuck Palahniuk's (1996) novel *Fight Club*:

> In the novel, Jack makes this desire [his sexual/romantic desire for Tyler] explicit in the first chapter, claiming that he, Tyler, and Marla Singer "have a sort of triangle thing going on here. I want Tyler. Tyler wants Marla. Marla wants me" [Palahniuk, 1996, p. 14]. Jack is not only sexually attracted to Tyler Durden, he is also in love with him. (p. 864)

Peele identifies other homoerotic elements present in the film, such as the pictures of penises that Tyler splices into family films and Marla's large, lifelike rubber phallus that captures Tyler's attention (p. 864). Peele states, "My claim here is not that Durden and Jack are *really* gay. As both the novel and the film make clear, the center of the tension is Marla Singer" (p. 864).

Ultimately, Peele does not seem to want to commit to his homoerotic read of the film. He supports his queer reading of the film by discussing evidence from the novel and from several pictures of Brad Pitt in drag published in *Rolling Stone* to promote *Fight Club*. Evidently Peele does not find enough compelling evidence in the film itself to support his homoerotic interpretation. Furthermore, Peele wrote,

> Thus, while Giroux may be correct that this film is misogynist, this film is also queer. This film does not simply denigrate women (if that is in fact what it does), it also suggests the possibilities for an eroticized, pleasurable queer space where men don't have testicles and where women have penises. (p. 867)

Here, Peele commits to a noncommittal recognition of Giroux's interpretation of the film. Peele indicates that Giroux may be correct, but Peele, evidently, cannot be certain. Why? In the end, Peele is left to articulate: "Queer lives and queer studies have much to offer the mainstream, heterosexual majority when it comes to challenging predetermined gender identities" (p. 868). In essence, Peele commits to queer studies, if not his queer reading of *Fight Club*. Like those of Giroux, Peele's words represent his apparent interests more than they represent the film. Just as the two speakers who deliver eulogies in *The Big Chill* fail to evoke the character of Alex, the words chosen by Giroux and Peele fail to evoke the character of *Fight Club*.

A student in a 2003 Introduction to Film Criticism course at UNC-CH submitted a four-minute, digital video homage to David Fincher's *Fight Club* for extra credit. Unlike Giroux and Peele, the student does not pull punches while interpreting Fincher's homoerotic film. The student's film featured a modified re-staging of a fight scene from Fincher's film, interspersed with a collection of additional scenes that accentuate the homoeroticism of *Fight Club*, effectively deconstructing the overt machismo of the original. The student's choice of excerpts from the film may suggest a homoerotic theme, but the student's choice of musical soundtrack provides the rhetoric that really drives home the student's point: The Ronettes' 1963 hit single, "Be My Baby" (Barry et al., 1963).

The student film focuses on a fight scene loosely compiled from two fight scenes in Fincher's original. In the student film, a group of five shirtless young men stand and listen to a faux Tyler Durden announce the rules for Fight Club, just as Brad Pitt does in the original film. Unlike Peele's critique, the student's homoerotic interpretation needs no evidence outside of the script and action of the film. The only words spoken in the student film are the rules for Fight Club: "(1) You do not talk about Fight Club. (2) You do not talk about Fight Club. (3) When someone says 'Stop,' goes limp, or taps out, the fight is over. (4) Only two guys to a fight. (5) One fight at a time, fellas. (6) No shirts, no shoes. (7) Fights go on as long as they have to. (8) If this is your first night at Fight Club, you have to fight." Then, in a rhetorical departure from the original, the faux Tyler and Jack grapple, throw punches, bleed, and kick in a slow-motion *dance* to the sound of Ronnie Spector's feminine plea: "Be my baby now-ow-ow. Whoa-oh-oh-oh." As Ronnie Spector sings, "for every kiss you give me, I'll give you three," the punches traded by Jack and Tyler are metaphors for kisses. Jack even lip-synchs the words as Tyler pummels him. The music continues as we visually break from the fight to see Jack and Tyler in a montage of scenes adapted from the original, such as Jack embracing Tyler (mutated into Bob [Meatloaf] complete with "bitch tits"), and Jack and Tyler hitting golf balls together. With Ronnie singing along, these scenes now seem like romantic scenes from dates the two had been on; these are

no longer the movements of two roommates, men who are simply comfortable with each other, but of two men who are lovers. The student film also includes scenes that feature Tyler sitting spread-eagled on the kitchen counter wearing a bathrobe, Jack's "Ozzie and Harriet"-inspired straightening of Tyler's bowtie, an obvious still picture of an erect penis spliced into the action, and, of course, Tyler standing above Jack with his gun in Jack's mouth.

Given the overt homoeroticism outed by the song, the rules for Fight Club resonate with new homoerotic gusto. These are the rules to homosexual sex in the nineties. The first two rules, central to the unnamed homoerotic thesis for Jack, reiterate Jack's mantra: Don't talk about homosexual sex! This is the twice-spoken rule of silence that allows us to identify the film's central tension not as Marla Singer, as Peele states, but as blatant-yet-unnamed homoeroticism/homophobia, as Peele apparently wants to state but doesn't. Jack needs to remind himself twice not to talk about what is really troubling him. Rule three could not make its sexual allusions any clearer: The first part states *no means no*, and the second part states that when you go *limp* or are tapped-out, it's over. Obvious enough. Rules four and five are consistent with the public outcry for monogamy brought about by AIDS and immortalized in the popular culture of the eighties and nineties by the music video for George Michael's "I Want Your Sex" (1987). After all, Michael assures us, "sex is best when it's one-on-one." Rule six, another AIDS-inspired rule for condom use, tells participants to take off their clothes but to keep their private parts covered. Rule seven states that it isn't over until it's over (i.e., when someone's had enough or has gone limp). Finally, rule eight states that for it truly to be your first time, you'll need to consummate the relationship. This plays nicely with Peele's observation that Jack and Tyler are not *really* homosexual. There's only one way to be *really* homosexual, evidently, and that is to participate in a homosexual sex act. Since we never see Jack and Tyler have sex with each other, they are evidently not *really* homosexual. However, we do see them trade punches, something that Jack recalls later as he pummels himself in his boss's office. Rule eight makes members expose their identities in a social act of intimate performance. Jack can no longer fantasize about participating; he must get into the ring and do it. In the student's film, that is precisely what Jack does.

This student's argument could not translate to print and encourage the audience to make meaning in the same way. For example, my explanation above may articulate a similar point more fully and possibly more precisely than the student's rhetoric; however, it is neither as succinct nor as entertaining as the student's film. The full rhetorical impact of the student's composition cannot emerge without the song, which functions metaphorically and ironically to forward the author's main point. Like Kasdan, this student uses a piece of popular music from the 1960s to enable us to consider a current situation from a specific historical perspective. As in *The Big Chill*, music works when words alone fail. The song, when juxtaposed with the images and integrated into the scene, asks audience members to consider the explicitly sexual plea of the lyric, thinly veiled behind the euphemistic "baby." We recognize that Ronnie Spector is asking for a "lover" by the orgasmic allusion in her impassioned "whoa-oh-oh-oh" and the apparent repression and aching that has led to the just-noticeably-different immediacy communicated in the three-syllable "now-ow-ow." Ronnie is not to be denied. Evidently, neither is Jack.

The student successfully and cleverly employs musical, cultural, visual, and verbal elements to declare an ethos for interpreting the thesis. The student asks us to use the entire framework

of interpretation available to us to judge the situation of the scene. He has created for us a dwelling place—a situated ethos—and suggested that we regard it with a humorous attitude. The elements of the digital video homage are predominantly found or re-enacted, yet the results are unique. The student delivers and defends an authentic thesis: a point that Giroux and Peele have shown to be truly arguable. The student demonstrates a critical understanding of the source material, synthesizes that material into a point, articulates that point, uses evidence from the original film to argue the point, and extends the discussion occasioned by the film. As Janangelo (1998) encouraged, the student has transformed ready-made material into a coherent and persuasive nonsequential text. His text is nonsequential not in its physical and temporal linearity of its format, but in the psychological interactivity that it demands of its audience. The film does not merely synthesize the student's point into a traditional thesis statement (e.g., *Fight Club* is inherently homoerotic). Instead, it provides an opportunity for interactive learning by way of metaphor; the student allows us to make the meaning ourselves by strategically providing us with a variety of media to integrate. In this case, the song provides the topic, an invitation to sex or courtship, and the film provides the vehicles for analogical extension: Sex is fighting, courtship is golfing, romance is embracing. Love is war.

4. Conclusions

The argument made in the *Fight Club* homage neither looks nor sounds like a traditional academic argument. Mary Hocks (2003) stated that a balanced integrated-media composition pedagogy "asks teachers not only to incorporate new kinds of texts into our classrooms but new kinds of multimodal compositional processes that ask students to envision and create something that perhaps does not yet exist" (p. 645). Interactive texts may take advantage of both new media and old rhetorical strategies. This student's work illustrates that integrated-media considerations validate the field of composition by recognizing that its provinces lie clearly beyond the dotted white lines marking the traditional edge of its universe. We can begin to explore the role of sound in composition only when we adjust to a new conception of our craft and our process: one not bound to silent, paper, and electronic pages. We can begin to realize the advantages of sound in composition only when we empower our students to articulate their arguments in the media that most appropriately convey them—as the student I have namelessly identified has done.

Dominique Nasta (1991) reminded us that "silent film never existed as a concept during the silent era; it was only *after* the invention of synchronous sound that films became silent as opposed to 'talking'" (p. 41). Integrating sound into electronically mediated academic writing may have a similar effect on academic communication. Music may empower our students to do what Hocks (2003) suggested: create something that perhaps does not yet exist. Our symbolic screens in composition (traditionally terministic) and the ethos supported by them may not suggest appropriate metaphors for hearing aural rhetoric in academic work. But, if as Manovich (2001) suggested, cinema is now the human-computer interface, then computer-based integrated-media compositions can call upon a new symbolic screen for suggesting appropriate metaphors for hearing aural rhetoric in academic work. As composition instructors

who are well indoctrinated to the ethos of academic work, we may not be in the best position to envision these new metaphors. They may sound too impious to us, at least for the moment. Our students may be in better positions to hear these possibilities than we are since they have not been shaped by the silent, text-only ethos to the extent that we have. However, as Janangelo (1998) suggested, we need a receptive, discerning, and anticipatory pedagogy to afford us a reasonable chance of hearing and responding helpfully to whatever it is our students have to say (p. 41). I suggest that we can begin to develop that anticipatory pedagogy by returning to the foundation of composition: rhetoric, where arrangement is understood not only as the progression of paragraphs but, as Kennedy (translating Aristotle, 1991) commented, more generally as "a structural pattern; that is, it consists of parts, each performing some function, but joined together into an artistic unity" (p. 257).

Furthermore, physical and psychological interactivity are not interchangeable. Manovich (2001) suggested that hypertextual links, forwarded by many as a synonym for educational interactivity, ask an audience "to mistake the structure of somebody's else [*sic*.] mind for our own" (p. 61). I like to think of this in terms of the Beat philosophy forwarded by Jack Kerouac (1957) in *On the Road*. Kerouac described the new world of opportunity opened up by the advent of the automobile. It is true that the automobile carried Kerouac and the Beat generation to places they had not been before, but they were still tied to an infrastructure of roadways: They could only go where somebody else had allowed them to go by, literally, paving the way. Hyperlinks, like roadways, facilitate physical interactivity. Metaphor, as psychological interactivity, allows audience members to travel their own roads as well as those suggested by the author because metaphor expressly invites the audience to become involved in meaning making. Hypertext is a technology, not a pedagogy. Ready-made popular music, especially in the form of downloadable digital files, is a technology, not a pedagogy. But, developing a systematic approach for using these technologies to instigate metaphor *is* a pedagogy.

David Blakesley (2003) wrote that "it is important to remember that rhetorical inquiry has, in the philosophical sense, always been concerned with multiplying perspectives, for elaborating and exploiting ambiguity" (p. 14). The filmmakers we have discussed multiply perspectives by exploiting the ambiguity of metaphor. Their audiences must become involved with their texts, personally and ethically, to integrate the information from the variety of media presented in order to interpret the filmmaker's message. The filmmaker plots a destination and tells us, the audience, what to look for along the journey; but precisely how we get there is our business. The use of popular music in film provides a model for developing an anticipatory pedagogy for transforming ready-made materials into coherent and persuasive psychologically interactive integrated-media compositions.

Kathleen Blake Yancey stated, "Composition is not writing anymore; it's composition" (qtd. in Taylor & Halbritter, in press). If we can embrace Yancey's disciplinary revision and accept that cinema is the human-computer interface, as Manovich (2001) asserted, then the ethos of our computer-based integrated-media compositions *must* become both more visually and aurally determined in the digital/media age. Cinema may serve as a primary model for integrating aural with visual and textual information. Aristotle defined rhetoric as "the faculty of discovering all of the available means of persuasion in any given situation" (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 1). Kenneth Burke, some 2,300 years later (in 1984), reminded us that, "Any given situation derives its character from the entire framework of interpretation by which we judge it" (p. 35).

Neither of these scholars limits his discussion of rhetoric to silent communication. Why should we? Composition is not writing anymore; it's composition. However, traditionally mediated writing is still a cornerstone of any academic context and is certain to remain a cornerstone of composition. The presence of instructional technologies that allow us to work with sound provides an opportunity for us to reexamine just what it means to discover *all* of the available means of persuasion in any given situation. The discussion of visual rhetoric has helped us envision new possibilities for composing in new media. An ongoing discussion of aural rhetoric may allow us to hear new possibilities as well.

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