

The Film Translated into Music: *Hiroshima Mon Amour* by Alain Resnais and Giovanni Fusco

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Abstract

This article investigates Giovanni Fusco's *Piccola suite per otto strumenti dal film Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1960), derived from his score for Alain Resnais's film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959). While Resnais himself compared the film's structure to Beethoven's Diabelli Variations or a string quartet, underlining the central role of music within its narrative construction, Fusco's transformation of the soundtrack into a concert suite exemplifies how film music can be translated from its original visual-narrative context into an autonomous musical composition. Through processes of reordering, reduction, and merging of musical material, the suite reconfigures themes initially tied to the cinematic image, preserving their expressive force while enabling them to function in a purely aural domain. The analysis demonstrates how Fusco's re-elaboration not only situates film music within the concert repertoire but also translates the film's central concerns with memory, oblivion, and trauma into an independent musical form.

Keywords: Film musica; Hiroshima mon amour; Giovanni Fusco; Film music suite; Cinematic listening.

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1 Introduction

The phenomenon of using film music in the concert hall is well known. The history of film music includes such famous examples as Sergei Prokofiev's cantata, *Alexander Nevsky* op. 78, and film suites by Dmitry Shostakovich and Alfred Schnittke, Ennio Morricone, John Williams and many others. Sometimes the suite is the original composition of the composer, as in the case of Prokofiev, or sometimes the music from a certain film is rearranged by another musician, as in the case of Shostakovich, whose film music was rearranged in suites by Lev Atovmyan (Kravec 2012).

The musical genre most suited to these transformations is the *suite*, the form that allows different musical episodes to be linked together. Separated from its natural visual-narrative embodiment, film music often requires some modification. Such changes may be expressed through a reordering of musical numbers, a reduction, or the merging of musical material. These kinds of re-elaboration of the music material are exactly the focus of my contribution in which the film music of Italian composer, pianist, and conductor Giovanni Fusco (1906–1968), specifically his suites from the film *Hiroshima mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959), is analysed.

2 Giovanni Fusco

A versatile and highly talented musician, he wrote around 300 compositions, including theatre works, chamber music, sacred music and, above all, soundtracks for feature films, short films and documentaries. He studied in Rome with Alfredo Casella who was one of the composers of the so called *generazione dell'Ottanta* ("generation of the '80s"), whose mission was to reform Italian music and open it up to new musical solutions. Fusco learned from Casella the courage and ability to use different styles, to utilize the rhythmic principles of various forms and to experiment with new musical languages.

2.1 Fusco's legacy

The legacy of the composer isn't very well known just a few publications are dedicated to him and his music. There is a biographical essay with the overview of his compositions written by Ermanno Comuzio (1968) as an obituary of Fusco, several short interviews and a website¹ dedicated to Fusco's biography and his music, but they do not provide much detailed information. The book written in 2012 by Roberto Calabretto, *Antonioni e la musica*, (Calabretto 2012) discovers the music and musical strategies of the whole cinematographic production of Michelangelo Antonioni, with detailed and profound analysis of the music written by Fusco for Antonioni's films.² There are thus some publications dedicated to the music for the film *Hiroshima mon amour* (Colpi 1960, 1963; Calabretto 2008). As of late, Fusco's musical archive has been housed at the Fondazione Ugo e Olga Levi in Venice,³ where it will not only be systematised but also digitalised, which in the long term should greatly facilitate the study of his music.

2.2 Fusco and cinema

In cinema, Fusco acquired all the practical skills – composing, arranging and substituting the original soundtracks of foreign films – that are just as important for a film music composer as a strictly musical one. His working relationship with Antonioni began in 1948 with the composition of the soundtrack for the documentary short film *N. U. (Nettezza Urbana)*, Italian urban cleaning service). Their fruitful collaboration continued until 1964 with such important films as *Story of a love affair (Cronaca di un amore)*, 1950), and *The Adventure (L'avventura)*, 1960) which earned the composer the prestigious prize "Nastro d'argento" for best music and many other films.

1. <http://giovannifusco.com/Home.asp> (last accessed 22-01-2025).

2. For a complete list of Antonioni's film with music by Fusco see (Calabretto 2012: 199–206).

3. <https://www.fondazionelevi.it/en/la-fondazione/>. My sincere thanks to Giorgio Busetto, Director of the Fondazione Levi, Roberto Calabretto, Scientific President, and Archivist Claudia Canella for the opportunity to conduct research on the Fusco Collection.

Fusco's international collaboration is notably represented in two films by Alain Resnais: *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) and *The War is Over* (*La guerre est finie*, 1966). Apart from these two important collaborations (with Antonioni and with Resnais), Fusco worked with many directors, Italian, French and Spanish, both experienced directors and young and aspiring ones. He excelled in all genres, could write beautiful stylisations, could write typical music for, as we would say today, blockbusters. An example is *The Cossacks* (*I cosacchi*, 1960) an Italian epic adventure film directed by Victor Tourzhansky and Giorgio Rivalta which contains both typical music describing battle scenes – the film is set in Russia and the Caucasus in the 19th century – and various national stylisations such as mazurkas, lezginkas, etc.

His numerous collaborations with directors showed many creative and innovative musical solutions. Fusco's mastery of a vast variety of musical styles and his profound knowledge of orchestral writing are naturally and brilliantly reflected in his musical language. In contrast to the traditional film music of his epoch, the music by Fusco aims at single instruments or small ensembles, more chamber than symphonic in character, so as to define their isolated timbres, gradually stripping them down to pure and essential sounds. He ties them to specific situations, atmospheres and emotions until they become identified with them.

As Fusco explains in an interview quoted in Calabretto's book on Antonioni, he deliberately and consciously came to the decision to use small instrumental combinations.

I think that music, in order to be allowed within a film, must have its own function, which is to emphasise, without ever overflowing, certain moments of the story; to illuminate, precisely musically, certain situations; to contribute, from a distance, to the plot of the work, helping the spectator to understand its recondite schemes and, above all, to focus on the interiority of the characters. A film's music needs to be very incisive and quite restrained. A now consolidated experience allows me to say with certainty that the most effective results are obtained with small ensembles. As far as I'm concerned, particularly when working with a director of Antonioni's calibre, I completely eliminate the orchestra. For many years now, I have been using small ensembles; a small number of instruments is sufficient to express what I have to say (Calabretto 2012: 23, n. 45).⁴

Fusco's attention to timbre drew him to use exceptional instrumentalists such as the great French saxophonist Marcel Mule in *Preludio* for the saxophone and piano for *Cronaca di un amore* (1950). In fact, we can see on the title page of the edition of the suite that Mule was the first interpreter of the piece (Fig. 1). The name of the pianist, Armando Renzi, isn't mentioned.

As Fusco remembers in the interview: "In *Cronaca di un amore* I have managed to demonstrate, in the most convincing way, my ideas on the use of film music. I used a saxophone, played masterfully by Georges [Marcel] Mule from the Paris Conservatoire" (Calabretto 2012: 23, n. 45).⁵

Another masterful example is the use of five saxophones, the *Paris Quintet*, conducted by Mule, for the film *The Lady Without Camelias* (*La signora senza camelie*, 1953). We can also see the use of other wind instruments presented in many Antonioni-Fusco works, as for example, *Notturmo 2* from the *l'Avventura* with a soloist role of clarinet.

For *Hiroshima, Mon amour* [Alain Resnais, 1959] I used a relatively large formation of nine instruments. In *I Vinti* [*The Vanquished*, Michelangelo Antonioni, 1953] I only used a piano [...]. In *Traviata '53* [Vittorio Cottafavi, 1953], a trumpet solo with string and piano accompaniment

4. "[...] io penso che la musica, per poter essere ammessa all'interno di un film debba avere una sua funzione propria che è quella di sottolineare, senza mai debordare, alcuni momenti del racconto; di illuminare, proprio musicalmente, determinate situazioni; di contribuire, di lontano, alla trama dell'opera, aiutando lo spettatore a capire i suoi piani reconditi e, soprattutto, a mettere a fuoco l'interiorità dei personaggi. Occorre che la musica di un film sia molto incisiva e abbastanza misurata. Un'esperienza ormai consolidata mi permette di dire con certezza che i risultati più efficaci si ottengono con degli organici ridotti. Per quanto mi riguarda, in particolare quando lavoro con un regista della levatura di Antonioni, elimino completamente l'orchestra. Già da molti anni, mi servo di piccoli ensembles: un piccolo numero di strumenti è sufficiente per esprimere quanto devo dire" (Calabretto 2012: 23, n. 45).

5. "In *Cronaca di un amore* sono riuscito a dimostrare, nel modo maggiormente convincente, le mie idee sull'utilizzo della musica cinematografica. Mi sono servito di un sassofono, suonato magistralmente da Georges [Marcel] Mule del Conservatorio di Parigi" (Calabretto 2012: 24, n. 45).

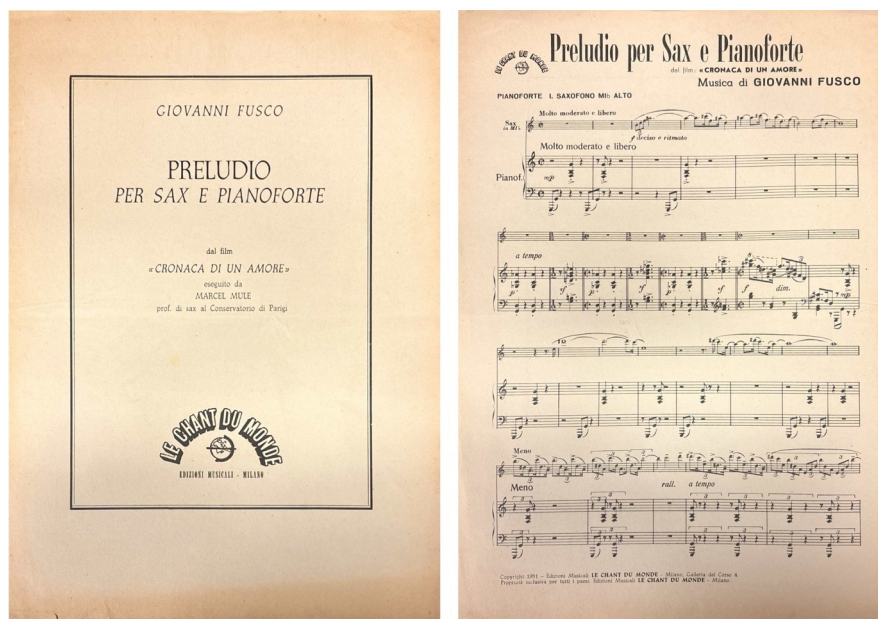


Fig. 1. – Giovanni Fusco, *Preludio per Sax e Pianoforte dal film Cronaca di un amore*, I-Vlevi, Fondo Fusco, scat. 2.

was the sound accompaniment to Cottafavi's work. Similarly, in Damiani's film *Il rossetto* [*Lipstick*, 1960], a trumpet and a children's choir, always used very parsimoniously, very effectively underlined the film's most significant scenes (Calabretto 2012: 23, n. 45).⁶

This careful approach to minimizing the musical accompaniment of films is due, among other things, to Antonioni's very attentive and demanding attitude.

Although Antonioni was not as categorical as Robert Bresson, who said that cinema did not need music at all, favouring ambient sound, Antonioni was also a strong opponent of excessive, illustrative music:

On the other hand, there are films where music naturally enters more directly to complement the image, to enhance the meaning of the image itself, in a more recondite meaning. Then you see, as in certain scenes in *Avventura* (1959), or as in *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959) – to cite a film set to music by Maestro Fusco – the music is used in an excellent way. And I must say that it helps very well, that is, it expresses what the image wanted to express, it merges with the image itself. Having said that, I must also say, however, that I personally am very reluctant to put music in films, precisely because I feel the need to be dry, to say things as little as possible, to use the simplest and least means. And music is one more means (Calabretto 2012: 31).⁷

6. "Per *Hiroshima, Mon amour* [Alain Resnais 1959] ho utilizzato una formazione relativamente numerosa, di nove strumenti. Nei *Vinti* ho utilizzato soltanto un pianoforte e in *Cronaca di un amore* sono riuscito a dimostrare, nel modo maggiormente convincente, le mie idee sull'utilizzo della musica cinematografica. Mi sono servito di un sassofono, suonato magistralmente da Georges [Marcel] Mule del Conservatorio di Parigi. In *Traviata* '53 [Vittorio Cottafavi, 1953], un assolo di tromba con accompagnamento di archi e pianoforte è stato l'accompagnamento sonoro dell'opera di Cottafavi. Parimenti, nel film *Il rossetto* di Damiani [1960], una tromba e un coro di voci bianche, sempre utilizzati con molta parsimonia, hanno sottolineato con molta efficacia le scene più significative del film" (Calabretto 2012: 24, n. 45).
7. "Ci sono invece dei film dove naturalmente la musica entra più direttamente a complemento dell'immagine, ad aumentare il significato stesso dell'immagine, in un significato più recondito. Allora si vede, come in certe scene dell'*Avventura* [1959], o come in *Hiroshima, mon amour* [1959] – per citare un film musicato del maestro Fusco – la musica usata in modo eccellente. E devo dire che aiuta benissimo, cioè esprime quello che l'immagine voleva esprimere, si fonde con l'immagine stessa. Detto questo, devo anche dire però che io personalmente sono molto restio a mettere musica nei film, proprio perché sento il bisogno di essere asciutto, di dire le cose il meno possibile, di usare i mezzi più semplici e il minor numero di mezzi. E la musica è un mezzo in più" (Calabretto 2012: 31).

3 Piccola suite per otto strumenti

“However, as long as the music can be separated from the film to be recorded in a record that has its own independent validity, then I have to say that such music is not music for film”.⁸

This statement, expressed by Antonioni in an interview, does not apply in any way to Fusco’s *Suite* based on the music for the film *Hiroshima mon amour*; indeed, the role of music in Resnais’ film is quite unique. In the following pages, analysing the *Suite*, we will see how cinematic the music is, and at the same time how it is self-sufficient.

As Emilio Audissino (2012: 10) remarks: “Considering the entirety of film history, the main manifestations of the external life of film music can be grouped into three types: piano reductions for home performance, disc records, and adaptations for concert performance”.

The case of Fusco’s *Suite* belongs to the second and third type. We may presume that the main impetus for Fusco was the possibility of the recording, and not concert performance, since we have little evidence of those. Instead, there is an LP disc, and it is well known that the disc production (LP) was an important part of the extra-screen life of film music.

4 The film and its genesis

Hiroshima mon amour began as a project for a documentary on the atomic bomb. Resnais was ready to abandon the project, as he was convinced that he could not make another documentary about a twentieth-century catastrophe, wanting to avoid repetition with his previous work on the film *Night and Fog (Nuit et brouillard)*, 1956), referring to the Nazi concentration camps. The solution came when Resnais decided to create a fictional story, a love story in which the protagonists are spectators of the catastrophic events in Hiroshima. He asked the novelist and playwright, Marguerite Duras to write a script (Resnais in Armes 1968: 67): “I just gave Marguerite something purely abstract. I intended to compose a sort of poem in which the images would act as a counterpoint to the text. The film links up with my preoccupation with making an opera”.

Resnais requested that Duras wrote it “in the rhythm of Moderato cantabile”,⁹ and later, when talking about the finished film product, the director said (Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat 2006: 151):

I think that if we were to analyse Hiroshima using a diagram on graph paper, we would see something close to a quartet. Themes, variations from the first movement; hence the repetitions, the flashbacks. [...] The last movement of the film is a slow, disconcerting movement. There is a decrescendo. This gives the film a triangular, funnel shaped construction.¹⁰

At first, he thought of inviting to work on the film the composer Luigi Dallapiccola, a composer known for his “lyrical twelve-tone compositions”. Then, however, he decided to refer to Fusco, who was already known as a trusted composer of Antonioni. As Ermanno Comuzio relates in his essay, *Ricordo di Giovanni Fusco*, (Comuzio 1968: 91) Resnais’ choice of composer was made after a re-visioning of Antonioni’s films *Le amiche* (1955) e *Il grido* (1957). A deep mutual understanding, an instant comprehension of ideas defined the relationship between the director and the composer from the time they first met. Resnais later recalled this in an interview with Michel Delahaye (1959: 10):

8. “Fino a quando però la musica può essere scissa dal film per essere incisa in un disco che abbia una sua validità autonoma, allora devo dire che quella musica non è musica per il cinema” (Calabretto 2012: 31).

9. Here Resnais alludes on the Duras’ novel *Moderato cantabile*, 1958, where the *Sonatina* by Antonio Diabelli op 168, n. 1 is diegetically presented in the plot.

10. “Je crois que si l’on analysait Hiroshima par un diagramme sur du papier millimétré, on assisterait à quelque chose proche du quatuor. Thèmes, variations à partir du premier mouvement; d’où les répétitions, les retours en arrière. [...] Le dernier mouvement du film est un mouvement lent, déconcertant. Il y a là un decrescendo. Cela donne au film inné construction en triangle, en entonnoir” (Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat 2006: 151).

It sounds like a fairy tale. Fusco arrived in Paris within twenty-four hours. At midday I was showing him the working copy of *Hiroshima* and by seven in the evening he was explaining the film to me. He had felt and assimilated it totally. He had understood everything: the game of contradictions, of oblivion... everything. In just one day we came to an agreement about the music.

We also have testimony from the opposite side, here's what Fusco said about the first meeting with the director (Magaldi 1964: 559):

What if I didn't know all the music, from Frescobaldi to surf. When Resnais spoke to me for the first time about *Hiroshima mon amour* (we were in Paris, in a beer hall, and it was the early hours), he told me: 'When you compose the music for this film, Maestro, think of the Beethoven of the *Variations on a Theme by Diabelli*. This is the spiritual atmosphere to achieve.'¹¹

To complete this collage of quotations, the last one is from the letter of Resnais to Fusco (Calabretto 2008: 88, n. 31):

My enthusiasm for your score is undiminished. If anything, each new listening reinforces it! And I'm still amazed when I remember the almost diabolical rapidity with which you got to the 'heart' of our film. Without you, the film would have been nothing more than a cold, lifeless puppet.¹²

5 The plot

The plot is very simple: a Japanese architect (Eiji Okada) falls in love with a French actress (Emmanuelle Riva) who has come to Hiroshima to make an anti-war film, but she plans to leave Japan in 24 hours. Meanwhile, the main idea behind this story deals with memory and oblivion. The plot unfolds in Hiroshima intertwined with the flashback of the heroine, who relives the trauma of her love for a German soldier in her occupied hometown of Nevers during World War II. The soldier was killed, and she was dishonoured by her fellow townspeople. The experience of oblivion rises in her memory in anticipation of her parting with her new Japanese lover.

The film has a dramatic structure consisting of five acts. *Prologue, Nuit et Matinee, la Journée, le Café du fleuve, Epilogue* (Colpi 1960: 6-11). The opening part shows embracing bodies covered in ashes – a metaphor for love and death. The second part focuses on the relationship between two people in love. In the third act, the actress begins to reveal images of her first love with a German soldier back home in her hometown. The fourth episode takes place at night at the Riverside Café in Hiroshima. In this part of the film, the protagonist – She – moves from the past to the present and back again, trying to make sense of her first love and her current love. The last part of the film is a decrescendo of emotions and memories. She is almost ready to stay in Japan, but a succession of mutually insufficiently convincing actions and gestures follows, and the film ends (it has an open end) with the protagonists looking at each other without seeing each other and repeating their names: *Hiroshima is your name. Your name is Nevers*.

6 Music written by Giovanni Fusco

A major part of the music is written by Giovanni Fusco. There are a few moments of diegetic music: in the Riverside caffè scene two songs played on the jukebox can be heard. One is a waltz composed by Georges Delerue,¹³ and the other a Japanese song performed by the singer Misora Hibari *Sore wa naisho* (*It's a Secret*,

11. "Guai se non conoscessi tutta la musica, da Frescobaldi al surf. Quando Resnais mi parlò per la prima volta di *Hiroshima mon amour* (eravamo a Parigi, in una birreria, ed erano le ore piccolissime), mi disse: 'Componendo la musica per questo film, Maestro, pensi al Beethoven delle Variazioni su tema di Diabelli. Questa è l'atmosfera spirituale da raggiungere'" (Magaldi 1964: 559).
12. The letter from Alain Resnais to Giovanni Fusco, dated May 25, 1959, qtd. in Calabretto 2008: 88, n. 3. "Il mio entusiasmo per la sua partitura non diminuisce. Ogni nuovo ascolto piuttosto lo rinforza! E rimango stupito ricordandomi la rapidità quasi diabolica con la quale lei è penetrato al 'cuore' del nostro film. Senza lei quest'ultimo rischiava di essere un freddo burattino senza vita reale".
13. In some references, Delerue is incorrectly listed as the sole author of the music for the film *Hiroshima*. For example, in the handbook by Roger Hickman, *Reel Music: Exploring 100 Years of Film Music*, "The music for Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959),

1957). We find some other fragments of diegetic music when the actress meets two guitarists who are walking in the nighttime streets playing guitar in unison. We will return to this episode concerning the *Suite*. Another tune played on a Japanese folk wind instrument is the tune that awakens the lovers in the middle of the night at 4:00 AM.¹⁴

Henri Colpi, film editor of *Hiroshima* in his article published in 1960 listed the music entrances (Colpi 1960: 6–11). There are 55 ‘M’, music elements or cues, divided in 5 acts (named above). The main themes are four: the *Theme of Oblivion* the *Theme of the Bodies*, the *Nevers Theme* and the *River Theme*.

There are a number of contributions¹⁵ analysing the music for this film, so I will only mention a few key moments and focus on the analysis of the *Piccola Suite*.

As has been already mentioned, Fusco favoured small instrumental ensembles, particularly in psychological and conceptually-oriented films (Miceli 2009: 318). In the score for *Hiroshima*, Fusco employs eight instruments: piano, piccolo, flute, clarinet, horn, viola, double bass, and guitar. The combination, juxtaposition, or opposition of different instrumental voices helps to reveal the individual character and timbre of each instrument. The composer frequently exploits the extreme registers of an instrument or creates unexpected sonic combinations with others. Moreover, Fusco often restricts the texture to only two or three instruments – or even to a single instrument out of the eight – reserving full ensemble passages (*tutti*) for only a few cues. This approach to instrumentation results in a minimalist, transparent, and predominantly spare compositional texture.

Fusco masterfully uses minimal means to achieve a great expressiveness. In addition to his use of ostinato, the composer attains unusual sonorities using a minimal number of notes. For example, at the beginning of the third number of the suite, *Allegro spiritoso*, (Fig. 2) Fusco uses just three notes G, C sharp and F sharp, played by the piano; the three notes move upwards in the upper voice, while in the lower voice the same three notes are played, but in reverse order and moving downwards.¹⁶ In the film, this music accompanies images from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.



Fig. 2. – Giovanni Fusco, *Piccola Suite per otto strumenti*, *Allegro spiritoso*, bb. 1-4, p. 7, I-Vlevi, Fondo Fusco, scat. 14.

We can also notice that Fusco works with micro motifs to achieve a unity of the separate or even contrasting themes, emphasizing and highlighting different facets of the same idea, of one crystal or of the same event connecting apparently dissimilar themes and emotions with related and re-elaborated micro motifs. The Theme of the Bodies that starts with a minor third first ascendent and then descendent if taken from the second note assume the significance of *Lamento* – a descending minor third. (Fig. 3) Fusco use this ambiguity several times to connect musical episodes.

In these two following examples we can see the *Cadenza* for French horn and the beginning of the next number *Andantino*. Figure 4 is a draft from the manuscript score ‘minuta’ (an Italian name for a musical draft or sketch),

composed by Georges Delerue, includes some popular musical cues as well as some suggestions of Japanese music. For the most part it maintains a serious, modern character, as befitting an intense drama set in the aftermath of the nuclear holocaust” (Hickman 2006: 261).

14. In the list of music presented in the article by Henri Colpi (1960: 7) this cue has a number 21.

15. See pp. 2-3.

16. It is worth noting that a similar musical solution was employed by composer Bernard Herrmann in his music for the film *Vertigo* directed by Alfred Hitchcock (1958).

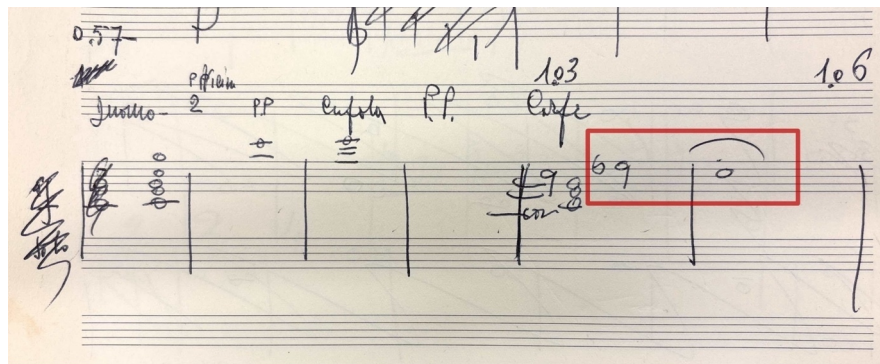


Fig. 3. – Giovanni Fusco, Draft manuscript score for *Hiroshima*, The Theme of the Bodies – Lamento, bb. 5-6, p. 20, I-Vlevi, Fondo Fusco, scat. 14.

where the first five bars correspond to *Cadenza*, and from bar 6 there is the beginning of the *Andantino*. We can see the notes D-E-D for flute and clarinet in the upper line and the *ostinato* rhythmical figuration for viola in the bottom line. In Figure 5, the same musical material is presented in the “full” transcription.

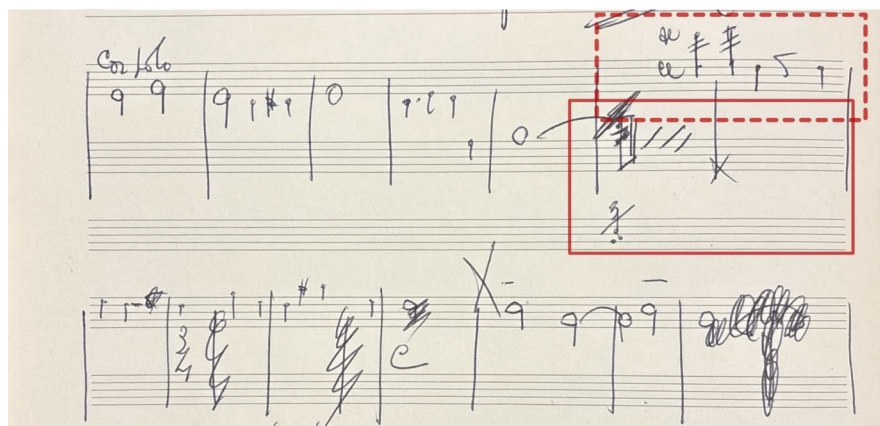


Fig. 4. – Giovanni Fusco, Draft manuscript score for *Hiroshima*, The *Cadenza* for French horn, p. 40, I-Vlevi, Fondo Fusco, scat. 14.

The *Theme of Nevers* (Fig. 6) – the hometown of the protagonist which is related to her youthful love – starts with the repetitive motif with the interval of the minor second (ascending-descending) that after a few attempts arrives at the interval of fourth. The same intervallic structure, though in an expanded form, appears at the beginning of the *Andantino*, whose music is associated with the image of ruins after an explosion (See Fig. 5, p. 25 of the *Piccola Suite*, bb. 1-5).

Both the choice of instruments¹⁷ and the type of musical writing evoke associations with composers such as Stravinsky and Bartók, who radically transformed the musical language of the twentieth century. In addition to the purely musical parallels between Fusco's music and that of Stravinsky and Bartók, we find other parallels between the creative objectives of Alain Resnais and the aforementioned composers in the quotes of cinema critics and film directors in discussion on the film *Hiroshima* published on the pages of journal *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*.

17. For example, Bela Bartók's *Contrast* (1938) for violin, clarinet and piano and Igor Stravinsky's *Histoire du soldat* scored in 1918 for clarinet, bassoon, cornet (or trumpet), trombone, percussion, violin and double bass or its Suite version written by Stravinsky in 1920 for the same three instruments as Bartók's piece: violin, clarinet and piano.

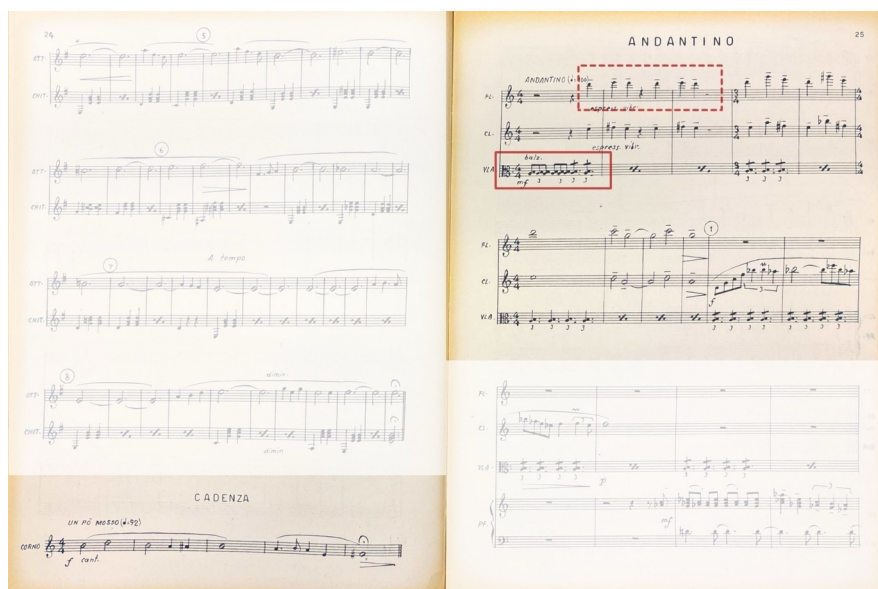


Fig. 5. – Giovanni Fusco, *Piccola Suite per otto strumenti*, *Cadenza and Andantino*, pp. 24–25, I-Vlevi, Fondo Fusco, scat. 14.

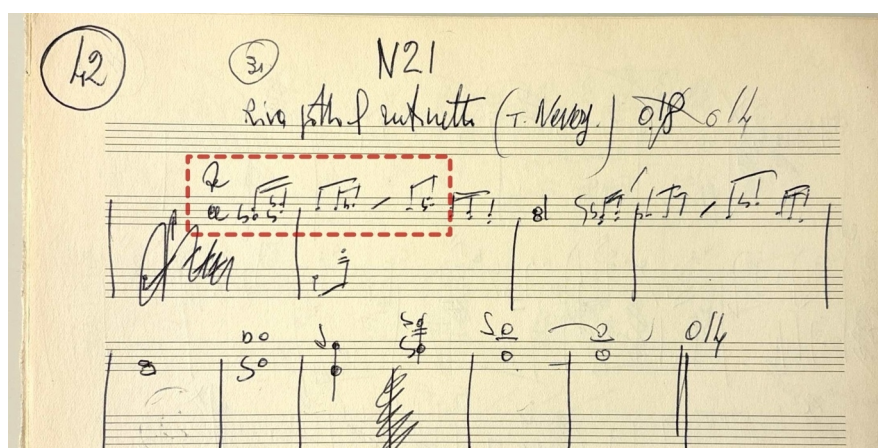


Fig. 6. – Giovanni Fusco, Draft manuscript score for *Hiroshima, The Theme of Nevers*, bb. 1-2, p. 42, I-Vlevi, Fondo Fusco, scat. 14.

Jacques Rivette says, “The problems that Resnais poses within cinema are parallel to those that Stravinsky poses in music” (Colpi 1963: 128) and, for Robert Benayoun, *Hiroshima mon amour* is a present-day film, among other reasons because “it bases its conception of duration on notions of counterpoint central to Igor Stravinsky and Bela Bartók” (Colpi 1963: 128).

Such musical elements as *ostinato*, microvariation of motifs, refined choice and employment of instruments are used to transmit the essence of the plot, the main theme of the film: the fleeting nature of memory and the fear of forgetting the past.

7 Suite

In his seminal article *Film-as-concert music and the formal implications of ‘cinematic listening’* Frank Lehman (2018: 14) proposes a kind of checklist to describe the transition from film music to concert music:

What has changed in the transition to the concert hall, and what remains unaltered? Where are there excisions, interpolations and expansions, and how do they impact the formal argument of the piece? What will a listener who is familiar with the original movie notice for the first time (this could include freshly arranged or composed material, but also passages that were previously drowned out in the film mix)? Answering these and similar questions helps situate the work with respect to its filmic sources and provides a method for reconstructing the practical choices made by a composer and/or arranger.

The sources available for comparison include the film soundtrack (as no finished score is preserved in the archive), the piano reductions of all musical numbers submitted to SIAE (the Italian copyright collecting society), the published score of the *Piccola Suite* (Fusco 1959), and the LP recording.

Looking at the music programme or at the list of 55 numbers described by Henri Colpi, (1960: 6-11), the first noticeable characteristic is the cyclical and repetitive pattern of themes.

The *Prologue* (the first fifteen minutes of the film) opens with the theme of oblivion and ends with the same theme. It is characterised by the *ostinato*, that “plays an introductory role in the film, creating a strange, desolate atmosphere by repeating groups of six identical notes” (Colpi 1960: 2). Within the *Prologue*, the second musical element is the *Theme of the Bodies*. In the film we see embracing bodies “as if drenched with ashes, rain, dew or sweat”, with which Duras intended to generate a feeling “violent and conflicting, of freshness and desire” (Duras 1961: 5), linking ideas of love and death, pleasure and pain. This theme, too, is repeated many times as a refrain or *ritornello*, to use the musical term.

In the third act, *La Journée*, the *Theme of the Bodies*, will reappear three times. In the fifth act, the *Epilogue*, the *Theme of the Bodies* will return four times, but in the last musical number the *Theme of Oblivion* will return, thus mirroring the circle, its inconsistent, desperate monotony dominating the end of the film and bringing it to a close with a cry. To summarize, the *Theme of the Bodies* appears a total of 14 times, seven in the *Prologue*, three in the third act and four in the *Epilogue*.

As we may recall, Resnais advised Fusco to think about Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations* as the spiritual atmosphere to achieve. Fusco evidently perceived this indication, as the whole musical structure is perfectly suited to the notion of variations. The *Theme of the Bodies* undergoes various transformations during the film; sometimes it is played by the whole ensemble, referring to a chorale, sometimes it is played by a solo piano, in which case it assumes the sonority of a funeral march.

Of the 55 musical numbers in the original soundtrack, 13 were selected for inclusion in the *Piccola Suite*.

From Tab. 1, the structure of the *Piccola Suite* is clearly symmetrical and circular. Even the number of bars in the *Cadenzas (Theme of the Bodies)* is symmetrical – 15 bars in number 2 and number 12, seven bars in number 4 and number 10. Following this spiral structure, the central piece is number 7, *Serenata*, assigned in the *Suite* to piccolo and guitar. The *Serenata* contains the *River Theme*, or the theme of the “plenitude of love,” to use Colpi’s definition. This logic of the *Suite* structure coincides with that of Resnais, who structured the film to

build toward its peak intensity in the middle, then to enter a decrescendo phase – a musical term he used to describe the progression of the film.

Table 1. – 13 musical numbers of the *Piccola Suite*.

	Title	Tempo	Instruments	Contents in film
1	<i>Introduzione</i>	<i>Moderato</i>	tutti	<i>Theme of Oblivion</i>
2	<i>Cadenza</i>	<i>Calmo, molto espressivo</i>	piano (15 bars)	<i>Theme of the Bodies</i>
3	<i>Allegro spiritoso</i>	<i>Allegro spiritoso</i>	tutti	Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum
4	<i>Cadenza</i>	<i>Lento</i>	Flute and clarinet (7 bars)	<i>Theme of the Bodies</i>
5	<i>Berceuse</i>	<i>Andantino</i>	Piccolo and horn; piccolo, flute, horn, viola. The piano solo plays the <i>Theme of children</i> .	Panoramic view of Hiroshima after the explosion, documentary fragments. Children after explosion, from documentary footage.
6	<i>Cadenza</i>	<i>andante</i>	Double bass (8 bars)	
7	<i>Serenata</i>	<i>mosso</i>	Piccolo and guitar	<i>Theme of the river</i> . The theme is in the rhythm of a waltz.
8	<i>Cadenza</i>	<i>Un po' mosso</i>	Horn (5 bars)	
9	<i>Andantino</i>	<i>andantino</i>	Flute, clarinet, viola; 7 bars of piano solo insert	Hiroshima after the explosion, documentary fragments.
10	<i>Cadenza</i>	<i>andantino</i>	2 guitars (7 bars)	Presumably corresponds to the diegetic musical episode with the two guitarists the heroine meets walking the streets. It is in 6/4, can be interpreted as a waltz.
11	<i>Largo</i>	<i>Largo misterioso</i>	In the beginning there is the <i>Theme of the Bodies</i> (7 bars) piano solo, poi tutti. [2'33']	Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Overlapping of the <i>Theme of the bodies</i> and the <i>Theme of the Museum</i> .
12	<i>Cadenza</i>	<i>Calmo (molto espressivo)</i>	Piano (15 bars)	
13	<i>Coda</i>	<i>Moderato</i>	tutti	<i>Theme of oblivion</i>

The first number, entitled *Introduction*, is a theme of *forgetting|oblivion*. The *Cadenza*, that will appear six times in the *Suite* is the *Theme of the Bodies*, performed by different instruments, solo or not. It is interesting to note that reflecting on the structure of the main score, here as well the first and second numbers are the same as the last and penultimate but in mirror reflection. [*oblivion* – *bodies* – *bodies* – *oblivion*]. Number 3, *Allegro spiritoso*, includes the montage of the themes related to the museum in Hiroshima. Number 5 – *Berceuse* is a theme of ruined city. A poignant lament consists of an *ostinato* played by the French horn and a descending melody by the piccolo, with the *lamento* intonation being left to the clarinet.

The *Serenata*, number 7, is, as mentioned above *Theme of the river*.¹⁸ The theme is in the rhythm of a waltz. It stays at the center of the cycle, as we have seen, with Fusco placing this peaceful love theme at the core of the dramaturgical structure. It is followed by the shortest *Cadenza* that consists of only five bars, this time it is a French horn to play the *Theme of the Bodies* (Fig. 5). Number 9, *Andantino*, this music is used in the film to accompany the few documentary inserts showing footage taken immediately after the atomic explosion, the fires, the squirming bodies of burned people. *Largo*, number 11, corresponds to the sequence of the nighttime

18. A gentle, melodic phrase dedicated to the river appears in the *Prologue*. It is related to the views of the river Ota and is linked to the *Theme of the Bodies*. The *River theme* is linked to love and gives the *Theme of the Bodies* more affective rather than corporeal character.

walk of the female protagonist as she cannot decide whether stay or leave. The last *Cadenza* (number 12) repeats exactly the number 2. It has the same duration of 15 bars and is played by piano solo. Number 13, *Coda*, is a return of the first theme – *Oblivion*.

As for the return of the theme of Oblivion, this takes place a long way off, in sequence 51: the inner monologue is led by the theme Nevers, which is replaced by the Theme of the Bodies for the final evocation of German love, a love that has already been forgotten, and then the theme of Oblivion reappears, its inconsistent, despairing monotony dominating the end of the film and ending it in a cry (Colpi 1960: 14).

Frank Lehman argues in his article that: “Even without an accompanying movie to render its meanings explicit, film-as-concert music is dense with extra-musical information” (Lehman 2018: 19). To have an example of this kind of extra-musical information we can analyse one of the most important for the developing of the plot scene. It is in the last, fifth act of the film and in the *Suite*, it is corresponded to the numbers 10 and 11. The sequences communicates the tension associated with the heroine’s hesitation to stay in Japan, her reflections accompanied by repeated alternating shots of Nevers and Hiroshima (perfectly filmed in the same rhythm and tempo). The female protagonist moves from past to present and back again, so that it is a continuous reflection on time and memory. At one climactic moment, when He, having expressed his request for Her to stay, stops, rather than, as She imagined, embracing her and holding her, She continues to walk forward and meets two passers-by who are playing the guitar. In his work on the score for the *Suite*, Fusco retains a timbre /instrumental dramaturgy. Thus, the *Theme of the Bodies*, which throughout the *Suite* plays the role of a refrain, a *ritornello*, is in this case assigned to the guitars’ duo.

This well-calculated architectonic use of the main themes reflects the importance of music in the film and its reflection in the piece meant exclusively for aural perception. This description allows us to infer a very detailed structure that repeats the key dramaturgical knots of the story.

Lehman also claims that a film-in-concert music, or suite, through its elaborate musical construction, can sometimes even convey the film’s intent in an even more explicit way than the film itself:

A suite may reveal aspects of a film’s structure that are less apparent when wading through an entire screenplay, illuminating the trajectory of narrative, the conventional and/or boundary-pushing qualities of plot, the manner in which the status quo is retained or overturned, and so on (Lehman 2019: 18).

Though not entirely applicable to *Piccola Suite*, one can argue that in this dense and concentrated composition Fusco communicates the main concept of Alain Resnais.

Among the materials preserved with the score is a handwritten list of the 13 numbers comprising the *Piccola Suite*, each accompanied by its precise duration. The handwriting doesn’t seem to be by the composer, and the exact purpose of the list remains uncertain. We do not know to what this list refers. Probably the timing was calculated for the concert performance. The total time is 17’85”. May be there is an error, because in the timing for the last *Cadenza* (number 12) the first digit is crossed out or corrected. The duration of the last cadence is indicated as 0’25 or 1’25, even if the identical cadence (number 2) has, according to this list, a duration of 1’00 minutes.

There is not much known about the concert performance of the piece. There is one document that testifies to a performance. It is a typewritten copy of the programme note *Prolusione al concerto di musiche di Giovanni Fusco*, written by Carlo Belli, an Italian intellectual and art critic, for the concert of Fusco’s music held at Casaletto (near Rome) on 14 June 1973. The document is quoted in Calabretto’s article *La musica secondo Resnais* (2008: 86, n. 25):

At first glance, [Fusco’s music] seems to be all vertical writing, and it certainly is. But the musicians present here know that it would not be so beautifully upright if it were not supported by that internal framework that only a perfect digestion of the old counterpoint can give: you will hear it in the Suite from Hiroshima, Mon amour, admirable also for the instrumental skill.

Another performance took place on 19 May 2004 in Rome in the event dedicated to Fusco, *La musica, luce e anima del film* (Music is a light and soul of film) and in Bari, 19 January 2006 in a series of three concerts entitled *Identification of two authors: Michelangelo Antonioni, Giovanni Fusco*.¹⁹

As it was mentioned, the other source that we have is a vinyl disc. Both the score of the *Piccola Suite* and the disc were published in 1960, the year after the film's release, and both sources reflect the idea of a reduction of the original soundtrack to its concentrated and aural version. The following table lists the musical numbers selected for the release of the disc.

Table 2. Nine musical numbers from the Vinyl disc, *Hiroshima, mon amour*.

	Title	Tempo	Instruments	Contents in film
1	<i>Valse du café du fleuve</i>	<i>Tempo du Valse</i> [2'30'']	A small ensemble with accordion, guitar, violin and other instruments.	Music from jukebox in a Riverside Cafe
2	<i>Introduzione</i>	<i>Moderato</i> [2'20'']	tutti	<i>Theme of Oblivion</i>
3	<i>Allegro spiritoso</i>	<i>Allegro spiritoso</i> [2'10'']	tutti	Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum; present differences from the suite. (Omitted bars 134-271).
side 2				
4	<i>Berceuse</i>	<i>Andantino</i> [1'48'']	Piccolo and horn; Piccolo, flute, horn, viola. The piano solo plays the <i>Theme of children</i> .	Panoramic view of Hiroshima after the explosion, documentary fragments. Children after explosion, from documentary footage.
5	<i>Cadenza</i>	<i>Un po' mosso</i> [15'']	Horn (5 bars)	
6	<i>Andantino</i>	<i>Andantino</i> [1'00'']	Flute, clarinet, viola;	Hiroshima after the explosion, documentary fragments. Present differences from the suite. [Bars 20 to 23, 35 to 39, 52 to 65 are omitted, compared to the edition of the <i>Piccolo suite</i>].
7	<i>Largo</i>	<i>Largo misterioso</i> [2'33'']	In the beginning there is The <i>Them of Bodies</i> (7 bars) piano solo, poi <i>tutti</i> with overlapping of different themes and again [2'30''] The <i>Them of the Bodies</i> (7 bars) piano solo.	Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Overlapping of The <i>Theme of the Bodies</i> and the <i>Theme of the Museum</i> .
8	<i>Serenata</i>	<i>Mosso</i> [50'']	Piccolo and guitar	<i>Theme of the river</i> . The theme is in the rhythm of a waltz. Present differences compared to the edition of the <i>Piccolo suite</i> .
9	<i>Coda</i>	<i>Moderato</i> [18'']	Tutti	<i>Theme of Oblivion</i> . Present differences compared to the edition of the <i>Piccolo suite</i> .

19. <http://giovannifusco.com/Eventi01.asp> (last accessed 22-01-2025).

In this table we can see that the disc contains nine numbers (out of 13 of the *Piccola Suite*, five numbers are not included in the recording). The explanation could be very simple, as this kind of disc has only a seven-and-a-half-minute duration on each side. The first track on the disc is *Waltz* by Georges Delerue, which appears in the film as diegetic music played from a jukebox in a riverside café: *Valse du café du fleuve*. Henri Colpi (1963: 131) explains the function of this waltz in the following words: “It had to remind the protagonist of her youth. The instrumentation therefore had to be Japanese in style, but the melody had to have a Western character, a sort of traditional folk tune”.

In this way, the overall structure differs from both the original film soundtrack and the *Piccola Suite*, each of which begins with the characteristic ostinato of the *Theme of Oblivion*. Here instead the first number is a peaceful music in a waltz rhythm. The second number is a *Theme of Oblivion* that doesn't present any differences from the soundtrack or the *Suite*. The third number contains the themes that represents the memory of the catastrophe, shown through the object in the museum. This number coincides with the *Allegro spiritoso* of the suite, but in comparison to the *Suite* the bars from 134 to 271 are omitted.

Side two of the disc opens with *Berceuse*, identical in this version to its counterpart in the *Piccola Suite*. It is followed by the *Cadenza*, or the *Theme of the Bodies* – the only *Cadenza* presented as an independent track on the disc. Performed by French horn, it occupies the central position within the disc's mirrored sequence of numbers. The next number is *Andantino*, that as in the previous *Berceuse*, is associated with the fragments of the documentary showing Hiroshima immediately after the explosion. It presents differences from the suite: bars 20 to 23, 35 to 39, 52 to 65 are omitted, compared to the edition of the *Piccola suite*. *Largo* (number 7) has its similarities with *Allegro spiritoso* (number 3); both numbers are connected to the images from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. The particularity of *Largo* is that in the beginning and at the end it has the *Theme of the Bodies* played by piano in a very sombre character, in a very slow tempo (*largo*), duplicating the melody in octaves in both hands. The penultimate number is the *Serenade*; in the 13 numbers of the Suite it occupies the central seventh place, on the disc, however, it is omitted (if one were to follow the sequence of the *Suite* and the film) and placed almost at the very end. After the *Serenade*, there is only a very short, concluding *Coda*, which brings us back to the *ostinato* and hence the *Theme of oblivion*. This number and the entire descends, as originally intended by the composer and director, with a rising crescendo that ends like a scream: “Theme *Oubli* with Crescendo of the piano and fortissimo of the orchestra, abrupt stop, like a scream, 18”²⁰. There is also precisely the same timing of 18 seconds in the original music list written by Colpi and in the last number on the vinyl disk.

This analysis reveals that the disc is organised in a cyclic and symmetrical manner. The reordering that places the *Serenade* at the end of the cycle may be explained by an intention to conclude the composition with a waltz, thereby framing the work with ‘waltzes’ at both the beginning and the end. In this symmetrical arrangement, the central point is occupied by a *Cadenza* – or the *Theme of the Bodies* – performed by French horn.

As in the case of the *Suite*, we may hypothesise that the distribution of numbers, and the deliberate central positioning of certain ones, have their own grounds for interpretation and for emphasizing the significance of certain narrative points.

8 Conclusion

We can conclude that Fusco transmitted in the *Piccola Suite* all the main ideas of the film using exclusively musical means. Even in this reduced version the main idea of the cyclical/mirror form is maintained as well as the evident reference to the variation form, according to Resnais' original plan. The themes of memory and oblivion, time and its perception, find expression in the form that we could define as a Suite-Rondò, with its main key-themes and their evolution or development inside the composition.

Fusco's composition operates on dual levels. For a listener familiar with the film, the *Suite* absolutely brings back the visual and emotional aspects of the narrative, but at the same time, thanks to Fusco's supreme level of composition, the *Suite* can be perceived by a listener unfamiliar with the source film as a complete and independent piece of chamber music.

20. “Thème *Oubli* avec crescendo du piano et fortissimo de l'orchestre, arrêt brusque, comme un cri, 18” (Colpi 1960: 11).

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