Hidden Voices:
Exploring Desire and Memory in Joe Hisaishi's DEPARTURES

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In this article, I apply theories of acousmatic voice to investigate how a musical theme uncovers the protagonist's desire in DEPARTURES: THE GIFT OF LAST MEMORIES, original Japanese title OKURIBITO (おくりびと, Japan, 2009, directed by Yōjirō Takita). Specifically, I demonstrate how the main theme incorporates a hidden quotation of the Irish folk song »Danny Boy«, revealing a symbolic message from the absent father of the protagonist Daigo Kobayashi. The repetition of the main theme, embedding this quotation, evokes the father's presence and transforms into Daigo's inner voice. Its theme and variations guide him toward his new life as a mortician and facilitate his reconciliation with his father. I situate the musical and narrative construct of DEPARTURES within the discourse of voice and psychoanalysis, with an emphasis on Mladen Dolar and Brian Kane's exploration of Michel Chion's concept of ›acousmêtre‹ and de-acousmatization as informed by Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic concepts (Chion 1999, 17–23; Lacan 1994, 168). This transformation from the father's message to Daigo's inner voice allows for the de-acousmatization of Daigo's true desires, reflecting the unveiling of Lacan's ›l'objet petit a‹ in his transformative journey of reflecting on life, death, and his relationship with his father. In terms of methodology, I combine musical analysis with psychoanalytic theory to elucidate the narrative's complexities and the character's psychological state.

Death is often considered a taboo in Japanese society, and being a mortician or an en-coffiner has traditionally not been an occupation that can ever bring pride to the family. Yōjirō Takita's DEPARTURES brought this humble occupation to the cinema and expressed ineffable insights on life and death through a complex relationship between father and son. The film received critical acclaim worldwide and won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. Distinguished film critic Roger Ebert praised it as »excellent at achieving the universal ends of narrative« (2011). This poignant story captivated audiences with its exploration of themes such as life, death, and traditional Japanese culture.

The inspiration for the film came from the experience of the lead actor, Masahiro Motoki, who plays the role of a mortician (*nōkanshi*) in the film (Bache 2009). Motoki traveled to India with his friends and witnessed the cremation ritual on the Ganges, which inspired him to read more about the relationship between life and death. Among his readings was Shinmon Aoki's *Coffinman: The Journal of a Buddhist Mortician* (2004), which became an important reference for the film. However, death was not a popular topic to be screened in Japan, especially for a film that wants to document all the details of the ceremonial rituals. Motoki and the production team faced difficulties securing funding (Hale 2009), and after the film was completed, they had to wait thirteen months before its release due to the challenging subject matter. The attitude towards DEPARTURES soon took an opposite turn after its release. The film attracted the audience with its quiet pace, elegance, delicate portrayal of the work of a mortician, and exploration of human relationships in the light of the inevitability of death.

While existing literature on DEPARTURES focuses on contemporary Japanese views of life and Buddhist rituals (cf. Ama 2010; Asai et al. 2010; Hamada and McCaffrey 2024), this article explores the film's original score and how it reveals the protagonist's desire. The lyricism of the film score in DEPARTURES suggests an aura of farewell, warmth, and sadness, aligning with the general sentiment of the film. The film score was composed by Joe Hisaishi, who is referred to as the »John Williams of Japan« by critics (Gerber 2017). Hisaishi has been active in the industry since the 1980s and is particularly renowned for his collaborations with acclaimed anime director Hayao Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli. Some of his most notable works include the scores for films such as MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO (1988), PRINCESS MONONOKE (1997), SPIRITED AWAY (2001), and HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE (2004). While studies on Hisaishi's music primarily focus on his collaborations with Miyazaki, particularly the musical language he employs (cf. Koizumi, 2010; Hara, 2020; Roedder, 2013, 2014; Bellano, 2010), Hisaishi has also emerged as one of the most sought-after film composers in East Asia, particularly for drama movies – an aspect that has not received signification attention from music scholars. His collaborations with director Takeshi Kitano on films such as SONATINE (1993), HANA-BI (1997), and KIKUJIRO (1999) have been particularly notable. Many of the musical features in Hisaishi's music for animations, such as the use of pentatonic scales, Western classical musical style,

melodic development and characteristic instrumentation can be identified in his works for drama as well. This includes the use of shamisen and the Okinawa scale in SONATINE, which lacks the second and sixth notes in the C major scale (Koizumi 2010, 69), synthesized percussion and winds in A SCENE AT THE SEA (1991), and a Western orchestral style in DEPARTURES, as discussed below.

Prior to his venture into film music, Hisaishi had a background as a classical composer with a keen interest in minimalism (Hisaishi 2024, 13–14, 25). While Mervyn Cooke has described Hisaishi's music as an »unambitious international style« that incorporates elements of pop minimalism (2008, 394), as evident in the film score of KIKUJIRO, minimalism is only one of the many musical styles and procedures Hisaishi employs. As the composer admitted, there is not a single unified musical style in his film scores (Hisaishi 2024, 15). However, Hisaishi does emphasize sentimentalism in his compositions, which he derives from his intuition and musical experiences. Despite the fluidity of musical styles in his works, Hisaishi's film scores often effectively capture the essence of the film's characters. For instance, the simple themes in SPIRITED AWAY portray the naivety of the ten-year-old protagonist Chihiro. The syncopated three-note motif fitting the pronunciation of »Totoro« reflects the lively nature of the hamster-like creature Totoro, and the melancholic theme in the style of lounge music in HANA-BI depicts the sorrow of the police officer whose wife is suffering from terminal leukemia. This ability to translate the emotional essence and psyches of a film's characters into music is precisely why Takita invited Hisaishi to compose the score for DEPARTURES (UCLA International Institute 2009). Takita explains that he intends to express the protagonist Daigo's transformation in »living one's own life« through Hisaishi's music:

> I had worked with Hisaishi before and already knew that he has been given an amazing gift, which is to effectively translate the characters' emotions into music. In this movie, there is a story about Daigo and his father. Daigo evokes his memories while taking care of his own father as a nōkanshi, and in turn, finally renews the connections with his father…This story is also really human. So what I wanted to do is to inspire the idea of »living one's own life« by his music.

According to Hisaishi, his initial approach to film scoring is primarily to convey the core message of the film. To him, sensibility plays a significant role in his creative process, aiming to be moved by his own creations (Hisaishi 2024, 25, 35–36). The music in

DEPARTURES, especially its main theme, can be seen as another example that effectively captures the sentiments of the main characters and the general atmosphere of bidding farewell. The film follows the story of Daigo Kobayashi, a professional cellist who loses his job in a small provincial orchestra in Tokyo that disbands. Daigo and his wife return to his hometown in Yamagata, where he unexpectedly finds employment as a mortician, earning a high wage to repay the mortgage on his expensive cello. Initially repulsed by his new job, Daigo gradually undergoes a transformative journey through his encounters with life and death while performing encoffinment rites and rituals. The film also delves into Daigo's personal journey of reconciliation with his estranged father, who had abandoned their family years ago. Daigo's attitude toward his father evolves from bitterness to acceptance, while the transformation goes hand in hand with his gradual acceptance of his job as a mortician. The plot reaches its climax when Daigo receives the news of his father's death. Discovering that his father has been living alone for years, he performs the encoffining ritual, leading to complete forgiveness. As Daigo performs his daily tasks of encoffinment or plays the cello accompanied by moments of self-reflection, the recurring diegetic and non-diegetic musical theme reverberates his inner thoughts that are infused with his sentiments toward his father. While DEPARTURES explicitly portrays death through the encoffinment ceremony, it subtly depicts how people express their feelings toward it, with music playing a crucial role throughout.

As I argue below, the main theme and its variations reveal Daigo's psychological state and his transformation in life. In fact, such practice is not new to Hisaishi. As noted by Marco Bellano, in Hisaishi's later collaborations with Hayao Miyazaki, such as HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE and PONYO in the mid-2000s, he began to favor longer, more developed melodic themes over the fragmented motifs he had previously used to accompany the visual cues in Miyazaki's films (Bellano 2010, 4–55). This shift is particularly evident in the score for HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE. To depict the protagonist Sophie's dramatic physical and psychological transformation – from a young woman, to an elderly lady, and back again – Hisaishi employed the technique of theme and variations (Hisaishi 2024, 80–83). The main waltz-like melody is presented in multiple variations, evolving alongside the changes in Sophie's appearance and inner state.

In addition, the use of cello in DEPARTURES is iconic and carries a strong corporeal connotation. As the director Takita explains,

> Ironically, there is something similar between the process of encoffinment and the act of playing the cello. When you play the cello, the instrument has a human, curvaceous form. The cellist embraces that form when playing the instrument, very loving, affectionate. That's very similar, physically, to the actions of the encoffiner, cradling the body, being tender and gentle with it. (Moore, 2009)

While Daigo adjusts to his new occupation as mortician, he plays his childhood cello in his hometown to reflect on life, death, and his relationship with his father, which seems to converge into a shared thought. The intimacy of playing the cello requires one to embrace the instrument and listen closely, similar to having an intimate conversation with oneself. There are two prominent sequences of Daigo's cello playing. The first occurs in his childhood room, where he plays the main theme diegetically, evoking happy memories with his father through a flashback montage. This theme is indeed his father's favorite song. The second sequence takes place in the countryside, where he reflects on his life as a mortician as he plays the cello. This moment is also presented in a montage, suggesting he is internalizing his thoughts about his work and life. In this context, the cello overlaps with the father's body and the act of encoffinment, becoming a source through which he recalls childhood memories with his father. The instrument symbolizes Daigo's inner self, where his desires resonate and drive his actions.

My study explores how the main theme can be heard as Daigo's inner voice, manifesting as a repetitive disembodied voice, or ›acousmêtre‹, that reflects his responses to the environment and life situations surrounding him. The repetition serves as a process that unveils his true desires. The term ›acousmêtre‹ (acousmatic being), derived from the Greek word meaning »a sound heard«, was adopted by Pierre Schaeffer in his famous *Traité des objets musicaux* (1966) in relation to listening to mass media, such as radio. According to the Greek myth, the acousmatics were disciples of Pythagoras who, concealed by a curtain, followed his teachings for five years without seeing the master. The purpose was to focus on the master's words, and the veil acted as a device to separate the spirit from the body. After five years, the disciples were brought to the sanctuary and allowed to see their master, the authoritative voice's owner (Schaeffer 2017, 64). The curtain is finally drawn back and the acousmatics are able to see its source – the desire is seemingly fulfilled. As

Diderot explained in *Encyclopédi, ou, Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, the disciples who can meet the master are referred to as ›Esoterics‹, while those who remained behind the veil are called as ›Exoterics‹ or ›Acousmatics‹ (1751, 111). Chion developed the notion of ›acousmêtre‹ to discuss a disembodied voice in cinema – specifically, a sensation that can be heard but not seen (Chion 1999, 17–23). The expectation of being visualized is what differentiates an acousmatic being in cinema from radio voice or ›musique concrète‹ (Buhler et al. 2010, 88). Schaeffer and Chion discuss the myth of the acousmatic voice and the Pythagorean veil to explain the acousmatic nature of ›musique concrète‹ and acoustical beings, respectively (Schaeffer 2017, 64–65; Chion 2009, 11). Both of them relate to the technological side of listening, as listening habits were significantly altered by telecommunication and mass broadcasting during the wartime, allowing audiences to hear the voice of announcers without seeing their faces. Some discourses on ›acousmêtre‹ focus on acoustic spatial entity, including corporeal space, or suggestive sounds as voiceless acoustical beings, especially in digital surround sound or in horror films (Chion 2003, 466; Jordan 2009, 47–71; Johnston 2015, 131–144). In the latter, there is often a dislocation between the body and the voice. Other discussions on voice and the body in psychoanalysis further explore the notion of acousmatic voice through the lens of one's desire.[1] While acoustics focuses on the physical properties of sound, acousmatics is concerned with an individual's reactions to sonic stimuli. The difference does not exactly lie in the contrast between objectivity and subjectivity, but in the subject's interpretation of the sound objects. The acousmatic questions such as »What am I hearing?« and »What are you hearing?«, in relation to what I am seeing, are directed back at the subject regarding their perception.

[1] Recent scholarship has explored the intricate relationship between film music and psychoanalytic theory, particularly through the lens of the acousmatic voice. Mary Ann Doane has examined how soundtracks serve as vehicles for unconscious desires, with music acting as a disembodied inner voice that reflects the psychological states of characters. This notion aligns with Jacques Lacan's concept of ›l'objet petit a‹, emphasizing how film scores not only enhance emotional engagement but also reveal the complexities of identity and desire. Furthermore, the work of Claudia Gorbman illustrates how film music functions as a suturing device, immersing viewers in the narrative while simultaneously masking the technological and ideological underpinnings of cinematic representation. These analyses highlight the significance of music in shaping the viewer's experience and understanding of character motivations within the psychoanalytic framework.

Mladen Dolar (2006) and Brian Kane (2014) examine the idea of voice as an object, arguing that it is detached from its original source. This is precisely where the concept of the acousmatic voice becomes relevant (Dolar 2006, 67–70; Kane 2014, 216–222). They further elaborate on the Pythagorean veil in relation to one's curiosity to pin down a voice to a source and its subsequent fulfillment. This process of de-acousmatization is related to the desire to uncover the mystery (Chion 1999, 23). De-acousmatization may happen in different stages, which Chion describes as a »striptease« – each stage allows the subject to get closer to the source. Dolar and Kane explore the notion of de-acousmatization of the unseen voice in relation to Jacques Lacan's concept of ›l'objet petit a‹ (Dolar 2006, 67–70; Kane 2014, 216–222). In line with Freud's idea of »the lost object of desire« – as something that is sought incessantly but never found – Lacan argues that when the object of desire is found, a person turns to another, an ›a[utre]‹. This ›l'objet petit a‹ represents an elusive object of desire at the core of the subject's enjoyment (›jouissance‹) (Fink 1995, 83–92). It is not a tangible object but a symbolic construct that emerges from the subject's relationship with the Other – the ›Symbolic Order‹. Although the person experiencing the acousmatic voice may desire to unveil its source, it could be the case that when the voice becomes attached to a body, the authoritative voice loses its omnipotent and charismatic character. De-acousmatization in films can lead to disappointment, as exemplified in THE WIZARD OF OZ (1939, Victor Fleming), where the unveiling of the powerless old man behind the Wizard produces a »castrating effect«[2]. Nevertheless, ›l'objet petit a‹ also symbolizes the inherent lacking, an inherent desire, like a window that shows what is missing. Thus, it represents an object that is both desired and lost, sustaining the subject's desires and driving their pursuit of fulfillment. It is also possible that Pythagoras' disciples maintain an illusion after de-acousmatization to cover up their disappointment, ensuring that the disillusionment does not affect the Big Other – the locus of desire structured by cultural and social signifiers. They may deny the disenchantment they have experienced, as the source is perceived to be an authoritative and respected figure. To the extreme, the disciples may raise another »screen of fetishism«, as Kane describes in relation to Freud's theory of fetishism and Lacan's writings (Kane 2014, 210–212), to maintain their fantasy. This dynamic is also reflected in DEPARTURES, as discussed below, where Daigo's desire

[2] See Kane 2014, 210.

for paternal love is resolved as he encoffins his father, subsequently directing his love and desire toward his unborn son. His desire will never be completely fulfilled. Daigo will keep permanent feelings of lack and longing (in keeping with Lacan's concept of ›l'objet petit a‹), yet he continues to drive his pursuit of fulfillment.

This article suggests that the acousmatic inner voice of Daigo is rooted in the main theme, particularly through the quotation of a phrase from the Irish folk song »Danny Boy«. This transformation of Daigo's psychological state is conveyed through the theme and its variations, culminating in his triumph over life's struggles in the final variation. The journey begins with this quotation and its connotations.

The Quotation of »Danny Boy«

The recurring main theme goes hand in hand with the unfolding of Daigo's story as a mortician. Upon closer examination, we can identify a quotation of a phrase from the Irish folk song »Danny Boy« in the main theme. As Figures 1a and 1b illustrate, the second phrase of »Danny Boy« is quoted, with the last three notes repeated and reinforced. This quotation becomes even more pronounced in the orchestral version of the theme, highlighting its presence.

This main theme is presented diegetically twice in the film and has a strong association with Daigo's father. The first instance occurs when Daigo returns to his childhood home in Yamagata and plays the theme on his childhood cello, as previously mentioned. It is first presented as a solo cello piece played by Daigo diegetically, and when it repeats, the piano accompaniment enters to underscore a flashback to Daigo's childhood, where we see his parents proudly listening to him playing the cello – perhaps the reason Daigo became a professional cellist. In these memories, Daigo and his father exchange »stone letters« as a gesture of love. However, Daigo's father's face remains blurred, as if Daigo is struggling to fully recall the details of their relationship. The intimate, personal nature of the main theme's diegetic usage, combined with the association with Daigo's father, helps to establish the theme's symbolic importance in evoking Daigo's emotional journey and connection to his past.

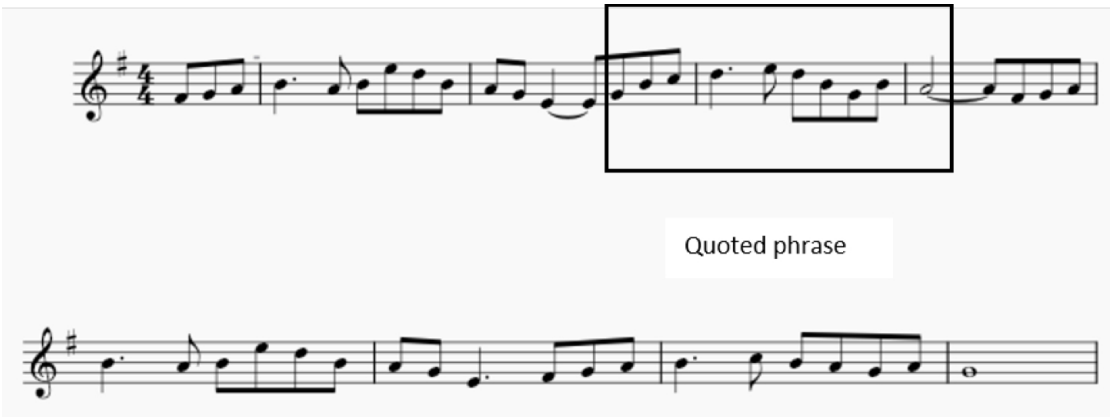

Figure 1a: »Danny Boy«. Transcriptions by the author unless indicated otherwise

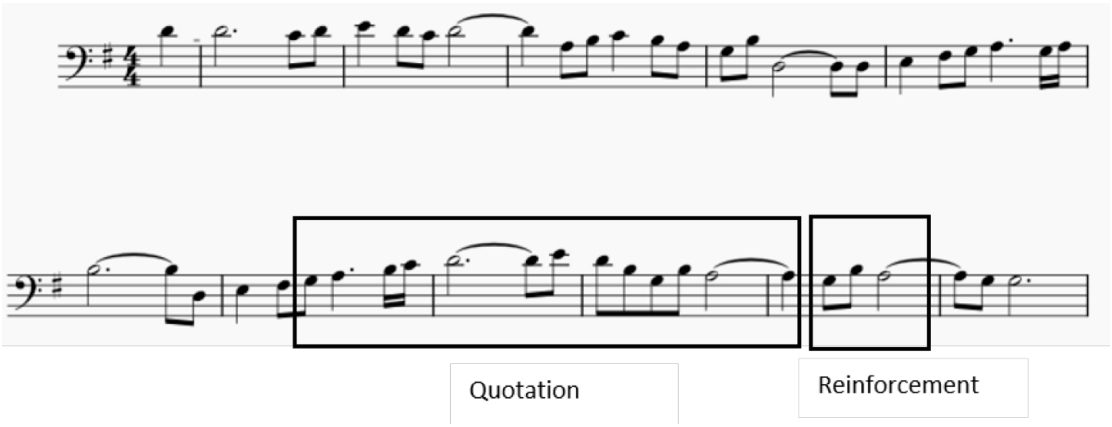

Figure 1b: Main theme of DEPARTURES

The significance of the main theme becomes even clearer in its second diegetic use in the film. This time, the theme with the piano accompaniment is played on a vinyl record. At this point, the audience can understand that the flashback in the previous scene is related to this cello piece on the record. When Daigo's wife Mika plays this music in the old coffee shop owned by Daigo's father, Daigo explains that it was his father's favorite song. Daigo gazes at the turntable with a sense of bitterness as the music plays. This diegetic use of his father's favorite song, treated as a pre-existing music within the film, further associates the main theme with Daigo's father and his identity. It is also during the same sequence that Daigo confides to Mika his complicated feelings toward his father, who had abandoned the family for another woman.

The adoption of the quotation from »Danny Boy« appears to be more than coincidental. In one episode of the film, Yamashita, Daigo's former classmate and a mirror of Daigo's

own experiences, has a strained relationship with his mother, Kizuna, due to financial issues. Kizuna is reluctant to sell her public bath, which could have provided Yamashita with a good sum of money. When Kizuna passes away, Daigo performs the encoffinment ritual for her, and Kizuna's theme is introduced at this moment. The theme begins with the same quotation from »Danny Boy« played by a solo flute (soundtrack no. 15 for the original version, no. 9 for the piano version) as Example 2 shows. After the funeral, Yamashita experiences complex sentiments of regret, understanding, and relief from his mother's death and the strained relationship between them. The mother-and-son relationship foreshadows Daigo's attitude toward his father in the second half of the movie, and the two themes are connected by the same quotation from »Danny Boy«.

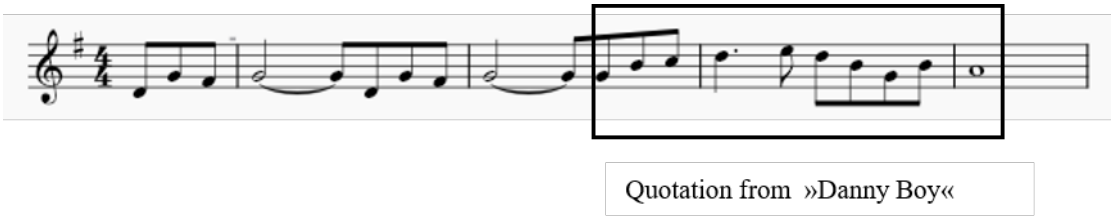

Figure 2: Beginning of Kizuna's Theme

Interestingly, the musical features of the main theme do not entirely reflect Daigo's description of his father as an irresponsible, cold-hearted person. The theme conveys a sense of warmth and humanity. The song »Danny Boy«, with lyrics set to the Northern Ireland tune »Londonderry Air«, is often associated with farewells and funerals, resonates beneath the surface of the film. This is particularly significant considering the song's common usage in memorial events and funeral ceremonies nowadays, as it echoes Daigo's work as a mortician and foreshadows the encoffinment ritual he performs for his father at the end. Although it is not a common practice to sing »Danny Boy« in Japanese funerals, Irish folk songs are well-known in Japanese society. During the modernization of education in Japan's Meiji period (1868–1911), Japanese scholars were sent to the West, including America, to learn about pedagogy and music. Sheet music and Western musical instruments were imported, and strophic song forms became popular. William Malm notes that Japanese schoolchildren easily picked up some Western folk songs, including »Danny Boy« and »The Last Rose of Summer«, more readily than others (1977, 272). As Sean Williams observes, Irish folk songs evoke a sense of nostalgia in Japanese society. In

his study, those Japanese who heard the Irish tunes reported that the music reminded them of their childhoods, hometown, or their mother's singing (2006, 102). In addition, the Japanese terms *kyōshū* (homesickness), *kaiko no jō* (yearning for the old days), and a Westernized nostalgia of *nosutarujia* can be applied to Irish music to express longing for a rural past, missing one's mother, or »the pang of the unrequited desire for belonging« (Yano 2002, 14; Williams 1977, 114). These sentiments resonate with the plot of DEPARTURES, particularly Daigo's nostalgic feelings for his hometown and his love for his parents. Joe Hisaishi recognizes the influence of Irish and Scottish folk songs on Japanese children, noting, »For modern Japanese, I think English and Irish folk songs are like their foundational musical experience« (Hisaishi 1992, 57). He also admitted that the film score for NAUSICAÄ OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND was inspired by elements of Scottish and Irish folk music (Koizumi 2010, 64). In addition, Hisaishi scholar Kunio Hara observes that as early as CASTLE IN THE SKY and MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO, there has been a noticeable influence of folk music from the British Isles (Hara 2020, 41–42).

The song »Danny Boy« features lyrics by Frederic Weatherly, written around 1913, from the traditional Irish melody »Londonderry Air«. Although there is no unified interpretation of the song's meaning, it is generally seen as a depiction of a parent bidding farewell to their son as he goes off to war. The parent is saddened because, upon the son's return, the parent will likely be deceased.[3] If we consider the second verse of the song, the lyrics of the quoted phrase is the key to the whole film from the parent's perspective and directly mentions death: »If I am dead, as dead I well may be.«[4] The verse expresses the hope that the son will visit their grave one day. The use of the quotation serves as a reminder of its original source and its associations. The whole second verse in fact depicts the story from the perspective of Daigo's father:

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[3] The song also evokes connotations of Irish patriotisms and the Irish diaspora, but these serve primarily as symbolic meanings derived from the song. See more on the song's meaning in Wayback Machine Internet Archive entry on »Danny Boy«: https://web.archive.org/web/20181008013330/http://www.standingstones.com/danny3.html#sister (24.03.2025).

[4] See the full lyrics in »Fred Weatherly's Own Description of Writing Danny Boy«, in Wayback Machine Internet Archive, https://web.archive.org/web/20181008013330/http://www.standingstones.com/danny3.html#sister (24.03.2025); See also the original sheet music on Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/dannyboysong00weat/mode/2up (24.03.2025).

But when ye come, and all the flowers are dying,
If I am dead, as dead I well may be,
You'll come and find the place where I am lying,
And kneel and say an Ave there for me.

And I shall hear, though soft you tread above me,
And all my grave will warmer, sweeter be,
For you will bend and tell me that you love me,
And I shall sleep in peace until you come to me!

Within the story's context, the quotation of »Danny Boy« foreshadows the father's death and the son's return to the hometown in Yamagata. It can also be seen as the father's plea for forgiveness for abandoning the family. The strong conversational tone in the lyrics embedded in the hidden quotation in the theme acts as a father's message to his son. This quotation imbues the main theme with a strong sense of the father's identity. Although Daigo's father may not possess omnipotence or traditional power, his negative image and abandonment of the family have inflicted profound pain and potentially even trauma upon Daigo. Consequently, Daigo's yearning for his father's love establishes his father as an authoritative figure in his life, albeit reluctantly acknowledged. The musical theme itself is lyrical. This embedded presence of the father becomes an obsession in Daigo's mind, as the main theme recurs both diegetically and non-diegetically. The father's image exerts a mysterious power over Daigo through his inner voice, compelling him to reflect on life, death, and family bonds.

Unveiling Desires through De-acousmatization of Inner Voices

The main theme recurs multiple times in variations to signal different stages of Daigo's transformative journey as a mortician learning life lessons along the way. It becomes Daigo's inner voice, which derives from his desire and has no physical body – we recall the concept of ›acousmêtre‹ that extends beyond cinematic representations to psychoanalysis. Its recurrence can thus be viewed as the de-acousmatization of this inner voice to reveal what his true desire is. The reference to »Danny Boy« in the music and its lyricism, his father's blurry face in his memory, along with the »stone letters« exchanged between father and son set up Pythagorean veils in Daigo's interior, building a desire within him through his inner voice. This becomes Daigo's drive to search for his inner desire regard-

ing his father when he gets involved in the mortician business – an occupation that traditionally centers around family bonds. One's internal conversations over time is an indispensable part of the narrative, and an important thread to help the audience to understand why Daigo stays in a job that does not gain respect from society and his final reconciliation with the father.

The main theme appears in multiple sequences non-diegetically or meta-diegetically. After being introduced diegetically through Daigo's own playing and the vinyl record, the main theme resurfaces three times in non-diegetic contexts: during a montage of Daigo's life as a mortician, while he performs the encoffinment ritual for his father, and during the end credits alongside his demonstration of the encoffining work. The theme begins with a diegetic cello solo as Daigo plays the melody in his room, transitions to a piano-accompanied version on the vinyl record, and later to fuller and richer orchestral variations, reflecting his increasingly positive view of his job and his relationship with his father.

The main theme culminates in a beautiful montage showing Daigo's life as a mortician and his growing sense of job satisfaction. The main theme is played the fullest in its orchestral version, accompanying the montage as a variation. The rich orchestral arrangement amplifies Daigo's thoughts and experiences as a mortician, strengthening relationships and love among people. The montage also features shots of clients finding relief and expressing love for the deceased during funerals. Additionally, there are scenes of Daigo playing his childhood cello in the picturesque countryside, serving as a moment of self-reflection on life, death, and his relationship with his father. The quotation, folk-like style, timbre of the cello, and the act of playing all symbolize the father's presence and the encoffinment rite.

The main theme reappears when Daigo learns of his father's death and prepares the body for encoffining in his apartment. The vinyl record version of the main theme is played when Daigo discovers that his father is holding Daigo's »stone letter« on his deathbed. As Daigo performs the encoffinment ritual for his father, he vividly recalls his face, and the spectators finally get a clear glimpse of it. While Daigo performs the ritual, the same flashback of childhood scenes is evoked, and this time the father's face completes the final piece of his childhood memory. De-acousmatization takes place: the acousmatic voice of

Daigo's desire finally finds its source. However, this unveiling also leads to disillusionment – not because the audience discovers that the father is merely an ordinary old man, but because Daigo realizes that his father is not with another woman or leading a different family as he has believed. The father is not as cold-hearted as Daigo imagines. This revelation challenges Daigo's bitterness and moral judgments, confronting him with feelings of regret and self-blame.

The main theme ceases after the encoffinment ritual. The source of the acousmatic voice is then unveiled. However, as Dolar and Kane explain, the source is not an object, as Daigo's father is not the »thing« he truly desires. Desire is perpetually allured by its own quest for fulfillment, driven by the endless progression of various objects or signifiers occupying the position of the desired thing. If the de-acousmatization process is to unveil the ›objet petit a‹, it is not a physical object one wants to see. It represents the object of the subject's fundamental lack, the thing that fuels the subject's endless desire. It is the object that the subject can never fully possess or attain (Fink 1995, 90–91). In other words, behind the Pythagorean veil, there is nothing. The speaker's body functions as a second veil, serving as a screen upon which the fetishistic structure of desire is projected and propped up (Kane 2014, 212). This is why, after the ritual, Daigo places the father's »stone letter«, representing his father's love, on his pregnant wife's belly, for their unborn son. Daigo's desire remains unfulfilled, as his eternal desire is for paternal love, and now his unborn son occupies the place of that desire. Slavoj Žižek's description of the Pythagorean veil further explains Daigo's situation: the perpetuation of the current social order, the Big Other, in this case the family system, is maintained by Daigo's desire for paternal love.

Immediately following this de-acousmatization sequence is the film's end credits, which play alongside Daigo's elegant demonstration of the full encoffining ritual. The main theme is presented in a lively, energetic orchestral variation at a faster tempo, suggesting that Daigo has finally freed himself from his internal struggle and is ready to »live his own life« (recalling Takita's statement). The rhythmically-driven strings evoke a renewal and the start of a new chapter for Daigo.

Conclusion

Chion's notions of ›acousmêtre‹ have been further developed for more than half a century, spanning discussions from the use of film sound and telecommunication to discourses on unseen sound and desire. This article focuses on Mladen Dolar and Brian Kane's recent analyses of the acousmatic voice, as well as Joe Hisaishi's film score for the film DEPARTURES: THE GIFT OF LAST MEMORIES. It illustrates how a musical quotation is embedded in a theme, embodying the presence of the protagonist's father and unraveling the complexities of the protagonist's psychological state. This article demonstrates how this theme, with its strong conversational tone derived from the quotation, transforms into the protagonist's inner voice – an acousmatic voice that lacks a physical body yet exerts a mysterious power over him. This acousmatic voice becomes an obsession, guiding his transformative journey through variations of the main theme. Through the »de-acousmatization« process, the protagonist's inner desire is ultimately exposed. This analysis provides insights into how the acousmatic voice, conveyed through music, can play a critical role in shaping the narrative and character development in film. Further directions for research could explore the musical development or the form of theme and variations in relation to the discovery of characters' desires and drives, particularly in connection to voice and their inner thoughts.

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Choi, Misty: Hidden Voices: Exploring Desire and Memory in Joe Hisaishi's DEPARTURES. In: *Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung* 19 (2025), S. 80–97, DOI: https://doi.org/10.59056/kbzf.2025.19.p80-97.

Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung (ISSN 1866-4768)