The Music and Sound of Experimental Film

Edited by
HOLLY ROGERS and
JEREMY BARHAM

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For Daisy (HR)
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Preface

THE EXPERIMENTAL IMPULSE is fundamental to the human condition. Experimentation can take many forms. It can be painstaking and laborious work, built on the foundation of generations of earlier thinkers, inching a discipline forward. But those inches can contain immeasurable potential within them. Or experimentation can be impulsive, intuitive, unstructured and bravura, yielding insights and knowledge that may make immediate and dramatic leaps forward in avant-garde fashion or may take years to be assimilated and understood. As a comparatively youthful art form, film began as an experiment, its early identity embodying the experimental spirit, and its progress unfolding through an amalgam of pioneering technological investigation and unbridled creative imagination. Now having matured into a pluralistic, dominant, global cultural form in a media-saturated world powered by unrelenting commercial concerns, film's experimental origins and continued experimental development all the more deserve serious recognition and exploration. This is particularly so in terms of the sonic dimensions of such film's audiovisuality, given the often-assumed hegemony of the visual in multimedia contexts, and given the rapidly expanding body of scholarly work that has emerged over recent years in more mainstream fields of screen music studies. With a sense of intuition combined with close consideration, and from something of an experimental perspective ourselves, we therefore present this collection of chapters

as the first of its kind to address repertoire, ideas, approaches, artists and cultures of the auditory in experimental film contexts, in the hope that it will inform our wider knowledge and experience of an art form that can so radically and so subtly frame and reframe our sensorial, intellectual and imaginative existence.

Jeremy Barham

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Dieter Daniels is Professor for Art History and Media Theory at the Academy of Visual Arts (HGB) in Leipzig. He is an art historian, media theorist and exhibition curator focusing on media history, media art and the relation between art and music. He is the author and editor of monographs on Marcel Duchamp, George Brecht and John Cage, and is editor of *Audiovisuology: A Reader* (Verlag Walther König, 2015).

Terence Dobson's book *The Film Work of Norman McLaren* is the fullest account of McLaren's work yet to appear in print. He has published extensively on Norman McLaren and he has presented, with the National Film Board of Canada's support, a wide selection of McLaren's films and experiments on a national tour of New Zealand. He received his PhD from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, his MPhil from Griffith University, Australia, and has lectured in film animation at universities in both countries.

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Holly Rogers is Senior Lecturer in Music at Goldsmiths, University of London. Before that, she was the founding director of the Research Centre for Audio-Visual Media at the University of Liverpool, Fulbright Scholar at the DocFilm Institute in San Francisco and Research Fellow at the Humanities Institute of Ireland. Her primary interest lies in the relationship between sound and image in experimental film, video art and music video. Holly is the author *Visualising Music: Audio-Visual Relationships in Avant-Garde Film and Video Art* (Lambert Academic, 2010) and *Sounding the Gallery: Video and the Rise of Art-Music* (Oxford University Press, 2013). She has also edited two books on audiovisual media: *Music and Sound in Documentary Film* (Routledge, 2014) and (with Carol Vernallis and Lisa Perrott) *Transmedia Directors* (in preparation). She is a founding editor for the Bloomsbury book series New Approaches to Sound, Music and Media.

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Carol Vernallis's areas of specialisation are music video and recent film; her research deals more broadly with questions of sound and image in moving media. Her first book, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Content* (Columbia University Press, 2004), attempts to theorise the genre. Her second, *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema* (Oxford University Press, 2013), takes account of a new mediascape driven by intensified audiovisual relations. The book considers techniques and strategies that are shared between the three forms of digital media it focuses on. She is now working more closely with directors and other practitioners who create innovative audiovisual work across platforms and media—her book in progress (with Holly Rogers and Lisa Perrott) is entitled *Transmedia Directors*—and she is asking about the viewer/listener's experience of audiovisuality in today's media-saturated, multiplatform swirl. She is also co-editor of *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics* (2013) and *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media* (2013).

Introduction

Holly Rogers

EXPERIMENTAL FILM IS a slippery category. Within the plurality of visual styles, filmmaking techniques and aesthetics that have fallen under this heading is an equally diverse range of musical types, textures and trans-aural relationships. Relative to era, audience, culture and technology, the sheer variety of visual and sonic combination makes a coherent understanding of what constitutes audiovisual film experimentation hard to pin down. In today's pluralistic era of convergence, definitions become more difficult still. The accelerated style and intensified musicalisation of post-classical cinema and the transmedial connectivity of YouTube and other Internet platforms have blurred the already unstable boundaries between mainstream and experimental film practices and the ways in which music has been used in each. From the nonlinear editing systems that David Bordwell highlights in post-classical cinema, through the media swirl that Carol Vernallis sees as drawing previously discrete genres into "a mediascape that foregrounds musical feature" (what she calls the "audiovisual turn"), or the database structures that Lev Manovich understands to be pressing at the traditional customs of narrative film, our inter-mediating age of transmedial play, self-reflexivity and mashup has afforded music a more prominent role than ever before.[1]

[1] David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Carol Vernallis, *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5, 7; Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), xv, 20.

This book is based on the belief that the creative innovations in film sound that characterise contemporary cinema can be traced back not only through the scoring practices of commercial narrative film, but also through the intensely musicalised forms that resonate through many different schools of experimental film. It is our hope that the prominence of music in both today's screen media and its theory will encourage us to look back at experimental film culture through a different lens. While it is not possible to suggest that the constantly refreshed disruptive forces that drive experimental filmmakers and composers have formed a distinctly musical genre—there are a significant number of artists who have chosen not to use creative sound or music in their films at all, for instance—it is true that when sonic elements do form an integral part of a film's discursive strategy in the form of radical sounds or shocking audiovisual relationships, they can be extraordinarily powerful forces in the creation of an experimental aesthetic.

The rich and varied nature of recent film music scholarship has gone a long way towards drawing out the sonic complexities of mainstream film sound, from its earliest iterations to the newer forms of post-classical cinema. These dialogues have focused on a tradition that assumes some degree of consistency in its uses of music to forge particular forms of audiovisuality and immersivity. There are of course numerous exceptions, but useful generalisations have been drawn to form several coherent and complementary theories of music's use and power within feature-length narrative film, including scoring practices, reception, point-of-audition, the problems of diegesis, narratology, semiotics, aesthetics and the relationship between music and a film's other aural components. At first glance, the wild divergences found within experimental film practice—of aesthetics, style, texture, performance, even representation—offer a bewildering array of audiovisual gestures that cannot, and perhaps should not, be pinned down to common styles. Such plurality has been embraced in the historical and analytical accounts of experimental film styles and schools, and many do an excellent job of interrogating the visual and technological trends, aesthetic styles and influences and structural ideologies of the many different cultures that have emerged over the last century. As yet, though, no such concerted approach has been made to understand or catalogue this diversity in terms of its aural evolution and innovations.

To this visually dominated scholarship, the authors in this book add the beginnings of a narrative that takes into account the music, sound and audiovisual composition of experimental film. Although there have been no book-length studies of experimental film sound, several examples touch ground that is similar. In *Cinesonica: Sounding Film and Video*, Andy Birtwistle explores audiovisuality through a variety of cinematic styles, including experimental film, in order to construct his theory of film sound—or cinesonica; Annette Davison's *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice: Cinema Soundtracks in the 1980s and 1990s* is concerned with the ways in which the styles of mainstream fiction film have been expanded by directors working at the edges of Hollywood. Sticking to high-budget, narrative films, she considers the ways in which

directors such as David Lynch and Wim Wenders reconfigure Hollywood's sound-worlds, while remaining firmly rooted within its parameters; and in my work, I have considered the ways in which certain strains of experimental film and video art have been so musical that a new audiovisual media fusion has arisen that allows practitioners to create both image and music.[2] Of all the experimental film cultures, the visual music scene has received the most attention for its sonic aspects, with William Moritz, Cindy Keefer and Aimee Mollaghan producing close readings of the work of Oskar Fischinger and others.[3]

Building on these previous analyses, this initial foray into the topic mixes several types of approach and methodology to explore some of the ways in which audiovisual experimentation has responded to, and promoted, technological developments, social and political change, expanded modes of reception, cultural interventions and innovative forms of remediation and intertextuality. These approaches range from socio-historical contextualisations of intellectual culture to investigations into the impact of new audiovisual textures on cultural innovation, queer rights and feminism. Supporting these broad, theoretical frameworks are chapters that magnify particularly significant audiovisual moments through close analytical and aesthetic readings. Here, the focus moves between the technicalities of audiovisual innovation and compositional strategy, the process of collaborative creativity, the formation of intermedial textures and the disruption of aural expectations within the work of particular artists.

Within this oscillation between context and close reading, the area of investigation has been limited in two ways. First, we have restricted our focus to European and North American film practices, although we remain keenly aware of the push and pull of influence from other cultural centres, and the significance of transnational flow arises briefly in several chapters. It is important, however, for this exploratory collection to have a geographical coherence. Second, our interest rests at the outer edges of screen media experimentation. While the fresh and innovative treatment of music by artists such as Andrei Tarkovsky, Jean-Luc Godard, Peter Greenaway, Werner Herzog, David Lynch and the host of other directors who have played with the fiction feature format (often with substantial financial support) has forged exciting new audiovisual relationships, the critique and subversion of familiar narrative forms mean that existing film music

[2] Andy Birtwistle, *Cinesonica: Sounding Film and Video* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); Annette Davison, *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice: Cinema Soundtracks in the 1980s and 1990s* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004); Holly Rogers, *Visualising Music: Audio-Visual Relationships in Avant-Garde Film and Video* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic, 2010) and *Sounding the Gallery: Video and the Rise of Art-Music* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[3] William Moritz, *Optical Poetry: The Life and Work of Oskar Fischinger* (London: John Libbey, 2004); Cindy Keefer and Jaap Guldemond, eds., *Oskar Fischinger (1900–1969): Experiments in Cinematic Abstraction* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013); Aimee Mollaghan, *The Visual Music Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

theories can offer a useful starting point for analysis. The artists and musicians represented in this collection, however, have produced work that lies beyond the scope of existing audiovisual scholarship.

Within these boundaries, we have worked towards an open and inclusive understanding of experimental film, but one that emphasises moments of significant audiovisual revolution and transformation: in particular, occasions when music and/or sound have been used in surprising, subversive and/or politically charged ways by those operating outside of the artistic and financial aesthetics that drive dominant commercial cinema. Often, these filmmakers work alone or in small collaborative groups to produce social, political or gendered forms of discourse, films that highlight their materiality by eschewing the audiovisual immersivity of mainstream fiction features to encourage a critical distanciation between audience and work.

By questioning existing presumptions of visual primacy in experimental film, the authors collected here discuss their chosen examples in holistic audiovisual terms in order to initiate and develop new theoretical approaches to music, art and film: what happens when images extend from a musical sound world, or when a visual progression is warped and distorted by sonic experimentation? What can the role of music be in aesthetic environments far removed from those formed in mainstream film? Are there any constancies in sonic practice? Or is the lack of consistency the key? Do experimental films have innovative soundtracks or does an avant-garde texture arise from a distinct placement of music against, or with, an image? Can these questions help to create, or fragment, a definition of experimental film?

Although fully expecting the responses to these questions to be as eclectic as experimental film practice itself, it was a surprise to find that several recurrent themes permeated most of the chapters. Consistent among these was the identification of a liminal space that opens up between previously constructed binaries when audiovisuality is treated experimentally: between music and noise, active and passive, popular and avant-garde and audiovisual synchronicity and dissonance. Of these dissolving borders, the last forms the dominant theoretical crux of the collection. Nearly all of the authors identify experimental audiovisuality as operating either in extreme, even inextricable, synchronicity, or through strident forms of antagonism that reveal a gap between what is shown and what sounded. Such sound and image interactions lie well outside the dominant syntax of twentieth-century film.

Synchronicity and Animated Sound

Audiovisual synchronisation has become easier with every decade that film has existed. From early improvised accompaniments, cue sheets and roto scores through to digital methods of producing exact rhythmic synchronisation, the alignment of music and image has played a large role in the technological innovations and aesthetic reception of

dominant film practice. Introducing the term "synchresis", Michel Chion writes of "the spontaneous and irresistible weld produced between a particular auditory phenomenon and visual phenomenon when they occur at the same time."[4] While there has developed, within the mainstream film tradition, a highly successful method of audiovisual combination to produce such an "irresistible weld", many of the experimental artists represented in this book have employed a variety of methods to take the idea of synchronicity to an extreme.

Perhaps the best-known approach can be found in the work of those who used film's temporal capabilities to visualise music. Mainly using pre-existent pieces, these artists animated to musical scores, which could be used as a rhythmic or emotional framework. The images of Oskar Fischinger's *An Optical Poem* (1937), for instance, dance around Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody no. 2 (1847), while his animated response to Bach's Brandenburg Concerto no. 3 (1721) in *Motion Painting No. 1* (1947) travel alongside Bach's music in "giant steps":

> what you see is not translated music, because music doesn't need to be translated on the screen—to the Eyes music is in itself enough—but the optical part is like we walk on the side of the river—sometimes we go a little bit farther off (away) but we come back and go along on this river, the concerto by Bach. The optical part is no perfect synchronisation of every wave of the river—it is a very free walk, nothing is forced, nothing is synchronised except in great steps. The film is in some parts perfectly synchronised with the music, but in other parts it runs free—without caring much about the music—it is like a pleasant walk on the side of a river. If the river springs, we on the side do not necessarily spring to it, but go our own free way—sometimes we even go a little bit away from the river and later come back to it and love it so much more—because we were away from it.[5]

The exuberance of Fischinger's visual response is clear to see. The shapes, painted onto Plexiglass, simultaneously blend with and repel the music, operating like another voice that transforms Bach's sonic ritornello into a multi-dimensional, audiovisual one. Although working to a different aesthetic, Mary Ellen Bute explored the idea of image moving its "own free way" along a musical path in her series of abstract shorts, *Seeing Sound* (1930s to mid-'50s). In her analysis of *Rhythm in Light* (1934), Lauren Rabinovitz reads Bute's loosely synchronised animated response to "Anitra's Dance" from Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt* (1875) as only "abstractly express[ing] the programmatic music's climax and variations, its moods and psychological moments", while Frank Stauffacher

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[4] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 63.

[5] Oskar Fischinger quotation taken from Fischinger's writings, found on eight narrow strips of paper; reproduced at http://www.centerforvisualmusic.org/Fischinger/OFFilmnotes.htm, accessed 20 August 2016.

points out that, like Fischinger, the artist did not strive for rigid synchronisation: "The forms complement rather than correspond," he writes.[6]

The mobilisation of image to pre-existent music through "giant steps" and complementation appears several times in this book. Malcolm Cook (chapter 2) uses Len Lye's visual improvisations to popular songs and jazz standards to articulate a form of audiovisual alliance based on aesthetic harmony rather than strict audiovisual synergy, a companionship that confuses and problematises the distinctions between experimental film practice and sing-along Hollywood movies. This positive interplay, despite sometimes resulting in a separation of the senses (or what Cook calls "multimodal sensual perception"), nevertheless achieves a dialogue that stretches towards a synaesthetic play. In chapter 14, Jeremy Barham uses the visualisation of Mahler's work by twenty-first-century musical, visual, sound-art and mixed-media artists to re-evaluate the aesthetics and working methods of visual music creatives. Noting how visualisations of music are often forged from rhythmic fusions, with little response to other musical criteria—timbre, texture, dynamics, pitch, tempo and so on—he references 3D imaging, real-time intermedial manipulation, VJing and other forms of digital interactive audiovisuality to show how new media can signal a move towards a more fluent form of intermediality. At the same time, however, he interrogates the very assumptions on which the visual music scene has been built and problematises the terminology—and its aesthetic resonance—most commonly associated with music-image interaction: synthesis, hybridity, fusion, union, combination, marry, translation, homogenisation, remediation and so on. This enables him to question whether new medial visualisation of music produces merely a form of sensory saturation or whether, in fact, it enables a degree of medium specificity that can speak to a coherent form of collaboration. Several other authors also focus on the use of pre-existent music but, as we shall see below, in these instances, the potential for audiovisual dialogue is expressed very differently.

While the visualisation of pre-existent music is not, as Fischinger insists, a form of cross-media translation, the same artists who embraced these "giant steps" were also responsible for reducing the audiovisual gap through drawn, synthetic or optical sound; that is, sound not produced by an instrument or voice but by a drawn pattern or shape. This process, which enables single-authored audiovisual work, has been amply explored throughout film's history, from the photographing of shapes onto a film strip to produce distinctive sounds by avant-garde Russian composer Arseny Avraamov to the hand-drawn sound strips, or *tönende Handschrift* (sounding handwriting) of Rudolf Pfenninger that produced what contemporary critics described as "very beautiful

[6] Lauren Rabinovitz, "Mary Ellen Bute", in *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde*, ed. Jan-Christopher Horak (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 322; Stauffacher, quoted in Sandra Naumann, "Mary Ellen Bute's Vision of a Visual Music: Theoretical and Practical Aspects", master's thesis, University of Leipzig, 2006, 123.

'mechanical' music, a sort of carousel music".[7] In a statement issued in 1932, Fischinger referred to his technique of drawing on the optical soundtrack of the film strip to produce direct sound *tönende Ornamente* (sounding ornaments), describing the result as "drawn music . . . when run through a projector, these graphic sounds broadcast tones of a hitherto unheard of purity, and thus, quite obviously, fantastic possibilities open up for the composition of music in the future."[8] Bute also explored the possibilities of audiovisual translation in *Abstronic* (1952) and *Mood Contrasts* (1953), in which her use of electronically generated images and an oscilloscope enabled her to forge what Gabriele Jutz describes as a "direct transformation of sound into image".[9]

Forming one of the most consistent threads in experimental film's sonic history, the possibilities of synthetic sound—and the simultaneous creation of both sound and image—were explored by John and James Whitney, Paul Sharits, Barry Spinello, Robert Russett, Guy Sherwin, Kurt Kren, Bärbel Neubauer, Richard Reeves and Peter Tscherkassky among others.[10] In fact, it is easy to identify a clear lineage from the early visual music innovators to the recent forms of computer-based hyper-animation explored by Bernd Lintermann and Torsten Belschner, Jeffrey Shaw and Vibeke Sorensen, who use telecommunications and genetic algorithms to generate and manipulate sound and image simultaneously.[11] Although not created through a direct descendent of hand-drawn sound, Shaw's 1989 computer graphic installation *Legible City* requires the visitor to cycle on a static bike, through one of three cities—Manhattan, Amsterdam and Karlsruhe—where the architecture has been replaced by scaled words: for the Manhattan journey, the cyclist can choose a spoken narrative adjoined to a specific route (marked by colour) by the ex-mayor Ed Koch, Frank Lloyd Wright, Donald Trump, a tour guide, a confidence trickster, an ambassador and a taxi-driver. Here, sound and image work together to replace the real world with a simulated, text-driven readerly form of animation.

In more recent times, newer computer technologies and digital media such as Jitter (Max) and Max MSP have enabled an expansion of early process-based sonic film into fluid and sometimes interactive environments. Moreover, and as Barham discovers in his chapter, the ability for real-time improvisation and the easy sonification of an animated

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[7] Critic quoted by Thomas Y. Levin, " 'Tones from Out of Nowhere': Rudolph Pfenninger and the Archaeology of Synthetic Sound", *Grey Room* 12 (2003): 54.

[8] Fischinger, "Sounding Ornaments" (1932), accessed 20 August 2016, http://www.oskarfischinger.org/Sounding.htm.

[9] Gabriele Jutz, "Not Married: Image-Sound Relations in Avant-garde Film", in *See This Sound: Versprechungen von Bild und Ton / Promises in Sound and Vison*, ed. Cosima Rainer, Stella Rollig, Dieter Daniels and Manuela Ammer (Cologne: Walther König, 2009), 80.

[10] For more on this history see Rogers, *Sounding the Gallery*; and Jutz, "Kurt Kren and Sound", in *Kurt Kren: Structural Films*, ed. Nicky Hamlyn, Simon Payne and A. L. Rees (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2016), 15–18.

[11] For more information on this lineage, see Robert Russett, *Hyperanimation: Digital Images and Virtual Worlds* (New Barnet, UK: John Libbey, 2009).

or videoed image has given rise to live VJing in many spheres, including the live music scene and various forms of interactive art. While the pursuit of synchronicity has formed a consistent thread in the histories of experimental audiovisuality, then, technological developments have brought music and image closer together in increasingly achievable and intermedial ways.

In this book, we rethink the work of several artists—whether working alone or as part of a collaborative team—who have played significant parts in the exploration of tightly interwoven forms of audiovisuality and the refreshed and open forms of reception that this can engender, and yet whose work has rarely been analysed for its sonic qualities. In his critical history of Polish avant-garde filmmakers (chapter 6), Daniel Muzyczuk draws our attention to several forms of experimentation with audiovisual synchresis and the direct translation of sight into sound. Looking in particular at the optical music films of Franciszka and Stefan Themerson, Muzyczuk likens their form of pure audiovisual experience to that of Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter. Such experimentation, he argues, can be understood as a form of shared research that negotiates the bridges and fissures between ideas and practice within particular institutional parameters. Terence Dobson (chapter 4), on the other hand, tackles the subject through an analysis of Norman McLaren's hand-drawn sound, which was meticulously created by scratching the visual and sound strips of the film stock to create both sound and image together, a process that afforded the artist incredible accuracy and control over rhythm, timbre, attack and decay.[12] Aimee Mollaghan (chapter 10) uses the translation of the optical soundtrack into image in the work of Lis Rhodes to show how synchresis can signify beyond the film's space. Rhodes thwarts moments of conjunction during the live projection of her work to produce unexpected and jarring moments of audiovisual disconnection. Identifying a tendency to privilege image over music in some film traditions, and working from a reception point of view, Mollaghan reads the subversion of this in Rhodes's work as metaphorically highlighting and emancipating the oppressed women's voice in both music history and society more generally.

Experimental Images: Experimental Sounds

For many artists, and certainly for those mentioned above, the interest in close forms of experimental audiovisuality and direct sound extended to a corresponding engagement with avant-garde compositional techniques and the expansion of musical material: László Moholy-Nagy, for instance, spoke specifically of the role of the sonic in activating the audio-viewer when he called for a "fundamental renewal in sound

[12] For more on McLaren's engagement with sound, see Rogers, "The Musical Script: Norman McLaren, Animated Sound and Audiovisuality", *Animation Journal* 22 (2014): 68–84.

generation".[13] In particular, the innovative soundworlds for many closely synchronised experimental films suggest a significant relationship with the concurrent development of electronic music, as Richard S. James has argued: "avant-garde sound-on-film techniques developed around 1930 and were used well into the 1950s. These techniques constitute one of the least-known yet most striking parallels to the working methods and ideas of electro-acoustic music, especially those of musique concrète."[14] This isn't surprising. Filmmakers often moved in similar circles as, and worked according to similar aesthetics to, those experimenting with musical forms. In particular, extracting sound from its source and elongating it into music was a process driven by an aesthetic similar to that found in early experiments with visual montage and abstraction. The chopped visual nature of Vsevolod Pudovkin's first sound film, *The Deserter* (1933, with a score by Soviet composer Yuri Shaporin), for instance, was accompanied at one stage by a montage of sounds taken from dockyards.[15] Pudovkin explained that this montage of "interesting sound experiments" included "the use of metallic, industrial noises to create rhythmic symphonies, or the occasional treatment of sounds (such as running noises backwards), to create overt sonic markers".[16] The ability of image and sound, when produced via similar technological process, to signal with a comparable resonance can be found in a divergent range of film practices. An example formed from issues wildly different from those that drove Pudovkin is the sonic mixture of sirens, wailing cats, cries, snippets of spoken word and other real-world sounds to signify accruing physical and psychological illness in Carolee Schneemann's *Plumb Line* (1971), from her Autobiographical Trilogy.

Many of the chapters that follow take the expanded forms of musical material as a starting point. In his chapter on Walther Ruttmann (chapter 1), Dieter Daniels shows how the filmmaker's dual interest in sound and image found its experimental conjunction during the technological innovations of the 1930s, when Ruttmann fused the possibilities inherent in the communication media of telegraphy and telephony with the recording technologies of film and photography to produce the hybrid acoustic film

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[13] László Moholy-Nagy, "Produktion-Reproduktion" (1922), in *Die Zwanziger Jahre*, ed. Uwe M. Schneede (Cologne: Dumont, 1979), 239. He also asks that for sound, we "expand the apparatus hitherto applied solely for reproduction purposes, for production purposes" (238).

[14] Richard S. James, "Avant-Garde Sound-on-Film Techniques and Their Relationship to Electro-Acoustic Music", *Musical Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (1986): 74–75.

[15] For a public performance of the film, Pudovkin created a different montage; "I took sound strips and cut, for example, for a word of a speaker broken in half by an interruption, for the interrupter in turn overswept by the tide of noise coming from the crowd, for the speaker audible again, and so on. Every sound was individually cut and the images associated are sometimes much shorter than the associated sound piece. . . . Sometimes I have cut the general crowd noise into the phrases with scissors, and I have found that . . . it is possible to create a clear and definite, almost musical rhythm"; *Film Technique and Film Acting*, trans. and ed. Ivor Montagu (Cranston, RI: Mayflower, 1958; first published in 1929), 108.

[16] Pudovkin quoted in Jamie Sexton, "Avant-Garde Film: Sound, Music and Avant-Garde Film Culture Before 1939", in *Sound and Music in Film and Visual Media*, ed. Graeme Harper, Ruth Doughty and Jochen Eisentraut (New York and London: Continuum, 2009), 581.

for radio, *Weekend* (1930). Here, sounds recorded during a weekend were compressed into eleven minutes to produce what Ruttmann describes as "photographic sound art".[17] Responding to the socio-historical resonances of Ruttmann's intellectual culture, Daniels understands this innovative acoustic film as an anticipation of *musique concrète*, an example of found sound being used many years before Pierre Schaeffer (in the '40s), and which harks back to Italian futurist Luigi Russolo's 1913 "The Art of Noise" Manifesto.

In chapter 4, Dobson notes how McLaren's animated sounds, which signalled an important stepping stone towards the beginnings of electronic music, had little relationship to existing instruments. Although noting that McLaren's explorations were driven by an attempt to assume complete control over his work, Dobson reads such sonic abstraction as a way to produce sounds unshackled from specific cultural or national tropes. The direct film experiments of Stan Brakhage can be read differently. In *Fire of Waters* (1965), the soundtrack includes the slowed-down song of a bird and the speeded-up sound of a woman giving birth, among other things. In chapter 5, Eric Smigel relates the filmmaker's interest in *musique concrète* to his formation of a "closed-eye vision" that evoked dreams, hallucinations and hypnagogic sight that complicated the processes of cognition and recognition.[18] Smigel suggests that Brakhage's sounds, unlike McLaren's culturally abstracted ones, not only retain the resonances of their original source, but also arouse the listener's imagination in culturally specific ways.

Several others chapters explore how the creative overlap between music and sound design can push noise to the perceptual foreground. In his chapter on John Smith (chapter 8), Andy Birtwistle compares the English filmmaker's placement of ambient sound in the foreground of the audio-viewer's perception against its unheard and audiovisually synchronised position in commercial narrative film, suggesting that such creative treatment of atmospheric, even functional, sound encourages the audience to hear and see afresh. Paul Hegarty (chapter 7) finds a similar sonic repositioning in the 1970s films of Chantal Akerman, in which the commonplace background sounds of everyday objects and events are amplified to such a degree that they outstrip their visual connections. Such a disorienting audiovisual space opens sounds ordinarily heard as ambience to critical and detailed listening. Critical listening also plays a role in Juan A. Suárez's engagement with what he calls "wayward", or transgressive sound—particularly that formed

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[17] Ruttmann quoted in Brian Hanrahan, "13 June 1930: Weekend Broadcast Tests Centrality of Image in Cinema", in *A New History of German Cinema*, ed. Jennifer M. Kapczynski and Michael D. Richardson (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012), 211.

[18] Brakhage quoted in Russell Lack, *Twenty Four Frames Under: A Buried History of Film Music* (London: Quartet, 1997), 234. Marie Nesthus has pointed out the similarities between the compositional techniques of Brakhage and those of Olivier Messiaen. Speaking about his film *Scenes from Under Childhood Part One* (1967), Brakhage refers to his exploration of aural experience and colour, a tone poem for the eye, and acknowledges the composer as his influence; Nesthus, "The Influence of Olivier Messiaen on the Visual Art of Stan Brakhage in *Scenes from under Childhood Part One*", *Film Culture* 63 (1977): 39–50.

from non-traditional sources and noise—in experimental film (chapter 12). With a focus on queer film, Suárez outlines the ways in which such sonorities have been used to signify and represent emergent forms of camp throughout experimental film history, particularly when conjoined with disruptive and unusual image qualities.

But of course, not all film sound experimentation has followed the route of *musique concrète* or acousmatic magnification. In his groundbreaking investigation into the relationship between sound and avant-garde film practice before the coming of sound, Jamie Sexton has noted that early film practice was largely the reserve of visual artists interested in experimentation with image: sound, he argues, posed a threat to the purism of film as an artform on financial grounds (sound technologies were expensive and undermined the low-budget explorations of many experimental artists) and for aesthetic reasons (the more "realistic attitude" of a sound film could draw attention away from film as an artistic medium, something understood by André Breton as "clearly . . . hostile to any intellectual or moral advancement").[19] When music was being used during these early years, it often involved close collaboration with a composer. Sexton draws our attention to two significant examples of pre-synchronised-sound films, both from 1924, with highly prominent and audiovisually integrated scores: Erik Satie's original music for René Clair and Francis Picabia's *Entr'acte* and George Antheil's score for Fernard Léger and Dudley Murphy's *Ballet Mécanique* (the latter was so complex that early screenings did not include music).[20] To these two can be added the highly charged original music for several experimental narrative films also produced in France around the same time: Arthur Honegger's scores for Abel Gance's *La Roue* (1924) and *Napoléon* (1927) and George Auric's mixture of music and sound effects for Jean Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un poéte* (1930).

Close collaborative work with a forward-thinking composer already successful beyond the world of film has been a hallmark of experimental filmmaking and can be found in many different styles: from Edmund Meisel's score for Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925); Mauricio Kagel's new score for Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929); Teiji Ijo's posthumous music for Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943, music added c.1958); John Cage's collaborations with Sidney Peterson and Hy Hirsh (*Horror Dream*, 1947) and Herbert Matte (*Works of Calder*, 1950); Mike Ratledge's obsessively repetitious prog score for Laura Mulvey and Peter Woolen's *Riddles of the Sphynx* (1977); Philip Glass's hypnotic and driving soundtrack for Godfrey Reggio's *Qatsi* triology (1982, 1988, 2002); to the experimental soundworlds created for Derek Jarman by Simon Fisher Turner. The list is as long and diverse as the fractured history of experimental film.

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[19] Sexton, "Avant-Garde Film", 577; André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924), *UbuWeb*, accessed 20 August 2016, http://www.ubu.com/papers/breton_surrealism_manifesto.html.

[20] Sexton, "Avant-Garde Film", 574–75.

The relationship between exploratory image and experimental compositional styles is explored here by Smigel, whose chapter interrogates the working relationship between the electronic and acoustic microtonal harmonies of American avant-garde composer James Tenney and the film images of Brakhage, arguing, as mentioned above, that the two components work together to dissolve the boundaries between objective and subjective time and thus activate the liminal space between "synchronous" and "asynchronous" sound.

Audiovisual Dissonance

In many of the films analysed in this book that offer an experimental soundscape, a form of synchronous, or parallel audiovisuality is formed. Interestingly, however, many experimental filmmakers do not use experimental music at all. As we have seen, Fischinger and several other early visual music filmmakers enjoyed visualising pre-existent pieces of popular art music. But while the visual filmmakers produced an audiovisual progression that moved, at least roughly, along the same path, others have taken their images in a different direction. In particular, the cultural connotations of popular music, which can speak loudly and evoke strongly, have provided a sonic trajectory to manipulate and work against. We can say here that experimental audiovisuality is produced not only via an innovative soundworld in and of itself, but also through the ironic, jarring or culturally subversive placement of popular songs, familiar classics and pre-existent film music against the moving image to create what Kristin Thomson has called a "perceptual roughening" and Dean Duncan a "conceptual clash of sound and image" that "creates a kind of multi-sensory chord".[21] Instances of such roughening are hard to find in mainstream filmmaking, as they can question the integrity—or coherence—of what is being offered. In experimental film, however, such clashes are relatively common. This brings us to the book's second over-arching category: audiovisual dissonance, a filmmaking style closely aligned with the early rejection of synchronised sound and the part it played in the construction of a film's "realistic attitude". While often operating in close proximity with the audiovisual aesthetics of optical music and other forms of audiovisual synchresis—sometimes even in the same film—audiovisual dissonances nevertheless draw attention to very different concerns.

As we have seen, early experimental film was created before the advent of synchronous sound, so the use of a sonic anchor to forge an illusory audiovisual realism was not possible. But almost immediately on the advent of sound film, it became desirable to both hear and see sonically embodied objects onscreen and filmgoers quickly became conditioned in their expectations. During the early twentieth century, many experimental

[21] Kristin Thompson, "Early Sound Counterpoint", *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 121; Dean Duncan, *Charms that Soothe: Classical Music and the Narrative Film* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 81.

filmmakers sought to address what was fast becoming accepted as "filmic realism" by producing clashing and aggressive forms of audiovisuality that placed filmgoers in uncomfortable interpretative positions. Although this form of rupture can be found throughout experimental film's history, it was a clear pre-occupation for many of the earliest practitioners. In his 1922 Manifesto, for instance, Dziga Vertov proclaimed that "We protest against that mixing of the arts which many call synthesis. The mixture of bad colors, even those ideally selected from the spectrum, produces not white, but mud. . . . We are cleansing kinochestvo of foreign matter—or music, literature, and theater."[22]

Pontus Larsson has argued that "sensory integration, perceptual fusion, or synergy is achieved" when sound and image are perceived as matching, meaning that "information from auditory senses provides help for assigning meaning to information from visual senses and vice versa."[23] If a mismatch arises, the resultant semantic or affective ambiguity can encourage the receiver to focus on one sense over the other: while acknowledging the differences in individual cognitive makeups, Larsson argues that, most often, attention will be grabbed by the visual. However, from the earliest instances of experimental filmmaking, a particular type of mismatch has been embraced, one that arises from an innovative, loud, unexpected and/or dissonant sonic flow. Sometimes such soundworlds have been used to disrupt the assignment of meaning to visual information; at others to subvert, undermine or create a playful irony with the image. Nearly always, attention is drawn to the film's aural components. Dalí and Buñuel, for example, demonstrated their Surrealist attitude of defamiliarisation and re-contextualisation by haphazardly placing the random and repeated juxtaposition of two tangos ("Tango Argentino and "Recuerdos", performed by Vicente Álvarez and Carlos Otero) with small sections from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* (1859) against the subverted cinematography of *Un Chien Andalou*. Conjoined through chance—the records were replaced when they ran out and so on—the music seems sometimes appropriate, while at other times it appears to ridicule the image. Chion's discussion of anempathetic sound is useful here, as it describes moments when sound appears indifferent to what is happening onscreen; it does not react, or at least not at the moment or in the way we would expect it to (Chion uses the continued sound of the shower after Marion Crane falls to the floor and out of shot in *Psycho* [Alfred Hitchcock and Bernard Herrmann, 1960] as an example of such sonic indifference).[24] In fact, this apparent indifference can signal strongly to create moments of great drama, confusion or emotional upheaval.

[22] Dziga Vertov, "WE: Variant of a Manifesto" (1922), in *KINO-EYE: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 7.

[23] Pontus Larsson, Daniel Västfjäll, Pierre Olsson and Mendel Kleiner, "When What You Hear Is What You See: Presence and Auditory-Visual Integration in Virtual Environments", in *Proceedings of the 10th Annual International Workshop on Presence* (25–27 October 2007), 2, accessed 20 August 2016, http://astro.temple.edu/~lombard/ISPR/Proceedings/2007/Larsson,%20Vastfjall,%20Olsson,%20Kleiner.pdf.

[24] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 8–9.

When sound and music are used to actively counter what is being shown, a different mode of reception is engendered. Perhaps most famous in the early examples of audio and visual disjunction is the call by Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Gregori Alexandrov in "A Statement" (1928) for an audiovisual dissonance that would whip audiences into a frenzy, a form of counterpoint in which music and image could enter into a battle of equal voices, each vying for an audiences' affiliation.[25] Although, as Kristin Thompson has pointed out, the authors do not explicitly refer to their idea in terms of contrapuntal play, their statement on sound nevertheless reviles the forms of synchronisation made possible by the developments in film technologies.[26] Exploring the practical manifestations of the ideas outlined in "A Statement", Jay Leyda has argued that they rarely found a practical application, remaining instead an ideal condition to work towards.[27] Pudovkin's "Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film", written a year later in 1929, developed these ideas further and paved the way for the audiovisual experimentation of *The Deserter*, as we saw above. Here, Sexton identifies "a number of occasions when sound is abruptly cut, or when different sounds are edited together extremely rapidly in order to create a discordant, edgy sound fabric that is often mirrored by the extremely fast visual montage."[28]

However, the very idea of audiovisual dissonance—particularly when formed from "a discordant, edgy sound fabric"—rests on an unsettled and shifting conceptual framework: it implies that both sound and image must mean something concrete before their combination; that they must each signify something stable; and that these established meanings can be retained and extended when combined with another voice. Such issues, only recently taken up by film music scholars, have been addressed most coherently by Chion, although his focus remains primarily on the mainstream film tradition. Chion differentiates between what he calls "true *free counterpoint*"—"the notion of the sound film's ideal state as a cinema free of redundancy where sound and image would constitute two parallel and loosely connected tracks, neither dependent on the other"—and "dissonant harmony", by which an active opposition is established between music and image.[29] Whereas free counterpoint can be found in isolated examples throughout cinema history (Chion uses the sound of breaking glass that accompanies Hari's resurrection in *Solaris* [Tarkovsky, 1972] as an example of this), harmonic dissonance is more difficult to

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[25] Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Gregori Alexandrov, "A Statement", in Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1949), 257–59.

[26] Thompson, "Early Sound Counterpoint", 118.

[27] Thomas suggests that examples can be found in several films from 1930–34 in "Early Sound Counterpoint", 116; while Sexton argues that "the manifesto was actually more influential than this, for it was propagated within specialist film cultures around the world and led to critics and theorists taking a more positive view towards found film", in "Avant-Garde Film", 578; Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of Russian and Soviet Film* (New York: Collier, 1973), 278–79.

[28] Sexton, "Avant-Garde Film", 581.

[29] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 39, 36, 37; italics in original.

locate, because it presupposes for both sound and image a "precise point of meaning", or rather, a "prereading of the relation between sound and image" that "imposes the model of language and its abstract categories, handled in yes-no, redundant-contradictory oppositions."[30] While harmonic dissonance as a concept is problematic, Chion's identification of a mode of mismatch that rails against the languages of synchronous film is easy to find throughout the histories of experimental film. In fact, although the types of hermeneutic slippage that it initiates are multifaceted, mismatched audiovisuality delivers a practical critique comparable to Chion's theoretical one.

The ideas of sonic meaning, of learned methods of receiving audiovisuality, of harmonic dissonance and opposition and the theoretical ramifications of all three pervade this collection. With little in the way of scholarship to work with or against and with reference to diverse experimental film styles, the authors here come to many different conclusions about how a gap in image and sound can be conceived, utilised and identified, either through dissonance, perceptual roughening, contrapuntal layering, via the distancing effect or through embracing that which exceeds synchronisation.

The following chapters that engage with audiovisual rupture can be divided into two forms of exploration. First are the investigations into newly composed soundscapes able to oscillate between synchronicity and a critical disconnection with the image. In his investigation into the hybridisation of disciplines in the early twentieth century, Daniels outlines Ruttmann's development of what the director refers to as "an optical-acoustic counterpoint", something particularly perceptible in the asynchronous placement of image against Meisel's score for *Berlin: Symphony of a City* (1927).[31] While Muzyczuk, as we have seen, draws our attention to the Polish history of optical music, he also identifies a later exploration of the audiovisual *V-Effekt* in the film work of Wojciech Bruszewski, who employed newly available electroacoustic devices to produce unusual auditory phenomena. Such curious sounds, he argues, promote feelings of audiovisual "estrangement", which challenge the normalcy of film language and press at the threshold of perception. Smigel identifies a different critique of audiovisual perception in the collaborations of Brakhage and Tenney. Working to the belief that moving images and music should retain their singularities, rather than attempt to fuse with one another, the duo were interested in the psychological responses that such independence could induce in an audience attuned to synchronicity. As we saw above, Mollaghan's work on Rhodes finds politically charged and gender-fuelled implications in the disruption of a directly synchronised—and newly composed—audiovisual flow.

The second form of dissonance occurs when filmmakers make use of pre-existent music and intertextuality. Often, this music is popular, tonal, familiar, and the mismatch occurs through its unusual juxtaposition with the image. Here, audiovisual

[30] Ibid., 38.

[31] Ruttmann, (1928), quoted in *Walter Ruttmann: Eine Dokumentation*, ed. Jean Paul Goergen (Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek, 1989), 33.

rupture can be achieved directly or through a remediated sense of irony; through the de-contextualisation and re-appropriation of familiar sound objects against unexpected images (as in *Un Chien Andalou*); or via the subversion of an existing practice or mass-cultural artefact. Several authors in this book investigate the ramifications of such audiovisual defamiliarisation.

The pair of chapters that focus on found-footage film—by Nessa Johnston (chapter 11) and myself (chapter 9)—examine what happens when it is not only sound that is pre-existent, but also image. Johnston's work forms a particularly useful contribution to the audiovisual dissonance debate, as she compares a film with a newly composed score (Peter Delpeut's *Lyrical Nitrate*, 1991), with one that uses a compilation of old phonograph recordings of arias (Bill Morrison's *Decasia*, 2002) in order to show the different ways in which the materiality of audiovisual film can be ruptured by contradictory image and sound tracks. By analysing the quality of the audio and visual recordings, rather than the captured material itself, she finds that an aesthetic correspondence—based on decaying noisy textures—arises from the heterogeneity, a contradictory dissonance-synchresis that resonates not only at a local level, but also at a symbolic one by suggesting a modernist audio-viewing condition.

In my chapter, I go further to interrogate the relationship between the original contexts for images and sounds used for experimental found footage collage films and their modes of signification within their recontextualised settings. With an emphasis on intertextuality, I suggest that found sounds and images can simultaneously retain and interrogate their original identities through defamiliarisation. In this way, the dissonant re-alignment of audiovisual elements from different films can become a powerful way of generating new meanings. In particular, the re-contextualisation of images and sounds plundered from narrative feature film can highlight and problematise traditional methods of consuming film and its musical modes of discourse.

As we have seen, Suárez also explores re-contextualisation in his chapter on queer film. Here, he finds ill-fitting audiovisual alignments to be one of the main strategies at play in queer film, where camp arises through the mismatching of song and image or by audiovisual anachronism, a contradictory flow that subverts our original response to the music and gives rise to new political messages. Suárez shows that this can happen in several ways: through an excess of musicality unsuited to the low-fi or trivial image (camp), through the disturbance of a visual progression (noise) or through outright rupture (dissonance). In a way similar to the audiovisual methods I found at play in the found footage film, he concludes that camp arises not through the musical materials themselves, but through the nature of their new collaged surroundings, and it is thus not the nature of the sound that is queer but rather the process, or effect, of re-contextualisation that results in a queered form of experimental film.

Carol Vernallis's exploration of popular song in experimental film (chapter 13) lends yet another viewpoint to the debate. Using a playful and experimental montage approach to analysis, her close aesthetic readings of moments when well-known pop

songs are placed—sometimes in their entirety—in avant-garde contexts reveal a disconnect between the immersive synergies of music video and the fractured forms of experimental film. In the latter, songs are not embedded within the audiovisual texture, but rather sit alongside the images, ready to bounce back against the viewer. Like Johnston, Suárez and I, Vernallis suggests that the large aesthetic gaps between audio and visual elements encourage a fundamental re-reading of the pre-existent music. From her examples—from the work of Andy Warhol, Kenneth Anger, Joseph Cornell, Pipilotti Rist and others—it is clear that these instances of musical audiovisuality reject the immersive trends of mainstream suture for a clear exposure of the materiality of film and its mechanisms.

The Experimental Soundscape

As in cinema's commercial traditions, music in experimental film does not act in aural isolation but exists within an integrated soundscape that is coherent within itself as well as in relation to the image. The treatment of film sound in this way has been promoted within film music theory by Rick Altman in his call for a *mise-en-bande*, by Chion and his interrogation of film's "instantaneous perceptual triage" and by Kevin Donnelly in his writings on the creative convergence of recent creative sound design.[32] While these authors investigate examples from commercial narrative cinema, traditional aural relationships—both horizontal (sound-to-sound) and vertical (sound-to-image)—have been problematised by the textures of experimental audiovisuality. In fact, the disruption of established hierarchies among music, sound and dialogue has been one of the most notable ways in which directors have highlighted and subverted the customary ways of seeing and hearing a film. This disruption is particularly apparent in more narrative works that demonstrate a clear critical relationship with commercial film and can have a particularly disquieting effect, something famously explored by Jean-Luc Godard in both *À bout de souffle* (1960) and *Le Weekend* (1967), in which the sudden crescendo of dramatic music at several pivotal moments renders dialogue inaudible.

The complication of the sonic hierarchies that we have become accustomed to in our fiction filmgoing provides a complimentary theoretical strand that crosses and connects to the discussions of synchronicity and dissonance that populate this collection. As we have seen, Birtwistle explores the audiovisuality of John Smith, who has explored different models of soundscape by highlighting the conventional relationships among music, sound and voice in film and, in turn, the ways in which audiovisual elements can respond

[32] Rick Altman, "The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound", in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, ed. Altman (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 15–34; Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 3; K. J. Donnelly, "Extending Film Aesthetics: Audio Beyond Visuals", in *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, ed. John Richardson, Gorbman and Vernallis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 359.

to, and influence, how we engage with the world. Birtwistle enhances previous research into the tripartite construction of the film soundtrack—music, voice and dialogue—by interrogating moments when the individuality of the audio tracks is dissolved, either through the use of voice-over for its grain and timbre rather than its semantic qualities, or via the heightened audibility of ambient sound—something also explored by Suárez in his work on queer film and Johnston in her analysis of found-footage film.

But destabilisation can also be forged through the de-synchronisation of sound and image. Walter Murch famously wrote that the re-association of image and sound is the "fundamental pillar upon which the creative use of sound rests, and without which it would collapse".[33] The implications of collapse—or rather, sonic renegotiation—lie at the heart of Hegarty's chapter on Akerman. He discovers that, in her films from the 1970s, an explicit decoding of traditional filmmaking customs is instigated through a process of structural deconstruction. In particular, voice-over is marginalised through a dislocation of utterance and body, sound and image, initiating a rupture that draws attention to previously unnoticed atmospheric sounds. Heightened and manipulated, these sounds give rise to what he calls a "sensorial dissonance", by which sound-image combines call into question the established tenants of mainstream cohesion.

In his analysis of the placement of music in Julian Bryan's experimental educational documentaries (chapter 3), James Tobias considers how the "Good Neighbor" policy between central and South America in the 1930s and '40s impacted on cultural innovation; in particular, how the propaganda films created in support of the policy used ruptured forms of audiovisuality to undermine standard political messages. Like Hegarty, Tobias draws our attention to the moments when image and sound pull away from each; sections where what we hear does not correspond to what we see. While sound at such moments is often plausible—Tobias analyses a scene in which a girl plays the piano, yet we hear a piece clearly different from the one her fingers imply—subtle differences produce a profound impact on a film's reception, asking us to rethink the visual message through the lens of gender stereotypes, cultural expectations and educational rituals and their political ramifications. Like Akerman's ruptured forms, Bryan's particular form of dissonance is not only structural, but also political, sexual and aesthetic; significantly, the audiovisual contradictions work by calling into question the validity of what is being shown.

The Music and Sound of Experimental Film

While it is not possible or desirable to make universal claims about the soundscapes of experimental film, in the studies that follow, several persistent ideas have emerged.

[33] Walter Murch, "Stretching Sound to Help the Mind See", *New York Times*, 1 October 2000, accessed 20 August 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/01/arts/01MURC.html?pagewanted=all.

William Verrone has argued that avant-garde film promotes a different kind of viewing experience from mainstream film: "it involves the senses in ways that are atypical of mainstream films" because "nothing is clearly denoted" for the audience, who have "to work" to make sense of the images.[34] If we take the placement of music with or against the images into account, the activation of the senses becomes even more striking. In the work of the filmmakers here discussed, music has often been used to promote a Brechtian *V-Effekt* that can call into question what is being shown, creating an audiovisual whole that is either so synchronised, or so ruptured that an audience is presented with an interpretative gap.

The processes of activated viewing and listening that this gap engenders is explored in nearly every chapter in this collection: Mollaghan uses work from the London Filmmakers' Co-Operative in the 1970s to show how participatory and aleatoric works can place an audience at the heart of expanded cinema work; Hegarty identifies a process of "critical distanciation" that emerges from audiovisual rupture; Birtwistle explores moments when an audience is asked to oscillate between "immersion and distanciation"; I discover that an active participation in the gap between sound and image can question and subvert film's syncretic languages; and Daniels's work on Ruttmann, Smigel's interrogation of Brakhage and Johnston's exploration of film stock's decay show how such critical distanciation, driven by an unusual focus on music and creative sound, can help to expose the limits of filmic perception. In addition, many of the authors discover that audiovisual disunity also signals at a political level: Muzyczuk outlines the ways in which early Polish avant-garde filmmakers used music and sound not only to undermine the established structures of representation, but also to question the social-political beliefs behind them; Tobias finds a similar social critique at play in the dislocation of voice-over from experimental documentary footage; Suárez finds camp emerging from the gaps between sight and sound; Mollaghan reads audiovisual dissonance as enacting a feminist critique of music history and the audiovisual balances of narrative film; Hegarty finds an emergent feminist discourse arising from the rupture between image and voiceover; I read the re-use of existent material in a dissonant way as manifesting a metacritique about film synchronicity and synchresis; and for Vernallis, the re-appropriation of pop songs within an avant-garde context gives rise to a critical re-reading of artistic intent. But political commentary can also arise through tightly synchronised audiovisuality, as Dobson shows in his identification of inter-cultural comprehension in the process of McLaren's animated sound, Cook finds in the unique form of primitivism that develops from Len Lye's synaesthetic, kinaesthetic audiovisuality and Barham discovers arising from the remediation of pre-existing music through a digital lens.

While the chapters here focus on an eclectic sample of alternative models of music-image relationship in film, then, similarities of intent and gesture have nevertheless risen

[34] William Verrone, *The Avant-Garde Feature Film: A Critical History* (London: McFarlane, 2011), 18.

to the surface. Although I have divided these similarities into two overarching categories in this Introduction—synchronicity and dissonance—the lines between these are blurred, and often filmmakers and composers prefer a fluid approach that is apparent not only between, but also within, individual works. With this in mind, this collection operates as a first glance at the different ways in which directors, musicians or director-musicians have responded to, and experimented with, film sound and music. While these chapters celebrate the disjunctions and individuality of experimental film culture, when combined they also go some way towards identifying common forms of sonic innovation that have persisted throughout its numerous histories and point towards the ways in which these musical gestures have infused the new media swirl.

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film and radio . . . possess their own values, values belonging entirely to them, which can grow into specific art forms through steady development.[1]

KURT WEILL, 1925

1 Absolute Sounding Images

ABSTRACT FILM AND RADIO DRAMA OF THE 1920s AS COMPLEMENTARY FORMS OF A MEDIA-SPECIFIC ART

Dieter Daniels

Translated from German by Annie Buenker

IN THE YEARS between 1920 and 1930, the new media of film and radio led to absolute forms of art whose aesthetics were guided by their idiosyncratic technological identities. In particular, abstract film and radiogenic (*funkisch*) drama, today often referred to as the predecessors of media art, were underpinned by theoretical examination of the relationship between music and moving image, and between sound and visual perception. In Germany, musicians such as Kurt Weill, fine artists and filmmakers such as Walther Ruttmann and radio makers such as Hans Flesch and Friedrich W. Bischoff—partially in dialogue and partially independently of one other—worked on related questions that explored the parallels, differences and interactions between these media and other art forms. Until recently, discourses of media history tended to be divided into the study of either acoustic or visual media, or more specifically, into media for language, image and music. And yet, so long as these developments continue to be discussed separately, the diverse reciprocities of these media—and above all the

[1] Kurt Weill, "Possibilities for Absolute Radio Art" (1925), in *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory, 1907–1933*, ed. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer and Michael Cowan, trans. Michael Cowan (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 587. First published as "Möglichkeiten absoluter Radiokunst", in *Der Deutsche Rundfunk* 3, no. 26 (June 28, 1925): 1625–28.

crucial processes of hybridisation—cannot be ascertained.[2] It is therefore vital to find a model able to combine diachronic and synchronous considerations of media technologies and their related art forms.

To go some way towards such a discourse, it is essential to note the important, yet often overlooked difference between communication and recording media: while the cultural impact of communication media has often been neglected or misunderstood, recording media entered the radar of cultural and media theory at an early stage. While theoretical and literary texts dealing with photography and the phonograph were in existence by 1900, for instance, considerably fewer dealt with telegraphy and the telephone. Today, photography and film theory have established themselves as scientific disciplines; radio and television theory, on the other hand, continue to stand on the sidelines, while a coherent theory of the telephone still hardly exists.

The divergence of these critical voices is to some extent due to the technological histories of each media. Film and (broadcast) radio emerged independently from each other from 1895 at different locations (film through the Lumière Brothers, Max Skladanowsky and Thomas Edison; radio through Guglielmo Marconi and Alexander Popow, among others). But when the first public film screenings of work by the Lumières, Skladanowsky and Edison took place in 1895 in places such as Paris, Berlin, New York and London, nobody anticipated—despite the great public interest—that this would develop into the first media-technical form of mass entertainment just a few years later. And when, in the same year, Marconi in Bologna and Popow in Petersburg sent out the first wireless signals over a distance, neither could have imagined this turning into the mass medium of radio that would soon surpass film in its pervasiveness. These parallel, but up to that point uncorrelated, developments became connected following a series of complex, technical, social and aesthetic reciprocities that ultimately led to television. Significant for the blind spots of art and media theories are the artistic-theoretical-technical-experimental interactions between film and radio in the 1920s that to this day exist in a kind of historical "Bermuda Triangle". These lost interactions are the focus of this text.

During the 1920s, the debates surrounding the artistic aptitude of film and radio developed in parallel, focusing on the media-specific aesthetics of either the filmic or the radiogenic artwork. In part, such specificity was due to the absence of sound in silent—or mute—film and of image in radio work. The common contemporary practice in adapting existing genres such as theatre for the new media often involved compensating for such absences through the emphatic gestures of the silent actors, or by the accompaniment through invisible speakers of atmospheric sounds. Exaggerated

[2] See Dieter Daniels, "Hybrids of Art, Science, Technology, Perception, Entertainment, and Commerce at the Interface of Sound and Vision", in *See This Sound: Audiovisuology, a Reader*, ed. Dieter Daniels and Sandra Naumann (Cologne: Walther König, 2015), 442–59.

attempts in each medium to compensate sometimes provided an involuntary element of comedy, which still contributes to the fascination with silent film today. Radio also provided some famous examples of such adaptation, as in Alfred Braun's 1924 reworking of Friedrich Schiller's *Wallensteins Lager* (Wallenstein's camp, 1799), with actors in clattering armour and full weaponry marching towards the lonely microphone of the broadcasting studio and storming through the staircase of the building in order to achieve the illusion of space.

Such attempts at adaptation are a long way from establishing a media-specific art form. However, a theoretical debate accompanied by practical experimentation began to develop during the early 1920s that led to two new art forms: abstract film and sound-based radio drama. At the time of their emergence, both were discussed as closely connected developments. However, this connection seems to have broken down today, and this is the motivation for a reconstruction here. The scope of this investigation is restricted to Weimar Republic Germany because this period offers particularly fertile ground for material sources. In fact, personal factors were instrumental in the cross-fertilisation of abstract film and radio drama. As practitioners and, *at the same time*, theorists, Ruttmann, Flesch and Weill, among others, played a significant part in the development of both art forms up until the mid-1920s. By the end of the decade, this circle also included Rudolf Arnheim, Oskar Fischinger and László Moholy-Nagy. Within this artistically and media-expanded field, connections were forged with the Bauhaus (Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, Kurt Schwerdtfeger, Moholy-Nagy and Werner Graeff), with Dada (Hans Richter, Kurt Schwitters and Raoul Hausmann), with socially engaged literature and theory (Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno) and with new music (Paul Hindemith). Absolute film and radio drama were positioned at the junction of the Weimar Republic's interdisciplinary explorations.

The term "sociotechnological networks", coined by Bruno Latour for the field of science studies, could also be used by cultural and media theorists to describe the complex superimpositions that reside among and between artistic disciplines and media technologies. These networks create *hybrids*, as Latour calls them, which forgo any modern scientific categorisation because they are not perceivable from any one discipline's perspective.[3] With the aid of contemporary citations, the following text explains the theoretical background of the creation of networks and the hybridisation of acoustic and visual art, communication media and recording media.

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[3] According to Latour, these sociotechnological networks are "simultaneously real, like nature, narrated, like discourse, and collective, like society," and thus provide an indissoluble contradiction for scientific discourse. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 6.

Theories for the Practice of Media Art

Ruttmann, a painter and the author of the some of the earliest abstract films (from 1921) and the first radio drama recorded with sound-on-film (*Weekend*, 1930), drafted his vision of *painting with time* in a manuscript around 1919–20 (that is, even before his first absolute film) that remained unpublished during his lifetime. In it, he imagined:

> An art meant for our eyes, one different from painting in that it has a temporal dimension (like music), not in the rendition of (real or stylized) moment in an event or fact, but rather precisely in the temporal rhythm of visual events. This new art-form will give rise to a totally new kind of artist, one whose existence has only been latent up to now, one who will more or less occupy a middle-ground between painting and music.

Ruttmann located the necessity of such art within the

> "tempo" of our era. Telegraphy, express trains, stenography, photography, high-speed presses, and so on—although not cultural achievements in and of themselves—have resulted in a previously unknown velocity in the transmission of intellectual information. For the individual, this increased speed of knowledge transmission results in a constant inundation with material that can no longer be processed using old methods.

According to the artist, this "increased velocity with which individual data are cranked out" was also connected with the "reasons for our desperate perplexity in relation to the products of visual art" that consequently led him to absolute film.[4] Almost a decade later, he wrote in critical retrospect: "What is an absolute film? A film where one does not trust that art may emerge from the practice of filmmaking but rather where the theory, the confident idea of autonomous film art, comes first."[5]

How immediate such deliberations were transferred from film to radio broadcasting, which was introduced in Germany in October 1923, is illustrated by an essay by Kurt Weill, the composer of several film scores including for Brecht's radio drama *Lindberghflug* (*Lindbergh's Flight*, 1929, with Hindemith). Following the first grand public presentation of absolute film during a widely anticipated matinée in Berlin's Universum Film AG (Ufa) cinema in 1925, Weill expounded, in his "Possibilities for Absolute Radio Art", the opportunity to "probe the oft-repeated and oft-misunderstood comparison between film and radio more deeply" (he was speaking here about a specific event of experimental film held by the November Group in Berlin). According to the

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[4] Walther Ruttmann, "Painting with Time" (ca. 1919), in Kaes, Baer and Cowan, *The Promise of Cinema*, 451.
[5] Walther Ruttmann, "The 'Absolute' Fashion" (1928), in Kaes, Baer and Cowan, *The Promise of Cinema*, 465.

composer, the broad impact of the medium was a significant factor: "Radio has already achieved an immeasurable feat by bringing art to the masses", even though artistically, radio had what he deemed to be more of a quantitative than a qualitative significance. However, he also warned that:

> As in the case of film, such developments will lead to a strict separation between radio and other institutions of art, which still experience radio as a competitor. The arts will then shed certain domains of their total repertory, whose transmission will be the sole purview of microphones.

Like Ruttmann, then, Weill anticipated that radio could dismantle and reform the borders between genres in order to forge new art forms: "There are calls to completely separate the radio play from traditional theater, to develop it as an art oriented according to its own laws and the specific goals of the broadcasting studio."[6] Such aims were also pursued by the innovators of radio broadcasting, such as Bischoff, who established his model for a listening series (*Hörfolge*) during his time as artistic director of Breslau Radio. In 1926, he argued that, "[s]imilar to how the cinema needs an optically diverse rhythm of single scenic segments, the radio drama needs this in the acoustic sense." The entire development should lead to an "absolute radio art":

> A symphonic-acoustic classification of literary presentations, geared towards time and going beyond the socially diverse structure of time into the heart of the listener, must, it cannot be different, lead to an art product that combines word and music and must present itself as an acoustic artwork, in ultimate totality as pure radio drama.[7]

Alfred Braun, director of the department of acting at the Berlin Radio, called his piece *Der Tönende Stein* (*The Sounding Stone*, 1926) a "sound film" or an:

> acoustic film . . . a theatrical drama that in fast succession, with images gliding and bolting by colourfully and fast as if in a dream, with contractions, with overlaps—with tempo—with the interchanging of close-ups and wide shots, with fade-ins, fade-outs, cross-fades, consciously transferring the technology of the film to radio broadcasting.[8]

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[6] Weill, "Possibilities for Absolute Radio Art", 586–88.

[7] Friedrich W. Bischoff, *Was wir bringen, Schlesische Funkstunde*, quoted in *Programmgeschichte des Hörfunks in der Weimarer Republik*, vol. 2, ed. Joachim-Felix Leonhard (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1997), 1088.

[8] Alfred Braun, (1929), quoted in Heinz Schwitzke, *Das Hörspiel: Geschichte und Dramaturgie* (Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1963), 63. For more detailed writings on Braun and Bischoff, see Reinhard Döhl, "Neues vom Alten Hörspiel: Versuch einer Geschichte und Typologie des Hörspiels in Lektionen", Radio Broadcast WDR (29 December 1980); reprinted in *Rundfunk und Fernsehen. Wissenschaftliche Vierteljahreszeitschrift* 29 (1981): 127–41, accessed 18 August 2015, http://doehl.netzliteratur.net/mirror_uni/hspl_neualt.htm.

Along similar lines, Weill predicted the future possibilities of absolute radio art in his 1925 essay:

> both film and radio . . . possess their own values, values belonging entirely to them, which can grow into specific art forms through steady development . . . that the tones and rhythms of music might be enriched by new sounds, sounds from other spheres: calls of human and animal voices, voices of nature, the sound of billowing winds, rushing water, and rustling trees—and an entire army of new, unheard-of sounds that the microphone could produce artificially when sound waves are raised or lowered, superimposed or woven together, swept away and born anew. . . . An absolute and spiritual work of art that hovers above the earth.[9]

At the same time, Brecht, who was known for his criticism of radio, because "the results of radio are disgraceful, its possibilities are 'infinite' ", nevertheless showed a fascination for the acoustic image, noting that "[a]rt must come in where there is an apparent deficit. When the visual is disabled, that doesn't mean that one doesn't see anything, but just enough so that one can see as much as one wishes to".[10] The first radio dramas broadcast in Europe in 1924 clearly address this "deficit". The English author Richard Hughes, for instance, staged his drama *A Comedy of Danger* in a dark mine shaft, so that the actors could see as little as the listeners: in *Maremoto*, French auteurs Pierre Cusy and Gabriel Germinet created the illusion that the listeners were receiving wireless signals from a stricken ship by mistake. Flesch's *Zauberei auf dem Sender* (*Magic on the Air*), on the other hand—which we return to below—went beyond these metaphors to place radio at the centre of the discussion.[11]

Flesch, the artistic director of the Südwestdeutsche Rundfunkdienst AG (Southwest German Broadcasting Agency) in Frankfurt am Main and later artistic director of the Berliner Funkstunde station, wrote in his programmatic text Mein Bekenntnis zum Rundfunk" ("My Confession to Broadcast", 1925): "The real radio drama must develop on an acoustic basis, must grow out of the acoustic . . . (the) possibilities of radio broadcasting, where it appears as an independent art form: the radio drama."[12] And in his lecture "Hörspiel, Film, Schallplatte" (Radio drama, film, record) of 1928, he promoted

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[9] Weill, "Possibilities for Absolute Radio Art", 586–88.

[10] Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke: Schriften*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), 120, 124.

[11] See also Hans Flesch, "Zauberei auf dem Sender", in Wolfgang Hagen, *Das Radio* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2005), 103–11; and Solveig Ottmann, *Im Anfang war das Experiment: Das Weimarer Radio bei Hans Flesch und Ernst Schoen* (Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2013).

[12] Flesch, "Mein Bekenntnis zum Rundfunk", *Funk* 36 (1925): 445, accessed 18 August 2015, http://www.lmz-bw.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Medienbildung_MCO/fileadmin/bibliothek/flesch_bekenntnis/flesch_bekenntnis.pdf.

the then radical move towards a media specificity for radiophonic art: "The radio is a mechanical instrument, and its species-specific artistic impacts can thus only come from the mechanical. If one can't believe this to be possible, then one can't believe in the whole of the radio artwork."[13]

Common to all these examples was the demand for an art that was not simply an imitation of existing genres—not a transferral of painting, music and literature to new technologies—but rather for one that reflected and developed the "idiosyncratic effect" (*Eigenwirkung*) of the new media, a process sometimes referred to as the "idiosyncratic art" (*Eigenkunst*) of radio.[14] At the same time, however, differences in style became clear: Ruttmann and Weill emphasised artistic ideals, while Flesch and Bischoff stated more technical-institutional objectives. And yet they all sought to form a theory that could itself serve as the basis for a new practice. The significance of this 'artist theory' or 'practice-based theory' lay in its development from within an examination of the technical-aesthetic terms of production that had immediate effects on practice. This kind of fruitful and direct reciprocity of media theory and media art is difficult to find these days.

At the same time, the beginnings of German media theory developed directly out of art theory, while nowadays the international debate around the characteristics of "German media theory" often emphasises its technicism as a specific feature. The discourse surrounding the filmic or radiogenic artwork and the corresponding interrogation of whether these media can yield their own specific form or are rather simply suitable for the dissemination of existing forms, was undertaken by Arnheim in his analysis of optical and acoustic perception. In 1930, he completed two books, *Film als Kunst* (*Film as art*) and *Rundfunk als Hörkunst* (*Radio as Sound Art*, published in English with the title *Radio*), of which the first is famous and the second almost forgotten.[15] From today's perspective, both books can be read as media theories in the guise of a theory of art and perception. Reading these publications in parallel proves very insightful, since Arnheim saw the deficits of both media as the basis of their artistic form: "because, without such 'shortcomings' compared to reality, art wouldn't be possible at all".[16] Above all, Arnheim sought to demonstrate the necessity and fruitfulness of an art-theoretical analysis of such fields, ignored by the scholarship of his time. Despite their innovative qualities, an element of nostalgia is mixed into both books, as according to the author, silent film

[13] Flesch, "Hörspiel, Film, Schallplatte", lecture given at the first Program Council Conference in Wiesbaden on 5–6 April 1928; *Rundfunk-Jahrbuch* (1931): 28.

[14] The German term *Eigenkunst* describes an "idiosyncratic art", or "an art in its own right", which Ludwig Stoffels explains in more detail in "Kunst und Technik", in Leonhard, *Programmgeschichte des Hörfunks*, 2: 682–724.

[15] Rudolf Arnheim, *Film als Kunst* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1932) and Arnheim, *Radio* (New York: Da Capo, 1936), completed with the title *Rundfunk als Hörkunst* in Berlin in 1933, but not published in German during his lifetime.

[16] Arnheim, *Film als Kunst* (Frankfurt: Fisher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1979), 18.

and radio were set to lose their specific aesthetic with the ensuing era of sound film and Arnheim's anticipation of the imminent birth of television.

Ruttmann and Flesch and the "Idiosyncratic Art" of Film and Radio

The contemporary quotations above that point towards a cross-linking and hybridisation of acoustic and visual arts and media can be extended into a practice-oriented analysis of the parallel, and then overlapping and connecting, developments of absolute film and radio drama. The two protagonists in the context of the Weimar Republic were Ruttmann and Flesch. Ruttmann's path took him from abstract (musical) absolute film (*Lichtspiel Opus 1*, 1921) via the "musical" montage of silent film employing original scenes (*Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt; Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, 1927) to sound film and finally, three years later, to the experimental soundscape radio play *Weekend*. Flesch's path stretched from an experimental radio drama that he single-handedly devised, to commissioning work for the "idiosyncratic art" of media, including Ruttmann's *Weekend*.

The initial step towards this originally parallel, but not yet connected, development was Ruttmann's first abstract film *Lichtspiel Opus 1*, with an original score by Max Butting, a work described by the filmmaker as an "optical symphony".[17] While Fischinger's later visual music films make use of pre-existing music, all abstract films in the *Opus* series by Ruttmann have an original score. Not much is known about the collaboration between Butting and Ruttmann, but the surviving score with little drawings by Ruttmann suggests a close correspondence of sound and image, as does the overall rhythmic structure of both (Figure 1.1). Significantly, almost all contemporary responses to *Opus 1* established an analogy with music. On 1 April, a month before its Berlin premiere, for instance, the film was presented to the press in Frankfurt without music at the Universum Film AG (Ufa) cinema UT im Schwan. Dramaturg and literary critic Bernhard Diebold responded with "Eine Neue Kunst: Die Augenmusik des Films" ("A New Art: Film's Music for the Eyes"), which appeared the following day in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*: "The primitiveness of this geometric construct will someday be superseded by grand forms of expression, just as the mathematically contrapuntal in music once liberated music from its absolutism."[18] Also writing in 1921, theatre critic and dramatist Herbert Jhering wrote that "[e]ssentially, it was the archetype of the cinema (which was only developed late in its time): to show forms in rhythmic movement, independent of material restraints, independent from the burden of matter. Visible music, audible light" (Figure 1.2).[19] Taking the

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[17] Ruttmann, April 3, 1921, quoted in Jeanpaul Goergen, *Walter Ruttmann: Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek, 1989), 78.

[18] Bernhard Diebold, "A New Art: Film's Music for the Eyes" (1921), in Kaes, Baer, and Cowan, *The Promise of Cinema*, 454.

[19] Herbert Jhering, 1921, quoted in Goergen, *Walter Ruttmann*, 99.

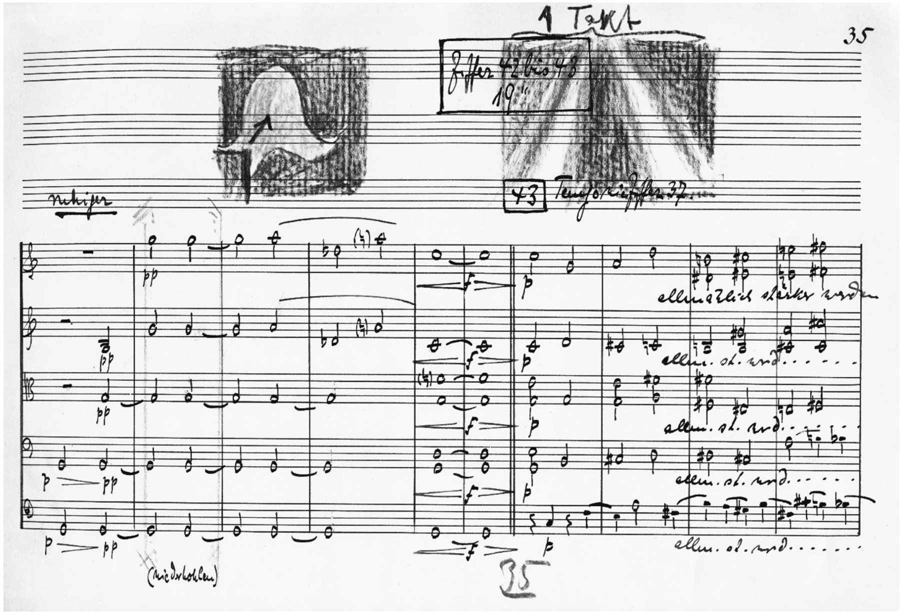

FIGURE 1.1 A page from Max Butting's score for *Lichtspiel: Opus 1* (1921), with hand-drawn annotations by Walther Ruttmann.

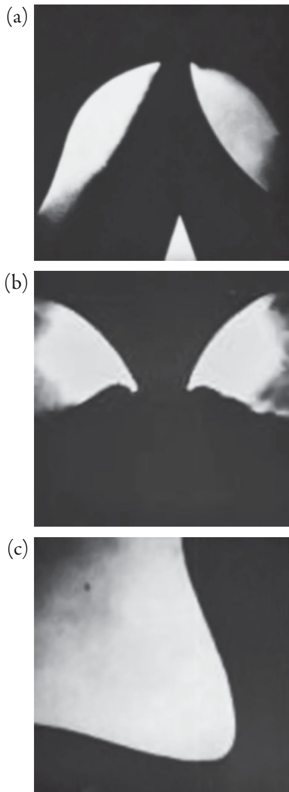

FIGURE 1.2 Three stills from Ruttmann's *Lichtspiel: Opus 1* (1921).

idea even further, Diebold, who had foreseen such synthesis as early as 1916, concluded that "painting has wed music. The [disciplinary] boundaries of Lessing's 'Laokoon' have been obscured. There is a *music for the eye*."[20]

Flesch was appointed artistic director of the Südwestdeutsche Rundfunkdienst AG in Frankfurt am Main in 1924 and sought collaboration with Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno and his friend and brother-in-law Hindemith from the outset. About a year after the official start of broadcasting, Flesch wrote and produced the first radio drama in German radio history.[21] As the title *Zauberei auf dem Sender: Versuch einer Rundfunkgroteske* (*Magic on the Air: Attempt at a Radio Grotesque*) indicates, the work was mainly intended as an example of the media-specific possibilities of radio—"this grotesque will never be transferrable to the stage or concert hall," he wrote—and as inspiration for other authors.[22] In his stage directions, Flesch formulated the goal of "suggesting an idiosyncratic artistic model of radio broadcast through the joining of sounds".[23] According to his assistant at the time, Ernst Schoen, Flesch modestly sought only to deliver "the material schema of an artwork", in order to smooth the path for other authors.[24] At its beginnings, radio emerges—just as absolute film does with Ruttmann—from close unity between creation, production, administration and technical experimentation. But this unity was not just borne out of necessity: rather, it corresponded to the intention of the piece, whose topic was above all formed by the medium itself: "Participants: every person employed at the Frankfurt broadcasting station, objects, and instruments," said the announcer of the show.[25] The director, portrayed by Flesch himself, is the first to experience the hallucinatory power of the medium, which leads his colleagues to declare him insane and almost institutionalise him.

As we can see, the commonalities between Flesch's first radio drama and Ruttmann's absolute film reach beyond the image-sound analogy. Both are, above all, reflections of their medium, a first answer to the question of whether film and radio can yield their own specific art form. According to Diebold, Ruttmann set the stage for a new beginning of "the instrument of film that has been violated by so much banality".[26] According

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[20] Diebold, "New Art", 454.

[21] Interestingly, the premieres of both of these parallel, however uncorrelated, developments of absolute film and radio drama take place in Frankfurt am Main.

[22] The show was a live broadcast of the Frankfurt radio station on October 24, 1924 and was not recorded. The script was published in: *Funk* 35 (1924) and reprinted for the first time in *Zauberei auf dem Sender und andere Hörspiele*, ed. Ulrich Lauterbach (Frankfurt: Kramer, 1962), 25–35. The Hessischer Rundfunk produced a re-adaptation on the basis of this script in 1962, accessed 18 August 2015, http://www.mediacultureonline.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Medienbildung_MCO/fileadmin/bibliothek/flesch_zauberei/flesch_zauberei.pdf.

[23] Flesch, "Mein Bekenntnis zum Rundfunk", 445.

[24] Ernst Schoen, "Vom Sendespiel, Drama, der Oper und dem Briefkasten", *Der Deutsche Rundfunk* 42 (1924), quoted by Stoffels in Leonhard, *Programmgeschichte des Hörfunks*, 1160.

[25] *Radio-Umschau* 36 (1924), 1116.

[26] Bernhard Diebold, 1916, quoted in Goergen, *Walter Ruttmann*, 99.

to Schoen, Flesch introduced the "representation of essential acoustic working methods and materials of art through radio".[27]

Both approaches hit upon a crucial point of the medium: its fictional character. *Zauberei auf dem Sender* pretended not to be a show, but rather an accident that developed into something haunting. It began with the broadcasting station becoming unable to turn itself off. This created the illusion that what was being heard was not intended for the listeners. Next, the broadcast's instruments started playing without the musicians touching them, and yet the resultant sounds were audible only to the radio listeners and the director, who asked: "Is it possible . . . I mean—in principle—that a music can sound even though it isn't actually being played anywhere?"[28] It almost sounds like a description of Flesch's radio drama when the American critic Herman George Scheffauer wrote that: "The silent symphony was over. Was it only an acoustic, optical illusion that you thought you could hear the vibrations of the symphony that you had only seen?"[29] In fact, however, he was describing the screening of Ruttmann's film that was apparently presented without its musical score.

Instead of creating an illusion of reality, abstract films promote direct, physiological reactions among their audiences. Numerous contemporary accounts of Ruttmann's *Opus* films, for instance, claimed that they have the ability to trigger "feelings of lust" or "sometimes associated ideas of an erotic nature". This culminated in the adult-only censoring of *Lichtspiel Opus II* (1923), which was also perhaps associated with its feared hypnotic effect on the audience.[30] This suggestive effect of media, not as a reflexively recognisable fiction but rather with its immediate impact on the viewer or listener, was proved by the reaction of the audience of Ruttmann's films, and demonstrated by the effect achieved through Flesch's illusion that something goes wrong during the broadcast—the radio gets out of control and all this is live on the air. This was explicitly taken as the radio drama's theme, however, until indeed the moment when the broadcasting faux pas at last seems to lose credibility and its suggestive effect breaks down. At the end, the magician responsible for this apparition enters the stage and it transpires that this was his revenge on the director, who had refused to let him perform his magic tricks on the radio, because he thought it was nonsense to bring "things that you can only see" into the programme. Yet the magician prompted the listeners of the broadcast to have a look at the electronic tubes of their radio apparatus, because, "thanks to my powers, the radio listeners can become radio viewers".[31] Thus, this drama dealt with the magic of

[27] Schoen, "Vom Sendespiel, Drama, der Oper und dem Briefkasten", quoted by Stoffels in Leonhard, *Programmgeschichte des Hörfunks*, 1160.

[28] Lauterbach, *Zauberei auf dem Sender und andere Hörspiele*, 29.

[29] Herman George Scheffauer, *The New Vision in the German Arts* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1924), quoted in Goergen, *Walter Ruttmann*, 100.

[30] See Holger Wilmesmeier, *Deutsche Avantgarde und Film: Die Filmmatinee "Der absolute Film"*, May 3 and May 10, 1925 (Münster and Hamburg: Lit, 1994), 51–53.

[31] Lauterbach, *Zauberei auf dem Sender und andere Hörspiele*, 32–33.

the medium to produce images through sound—and at the same time anticipate almost word-for-word the later idiom used in German, "to look into the tube" ("in die röhre schauen") to describe future television technology. A puzzled director is left at the end: "Now I am really beaten. Nonsense has won. This really means that we wanted to do was something right, and couldn't because someone else wanted to do something that is wrong."[32] Only the prompt entrance of Johann Strauss's *The Blue Danube* (1866) is able temporarily to relieve him from this crisis of meaning. The circle closed when the critic Hans Pander took *Opus 1 + 2* as the occasion for "profound investigations of the psyche": "Confronted with such a riddle, as the Ruttmann films surely are for their average audience," he recommended that audience members "try to conjure up ideas about the puzzle which governs the performance, form a chain of these thoughts, then this chain might lead to the source from which the apparently nonsensical conscious content stems, and thereby the puzzle could reveal its meaning."[33] Both cases demonstrate—sometimes ironically, sometimes dressed up as psychoanalysis—a glimpse of a media power that lies beyond any rationality.

Weekend (1930) as Synthesis and both Developmental High Point and End Point of the 1920s

Ruttmann distanced himself from the "absolute fashion" as early as 1925, while others such as Fischinger continued their work in this vein for several decades more.[34] The development of Ruttmann's oeuvre provides further evidence of the reciprocity between media-related shifts in perception and innovative artistic production, as it led him beyond the painterly style, the "painting with time", of his four *Opus* films. Instead, he turned to a musical montage of documentary scenes with his *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*.

His return to capturing the real was reinforced by the new technology of sound film that Ruttmann dedicated himself to in 1928. As a promotional film for the Deutsche Rundfunk (German Radio), he shot *Tönende Welle* (*Sounding Wave*; sometimes also called *Deutscher Rundfunk*), a sound-film experiment in which he applied the montage method of *Berlin* to sound film. The premiere took place during the Berliner Funkausstellung (International Radio Exhibition Berlin, or Berlin Radio Show) in 1928.[35] For Ruttmann, the beginnings of sound film, which focus mostly on narration and musical accompaniment, were disappointing: "One all too often uses it [the sound] as a decoration underscoring the image and thus neglects almost entirely the essential

[32] Ibid., 35.

[33] Hans Pander "Lichtspiel Opus 1 und Opus 2", *Der Bildwart*, Berlin 7 (July 1924): 203–05, quoted in Goergen, *Walter Ruttmann*, 102.

[34] Ruttmann, "'Absolute' Fashion", 464–65.

[35] Unfortunately, the film is now missing.

advantage of these new means: the possibility to express other things that differentiate themselves from images with the help of sounds."[36] In response, Ruttmann developed an artistic strategy for sound film that he described as "an optical-acoustic counterpoint, a counter-music-making between visible and audible movements".[37] Following this logic, Siegfried Kracauer wrote on the occasion of the first sound film screenings: "The sound-image film will achieve its true meaning only when it discovers the unknown existence that lies before it, the sounds and noises around us that have never before communicated with visual impressions, and have always escaped our senses."[38] Kracauer was specifically inspired here by Ruttmann's sound film *Tönende Welle*.

The first, and for a long time the only, realisation of all these contemporary tendencies and ideas was Ruttmann's *Weekend*, a sound-on-film work produced without recording images, created for the Deutsche Rundfunk in 1930 and commissioned by none other than Flesch himself, by then the artistic director of the Berliner Funk-Stunde station.[39] The work was a montage created solely from "natural" sound material recorded in the city of Berlin and presented without any literary or textual reference. It was the first radio drama not performed by actors; instead, it consisted only of recorded original sounds and the voice recordings of non-professionals. During the production period, the Berlin *Film-Kurier* wrote that "Ruttmann, who wants to record his series of six sound scenes within three days, will work with amateurs and not with actors, and will make external recordings of factories in Berlin, underground stations, etc., alongside sound studio recordings."[40]

As with all radio programmes of the time, radio dramas were realised as live broadcasts in front of the microphone, due in part to the poor sound quality of contemporary recording media (records and sound film). But even after the refinement of recording technologies, ideological debates still resonated between the advocates of liveness as the sole authentic and 'auratic' form of art and the supporters of recording material for

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[36] Ruttmann quoted in a French essay on Ruttmann by Jean Lenauer, "Pour vous", Paris, Nr. 88, July 24 1930, quoted in Jeanpaul Goergen, *Walter Ruttmanns Tonmontagen als Ars Acustica* MuK 89 (Siegen: Massenmedien und Kommunikation, 1994), 42.

[37] Ruttmann, Kopfnotiz über den Funk-Tonfilm, in: Film-Kurier, Berlin, Nr. 191, 1928.

[38] Siegfried Kracauer, *Der verbotene Blick: Beobachtungen, Analysen, Kritiken* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1992), 301.

[39] *Weekend*, directed by Ruttmann; produced by Reichsrundfunkgesellschaft and Berliner Funk-Stunde, 11.10 min.; premiere, 15 May 1930, Berlin (Haus des Rundfunks; internal screening on the occasion of the fifth anniversary celebrations of the Reichsrundfunkgesellschaft); first broadcast, 13 June 1930, 9 p.m., over the Berliner and Schlesische Funkstunde as part of the programme *Hörspiele auf Tonfilmen* (*Radio Plays on Sound Film*), which also included the broadcast of Bischoff's radio drama *Hallo! Hier Welle Erdball*. *Weekend* is included as part of the DVD of Ruttmann, *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt & Melodie der Welt*, Filmmuseum München, edition no. 39 (Munich, 2008).

[40] *Film-Kurier Berlin* 41 (15 February 1930). See also the attempts at subsequent transcription: Antje Vowinckel, *Collagen im Hörspiel: Die Entwicklung einer radiophonen Kunst* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1995), 68–75, as well as Frisius's structural analysis of *Weekend*, accessed 18 August 2015, http://www.frisius.de/rudolf/texte/txhorend.htm.

subsequent broadcast (as commonly practised today).[41] Flesch belonged to the pioneers of media-specific differentiation. With music, the recording of multiple performances of a piece and the selection of the best version for broadcast could enhance artistic quality. Likewise, the use of recording in radio drama enabled the combination of different sound sources and their refinement through montage, a practice that was already standard in films of that time. Flesch, however, advocated live broadcast directly on location, which, although today is a common occurrence, was at the time a rare phenomenon.[42]

A central concept in the tangle of contemporary discussion on the subject was the mechanical reproduction of art. As early as 1927, for instance, Moholy-Nagy demanded "that the resources previously used just for reproduction purposes should be broadened to the purposes of production", referring explicitly to photography, the gramophone, sound film and television.[43] Even before Walter Benjamin examined the reproduction capabilities of art from a media- and art-theoretical standpoint in his famous essay, this idea had turned into a new paradigm of radio art for Flesch.[44] From today's perspective his intention could be formulated as follows: in order to move beyond the communications lineage of telegraphy and telephony, radio had to form a hybridised fusion with the recording media of photography and film. At the same time, the boundaries between the mechanical reproduction of art and an artwork produced with the same reproduction technologies became blurred to form a unique synthesis of artistic and media-technical developments that still exists today. For Flesch, Ruttmann was the ideal artist to forge such a media-specific radio art. *Weekend* tapped into the experiences of avant-garde film to create a new sound art, which for the first time was not dependent upon a script. Instead, it developed entirely from the acoustic material that at the same time was emancipated from the linearity and locality of a live broadcast, in order to combine different times and spaces in one filmic sound montage.

Seven months before the completion of his radio drama, Ruttmann laid out its theoretical groundwork in his text *Neue Gestaltung von Tonfilm und Funk: Programm einer photographischen Hörkunst* (*New Formation of Sound Film and Radio: Programme of a Photographic Art of Listening*, October 1929). The text's programmatic character closely resembles the manuscript *Malerei mit Zeit* (*Painting with Time*) of 1919–20, in which he drafted the theoretical basis for absolute film. The transferral of methods from film

[41] See also Stoffels in Leonhard, *Programmgeschichte des Hörfunks*, 712–24, and: Daniels, "What is Live? From the Aura to the Avatar", Berlin (2011), accessed 18 August 2015, http://transmediale.de/content/what-live-dieter-daniels-de-and-his-talk-about-what-live-aura-avatar.

[42] See Hagen, *Das Radio*, 110.

[43] László Moholy-Nagy, "Produktion—Reproduktion" (1927), in *Malerei Fotografie Film* (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 2000), 28.

[44] Wolfgang Hagen even speculates: "you could almost think that, he, Benjamin, . . . might have overheard some of his famous thesis from his long-time employer, Hans Flesch, in Frankfurt and Berlin" (Hagen, *Das Radio*, 108). Yet Benjamin's theses are much more complex and contradictory than the pragmatic and result-oriented proposals of Flesch.

to radio drama, as already implied in the notion of *photographische Hörkunst* (*The Photographic Art of Listening*), is explained in the later text as the artistic consequence of the hitherto neglected technical possibilities of sound film:

> The genuine creation and compositional assembling of natural material available to radio broadcasting require the possibility of a montage free from any contingencies, and executed to the last detail by the responsible author—just as in film. The technology of sound-on-film provides this possibility. Sound film does not denote here the combination of visual and acoustic photography, merely the process of photographing phenomena perceivable by the ear, without any form of stylisation and including their specific spatial characteristics. As the photography of sound is achieved by the exposure of a film tape, acoustic montage is now provided with the same possibilities available to film montage. All the world's sounds become material. . . . This clears the path for a completely new form of acoustic art—new, following its own means, and its own impact.[45]

Here, Ruttmann's mixture of technical pragmatism, descriptions of engineering feasibility and visions of artistic impact came to full fruition. As the pioneer of abstract film who was soon to turn away from absolute art to dedicate himself to 'natural material', Ruttmann produced a unique form of photographic sound art in his Berlin film, with its close affinity to reality. The acoustic equivalent of his twofold experience in film was realised with *Weekend*, which was not so much 'absolute art' as a piece of 'concrete' sound that anticipated later experimentation with *musique concrète*. A long history of avant-garde ideas which reaches from Luigi Russolo's 1913 manifesto *The Art of Noises* to Weill's drafting of "absolute radio art" found its first implementation in *Weekend*.[46]

Furthermore, in order to establish a link with film reception, it is important to note that *Weekend* was also presented multiple times in cinemas, including at the Second International Congress of Independent Film in Brussels (27 November–1 December 1930) as an example of the German school of avant-garde film, as well as at further events in Berlin and perhaps also in Paris.[47] Developments of media-specific film art and radio art, which until then shared the same ideas but were physically separate, came together for the first time in *Weekend*—and this in the personae of none other than the two pioneers of absolute film and radio art: Ruttmann and Flesch. The use of sound film as an innovative recording medium in radio was substantially advanced by Flesch as the

[45] Ruttmann, "Neue Gestaltung von Tonfilm und Funk. Programm einer photographischen Hörkunst", *Film-Kurier Berlin* 255 (26 October 1929). Reprint in Goergen, *Walter Ruttmanns Tonmontagen*, 25–26. See excerpts online: accessed 8 July 2016, http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/quellentext/40/.

[46] Luigi Russolo, "The Art of Noises: A Futurist Manifesto" (1913), *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York and London: Continuum, 2006), 10–14; Weill, "Possibilities for Absolute Radio Art".

[47] Goergen, *Walter Ruttmanns Tonmontagen*, 2, 31.

artistic director of the Berlin Radio Hour (Berlin Radio). His vision for an "idiosyncratic art form" of the radio became tangible for the first time through the collaboration with Ruttmann. In the programmatic text *Rundfunk heute* (*Broadcasting Today*, 1930), Flesch described his quest for:

> broadcast as an independent artwork. I have not yet seen or heard anything that justifies this label, neither musically nor literary, even though I try to bring any tendency, any implication, any attempt, in front of the microphone. Hindemith's organ concerto, the "Berlin Requiem" by Brecht and Weill, Bischoff's "Song", "Lindbergh's Flight", to name four examples, are pieces bearing different artistic qualities that undoubtedly suit the radio very well and can be adapted to its possibilities. No one, however, can claim that they can achieve their full effect exclusively and solely through radio. Walter Ruttmann's purely acoustic film "Weekend", commissioned by and produced for the Berliner Funk-Stunde, is perhaps the boldest, most idiosyncratic, and most far-reaching attempt that exists to date.[48]

The special significance that Flesch attributed to this piece was also demonstrated by the double broadcast on the evening of its premiere, a repetition of *Weekend* in full that followed "the explanatory words of the artistic director Flesch, with his great loving commitment for this experiment".[49]

Hardly anything is known of the relationship between Flesch and Ruttmann, particularly since their biographies diametrically diverge after 1933—persecution by the Nazi regime in the case of Flesch, service to the authorities in the case of Ruttmann. Apparently there was only a short period of congenial correspondence expressing their interests in an "idiosyncratic art form" of media around 1929 and 1930. However, this had little consequence for the field of art or for the mass medium of radio. Indeed, *Weekend* had very extensive resonance at the time of its conception, which is documented in detailed reviews and interviews in the German press as well as in Paris, Prague and Rome.[50] In addition, Richter recounted the enthusiasm of Vsevolod Pudovkin, to whom Ruttmann had presented *Weekend*.[51] This makes all the more surprising the century-long neglect of *Weekend*, which received no substantial literary references or presentations after 1932. The original sound-film vanished, as did the shellac record copies from the radio archives. In fact, *Weekend* only survived by chance as an audio tape recording belonging to the cutter Paul Falkenberg, who took the print with him when he emigrated to New York, where it was discovered in 1978. It was broadcast again for the first time by

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[48] Hans Flesch, "Rundfunk heute", *Der Querschnitt Berlin* 10, no. 4 (1930): 245–47; quoted in Goergen, *Walter Ruttmanns Tonmontagen*, 32.

[49] *Acoustos, Funk-Kritik der Woche* (1930), quoted in Goergen, *Walter Ruttmanns Tonmontagen*, 39.

[50] See reprints in Goergen, *Walter Ruttmanns Tonmontagen*, 41–52.

[51] Hans Richter, *Köpfe und Hinterköpfe* (Zürich: Arche Verlag, 1967), 156–57.

Hansjörg Schmitthenner on the Bayrischer Rundfunk (Bavarian Broadcast Station) on 24 April 1978.[52]

Although receiving relatively little credit for their pioneering achievements, Ruttmann's and Flesch's ideas for a media-specific art have been widely realised since the second half of the twentieth century. Why then did this pioneering work, whose methods anticipated not only *musique concrète* but also sound art and the sampling and mashup cultures of popular music, disappear for so long? This oversight is especially remarkable when compared to the broad historical reception of Brecht's radio drama *Lindberghflug*, which in the end failed due to a misjudgement of the medium.[53] It is possible to speculate about the reasons for the gap in the work's reception history. On the technological side, sound film in radio had been blighted by high costs and problematic sound quality; in fact, *Weekend* and a second commissioned production by Bischoff remain the only examples of the genre, since the introduction of the wax record (used in radio from 1930) no longer allowed for filmic montage. There were also political reasons: Ruttmann's contributions to Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*, 1935) and his own propaganda films of the Nazi era surely played a major role in the fact that he was no longer considered part of the 1920s avant-garde that was being rediscovered after 1945. In the epilogue below, I examine various paradoxes that contest the transformation of ideal 'absolute art' into mass media forms, but that have nothing to do with the technological or political aspects of *Weekend* that Ruttmann mentioned above. These are in fact aesthetic issues hinted at by Nina Hamson, Ruttmann's life partner of the time, when she wrote about *Weekend* in 1930: "This work marks the beginning of a new form of art, but also marks its culmination".[54]

Epilogue: Paradoxes in Transferring 'Absolute Art' to the Media

From today's perspective, it is surprising that the pioneering achievements of the media-specific art illustrated here could be so thoroughly forgotten. In fact, Ruttmann's *Opus* films and *Weekend*, as well as Flesch's *Zauberei auf dem Sender*, remained mostly unknown well into the 1970s, while simultaneously, the emergence of other forms of media art (experimental film, television and video art, sound radio dramas, electronic music and so on) received continual critical and theoretical engagement. Only in retrospect have the achievements of the 1920s turned into a kind of "overlooked role model"

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[52] Goergen, *Walter Ruttmanns Tonmontagen*, 2–3.

[53] See Dieter Daniels, "Lindberghs Flug und Brechts Kampf mit dem Apparat: Eine kritische Revision von Bertold Brechts Radiotheorie und seines Hörspiel-Experiments *Der Lindbergh Flug*", in *Populärkultur, Massenmedien, Avantgarde, 1919–1933*, ed. Jessica Nitsche and Nadine Werner (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2012), 83–97.

[54] Nina Hamson in a French essay on Ruttmann: *La Revue du Cinema Paris* 2, no. 12 (1930): 70–71; quoted in Goergen, *Walter Ruttmanns Tonmontagen*, 46.

for complex and diverse developments that have continuing effects today. The same applies to the theories of these early experimental artists and musicians, who in many ways explored for the first time today's fundamental questions of an art of, and in, mass-media technologies. The reasons for this range from biographical, political, economic and technical factors to less frequently discussed artistic ones.

First of all, the obvious external factors: the end of the Weimar Republic and the coming into power of National Socialism ended the era of artistic experimentation with film and radio in Germany. Flesch was fired and persecuted; Weill, Arnheim and Fischinger escaped to the United States; and Ruttmann turned to fascism. But even before 1933, and independent of the cultural rupture of National Socialism, important economical and institutional factors opposed the transferral of 'absolute art' to mass-media forms. In contrast to the United States, there was a fundamental division within the economic-institutional constitution of German film and radio. Film only existed on a private economic level, as part of commercial cinema production; radio, on the other hand, existed only as state-run broadcasting, financed with broadcasting fees and under direct political control. As a result, a film could survive only as entertainment, whereas radio was state-decreed with an educational mandate. Ruttmann described this disjunction as early as 1928 when he wrote that "The art of film needs a strong patron", but noted that the industry could not take on the role because of other interests: this is why, he explained, the state is "the last hope at present".[55] However, while no state funding was available to support the implementation of an experimental lab for artistic film, as demanded by Ruttmann, an equivalent for the radio did manifest itself in the Rundfunkversuchsstelle (Laboratory for Experiments with Radio), which was attached to the Music Academy in Berlin. Here, Hindemith, Friedrich Trautwein and Oskar Sala among others developed the groundwork of electronic music between 1928 and 1933. Ruttmann escaped this dilemma—film or radio—with his successful promotional films that made use of some of the same film material from the *Opus* films, and which he applied to product advertisement. This is how the battle of geometric forms in *Opus 1* turned into a battle between a round tire and the sharp stones of a highway in *Der Sieger* (*The Winner*, 1921). There were obvious conflicts of production between 'absolute' and 'applied' arts, which are often considered as antipodes of each other. First, moving between the two forms creates *technological paradoxes*. When classic genres (painting, music, literature) meet media-based technologies (film, radio, sound film, record), an unclear zone of conflict arises between artistic reliance on recording media (painting, literature, sound film, records) and a complementary reliance on live performance or live media (music and radio). New combinations of live performance with recording media emerge that cannot be categorised within existing genres: absolute film, created by painting with time and recorded, is synchronised with live music; the radio drama is a live broadcast of literature that makes

[55] Ruttmann, "Staat, Film und Alkohol" (1928), *Film-Kurier* 1 (1 January 1928): quoted in Goergen, *Walter Ruttmanns Tonmontagen*, 82.

use of pre-produced sounds. As a result, ideas for an 'absolute art' become entangled with recording media and live practices during their transfer from the context of painting and music into the new media of film and radio. Second, this results in *aesthetic and conceptual paradoxes*. Developing out of photography, film is a medium of recording/playback/montage of documentary footage. By contrast, absolute or abstract film, which operates without direct reference to the outside world, is a medium of painting/composition/synthesis. As a result, absolute film converges with painting-like abstraction, on the one hand, and absolute music on the other, whereas absolute radio art on sound film (with *Weekend* as the only example) connects to the 'natural material' of noises. It is just as concrete as photography and film, then, but not abstract in the sense of absolute film.

If it were to run smoothly, this threefold relationship between time-based and iconic art (absolute music—abstract painting—absolute/abstract film—absolute sound-based radio drama) would almost counteract the need for a media-specific form of art. However, it runs anything but smoothly, operating instead as the catalyst of categorical confusion: neither are artistic-creative categories such as abstract, absolute and concrete any longer distinct (if they ever were); and nor are the economic-aesthetic differentiations between absolute and applied art or the technical-aesthetic differentiation between mechanical reproduction and the artistic productivity that employs reproduction media. From today's perspective, a confusion of terms becomes apparent, whose catalyst is nothing other than the new aesthetic possibilities of film and radio media technologies that, additionally, connect with, fertilise and confound each other in the above-mentioned discourse.

Such confusion of terms could already be discerned in the theoretical texts of the 1920s. For Weill, for example, absolute radio art should enable the creation and synthesis of sounds, and he describes the microphone as if it were a medium of sound creation rather than a medium of recording and reproduction, thanks to "unheard-of sounds that the microphone could produce artificially".[56] Although absolute film prompted Weill to draft his text, at the same time he turned against its implications of applied art. According to Weill, it lacked "the spiritual dimension, the inner melody. This failure to convey the essential element makes absolute film into a decorative art."[57] By contrast, in 1928 Ruttmann explicitly turned against absolute music as a false role model because he believed that it threatened absolute film with a similar marginalisation: "Should it drift into poorly visited concert halls, distil itself monastically for a small parish of aesthetically discerning people who guard the 'purity' of its structure?" Because "when it purports to be an end and goal in itself, it slides automatically into the junk room of *l'art pour l'art*, from which film has just released us."[58]

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[56] Weill, "Possibilities for Absolute Radio Art", 589. Wolfgang Hagen refers to Weill's mentor Ferruccio Busoni as his source of inspiration: Hagen, *Das Radio*, 95.

[57] Weill, "Possibilities for Absolute Radio Art", 588.

[58] Ruttmann, "'Absolute' Fashion", 465.

These debates around autonomy or media-specificity can be found throughout the history of so-called media art, beginning with the simultaneous development of electronic music and video art during the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1990s, as a hybrid between the paradigms of reproduction and the synthesis of images, digital photography became the subject of a similar confusion of terms. The same applies to sampling as a creative recoding of reproduction media. At the same time, net artists tried to address the Internet as a 'medium', before it became clear whether or not it really was, or is, a medium in the classical sense. Although these debates of the 1990s were left unresolved, they began to change again with the rise of postmedia around the new millennium, ensuring that the uncertain status of art in a media-based society that first emerged in the 1920s is still being interrogated today.[59]

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[59] For an overview of the confusion of terms of postmedia, see Andreas Broeckmann, *"Postmedia", Discourses: A Working Paper*, accessed 18 August 2015, http://www.mikro.in-berlin.de/wiki/tiki-index.php?page=Post media+Discourses.

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2 A Primitivism of the Senses

THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN LEN LYE'S EXPERIMENTAL ANIMATION

Malcolm Cook

MUSIC WAS CENTRAL to the film work of Len Lye throughout his career. It served a vital aesthetic role in the formal construction of his films, with the tight synchronisation between image and sound in *A Colour Box* (1935) being its most prominent quality. From a biographical perspective, Lye acknowledged the influence of jazz on his formative years in New Zealand and Australia, and he named his son Bix after the famed jazz cornettist Bix Beiderbecke.[1] Moreover, music also served as a theoretical model for his work: as Lye commented, "if there was such a thing as composing music, there could be such a thing as composing motion."[2] Despite his strong relationship with music, however, there has been little direct examination of sound in Lye's work, with scholars commonly marginalising music and sound in their attempt to establish motion as the defining characteristic of his work. This is most evident in the work of Lye's biographer Roger Horrocks and in the writings of Wystan Curnow, Andrew Johnson and Lisa Perrott.[3]

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[1] Wystan Curnow, "An Interview with Len Lye", *Art New Zealand* 17 (1980), accessed 7 December 2015, http://www.art-newzealand.com/Issues11to20/Lye09.htm.

[2] Roger Horrocks, "Len Lye: Origins of His Art", in *Len Lye*, ed. Jean-Michel Bouhours and Roger Horrocks (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2000), 179.

[3] Andrew R. Johnston, "Signatures of Motion: Len Lye's Scratch Films and the Energy of the Line", in *Animating Film Theory*, ed. Karen Beckman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 167–80; Lisa

This critical bias away from music and towards motion may have its roots in Lye's later American work, especially his kinetic sculpture, which was more clearly concerned with movement: accounts that emphasise motion, and teleologically extend it backwards to his first works, can more easily establish a consistent thematic concern running through his oeuvre. While Lye singlehandedly created the motion in his direct films, the music introduces a more complex authorial position, as he relied on collaborators, especially Jack Ellitt, for the musical elements of his work. Thus motion enhances Lye's status as auteur while music complicates it. Furthermore, as a result of his kinetic work in the 1960s and 1970s, Lye's theoretical and philosophical perspective on art also crystallised around the theme of motion, which happened to coincide with a renewed interest and rediscovery of his earlier work by Horrocks, Curnow and others. Consequently, the account Lye gave of that early work in interviews in the 1970s foregrounds motion, but this inevitably reflects the later development of his ideas. In addition, his statements "Composing Motion" and "Figures of Motion," which ostensibly describe the early development of his aesthetic sense and are commonly cited in relation to his early work, were made in the 1970s.[4] Moreover, describing the role of music in Lye's work purely as an analogy for the creation of abstract art situates his work in a modernist artistic and filmmaking tradition typified by the work of Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling and distances him from the more synaesthetic work of Oskar Fischinger and Walther Ruttmann.[5] Reinstating music as integral to Lye's work formally, as well as conceptually, not only resituates his output in relation to these other modernist artists, but also engages difficult questions about his "primitivist" impulses, not only as typically perceived in his 1929 film *Tusalava* but also as it continues and develops throughout his audiovisual experimentation.

Ideas of a widespread Western cultural conception of the "primitive" that denigrated and flattened distinctions between radically diverse cultures across Africa, the South Pacific and other regions have a long history and historiography.[6] Conventionally, primitivism in the visual arts has been seen as originating in the interest that artists at the turn of the twentieth-century, such as Gauguin, Picasso, Matisse and Derain, took in African and South Pacific arts.[7] These discourses and aesthetic influences continued

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Perrott, "Zigzag: Reanimating Len Lye as Improvised Theatrical Performance and Immersive Visual Music", in *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, ed. John Richardson, Claudia Gorbman and Carol Vernallis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 233–50.

[4] Roger Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001), 27.

[5] For more discussion of this important distinction in abstract filmmaking see: Malcolm Cook, "Visual Music in Film, 1921–1924: Richter, Eggeling, Ruttman", in *Music and Modernism, c. 1849–1950*, ed. Charlotte de Mille (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 206–88.

[6] Raymond Corbey and Wilfried Van Damme, "Introduction: European Encounters with 'Primitive Art' during the Late Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Art Historiography* 12 (2015): 1–10. See also the other contributions to this special issue of the *Journal of Art Historiography*.

[7] William Rubin, "Modernist Primitivism: An Introduction," in *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art*, ed. Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 2.

to play a diverse role in various twentieth-century arts up to and including the period being examined here, when Lye was working in Britain. Critical attention to primitivist ideas and artworks has been continuous since that time. Robert Goldwater's influential *Primitivism in Modern Painting* was published in 1938, for instance, and the next thirty years saw a critical focus on what Jack Flam calls a "scientifically oriented anthropological approach", in which the minutiae of sources dominated the broader ideological basis of the categorisation of primitive art.[8]

This trajectory was radically altered in 1984 when the Museum of Modern Art in New York staged the exhibition "'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern", accompanied by William Rubin's two-volume book.[9] The exhibition became a watershed moment for discussions of primitivism in relation to modern art, which was frequently expressed as a vociferous negative critical response. Emergent post-colonial and postmodern theorists, including Thomas McEvilley, James Clifford and James Knapp, not only expressed disdain at the show's curatorial practices and critical discourses but also voiced growing criticism of modern artists, who were seen as guilty of the "appropriation of tribal productions" (Clifford) or, in the words of Lucy Lippard, of having "pillaged from other cultures".[10] While such language undoubtedly served as a corrective to the labelling of other cultures as primitive, recent research has provided a more nuanced acknowledgement of the power imbalances inherent in these concepts, while also fully exploring their historical significance and specificities. Ruth B. Phillips has recently argued for "a critical distinction between a negative sociological primitivism and a positive aesthetic primitivism", a distinction that would seem to be found in work by authors including Francis Connelly and Tom Perchard, which seeks to understand the complexities of historical primitivism without offering either an apologia or blanket condemnation.[11]

Given the long and diverse history of these ideas and the complexity of their critical responses, it is impossible to address all aspects of this topic. Instead, I identify key

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[8] Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Painting* (New York: Harper and Bros, 1938). This book was revised, re-titled and reissued in 1967 as *Primitivism in Modern Art* (New York: Vintage, 1967); Jack Flam, "Introduction," in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History*, ed. Flam and Miriam Deutch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 17.

[9] Rubin, *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art*.

[10] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 197; Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 24; Thomas McEvilley, "Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief", *Artforum* 23 (November 1984): 54–60; James F. Knapp, "Primitivism and the Modern", *Boundary 2* 15, nos. 1–2 (1986): 365–79.

[11] Ruth B. Phillips, "Aesthetic Primitivism Revisited: The Global Diaspora of 'Primitive Art' and the Rise of Indigenous Modernisms", *Journal of Art Historiography* 12 (2015): 8; Frances S. Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in Modern European Art and Aesthetics* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995); Tom Perchard, "Tradition, Modernity and the Supernatural Swing: Re-Reading 'Primitivism' in Hugues Panassié's Writing on Jazz", *Popular Music* 30, no. 1 (2011): 25–45.

threads of particular pertinence to the discussion of music in Lye's work. First is the relationship between modernism and primitivism, second is the role of authenticity in defining the primitive, and finally there is the treatment of jazz as a specific form of primitivism.

For Sieglinde Lemke, "there is no modernism without primitivism", yet, as she also acknowledges, the two can, and did, exist independently of the other as well.[12] Modernist artists saw two overarching characteristics in what they perceived as primitive art: on the one hand, a complete break from the Western classical traditions avant-garde artists were looking to disavow,[13] and on the other, a perceived simplicity and rejection of illusionism, even figuration, that resonated with Western artists moving aesthetically towards stylisation and abstraction.[14] As Flam explains, primitive art acted "both as a visible influence on the way modern art looked and as a kind of invisible presence that affected the aspirations and functions of art—as a model for both forms and practices."[15] While these two strands might appear compatible, there are tensions and even contradictions in this pairing of modernism with primitivism. Connelly argues that a "presumed lack of reason was the fundamental issue that separated ['primitive' art] from the arts of 'civilized' peoples", and this rejection of the basis of Western rational thought underpinned the avant-garde attraction to it.[16] Yet abstraction may be understood as highly intellectualised, or as a product of modern scientific rationality rather than a rejection of it.[17] There is a contradiction between primitivism as practice and the formal qualities of modernist abstraction.

Similarly, primitivism entailed a sense of authenticity that sits uncomfortably with the globalisation that is integral to modernity, and therefore modernism. William Rubin narrowly defines an authentic primitive object as "one created by an artist for his own people and used for traditional purposes", untouched by modern global economic exchange.[18] Yet that art object can come to influence Western artists only through that same economic system and, following Connelly, we might even argue that the very notion of primitive art is a product of that modernity rather than something which sits outside it.[19] Thus, as Shelly Errington has explored, the idea of

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[12] Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 144.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Flam, "Introduction", 3.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason*, 14

[17] Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon", in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1, *Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 31–32; Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 5.

[18] Rubin, "Modernist Primitivism," 76.

[19] Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason*, 26, 34.

"authentic primitive art" and its relationship with modernism is highly contested and contradictory.[20]

Music was also intimately bound up with these same discourses of primitivism and the primitive in the early twentieth century. With its folk-music motifs and the infamous 1913 Paris riot securing its avant-garde credentials, Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*, 1913) engaged in primitivism in both form and practice while remaining embedded within Western classical practices.[21] Of greater importance to the discussion of music in Lye's work is the relationship of jazz with primitivism. The blossoming of artistic activity in New York known as the Harlem Renaissance was entwined with the contradictory ideas of primitivism raised here, and jazz was a key component.[22] Alain Locke, whose 1925 book *The New Negro* may be considered a "manifesto" for the movement then known as the Negro Renaissance, situated African American art and music in the context of "the Ancestral Arts" of Africa, seeing an "emotional inheritance" in Negro Renaissance art works.[23] Parallel with the reassessment of primitivism in visual art, the 1980s saw critical analysis of the unthinking association of jazz with the primitive: Ted Gioia stated forcefully in 1989 that "jazz is not primitive art. Nor . . . is it imitative of primitive art".[24] More recent research has recognised the inequality of identifying art as primitive while also acknowledging the historical role primitivism played in the development and reception of jazz. Crucially, primitivism in jazz was entangled with its modernism. Jody Blake identifies a tension between jazz as modern and jazz as primitive. Jazz and ragtime were "created by American blacks, contained European elements, and were commercialized for white audiences", yet they were still understood as African or non-Western primitive art.[25] For Bruce Johnson, "African components [of jazz] paradoxically enabled the music to be declared barbarically primitive yet possessing the 'rhythmic aggressiveness' of 'the moderns'."[26]

These ideas of primitivism's close relationship with modernism are central to understanding Len Lye's experimental animated films. Most writers raise the very clear visual relationship between his first film *Tusalava* (1929) and the Aboriginal Australian and South Pacific sources he drew upon.[27] Yet Lye's primitivism is commonly understood to

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[20] Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 3.

[21] Aaron Yale Heisler, "Literary Memory and the Moment of Modern Music", *Modernism/Modernity* 19, no. 4 (2012): 695; Peter Hill, *Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 35, 158.

[22] Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

[23] Alain Le Roy Locke, ed., *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: A. and C. Boni, 1925), 254.

[24] Ted Gioia, "Jazz and the Primitivist Myth", *Musical Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (1989): 142.

[25] Jody Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900–1930* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 5.

[26] Bruce Johnson, "Jazz as Cultural Practice", in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and David Horn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 97.

[27] Anne Kirker, "The Early Years in London", *Art New Zealand* 17 (1980), accessed 7 December 2015, http://www.art-newzealand.com/Issues11to20/Lye08.htm; Curnow, "Interview with Len Lye"; Barbara Rose, "Len

have diminished after that first film. His move towards abstraction in his direct films, such as *A Colour Box*, enacted a standard narrative of modernist art in general, analogous to the way the primitivism of Picasso and Braque evolved into Cubism.[28]

By examining the music in Lye's films, we can see the complexities and contradictions inherent in this conventional narrative, and by extension the relationship between primitivism and modernism. *Tusalava*, although understood today as a 'silent' film, had a soundtrack and was considered by Lye and Ellitt to be the first of a trilogy of films in which a musical as well as visual progression would engage directly with ideas of the primitive. Closer inspection of the music of the extant film, and the unrealised sequels, gives a more nuanced perspective on the work's primitivism. Lye's appropriation of other cultures for the iconography of his first film sits alongside a multifaceted notion of the primitive in which he moves beyond the cultural or sociological to include the developmental, evolutionary and perceptual.

Conversely, the consideration of music in Lye's later British films of the 1930s, which were predominantly scored by Ellitt using pre-existing jazz recordings, reveals the continuation of a primitivism often ignored in favour of his visual abstraction and technical experimentation. His second film, *Experimental Animation* (1933), also known as *Peanut Vendor*, for example, clearly demonstrates a continued musical and visual primitivism. Yet, a close examination of the film's musical and iconographical heritage reveals an involved set of geographical origins that denies any straightforward identification of authentic culture available for appropriation. The film also draws attention to a set of perceived characteristics in the primitive that exceed a sociological perspective and that would remain important to his films throughout the 1930s, when he afforded music a central role. The combination of new synchronised sound technology with his visual art offered a distinctive approach to the primitivism-modernism interaction. With Ellitt, Lye retained the appeal of the primitive as a rejection of rational Western musical and artistic standards, embracing instead a form of "unreason".[29] This did not, however, lead to an aesthetic simplification or abstraction, but rather embraced a multisensory or synaesthetic kinaesthetic experience.

Tusalava: Multifaceted Primitivism

Tusalava, produced over a period of two years following his arrival in London in 1926, is the result of around 4,400 black and white drawings created at a typical rate of eight

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Lye: Shaman, Artist, Prophet", in *Len Lye*, ed. Jean-Michel Bouhours and Roger Horrocks (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2000), 216–18; Ian Christie, "Colour, Music, Dance, Motion: Len Lye in England, 1927–44", in Bouhours and Horrocks, *Len Lye*, 187; Jonathan Dennis, "Tusalava," in Bouhours and Horrocks, *Len Lye*, 184.

[28] Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten, *Cubism and Culture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 24–63.

[29] Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason*, 13.

per day.[30] Modestly financed by the London Film Society and personally by a number of its members, it was first screened on 1 December 1929.[31] The film draws on Lye's experience of Maori art in his home country of New Zealand, Aboriginal art from Australia and his time in the South Pacific, when Lye may have had firsthand, though limited, exposure to indigenous arts in Samoa.[32] Many of Lye's sources were those of Western origin that interpreted African and South Pacific art, including Ezra Pound's *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (1916), Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen's *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899) and the 1921 documentary by Frank Hurley, *Pearls and Savages*.[33]

Because of such diverse and often indirect sources, the appropriation of these cultures for Lye's own art may be subject to the same criticisms that applied to other Western artists who were involved in producing primitivist work in the first decades of the twentieth century. In these purely visual terms, Lye's first film is closely aligned with that broader modernist primitivism. Its non-Western influences serve as an avant-garde rejection of conventional filmmaking practice, causing a *Daily Sketch* reviewer to describe it as both "remarkable" and "weird".[34] Equally, its use of non-Western iconography lends the film a simple, graphic aesthetic that moves towards total abstraction when using the "witchetty grub", imagery composed of lines and circles, derived from Australian Aboriginal sources.[35]

Music was intended to be a fundamental part of the primitivism in *Tusalava*. Befriended by Lye in Australia, Ellitt moved to London in the late 1920s and became Lye's vital collaborator for the next decade.[36] In his 1930 book *No Trouble*, Lye described how music and image would work in *Tusalava*: "Jack is making the sound for the first section on 2 pianos and it will be synchronised, vide [*sic*] talkie apparatus".[37] A specially composed score would allow a tight synchronisation and integration between visuals and audio, a quality that became central to Lye's multisensory form of primitivism. However, while synchronised sound technology was becoming more familiar in cinemas in the late 1920s, the funding Lye had received from the London Film Society did not extend to creating a sound print of the film. Ellitt instead created a written score for live performance at screenings.

Horrocks reports that the composer intended to create music "suitable for these primitive forms", using pianos percussively in order to produce primarily rhythmic sounds that aspired towards non-specific tribal music. While Lye's film was well received by many, Ellitt's soundtrack suffered from the limitations of live cinema performance, both in

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30 Len Lye, *No Trouble* (Deya, Majorca: Seizin Press, 1930), 8; Horrocks, *Len Lye*, 91.

31 *Daily Sketch*, 2 December 1929, 14; Horrocks, *Len Lye*, 92.

32 Horrocks suggests that Lye did not come into direct contact with Aboriginals during his time in Australia; Horrocks, *Len Lye*, 63–67, 69.

33 Horrocks, "Len Lye", 178–83; Kirker, "The Early Years in London"; Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1899), 148–49.

34 *Daily Sketch*, 2 December 1929, 14.

35 Spencer and Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, 146–50.

36 Horrocks, *Len Lye*, 69–71.

37 Lye, *No Trouble*, 12.

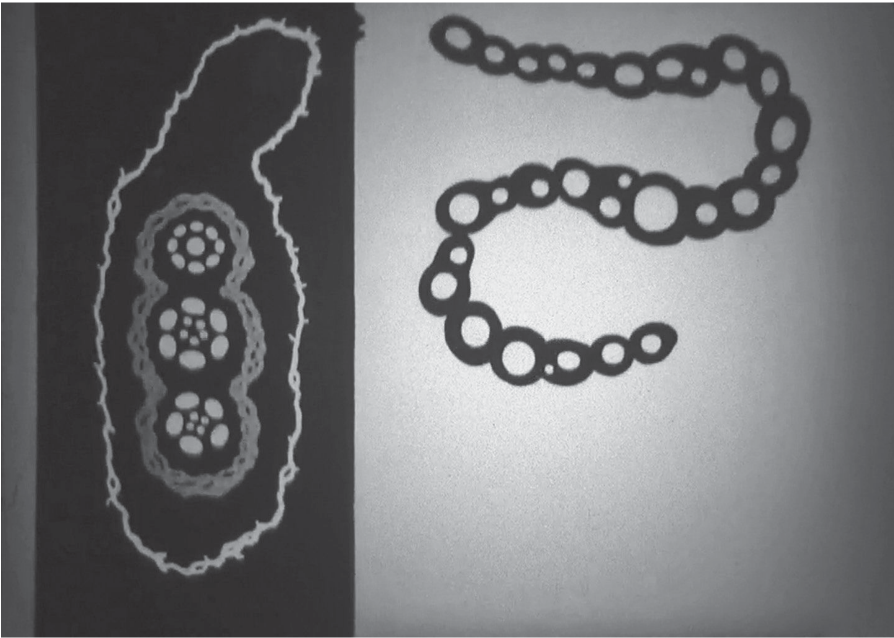

FIGURE 2.1 Single-cell organisms in Len Lye's *Tusalava* (1929).

translating a score for dual pianos for a single performer and in the difficulty of maintaining synchronisation, leading to the presentation being deemed a failure.[38] Unfortunately this score is not known to have survived. Lye later suggested Eugene Goossens's *Rhythmic Dance* (1928) as a suitable alternative, which may give some indication of the intended effect. Goossens's work can be associated with a modernist primitivist aesthetic, as he presented the first concert performance in London of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* in 1921, albeit rooted in concert-hall conventions.[39] Nevertheless, in *Rhythmic Dance*, melody is subordinated to rhythm and the physicality of the player and instrument. Music thus served an important role in communicating the notion of the primitive Lye was expressing. Despite its evident cultural primitivism, however, *Tusalava* was concerned with a more diverse and complex, if under-theorised, notion of the primitive, and is thus an important precursor to Lye's later films. In 1930, *Close Up* published two images from the film, describing it as "a film of life cells, attack and repudiation", while Oswald Blakeston suggested that "life cells form the actual *motifs* of the diagrams: biology is their inspiration".[40] The film suggests an evolutionary primitivism, with its microscopic imagery and the single-cell organisms with which all life began (Figure 2.1), a developmental primitivism

[38] Horrocks, *Len Lye*, 93–94.

[39] Carole Rosen, "Goossens: (3) Sir Eugene Goossens", in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2007–2016), accessed 20 December 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/11466pg3.

[40] *Close Up* 6, no. 2 (February 1930); Oswell Blakeston, "Len Lye's Visuals", *Architectural Review* 72 (July 1932), italics in original.

in the reproductive narrative and the birth of new life and a perceptual primitivism based on basic geometric shapes and the evocation of non-specific tribal art derived from Lye's diverse sources.

The versatile primitivism Lye expressed in the extant section of his first film is indicative of a wider ambition. In *No Trouble*, he suggests that *Tusalava* was intended as the first of a three-part work, outlining a progression from the most primal imagery of the completed first section, through the geological developments in the second, to the evolution of "humanised shapes" in the third.[41] This figurative development is mirrored in movement, with a shift from "flat . . . two-dimensional movement" to a "ballet of natural objects with marionette models for the more intricate meaning movements".[42] This progression is also expressed sonically: the second and third parts of the film were planned to be accompanied by further experimental music by Ellitt, as Lye explains:

> in the second section wire brushes, tap drums, natural sounds, e.g. rushing water, crackle of high-frequency current etc. then in the third section voices talking emphasize the content of film.[43]

A revealing hierarchy of sounds is established here. The evolutionary or developmental visual progression is accompanied by a sonic narrative, first to a form of concrete music and then to human voices and language. Here the progression to modernity does not result in modernist aesthetics: the modern is not aligned with the primitive, but is set in opposition to it. The rhythmic piano music Ellitt had created for the first section is cast not as a modernist abstraction, but rather as the most atavistic of the sounds discussed, complementing the primal cellular imagery of the completed film at its most basic level.

Experimental Animation and Cuban Music

The conventional account of Lye's film career after *Tusalava* identifies an absolute break from all aspects of his first film, resulting in his celebrated work *A Colour Box*. *Tusalava* is black and white, 'silent', constructed by photographing hundreds of individual drawings and engaged in cultural primitivism in its imagery. In contrast, *A Colour Box* is in colour, uses closely synchronised sound and abstract visuals, and was created rapidly through a direct film approach without the use of a camera. For Curnow, "Lye soon abandoned . . . the mechanical and the tribal as sources of constitutive imagery", while Anne Kirker sees a move "away from the biomorphic and primitive iconography of

[41] Lye, *No Trouble*, 12–13.

[42] Ibid., 12.

[43] Ibid.

Tusalava towards the purely gestural".[44] Horrocks describes Lye as "distancing himself from the hard-edged style of *Tusalava* and Aboriginal art", and Jean-Michel Bouhours argues that, "iconographically speaking, Len Lye's direct films constitute a radical break with his previous works inspired by primitive art".[45] This narrative of rupture undoubtedly serves to absolve and distance Lye's work as a whole from criticisms that might be directed at his appropriation and romanticisation of the cultures he was influenced by.[46] Equally, it establishes Lye as typically modern in his adoption of abstraction. While even the briefest glance at *Tusalava* and *A Colour Box* will attest to a shift in Lye's iconography, such binarism oversimplifies the earlier film as it fails to take into account the multifaceted primitivism discussed above. Furthermore, it downplays the film Lye and Ellitt made between these better-known films, *Peanut Vendor*, and ignores the crucial role music played in the evolving idea of primitivism across all three films.

In *Peanut Vendor*, Lye abandons the drawn animation of *Tusalava* in favour of stop-motion animation. The film features a two-foot-high monkey puppet (Figure 2.2) that

FIGURE 2.2 The two-foot-high monkey puppet in Lye's *Peanut Vendor* (1933).

[44] Wystan Curnow, "Len Lye's Sculpture and the Body of His Work", *Art New Zealand* 17 (1980), accessed 7 December 2015, http://www.art-newzealand.com/Issues11to20/Lye05.htm; Kirker, "The Early Years in London".

[45] Roger Horrocks, *Art that Moves: The Work of Len Lye* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009), 54; Jean-Michel Bouhours, "Uniting Form and Movement", in Bouhours and Horrocks, *Len Lye*, 203.

[46] See discussion in Horrocks, *Art that Moves*, 45–46.

was manipulated using jointed limbs and interchangeable mouths to create the changes in facial expression required by the song of the title. Yet while this film stands apart from *Tusalava* in technique, its imagery remains indebted to a form of cultural primitivism, albeit referencing a different source by evoking the racial caricatures that were pervasive in Hollywood cartoons of the period. Again, music plays a key role in the film's construction of primitivism. Rather than a specially composed score, the filmmaker and composer opted for a piece of pre-recorded jazz. While the use of pre-existing music within film might ordinarily mean a less strict sync between visual track and soundtrack, that was not the case here, and Ellitt's contribution to this film was no less important than that to *Tusalava*.[47] Ellitt selected, edited and charted the music for Lye to work to: evidence of this remains in the film in one frame, which Lye has inadvertently exposed with a chart that has been used to guide the animation of the swaying palm tree still visible (Figure 2.3). The new technology of sound cinema and the specificities of the animation production process ensured the close alignment of music and visuals without the need for a specially composed score. Furthermore, the adoption of a jazz piece facilitated Lye's continuing engagement with the ideas of primitivism.

FIGURE 2.3 Exposure of Len Lye's chart in *Peanut Vendor* (1933).

[47] Horrocks, *Len Lye*, 131.

The music was a rendition of the song "The Peanut Vendor", a hugely popular hit in the early 1930s. A translation of the Cuban song "El Manicero", it was based on a particular type of the Cuban musical style called *pregón*, which appropriated the cry of a street seller.[48] This derivation is evident in the selected performance by Red Nichols and His Five Pennies, in which the monkey protagonist sings "buy a bag of peanuts now before you sleep" and repeatedly advertises his wares by calling "peanuts . . . peanuts". The version is highly appropriate, as the film was produced speculatively and funded privately by Granada cinema chain manager Sidney Bernstein as an advertisement for Lye's skills: this is Lye selling his own work.[49] Moreover, like the *pregón*, Lye would become adept in the 1930s at transforming advertising and promotional messages into art, with his work for the General Post Office (GPO), Imperial Airways and Shell.

Despite the affinity between the song's origins and Lye's use of it, the route between them was indirect and complex. As a form of jazz, this music was associated with the Harlem Renaissance, which might be understood as a primarily African American movement, yet Caribbean artists, especially musicians, played an important role in it.[50] "The Peanut Vendor" was a leading example of this pattern. Written by Moisés Simons, a Cuban musician of Basque descent, "El Manicero" became a popular hit in Cuba in the 1920s.[51] Don Azpiazú and his Havana Casino Orchestra travelled from Cuba to New York in 1930 and presented the song successfully in its original Spanish language: "native stuff with the glamorous and exotic setting".[52] Azpiazú also recorded the song for RCA with Antonio Machin singing the Spanish lyrics, but the song achieved lasting success when Machin was replaced by Azpiazú's sister-in-law, American actress Marion Sunshine, who also translated "El Manicero" into the English "The Peanut Vendor".[53] It became something of a craze and was recorded by numerous Harlem musical stars, including African Americans Louis Armstrong in 1930 and Duke Ellington in 1931, as well as by the white jazz bandleader Red Nichols, who produced the recording used by Lye and Ellitt.[54]

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[48] John Storm Roberts, *Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 77.

[49] Horrocks, *Len Lye*, 131.

[50] Locke, *The New Negro*; Roberts, *Latin Tinge*, 7–8, 76–79.

[51] *Variety*, 13 May 1931, 76; *Radio Digest*, March 1930, 66; Waxer Lise, "Azpiazú, Don", in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2007–2016), accessed 17 December 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/49875.

[52] *Variety*, 23 April 1930, 53.

[53] Roberts, *Latin Tinge*, 76–78; Maristella Feustle, "Gilbert, L. Wolfe", in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2007–2016), accessed 17 December 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2262323; *Variety*, 24 December 1930, 59; *Variety*, 12 November 1930, 75.

[54] *The Melody Maker, The Gramophone Review*, 1 June 1931, 490; *Variety*, 18 March 1931; *Ellingtonia*, accessed 7 December 2015, http://www.ellingtonia.com/discography/1931-1940.html.

Born out of a colonial melding of African and Spanish cultures due to the circumstances of the slave trade in the Caribbean, transported to New York where it was absorbed into a primarily African American movement and Anglicised before becoming a part of widespread American popular culture and then exported internationally, "The Peanut Vendor" and Latin jazz generally were thus products of a complex international gestation, just like Lye himself.[55] Lye was a white colonial subject, having been born in 1901 when New Zealand was still a colony, before it became a dominion in 1907.[56] He subsequently lived in Samoa and Australia, before arriving in London.[57] While we may feel uneasy about aspects of Lye's appropriation of other cultures, we might also see strong parallels in these complex histories which, as Errington would argue, challenge any easy notion of cultural specificity or authenticity in which an artwork wholly and unequivocally expresses the single culture it derives from, untouched by the global flow of modernity.[58] Neither Lye's work nor the jazz it incorporates can be considered as meeting such a standard.

The Harlem Renaissance Comes to Britain

Jeffrey P. Green has highlighted the strong connections between the Harlem Renaissance and England, and this is evident in the early 1930s, as Ellington, Armstrong and Azpiazú all performed in London having already recorded their own versions of "The Peanut Vendor".[59] These performances were situated within an ongoing discourse of primitivism that pervaded discussion of the Harlem Renaissance in Britain. In 1929, for instance, *Melody Maker* described the "red-hot coloured bands and cabaret shows" of "Harlem—The Negro Quarter", concluding that "the orgy of rhythm never quite obscures the inherently simple and amazingly melodic soul of the negro race".[60] Although couched in positive terms, this description clearly perpetuates the stereotype of the innately carefree, instinctual and musical African American.

Lye and his social circle attended events of this kind, in which Harlem Renaissance stars and shows were transported to London and adapted to local audiences. Lye's

[55] Susan Thomas, "Latin American Music", in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2007–2016), accessed 17 December 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2093315

[56] *Auckland Star*, 26 September 1907, 5.

[57] Horrocks, *Len Lye*, 8.

[58] Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art*.

[59] Jeffrey P. Green, "The Negro Renaissance and England", in *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Samuel A. Floyd Jr. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 151; *Melody Maker*, April 1933, 327; *Variety*, 12 July 1932, 40.

[60] *Melody Maker*, November 1929, 1036.

close friend Robert Graves recorded in his diary for Tuesday 26 August 1936 the following entry:

> to Blackbirds with Len [Lye], Jane [Lye], L[aura Riding], Jenny [Nicholson]
> Bad, all agreed, but for some tap dancing & the occasional crosstalk about human anatomy & its errors.[61]

The revue *Blackbirds* originated at Keith's Alhambra in Harlem in April 1926, with new productions regularly transferring to London and other European cities over the next ten years.[62] The *Blackbirds of 1936* production that Lye attended was typical of the changing show's underlying pattern, dominated by African American dancers, singers and comedians. It starred the Nicholas Brothers, whose tap dancing was undoubtedly the subject of Lye's and Graves's praise and would famously later be showcased in many 1940s Hollywood musicals.[63] These performances were a product of the primitivism described earlier: Lavaida Carter performed a "wild 'Cannibal Kid' dance"; the show depicted "the sad bad days of the landing of slaves at Jamestown to the happier cotton field days"; and presented " 'Akosiah's Wedding' . . . a gorgeously coloured African legend", in which "Lavaida and her jungle-maiden attendants" dance while Anise and Allen perform as a "barbaric dance-duo".[64] One review praised its "negro exuberance", while another found it showcasing "the negro instinct for emphatic expression".[65]

While *The Blackbirds of 1936* post-dates Lye's *Peanut Vendor* and *A Colour Box*, it nevertheless provides evidence that he was attending this kind of show and demonstrates the context in which he used jazz: it was clearly associated with African American and Latin cultures and a range of caricatured imagery and stereotypes, the influence of which may be seen in the character design and *mise-en-scène* of Lye's film. The music was also understood as natural, unhindered by rationality and appealing to the listener in an atavistic way. Jazz was not simply an aural experience, and as well as combining music with the visual, it evoked a kinaesthetic reaction. Bruce Johnson argues: "as performance music it is registered by and through the body in a way that is exuberant compared with 'classical' music. Jazz musicians and audiences are more physically animated."[66] This was expressed through the dance of both performers and audience, and, as Ian Christie

[61] Robert Graves, *Diary of Robert Graves, 1935–39, and Ancillary Material*, ed. Beryl Graves, C. G. Petter and L. R. Roberts (Victoria: University of Victoria Libraries, 2002), 22.

[62] *Variety*, 31 March 1926, 7; *The Billboard*, 25 June 1927, 54; *The Billboard*, 6 April 1929, 8; *Saturday Review*, 1 September 1934, 60; *Variety*, 20 November 1935, 15; *Variety*, 22 April 1936, 2; *The Stage*, 16 July 1936, 10; *The Stage*, 23 April 1936, 6.

[63] *The Stage*, 16 July 1936, 10.

[64] Ibid.; *The Stage*, 25 June 1936, 10.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Johnson, "Jazz as Cultural Practice", 106.

has shown, dance would prove an important component of Lye's work in this period.[67] More pertinent to the current discussion, his second film evokes a different embodied response, that of singing, an activity that was familiar to cinema-goers of the period and was bound up with the new technology of sound cinema.

The Coming of Sound and the Singalong Film

For *Peanut Vendor*, Lye and Ellitt adopted the new technology of synchronised sound, which by 1933 was more commonly available in both production and exhibition facilities. While the shift to sound is most often understood as a move towards "the talkies", not all sound films of this period followed this trajectory. Of particular importance here is the growing popularity of singalong films, and especially another 1933 animated synchronised sound film featuring the song "The Peanut Vendor", an entry in the Paramount Screen Song series created by the Fleischer Studio.

The Fleischer brothers had pioneered this form of animated cartoon in 1924, featuring an animated ball or similar device to highlight the onscreen lyrics in time with the music, with the aim of encouraging a communal singalong.[68] Films of this kind were an important part of debates about what the emerging sound cinema would sound and look like, especially in Britain, where their popularity coincided with, and reinforced, the wider community-singing movement that peaked in the late 1920s.[69] The Fleischers' version of *The Peanut Vendor* featured the Mexican actress and singer Armida, incorporating her performance and onscreen lyrics within a loose set of animated gags set in and around a zoo, which includes both human and monkey peanut sellers.[70] The Fleischer Studio's version of the song offers another possible source for Lye's use of "The Peanut Vendor", and points to two further aspects of Lye's film. Firstly it provides another route by which Lye would have encountered the Harlem Renaissance, the jazz that sprang from it, and the ideas of primitivism that accompanied it. As Daniel Goldmark observes, the Fleischer Studio was one of the few animation studios left in New York in the late 1920s and early 30s, giving them unique access to visit Harlem nightspots and collaborate directly with Renaissance stars bringing a representation of them to an audience far beyond the reach of Manhattan.[71]

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[67] Christie, "Colour, Music, Dance, Motion".

[68] Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film, 1898–1928* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 175.

[69] Malcolm Cook, "Animating the Audience: Singalong Films in Britain in the 1920s", in *The Sounds of the Silents in Britain: Voice, Music and Sound in Early Cinema Exhibition*, ed. Annette Davison and Julie Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 222–42.

[70] *Film Daily*, 24 April 1933, 21.

[71] Daniel Goldmark, *Tunes for 'Toons: Music and the Hollywood Cartoon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 87.

With his large, bulging eyes, protruding lips, gleaming teeth, enlarged hands and feet, and elongated limbs, Lye's monkey protagonist clearly shares similarities with the depiction of African American stars in the Fleischer films, which were in turn derived from the blackface minstrel traditions of vaudeville.[72] His long spindly legs are comparable to the ghost-like creature Koko the Clown transforms into while singing "St. James Infirmary Blues" in the 1933 Betty Boop cartoon *Snow-White*, for which the music and rotoscoped animation reference were provided by Cab Calloway. Likewise, his physiognomy, including bulging eyes and protruding lips, are similar to the cannibal figure Louis Armstrong is transformed into in the 1932 *I'll Be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal You*. Of course, the *Peanut Vendor* films of Lye and the Fleischers share a Latin tinge, acquired by virtue of their musical source. In both, we find tropical scenery that implies a faded colonial grandeur, with brickwork exposed behind crumbling plaster, and rampant plant life. Yet amid this, the protagonists sing without inhibition, again suggesting a stereotype of carefree abandon and flamboyance that has both ethnic and class implications.

An examination and comparison of the *mise-en-scène* of both *Peanut Vendor* films demonstrates not only their shared iconography, but also a second key aspect of Lye's film. The settings and inanimate objects in both films are not simply naturalistic, but are synchronised to the rhythm of the music. In addition to its animated anthropomorphised animals in the zoo moving in tempo with the music, the Fleischer film sees a melting ice block, roasting peanuts and a peanut vendor's oven and cart all bouncing with the music. Likewise, throughout Lye's film a palm tree sways and dances to the soundtrack.

That *Peanut Vendor* is built around a popular song and offers the tight co-ordination between music and visuals indicates a privileging of music and sound as a structuring element at a time when image was often paramount. Lye's primitivist use of jazz was about not simply formal appropriation but also rejecting conventional practice, in this case the favouring of the visual and the separation of it from the aural, as well as other established cinematic conventions. The monkey in Lye's *Peanut Vendor* directly addresses his singing to the spectator, as does Armida in the Fleischer's version, breaking the fourth wall and any attempt at illusionistic self-containment. A vital aspect of this direct address was the encouragement of audience participation, reminiscent of music-hall and vaudeville practices. In a 1935 article, Lye spoke of audiences who, upon entering the cinema, "can have all sorts of adventures, sing all sorts of songs and visit all sorts of places".[73] While Lye's film does not include the bouncing ball and onscreen lyrics of the Fleischer's film, it can nevertheless be seen as tacitly evoking a participatory

[72] Donald Crafton, *Shadow of a Mouse: Performance, Belief, and World-Making in Animation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 116–26; Nicholas Sammond, *Birth of an Industry: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Rise of American Animation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

[73] Lye, "Colour and the Box-Office", *Life and Letters To-day*, September 1935, 197.

spectatorship whether in the form of singing or dancing, or in other forms of embodied, kinaesthetic response.

Len Lye's Direct Films and their Primitivism of the Senses

Acknowledging the place of *Peanut Vendor* in Lye's career helps to reveal the full context and meaning of the use of jazz in his subsequent films, not only *A Colour Box*, but also *Kaleidoscope* (1935), *Rainbow Dance* (1936), *Trade Tattoo* (1937), *Colour Flight* (1938) and *Swinging the Lambeth Walk* (1939). While the predominantly abstract iconography of these films sees a decline in cultural primitivism at a visual level, their use of pre-existing jazz recordings of Cuban or Latin descent indicates a sonic continuation of it.[74] In addition, Lye's 1930s British films continued to evoke participatory audience response: Horrocks remarks that there are "four circles turning clockwise in formation in *Lambeth Walk* that recall the bouncing balls in sing-along films of the period", and the selection of that song, associated as it was with a popular dance and the enthusiastic yelling of the punctuating "Oi!", is a clear continuation of the concerns seen in *Peanut Vendor*. Yet beyond these continuities, Lye's abstract films exhibit an increasing concern with the underlying conceptualisation that attracted the animator to those other cultures and musics.

This interest is evident in Lye's own writing, such as the 1936 piece "Notes on a Short Colour Film", where he argues for "sensation form": "a direct and immediate impulse-feeling as opposed to the literary feeling that requires a memory background finely filtered through consciousness of realism."[75] He writes that:

> sensation form is widely evident, for instance in good swing dance music. And with primitive races, who have little conscious literary crust on their minds, this sensation form is their emotional bread and butter. Their use, not only of sound, but also of colour and imagery depart at times completely from literary realism. And the music and dance of their rituals result from, and also convey pure sensation stimuli.[76]

It is not the cultural other per se that he is attracted to, but rather the capacity to achieve "sensation form". According to Lye, this is lacking in Western culture and he projects it upon these distant groups. Starting from a cultural primitivism, Lye progresses to a

[74] Space precludes full exploration, but there are instances of a continuation of the iconography of primitivism and colonialism in these later films. This includes the use of found footage of the empire in *Trade Tattoo* and an uncanny evocation of black-face minstrelsy as a result of the colour separation negatives in *Rainbow Dance*.

[75] Lye, "Notes on a Short Colour Film" (1936), in Bouhours and Horrocks, *Len Lye*, 226.

[76] Ibid., 227–28.

formal and perceptual primitivism, one concerned with the combination of sound, colour, imagery and an appeal to the spectators' basic perceptual faculties, unhindered by memory or rationalisation. Just as the addition of new synchronised sound technology for *Peanut Vendor* was emblematic of Lye's underlying aesthetic concerns, the embracing of the Dufaycolor film process indicates the inclusion of colour as another formal element that would contribute to the cross-sensory, kinaesthetic response to his latest film. Music is integral to this project, both at a formal level, by engaging the spectator aurally and kinaesthetically, and at a conceptual level, by offering a model for breaking out of both literary rationalism and formalist modernist abstraction.

While *A Colour Box* and the films that followed it ultimately adopted the use of pre-existing jazz recordings due to practical constraints, both Lye and Ellitt anticipated the development of new musical forms that would fulfil the conception of "sensation form" and achieve an aural expansion equivalent to the visual one achieved by the direct film techniques Lye pioneered. Lye wrote that "it seems to me that we might have a pure sensation music—as opposed to jazz music—which would be a pure sound construction, perhaps in ranges of sound not yet made use of."[77] This new music would reject both "classical traditions" and "present chromatic and atonal harmonies" because both, despite their great differences, share a dependence upon "literary form", by which Lye meant an intellectual, rational basis distinct from the innate, sensual form of music he was seeking.[78] Ellitt expressed related concerns in his article "On Sound" published in 1935, focusing on the practicalities of new instrumentation and sound-image relations in his call for "new and imaginative sound forms". He nevertheless echoes Lye in looking beyond existing forms for sound that bypasses cultural learning, when he writes that "the ear *can* accept or reject a progression of various sounds without reference to preconceived laws".[79] While moving away from the cultural primitivism of earlier work, Lye and Ellitt continued to reject Western rationalism and embraced the "unreason" that Connelly sees as the defining feature of primitivism.[80]

Lye and Ellitt would not fulfil this desire for a new form of music in their collaborations in the 1930s, and instead relied predominantly upon pre-recorded jazz, frequently with Latin influences.[81] Nevertheless, Lye clearly felt that jazz fulfilled many of his aims: "the sensation element exists at times so obviously in jazz music" and as a result it is "continually alive": this quality is amply demonstrated in *A Colour Box*.[82] One of the key

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[77] Ibid., 228.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Jack Ellit, "On Sound," *Life and Letters To-Day* 13, no. 2 (1935): 182, italics in original.

[80] Connelly, *Sleep of Reason*, 13.

[81] Of course, a number of later films used other accompaniments as well, notably *The Birth of the Robot* (1936), which used Holst's *The Planets*. Lye used Sonny Terry's blues for the soundtrack of his first American film, *Colour Cry* (1953), followed by the Bagirmi Tribe of Africa's music for *Free Radicals* (1958/1979). These uses have their specificity and consequently must remain for future research, although they may still be considered to engage in primitivism,

[82] Lye, "Notes on a Short Colour Film", 228.

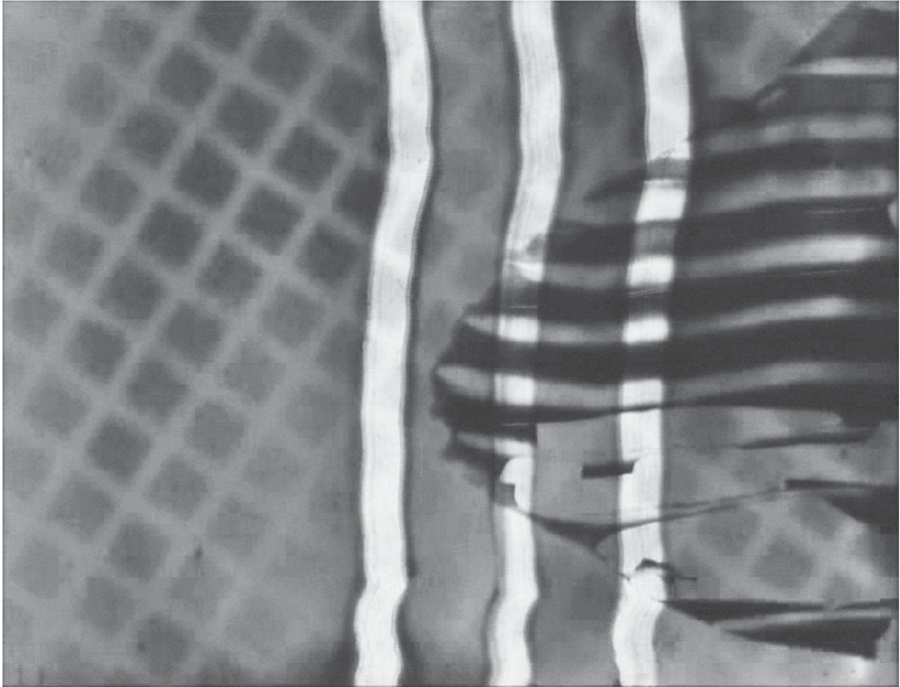

FIGURE 2.4 The vertical lines in Len Lye's *A Colour Box* (1935).

qualities of jazz is the space it makes for improvisation.[83] While some players maintain a consistent rhythm or melody, others are free to play around the fundamental structure. This also extends to the listening and dancing of the audience, who are given equal freedom to attend and move to the music as they choose. Lye's use of jazz allows him room to improvise within the visuals, to drift from the tempo of the music without simply breaking the connection between them. His visual improvisation, including the use of colour, is always in keeping with the spirit of the music, even if it drifts away from the specific rhythm or melody. This element of jazz finds a visual equivalent in the vertical movement of *A Colour Box*. Throughout much of the film, a vertical line runs through the screen (Figure 2.4), constantly shifting and fluttering. This serves a material purpose, reminding the viewers of the physical celluloid running through the projector and direct film method Lye used to produce the film. Yet the vertical lines also serve the same role as rhythm or melody in jazz, providing a visual base from which improvisations can be made and understood to give a sense of the music and visuals as "continually alive" while always unified.

Lye's approach differs from other film artists looking to unite the visual and the aural in a synaesthetic combination, not simply due to his use of jazz, but more precisely

[83] Johnson, "Jazz as Cultural Practice", 103; Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

his primitivist conception of it. By 1935, László Moholy-Nagy and Oskar Fischinger had already experimented with transposing the optical soundtrack and the image, and Norman McLaren would also do so in the 1940s, creating a perfunctory translation between the two.[84] Yet this served as much to juxtapose the visual and the aural; to emphasise their differences. Conversely, Ruttmann's *Lichtspiel Opus 1* (1921) and Fischinger's *Studie* films (1929–33) allowed for a less mechanical equivalence, but their work remained embedded in classical traditions and thus they had a rationalist approach that identified formal equivalents between music and image, for instance between pitch and height, or between timbre and colour.

In contrast, Lye's adoption of the improvisatory and performative principles of jazz allowed him to produce a true synthesis of the visual and the auditory, not an abstract juxtaposition and separation, or a mechanical transformation of one into the other. Rather, he achieves a rejection of Western rationalism and the "separation of the senses" it entails, returning to the basic multimodal sensual perception that he saw as primitive.[85] As painter Paul Nash put it at the time, "the simple, direct visual-aural contact of sound and colour through ear and eye": a synaesthetic primitivism of the senses.[86]

Conclusion

Close attention to the music used in Len Lye's films of the 1920s and 1930s provides a new perspective on the familiar narratives used to describe his work. It both establishes a more nuanced understanding of the primitivism in *Tusalava*, and elucidates the continuous, if evolving, place of those ideas in his later work during the 1930s. This has far-reaching implications for our understanding of Lye's work and for experimental film more generally.

Placing Lye's work in the context of jazz and the Harlem Renaissance, along with the popular animation that employed them, complicates the conventional context of the literary and artistic circles he socialised within. In conjunction with this, the identification of Lye as an archetypal modernist must also be reassessed. Those artistic and literary contexts placed Lye at the centre of British modernism, leading us to emphasise the purely visual in his move towards abstraction or surrealism in his direct films. His use of music not simply as model or analogy but as a form integral to his work indicates a synaesthetic impulse that does not straightforwardly fit in this model, not least in the need to understand the specificity of his primitivism distinctly from that of other artists.[87]

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[84] Robert Russett and Cecile Starr, *Experimental Animation: Origins of a New Art* (New York: Da Capo, 1976), 163–69.

[85] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 19.

[86] Paul Nash, "The Colour Film", in *Footnotes to the Film*, ed. Charles Davy (London: Lovat Dickson, 1937). 124–33.

[87] For further background and discussion of this distinction, see Cook, "Visual Music in Film".

Lye's films point towards expanded, plural modernisms, in distinction to a restrictive, singular definition.

This discussion also raises questions that have implications for the wider concerns of this book. Lye called his second film *Experimental Animation*, a designation that has been used to describe Lye's entire body of work. It has also been used to describe a broad field of cinema, notably in Robert Russett and Cecile Starr's landmark 1976 book of the same title, in which Lye's work is prominent alongside the work of McLaren, Fischinger, Ruttmann, Eggeling and Richter, all of whose work is discussed elsewhere in this collection.[88]

In one sense, Lye's films fit a narrow, restrictive definition of the "experimental". He was continually experimenting with new techniques and technology, from the direct painting on film seen in *A Colour Box* to the use of found footage in *Trade Tattoo*. However, "experimental" is usually intended to mean more than this. *Experimental Animation*, for instance, fulfils a broader remit, especially in its idiosyncratic subordination of the narrative, visual and linguistic to a musical sensibility. As such, Lye's films stand distinct from classical Hollywood practices. His work from the 1920s and 1930s was produced largely outside of Hollywood's economic system, relying upon private, commercial or government sponsorship with no intent to generate profit. Finally, much of Lye's work in this period was for John Grierson's GPO Film Unit, traces of which can particularly be experienced in the images of workers in *Trade Tattoo*. In this respect, Lye's work can be considered part of the socially progressive agenda Grierson initiated. In brief, Lye's films can be called "experimental" in technological, aesthetic, economic and social ways.

Yet the cartoony figuration and use of popular music in Lye's second film sit uneasily with the body of work normally classified as "experimental". The study of the music in Lye's work has shown that the characteristics that help define it as "experimental" are also the result of its similarities to, and close links with, fields rarely considered under the rubric of "experimental film". The emphasis on sound as the structuring element and the subordination of the visual to musical logic, as well as the appeal to a participatory, embodied audience are as much a part of the singalong genre and mainstream animated cartoons as they are fundamental to Lye's work examined here. They anticipate the much later innovation of music videos and interactive video games. Lye's economic model was frequently dependent upon the creation of advertising, whether for Imperial Tobacco (*Kaleidoscope*) or Imperial Airways (*Colour Flight*) or promotional messages for the GPO, a situation that was not uncommon for Lye's experimental filmmaking peers.[89] His work is both self-evidently experimental in many ways, while also being entwined with traditions normally excluded or ignored when studying "experimental film". As such, this chapter's findings bring into question the very boundaries and definitions of that category, and how we incorporate or exclude work into our field of study.

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[88] Russett and Starr, *Experimental Animation*.

[89] Michael Cowan, "Absolute Advertising: Walter Ruttmann and the Weimar Advertising Film", *Cinema Journal* 52, no. 4 (2013): 49–73.

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3 An Educational Avant-Garde

SOUND AND MUSIC IN JULIEN BRYAN'S OIAA FILMS ON LATIN AMERICA, 1942–1949

James Tobias

BOTH RECENT SCHOLARSHIP and informal online comment routinely critique films sponsored by the Second World War–era Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA) as factually problematic and US-centric, legitimising historical US economic domination of the Western hemisphere or the emerging US domination of the post-war world order.[1] Twenty-three of these films were made by American documentarian Julien Bryan, who was hired in 1940 by the OIAA to create films that would help to educate American viewers on the customs and cultures of various Latin American countries. Created in the midst of the Second World War, the films were intended to promote a form of understanding and tolerance that would prevent the political and cultural upheavals that were fracturing Europe at the time. Uwe Lübken's recent study describes Bryan's OIAA-sponsored films as designed to help accomplish a turn in US policy whereby a more implicit US hegemony over the Western hemisphere became more explicitly formulated, now in a more global frame. In this turn, "the archetypal American myths of 'the city upon a hill' and Manifest Destiny were transferred to the entire Western

[1] See, for example, Gisela Cramer and Ursula Prutsch, "Nelson A. Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs (1940–1946) and Record Group 229", *Hispanic American Historical Review* 86, no. 4 (2006): 785–86.

Hemisphere." Now, instead of US policy models premised on the logic of the city-state as nation-state, foreign policy logics are internalised to a greater degree, as US interests are increasingly globalised, so that "Pan-America of the world would be the [emergent policy] model".[2] Lübken's account sees Bryan's films as symptomatic of a larger shift in the structure and dynamics of US governance and policy. What is at stake in Bryan's films and OIAA policy materials generally, in this view, is not an attempt on the part of the United States under Roosevelt to improve international political, trade and cultural relations with Latin American nations. Rather, these films are symptoms of a shift in the way that the United States organised foreign policy globally, according to what had become, by the end of the Second World War, a presumptively dominant position in the Western hemisphere informing US global policy ambitions. Bryan's films become indistinguishable from any other educational policy materials produced with OIAA support—pamphlet, magazine spread, narrative film and so forth—to communicate the value and meaning of US interests abroad internally as "*Pax* Americana" mutated into the "American Century".

Less far-reaching, online comments responding to Bryan's 1949 *Fundo in Chile* find this film (made with production materials funded by the OIAA, but well after that agency had been folded into the US State Department) problematic in terms of a contradiction between the film's demonstration of facts and its demonstration of effects. *Fundo in Chile* tells the story of two brothers who each inherit a ranch on their father's death, one continuing to manage his *fundo* as his father had, the other embarking on a modernisation program (Figure 3.1). One commenter finds the film moralising and patronising: another complains about the film's failure to stress adequately the power of the Catholic Church and *fundo* owners to jointly suppress agricultural workers; a third finds the first half of the film on traditional methods of estate management (in the film, inefficient and exploitative) "engaging", but the remainder (in the film's key section on modernisation) "made me terribly bored".[3]

Although these responses, whether scholarly or user-generated, differ in focus and rigour, they all nevertheless trouble the presumed documentary, evidentiary status of *Fundo in Chile* specifically and Bryan's OIAA films more generally. Either these films are factually inaccurate and ideologically misleading or, as far as their address of their audience, the evidence they offer is neither persuasive nor particularly interesting. Such responses to Bryan's OIAA-sponsored films provide a useful summary of familiar attitudes towards the genre of educational sound film, which Bryan himself arguably helped to define: educational film, seen in terms of documentary pretension, is factually simplistic or misleading, its mode of address officious and patronising. The effect

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[2] Uwe Lübken, *Bedrohliche Nähe: Die USA und die Nationalsozialistische Herausforderung in Lateinamerika, 1937–1945* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2004), 250; translation by James Tobias.

[3] Online comments responding to *Fundo in Chile*, 2003–04, accessed 17 December 2016, http://archive.org/details/FundoinC1949.

FIGURE 3.1 *Fundo in Chile* (Julien Bryan, 1943). The voice of the "film lecturer" narrates a dialectic of old and new to dramatise the tensions and transformations in agricultural production in wartime Chile. As an ox-drawn cart (image left) bears away sacks of wheat towards the background, a modern tractor approaches the foreground on the right. Meanwhile, the more modern and productive of two heirs (white jacket, middle front left) explains to his dissolute playboy brother (black shirt, middle front right) how he is modernising his half of their ancestral lands as owner-operator rather than absentee landlord.

is a problematic mixture of affective tendentiousness that presents an authority that is overwhelming and easily rejected.

Yet this is a rather extraordinary combination. How can the educational film be so boring *and* have such power? The beginning of an answer is that while the visual materials of these films suggest documentary pretensions failing to register indexical fact, their voice-overs suggest the humdrum nature of national policy formation, their scores attempting to sway skeptical audiences with familiar cadences. Educational sound film, then, may rise or fall to the extent that it indexes documentary reality in some substantive part informed by third-sector educational policy contexts arising between state and market (rather than the indexical "physical reality" that figures like Siegfried Kracauer hoped might redeem through cinema's indexical capabilities).[4] Especially in Bryan's case, third-sector media policy is conveyed through sound, in the registers of voice-over and

[4] Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

musical narration. And now, with the once-relevant policies long lapsed or transformed, the sonic powers of audiovisual works become even more immersive and engaged. As a result, the historical educational film loses its character as policy film, causing its fading indexical qualities, never primary in the first place, to become a weird, droning echo of now-derelict bureaucratic clutter.

But perhaps we who present media in educational contexts, tasked with re-voicing audiovisual media in our own lectures, turn away from the educational film too quickly. Bryan's OIAA films on Latin America illustrate much looser synchronisation strategies than those described by Michel Chion.[5] Further, given Bryan's long career as a well-known film lecturer using footage shot in Poland (famously used in his 1949 short, the Academy Award–nominated *Siege*), China and the USSR to educate national audiences in international affairs, and given that Bryan often narrates his Latin American films himself, the audiovisual composition of these documentaries limits what Chion describes as the *acousmêtre*: sound which emanates from an unlocatable source.[6] Here, much of the source of voice-over and musical sound is avowed as Bryan and his creative team, even while the audience itself is overtly prompted for its own questions and answers in response (even if that response necessarily remains 'unvoiced' in the films' material composition).

To explore these films' assemblage of sound, image and audience positioning, I draw on Jennifer Peterson's recent extension of Tom Gunning's account of presentational voice in early cinema, along with Amy Herzog's discussion of dissonant refrain in cinema scoring, to argue that Bryan's educational filmmaking in fact challenged Franklin Roosevelt's and Nelson Rockefeller's Good Neighbor policy goals for educational media in the Second World War period.[7] I conclude that in his essayistic uses of image, voice and music in his Latin American films, Bryan broached both constructionist and constructivist practices for the educational audiovisual essay, helping, on the one hand, to define progressive examples of the genre for mid-century observers, including the Museum of Modern Art's Iris Barry, while in retrospect offering an example of producer resistance to US national media policy imperatives. In this way, Bryan's OIAA films on Latin America help to sonically re-conceptualise the limits and failures of US educational media and media communications policies at a key moment in the United States' emergence as world 'superpower' or 'hyperpower'.

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[5] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[6] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 63, 129–30.

[7] Jennifer Peterson, *Education in the School of Dreams: Travelogues and Early Non-Fiction Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Cinema, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde", in *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 58–62; Herzog, *Dreams of Difference, Songs of the Same: The Musical Moment in Film* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

Sound, Fury and Boredom: Music and Voice in Educational Policy Media

The limited budget and explicit design brief that we associate with government policy films—here, Bryan's "Good Neighbor" policy films—result in an overtly pedagogical address closely synchronised with visual evidence it clearly narrates after the fact of its construction as evidence. As observed above, the audiovisual unity in these films reverses the tendency for audiovisual "synchresis"—the fusion of auditory and visual elements into combined events that Chion describes—while sound and voice are carefully, but never very precisely, synchronised (in part, a matter of budget constraints artfully turned in to meaning-making affordances). Meanwhile, the sense of *acousmêtre* is also undercut as Bryan's own, identifiable voice is credited as a matter of creative labour in the films' titles.

When streaming sound and image are so clearly constructed for audience elaboration, rather than tightly synchronised as simulated events to be grasped 'virtually' by audiences, strong claims made amidst a lack of narratological or audiovisual closure can prompt reception of the voice-over as both authoritative and impotent, and translate to policy outcomes irrelevant to the receiver. Yet the overtly constructed and contingent ways in which sound and image are combined in Bryan's films made them interesting for reviewers closer to the time of their production and arguably most interesting when they featured musical sequences prominently.[8]

Consider, in the film *Montevideo Family* (1943), a sequence in which the soundtrack cue is scored for piano, and synchronised with an image of Raquel Guarditas, a Montevideo girl, practising piano at a clearly less advanced level than the sound we hear on the soundtrack. The sequence begins as we hear a cue suggesting a melodic derivation of the pattern-based finger exercises taught in the by then ubiquitously distributed Hanon's *Virtuoso Pianist* (since the late 1800s prescribed daily by piano teachers to children internationally for building finger strength, independence, accuracy and dexterity). The cue is introduced as Sra Guarditas, Raquel's mother, walks from home to street to purchase fresh vegetables from a cart vendor: here, the solo piano's steady rhythm and distinctly staccato melodic line stretches upward and downward to suggest fingers stretching to reach across smaller or larger expanses of keyboard space. The cue conveys a sense of stretching, or training, in contrast to an earlier cue scored for a small ensemble of winds, strings and piano, and whose trade-offs between instruments, syncopated rhythm and rising and falling melody suggested the less directed, but still routine, to-and-fro rhythms of movement between home and street or garden. We will see that there

[8] Other well-known methods for analysing sound-image combination also seem less than fully appropriate here. See, for instance, Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); Goodwin's analysis of illustration, contradiction and amplification in music video tends to devalue precisely the mixture of literalness and constructedness that educational documentary like Bryan's aims to achieve, whether in communicating a policy argument or achieving grand ideological visions (or falling flat).

is a key set of observations and comparisons being set up for our consideration, where 'musical development' helps to narrate questions about 'child development'.

If the to-and-fro rhythms of the small ensemble have given way to the finger stretching of the simple piano studies, the image of Sra Guarditas is shortly to give way to that of her daughter. Although we first hear the training motif as incidental to the older woman's performance of her everyday duties, we then hear the piano cue pointing to its quasi-diegetic source: Raquel is practising piano and, returning inside, the narrator informs us that "Raquel is still at work, spending time on one of those ladylike pursuits so dear to mothers the world over." The complexity of the training-like piano patterns is, though, far in advance of the simpler, more tentative movements made by Raquel on the keyboard. It is not that Raquel's fingers can't quite synchronise with the professional performance that is scored for the audience to hear and consider: rather, her movements are so obviously different that when we imaginatively fill in the extant soundtrack with the piano tones Raquel would be producing, we understand that her image and the piano we hear are not to be read as "fused" (at least, not in the sense Chion described) at all.

Nor does the piano cue overdetermine Raquel's actions as her being condemned to train in the mode of some compulsory heterosexual femininity: becoming bored, or perhaps just refusing to be put on the spot by the camera, Raquel whips her hands away from the keyboard and spins around on her stool to happily re-join her circle of smiling friends, the musical cue just as suddenly halting with her sudden turn (Figure 3.2).

FIGURE 3.2 *Montevideo Family* (Julien Bryan, 1943). Raquel Guarditas spins away from her piano, turning to face a half-circle of friends gathered to listen.

With the rhythmic syncope of a silent pause, our gaze holds, our ears await, our own attention being retrained away from questions of gendered education and domesticity, and towards the potential sociality of less rule-bound play that might follow Raquel's lessons. Then, a flute picks up the melody with a gentler, less mechanical phrase, and our view shifts to Sra Guarditas dressing for the tasks of the adult woman: afternoon shopping for the evening meal.

The musical rhythm of sound and image in this sequence suggests a complex comparison and resulting difference proposed in a material, rhythmic and affective stream that projects a range of symbolic meanings, rather than a primary meaning determined in the synchronisation of sound and image elements. We might think Raquel's music lessons similar to the sound and energies of musical training we know and, if so, her lessons provide a comparative frame for considering gendered ideas about appropriate child development. In this case, the perfected staccato piano arpeggios we heard while watching Raquel practice indicate the potential of her musical socialisation; that is, her future development from rambunctious girl into proper woman. But as such, this comparison also re-frames and points to our own gendered value schema for child development. The schemata, not the identities, are measured and found comparable across national contexts: not definitively similar and apparently different. The meaning of "present training leading to future gender fitness" conveyed in the piano cue of this sequence prompts a gentle critique of Raquel's being kept at home, away from school and from professional training opportunities, and being steered instead towards domestic life and marriage. In so doing, it acknowledges real differences in, but suggests no presumptive logic for, Raquel's developmental path: mother-daughter identification different within, but comparable across, hemispheric geopolities. Visually, as Sra Guarditas runs her home, she is also training her daughter for domestic work, but in a gendered division of pedagogical labour (as the father's career and son's training make clear). Audition-wise, as Raquel trains in, but also rejects, the virtuosities of this aestheticisation of gendered labour, her quiet rebellion turns out to be two-fold. She rebels both from the future the musical development implies for her and from the comparative frame established for our gaze by the musical cue enabling us to consider her training or desires in relation to those which US parents may express for their own daughters. In that silent syncope linking Raquel's musical refusal to her mother's dutiful embodiment, as audience members we get lost in thought as to what Raquel's potential may be, and what the equivalent at home should be.[9] In other words, we are afforded a moment to break from given educational policy norms, to consider differing ideas of child development in comparison, but without one proffered as desirable.

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[9] On the rhythmic gap in musical form and its affective dimensions, see Catherine Clément, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); I mention Clément's text here but caution against the insistent Orientalisms of the broad discussions of musical rapture it presents.

In important ways, then, this sequence, highly musical in its audiovisual pacing, deploys musical meanings derived from childhood experience in order to present historical, economic, cultural and aesthetic development as gendered repetition. It concludes by suggesting that Raquel's future is likely to be different from her mother's present. The rhythmic gap here suggests a contingency more than a rupture, whereby the way the child recapitulates the embodied habituation of the parent may be subject to a creative potential that is under-determined. Concretely, then, 'refrain' here has to do less with the formal signs of the Hanon-inspired arpeggios and more to do with the back and forth between the rhythmic steps or turns of Sra Guarditas's and Raquel's gestures as captured on film.

As Herzog develops Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's influential treatment of the refrain, "individual refrains either minimize difference or allow it to flourish unresolved".[10] In this key musical sequence of *Montevideo Family*, where the musicality of the audiovisual stream is made to interrupt the musical disciplining of image by sound, of Raquel by her mother and by gendered cultural expectations, both of those vectors of development are held in suspension. Difference both minimised and unresolved, musical sound and musicalised, rhythmic images proceed in a dialectical stream that prompts and positions its audience in material and semiotic modalities.

The film's musical depiction of this gendered model of child development is thus more demonstrative question than declarative statement: do Raquel's duties provide adequate opportunities for play? Is aesthetic training compensation enough for not preparing to work outside the home? What are the implications for the maid, whose difficult childhood is mentioned in a different sequence, or for Raquel's mother, whose life seems largely devoid of pleasure like the ones routinely associated with musical expression? *Montevideo Family* demonstrates complex tensions between gendered paradigms of child and national development, building questions of childhood pleasure and parental role-modelling in the passage from images and habits of young femininity to those of mature womanhood, on premises presuming divisions between private and public life. Stated as an audiovisual question, this interrogation is addressed to US audiences, not to Raquel or her family who, the film assures, will carry on in futural uncertainty without us.

To arrive at this understanding of the sequence, we have to refrain from reducing the sound and image combination in terms of positive or negative valuations assigned to specific events or phrases, in case we forgo a sensitive and intimate comparison of critical, differential and complexly gendered development paradigms for a poorly wrought instance of what Cook has called "conformance", or a rhetorically naïve "complementation", or simply inadvertent "contestation" resulting from mismatching audio and visual elements.[11]

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[10] Herzog, *Dreams of Difference, Songs of the Same*, 89.

[11] Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Cook's analysis of audiovisual "conformance", "complementation" or "contestation" between sound and image is directed

Especially in the educational essay film, the sound and image tracks often work not simply as series of synchronised events, but as synchronised streams producing, for example, in Hanns Eisler's scores for non-fiction films, a dialectical prompting the audience's critical and affective investments.[12] The analytical problem is not so much local synchronisation of sound and image as sensory isolates timed together to produce specific events whose meaning we parse by virtue of metaphoric values, but a far more general kind of audiovisual fusion: as a problematic of the audience's relation to historical or everyday time (which the projection of sound and image blocks or suspends) and of the time of producer or distributor exhibition in relation to that of audience reception.

In this larger frame, this sequence demonstrates that it is amidst the everyday tensions animating childhood, familial, educational, professional, economic, technical and national and transnational development that we might consider commonalities or differences between US class values and those of Uruguay, not in any presumptive or exportable model of class structure, housing development, education, urban design or economic development originating in the United States. Given this more general problematic of synchronisation, where the receiver's position and disposition are as much as an element of the media composition as are sound and image, the receiver's knowledge is quite literally at stake. What we know or should know is foregrounded as the work explicitly prompts consideration not only of what is exhibited but also of how it is exhibited; that is, it prompts evaluation in terms of what kind of demonstration has been made and what its demonstrable value has been.

A wide range of scholars have described OIAA agency films as effecting a violent narcissism in the cinematic mediation of the US public sphere, a "hemispheric" but "circular" gaze demonstrating US nationalist attitudes to northern body politics while legitimating the development of markets (including media markets) to the south.[13] But watching and listening to Bryan's OIAA-sponsored films on Latin America against other OIAA

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to works emphasising complex audiovisual musicality, but Cook's analysis tends to presume a strong logic according to which visual or musical materials cohere, rather than the often overtly constructed or contingent ways in which sound and image are combined in Bryan's films—which, in fact, are arguably most interesting when they do feature musical sequences prominently.

[12] James Tobias, *Sync: Stylistics of Hieroglyphic Time* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2010), 140–43.

[13] Catherine Benamou, *It's All True: Orson Welles's Pan-American Odyssey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Adrián Pérez Melgosa, *Cinema and Inter-American Relations: Tracking Transnational Affect* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Lisa Cartwright and Bryan Goldfarb, "Cultural Contagion: On Disney's Health Education Films for Latin America", in *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom*, ed. Eric Smoodin (New York: Routledge, 1994), 169–80; J. B. Kaufman, *South of the Border with Disney: Walt Disney and the Good Neighbor Program, 1941–1948* (New York: Disney, 2009); Kaufman, despite offering a view of Disney's OIAA films that is much more positive than that of Cartwright and Goldfarb, nevertheless also provides documentation of critical responses from Mexican educators to Disney's health and literacy films, showing the films to have nowhere near the ideological power Cartwright and Goldfarb attribute to them.

films designed to familiarise US subjects with their southern 'neighbours' often brings us up short. On the one hand, there is indeed a familiar pedagogical address—voiced by Bryan himself—that characterises Uruguay as "likeable" (*Uruguay*, 1945), or having a future now held "in capable hands" (*Young Uruguay*, 1943). These comments are patronising, as Jane Loy has pointed out, especially when the hopeful words do not seem supported by the visual evidence with which they are synchronised. Still, as Loy mentions in passing, these films' rhetorical address presumes that the North American viewer "is woefully ignorant about his [*sic*] neighbors to the South; and since he [*sic*] imagines them to be headhunters and gauchos inhabiting a vast jungle, he [*sic*] is incapable of being a Good Neighbor."[14]

The larger concern for Loy, like so many others, was the question of documentary, visual and evidentiary value in Bryan's films; in particular, the ways in which they presented historical evidence, rather than how the films worked as audiovisual essays on national and international policy in which US national audiences might well be thought to have considerable interest. When Bryan tells his audience that Uruguay is in its own, capable, likeable hands, he is not only giving historical evidence of Uruguay's developmental sustainability, but is, rather, asking his North American audience not to presume that Uruguay needs US intervention. In fact, Bryan often argues explicitly that North Americans, more than simply needing to learn about Latin America, need to learn *from* Latin America. The comparisons provided to do that are not usually direct ones, since Bryan routinely cautions about making direct comparisons between, say, different national configurations of class structure or status.

Instead, comparative prompts for the North American audience of Bryan's Latin America films tend to be filtered through their reflexive and presentational character. In terms of the sound of his voice-over, the director's presentationality as narrator is associated with that of the film lecturer and gently vies with the music and moving image. One result is a contrast between what Jennifer Peterson understands as the relatively "open-ended" nature of the early commercial travelogue and the enunciative authority wielded by the film lecturer, whose "constructed persona" Peterson describes as a substantive part of the travel lecture's documentary appeal.[15] Bryan's voice-over draws on his own already established identity as a film lecturer as well as documentary film producer, so that the presentationality of the lecturing voice-over not only is self-evident, drawing on and renewing the older presentational modes of the film lecturer, but also draws on modes of vocal authority associated with radiophonic transmission: the more distant "correspondent" and the more familiar "commentator" personae typical of the period.[16]

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[14] Jane M. Loy, "The Present as Past: Assessing the Value of Julien Bryan's Films as Historical Evidence", *Latin American Research Review* 12, no. 3 (1977): 111.

[15] Peterson, *Education in the School of Dreams*, 36, 24.

[16] Just as Maurice Ellis is credited as "commentator" in the similarly loosely synchronised *One Tenth of a Nation* (Greene, 1940).

Especially when he performed his films' voice-over, Bryan drew together modes of narration as presenting witness (the film lecturer who had 'been there'), as presenting a constructed timeliness or 'eventality' (the updating of newsworthiness typical of the radio correspondent) and as publicity (the public opinion associated with the commentator). In taking a clear rhetorical position exhorting US audiences to change their habits of thinking and feeling about Latin America, these are not documentaries which are educational, but rather educational films that use documentary images, among other materials. Loy suggests as much when arguing that films like *The High Plain* (1944), whose "imaginative camera work and thoughtful narration" result in "realistic, sensitive, deeply moving visual essays", are representative of "the highest standards of documentary art".[17] In the context in which significant sums were being spent by private foundations like the Rockefeller Foundation on improving sound and music in film, Museum of Modern Art film curator Iris Barry called Bryan's films standouts among those sponsored by the OIAA. According to her, they were "striking" in the "intimate view" they provided:

> In the aggregate, these pictures gave a generally informative, thought-provoking, revelatory account of the peoples of South America in numerous regions and at many different income levels: they suggested both the particular local peculiarities and problems, and the common humanity of such peoples.[18]

Bryan's OIAA films were not quite as "intimate" as Barry imagined, however, and rather than being made "on the spot", they required prefatory research and post-production materials including beautifully rendered title credits and sensitively composed music. In fact, Bryan invested personal funds beyond the grants provided by the OIAA in the interest of achieving higher than typical quality.[19] The materials Bryan and his crew gathered in Latin America would later be re-used in films made as late as 1949 (remaining OIAA functions were folded into the State Department in 1945). Meanwhile, the valuation of Bryan's Latin American images as having evidenciary value continues, with still photographs taken by Bryan on location in Bolivia used to illustrate mid-century gendered divisions of labour governing subsistence agricultural operations, for instance. In any case, although these films rise above what Barry considered the uniformly mediocre quality of most OIAA films to reach the status of 'ideas' films and what Loy considered their evidenciary problems to become visual essays and documentary art, these are not essay films of the type Timothy Corrigan has recently championed as demanding "both

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[17] Loy, "The Present as Past", 111.

[18] Iris Barry, *Observations on the American Documentary Film in Wartime*, Technical Report (New York: Museum of Modern Art Film Library, 1946), B4–B5.

[19] Julien Bryan, "The 1958 Kenneth Edwards Memorial Address", *Journal of the University Film Producers Association* 11, no. 1 (1958): 6.

loss of self and the rethinking and remaking of the self".[20] They rely instead on a different style of relationship between pedagogical symbolic materiality and historical datum.

One of Barry's insights continues to be particularly useful: especially when taken together, these films exhibit a well-designed and highly musical patterning not only of variegated lifestyles but also, reflexively, of demonstration. The patterning of voice-over, moving image, title and musical cue across Bryan's OIAA films on Latin America suggests that these demonstrative essays, subject to counter-argument or falsification, are not necessarily in accordance with Good Neighbor policies articulated by the US state. The films' demonstrativity, especially in Bryan's frequent challenging of his US audience's everyday habits and structures of belief and feeling, suggests that the developmental imperative we associate with US liberal, militarised hegemony is here used to challenge the presumptions grounding the logics of such policies.

Thus, the reflexive demonstrativity in the films' voice-over, music and often highly musical audiovisual composition are often in the foreground. In the colour film *Colombia: Crossroads of the Americas* (1942), the film's title credits are reflexive and deictic: "Julien Bryan took these pictures and his voice tells the story. Norman Lloyd wrote the music. Irving Lerner put the film together." The style of attribution, while graphical, invokes authorship as individual, collaborative and constructed: the materials are "put together", as if the audience's disposition and reflection on the film will complete it. Voice-over in such films is as much a guide to the work itself as it will be a guide to the polity, terrain or community whose still developing history *and* historicity is to be demonstrated. Instead of the vocal authority 'pointing' to a fictively finished world, history or future beyond itself, the films point their audiences to their own demonstrative prompts.

But in highlighting the labours that produced the film, the film also emphasises the affective labour it challenges the audience to perform. This film turns to the labouring relations producing racialised violence differentially, hemispherically. After an official-sounding statement announcing Colombia's alliance with the US in the war effort, Bryan says that US propensities for racialised ethnocentrism is not necessarily shared with "our first neighbour south of the Panama Canal". Bryan intones: "Colombians are far more tolerant of differences in colour and race than we are. And this, and in other specific aspects of their national culture, they may well serve as an example to their North American neighbours." On the one hand, the assertion of good-neighbour solidarity reassures his US audience of Latin American policy alignments serving US national interests; on the other hand, an assertion as to what US audiences can learn more about their own biases at home.[21]

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[20] Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, after Marker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37.

[21] Bryan was certainly not alone in such attempts, but he was more successful than others in managing to get them on the screen, no doubt in part due to working in "educational documentary". The 1993 reconstruction

Bryan's essays on Latin America mobilise demonstrative voice-over, musical accompaniment, musical audiovisual composition and often musical meaning in order to activate the exhibitionary and receptive dimensions of the educational cinema as a site of symbolic and material exchange reflexively modelling 'cultural exchange' rather than the kind of disciplining of eroticised desire seen in the more touristic OIAA travelogues; or Corrigan's more recent critical suggestion, an essayistic loss of self. But Bryan's educational films do function as essays prompting responses in varied ways, including revision of US educational policies.[22]

Several years later, in Uruguay, Bryan's team would continue arguing for the country's status as a progressivist paradigm: the national minimum wage laws apply to farm workers as well as to industrial workers (then, not applied in the United States, and still at issue today); there is increasing self-sufficiency in food supply; free education from primary school through university; literacy second only to US levels; two weeks paid vacation per year for every working adult; free hospital care—"It doesn't cost much to be sick in Uruguay!"; effective state management of key economic functions, including public administration of mortgage markets and strong public welfare and pension systems—"anyone can retire at sixty with a pension"; education, labour, suffrage, public works, public health: all, according to Bryan, equaling or exceeding US equivalents.

But given that OIAA films had to present Latin American countries in positive ways, the film does not document problems arising in the uneven development between metropole and periphery in 1940s Uruguay, although it does allude to some of the difficulties and some of the achievements of the period. José Pedro Cardoso, a physician and an elected member of the lower house of Uruguay's general assembly, the Chamber of Deputies (Cámara de Diputados), published an "X-ray" of the rural poor of Uruguay in 1940.[23] Finding widespread poverty, with significant numbers of families living in one- or two-room homes whose disrepair exposes inhabitants to the elements, Cardoso quickly encapsulates the conditions of poverty, poor housing, poor nutrition and illiteracy that define the rural poor's needs. While we certainly see none of these directly discussed in Bryan's Uruguay films, they are alluded to. *Montevideo Family*'s maid, we learn, was excess labour in the country and without prospects had to come to the city to work. Meanwhile, a key symptom of malnutrition pointed out by Cardoso, the routine

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of Orson Welles's OIAA-RKO production of *It's All True* suggests a similar attitude on Welles's part; that film was cancelled mid-production.

[22] For example, in his 1943 *Young Uruguay*, Bryan finds a course in logic offered at the University of Montevideo that he feels is without counterpart in the United States in the way it deploys symbolic logic in lectures on "good and evil"; the implication is that symbolic logic applied in this way might be borrowed from Uruguay for US higher education. In that same film, Bryan surveys progress in public education, finding more lessons on co-education, access or disability for US viewers. What is essayed here is a differential treatment of historical development demonstrated, by turns, across nations and regions.

[23] José Pedro Cardoso, "Radiografía de la Miseria de Nuestra Campaña", *Andén* 1, no. 1 (1940): 12–14.

substitution of crackers for bread among the rural poor, is depicted in *Montevideo Family* as a facet of the middle-class family's everyday frugality, serving as Sr Guarditas's breakfast.

Bryan's depiction of the family as adjusting amidst changing historical conditions does not provide much depth from that Uruguayan perspective, but it also does not entirely erase details of concern to left-leaning political representatives in the period, as it manages to addresses the country's larger success in managing development with a predominantly statist, urban-centered economy. And in retrospect, Bryan's demonstration of family life in Montevideo in the 1940s corresponds roughly to what Fernando López-Alves identifies as a period of "re-democratisation" in Uruguay from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s. Amidst fractious party politics, the closing of European markets due to war and the emergence of an industrial class favoured by leading political parties, state employment rose to 15 percent of the labour force by the late 1940s. Protectionist policies reflected strong links among labour, industry and the state, and combined to produce prosperity reflecting increased production of consumer goods and a decline in the value of cattle for both export and domestic markets, increasing poverty in the rural periphery.[24]

While films like *Montevideo Family* allude to these developments, its emphasis on women's work and education in the home, particularly in the piano-practising sequence, suggests the gendered aspects of child, economic or labour development amidst the tensions described by López-Alves characterising Uruguay's 1940s re-democratisation. But what happens in Bryan's turning of these issues to face his North American audiences is that the gaps and elisions, the changes in policy priorities and the different modes of address required for the changed reception context are handled through the demonstrative and unusual uses of voice-over, musical accompaniment and rhythmic or lyrical pacing of editing and synchronisation. The resulting address of these films, that is, the way they relay their complex production locations and their sponsoring authorities, does not accumulate in presentational power but rather reflexively frames the problems of regulation and control to devolve larger questions about agency and action to their audiences' "better judgment".[25]

Even as these films deploy sound and music to undermine fears of "control" (media, market, governmental, foreign) that was of such great concern to cultural and policy analysts, as well as to contemporary audiences, they also reflect the interest in greater control of the technological medium in the interest of staging engagements between presenter and active audience. The "interactive" use of educational film, which would

[24] Fernando Lopez-Alves, "Why Not Corporatism? Redemocratization and Regime Formation in Uruguay", in *Latin America in the 1940s: War and Postwar Transitions*, ed. David Rock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 197.

[25] See Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau, "Record, Rhetoric, Rationalization: Industrial Organization and Film", in *Films that Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media*, ed. Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2009), 36.

be shown, stopped for classroom discussion, and then started again, was highlighted by Jean Benoît-Lévy in his description of appropriate production techniques in *The Art of the Motion Picture* (1946), which would, ideally, prompt the "symphony of sound of classroom discussion in response to film bringing the world into the site of instruction through the expanded classroom lecture."[26]

In sum, assembling an educational public sphere, Bryan's combination of voice, music, indexical moving image and graphic, diagram or chart exhibits pronounced constructivist (as well as constructionist) tendencies through its rhythmic, lyrical style. His Latin American films are constructivist more in the sense that they present a temporalised, audiovisual vernacular that is specific, yet open-ended, rather than a strictly formalist visual intervention that we associate with modernist constructivisms in the visual or plastic arts. The constructivist tendency inhering in educational cinema as pedagogical media vernacular also includes the address, the positioning of the audience in relation not simply to the 'content' or 'form' of the work but also to the values, viability and limits of hemispheric cultural policy: the work the audience must do if policy is to be warranted in democratic action rather than in a command from above. For Bryan, as for figures like radio commentator Edward R. Murrow, combating poor media coverage and political ideology was a matter of gathering empirical facts, placing them in an interpretative (here, temporalised) framework and prompting agentive consideration both with regard to and beyond the resulting pedagogical frame.[27] In other words, the films exhibit a constructivist educational vernacular that can be seen as a distant, cinematic precursor to recent constructivist policy debates on US relations with Latin America, in which, as Mares explains for contemporary policy debates, "empirical facts require interpretation to ascertain their meaning, which will vary across audiences."[28]

Bryan's OIAA films, seen as constructivist policy essays, owe debts to the comparativist, multimedia essay; to the then-disappearing tradition of the film lecturer; to the emerging documentary film essay; and to the policy contexts in which educational and media policies were thoroughly entangled in the United States by 1930, and which by 1940 were used to inform OIAA activities. Deploying these diverse strains of demonstrative discourse, these films problematise US economic liberalism, specifically outlining a comparative and variegated developmental progressivism as their explicit argument.

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[26] Jean Benoît-Lévy, *The Art of the Motion Picture* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1946), 23. Benoît-Lévy worked with the Disney Studios on their OIAA educational film efforts.

[27] The RF's John Marshall consulted with Edward R. Murrow, as European director of CBS, after Murrow's testimony for the US Federal Communications Commission in its investigations of US radio broadcasting's potential monopoly tactics; Marshall proposed an RF-funded grant to support work by Murrow analysing current radio broadcasting in Europe, in effect lending his voice to media communications and policy research. Murrow would not be available to undertake the work. Interview with Murrow by John Marshall, 17 January 1939; letter from Murrow to Marshall, 8 February 1939, RF 200 175.1268.

[28] David R. Mares, "The United States' Impact on Latin America's Security Environment: The Complexities of Power Disparity", in *Routledge Handbook of Latin American Security*, ed. David R. Mares and Arie M. Kacowicz (New York: Routledge, 2016), 306.

And this argument was aimed more at articulating a progressive understanding on the part of the US audiences than it was at demonstrating familiar evidence of neighbourly Latin American identity. The demonstration of incompletely achieved democratic values was one that had to be carefully prompted, given the nationalistic confidence and transnational trustworthiness with which Roosevelt's administration sought to imbue the second, newly militarised and interventionist phase of Good Neighbor policies after 1939. Sound and music about, and from, our neighbours "to the south" helped ease that blow and communicate alternatives.

To a Distant Listener: Comparative Historical Temporalities in *The High Plain*

By way of closing, I return to the Bryan production celebrated by both Barry and Loy: *The High Plain*. Here, the voice-over is spoken by Tony Kraber, not Bryan. With title illustrations by artist Philip Stapp and scored through by Norman Lloyd, *The High Plain* is one of the most carefully designed of Bryan's Latin American works. The film concerns the contemporary life of Bolivian Aymará working on haciendas located in their ancestral homeland and granted by Spanish imperial title during the colonial period. The film indulges many of the familiar tropes of what is often too simply described as the ethnographic gaze, and what we might more aptly describe as a lecturing ethnographic demonstrativity. Specifically, here, the film vocally describes the hacienda's owner as a benevolent patron who takes care of "his people". Still, even when *The High Plain* deploys the lecturing ethnographic demonstration, it mixes its message. We meet the landowner with an upward camera shot that makes him seem to tower darkly over his native workers, resulting in a resonating dissonance between voice-over narration and streaming image. Meanwhile, Aymará workers are photographed at level, or at lower levels, of gravity so that we do not feel placed above them, and we can see the care and skill in their work.

The audiovisual demonstration of the film presents a contrast: we have ascended to "the top of the world", reaching an ancient people, but have arrived at an occupied land visually dominated by landed capital still working to replace or dislodge a historically dynamic and tenacious environment, people and time. As the camera spends more time with the labouring productivity of the Aymará, so does the soundtrack now also "take sides" with them, as predominantly wind motifs and melodies in inflections inspired by Andean *quena* music rise and fall throughout the film's score.

Thinking back to the historical moment in which Bryan produced *The High Plain*, it is possible to hear these ethnographically inspired motifs as the kind of "prejudice" or "bad habit" that Eisler and Adorno had only recently, and very scornfully, identified as among Hollywood scoring's worst tendencies: using "just folk music" to convey historical and geographical specificities.[29] But Andean music is not used literally; rather,

[29] Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 8.

Andean musical forms and elements are derived for a small studio ensemble, the effect conveying the conditions that Bryan aimed to demonstrate: a picture of conquest without the inevitability of assimilation. In fact, the film seems to attempt the reverse of the dynamics of colonisation in the scoring of the educational essay film. Making the small studio chamber orchestra relay Andean motifs to an unfamiliar US audience via soundtrack is, in some ways, the reverse of picturing the landowner dominating the line of Aymará workers, but without making the claim that we can quite know what is being echoed to us. As the film puts it: "They had an art, a science and a language, long before the time of the Incas, and it has not all been lost."

Rather than trying to tell the audience what this art, science and language are, instead, we are given only suggestions as to how contemporary habits and working responsibilities continue to manifest ancient "sciences" in new ways; here, split between working for the hacienda and for themselves. Ancient foods— including quinoa, then unfamiliar but now popular in North America—are grown in a tension between autonomy and occupation. Three days they work for the hacienda, three days they work for themselves, we hear. The musical score in effect does something similar, but the meaningful portions of what we hear are derived from those modernising Aymará customs that seem to both update and call back to the past. The wealth produced for the hacienda owner is clearly produced on the basis of the Aymará's ability to retain their memory of autonomy even if it is not enunciated in the form of, say, a rebellion. There is a curious détente between labour and capital, autonomy and occupation, memory and modernity, which, if it is holding, is primarily the effect of Aymará melding now not simply hand and land (depicted in the worn fertility idols found guarding the fields) but also memory and modernity.

In part, this affective labour seems to treat modern capital as but another hostile environmental surface to adapt to, and this adaptation, rather than assimilation, is accomplished through disidentification: on festival days, attendees dance "the travesties of colonial Spain, with curls and silks and posturing, with masks full of terror and music from the depths of their own past." As the score and the rhythmic patterns of everyday life cohere in festival, the receiver is prompted to consider the counter-rhythms of the locale's historical discontinuity in political terms and its continuity in cultural ones. The only shot in *The High Plain* that is close to audiovisually synchronised is a festival scene in which we hear a *quena*-inflected melody and rhythm again become salient, and in which we see a pair of pipe players performing. The image of *quena* players catches up with a soundtrack in which we have previously heard these instruments referenced, and we witness what is deferred in the stalled dialectic of semi-captive tribal labour and global capital investment: a slow modernisation at odds with the time of developmental capital, one in which memory is, unlike politics, not deferred but re-demonstrated in a brief yet protracted moment of dancing, drinking, music making: de-colonial carnivalesque.

As in the piano sequence in *Montevideo Family*, there is no close synchronisation deployed or intended in this sequence. The music we hear does not seek to replace native

instrumental, rhythmic or melodic enunciation with a North American simulacrum of it, but rather, arguably, to suggest that whatever that art, science and language are, they are indeed not "lost" and can be heard indirectly, in derived, distant form, by the North American viewer and listener. The score's musical derivation of Andean musics performs as a synecdoche of native autonomy that works through the seasons not simply to produce profit for the landowner, but also to restate a claim for Aymará historical temporality as pre-Columbian and extant, modern and in tension with, not subsumed within, the time of capital, at least in terms of memory and the hieroglyphic "sciences" metonymised for the film's audience as musical sound and rhythm.

Even voice-over in *The High Plain* awkwardly contorts in emphasising rhythmic musicality. For example, rather than the more straightforward narration typically spoken by Bryan, here the text undergoes anastrophic inversions of adverbial and prepositional phrases: "Back at sunset to the houses on the plain go the workers. The sheep and the tired shepherd, back to their quiet houses." The commentator's voice is drawn into awkward rhythmic phrases, signalling an indebtedness to the Aymará historical temporality he attempts to denote but cannot or will not elucidate.

Films like Bryan's production of *The High Plain* were highly limited by the constraints of what they could attempt to demonstrate. In an age in which state control of greater and greater portions of the US economy under war mobilisation created considerable consternation among a broad range of constituencies, Good Neighbor polices also had to create US goodwill for support of Latin American economies, a project complicated by US xenophobia as well as by uncertainty or outright distrust of economies often dominated by military regimes or emerging forms of democratisation that were unfamiliar or threatening. At the same time, US markets stood to gain from economic interventions under what was arguably a new phase of Roosevelt's Good Neighbor era, one in which the United States in fact returned to new forms of military interventionism in Latin America that it had pulled back from in the mid-1930s. Perhaps observers like Barry found Bryan's films "striking" because they consistently attempted to demonstrate comparative historical development in ways that clearly emphasised difference—multiple modernities—rather than mythically universal middle-class values through the staging of variegated, contingent and changing rhythms of hemispheric scenes in a highly—often extremely musical—constructivist media vernacular: a "striking" demonstration of "information" whose rhythmic, lyrical power other OIAA films failed to match.

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4 "bump . . . bup . . . bup"

AURAL INNOVATION IN THE FILMS OF NORMAN MCLAREN

Terence Dobson

NORMAN MCLAREN WAS a prolific and innovative filmmaker for almost half a century. During this time, his experimentation with image, sound and the physicality of filmmaking produced ground-breaking examples of audiovisuality that form pivotal moments in the history of experimental film. There are several factors that led to such innovation in cinematic sound, the most formative being the filmmaker's upbringing surrounded by music. Although as a child McLaren had formal violin and piano lessons, had taken some music theory classes and participated in music-making groups, it was during adolescence that he engendered an aesthetic realisation of music. As a teenager in Stirling, Scotland, he was inspired by his experience of synaesthetic responses to music. While listening to BBC radio, the young McLaren saw, in his mind's eye, a moving visual equivalence to the music he heard.[1] When he became a filmmaker, he therefore naturally considered and saw music (pun intended) as an important element in his films.

The innovative aspect of McLaren's work in film sound reflects two qualities of his general way of working. First, a lack of resources sometimes compelled McLaren to be inventive. Indeed, his radical decision in 1933, as a student at the Glasgow School of

[1] This recollection is recounted in Terence Dobson, *The Film Work of Norman McLaren* (Eastleigh, UK: John Libbey, 2006), 24, 33.

Art, to paint directly onto the film stock was motivated by having no movie camera with which to film images in the traditional way. In his first film, which he made for the art school's end-of-year student exhibition, the frantically moving abstract images, painted ignoring frame divisions, caused a sensation.[2] In fact, demand to view the film was so great, and the film projected so often, that it disintegrated. The consequences of success can be unpredictable. However, the most significant consequence of this early success was the precedent it established. Second, growing from this early experience was McLaren's subsequent consideration of technical processes as an artistic challenge. For example, drawing or painting directly on clear film, a practice he was to develop, produced its own difficulties. One of those was the continual problem of keeping the clear film free of fingerprints, dust and other unwanted blemishes that would be magnified on the big screen. McLaren therefore decided to use black film. Unfortunately this obscured his ability to register successive images. He thus drew (or scratched) clusters of imagery that left long stretches of film black. This process led to the stroboscopically linked imagery seen in *Blinkity Blank* (1955). Overcoming the technical difficulty had led to a new process and a new film work that, as a result, introduced fresh qualities to the repertoire of film.

McLaren embraced the use of a technical challenge to generate his films, even though on occasion this may have occurred through economic necessity. The filmmaker was also interested in the ways in which practical necessity and experimentation could inform the creative aspects of his work, and in 1937, after reading an English translation of André Breton's *What is Surrealism?* (1934), McLaren began to explore surrealist methods of working. In particular, he sought to create works that stemmed from the subconscious part of the mind in the belief that such films, freed from the constraints of tradition or habit, would be able to express his ideas and feelings more deeply. By diverting his attention through working on a technical challenge, McLaren believed that his conscious input into his film work could be minimised, thus giving pre-eminence to his subconscious processes.[3] As we shall see, although limited available resources and technical challenges would give opportunities for his subconscious processes to emerge, McLaren himself would increasingly compromise these methods as his artistic career progressed.

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[2] McLaren acknowledges that other presentations at the end-of-year student show were of paintings, print works and sculpture—static presentations. In this context particularly, his frenetic abstract movie accompanied by jazz music was exceptional. See McLaren's various accounts in *Creative Process: Norman McLaren*, directed by Donald McWilliams (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1990).

[3] See Donald McWilliams, "Norman McLaren Essay-Biography", *McLaren's Workshop App*, accessed 20 July 2016, http://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/mclarens-workshop/id622560819?mt=8; and Dobson, *The Film Work of Norman McLaren*, 196.

Sound Methods (1)

Even in 1936, as a young recruit to John Grierson's General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit in London, McLaren was aware of the early work in film sound by Rudolf Pfenninger, an electrical engineer working in Munich.[4] He had seen Pfenninger's film *Tönende Handschrift* (1931), the first part of which is a documentary showing the European's method of creating sound. The method exploited the contemporary technology used to produce sound for film, in which film-stock carried not just a visual track, but also a soundtrack. Running down the soundtrack was a series of black or grey shapes on the clear celluloid. When these shapes passed in front of a small lamp in the projector, they modified the amount of light reaching a photo-electric cell. The cell's variable states of excitement were electrical: light caused an electrical signal to be emitted from the cell. These electrical signals were then converted into sound. Normally the soundtrack's configurations were obtained through recording live sounds: the sounds were converted into electrical signals in a microphone and these signals were then used to excite a photo-electric cell, the light from which would determine the imagery that would appear on the soundtrack. This entire recording stage in the process was circumvented by Pfenninger. The visual nature of the soundtrack had inspired the logical step of creating sounds not by recording, but by drawing or painting shapes and then photographing these shapes onto the sound-strip. Pfenninger's system made use of a series of cards, on each of which were specifically designed configurations. Each card, when photographed onto the optical soundtrack area of film, was capable of producing a particular pitch.

Other artists, such as those working in the Soviet Union—Arseny Mikhaylovich Avraamov, Evgeny Scholpo and Nikolai Voinov—also devised systems that exploited the manner in which sound was recorded and reproduced for film.[5] The aim of most of these people, including Pfenninger, was to recreate established forms of music using the pure, perfectly controlled pitches and timbres provided by their various systems. The second part of Pfenninger's film, for instance, was a rendition of his system's version of a Largo by Handel. Avraamov alone among these pioneers had a more adventurous aim: he intended to free his music "from the restrictions of the twelve-tone tempered scale" and to create "new tonal systems assimilating many of the scales of the traditional folk music of the Eastern and Southern Republics [of the Soviet Union]."[6] McLaren was also excited by the potential of what he would later call animated sound.

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[4] McLaren acknowledged this awareness in "An Interview", in Maynard Collins, *Norman McLaren* (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1976), 73–74.

[5] McLaren himself provided a technically detailed account of these developments in a pamphlet published by the NFB in 1950: McLaren, *Animated Sound on Film* (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1950), reprinted in Robert Russett and Cecile Starr, eds., *Experimental Animation: Origins of a New Art*, rev. ed. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976), 166–68.

[6] As quoted in Dobson, *The Film Work of Norman McLaren*, 76. See also McLaren, *Animated Sound*, 167. It should be noted that other experiments in creating sound from specially designed configurations on the sound track were conducted in the 1930s. László Moholy-Nagy and Oskar Fischinger for instance, each

An UnSound Start

On seeing *Tönende Handschrift*, McLaren made a mental note and "kept it in mind for further exploration as a valid and useful way of making truly animated sound".[7] In the meantime, he worked at various filmmaking tasks for the GPO Film Unit. He nevertheless kept his mind open to new ideas, as he later recalled:

> I was running some blank film on the sound head of a moviola. I had a knife and just sort of tapped [the film], played it back and it made a scratchy noise. Then I put it on the picture head which has an intermittent motion, and I found it bounced. I played it and realized you could get different kinds of sounds, very primitive and limited, but still . . . I started playing around with this.[8]

When McLaren was given the task of directing a documentary film on the production of the London Telephone Directory, he sought to use his new sounds. The filmmaker recognised that the mechanical percussive characteristics of his sounds were perfectly in accord with the filmed machinery, "[s]o I did a sound track for . . . *Book Bargain* [1937] because it was full of scenes of panning along machinery, close-ups of machines, and complicated machinery." McLaren intimated the characteristics of the sounds: "An arm would come up, something would go 'bump . . . bup . . . bup' and pan along to some other kind of operation. I worked out rhythms for those machines and it fitted very nicely."[9] Unfortunately, Alberto Cavalcanti, the film's producer, thought that the soundtrack would compete too strongly with the film's planned commentary so, despite McLaren's compromise suggestion to lower the track's volume, the innovative animated sounds were jettisoned from the film. Despite this rebuttal of one of his most daring innovations while working at the GPO Film Unit before the Second World War, McLaren's technique remained imprinted on his young mind and would be re-adopted at a more propitious time.

The above instances are early examples of two of McLaren's artistic strategies. The first shows the artist, alert to the potential in accidental discoveries, playing with some equipment and revealing unexpected results, which he then stripped of their "accidental" or "mistake" connotations. For example, on viewing film rushes that had been accidentally overexposed, he had the ability to see the images not as failures of what had been intended, but rather as successful trials of how to achieve certain effects of

working in Germany, constructed strong visual designs for sound tracks. The text is limited to precedents acknowledged by McLaren.

[7] McLaren, "Technical Notes on the Card Method of Optical Animated Sound: As Developed at the NFB of Canada by Evelyn Lambart and Norman McLaren (1952)", unpublished transcript, rev. ed. (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1985), 4.

[8] McLaren as quoted in "An Interview", 73.

[9] Ibid.

overexposure.[10] The second McLaren strategy refers to his decision to not waste an idea or technique if it could not be used immediately: instead, he would store it in readiness for a possible future use. Over the ensuing years, McLaren hoarded countless film or sound trials, whether they were used at the time or not. This range of material included abandoned films (*Chalk River Ballet*, 1948, for instance, remained on the shelves for over twenty years until a reappraisal of the music and the film's previous nuclear context allowed it to be released as *Spheres* in 1969) and abandoned tests (the sound and vision "Flicker" tests, in which rapid alternation of black and white fields onscreen and equally rapid alternation of sounds, probed the extremes of perception, the ideas from which were finally explored in *Synchromy*, 1971). These stored ideas became a valuable source of inspirational ideas, many of which were subsequently adopted, adapted or extended in his later film work.[11]

Sounding Necessity: *Dots* and *Loops*

Within a few months of moving to New York in 1939, McLaren described his state as parlous rather than propitious in a letter to Grierson.[12] With his savings depleted, he could afford only incidentals like clear leader film. With no camera at hand, he decided to revive his art-school solution to this problem: he would make a film by drawing or painting his visuals directly onto the clear film-stock. This time, however, he observed the frame divisions, drawing images on each frame that were slightly different from their neighbouring ones, thereby creating, when the film was run through the projector, the illusion of movement. The film was also to include sound, but McLaren had no musicians, no recorder and no money to pay for copyrighted music. Remembering his unused work for the soundtrack of *Book Bargain*, he realised his problem could be solved by simply drawing or painting images on the soundtrack to create animated sound.

For *Dots* (1940) and *Loops* (1940), the New York films in question, McLaren discovered there were further advantages to this direct method of making films. As well as extreme economy of means and the process's unique sound qualities, the system also appealed because, being a hand-drawn process, McLaren could create his visual and aural imagery simultaneously, literally side by side: the sound was drawn "at the same time. I drew a foot or two's worth of images then immediately afterwards I drew on the sound. It fascinates me to realise that I was capable of drawing on the sound track

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[10] McLaren colleague and NFB producer Tom Daly speaking at a McLaren tribute function, shown in *Creative Process*.

[11] Some examples will occur as this text unfolds. Many tests, outtakes and abandoned films are contained in the seven-disc DVD set *Norman McLaren: The Master's Edition*, produced by Marc Bertrand and Marcel Jean (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 2006).

[12] McLaren to John Grierson, December 6, 1939; Grierson Archives, GAA 4:23:51, University of Stirling, UK.

without being able to hear it."[13] But he could *see* it. Uniquely in this pre-digital (and pre-magnetic) sound-recording time, McLaren's method gave him instant playback, so he could see how his audiovisual work was progressing without waiting days or weeks for a laboratory to process the film. He received sufficient feedback by simply looking at and reviewing the marks he was making on the two tracks. Such a method of review enabled McLaren to maintain his spontaneous thread.

The hand-drawn method also gave the filmmaker an unprecedented and comforting intimacy with his film materials. He likened it to the closeness and intimacy that painters have with their paint:

> I have tried to preserve in my relationship to the film the same closeness and intimacy that exists between a painter and his canvas. In normal filmmaking, everybody knows, there's an elaborate series of optical, chemical and mechanical processes. And these stand between an artist and his finished work. How much simpler it is for an artist with his canvas. So I decided to throw away the camera and instead work straight on the film with pens and ink, brushes and paint. And if I don't like what I do, I use a damp cloth, rub it out and begin again.[14]

McLaren did not notate the films' music beforehand, so sound, like image, was created directly, on the spot. Using this direct method, the filmmaker was able to experience the "closeness and intimacy" of making physical marks. Importantly, the process also allowed a spontaneous approach to his filmmaking. It will be recalled that it was McLaren's conviction—inherited from Surrealism—that the thought processes to be explored are the subconscious ones and that he used his preoccupation with technical challenges to distract him from an overly conscious awareness of his creative work. Spontaneity also fulfilled his surrealist objectives: "Surrealism meant cutting down on the conscious control of what was happening. Now I had tended to be an improviser in my earlier films [like *Dots* and *Loops*] so this fitted in with the idea of surrealism. You let it come out of your own subconscious—what the image is going to do next."[15] Not only was McLaren able to see the spontaneous and interactive relationship between visual and aural components of his film as he was working, he was also able to create his audiovisual animation frame-by-frame thereby exerting absolute control over each image and each micro-second of sound. For McLaren, this was in fact the major appeal of the hand-drawn process: "I did not make them [animated sounds] to explore new

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[13] McLaren as quoted in "Interview With Norman McLaren", *Norman McLaren: Exhibition and Films* (Edinburgh: Scottish Arts Council, 1977), 14.

[14] McLaren speaking in *Creative Process* and in Donald McWilliams and Susan Huycke, unpublished working script, *Creative Process: Norman McLaren* (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada), 6. Originally spoken by McLaren in Clyde Gilmour, *Window on Canada #29*, directed by Guy Glover (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada,1954).

[15] McLaren speaking in *Creative Process*; and in McWilliams and Huycke, *Creative Process*, 7.

sounds, but simply for my own needs. I wanted to control the sound track precisely and personally."[16] Consequently, the visual and aural components each became an expression or compliment of the other, an audiovisual fusion that points back towards McLaren's youthful experiences of synaesthesia. Significantly, the direct process also allowed him to make his close audiovisual films, like *Dots* and *Loops*, solo. His control was not only over each micro-second, but also over every input, aural or visual. As a young filmmaker, he was free from any obligation or need to compromise with other creative inputs: the films were his, and only his, expressions.

The Marks and Sounds of *Dots* and *Loops*

In technical notes that he prepared, in his public-spirited way, for distribution to any interested party, McLaren provided a wealth of detail on how he produced the sound he used in *Dots* and *Loops*.[17] He explained in a precise and methodical manner how he created pitches by increasing or decreasing the frequency of striations. Increasing or decreasing the volume could be achieved by changing the size of the marks across the width of the soundtrack. Similarly, simple attack and decay of sounds could be created, but by *progressively* increasing or decreasing the striations' size across the width of the track (Figure 4.1).

However, describing the quality of the sound in *Dots* and in *Loops* presents difficulties, since the sounds were unlike anything else ever heard, be they natural sounds or sounds from musical instruments. General terms like 'percussive' and 'rhythmic' may be applied. Further, and as I have suggested elsewhere, "[t]hey range in pitch, volume and duration, but not in their timbre or their attack or delay. Thus each of the sounds possesses a similarity of attack and decay, and, to a varying degree, a 'kissing' resonance—with a hint of raspberry."[18] The uniqueness and unprecedented nature of these sounds in 1940 not only made them distinct, but also anticipated the recording of non-instrumental sounds and their manipulation by, for example, Pierre Schaeffer in the creation of *musique concrète* from 1942 onwards.[19] In this sense, Holly Rogers has argued that they "represent one of the first instances of electronic music and operate as a precursor to the synthesizer".[20] Their lack of association with any known musical instrument or any sound in the natural world, however, distanced these sounds from

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[16] McLaren in answer to Ivan Stadtrucker, questionnaire, March 1975; NFB Archives, McLaren Files, 1184 D112, 3.

[17] McLaren, "Technical Notes for Sound on 'Dots' and 'Loops' (1940 & 1969)", unpublished transcript, rev. ed. (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1984).

[18] Dobson, *The Film Work of Norman McLaren*, 106.

[19] Carlos Palombini, "Machine Songs V: Pierre Schaeffer: From Research into Noises to Experimental Music", *Computer Music Journal* 17, no. 3 (1993): 14–19.

[20] Holly Rogers, "The Musical Script: Norman McLaren, Animated Sound and Audiovisuality", *Animation Journal* 22 (2014): 76.

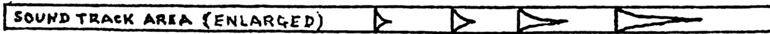
Technical notes for Sound on "DOTS" and "LOOPS" (1940)

The percussive, semi-musical sounds were made by painting and drawing with black India ink on clear 35mm. film.

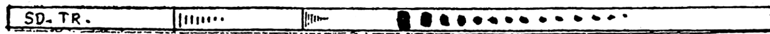
The sounds were placed in the sound track area adjacent to the picture; in this case, on the same piece of film on which the visual images were drawn. For synchronization during projection, the track was positioned 20 frames ahead of picture it was intended to synchronize with.

The sound track was later transferred to normal variable area format for release.

Almost all the sounds were in the form of 'notes' having an abrupt beginning or sudden attack, and a tapering-off or decay, where possible, with an exponential shape or envelope:

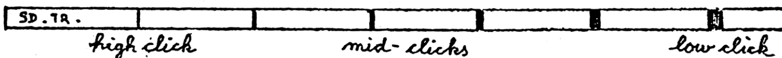


Each note was made up of a number of strokes of the pen or brush.



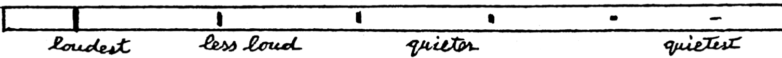
CLICKS WITHOUT PRECISE PITCH

Just one stroke across the track made a clicking sound:

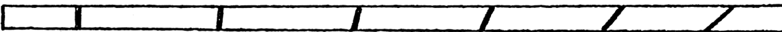


VOLUME OF CLICK

The loudness of a click depended on how much the stroke stretched across the sound track. For example:



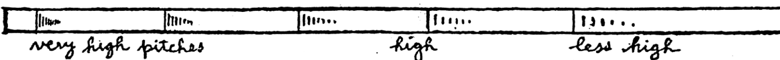
Volume could also be controlled by the slope of the stroke:



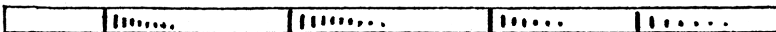
SOUNDS WITH PITCH

At least six strokes, if evenly spaced, were enough to make a sound with a definite pitch; the closer together the strokes were the higher the pitch, the further apart, the lower the pitch.

For high sounds a crow-quill pen was used:



For notes in the middle-pitch range, an ordinary broad pen was used:



For deep notes narrow and broad brushes were used:

FIGURE 4.1 Page 1 of Norman McLaren's Technical Notes for *Dots* and *Loops* (1940). National Film Board of Canada.

any specific regional, cultural or national source. Consciously or not, McLaren had begun the process of removing culturally specific adornments to his films, a development that was inspired by the filmmaker's political and social convictions and would be continued after the Second World War when, among other technical innovations, he explored the creation of animated sound using a method akin to that developed by Pfenninger.

Sound Methods (2)

After the war, by which time McLaren had rejoined Grierson, this time at the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), the young filmmaker's internationalist ideals emerged and were invigorated by the artistic and social environment in which he found himself. Before the war, as a young man, through his observation of the slums in his home town, his brief visit to the Soviet Union, and his experiences while filming—for Ivor Montagu's film *Defence of Madrid* (1936)—the wounded, the dying and the dead during the Spanish Civil War, he had developed a deep empathy for the underprivileged and an intolerance of violence.[21] He also developed a belief in the value of international cooperation and understanding at all levels: from the governmental to the personal.[22] In Canada, a country of many national cultures, this internationalist view was also a nationalist one. In confirmation of this, the NFB had a mandate that promoted Canada's role as a member of the international community.[23] McLaren wished his films to be understood across political and cultural boundaries and was in an environment that enabled him to pursue this objective. He had never used speech in his films, so he was already free of this cultural limiter. But he wished to go further; he also wanted his music to be as free as possible of culturally specific features. For *Chairy Tale* (1957), he commissioned Indian music but wanted a compromise between Indian ragas and Western music. He therefore asked his composer-performer, Ravi Shankar, to radically simplify the music's structure, thereby increasing the film's international comprehension. But it was for his renowned Oscar-winning film *Neighbours* (1952) that McLaren used internationalist sound of a different type. The fresh and unique qualities of the animated sound process, allied with McLaren's newly developed pixillation (stop-motion) of live actors, contribute to the film's distinctive impact.

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[21] McLaren's letters of the period reveal the depth of his feelings. See McLaren to parents, 2 December 1936; Grierson Archives, GAA 31:61, University of Stirling, UK.

[22] McLaren spent two extensive periods doing pioneering work in first Chinese and subsequently in Indian rural areas teaching rudimentary animation and poster work for the then fledgling UNESCO body. See, for example, McLaren, *The Healthy Village: An Experiment in Visual Education in West China*, Monographs on Fundamental Education 5 (Paris: UNESCO, 1951).

[23] For a detailed presentation of these issues see Crystal Chan and Terence Dobson, "Norman McLaren, Internationalist", *Animation Journal* 23 (2015): 26–50.

Neighbours is an anti-war parable which depicts the conflict of two next-door neighbours who each claim the flower that blooms on their common boundary. The humour and then horror of the disproportionate violent reaction to a minor dispute is underscored by the techniques used. McLaren shot his actors in stop-motion; that is, his stationary actors were photographed one frame at a time but between shots they changed positions slightly, thus when the film is screened, they appear to move. Using this technique (for which McLaren coined the term "pixillation"), the actors appear to achieve extraordinary movements, including sliding, gliding and flying.[24] The additional manipulation of camera speeds also exaggerated normal human movements, such as walking. These, at first amusing, departures from expected live-action movement endow the film with a mix of the familiar and the strange, the ordinary and the extraordinary.

The soundtrack also delivers these paradoxes, and for it McLaren used his synthetic sound. However, he decided against using the system that he had deployed in *Dots* and *Loops*. Film animation requires enormous numbers of frames to be shot, or in this case drawn, even for short films like *Dots* and *Loops*. For instance, a two-and-a-half-minute film (about the length of each of *Dots* and *Loops*), would require 3,600 frames, each with finely registered drawings on them. Hand-drawing sound onto the soundtrack area of film-stock was at least as laborious as drawing onto the visual area, but with the added difficulty that the sound-strip was about one eleventh the width of even the tiny size of the visual frames. Whereas McLaren was able to adapt and reduce his work on the visual track by applying marks that crossed into more than one frame-area (and thereby produce a radically fresh presentation of imagery such as that used in his 1949 film *Begone Dull Care*), this was not feasible on the sound-strip. In addition, the multi-frame approach for the visuals also greatly increased McLaren's scope for gesture.[25] The possibilities for gestural accomplishment in the soundtrack's width of a fraction of a centimetre were limited and, as has been mentioned, the soundtrack area could not be extended. For these reasons of, first, extreme satiation (of hand-drawing sound), second, exhaustion of further possibilities and, third, limited gestural opportunities, McLaren came to adopt and develop another method of animating sound.

For the soundtrack of *Neighbours*, McLaren revived his interest in Pfenninger's card system, in which striations on cards were photographed onto the optical soundtrack, with different frequencies of striation generating different pitches. With the assistance of fellow animator Evelyn Lambart, he made a set of cards and by developing systems to vary the

[24] Norman McLaren, "Technical Notes for 'Neighbours' (1952)", unpublished transcript (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1952), reprinted in Russett and Starr, *Experimental Animation*, 125–26; and in Donald McWilliams, ed., *Norman McLaren on the Creative Process* (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1991), 67–71.

[25] Viewing on the large screen such films as *Begone Dull Care* (1949), the gestural accomplishments of McLaren may be seen to compare with those of the painter Jackson Pollock, even though the filmmaker was working on areas measuring mere centimetres.

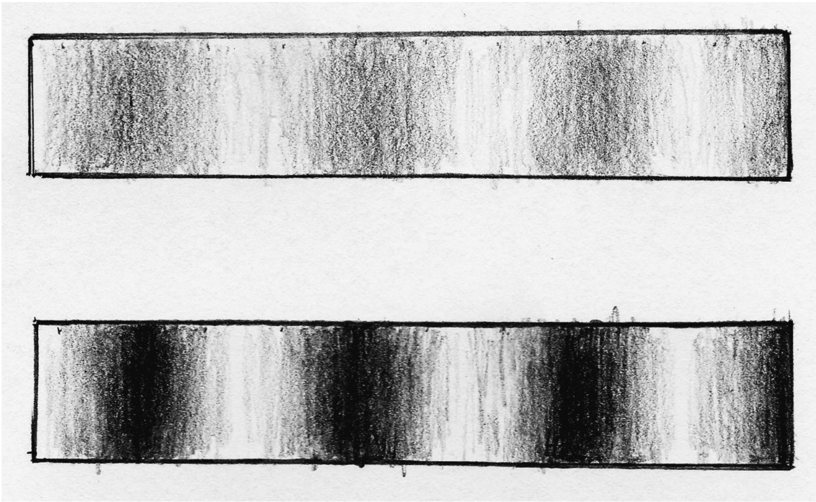

FIGURE 4.2 The variable-density method for *Dots* and *Loops* (1940). The lower illustration has greater contrast between its lights and darks and thus generates louder sound than the upper one. After Norman McLaren's Notes.

amount of light reaching the photoelectric cell, was able to overcome Pfenninger's inability to control volume. One way of achieving this control of the light density was by making the striations themselves lighter or darker in tone. This presented two practical difficulties: first, each pitch would have not just one striation card assigned to it, but several, depending on the number of variations in sound volume required. This would significantly increase the workload. Second, as McLaren put it, "[I] decided using dark and light was too tricky because if lab prints are too light or too dark, it changes the sound" (Figure 4.2).[26] McLaren's solution was simple, practical and elegant: "I decided to use just purely black and white and to control the volume I simply close[d] down the width of the sound track."[27] The width was closed down by the use of a few masks that could be placed over any of the striation cards when they were being photographed onto the soundtrack, thus easing time and work. The striation cards, as organised by McLaren and Lambart, were assembled in a box, where they were placed according to pitch, the highest at the back ranging to the lowest at the front. As the striations became broader, more spaced apart and fewer on each successive card, the pitch represented became correspondingly lower. Each row had twelve cards and thus spanned an octave. There were five rows of cards in the box, so five octaves were represented.[28] It is apparent that McLaren's pitches matched those of Western musical scales (each striation represented a semitone in a chromatic scale of, in this case, five octaves).[29] The system could,

[26] McLaren, as quoted in "An Interview", 74.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Russett and Starr, *Experimental Animation*, 167. Later card boxes contained six octaves.
[29] McLaren, "Technical Notes on the Card Method", 5.

however, be used to create an infinite number of pitches and hence scales. Indeed, in the late 1940s, John Cage, who was aware of McLaren's work, suggested that the filmmaker extend his method so that an infinite range of pitches could be achieved. In 1951 McLaren developed a card method which provided such a range and, further, he conducted a film test. Although the test showed that McLaren's card system could be adapted to produce an infinite range of pitches it also revealed the new method as being more laborious and time consuming. McLaren went no further with the process.[30] His reluctance to adopt Cage's suggestion is understandable. He chose to make his system more workable by first limiting the pitches and, second, by adopting the Western chromatic scale, as it was the one that he thoroughly understood.[31] As has been discussed, McLaren wished his films to appeal to as wide an audience as possible.[32] At that time (the 1950s), using Western-scaled music would have given him a much greater and wider potential audience, even in international terms, than using the music of any other culture.

Although McLaren gave his card system sounds a Western pitch structure, the sounds themselves were strange and exciting: like the hand-drawn sounds, the card-system sounds referenced no sound either of the natural world or of musical instruments. In fact, the timbre produced was different even from that produced by the hand-drawn method. The sounds, unadorned by any wayward frequencies, possessed an extreme purity and garnered further special qualities when McLaren, in his use of his card system, determined to limit certain characteristics. For example, the technique presented some difficulties in creating sustained sounds. Photographing striations across frame divisions, particularly when using broad frequencies, did not always provide a continuous match—lines could be cut off at the frame division causing irregularities in the sustained sound.[33] The brevity of single-frame sounds could be offset by adding reverberation during re-recording. It could also be moderated by photographing the striations onto alternate frames. This rapid trill could be further modified by adding reverb later during post-production. However, McLaren's animated sounds in *Neighbours* and other works tended to be staccato and therefore percussive. As has been observed, if sounds were sustained they were often trilled, with attack and decay achieved by the use

[30] The test was "Micro-Tone Improvisation", March 1951. See *Norman McLaren: Animated Musician*, film directed by Donald McWilliams (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 2014). The author is grateful to McWilliams for providing a working copy of this documentary.

[31] McLaren affirms his familiarity with Western music theory, particularly that of Hindemith in "An Interview", 75–76.

[32] For a fuller discussion of these issues, see Chan and Dobson, "Norman McLaren, Internationalist".

[33] Another difficulty was caused by frame lines printed on the film stock that extended across the soundtrack area. These created an unwanted 24 cycles-per-second "purring sound", the removal of which could only be achieved by using single-frame imagery on the soundtrack. Shaving off the offending frame lines only partially helped. Residual purring remained. One way of obscuring these sounds was dividing any sounds into brief and frequent bursts. McLaren details these problems and solutions in his "Technical Notes on the Card Method", 6–8.

of additional masking over the striation cards. For this reason, and because there was a greatly restricted opportunity to add these qualities to extremely brief sound pulses (tiny fractions of a second), attack and decay were not strongly featured qualities on McLaren's card-system-prepared animated sound. The system did lend itself to high-speed articulation, the rapidity of which would be difficult to achieve with extreme precision and over a sustained period by live performers, no matter the instrument.[34] Elaine Dobson has pointed out that it could also be used to achieve, with precision, other possibilities that were difficult for live performers, such as the rapid use of three degrees for each volume marking: ***ff***+, ***ff***, ***ff***– and so on.[35] However, the most prominent aural characteristics of the system remained the very brief, rapid notes which usually omitted attack or decay, something that encouraged various forms of rhythmic patterning: "It's free from the ordinary laws of acoustics and free from such elements as instruments and performers. As a matter of fact, as a rhythmic instrument it's probably superior to any traditional instruments if you're looking for speed, subtlety, and complexity of percussive rhythm."[36]

This extreme precision of the timing and of pitch, together with the purity of the sounds, further distinguishes the sounds produced by the card method from any other method of audiovisual composition at the time. Such qualities, then, as the timbre's sparsity of aural precedents, its purity and the diminution of characteristics such as attack and decay each contributed to the inter-cultural comprehension of McLaren's animated sounds, for these qualities reduced the culturally identifiable elements that are associated with most melodic musical instruments. The tendency to rely on the element of rhythm added a further impetus towards inter-cultural comprehension. The rhythmic component was, for McLaren, the most inter-cultural element of music and it was a feature that he used to that effect in numerous films that employed animated sound.[37] In *Neighbours*, the sound structures are thus, to most cultures, comprehensible and somewhat familiar. The sound's largely synchronous alliance with the visuals is also orthodox—the coincidence of action with musical phrasing and percussion abounds. And yet, as Rogers points out, "in terms of its unusual electronic timbre, it is other-worldly, distant, dissonant, and confusing".[38] These aspects of the audiovisual relationship are examples of the film's juxtaposing of the familiar with the strange and the ordinary with the extraordinary, which amplify the theme's incremental, disturbing journey from cordiality to deathly violence.

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[34] Elaine Dobson, "McLaren the Musician", paper presented at the Society for Animation Studies Annual Conference, Montreal, September, 2001, 5.

[35] Ibid.

[36] McLaren as quoted in "Interview With Norman McLaren".

[37] Dobson, *The Film Work of Norman McLaren*, 237.

[38] Rogers, "The Musical Script", 79.

Sound in Some Films and *Synchromy*

The satiation of drawing on the soundtrack McLaren experienced after *Dots* and *Loops* eventually wore off and he later returned to the technique. He also redeployed his card system in a number of further films. The filmmaker was able to adapt his approach to the needs of each film. For *Rythmetic* (1956) and *Blinkity Blank* (1955) McLaren also modified his technique. It will be recalled that, for *Blinkity Blank*, he had reacted to the frustrating problem of keeping his clear film-stock free of dust, fingerprints and other marks by using black film-stock. The soundtrack was also created, at least partially, on black film-stock. He went on, in 1956, to engrave a complete soundtrack on black stock for *Rythmetic*. Unwanted sound caused by extraneous marks could thus be avoided. *Rythmetic*'s drawn-sound system—drawn (or scratched) on black film stock—is used percussively and descriptively. There is no melodic component, the only changes of pitch being the use of small glissandi that accord with the acceleration or deceleration of the moving, rebelling numbers in the equations, the building of which comprise the film. The aural rhythm follows that of the drama-induced action of the numbers on screen and as such is dramatic rather than sonically driven—the sequential patterning of the sounds is subordinate to the visual action of the film. As in *Dots* and *Loops*, the raspberry-kiss sound quality of McLaren's soundtrack was the aural characteristic he chose to emphasise, a quality that brings the sounds into greater prominence.

The card-created sound McLaren devised for *Neighbours*, on the other hand, has affinities with operatic or feature film music, in that leitmotifs have been ascribed to various performers and emotions in the film. The neighbours have a joint theme that is varied according to their emotional states or actions: waltz-time is used when they dance, for example. The flower also has a motif, as does the picket fence.[39] In addition, as the film progresses, McLaren manipulates the sound source where appropriate, for instance creating coarser, rasping sounds when the protagonists' dispute descends to violence.

It is evident that, after his move to Canada, McLaren placed increasing importance on a third type of working strategy. When producing a film, various technical and artistic possibilities would occur to McLaren and his associates, like Lambart and Grant Munro.[40] McLaren would insist that each of these possibilities be explored to the point of exhaustion, which, recalls Munro, provided the artist with many options, or choices, on which way to proceed.[41] This suggests that the spontaneous approach to filmmaking was here modified by making overt artistic choices, at least within the body of the

[39] Dobson, "McLaren the Musician", 10–12.

[40] McLaren's practice of working solo was gradually giving way, although he always retained full artistic control and limited his help to a small number of sympathetic individuals like Lambart, Munro and Maurice Blackburn.

[41] Grant Munro, interview with the author, 23 October 1990, Montreal.

film. Although this may imply that his use of Surrealist-derived processes was beginning to diminish, the presence of choice goes some way towards explaining the quality and inventiveness contained in much of McLaren's mature work.

Three further films also display McLaren's ability to modify and develop his animated sound in order to embellish his work to accord with his artistic objectives. For the abstract film *Mosaic* (1965), the acoustically unidentifiable sounds derived from the hand-drawn method are undeniably appropriate. In this film, McLaren varied the audiovisual relationship. The incrementally energetic collisions and expanding flickers of the dots are accompanied, but not always on cue, by his synthetic percussive sounds. In the original soundtrack that McLaren created, a sound accompanied every action of *Mosaic*'s dots. On hearing the track, Ron Alexander, the sound mixer for the film, said to McLaren that this fusion of sound and image was predictable and ultimately boring. He suggested removing some sound and adding varying degrees of reverberation.[42] McLaren agreed to the suggestion. The result was the pared-down track that begins sparingly and the early silence is only occasionally punctuated by a short sound which may or may not coincide with a visual event such as a change in the dots' direction or their convergence. As the dots multiply and become gradually more frenetic, so the soundtrack increases in density, volume and reverberation. The only consistent visual and aural synchronisation of events occurs during the climax when the dots repeatedly flicker into brief bursts of colour. These bursts are accompanied by brief sonic phrases that have the effect of supporting these filmic moments. McLaren exclaimed that for the soundtrack of *Mosaic* he had at last escaped "Mickey-Mousing", the film-making term for the precise synchronisation of visual and aural events.[43] Rather than an automatic adherence to the tenets of "Mickey-Mousing", McLaren was able to use or discard the practice as it suited his artistic purpose. McLaren had thus endowed the soundtrack with its own rhythmic pattern that includes a syncopated effect. Even so, the sonic and the visual share a general amplification as the film progresses. This is one of a number of McLaren films structured according to a simple progression towards a climax followed by a brief denouement. His awareness of the structure of much Hindi music provided reassurance that this structure was valid, and its simplicity ensured that it would be widely understood, thus supporting his aspirations for a large and diverse audience.

In *Blinkity Blank*, the predictability of "Mickey-Mousing" was offset in other ways. Although he was aware of McLaren's intention to use sporadic clusters of images interspersed with stretches of blank, black film, NFB composer Maurice Blackburn wrote his acoustic score for the film before McLaren had started working on the drawings. Following McLaren's notions, Blackburn's sounds are also sporadic. Each sound's relationship to its neighbouring sound is attenuated by temporal distance (as in the visual

[42] McWilliams, *Norman McLaren*.

[43] Ibid.

images) and also by Blackburn's adoption of a semi-aleatoric process: rhythm and dynamics were exactly scored but the precise pitch was, within three parameters of high, middle and low, left to the instrumental performers to improvise. When the visuals were married with the music, sparsity ensured that not every visual action was accompanied by a sound. But, although their alliance is not entirely predictable, there is more than enough accord for the sound and visual tracks to be perceived as allied. McLaren also contributed animated sounds using his scratching on black film technique. These synthetic sounds are included within the acoustic sounds, adding pointed emphasis. There is also an early, extended passage in which the elemental bird-like visual images have yet to fully form and that uses only animated sounds. This isolated section is perhaps the remnant of McLaren's initial attempt to use the stroboscopic technique for an entirely abstract film. The figurative elements that McLaren eventually adopted as the subjects for the film, and which clarify as the film develops, were birds. These creatures offered distinct advantages to the animator: they can be drawn simply and have unrestricted freedom in movement. They also occur in every human habitat and so, along with such intermittent imagery of trees and fruit glimpsed in the film, they would be inter-culturally understood.

In these preceding films, McLaren shows that he carefully considered the sound in relationship to the image and to the film as a whole. He worked on developing both lines of what Rogers calls his "instrument" and, as a composer might, considered the intertwining of the lines.[44] In McLaren's case, the major lines were the visual and the aural, within each of which were other lines. In the temporal organisation of his sounds, McLaren tended to rely on the familiar and the accessible: it was the processes of making animated sound that appealed to him. The unique qualities of his animated sound were useful in that they could reach audiences across cultural borders. In his last abstract film however, the filmmaker extended his artistic parameters.

Synchromy, McLaren's final abstract movie, was also his last artistic expression using animated sound. It arose at least in part from earlier sound and vision flicker tests. Its fast and complex sound structure, produced via McLaren's card system, was derived from its manner of construction. It is important to bear in mind that each card had on it striations of a particular frequency that was capable, when photographed onto a film's soundtrack, of generating a particular sound frequency or pitch (Figure 4.3). As before, the filmmaker created the sound using visual images. In *Synchromy*, however, McLaren went further. He also photographed the striations onto the film's visual track, so that when a particular pitch is heard, the same striations that were used to create the sound are seen on the screen. This apparently perfect matching of sound and image could be expected to produce the perfect synaesthetic experience. Indeed, the audio-viewer is aware of the sight-sound accord that McLaren provides, particularly in the film's opening

[44] Film as a musical instrument is a concept delivered in Rogers, "The Musical Script", 70.

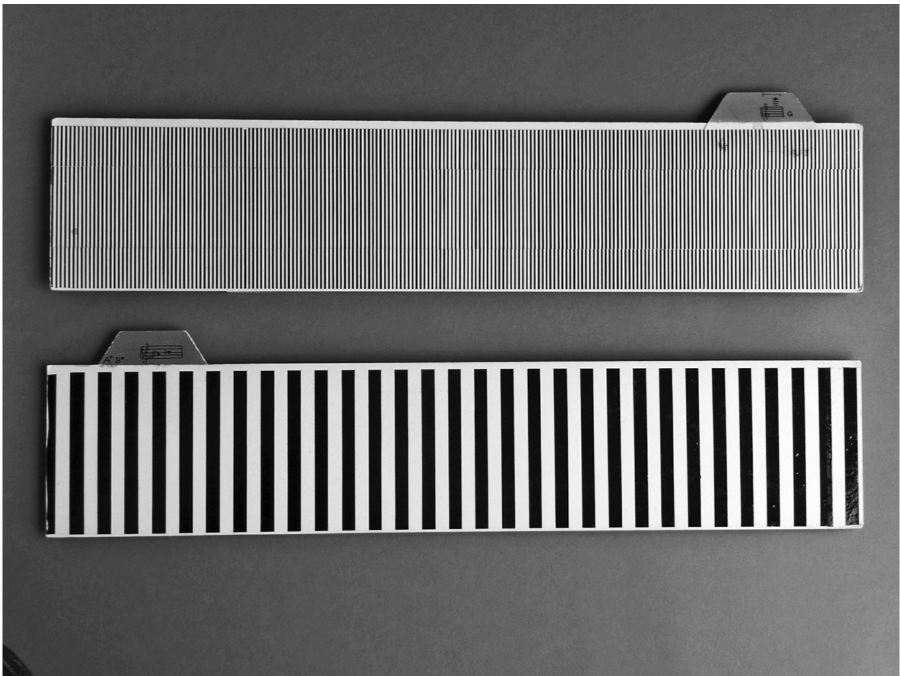

FIGURE 4.3 Norman McLaren's "A♯/B♭" (lower) and "two octaves above middle G" (upper) striation cards from *Synchromy* (1971).

expositionary section, in which the striations perform on a single band: each time the pitch rises, the frequencies that are presented on the band are seen to increase. However, the film's presentation and perception are not quite so straightforward.

Particularly as the film progresses, the visual component of *Synchromy* has variations added to it. An obvious instance is McLaren's addition of colour to the original black and white imagery. Also obvious is the multiplication of the soundtrack's appearance up to eleven times across the screen. There are other variations, such as image mirroring and successive displacement of striations across the screen. The variations may be seen as attempts to augment the qualities heard on the soundtrack: for instance, their successive introductions coincide with musical changes and their increasing complexity accords with the increasing complexity of the music. The visual modifications are designed to bring the visual and sonic aspects of *Synchromy* closer together, which implies that the original visual and aural presentations were not absolutely synaesthetic. In the past, various attempts have been made to render sound visually. Pitch, for example, has been rendered using different colours. Another method uses positioning to indicate pitch, whereby higher positioning equates with higher pitch (Western music notation is based on this concept, and McLaren himself used this approach for *Dots* and *Loops*). But in *Synchromy*, McLaren introduces another concept, the striations, and clearly demonstrates the visual-aural relationship at the beginning of the

film. The problem is that seeing and hearing operate in different realms. Their perceptual processes differ from each other. The most common form of musical perception is based on the recognition of short groups of notes in a phrase.[45] In *Synchromy*, despite the fact that each of McLaren's notes lasts just a fraction of a second and is interspersed with micro-silences, the listener is able to discern structured phrases. However, the visual perception on screen of those same brief pulses and their accompanying micro-silences differs. Visually, the manifestations of the micro-silences are perceived as successive temporal gaps. The result is the perception of a flicker. In the film's exposition, an understanding of the audiovisual relationship may be intellectually grasped, but whether or not this entails the subsequent perception of sequential visual patterning is a moot point. As the film progresses, McLaren adds more bands, striations, colour and modifications to the visual presentation. This increasing complexity has the effect of giving pre-eminence to the one constant visual characteristic: the pulsing flicker effect. Thus, differences between aural and visual perceptual processes cause a tension rather than an absolute and continuing accord between what is heard and what is seen.[46] The confluence (caused by an understanding of *Synchromy*'s explanatory exposition section that creates expectations of accord) and conflict (where these expectations are, at least partially, unfulfilled) of the relationship between vision and sound give the film an immense tension. The triumph of *Synchromy*, then, is that it takes us on a sensual and cerebral adventure in which we veer from knowing to unknowing, and from expectation to shock, excitement and joy.

Conclusion

For an artist who initially ostensibly adopted innovative techniques for their utilitarian value rather than for their aesthetic qualities, McLaren's application of his technology was far from prosaic, and his films display adventurousness in their exploration of a process. By embracing technological challenges and by provoking those challenges by having inadequate resources or by reacting to a satiation of the technique, McLaren ensured a technologically innovative oeuvre. This applied to the sonic as well as the visual aspects of his film output. His strategies of seeing unexpected potential in accidents and mistakes, keeping all tests and trials, and of exploring all artistic possibilities, ensured that McLaren had a wide selection of likely options at almost every turn and at almost every stage of work. Although the process might have diminished McLaren's early career aspiration to work from the subconscious, it did ensure that he had a continual choice of direction for his film, be it an aesthetic or thematic choice. Thus, his

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[45] This is according to research performed by Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff in *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983).

[46] For a fuller discussion of this phenomenon see Dobson, *Film Work of Norman McLaren*, 207–20.

manner of working helped to ensure that his films were aesthetically extended. His explorations and applications of film sound, generated by manipulating the soundtrack area of film, were pioneering adventures. But for McLaren, these achievements were merely facets of his ability to transform mundane technical processes into refined and informed filmic expression.

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5 Sights and Sounds of the Moving Mind

THE VISIONARY SOUNDTRACKS OF STAN BRAKHAGE

Eric Smigel

AMERICAN EXPERIMENTAL FILMMAKER Stan Brakhage cultivated a new poetic idiom in which disjunctive and non-narrative imagery was intended to reflect the subjective vision of the eye behind the camera, a paradigmatic shift that would revolutionise independent cinema. Brakhage believed that film productions based on scripts and realised through the directed activities of actors—a storytelling convention that he felt was more appropriate to the domains of theatre and literature—tended to gloss over the subtle qualities of moving light that film renders visible. Committed to an inclusive account of the lived visual experience, he set out to augment the cinematic vocabulary by affirming various internal processes, such as hallucination, dreams, closed-eye images, hypnagogic vision, synaptic impulses and optical feedback. To capture these ephemeral elements, Brakhage enlisted a wide variety of 'home-made' modifications to the filming process, including erratic hand-held camera movement, distortion of focus, changing camera speeds, the use of different filters, painting and scratching directly onto the film stock and an assortment of complex editing procedures, all in an effort to reveal what he came to describe as "moving visual thinking".[1] Rejecting the notion that he was creating filmic illusions, Brakhage considered his enterprise the purest form of documentary

[1] Suranjan Ganguly, "Stan Brakhage: The 60th Birthday Interview", in *Experimental Cinema: The Film Reader*, ed. Wheeler Dixon and Gwendolyn Foster (London: Routledge, 2002), 140.

filmmaking, since he was recording the psychophysiological act of seeing, and his practice launched what would become the widely emulated subgenre of experimental film that P. Adams Sitney calls "first-person cinema".[2]

Brakhage prioritised what he regarded as the essential qualities of cinema—light moving in time—and just as he believed that the viewer would lose sight of the rhythmic subtleties of the projected images if a film was dominated by a story, so did he insist that sounds detract from a purely visual experience. Accordingly, the overwhelming majority of his work is silent; less than thirty of his almost 400 films include soundtracks. One might dismiss these sound films as anomalies, isolated projects that he took on for various reasons in spite of his artistic preference for silence, but Brakhage was effusive about his ideas concerning the relationship between music and cinema, even when he was not employing soundtracks. "Ironically, the more silently-oriented my creative philosophies have become," Brakhage admitted, "the more inspired-by-music have my photographic aesthetics and my actual editing orders become, both engendering a coming-into-being of the physiological relationship between seeing and hearing in the making of a work of art in film".[3] He considered the perception of sound as analogous to that of sight, and often referred to his films as "visual music", but his perspective on the relationship between the senses was not limited to metaphor.[4] Given his explicit and consistent pronouncements about the artistic merits of silent film, those several occasions when he opted to incorporate a soundtrack become all the more conspicuous and reveal an unusual approach to audiovisual counterpoint.

Most discussions of audiovisual counterpoint in cinema concern the correspondence between a dominant visual narrative and a subservient soundtrack, where much of the analytic focus is on the synchronous or asynchronous relationship between image and sound. Soviet film director and theorist Sergei Eisenstein acknowledged the powerful potential of the soundtrack to enrich the contrapuntal effect of cinematic montage, but he predicted that its predominant use in the commercial realm—as a means to fortify the illusion of theatrical realism through synchronised sound and dialogue—would detract from the primary strength of the medium: "*Only the contrapuntal use* of sound vis-à-vis the visual fragment of montage will open up new possibilities for the development and perfection of montage," Eisenstein insists. "*The first experiments in sound must aim at a sharp discord with the visual images*. Only such a 'hammer and tongs' approach will

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[2] P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant Garde, 1943–1973*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 142.

[3] Stan Brakhage, "Letter to Ronna Page", in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 135.

[4] As Fred Camper describes the musical sensibility of Brakhage's silent films: "the distinctively rhythmic qualities in the camera movement and editing stimulate the viewer's senses, rhythmically, as sound might; the film produces distinct effects on the viewer's physiology that are analogous to those of sound"; Camper, "Sound and Silence in Narrative and Nonnarrative Cinema", in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elizabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 377.

produce the necessary sensation that will result consequently in the creation of a new *orchestral counterpoint* of visual and sound images."[5] Eisenstein's call for a "new orchestral counterpoint" suggests a kind of meta-counterpoint, an intermedial polyrhythm that results from the concurrent articulation of form in different media.

Eisenstein's colleague Vsevolod Pudovkin issued a similar statement concerning sound in cinema, but stressed the importance of rhythmic independence between the audio and visual tracks. According to Pudovkin, the asynchronous "interplay of action" affords greater artistic possibilities because it is grounded in the polytemporality of the perceived object and the subjective experience, a phenomenological condition that is typically denied by the artificiality of synchronised sound.[6] The specific contrapuntal examples that Pudovkin cites, like those offered by Eisenstein, are limited to incongruities between plot development and emotional content in a visual narrative; although they advocate an asynchronous relationship between image and sound, they do not address how this relationship might function in an audiovisual context where the film is not driven by narrative conventions.

Brakhage championed Eisenstein's notion of montage as the fundamental aspect of cinema as an art form, and his rhythmic approach to the soundtrack derives from Pudovkin's "interplay of action".[7] And yet his unique brand of audiovisual counterpoint is complicated by several factors. First, with a couple early exceptions, Brakhage's sound films are not visual narratives set against asynchronous sound, which is the basis for most discourse surrounding Eisenstein's theory. However, even though his films typically resist narrative interpretation, the distorted depiction of recognisable subject matter (up until the painted films of his later years) invites thematic analyses from both first-person and third-person perspectives. As a consequence, Brakhage's work concocts a cinematic realm that collapses the dualistic nature of subjective and objective time, and this obfuscates the distinction between "synchronous" and "asynchronous" sound. Also,

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[5] Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Gregori Alexandrov, "A Statement" (1928), in Eisenstein, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, *Writings, 1922–1934*, ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 114. Italics in the original.

[6] Pudovkin writes: "The course of [one's] perceptions is like editing, the arrangement of which can make corresponding variations in speed, with sound just as with image. It is possible therefore for sound film to be made correspondent to the objective world and [one's] perception of it together. The image may retain the tempo of the world, while the sound strip follows the changing rhythm of the course of [one's] perceptions, or vice versa. This is a simple and obvious form for counterpoint of sound and image"; Vsevolod Pudovkin, "Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film" (1929), in *Film Sound*, 87–88.

[7] Brakhage lamented that most filmmakers had not yet "begun to explore the possibilities of using sound in a more literate, literary relationship to the visual image", by which he means the audiovisual counterpoint outlined by the Soviet directors. "The last authentic, aesthetic advance in the use of sound in relation to the moving picture image, are those notes and fragments and semi-experiments in Eisenstein's work," Brakhage proclaims. "I don't feel anyone [has] progressed beyond that point." See Brakhage, Programme 17, *The Test of Time*, a weekly radio programme that the filmmaker hosted on KAIR, at the University of Colorado in 1982. Transcripts of the programme prepared by Brett Kashmere, accessed 17 December 2016, www.fredcamper.com/Brakhage/TestofTime.html.

Brakhage took great care to coordinate the soundtrack with the visual elements in accordance with his own poetic sensibilities of rhythm and form, but the sounds and images in his projects were conceived separately; he almost always selected soundtracks from pre-existing recordings of music. Instead of collaborating with composers or editing his films in precise rhythmic correspondence with the music, Brakhage more accurately served as a curator of sounds created by others. Essentially, Brakhage believed that the rhythmic qualities of physiological functions serve as the foundation for artistic form in all media, and he conceived of audiovisual counterpoint in terms of a grand polyphony of these inner impulses in concert with external entities. In other words, he regarded the images of moving light and the sounds of vibrating air as independent models of the perceptual process whose rhythmic properties could be combined to generate a "new orchestral counterpoint".

Brakhage produced films with soundtracks at different stages in his career, and his approach to sound reflects the ongoing development of his visual aesthetic. Just as he conceived of the images in his films as "moving visual thinking", so did he come to hear music as the "sound equivalent of the mind's moving", and he tended to select soundtracks that highlighted the fragmentary and constantly varied nature of the listening experience.[8] He was especially drawn to the genre of *musique concrète*—the technique of assembling, deconstructing, modifying, layering and reorganising recorded sounds—which he felt could enact the interplay of cognition and recognition that he sought to capture in the visual domain. In many ways, the compositional practices of editing magnetic tape comprising found sounds served Brakhage as an audio analogue for cinematic montage, and also represented an extension of Eisenstein's and Pudovkin's theory of sound design and counterpoint. As Brakhage explains, *musique concrète* "somehow does make an interesting new direction for film, because these live sounds are in some relationship to the actual real images, the sense of the real that we get from photography."[9] By the "sense of the real", Brakhage is referring to sonic and visual objects that forge a concrete connection with the external world, thereby prompting memory and recognition, the process by which meaning emerges.

The principle of separating the senses is evident not only in Brakhage's long-standing practice of isolating moving images from sounds, but also in his preference for deploying soundtracks featuring the electronic modification of found sounds. The term *acousmatics*, which refers to the phenomenon of hearing sound without visually locating its source, gained currency with the emergence of magnetic tape recording technology and its accompanying techniques of *musique concrète*. With acousmatic sound, the conventional duality of the sounding object and listening subject dissolves into a phenomenological engagement with the stimulus; the term does not simply denote the abstraction of a sonic object, but also a perceptual field in which a listener's imagination is stimulated

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[8] Brakhage, "Letter to Ronna Page", 135.
[9] Brakhage, "The Test of Time".

by a sound that is unseen. Since an unrecognisable sound may also assume the perceptual guise of invisibility, music theorist Brian Kane refers to the acousmatic state as an "under-determination" of a sound's origin.[10] Distinct from the indetermination of a source, which concedes unfamiliarity, under-determination indicates perceptual ambiguity, which enables the listener to formulate fluid and multivalent interpretations of an unseen sound, similar to Brakhage's rendering of under-determined images. After navigating through varying degrees of recognition, Brakhage eventually transcended all external representation in his films and soundtracks, and would cut hand-painted film to pre-existing instrumental music in an effort to convey the sights and sounds of the moving mind.

Early Sound Films (1951–54)

Brakhage's first sound film, *Interim* (1951), was also his first film—a neorealist drama about the romantic meeting of a young couple. Brakhage drafted a script without dialogue and directed the project, which was realised in collaboration with several of his high school friends, including James Tenney, who provided an original musical score for solo piano that he would perform live for screenings. The score for *Interim*, which was also Tenney's first composition, resembles the musical style of Samuel Barber, whose sonata the composer had been practising at the time. Following conventional scoring procedures of mainstream cinema, Tenney composed different sections in accordance with Brakhage's notes describing plot events in the film (e.g., "under viaduct until entrance of girl", "descent again to ledge", etc.). The music for *Interim*, in other words, was conceived in terms of its supplementary role in establishing or fortifying a general mood for the visual story.

The first radical change in Brakhage's cinematic and musical style is evident in *Desistfilm* (1954), which offers a first-person perspective of his friends at a social gathering. The shooting and editing of *Desistfilm* were much more spontaneous than that of *Interim*—there is less continuity in the narrative and more freedom in the techniques of panning, cutting and focus, which divulge the filmmaker's presence behind the handheld camera as an active participant. The soundtrack is a *musique concrète* arrangement of sounds that roughly correlate to the convivial atmosphere of the carousing adolescents without being synchronous to specific activities taking place onscreen. There are two basic sonic profiles to the soundtrack. The first comprises taped sounds that have been modified to a degree that obscures their source, including a buzzing drone (which was probably derived from the sustained feedback of recorded voices) and what sounds like the percussive striking of a metal pipe. Once the scene erupts into livelier activity, the

[10] See Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 145–50.

soundtrack abruptly reflects the visual content with a rhythmic dance on a rickety piano, the percussive beating of hands on found objects, and shouting voices, all of which are slightly altered, but no longer beyond recognition. The short film ends with the embrace of a boy and girl while the others look on through a window that distorts their vision, and the sounds return to their under-determined state that marked the beginning of the soundtrack. Even though the sonic source remains the same, the non-diegetic sounds heard at the beginning and end of the film are a distortion of the diegetic sounds heard in the middle of the film, an alternation between cognition and recognition that reflects the psychophysiological state of the filmmaker. Although the sounds, which derive from the visual action, still serve a subordinate role in *Desistfilm*, Brakhage's de-emphasis of the narrative element allows space for the soundtrack to function in more balanced counterpoint with the visual activity.

Correspondence with James Tenney (1955–64)

Brakhage's musical sensibilities were largely shaped by his friendship with Tenney, who had not only composed the score for *Interim* but had also appeared onscreen and played piano for *Desistfilm*.[11] In the late summer of 1954, Brakhage went to New York, where he shared a small apartment with the musician, who had just been admitted as a pianist at the Juilliard School. Wanting to use pre-existing music by Edgard Varèse and John Cage for two of his recent films, Brakhage arranged a meeting with the celebrated composers and invited Tenney to join them. Cage allowed Brakhage to use selections from his *Sonatas and Interludes* for prepared piano (1946–48), which serves as the soundtrack for the film *In Between* (1955), but Varèse did not own the rights to his percussion piece *Ionisation* (1931), so he had to deny the young filmmaker's request.[12] The significance of the meeting, though, went far beyond the procurement of copyright permission.

Tenney, who was becoming increasingly interested in composition, soon dropped out of the piano program at Juilliard and began private lessons with Chou Wen-Chung, Varèse's chief student. During the same period, he also studied informally with Varèse and Cage, who became his close friends. Brakhage indicates that he would occasionally audit Tenney's lessons, "at first with the idea of searching out a new relationship between image and sound and of, thus, creating a new dimension for the sound track."[13] But the advanced musical discussions had a sobering effect on the filmmaker: "I came to understand that I was not obsessed with sound like I was with vision," admitted Brakhage, who subsequently engaged music for his films with only the utmost

[11] For a detailed discussion of Brakhage's relationship with Tenney, see Eric Smigel, "Metaphors on Vision: James Tenney and Stan Brakhage, 1951–1964", *American Music* 30, no. 1 (2012): 61–100.

[12] The soundtrack for *Way to Shadow Garden* (1954) subsequently became a *musique concrète* essay by Brakhage.

[13] Brakhage, "Letter to Ronna Page", 134.

discretion.[14] "Primarily what I got from [Varèse and Cage] was the inspiration to make silent film," Brakhage remarks.[15] To be clear, Brakhage did not abandon the soundtrack out of any lack of interest in music—on the contrary, as his obsession with vision developed, so did his curiosity for drawing from music as a poetic analogy and structural model for his silent films.[16]

During his most extensive 'silent period' (between the mid-1950s and the mid-1980s), Brakhage created over 200 films, only seven of which contain soundtracks, but he also wrote his most extensive and carefully wrought statements about music. Most of these writings were informed by conversations with Tenney, visual artist Carolee Schneemann (Tenney's partner at the time) and Brakhage's wife, Jane, as the two couples would write letters and travel cross-country to visit one another and discuss their recent work. Their most fruitful exchanges took place in the early 1960s, when Brakhage was shooting *Dog Star Man* (1961–64) and drafting essays about filmmaking that would later be published as *Metaphors on Vision* (1963). At the same time, Tenney had earned a graduate degree at the University of Illinois, where he not only studied composition and electronic music, but also wrote a thesis entitled *Meta + Hodos*, in which he examined how principles of gestalt theory relate to the perception of musical form.

Towards the end of his graduate studies, Tenney composed a tape piece called *Collage No. 1 (Blue Suede)* (1961), which is a *musique concrète* assemblage of Elvis Presley's recording of "Blue Suede Shoes" (1956), the rockabilly song by Carl Perkins. *Collage No. 1* is not simply the playful pastiche of a popular song, but a phenomenological study of the listening process, and it would exert a profound influence on Brakhage's renewed approach to sound.[17] At just under three and a half minutes in duration, the piece has the brevity of a pop song and is cast in four basic sections: the first features various manipulations (splices, reversal of direction, echo enhancement, etc.) of the original recording at a slower tape speed (i.e., in a lower register), rendering the song unrecognisable; the second section adds a layer of manipulations at a faster tape speed (i.e., in a higher register); the third comprises recognisable but jumbled fragments of the song at the original playback speed; and the fourth combines elements from each of the preceding sections.

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[14] Brakhage, "We Are All Burning", *Millennium Film Journal* 47–49 (2007): 30.

[15] Ganguly, "Stan Brakhage", 154.

[16] Brakhage points out, for example, that his editing of *Anticipation of the Night* (1958) was modelled after the rhythmic dimensions of Anton Webern's arrangement of *The Musical Offering* (1935) by J. S. Bach. See Brakhage, "Film and Music", in *Brakhage Scrapbook*, ed. Robert A. Haller (Kingston, NY: Documentext, 1982), 50. Brakhage did not make direct correlations, although he admitted once to editing a film to the temporal specifications of a Bach fugue, which yielded "disastrous" results. See Ganguly, "Stan Brakhage", 155.

[17] This discussion of Tenney's *Collage No. 1* (1961) is drawn from Smigel, "Metaphors on Vision", 76–77. Also see Larry Polansky's analysis in "The Early Music of James Tenney", in *Soundings*, vol. 13, *The Music of James Tenney*, ed. Peter Garland (Santa Fe, NM: Soundings, 1984), 144–46.

The sporadic rumblings that begin the piece assume a different guise when the voice of Elvis becomes recognisable—once the listener comprehends that all the preceding sounds were derived from "Blue Suede Shoes", it becomes clear that one has been hearing the juxtaposition and superimposition of various permutations of fragments from the famous recording in different temporal strata. Since the basic musical material for *Collage No. 1* is a popular recording, its recognition immediately carries a wealth of explicit associations. The sudden engagement of these associations halfway through the work releases a torrent of information, and the entire musical process begins to resemble a complex system of firing synapses that are in the process of constructing a mental image. It is significant that Tenney does not begin with a clear musical subject that is followed by a series of variations, but proceeds from perceptual disorder to relative order. The listener experiences an incomplete process of formulation, the partial emergence of a sonic image. One never hears an entire phrase of the original recording—only, at most, one-second fragments that submerge back into the neural network in the final section of the work. Basically, *Collage No. 1* is a musical deconstruction and reconstruction of the listening experience.

Brakhage responded enthusiastically to Tenney's new work, which in many ways evokes the fragmented movement and varied recurrence of images in his recent films. In the summer of 1961, the filmmaker wrote to his friend that the new tape piece was "the best possible beginning . . . for really SOUND work I can imagine—beginning with the roots, what it all comes from."[18] Although he had been apprehensive about including soundtracks for his films after meeting Varèse and Cage, Brakhage expressed a renewed interest in the relationship between film and music, and was eager to collaborate with Tenney in some fashion. "I wish we could do some good SIGHT*SOUND work together," he implores his friend, "or at the very least a bit of jawing."[19]

After graduating from the University of Illinois, Tenney began working with digital synthesis at Bell Laboratories in New Jersey, and Brakhage repeatedly entreated his friend to a sustained discussion on the relationship between film and music. "I hope we can somehow arrive at a correspondence," Brakhage writes: "I have some tremendous problems sound-wise to work out of my system, so that I can either work into making some really fine sound tracks or give up altogether."[20] A few months later, after receiving tapes from Tenney, Brakhage remained persistent: "I wanted to be working out sound-vision problems, letting you make scores for films, making films that needed sound, etc., working together with you. The new piece [*Blue Suede*] really comes the closest to any possibility I've yet heard of having new-depth and non-interference with vision combination I've yet heard."[21]

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[18] Brakhage to Tenney, 29 July 1961. James Tenney fonds, Correspondence files [S00329], 1998-038/001 (12), Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University Libraries, York.

[19] Brakhage to Tenney, 29 July 1961; ibid.

[20] Brakhage to Tenney, 10 November 1961; ibid.

[21] Brakhage to Tenney, 24 February 1962; ibid.

Before such a correspondence materialised, Brakhage began to address these "sound-vision problems" in *Blue Moses* (1962), which is perhaps the most unusual film in his oeuvre. Brakhage not only used a soundtrack for the first time in five years he also wrote a script for an actor who, speaking directly to the camera, delivers a self-reflexive text about the illusory nature of filmmaking. "It explicitly postulates an epistemological principle," Sitney explains: "that there can be no cinematic image without a film-maker to take it and that the presence, or even the existence, of the film-maker transforms what he films."[22] The audial monologue is synchronous with the visual presence of the protagonist, but Brakhage sets the speech and images into contrapuntal layers, similar in effect to Tenney's polyphonic deconstruction of "Blue Suede Shoes". The resulting audiovisual collage positions the medium of cinema as a reverberant theatre showcasing the mind's whirring thought process.

In spring 1963, still eager to explore "sound-vision problems" beyond spoken narration, Brakhage visited Bell Laboratories, where Tenney had been working with digital synthesis, and they subsequently undertook the correspondence that Brakhage had been requesting.[23] They began their dialogue by exploring how phenomenological experiences of sight and sound might intersect, but were careful to avoid simplistic analogies. "I'm sure it is a mistake," Brakhage cautions, "to try to make any 'one-to-one correlation between audial and visual dimensions' or to consider any connection between them 'an inherent one, *subjectively*.'"[24] Identifying both media as "continuity arts", they discuss temporal elements of rhythm and form as they relate to physiological processes. "The place to start—the first fact—in sound/film relationship is *time*: rhythm, tempo, etc.," Tenney posits. "Our perceptions of the two (sound and film) may have this in common, that they both involve a kinesthetic response, a neuromuscular reaction, imitating—in some abbreviated, attenuated, perhaps symbolic way—the perceived process."[25] Like Brakhage, Tenney conceived of artistic form not as a fixed structure, but as an organic and continuous process that models the act of perception. Accordingly, they located a meaningful connection between sound and cinema not in the direct correlation of tone, texture, timbre and so on, but in the psychophysiological response to changes in such parameters. They also agreed that each medium should maintain independent integrity as an art form—that is, the sight-sound relationship should not be restricted to non-diegetic "mood music" or diegetic "lip-sync", both of which Tenney dismissed as "an awful narrowing of the range of possibilities".[26]

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[22] Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 163.

[23] For the entire correspondence, see Stan Brakhage and James Tenney, "Sound and Cinema", *Film Culture* 29 (1963): 81–102.

[24] Brakhage and Tenney, "Sound and Cinema", 86.

[25] Ibid., 90–91.

[26] Ibid., 98. One line of inquiry that Brakhage and Tenney did not resolve in their correspondence concerns the sonic equivalent to hypnagogic vision or visual hallucinations, which are such prominent elements in Brakhage's films. In his final letter of the exchange, Brakhage acknowledges the challenge, if not the futility, of accessing subconscious experience: "I cannot commission mind's eye-and-ear processes without

Isolated Experiments with Sound (1965–85)

Brakhage's first soundtrack following the "Sound and Cinema" correspondence was for a black and white film called *Fire of Waters*, which he completed in 1965. The title was derived from a postcard Brakhage received from poet Robert Kelly, who wrote: "The truth of the matter is this, that man lives in a fire of waters and will live eternally in the first taste."[27] Brakhage devised a physiological interpretation of Kelly's cryptic statement: "the body is mostly water and is firing constantly to keep itself going".[28] The film depicts a suburban neighbourhood, rapidly cut with blinking streetlights and lightning flashes, which serve as the rhythmic foundation for the entire film. For a soundtrack, Brakhage created a *musique concrète* assemblage featuring the sounds of wind, birdcalls and a recording of his wife giving birth, all of which were subjected to the alteration of tape speed. The distorted sounds, which vacillate ambiguously between intelligibility and unintelligibility, yield an effect that was in accord with Brakhage's psychodramatic program: "It definitely sounds like a dog in somebody's backyard in the drama sense of that scene, yelping in pain," Brakhage notes. "It does actually carry the sense of a terror beyond that."[29] Brakhage was pleased that a soundtrack composed of such primal sounds could evoke the sensation he was seeking, either on account of, or in spite of, their referential qualities, which for him affirmed the powerful presence of the subconscious.

Almost a decade after completing *Fire of Waters*, Brakhage undertook his next sound film, *The Stars Are Beautiful* (1974), which he describes as a "philosophical" enterprise.[30] As he had done with *Blue Moses*, Brakhage resorted to spoken narration, but now to articulate a metaphysical program consisting of several creation myths invented by the filmmaker and his spouse, Jane. Brakhage's voice is heard as images vary among the sky, foliage and domestic activities of his family. The narration, however, is occasionally interrupted by diegetic audio of his wife and children who are depicted on screen, which marks Brakhage's first use of synchronous sound other than speech. While the disembodied voice lends the delivery of the text an air of omnipresent authority, the diegetic sounds initially seem mundane by comparison. Over time, though, the repeated juxtaposition of disembodied recitation and embodied activity meld into a holoarchy, a

altering them in a way which would abnegate my concerns in this matter"; Brakhage and Tenney, "Sound and Cinema", 101. In *Meta + Hodos*, Tenney introduces a perceptual category called the "subjective set", which refers to a group of factors—including past experience, learning, habit and association—that a listener would bring from having heard previous music. See James Tenney, *Meta + Hodos: A Phenomenology of 20th-Century Musical Materials and an Approach to the Study of Form* (Lebanon, NH: Frog Peak Music, 1986), 43.

[27] Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 162.

[28] Ibid., 162.

[29] Ibid., 163.

[30] Brakhage, quoted in Bruce R. McPherson, ed., *Essential Brakhage: Selected Writings on Filmmaking* (Kingston, NY: Documentext/McPherson, 2001), 227.

union of elements that co-exist without hierarchical ordering, an effect that is facilitated by the counterpoint of image and sound.

Return to the Soundtrack (1986–98)

After *The Stars Are Beautiful*, Brakhage did not employ another soundtrack for a dozen years, during which time he produced a formidable array of silent films that figure among his most extensive visual studies, including the monumental *Roman Numeral Series* (1979–80) and *Arabic Numeral Series* (1980–82). Then between 1986 and 1998 he produced fourteen films with sound, an unprecedented deluge of audio that seems to have been prompted by several factors. In 1987, Brakhage went through a painful divorce, ending a relationship that had lasted thirty years and marking a radical change in his living and working environment as he moved from the mountains of Lump Gulch to the city of Boulder. The emotional intensity of this personal crisis engendered feelings of nostalgia, which led him to re-engage psychodramatic themes in his creative work and re-examine the primal sight of childhood. "I think I was seeking ground," Brakhage explains: "going back to my beginnings, to psychodrama, sound and collaboration, which are all aspects of my early filmmaking."[31] Welcoming the opportunity to assuage loneliness with some energising social interaction, he began working with composers Joel Haertling and Rick Corrigan of Architect's Office, an experimental music ensemble in Boulder, with whom he created the epic *Faustfilm* series (1987–89).

Brakhage cut several of his films from this period directly to pre-existing compositions, another striking shift in his practice, and his selection of music reveals much about his interest in the psychophysiological connection of sight and sound. *Kindering* (1987), for example, is Brakhage's setting of a haunting piece of *musique concrète* by Haertling (Figure 5.1). The composition consists of a child (Haertling's son) casually singing along with random orchestral recordings that were available in the studio, including the overture to Handel's *Messiah* and excerpts of a late Romantic symphony and chorus, all of which were subject to electronic modification. "[Haertling] evoked for me a quality of childhood that I hadn't really felt for a long time," Brakhage writes, "so I photographed my grandchildren with his music in mind and then edited the pictures directly to the music."[32] The film depicts Brakhage's young grandchildren playing in a backyard, with visual distortions of frame, focus, and speed. At one point, as the music swells, Brakhage's camera rests on the image of one of the children swinging what appears to be a long branch, as if conducting the recorded orchestra, an arresting visual cue that directs attention to the music. The portentous quality of the symphonic music is tempered by

[31] Ganguly, "Stan Brakhage", 152.

[32] Ibid., 155.

FIGURE 5.1 Stan Brakhage, film strip from *Kindering* (1987). Courtesy of the Estate of Stan Brakhage and Fred Camper (www.fredcamper.com).

the naïve vocalising of the child, and the soundtrack lends the filmed grandchildren a profundity that is alternately playful and foreboding.

Another composition by Haertling that Brakhage set to film is *I . . . Dreaming* (1988), a musical collage of such melancholic Stephen Foster songs as "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair", "Linger in Blissful Repose" and "Come with Thy Sweet Voice Again". The film, which Brakhage describes as his "self-in-crisis portrait", depicts images of himself with his shadow repeatedly settling down in repose, children playing in a living room and static shots of chairs, pillows and cushions illuminated by streaks of sunlight.[33] Scratched into the film at various points are isolated words of yearning that reinforce the passing song lyrics: "sigh", "kiss for kiss", "night loving", "see the dark void", "lured by dreaming", "sweet spirit", "true", "my heart", "waiting", "longing" and so on. Although the recorded songs are severely edited, there is enough continuity to preserve the musical integrity of entire phrases. Consequently, the soundtrack lends the film an unmistakable nostalgia, made more palpable by the audible crackling and hisses of the original LP recordings.

By Brakhage's own account, the most compelling of his sound-to-film projects was *Passage Through: A Ritual* (1990), which was the filmmaker's response to a composition by Philip Corner. The complete title of Corner's work is *Through the Mysterious Barricade (after F. Couperin) LUMEN 1 (for Stan Brakhage)*, which is itself an homage to Brakhage's *The Riddle of Lumen*, a silent film from 1972 that had recently inspired the composer. The solo piano version of this piece is a minimalist meditation on a rondeau from a keyboard suite by François Couperin ("Les Barricades Mystérieuses", from *Ordre 6ème de clavecin*, 1717), which Corner recorded live in a New York City loft. A high-pitched emergency signal from the street quietly permeates the recording, which lends an element of *musique concrète* to an otherwise acoustic performance and serves as the generative source for an extended piano improvisation. Corner plays a constantly varied tremolo in counterpoint to the signal until Couperin's original music emerges, or "breaks through", in the final ten minutes of the forty-two-minute piece, and in such a slow tempo as to render it almost unrecognisable.

Brakhage's setting of Corner's mesmerising work, which required meticulous editing, consists primarily of a visual drone of flickering black leader from which sudden flashes of photographed images emerge. Just as the sustained electronic signal and tremolos in Corner's work allow the listener to attend to the micro-acoustic qualities of sound, the extended footage of black leader permits the viewer to focus on the subtle variations of light that are the essence of all visual experience: "There's a shimmering of light all through and there are little sprocket holes in the black leader that are like stars of light," Brakhage explains. "The optic nerve-endings of the viewers interact all the time with this ephemera of light. The film proves that even with black leader you can't ever defeat the light."[34] In combination, the images and soundtrack of *Passage Through: A Ritual*

[33] Ibid., 156.

[34] Ibid., 156

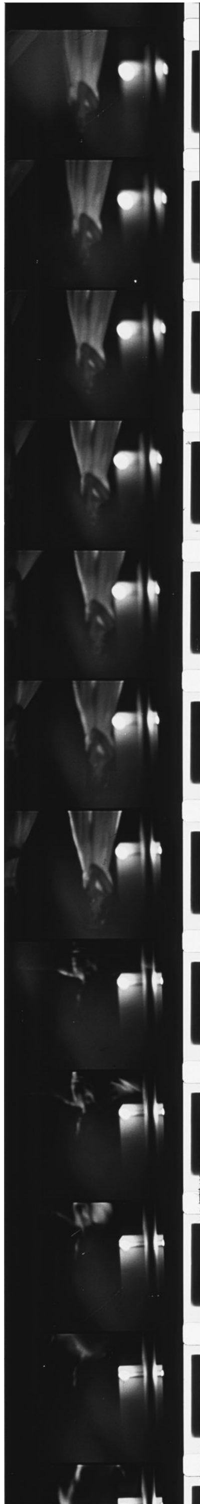

FIGURE 5.2 Stan Brakhage, film strip from *I . . . Dreaming* (1988). Courtesy of the Estate of Stan Brakhage and Fred Camper (www.fredcamper.com).

present the sight and sound of emergent consciousness as a creative expression of one's own physiology, in which the electric buzz of the nervous system is set in counterpoint to the drone of circulating blood.

The following year, Brakhage completed *Christ Mass Sex Dance* (1991), another sound film that was designed to model a function of the perceptual process (Figure 5.2). The film was edited to *Collage No. 1 ("Blue Suede")*, Tenney's first piece of *musique concrète* that had inspired Brakhage to undertake "sight-sound" research thirty years earlier. Brakhage's initial intention was to make a children's film based on footage from rehearsals of the annual Christmas production of Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Nutcracker* (1892) in Boulder, but the resulting images suggested to him a more prurient theme. "The instant I got back the film from the lab," Brakhage recalls, "I thought of Tenney's *Blue Suede*, which is a collage of Elvis Presley's 'Blue Suede Shoes' with the words broken up into a kind of sexual grunting, and it seemed perfectly suited to it, so I cut the film to the music."[35] Responding to the collaged aspect of Tenney's piece, which he felt correlated to cinematic splicing, Brakhage superimposed six rolls of film in "celebration of the balletic restraints of adolescent sexuality". "It was an extremely complex work to make," Brakhage admits, "but for me what it does very simply is give you something truer to a normal thought process."[36]

Brakhage continued his exploration of perceptual processes in *Crack Glass Eulogy* (1992), a sound film with music composed by Corrigan (Figure 5.3). Brakhage describes the film as "a nostalgic envisionment of city living—the potential shards of memory seen as if always on the verge of cutting the mind to pieces."[37] The images consist of a variety of aerial and ground shots of the city, and glimpses of sunlight reflect off various natural and artificial surfaces (such as glass, concrete, water, clouds) in a manner that frequently makes the objects indistinguishable from each other. The first thirty seconds and last ninety seconds of the film are silent, with the music emerging from and submerging into the images. The soundtrack is *Requiem*, a tape piece by Corrigan that features erratic pulsing of soft electronic tones at different pitch levels, registers, dynamics and durations. Because Corrigan limits the pitches to a diatonic collection, the distribution of individual notes gradually coalesce into a rhythmically stammering drone.[38]

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[35] Ibid.155.

[36] Stan Brakhage, "Fearful Symmetry", *Millennium Film Journal* 47–49 (2007): 119.

[37] Stan Brakhage, comments on *Crack Glass Eulogy* provided for the Canyon Cinema catalogue, accessed 17 December 2016, http://canyoncinema.com/catalog/film/?i=333.

[38] Stan Brakhage, comments on *Boulder Blues and Pearls and* ... provided for the Canyon Cinema catalogue, accessed 17 December 2016, http://canyoncinema.com/catalog/film/?i=316. Brakhage uses the same *Requiem*, along with another work by Corrigan, *Four Percussive Movements* (2012), as a composite soundtrack for *Boulder Blues and Pearls and* ... (1992). The film depicts urban and rural scenes in juxtaposition and superimposition, creating unanticipated correlations among natural and artificial objects, with hand-painted segments often serving as optical passageways. "Peripheral envisionment of daily life as the mind has it," is how Brakhage describes the film, "a terrifying ecstasy of (hand-painted) synapting nerve ends backfiring from thought's grip of life."

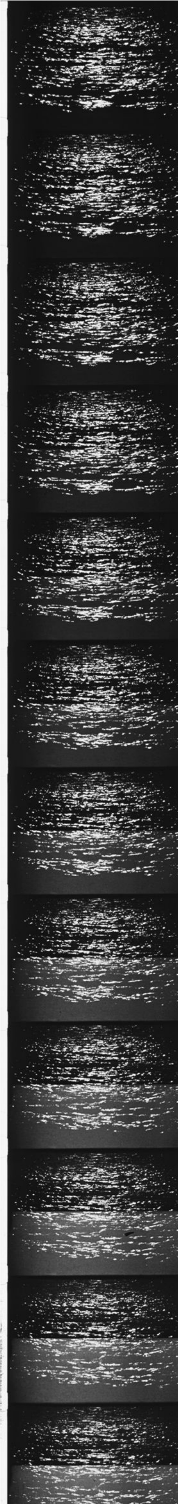

FIGURE 5.3 Stan Brakhage, film strip from *Christ Mass Sex Dance* (1991). Courtesy of the Estate of Stan Brakhage and Fred Camper (www.fredcamper.com).

For his last sound project, *"…" Reel 5* (1998), Brakhage intensified his study of closed-eye and hypnagogic vision by scratching and painting directly onto the film (Figure 5.4). The editing procedure was again determined by the soundtrack, which is another pre-existing composition by Tenney, *Flocking* (1993), a thirteen-minute work for two pianos tuned a quarter-tone apart. The piece begins with quiet, sporadic bursts of staccato pitches that gradually increase in duration and loudness. Although the tempo seems to fluctuate, there is no articulation of a steady pulse and the rhythmic relationship among the pitches constantly varies, so the perceived temporal irregularity is more accurately the result of changes in density. As *Flocking* progresses, the seemingly scattered pitches "flock" towards melodic and harmonic configurations, and the piece ends with wisps of lyricism. Not unlike the constructivist principle of *Collage No. 1*, Tenney explores the processes by which a listener assembles disparate elements and separates conjoined elements, but here in a purely abstract manner, without the external reference of a recorded pop song.

Visually, Brakhage's *"…" Reel 5* is also completely devoid of the external references to photographed objects. For the first two minutes of the film, Brakhage allows Tenney's music to sound alone, accompanied only by black leader, before the hand-painted, scratched and scraped abstractions begin to appear in rapid succession. Rather than synchronising the visual and sonic gestures, Brakhage edited the images in rhythmic counterpoint to the soundtrack; the film and music variously anticipate, imitate, modify and contrast with each other in a complex dialogue. Ultimately, like virtually all of Brakhage's sound films, *"…" Reel 5* affirms that the physiological impulses of sight and sound exist in an open field of perception, where visual and audial signals never cease.

Return to Silence

Whether by the presence or absence of a soundtrack, music played a critical role in Brakhage's aesthetic stance on audiovisual counterpoint, but *"…" Reel 5* would prove to be his final sound project. "I think I've come to the end of my infatuation with music and film, and film being a close corollary of music," Brakhage states. "I have to now find out what it is that film can do that's purely film."[39] It is fitting that the music for his first and last soundtracks was composed by Tenney, his close friend with whom he explored the correlation of sound and cinema with the greatest passion and intensity. "I know I have Jim often in mind when making a film," Brakhage admitted when he re-engaged with soundtracks in the mid-1980s, "and I suppose he's sometimes thinking of me when he composes".[40] Repaying the tribute to his lifelong friend, Tenney says that Brakhage possessed "the most powerful personality and most brilliant mind I have ever encountered,

[39] Ganguly, "Stan Brakhage", 161.
[40] Brakhage, "James Tenney", *Perspectives of New Music* 25, nos. 1–2 (1987): 470.

FIGURE 5.4 Stan Brakhage, film strip from *"..." Reel 5* (1998). Courtesy of the Estate of Stan Brakhage and Fred Camper (www.fredcamper.com).

and I believe he was one of the greatest artists of the twentieth century, in any medium. In his mature works what we see is a visual music the likes of which had never yet been heard."[41] With his portrayal of a first-person perspective of under-determined images and his soundtracks drawing from under-determined sounds, Brakhage's audiovisual counterpoint persuades viewing auditors to attend to their own embodied imagination, where the flickering light and humming sound are in perpetual counterpoint.

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[41] Tenney, "Brakhage Memoir", in David E. James, ed., *Stan Brakhage: Filmmaker* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2005), 60.

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6 Discontinuities and Resynchronisations

THE USE OF SOUND IN POLISH EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA FROM THE 1930s TO THE 1980s

Daniel Muzyczuk

THIS IS A story about exploring margins in times when there were no maps covering the whole territory and what was at hand were only a few directions left by previous visitors; a story of paradoxical lands that move without anyone noticing, only to be found when you look for something totally different; a story of discontinuity or discontinuities caused by war, technical developments and changes in cultural production. Bringing these separate moments back together is made possible by adopting a perspective that does not follow the history of a certain medium, but instead traces the common goal of artists, filmmakers and composers.

Even though they came into being in different institutional contexts, the three case studies presented below share a common approach in which the act of creating a sound film becomes a form of research into the meaning of audiovisual synchronisation. The protagonists of these stories are also representative of three distinct phenomenological dispositions and modes of work. Although the methods of these three groups emerged from larger developments in the field within which they were working, the unique position they occupied was based on a specific understanding of the semantic role of audiovisual synchronisation. We will see a discontinuous trajectory shared by the protagonists of pioneering Polish audiovisual art, a path that started with semantics, continued through cybernetics and ended in structuralism.

Franciszka and Stefan Themerson: Synaesthetic Sight and Sound Co-ordinators

Even the search for origins stumbles upon missing pieces. One of the first experimental films in Poland, *RC—Rhythmical Calculations* (*OR—Obliczenia rytmiczne*, 1934) by avant-garde writer Jalu Kurek, is lost. The same fate is shared by four films by Franciszka and Stefan Themerson: *Pharmacy* (*Apteka*, 1930), *Europa* (1931–32), *Moment Musical* (*Drobiazg muzyczny*, 1933) and *Short Circuit* (*Zwarcie*, 1935). Thus we can reconstruct these first attempts only on the basis of written statements, a few surviving stills and reviews and three works made between 1937 and 1945. It is highly significant that even in the titles of these lost works we can trace musical vocabulary. This indicates that experimental film in Poland was born from the same spirit as the works of Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter, films described by Themerson, according to the German terminology, as optical music.[1]

Franciszka (1907–1988) and Stefan (1910–1988) Themerson were second-generation artists of the Polish avant-garde. They started working together shortly after meeting in 1929. Franciszka trained as an artist and graduated with distinction from the Warsaw Academy, while Stefan studied physics and architecture. Before emigrating first to Paris in 1937 and then to London in 1940–42, they were occupied with painting, photography, writing (mainly children's books) and filmmaking. Between 1931 and 1937, the Themersons made experimental films, started a filmmakers' cooperative in Warsaw and edited and produced two volumes of the journal *f.a.* (art film). Stefan also continued his involvement with experimental photography, for which he invented new techniques. During the Second World War they both enlisted with the Polish Army.

Their films were rooted in a photographic device that they built in the early 1930s: a table with a camera placed under a sheet of tracing paper, on which different objects could be placed and photographed from below. The table was also equipped with movable light sources. This device enabled them to take photograms with a similar effect to those archived independently by Christian Schad or Man Ray. In his book *Urge to Create Visions*, Stefan Themerson (hereafter referred to as Themerson) described the photograms not as representations or abstractions but as concrete reality:

> You are going to call it an abstract picture.
> And it isn't.
> It is something unique.
> It is a photogram.
> It doesn't represent anything.

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[1] See Stefan Themerson, *Urge to Create Visions* (London: Gaberbocchus, 1983).

It doesn't abstract anything from anything.
It is just what it is.
It is reality itself.[2]

Since the device was able to take several shots of the same object with different light, it was only a matter of time before its creators started working on films based on these images. Both *Pharmacy* and *Moment Musical* were based on photograms. The former could be considered a surrealist film in which strange objects come to life; the latter an attempt to test the relation between pre-recorded music and the language of montage. The third of the lost films, *Europa*, was based on a poem by Anatol Stern and featured filmed images without the use of the photogram technique, thus appearing more figurative than the other works. According to Themerson's notes, the music for *Short Circuit* was written by Witold Lutosławski, then a very young avant-garde composer who would later become one of the most important figures in modern music in the People's Republic of Poland. The film was commissioned by the Institute of Social Affairs in Warsaw as part of a social campaign to increase awareness of the dangers of high-voltage electricity. The photograms used for this purpose were taken by a modified machine able to take pictures of a full human figure, which therefore had to be placed vertically. A set of semi-abstract images formed the basis for the composer's score, which was synchronised with the film afterwards. Tomasz Majewski notes that Themerson's collaborations with composers were often underpinned by common goals:

> The subtle affinity which Lutosławski felt between his experiments and "photograms in motion" consisted of replacing a priori rules concerning the construction of forms, limiting the area of the audience's anticipation by the free structure of analogies and series unfolding in time. A few years later Stefan Themerson was to discover the same principle in Kurt Schwitters' *Ursonata* in which the recitation of sounds reveals its own melodic or rhythmical structure without any additional musical background.[3]

Since both *Short Circuit* and *Moment Musical* are lost, Themerson's aim may be discerned from his writings. In *Urge to Create Visions*, he noted that when cinema became audiovisual, a victory of words over image was achieved: sound in film supplemented vision such that it became the organising force for the images. According to the artist, words also completely changed the vocabulary of montage. In his opinion, this was why René Clair, Charlie Chaplin and Sergei Eisenstein were initially against speech in

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[2] Ibid., 57.
[3] Tomasz Majewski, "The Themersons: Kinetic Collages", in *The Themersons and the Avant-Garde*, ed. Paweł Polit (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2013), 73–74.

movies.[4] For them, as for Themerson, music was an ally, whereas spoken words created a tension that always represented the victory of literature over cinema. Thus Themerson's cinema was an attempt to create a pure audiovisual experience. Both *Moment Musical* and *Short Circuit* should be treated as exercises in a new vocabulary that was not based on symbolic representations: rather, audiovisuality was a language in its own right and there was no need for mediation through words. In her essay on their work, Agnieszka Karpowicz notes that "[m]ultimedia experiments situating the work at the intersection of the art of word, image and sound are also an investigation of the possibility of translating the audible into the visible and the visible into the tonal. The literary, the visual and the musical function as equivalent, translatable entities co-creating the semantics of the total work."[5] Themerson offers additional means for analysing their films and methods in his novels. For example, in *Bayamus and the Theatre of Semantic Poetry* (1949), he describes semantic poetry in musical terms:

> You may read horizontally the melody of this poem, but you may also take each of its words and score it vertically for your whole intellectual orchestra, you may give each of them the flesh of exact definition; instead of allowing them to evoke the clichés stored in your mind, you may try to find the true reality to which every word points, and that is what I call Semantic Poetry.[6]

Here, Themerson clearly explains that it is not the symbolic level of a semantic poem that is predominant, and his use of musical vocabulary in describing how semantic poetry operates is striking.

A similar use of musical terminology is made in relation to the Themersons' audiovisual works, where translatability without the use of words as vessels of symbolism is enabled by synchronism. In one of his letters, for instance, Themerson gives a concise description of the aims of their audiovisual films:

> It is the sight-and-sound problem that I am again interested in. Bits of the films I made 20 or 30 years ago contained what I would call "pictures-to-music" essays. Well, most of the films of that kind were picture-to-music (translating music into picture and not vice-versa) and most, if not all, used non-cinematic devices, from Rimington's colour organ to (and past) Scriabin's *Tastiera per Luce*, aimed at a picture-to-music way of handling the problem.[7]

[4] Themerson, *Urge to Create Visions*, 41.

[5] Agnieszka Karpowicz, "Stefan Themerson i 'literackie multimedia'. Słowo-obraz-dźwięk", *HA!ART* 26 (2007): 15.

[6] Themerson, *Bayamus and the Theatre of Semantic Poetry* (London: Gaberbocchus, 1965), 42.

[7] Themerson, "Notes on Synæsthetic Sight and Sound Co-ordinator: A Letter to Mr. Ernest Lindgren, 1957", in *The Films of Franciszka and Stefan Themerson* (Warsaw and London: Ujazdowski Castle–Lux and Centre for Contemporary Art, 2007), 14.

This line of inquiry is evident in their final attempt at audiovisual film work, *The Eye and the Ear*, made in 1945. This ten-minute film is based on Karol Szymanowski's five song settings of poetry by Julian Tuwim entitled *Słopiewnie* (*Word Songs*, op. 46b; 1921 for piano and voice, 1928 for voice and orchestra). While the music is a cycle of five songs, the film is divided into four parts, each of which employs different methods of translation between sight and sound. In the first part, *Green Words*, the vocal part has been replaced by solo violin and the words of the poem are visualised by images of a forest, leaves and water. Offering a very interesting take on synaesthesia, in which the symbolism of the narration is represented by images, this part could be considered as a kind of impressionistic poetry. The second part is entitled *St Francis*. Here, the analysis of sound-image synchronisation goes further. The geometric shapes created with the use of photograms strictly follow the vocal part. *Rowan Towers*, the third part of the cycle, is an extension of this method and was described by Themerson as follows:

> Each instrument of the orchestra is represented by a simple geometrical form which changes its shape up and down according to the pitch of the note. Shapes representing different instruments were superimposed by multi-exposure, frame by frame. Crescendo, diminuendo, staccato, pizzicato, all had their visual counterpart. The vocal part was in "unison" with a horizontal line in which a "wrinkle", whose position depended on the pitch of the corresponding note, spread symmetrically to left and right.[8]

In part because of the geometrical character of the images, *Rowan Towers* bears the strongest resemblance to the 'optical music' films of Eggeling and Richter. Although it appears to work on an abstract level, the title suggests that in fact the visualisation of the music is related to architecture. The last part, entitled *Wanda*, brings together all the previous methods and underlines the lack of a border between abstract and concrete imagery, as Themerson explains: "Perfectly circular photogram-waves, aroused from the centre of the screen by each note of the music, moving both outwards and inward, satisfy 3 motifs at once: the melancholy mood of the song (rhythm) + shapes found in nature (waves) + the artifice of geometry (photogramatic treatment of waves in water)."[9] The reason for creating *The Eye and the Ear* can be traced to an article written by the artist back in 1928, in which he contemplates the possibilities offered by radio in helping fully to understand the new ways in which the medium of film could be used. Here, he divides the uses of radio and film into three parallel modes:

(1) Film images based on story and song, where the story is communicated by words.

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[8] Themerson, *Urge to Create Visions*, 92.

[9] Ibid.

(2) "Optical music" and instrumental music without story.
(3) Optical and acoustic sensations based on a specific, abstract approach to reality, where the moments that usually escape attention are underlined.[10]

Themerson's third kind of radio usage strangely predates the idea of reduced listening described years later by Pierre Schaeffer. But here he goes further, imagining a machine for what he calls "radio-phono-vision", which would be a domestic apparatus with headset and stereoscopic glasses; a device made for the ultimate sight and sound experience. This apparatus would serve only to playback pre-recorded films, whereas another imagined instrument, the "synæsthetic sight and sound co-ordinator", would be capable of the real-time composing of audiovisual films:

> It is a kind of keyboard capable of producing optical arrangements of space on a kind of screen and—at the same time—producing musical notes, which would possess a one-to-one relationship with the screen. . . . Things that may have some bearing not only on cinematography but also on experimental psychology, communication theory, and it struck me that they carry an idea which may lead to establishing some basic principles on which a suitable convention of representing sound by sight and vice-versa can be built, a convention without which the existing attempts for enabling blind people to orientate themselves in space cannot solve their problems satisfactorily. Such trials as I have made without actually building the "co-ordinator", indicate that there is something there that should be looked at more carefully and verified.[11]

The machine would be able to work in both directions of translation, turning a film into music and the other way round: the ultimate point of an inquiry separately conducted by people such as Scriabin, Arseny Avraamov, Daphne Oram and Evgeny Murzin. As with the "radio-phono-vision" player, however, this device was never built.

According to Michel Chion, even in the 1940s, synchronisation was the main affective tool of cinema:

> That sound and image were heard and seen like a couple of perfectly matched dancers was a spectacle in itself. Texts written at the time bear witness to this state of mind. So do the films, especially the musical ones, which exalted synchronism as such, showing violinists or banjo players whose every visual gesture provoked a distinct sound on the soundtrack.[12]

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[10] Stefan Themerson, "Możliwości radiowe", *Wiek XX* (Warsaw), 9 February 1928, 23.

[11] Themerson, "Notes on Synæsthetic Sight and Sound Co-ordinator", 14–15.

[12] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 64.

The Themersons went further than just adding an additional layer to the vision. *The Eye and the Ear*, semantic poetry and the idea for a synaesthetic sight and sound co-ordinator are all based on an act of audiovisual translation and the awareness that this act is not neutral, but allows additional aspects to form new meaning for the work. Through semantic poetry, one is able to communicate clearly without any noise by replacing words with their exact definitions. With film technology, the Themersons could create, by the sole act of translation, a message that is more open to different meanings than the original vision. As we shall see, this was a condition for the respective positions taken by other filmmaking groups working in Poland at the time.

The discontinuity between the Themersons' work and the wave of new filmmaking approaches during the 1960s and 1970s is clear to see. The Second World War and the influence of the socialist-realism doctrine on creative life helped to sideline abstract and less politically determined artistic approaches and film production. In fact, between 1950 and 1957, most of the modernist art (even made by artists supporting communist states) that did not follow the direct guidelines for an artwork's structure and content, was considered suspicious. Accordingly, when the Thermersons moved to London, they lost their motivation for filmmaking and decided instead to focus on publishing, setting up the Gaberbocchus Press in 1948. However, Aleksander Ford, one of the most powerful film directors in the People's Republic of Poland, wrote them a letter in which he expressed his intention of bringing them back in order to rebuild the Polish film industry.[13] When, in their reply, the filmmakers asked if they would be able to continue their audiovisual research, Ford answered in the negative because he was aiming for a new political cinema that would be instrumental in introducing socialism. As a result, their films and writings fell into obscurity and were neither seen nor discussed. The thaw after Stalin's death, however, initiated a new politics of culture and science in Poland, opening the doors for less ideologically involved creativity. Abstraction became a propaganda tool for showing that the freedom of the individual lay at the heart of communism and that every type of art could flourish within the emergent people's state.

Polish Radio Experimental Studio: "We Don't Experiment Here. We Just Work Here."

One of the most spectacular enterprises of the era, and a symbol of the new hope, was the establishment of the Polish Radio Experimental Studio (PRES).[14] Under the guise of a facility that was supposed to work mainly for radio and television, its young founder, the musicologist Józef Patkowski, in fact embraced a more complex set of ideas. He

[13] See *The Films of Franciszka and Stefan Themerson*.

[14] The statement "We don't experiment here. We just work here" is attributed to Bogusław Schaeffer, quoted in Michał Libera, "Tu się nie eksperymentuje. Tu się po prostu pracuje", in *Studio Eksperyment*, ed. Magda Roszkowska and Bogna Świątkowska (Warsaw: Bęc Zmiana, 2012), 55.

convinced the state to acquire expensive equipment that would forge the way for the birth of Polish electroacoustic music. With state-of-the-art technology and two experienced engineers, PRES was able to meet the needs of composers from a variety of backgrounds, encouraging research into tape music in particular. Aside from the explosion of creativity in new sounds and graphic scores that occurred at the studio, the space also encouraged fruitful developments in experimental film. One of the first movies to be scored in the studio was *The Silent Star* (Kurt Maetzig, 1960, later entitled *First Spaceship on Venus*), a science fiction mega-production based on Stanisław Lem's novel *The Astronauts* (1951).[15] Unusual abstract sounds were used to emphasise the atmosphere of space travel and futuristic technology, a soundtrack that may well have been inspired directly by Lem's own literary descriptions. In the film, scientists attempt to decode a recording on a "mysterious spool" made from material alien to Earth. Lem's description of the discovery leaves no doubt as to the spool's sonic character: "Indeed, the wire was magnetized, as if on its whole length electrical vibrations were saved, creating a unique interplanetary letter. It looked like the way of recording sounds on a steel tape, formerly practised in the radio and television."[16]

By a stroke of luck, those who remained in the service of Polish Radio were used to recording *musique concrète* on tape. With the help of Krzysztof Szlifirski and Eugeniusz Rudnik, composer Andrzej Markowski enriched the film with modulated sounds, which the decoding machine transformed into the spoken names of the elements. The treatment was simple: the recorded human voice was modulated, allowing composers to simulate the tuning of devices. The mechanistic qualities remained, evoking the uncanny character of the encounter with the unknown. Since the image depicted an interior full of screens and futuristic equipment, with the spool being turned in the centre of the room on a specially constructed playback device, the audience is encouraged to believe that the sounds are being reproduced with the use of the advanced technology. Louis Niebur used the term "syncretic acousmêtre" for this method, which is frequently employed in early science fiction movies.[17] The syncretic aspect of the film is a combination of synchronisation and synthesis, which builds a relationship between sound and image. In the words of Chion, synchresis is "the spontaneous and irresistible weld produced between a particular auditory phenomenon and visual phenomenon when they occur at the same time. This join results independently of any rational logic."[18] The *acousmêtre* is a result of electroacoustic research and is based on vocabulary developed by Schaeffer. It is an invisible object which lies at the source of acousmatic sound. The notion of *acousmêtre* is used

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[15] For a more detailed inquiry into connections between Stanisław Lem and *musique concrète*, see Daniel Muzyczuk, "His Master's Voice on the Magnetic Tape", in *Pole Reports From Space*, CD-ROM (Warsaw: Bołt Records, 2014), 4.

[16] Stanisław Lem, *The Astronauts* (Warsaw: Agora SA, 2014).

[17] Louis Niebur, *Special Sound: The Creation and Legacy of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 12.

[18] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 63.

by Chion in his analysis of horror movies, where withholding the source of disturbing sounds is crucial to the plot. By "syncretic acousmêtre", we should therefore understand the synthetic effect caused by seeing futuristic machinery and hearing synthetic sounds at the same moment, which leads to the unconscious reasoning that the phenomena are connected. This effect, frequently called "sound of the future" by the apologists of early research at PRES, became a trademark of the soundtrack production of the studio. After *The Silent Star*, science-fiction film production became a frequent focus for composers working at the studio, and this also acted as an interesting way of facilitating abstract music's acceptance into the mainstream. A similar story happened in Great Britain and the United States, where the BBC Radiophonic Workshop and Louis and Bebe Barron were respectively working to supply cinema with all the sounds of future computers, aliens and space travel.[19]

An experimental film by Tadeusz Makarczyński from 1957 entitled *Life is Beautiful* (*Życie jest piękne*) offers an example of a very different film score by Markowski. The first Polish work created using found footage, the film is based on the contrast between sight and sound. For example, a sequence depicting emaciated prisoners in concentration camps is juxtaposed with popular songs like the French "C'est ci bon" (Henri Betti and André Hornez, 1947) or the Italian "Arrivederci Roma" (Renato Rascel, Pietro Garinei and Sandro Giovannini, 1955) and an atomic explosion is connected with a jazz recording. Zofia Lissa, a musicologist who in the 1930s was already investigating the role of music in creating meaning in cinema, saw this method as the foundation of a type of philosophical commentary founded in the sight-sound relationship: "The counterpoint of both factors forces the viewer to perform complicated intellectual operations that explain the apparent contradiction between image and music."[20] This contradiction also builds a new sense of temporality, in which music represents a time that is not aligned with the time of the images: Lissa reads this discord as the "general time" of the twentieth century that is bound to mankind not individuals. The film is not a newsreel, but it uses a set of images of individual events and a collection of popular music pieces to give a condensed impression of the century. Again, a mix made on tape with the use of reel-to-reel recorders, scissors and glue was used to denote abstract concepts, only this time it is the aporia between the feelings evoked by image and sound that creates an audiovisual distance, or *V-Effekt*.

Another new form of audiovisual relationship promoted by the composers working at the PRES can be found in Jan Lenica's and Walerian Borowczyk's surreal film *House* (*Dom*, 1958), which depicts a world where animated objects begin to operate without human intervention. Włodzimierz Kotoński's score, composed with sounds from various

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[19] See Niebur, *Special Sound*; and Mark Brend, *The Sound of Tomorrow: How Electronic Music Was Smuggled into the Mainstream* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

[20] Zofia Lissa, "Problem 'czasu przedstawieniowego' w *muzyce filmowej* (1959)", in *Wybór pism estetycznych*, ed. Zbigniew Skowron (Kraków: Universitas, 2008), 284.

sources, follows a similar principle. Describing the qualities of *musique concrète*, Schaeffer emphasised the potential of the "sound object", which can be extracted from its original setting by means of magnetic recording tape and then assembled with various other objects, thereby creating another meaning.[21] This principle of electroacoustic music shares much with Marcel Duchamp's notion of the ready-made or the *objet trouvé*, a 'found object' taken from its original context and invested with new artistic significance. Speaking about *House*, Agnieszka Pindera notes that the sound plays a decisive role in animating the objects:

> In *Dom*, which employs a plethora of animation techniques, sound plays a key role, guiding the viewer through the narrative. Indeed, for me, *Dom*'s soundtrack is essential: if I watch the film with the sound muted, I lose all sense of orientation. Moreover, the electroacoustic passages always occur at moments when various objects are brought to life. The composer not only endows these objects with a voice but also with something like a soul, since their individual characters can be discerned from the sounds they emit.[22]

Clearly this was a continuation of the Themersons' efforts in audiovisuality, but conducted in a manner closer to the surrealists' attempts to awaken the uncanny.

House was also one of the first attempts to prepare a score for animated film, and became one of the most interesting and experimental collaborations between the filmmakers and the composers working at the studio. Daniel Szczechura's film *The Journey* (*Podróż*) (1970), with its soundtrack by Rudnik, clearly shows the full force of such an enterprise. The film depicts a train journey from the director's home town Warsaw to Łódź, where he was working in the film industry. The story is reduced to a minimum: we see a stationary figure looking through a train window with landscape passing by. The score is synchronised with the elements of the passing landscape: poles of electricity lines in front of the camera and behind the train, each of them allotted a slightly different sound. The other structures were synchronised with the act of opening the window, thus adding some variety into an otherwise repetitive soundscape. It also afforded Szczechura a clear indication that all the sounds used in the soundtrack have visible sources and are in synchretic relationship with the image. The *V-Effekt* is not created by the animistic aspect that synthetic sounds lend to the image. Rather, it is built on the strange musicality of seemingly everyday sound structures. This balancing on the border between composition and uncertainty is further deepened by the fact that this is

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[21] Pierre Schaeffer, *In Search of a Concrete Music*, trans. Christine North and John Dack (1952; reprint London: University of California Press, 2012), 13.

[22] Agnieszka Pindera, "Colors of Joy and Sadness: Polish Electronic Music in Service to Cinematography", in *Post: Notes on Modern and Contemporary Art around the Globe* (24 June 2014), accessed 20 August 2016, http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/481-colors-of-joy-and-sadness-polish-electronic-music-in-service-to-cinematography.

an animated film. Since it is six minutes long, sounds that were at first treated as 'natural', field-recorded phenomena turn into a rhythmical music. Here, the classic synchretic *acousmêtre* method has been replaced with a more subtle method of estrangement based on the idea of reflecting a state of mind rather than on depicting strange and uncanny areas of reality. The break with previous methods is also made evident by the use of rhythmic structures. In an interview conducted in 2012, Rudnik explained why working on animated movies was a relief from producing autonomous compositions where a certain set of methods was prohibited. This was the case with repetition, which, in accordance with the sonorist doctrine, was treated as a primitive tool. He explained that "I have a few works that I made out of spite for composers who were crazy for Stockhausenism. Poles tend to be stupid: if the Germans do something, it means it must be done that way, because the cultural influence of Germanness has always been meaningful to us."[23] For Rudnik, synchronising sound with image emancipated him from conventions governing the world of modern music. As we shall see, experiments with soundtrack synchronisation and de-synchronisation were key to the research in film language carried out in the 1970s and 1980s by members of the Łódź-based group, the Workshop of Film Form.

Workshop of Film Form: "boobytraps for WHAT EXISTS."

In 1965, future member of the Workshop of Film Form (WFF) Józef Robakowski happened to buy a score and seven-inch vinyl record of *Music for Tape no. 1* (1962) by Andrzej Dobrowolski, a composer who played a key role in determining the development of Polish tape music up to the 1970s. Dobrowolski was professor at the State Higher School of Music in Warsaw and at the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Graz, where he was involved with the Institut für Elektronische Musik. The unusual treatment and quality of the tape sound achieved by the composer inspired Robakowski to make a short documentary film on Hans Memling's triptych *The Last Judgement* (1467–71), accompanied by pre-existing sound taken from Dobrowolski's composition. For Robakowski, the abstract music provided an in-depth analysis of tape as a medium, and offered an experimental form of aesthetics. This critical methodology became the main occupation of a group of young filmmakers based at the Film School in Łódź, which was famous for producing 1950s and 1960s Polish-School masterpieces. The WFF was established in 1970 by Janusz Połom, Wojciech Bruszewski, Wacław Antczak, Jacek Łomnicki, Tadeusz Junak, Antoni Mikołajczyk, Lech Czołnowski, Zdzisław Sowiński, Robakowski, Pawel Kwiek, Kazimierz Bendkowski, Andrzej Różycki, Ryszard Waśko and Zbigniew Rybczyński, as a formal, self-education organisation for students, supported by the Łódź Film School.

[23] Muzyczuk and Eugeniusz Rudnik, "How Much Rudnik is in Penderecki, and How Much Rudnik is in Nordheim? Interview with Rudnik", *Post: Notes on Modern and Contemporary Art around the Globe* (28 January 2014), accessed 20 August 2016, http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/336-how-much-rudnik-is-in-penderecki-and-how-much-rudnik-is-in-nordheim-interview-with-eugeniusz-rudnik.

It is possible that the administration of the school saw the experimental working method introduced by its creators as a form of laboratory exercise whose discoveries could later be applied to mainstream cinema. But the members of the group were clearly interested in meta-film, a practice aimed at uncovering the limitations of the given medium. These practitioners saw film, which by the early 1970s was already a well-established genre, as contaminated by other arts, especially literature, and their mission was to allow it to develop its own language. In their *Manifesto II* (1975), for instance, they rejected the functions of traditional film as "politicising, moralising, aestheticising and amusing the spectator".[24] Significantly, sound research and audiovisual activities became the most vital form of media analysis and the main field of interest for some members of the group. This became explicit not only through their films, but also through their writings. In his manifesto-like text, *The State of Conciousness* (1977), Robakowski admitted that "by using the knowledge of physical reality, and analysing it by means of contemporary techniques (film, photography, video, **sound** . . .) I want to attack my habits of perception."[25] *Manifesto II* also condemned the contemporary modernist composer Krzysztof Penderecki, who at that time had become interested in neoclassicism and the classical jazz musician Jan Ptaszyn-Wróblewski. Both were considered examples of poetically engaged composers whose emotionally expressive sounds related to 'universal' problems instead of offering constant critical engagement with research into representations of reality. Although it was not explicitly stated, WFF saw a different, more positive tendency at play in PRES's methodology of sound research. The laboratory-like character of the work being developed there resembled the methods of Polish structural filmmakers, because the composers were dealing with sound reproduction on magnetic tape and the manipulations of pre-recorded sounds in order to create new perceptual phenomena. Moreover, Robakowski stressed common goals in the work of both groups: "My colleagues at the Workshop of Film Form also knew that there is a necessity to change both the image and sound in our films. We had to find new stylistic forms based mainly on counterpoint."[26]

Robakowski was the first among the members of the WFF to initiate collaboration between the filmmakers and the composers. He invited Rudnik to provide electroacoustic music for his documentary on avant-garde sculpture, *Spatial compositions of Katarzyna Kobro* (*Kompozycje przestrzenne Katarzyny Kobro*, 1971). Again, a documentary film on art was treated as a form that allowed a certain level of experimentation. An important modernist figure in Łódź, Kobro was explored through her sculptures, with a voice-over providing excerpts from her writings on art as an attempt to direct the rhythm of human movement (Figure 6.1). Rudnik's dark sounds, based on heavy treatment, reverberations

[24] Warsztat Formy Filmowej, "Manifesto II", in *Warsztat Formy Filmowej 1970–1977*, ed. Ryszard W. Kluszczyński (Warsaw: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej, 2000), 102.

[25] Józef Robakowski, "Stan świadomości", in *Warsztat Formy Filmowej 1970–1977*, ed. Kluszczyński (Warsaw: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej, 2000), 106.

[26] Robakowski, "Całkowicie stracić kontrolę. Z Józefem Robakowskim rozmawia Arek Gruszczyński", in *Studio eksperyment*, ed. Magda Roszkowska and Bogna Świątkowska (Warsaw: Bęc Zmiana, 2012), 43.

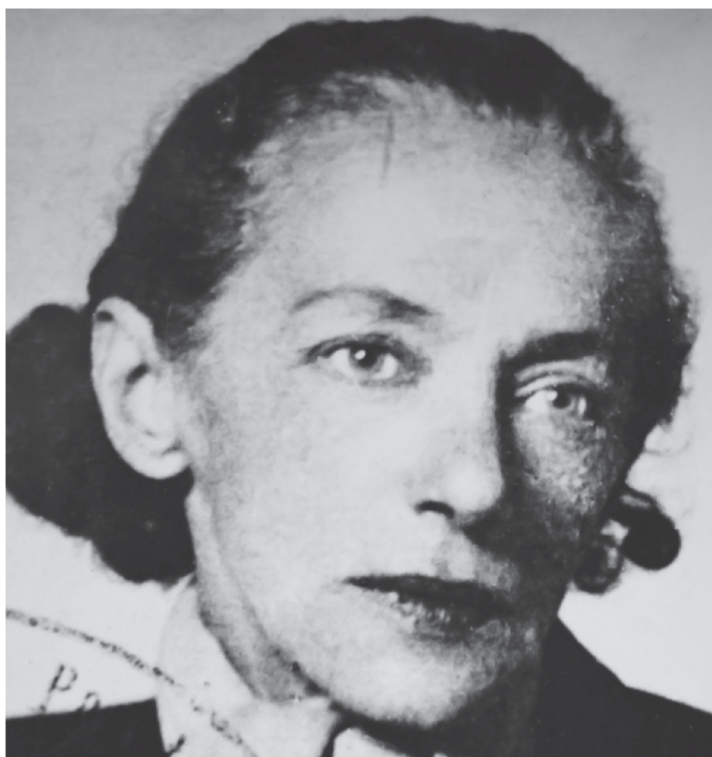

FIGURE 6.1 Józef Robakowski, image of Kobro, from *Spatial Compositions of Katarzyna Kobro* (35 mm, 11', 1971). Courtesy of the artist.

and overdubbing, emphasised the structure of her objects while at the same time reflecting on the tragic story of the artist, who destroyed most of her sculptures during the Second World War in order to heat her apartment. This fruitful collaboration led to a second, more experimental and non-narrative, audiovisual work. In *Dynamic Rectangle* (*Prostokąt dynamiczny*, 1971), Robakowski exploited what he called an "interdependence of sound and image as a source of various emotions".[27] The inspiration came directly from Rudnik's electroacoustic music. Robakowski translated its pulses into organic fluctuations of a red rectangle by filming through a mechanism with a diaphragm which could be flattened, expanded, narrowed and widened. The film is thus not just an abstract object of contemplation referencing the traditions of the Soviet avant-garde, but also a documentation of the movements of the animator's body as he tries, in real time, to convey musical changes visually. In interview, the composer summarised the experience as something that was totally out of the everyday routine at the studio:

> This is a remarkable thing. While I was making music, I would hear from these directors specializing in short or experimental forms: "How good it would be, if

[27] Robakowski, *Dynamic Rectangle* (Łódź: Warsztat, 1975), pages unnumbered.

> I could first get the music, and then could edit a film over it." I think it is exciting that, if you have a basis in sound in which time is structured, where there are accents, then the sound is asking to have an image pinned there.[28]

Rudnik was an ideal partner for both works: as we saw above, his animated works frequently used repetitive structures. His approach was formed by attempting to break from the arbitrary limitations of sonic practice employed by composers working on autonomous pieces. Interested in the rhythms and melodies of speech, Rudnik saw his role as that of a composer-engineer, able to organise sound into narrative and repetitive structures. This was an ideal match for the aspirations of Robakowski. Lasting only a year and resulting in two short films, the collaboration was meant to continue but Rudnik and Robakowski did not complete any work after 1971. The third film made by Robakowski in the same year reveals his more analytical aspirations. *Test* is a non-camera short made by making holes of different sizes in the black frames of the magnetic film reel. This seemingly simple operation was an investigation into the objectivity of the film image and its perception, as the short attacks of white light on the screen leave an afterimage on the audience's eyes. But it was also an attempt to reveal the materiality of the film reel itself to an audience used to the fact that light projected through a frame offers the illusion of reality. The soundtrack reflected the disruptions of the white light with a synchronised, mechanical sound, which appeared as an echo when the tempo of the holes increased. This de-regulation was a perceptual illusion which Robakowski consciously used to emphasise the effect of the afterimages.

Test shows how close Robakowski's research was to pieces by another important member of the group at the time, Wojciech Bruszewski. Bruszewski's work approached similar problems from a different angle. Unlike Robakowski, he never considered working with a composer because his sound research was an integral part of most of his films. In 1971, he began working with the soundtrack strips of the film reel, exhibiting them as a long hanging strip of photographic paper. As a result, the rhythm of spoken words became visible and mute, resembling a decorative, ornamental scroll. These *Photographs of Sound* (*Fotografie dźwięku*) marked a moment in his oeuvre when sound became the main tool in expressing "boobytraps for WHAT EXISTS" (Figure 6.2).[29] He treated art as scientific research that could be realised fully only if it allowed one to question common beliefs based on sensory evidence: in short, he believed that art should constantly undermine the borders of human cognition. This strategy was realised mainly through his film work, but Bruszewski also worked on sound objects and installations. *Junction* (*Skrzyżowanie*, 1973) is a perfect example of this tendency. It was created during the Action Workshop, an almost month-long 'occupation' by WFF of the Muzeum

[28] Muzyczuk and Rudnik, "How Much Rudnik is in Penderecki, and How Much Rudnik is in Nordheim?".

[29] Wojciech Bruszewski, "Traps", in *Warsztat Formy Filmowej, 1970–1977*, ed. Ryszard W. Kluszczyński (Warsaw: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej, 2000), 104.

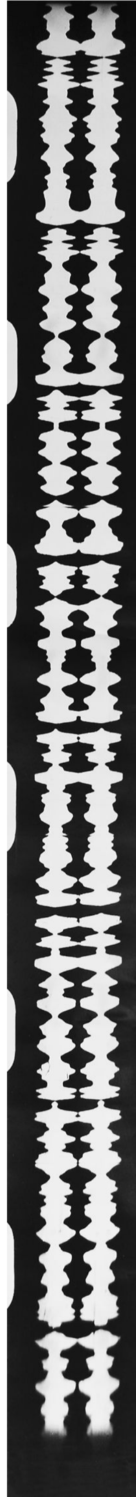

FIGURE 6.2 Wojciech Bruszewski, "Oh . . . !", from *Photography of Sound* (1971). Collection of Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.

Sztuki in Łódź. On 3 February, Bruszewski carried out a very simple intervention in the museum's immediate neighbourhood. He hung four microphones on the nearby road junction of Gdańska and Więckowskiego Streets, which continuously transmitted sounds from the outside environment to the interior of the building. On the other side of the wall, the artist projected a miniature image of the junction on the museum floor and installed four speakers. The project corresponded with other actions undertaken by the WFF based on image transmission, but its radical purism similarly emphasised the materiality of the medium. It is also possible to situate this work within the critical context of life in a 'wired' society, where the image of a microphone in a public space could allude to the control methods of a police state. This installation was symptomatic of Bruszewski's approach at the time, which tended towards simple, sometimes very minimal, interventions that distorted reality and critiqued the conventionality of everyday life. But it was also important for another reason. It was an interesting take on the idea of the realism of representation. An acoustic space formed by four loudspeakers seems more real than a stereo system, but of course both are just representations of reality, and only the conventions of media reception enable one to mix reality with representation. We can see a very interesting use of synchronism characteristic of transmission. If, as for the Themersons, the sync effect was used to expand the aesthetic field of creating meaning, and if the electroacoustic devices operated by the PRES engineers were employed largely to encourage estrangement, then we can see a significant change taking place in Bruszewski's work. His main aspiration was to create a specific space of criticality where auditory phenomena not only undermine the social-political complex of beliefs, but also challenge our basic assumptions of the structure of representation. "Boobytraps for WHAT EXISTS" used structural methods both for analysis and for the critical reconstruction of the limits of perception.

In addition to object-based practice, Bruszewski also continued his film-based research. One of the most interesting experiments of this kind was a short film entitled *Matchbox* (*Pudełko zapałek*, 1975), based on an apparently very simple principle. The image shows a hand repeatedly hitting a surface with a matchbox. The sound produced by this action is slightly delayed more and more each time. At first it is synchronised, then it becomes an echo of the action (hence it appears to offer some information on the invisible space outside the frame) and finally, when it is entirely disconnected from the visual action, it seems to be the sound of a totally different phenomenon. This is Bruszewski's version of structural cinema as a critical procedure that offers new tools for analyzing media language. But Bruszewski does not leave it at that. Contemplation of the synchronisation of sight and sound allows him to construct works that not only are critical, but also act as experiments in creating new models of communication. One of these projects was prepared for Robakowski's assemblage film, *Living Gallery* (*Żywa galleria*, 1975). Bruszewski was one of the artists approached to make a one-and-a-half-minute fragment as part of a neo-avant-garde panorama. He prepared a detailed script of his contribution entitled *The Vote* (*Głosowanie*), in which he explained the methodology of the project. The visual

aspect was built from a master shot of all the details that would be filmed later. He then took 100 close-up shots of individual objects, which were supplemented by the acoustic dimension in accordance with a certain procedure:

> In a studio, record 100 different sounds made with the voice apparatus of a single man, each sound separately, continuously, about 2 sec.
> These can be
> – vowels (aaaaaaaah. .. .. eeeeeeeh. .. .. ..), etc.
> – consonants (vvvvvvvvvvv. .. .. fffffff. .. .. .) etc.
> – howling, snorting, whistling, buzzing, booing, etc.
>
> Record it on a 35 mm tape and cut so that there are sections of pure sound, 12 to 30 frames long (cutting system the same as in the visual). Place the sections of the tape in a bag and mix. Edit one with another, taking out of the bag at random. Do not paste the sections back to front. Both aspects, image and sound, synchronize so that the beginning of the first shot was exactly in line with the beginning of the first section of the sound.[30]

Bruszewski clearly divided the film into two distinct sources of information: the visual and the aural. This conceptual split enabled him to create an experience that exposed the convention-based bonds between seeing and hearing in traditional cinematic perception. Furthermore, the proposed procedure attempted to construct a new semantics and grammar of audiovisual perception, one which needed to be learned but which offered new possibilities. Here, Bruszewski went beyond the process of synchronisation seen in the work of the Themersons and in the soundtracks produced at PRES. His research is based on structuralism, semiology and cybernetics in order both to criticise the language of cinema and to imagine new audiovisual means of communication.

Out of Sync and Back in Again

These three separate moments in Polish experimental film history have never been brought together because they belong to different traditions. The Themersons' story is one that now resides in the field of art, so the connections with WFF are obvious (they were so even for the people involved: for example Robakowski exchanged letters with the Themersons and saw his work as a continuation of their efforts). But the work accomplished in PRES is rarely brought into the same orbit, because for years it belonged to the specific field of electroacoustic music (even if the soundtrack work done there received the greatest popular exposure, it rarely gained attention from film critics). And

[30] Bruszewski, "The Vote", in *Phenomena of Perception*, ed. Elżbieta Fuchs and Janusz Zagrodzki (Łódź: City Art Gallery, 2010), 85–86.

yet the similar and sustained attention given by these three groups to the meaning of sound-image synchronisation is striking. The Themersons were working with the question of the translatability of sight and sound. This research led them to the most complex results in the field of experimental cinema at the time, as well as to the conceiving of new synaesthetic tools that could offer fresh uses for film. However, their research can be summed up as an investigation into audiovisual tools for expanding the field of cinema. The soundtrack work at PRES using *V-Effekt* raised new questions about the nature of sound objects and the possibility of founding a universal language. If we consider the philosophical implications of the invention of sound objects in light of the most interesting examples of the audiovisual work from PRES, we might come to the conclusion that the universality of sound language was forever limited by vision itself, which via the synchretic *acousmêtre* always described the sources of sounds. Thus any research of this kind by necessity had to be connected with the fantastic (science fiction or horror) or the "psychological". Even the most experimental aspects of PRES's research as applied in film were illustrative in character. But this type of inquiry into sounds as language clearly lay at the heart of Bruszewski's work, inspired by the materiality of sound on magnetic tape, cybernetics and the creation of models of reality based on a different understanding of the term synchronisation. Drawing together all the consequences of the previous research described above, he combined them with ideas taken from structuralism and started working on films and installations as theoretical objects that offered a critique of perception. Synchronisation and consideration of its consequences were still the main instruments of this research. Hence, even if full of historical discontinuities, a line of inquiry can be reconstructed in the research conducted by three generations of artists.

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7 Grid Intensities

HEARING STRUCTURES IN CHANTAL AKERMAN'S FILMS OF THE 1970S

Paul Hegarty

LIT OR UNLIT, Chantal Akerman's space sits brute in front of the viewer, as the camera holds firm and fixes space around it. In asserting the point of view of the camera, Akerman eschews the visual language of mainstream narrative film that is seemingly designed to reinstate the fourth wall of a lost theatre. Her excessively realistic directorial viewing practice moves away from the idea of aligning us with a character or an event, and instead places us in the film. This is done simply, through the refusal to cut within scenes and the rejection of camera lens movement, as if the body of the camera has been glued firmly into its stand. Akerman's realism, especially in the films of the 1970s, moves away from structures that normally lie hidden and moves instead towards a conscious and visually explicit manipulation of film as structure. But this structure is not exclusively visual: the films also discard the certainties of musical and sonic *accompaniment*. As a result, music's organised presence, in whatever spatial location we imagine for it, is surplus to requirement. Akerman's films of the 1970s, then, propose a model of excess, of de-formation.

Akerman's work in this specific period is renowned for its combination of formal rigour and feminist thematics. In combining two seemingly contradictory impulses, the structural deconstruction that results creates a highly effective avant-gardist practice. The relation between visual and sonic in the films of the 1970s not only reinforces but also constructs this deconstructive political approach. Sound and image depart from their standard indexicalities, yet complement and contradict one another, their relation

never one of permanent and predictable realist identity. It is in their non-matching that they combine in, or as, a theorised practice of processual intermedia. Beginning with the landmark *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), I wish to track the role sound plays in the set of films that span the 1970s, in order to identify how sound operates as reference or index of the real and how this indexicality is continually put under pressure. I also bring out the capacity of sound in Akerman's work to act as disruptive force and how, at varying points, it can act either as ground or as vector. Moving back to *Saute ma ville*, the short film from 1968, and continuing with *Je tu il elle* (1974), I then pass through *Les rendez-vous d'Anna* (1978) and conclude on *News from Home* (1976). This trajectory is designed to bring out the meta-structure of the decade's films, as revealed in the above set of processes that regulate and define Akerman's work of this time.

In the wake of the defining totalisation of sound terminology in film by Michel Chion, writers have begun to question the meaning and impact of dividing the sound 'in' film to that of 'diegetic' on the one hand and 'non-diegetic' on the other, with the first being 'in' the film, happening in some sort of real way within the perception of people 'in' the film, and the second being added music or sound. I believe that valuable contributions from Robynn Stilwell and Ben Winters have re-opened the terrain of how music is defined in relation to film, and that Akerman's use of sound creatively works through these much later re-conceptualisations. Chion had adapted Pierre Schaffer's notion of the acousmatic (a sound separated from its visible or identified referent) into the notion of the *acousmêtre* in order to account for sounds that acted as harbingers of events, actions or realised motivations in film. Chion defines this figure as having the following powers: "first, the *acousmêtre* has the power of *seeing all*; second, the power of *omniscience*; and third, the *omnipotence* to act on the situation."[1] Akerman takes away the resolving mission of this idea, and troubles the categorisation of sound as locatable in narrative terms either in space or in time in relation to other events in the film.

This leads to the question of diegetic and non- or extra- or meta-diegetic sound. In fact, these terms are mostly used by critics to refer to music, with the soundtrack of music being separated from the soundtrack of events in the film. Clearly, avant-garde cinema has, for many decades, disrupted these distinctions but, as Stilwell notes, the distinction between some sort of "inside" sound and another (outside), that exists to heighten or direct perception around visible events, is still useful, perhaps because, rather than in spite of, potential dissonances between sound and vision.[2] Furthermore, she notes that a transition between diegetic and non-diegetic is not inherently transgressive.

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[1] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 129–30. The functioning of the *acousmêtre* can be played with, but on the basis of its normally possessing these powers, it is typically evidenced in voice-over.

[2] See Robynn J. Stilwell, "The Fantastical Gap Between Diegetic and Nondiegetic", in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer and Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 200.

Akerman's films of this period betray no interest in implying that the crossing of sound from 'outside' the film to 'in' or vice versa is of inherently transgressive import.[3] What these works do insist on is the malleability of sound as something formless—something that is protean and therefore not subject to raising or reduction to the status of servitor to the image track. In short, she works around the notions of Chion and of Stilwell. This in turn brings her to the position outlined by Winters in his comprehensive reboot of thinking the non-diegetic.

For Winters, the notion of dividing music into diegetic and non-diegetic betrays the narrative value of "external" music such as a character's identifying theme and also downplays cinema's narrating structure in favour of a "realism" that owes more to literary study.[4] While Winters makes many valuable points, he falls into the trap of talking about music as an essentialist category and also fails to differentiate it from other "internal" sounds as being an already purposed, already organised element with an aesthetic end in mind. Nonetheless, if we reflect on his rethinking of the idea of "non-diegetic", it helps frame what Akerman was doing in the works from the 1970s. Whereas it is more radical to use sound (as Akerman does) that may or may not be generated in parallel to activities that produce visuals than to use music within or alongside visual narration, the positioning of these sounds in relation to diegesis is still relevant. Winters argues that music can unify narrative process over a more fragmentary visual montage, and in some ways this is exactly what Akerman does with her shifting sonic strategies, but instead of unifying, the now-unified film object serves to create a process of sensorial dissonance, even an agonistic relation of sensory streams.[5] So, it is true that the film has no outside component, and that even in these total sensory objects of Akerman, everything in some way adds up (following Winters), but this adding up produces discrepant results, aporetic acousmetrics. The complexity of Akerman's work makes it useful to retain the notion of "diegetic" and "extra-diegetic" as layers, perhaps, instead of opposed spaces or methods. Therefore, I acknowledge Winters's questioning of the diegetic claim of dividing sound into diegetic and non-diegetic, but in parallel to Stilwell, I retain the aural-spatial distinction as something eminently useful in this particular analysis of Akerman's work.

Akerman's filming methods have attracted a steady stream of critical comment and approval for her matching of formal experimentation with an explicit politics of feminist critique, without the one being the simple alibi for the other. The core filming technique of the static camera, around which events occur, presents a formal critique of the conventionality of apparent immersion in the progress of a film's story and characters. Lengthy visual exploration of actions and events often seen as mundane, or neglected

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[3] Stilwell, "The Fantastical Gap Between Diegetic and Nondiegetic", 185.

[4] Ben Winters, "The Non-Diegetic Fallacy: Film, Music and Narrative Space", *Music and Letters* 91, no. 2 (2010): 224–44.

[5] Winters, "The Non-Diegetic Fallacy", 236.

as hindrances to narrative exposition, helps establish the significance of everyday material conditions and behaviours seen as typical for women in the 1970s. It does this not merely to document but in order to reconstruct what is considered important and show how activities seen as women's work shape the 'wider concerns' of society or, indeed, how they are simply ignored as such, for example, through the absence of pay for such labour. Akerman's films construct feminine space as a set of areas that are occupied by living human women with agency, despite limits or conditions set upon their social or cultural role. It is not just the choice of spaces—such as interiors, shops, cafés—but the way in which the women (including on several occasions Akerman herself) exist within predefined zones, how they act once outside them, and how their actions do not validate the enclosure but subvert or even transgress it.

Arguably, Akerman's structural or minimalist works also constitute a filmic version of what Julia Kristeva had identified as "women's time"—outside of the monumental time of dialectical history, a critical time that would be to some extent cyclical but also a breaking out of the constraints of fully modelled time.[6] Time in Akerman's films is one of duration, a purposeful occupation of time that exposes its passing. With stripped-down narrative (at least in terms of plot) and apparent lack of perspectival mobility, the sense of time is built into the body of the film, such that it has a chance of constructing a more embodied (and therefore less "scopophiliac") viewing. This is the view taken by Ivone Margulies, who writes that in Akerman, "the affinities among minimal art, performance art, and minimalist and structural film clarify how strategies of real-time representation, repetition, and seriality engage the spectator's body, a critical step for a corporeal cinema."[7] While this is a significant improvement on the idea that the content of a film affects a body magically in "embodied viewing", it still presumes that visuality is elided, without telling us any of the methods needed to achieve this that are not about the visual aspect of the film. A consideration of the use of sound in this body of work from the 1970s is a vital expansion of the above claim in empirically transmitted form.

Jeanne Dielman offers a microcosmic view of the eponymous character's life, over the course of three days. The period stands in not only for her life, but also, from a feminist perspective, for that of the situation allocated women in modern society. The days unfold over 193 minutes, with painstaking attention to the detail of Dielman's activity. In the main, this consists of a set of highly routine gestures and movements, carried out for the most part in her apartment at no. 23 quai du Commerce, Brussels. She moves through her allocated domain in a series of predictable actions based around preparing food, cooking, cleaning, tidying, arranging, placing and re-placing utensils (Figure 7.1).

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[6] See Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time", in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 187–213. Conversely, see Elisabeth Grosz, *In the Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), for a critique of those who would seek to evade time, as this represents a rejection of physical being existing "towards" death.

[7] Ivone Margulies, *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 50.

FIGURE 7.1 The protagonist carrying out routine activities in Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975).

Her interactions with others interrupt these routines momentarily but with what we understand to be predictable timing. She eats with her son, who lives in the apartment and leaves to study during the day, and sometimes conversation emerges as they spoon up soup, or sit reading, or as they prepare for the end of the day. An unseen woman brings a baby for Dielman to mind for a portion of the day and sometimes talks to her at the door when collecting the child. The other encounter that takes place in the apartment takes the form of paid sex, unseen by the camera until the closing episode in the film. Each day, men turn up on appointment, have their outdoor clothes taken and then are led to Dielman's bedroom. The camera sits outside, unmoving, and unlike the portrayal of domestic activity, the real-time effect is broken, as seconds later Dielman and the client appear, the latter ushered out. Something significant happens in the (unseen) encounter on day 2, as she seems disturbed, as signalled by her disarrayed hair. We are given clear guidance that this is an unusual departure from routine as her son comments on her hair. From then on, the routine feels edgy, the highly disciplined order of the apartment is spatially disturbed as the previously enclosed subversion of the domestic order becomes a transgression that spreads through the apartment, carried in the body and responses of the central figure. Ultimately, this seems to lead to the murder of the third client, stabbed twice in the neck after what seems like an unwanted orgasm on the part of service-providing Dielman.

The use of sound in *Jeanne Dielman* is not significant so much on the scale of individual events as at the level of an overall disturbance of narrative. While critics have noted the value of sound in contributing to the effect and affect of the film, we need to build on Teresa de Lauretis's observation that "it is time we listened" (writing of the message

in Akerman's film) to fully appreciate the multisensorium of Akerman's films.[8] From the outset, in *Saute ma ville*, Akerman used the defamiliarising technique of detaching the sound, preventing it from being a simple index of events on screen. This mode of attention to the soundtrack is essential to her formal practice and can take numerous forms, including the over-emphasis on sounds of exactly what is being shown, but in a way that is precisely hyper-realistic and that therefore gives them an unrealistic quality. Such is the approach in *Jeanne Dielman*. Akerman's films of the 1970s amplify sounds of actions and objects, and also background noise, creating competing claims of indexicality. The central role of sound in the unfolding of the film is signalled in the presence of the audio track before the first image, while the credits run. The sound is of background traffic, establishing that this film will 'allow' the full spectrum of sounds, and not edit out non-dialogue, or non-significant audio events, in a simulacrum of the human mind's editing capacities. This posthuman process strips away desire to assign meaning hierarchically and literally echoes the visual choice of the static shot that is the only type of shot in *Jeanne Dielman*.

Dielman's activities are what make up the bulk of sound events in the film, and amount to an accumulation of ordinary indoor activities but which are highlighted by their amplification. This effect means that sound is not just turned up but magnified, open to detailed hearing (to the point where this becomes overload at points in other films, such as the middle section of *Je tu il elle*). For Marion Schmid, these actions show a particular kind of time that women do not so much dwell in as be subject to—disciplined, regular, unpaid, repetitive and, as Akerman notes, generally ignored as being a substantial part of women's experience in consumer society.[9] Meanwhile, the other sounds that fill the film's audio aspect "endow the film narrative with an uncanny dimension".[10]

The sounds generated by the central figure's actions are perceptually coterminous with the visual actions but exceed the visual through unexpected levels of volume. When Dielman leaves a room—and she does so often—she switches the light off, an action that at once soundtracks and emphasises her mobility. While the camera does not move with her, the sounds form an aurally apparent connection for movements. While a viewer might find that sound builds continuity, it disorientates through its loudness and through the presenting of actions in a fashion that contrasts with the visual track. So what could have been a grounding through the soundtrack perversely undermines the reconfigured ground of the still camera. The two realms of wavelength move out of phase. Objects dominate, and supply a way of understanding the world as technology—as suggested by the *nouveau roman* and also by Martin Heidegger. The latter is more important, in fact, as for him, technology is a process, and there is no pretence that the

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[8] Teresa de Lauretis, "Rethinking Women's Cinema: Aesthetics and Feminist Theory", in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 292.

[9] Marion Schmid, *Chantal Akerman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 37.

[10] Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, 39.

object world can live autonomously, that an object-oriented philosophy could break free of its tragic entrapment in the human.[11] Instead, objects come into sounding reality through interaction, through dialectical sounding in the hands of Dielman. Even many of the incidental sounds that hint at porosity between film and external world are brought into hearing by her actions. The key instance, or better still, instantiation, of this is in the opening and closing of curtains, which can reveal the sounds of a mechanised city, or the louder sounds of birdsong that launch the beginning of the day. Movement and action offscreen also generate sound, mostly in Dielman's physical encounter with object and structure of the apartment, indicating not just a world beyond, but the power to act outside of the surveillance of the viewer—here the prime example is not that of the sexual act, which lies outside of representation until the third day, but the winding of the clock, which occurs in shot, but out of vision, loudly suggesting the essential nature of time as experienced by Dielman.

In the second half of the film, the sounds envelop her increasingly erratic movements with harsher, richly varied and aperiodic tones. The character herself indicates that what would in fact pass for normal activity (even more normal?) is somehow wrong, as she frustratedly experiences her actions as something other to her intention and expectation. The sounds of this unraveling time—objects dropped, or not fitting into their proper place, or of feet going back and forth, lights clicked on and off as she slips out of her established routine, or of self-generated intrusions into the placid discipline of the apartment—are magnified, becoming excessive. More than that, they become harsher, the attack quicker, the overtones more clangorous, such that the audio waveform is actually sharper, more broken up by peaks. Akerman and Delphine Seyrig, as Dielman, conspire to offer an aural premonition of the knife that will puncture the last client's neck. After the act comes the non-resolution that dissipates and undermines the apparent definitiveness of this moment. Dielman goes out to the main room, and sits for several minutes, with what I take to be an ecstatic expression, in dim light, with the ambient city murmur the only sound.

The voice in *Jeanne Dielman* is marginalised—for practical reasons, we could imagine, as the high-level recording makes speaking difficult, but also because speech is not the primary relation or communicational form here. No-one is kept mute, but the voice is mostly reserved for practical communications when outside the house, and similarly indoors. Monologues come into hearing occasionally, in non-conversation with the son, or with the woman whose child Dielman minds. The role of the human voice in this particular film is to be removed, not as far as in the silence of *Hôtel Monterey* (1972), but even more explicitly as the thing that is being reduced.[12] This helps remove 'character motivation'

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[11] See Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, trans. William Lovitt (London: Routledge, 1993), 307–41.

[12] *Hôtel Monterey* is a rare object in being an actually silent film. As the location is of an inhabited residential hotel block in New York, the absence of sounds of dwelling or of the city outside the walls creates an

or statements about the film's attitude. Talking is caught up in notions of presence that might mislead a viewer/listener into finding an intention expressed, and so fall into a pre-feminist narrative based on a range of existing codes that act as traces for hidden expressions of cultural hierarchy. The attitude to voice in *Jeanne Dielman* marks Akerman's deeply formalist and intermedial feminism.[13] Voices will take other roles even in this most minimalist/structuralist period of her work, and in each case, voice is not just taken as a natural thing that occurs, but set apart, diminished, heightened, obscured, made to be an emptier of signification. In *Saute ma ville*, voice is other, an other that may or may not be in the interior of either the one character in the film or of the apartment she is in.

Akerman herself acts the part of the character, who seemingly blows up herself and her apartment. She also acts as the voice-over, a voice whose relation to the person on screen is peculiar and disorientating, an extra-diegetic sound with the capacity to comment on, mirror or pre-empt events and actions in the apartment. The voice is the main sound in *Saute ma ville*, channelling the bulk of the soundtrack, periodically mimicking the sonic effects of actions 'inside' the film. While it is an extra-diegetic voice, not generated by a character on screen, it effectively replaces the diegetic voice of the character that we do see, substituting for and supplementing her voice and much of the rest of her aural-effect generation. The voice also sings over the beginning of the film, and as is often in the case in Akerman's minimalist/formalist work, we hear before we see. The humming replaces a musical theme, the expected extra-diegetic in the most mainstream of films, and bleeds into the film, continuing as Akerman as actor races into her tower block, which occupies a slot in the wider concrete modern setting. The tune then moves from being an annunciation to being a statement of the character's mood. Fast-moving and jaunty, the accompaniment's proximity to the actions it overspeaks means a viewer is tempted to hear it as the internal voice of the character in the shot. So here, then, is the other most common use of extra-diegetic sound: the commentator, the reflective inner monologic voice, but very soon, it seems to pull apart from this twinning function (and pulls away from Chion's *acousmêtre* in so doing).

As with Akerman's later films in the following decade, the sonic effect of actions is heightened by volume or, indeed, the removal of volume. Concurrently, the voice starts to make the sounds we expect to occur in the course of actions that take place in a kitchen, culminating in a "bang", just before the bursting of a balloon, which itself precedes the final explosion. It also attempts to match the mood of the character, or her thoughts. This isometric relation does suggest an internal voice, but if that is what it is,

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uncanny effect: the sound has been removed from this setting, an absence amid the hotel dwellers, mirroring their social position, an emptied status.

[13] Akerman is able to make formalism political through the crossing of form and content or form and message. The location of this politicised formalism lies in a form that hovers between the media of sound and vision (in the case of the films discussed here), hence it operates as an intermedia, a multiple proto-form that is beyond a reductive divide between formalism and politics.

it is very much out of sync, and instead of being the expression of thoughts, seems more to comment on them (for example laughing at dancing, in a moment where there are two voices in the "voice-over"). It could be an internal voice that illustrates alienation, or isolation from the world, as an internal separation widens into a divide. The voice, at any rate, begins to separate from the character that we see, breaking down the possibility of voice or breath as the guarantee of presence. Furthermore, the way in which voice and character diverge is also temporal: the temporal divide is perhaps more curious than it at first seems, as the voice seems familiar with what we are seeing or what is about to happen. At one level, it is likely that this is Akerman (as director) watching, and performing her watching vocally, but at another, the voice is the character at one remove, and repeating reality—which would assert that time is not a linear sequence, but a set of reiterations which indicate the incapacity of the human to grasp that difficult and constant spiralling return of the same. Marina Abramović offers another example of intermedial feminism in her 1970s *Rhythm* pieces, and so offers a useful theoretical framework, developed through artistic practice, from which to hear radical formalist feminism. Like Abramović stabbing a knife between her fingers, then listening back to the recording in order to repeat the sequence, including where she hits a finger, in *Rhythm 10* (1973), the voice is condemned to repeat, and success or failure changes nothing of that. The temporal discrepancy, whether in some way "live" or an effect of reflection from a parallel reality, means that we need to exercise caution in thinking about the film as culminating in a suicide that comes about as a result of alienation. Signs of this are few and far between, as what we do see and hear are actions of resistance, an undoing of the domestic space. The image track of the film ends with Akerman lying on the cooker's hob, the gas on (we guess from the breathy hissing in the soundtrack). Then explosions occur over a black screen. While it would seem that the character does die, the explosion occurs in a space bigger than the apartment, and the title after all, is about exploding the city.

Along the way to this apotheosis of visually withheld destruction, the diegetic sounds of the apartment do not hold true. As Akerman busies herself with disruptive and parodic housework, a desultory dinner and impatient bustling, the sound is supplanted, simulated by the voice that is both outside of the film's visual space and somehow inside her head and/or apartment. At times the diegetic sound disappears, as at the point where the character mops up by shoving around various bits of kitchenware. So what is in the film, sonically, can be removed, while what is outside it, in the shape of the voice, intervenes in the substance of events, its commentary more directive or amplificatory than merely reactive. Where in *Jeanne Dielman*, the soundtrack is only of what is inside the film, but excessively rendered, *Saute ma ville* offers layers of sound that disrupt the internal self-presence of character, location and time, and this occurs in the play between voice "over" and the rattling of objects, with the character a vector for a para-diegetic narration. The excess of this particular film is not an excess of the same, but an excess whereby the same cannot settle into its position of identity—i.e., things and people cannot be just what they are, as such a reality is aurally demonstrated not to inhere.

FIGURE 7.2 Chantal Akerman's character hitchhiking in *Je tu il elle* (1974).

In *Je tu il elle*, the diegetic and extra-diegetic occupy their traditional places—sound generated by events in the film, if often loud, is presented in its capacity of indexicality, while the voice (of Akerman, commenting sporadically on the silent Akerman character) is safely outside of events, if not exactly acting as a reliable storyteller corralling a narrative into place. The film presents itself as a narrative in three parts, the first with Akerman inside a new apartment, trying to communicate, via the writing of a letter, with an ex. The second begins with a sudden cut to her hitching on a motorway, and then travelling with a truck driver, silently in the back of the cab for the most part, masturbating the driver at one point, stopping in bars to quietly drink amid ambient sounds of either television or other customers (Figure 7.2). The third part sees her rejoin an ex, possibly the one referred to in the opening third, and the two women have sex. The dialectic structure of the film suggests resolution, just as it suggests a journey through alienation towards authentic relations, hence the ease with which critics have found the film to work as a doubling of the feminism in *Jeanne Dielman*.[14] In fact, the consideration of sound tells us otherwise—for in fact we do not reach resolution, but a new

[14] For a reading of the ambiguities in any reading of a journey of salvation in *Je tu il elle,* see Maureen Turim, "Personal Pronouncements in *I . . . You . . . He . . . She* and *Portrait of a Young Girl at the End of the 1960s in Brussels*", in *Identity and Memory: The Films of Chantal Akerman*, ed. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster (Trowbridge, UK: Flicks, 1999), 9–26.

stage of simulation, as the return of love and sex that is on an even footing is portrayed as highly performative, stylised and more like a dance. In other words, it is the opposite of the discovery of truth, and more the replacement of other simulacra with a more consciously assumed simulation. While some readers of the film have been relieved it is not pornographic in intent, perhaps it could be thought of as meta-pornographic, in the sense of commenting on the limits of pornography through a response that on the one hand contains visible sexual activity, while on the other not really being about sex or love.[15] The sound in this section is principally the magnification of bodies interacting with crisp sheets, a reiteration of the object interaction in *Jeanne Dielman* and certainly a performative riposte to the possible angst in *Saute ma ville*. The other sounds, all heavily magnified, are of bodies rubbing, hands like sandpaper on dry skin, and also the estrangingly loud quasi-singing and breaths of the two women. In making normally quiet sounds of intimacy into technical acts of friction, personal alienation gives way to a joyous materiality that is not sucked into a simplistic presentation of physical harmony as resolution of either personal or political situations.

The magnification of sound in *Je tu il elle* varies in intensity—momentary in the first of the three parts, scaling peaks and troughs in the second, and a syncopation of body and sonic effect in the last part (which does hint at moving beyond alienation). Throughout the film, sound acts as a mode of defining space. In the first part, Akerman moves around furniture, and as the objects leave the screen, the sound continues, such that sound extends the space and diegetic sound hints at the non-diegetic. In the second part, the loud interior of the truck's cab is a foregrounding of machine noise. When the radio is switched on, a range of American stations is on offer, despite the characters having just left what seems to be a French bar—so the noise of the radio extends into a subtler type of noise where the solidity of "location" is undone. The first part of the film, like so much of Akerman's work from the 1970s, has plenty of background noise, a simple bonus, perhaps, of the high volume of the recording of sound on screen. Traffic features as a constant. But in the second part, "we" are the traffic—part of the sound as motion. The truck becomes a vector of the sound that otherwise grounds, creating a noise between the second part and the two others. The extension of space as aural spacing is itself stretched in the mobility of the truck. In the third part, the background returns at the end, framing the physical encounter, in turn countered by those bodily motions, which are the creation of sound as movement, as transmission of movement that is only secondarily visual.

All of these noisy features are a result of the "centrally" placed recording equipment, such that sound has to move around a fixed point, like waves around a jetty. In this way, Akerman's pragmatic choice confirms the importance of sound as spatialisation: as the camera sits still, so does the microphone, but sound continues offscreen and acts as a

[15] See Turim, "Personal Pronouncements", 11.

non-visual tracking device. The possibility of noise, of extreme variations in volume or of intrusions of ambient sound, or of seemingly incidental visual activities having a colossal aural effect, are all established from the start, and the extensibility of sound is then given an opening in which, from which, spatialisation can occur.

Les Rendez-vous d'Anna (1978) is nothing but movement, a constant travelling within which islands of meetings take place, and where speech as monologue, at diegetic level, displaces conversation. In this film, background becomes ground, as an almost perpetual train sound defines a contour for the film to glide along. The aural extensions of *Je tu il elle* transform into a paradoxical mobility where the solidity of setting is heard as mobility even more than it is seen, or conveyed by the limited plot. Akerman's familiar trope of the opening of curtain and window reveals the world as magnified sound, and here stands for the continued mobility that happens, even when the titular Anna is in a phase of rest, in, say, a hotel room, playing with the radio or telephone answering machine. Again, although the sound is diegetic, as it is generated within the film, it signals a world beyond, which is not another world, but a world in which what is on view occurs. The world that is aurally revealed, or replayed, perhaps, might be comforting, as so many of Akerman's characters invite the sound to enter the spaces they are in, or carry the sound out, through their actions. As Winters points out, this is exactly why we should question the removal from diegesis of what we call "non-diegetic" sound (although he is essentially talking about music, as noted above).[16] The world of sound happening beyond the frame moves inward, crossing over the threshold of the frame, and so supplies the chance of uncertainty, the prospect of something outside of control, and also the possibility of engaging with an object world that sounds. So while the sound can be seen as part of a multiple-layered diegesis, it still moves, as if spatially, towards the interior and changes its position within the development of the film. *Les Voyages d'Anna* offers the smoothest of Akerman's soundworlds, but still offers many magnified instances and also the strongest suggestion of voice as marking or framing absence, whether in silences, or in the silencing monotony of a monological talker. Around these audio events, Anna's voice-over early in the film works as a kind of transmuted background for the emptying of voice, a withdrawal into the spatialised sound of mobility/mobility as sound.

The voice in *News from Home* (1976) seems to offer something very different, in that it supplies what seems to be the missing narrative. This film is made up of footage of New York, taken when Akerman lived there (Figure 7.3). The voice is hers, and she reads the letters sent to her by her mother. For Margulies, this act opens up the question of self-presence that then haunts the film, doing so "at the very moment at which difference and distance seem abolished: the moment of voicing".[17] Akerman undergoes a series of dislocations through the use of the sound of her ventriloquising the mother, who addresses the daughter, in her absence. First, she (the addressee of the voice) is the central character,

[16] Winters, "The Non-Diegetic Fallacy", 232 and passim.

[17] Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, 151.

FIGURE 7.3 Footage of New York in Chantal Akerman's *News from Home* (1976).

the subject of the plot—she lives in the city, she is making a film, we hear. We do not see her in the streets. So she is absent from a film about her, a film she makes. Second, in reading the letters, she dislocates her actions on to another. Third, most of this action consists of not doing very much; of not informing the recipient of much detail as to her activity. So Akerman reads a voice of another, commenting on what she has not told that (written) voice. Fourth, the voice-over seems to hint at a narrative, one that encompasses "back home" in Belgium (in the voice of the mother, but voiced by Akerman, about Akerman in another location) as well as the here and now of New York (in the absented voice of herself as not her mother). Fifth, the letters being read bear little or no relation to what we see and hear of New York, until the last letter towards the end. Last, the voice of someone else being read by a someone else who is supposedly the subject of the film and the letters is overridden on numerous occasions by the roar of subway trains or traffic. A more telling dismantling of Chion's *acousmêtre* as controlling and ordering device could barely be imagined.[18]

Traffic provides a constant murmur in all these films, a linking ground whose presence does not so much properly ground as it steadily planes the sound world, in parallel to the "static" camera so prevalent in these works. Traffic can be a gentle, almost natural

[18] We should not be distracted by his "paradoxical *acousmêtre*" (Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 130), for anything that does not obey the rules of the normal version. This is just another example of the will to taxonomy that cannot brook exception.

susurration, and indeed, traffic is shown (aurally) to be the natural technomass of urban society, or its double on the motorways. The sound of traffic can be raised into intrusion, whether in the opening of curtains or when traffic is directly experienced from within, as in *Je tu il elle*. It tells us about locatedness as a secondary, local phenomenon within the wider ecology of machine movement. In *News from Home*, traffic is a highly active creator of visual and sonic image. As well as the many parked cars, there is always traffic in motion, sometimes in the shape of single cars dawdling or trundling in early morning lower Manhattan, at other times in the fast-moving waves of vehicles or in blocs of traffic proper. Whereas in the other films (apart from the middle section of *Je tu il elle*) traffic hums as an awareness of passing time and a populated elsewhere, in *News from Home*, traffic is in the centre, competing with the voice that reads the letters of news from home.

Traffic also spreads out from the centre, forming patterns that sonically counter the visual. Long shots dominate the visuals, shots with depth, whose length is of distance as well as duration. The camera and microphone move through the city, through many places long since gentrified, but their movement is mostly one of changing placement. This film is not dogmatic in its static framing, as it features notable tracking shots (including a ten-minute shot along Tenth Avenue on the west of Manhattan, from a moving vehicle, but held steady all the way, so its frame does not move; also the lengthy closing shot from the parting Staten Island ferry), much of the film literally revolves around fixed viewing and hearing stations. For one stretch of the film, these shots alternate between two corners at an intersection, and it is here (27–35 minutes in) that the purposeful counterbalance can be seen/heard. As the long visual shots alternate, the sound begins to work as a different mode of spatialisation, and to indicate proximity, the closeness of activity as a designator of space. This is because the still camera creates a steady visual field, but the microphone that does not move invites exactly the opposite, in the form of dramatic jumps in volume, many of which are not due to actual loudness, but perceptual volume as the result of a sound being made closer by. So there are two different processes *and* two different spatialisations at work.

The changing levels of sound are the way in which this particular film works its magnification of the audio dimension—because its amplitude range is vast, its potential to alter is greater and so sound as a whole, as a dimension of the film, acquires magnitude in a way that is subtly different from the magnification through amplification of other films, such as *Jeanne Dielman*. Traffic, in *News from Home*, in particular, is the privileged exemplar of the "noise" of Akerman's films: as Margulies notes, "all the sound in her films—a concrete score of amplified diegetic sound—is both content and matter, meaning and noise."[19] I would go a step further and look at how this noise infiltrates the idea of meaning, crossing a species barrier as far as "information theory" is concerned.

[19] Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, 154.

The "noise" of traffic, whether foregrounded as disruptive proximity or as normally unwanted, unshakeable background, becomes information. This information, though, is not meaning, but stuff, an excess of activity that does not cohere. Parking the word "information" for a moment, let us think of the sound of traffic as noise, and we can hear this noise, in Akerman's films, replacing information.[20] So, to be more accurate, traffic noise supplants sound as information, even while sound threatens to displace the visual and the narration alike.

It is not all traffic. Or not all cars, anyway, as the subway is another privileged location, whether shot from one platform or in tracking corridors and other pedestrian transit spaces in the inside of a station, or, as happens for long minutes, filming from a fixed position in a car, either looking at the doors (and looking out when the train stops), or looking down the length of the train. Here, the differential relation between sound and image that "we" hear and see at the intersections of street and avenue gives way to its opposite as sound becomes a constant, a flowing normalcy (the microphone cannot but hear in an interior, and it would seem these are either very quiet trains, or these sequences are selected from quiet moments, or some sort of instruction was given, or the camera actively silenced subway users) while the visual plane is regularly interrupted as people come in and out of the visual corridor that emanates from the capturing device.

Voices are, in any case, discouraged in the diegetic. The voice that counts for Akerman, however perversely it is established or undermined in its role, is the one that speaks from outside. The indexicality of the voice-over is negligible but not absent at every moment (faithful descriptions can occur, amid the deferred, fallacious, altered, or manipulating sounds of the would-be authoritative voice). Once the voice is disrupted in the most direct way of being overwhelmed by ambient sound, then the voice becomes noise, the fullness of information provided increasingly heard (by this listener at least) as parodic, and therefore entropic. The content of the letters is in strong contrast to the unfolding phases of New York City in the 1970s, the tone and interests of the writer a rejection of what is in front of us. The exception is the strange moment of almost traditional sound-image montage as the letter from home says that the writer will be happy to see "you" soon as the camera moves to exit the city (1.14–1.15). This exit is preceded, or pre-empted, sonically, as at 1.13 sounds of traffic and ferry water disturbance (and possibly the subway too) merge, signalling a peak interference, a moving out of phase that can be heard. This then gives way to the shot, which takes about ten minutes, of southern Manhattan receding to become skyline. As "we" leave, the mist blurs the city, and the sound of our travel does not wane in sympathy, but holds steady. Both sound of ferry and camera shot are only apparently steady, as both enable the constant change of content/input/material. This shot reflects back on to other instances of the static camera and microphone that permit

[20] There is no space here to discuss the severely limited idea of noise in information theory, but essentially the problem lies in a fundamental confusion between entropy, on the one hand, and noise in a circuit, on the other.

so much mobility, while denying either an overarching perspective or an immersion that would lead viewer or listener to think he or she was there. In fact, the corporeality of viewing set up by Akerman may come down to that—the sense of presence not through the fact of sitting still for a while, or having to listen, but in the "hereness" of a spectator/auditor that is predicated on the reiteration of not being in the there of the film that would otherwise become a here for cosy non-uncanny dwelling. This hereness is not one that can associate or identify with camera or microphone. Instead it is the creation of an alienated spectator, but one that is differently and creatively alienated, unlike the ideal viewer in the black box room of the cinema that merely forgets or represses his or her self. If this critical distantiation happens, it is driven by the listening enacted by Akerman, and that makes its way towards us, before, during and often after the image.

Akerman's practice in the films of the 1970s is highly significant in the development of film and video work more widely, and is arguably much closer to the intermediality proper to video art than to film. For that reason, many assumptions of film theory are already critically engaged in Akerman's practice. Rather than claim that therefore she is in some way better than readers of cinema, I would want to signal the pioneering nature of her view of sound, which is that it is not to be used or perceived as an accompaniment of the visual, but as an integral part of her film practice. In this sense, it might remind us of the diegetic question once more. If Akerman continually worries at the divide of what is "in" and "outside" of the events we see, she does so democratically between sound and vision, and we need to note, with Stilwell, the strong possibility of the image as the non-diegetic.[21] Stilwell observes this of Busby Berkeley musicals, but what if it could be applied more widely, at least strategically, to radicalise the image domination of film reading? Akerman certainly engages with a dismantling of the diegetic–non-diegetic divide and debate by moving the terrain entirely, onto diegesis as always already corrupted by non-, extra- or meta- diegesis, while not letting all this settle into a categorically pacifying new unity. Akerman does not answer the question of sound in film, but opens it up as site of questioning, as intermedial transit, such that the format (film) of the form (film structure) is itself deconstructed, along with the hierarchy that many still presume between image track and soundtrack.

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8 Meaning and Musicality

SOUND-IMAGE RELATIONS IN THE FILMS OF JOHN SMITH

Andy Birtwistle

ACTIVE SINCE THE early 1970s, the British film and video artist John Smith has produced a substantial body of work that demonstrates a long-standing creative and critical engagement with the role played by sound in film and video—and, in particular, with the ways in which sound creates meaning within an audiovisual context. Influenced by the Structural film practice of the 1960s and 1970s, and underpinned by a Brechtian concern with the political dimensions of representation, Smith's witty and thought-provoking approach to sound-image relations has remained a defining feature of his work for over forty years. However, despite the fact that he has become one of the best-known experimental filmmakers working in the United Kingdom today, and the subject of numerous articles, interviews, and essays, Smith's innovative and distinctive use of sound has received relatively little sustained critical attention.

The study of film sound often usefully focuses on individual elements of the soundtrack, as determined by the conventional tripartite division of speech, music and sound effects. Historically, music has attracted most attention in the critical literature on cinema sound; the corollary of this being that, until recently, sound effects and speech remained relatively neglected in film theory, including the writing on experimental cinema. While attempting to address this critical imbalance, by listening across the constituent elements of Smith's soundtracks rather than focusing on one area in

particular, my own study departs from the conventional paradigm of speech, music and effects in two important ways. First, in considering voice rather than speech, my aim is to think beyond the purely linguistic aspects of Smith's repeated use of voice-over, and to explore the ways in which qualities of voice and vocal performance contribute to his work. Second, in seeking to examine the use of ambient sound rather than sound effects more generally, my aim is to focus on an aspect of film sound that seldom attracts critical attention. Often termed 'atmos' in film production, environmental or ambient sound is usually called upon to bolster the naturalism that underpins many forms of cinematic representation—both in documentary and drama. As 'background sound', ambient sound rarely draws attention to itself; however, in Smith's work, which challenges and deconstructs naturalistic modes of cinematic representation, ambient sounds become audible, taking an active role within the film text and contributing significantly to a body of work that often seeks to examine familiar, everyday environments. In addition to voice and ambient sound, my analysis also considers Smith's use of music, precisely because it is heard so infrequently in his films. One of Smith's objections to the conventional use of music in cinema is that it is usually added to a film in post-production rather than being developed as part of an integrated soundtrack. Focusing on Smith's collaboration with composer Jocelyn Pook, the final section of this chapter considers the ways in which the soundtrack of *Blight* (1994–96) blurs the boundaries between voice, music and ambient sound, creating a soundtrack that represents a radical departure from conventional approaches to the use of music in cinema.

Smith's artisanal approach to filmmaking has enabled him to maintain almost complete creative control over the various stages of the filmmaking process and thereby to craft the soundtrack as a carefully integrated whole. Working outside the conventions and restrictions of commercial film production, Smith is able to work on projects over extended periods of time: hence his practice of not dating work with a single year of release but rather indicating the period over which the films are made. In relation to sound, the significance of this approach to film production is that it allows him to develop the soundtrack in parallel with the image, setting up a creative dialogue between the two rather than positioning sound as an accompaniment or supplement to the visual track.

Voice and Voice-Over: *The Black Tower, The Girl Chewing Gum, Hotel Diaries*

The voice has a gentle, relaxed presence. A London accent, but not particularly strong. Maybe a slight lisp, although the speaker tells us he can't hear it himself. The monologue seems to ramble, reflecting on everyday personal experience (the recent loss of a tooth, the exorbitant price of chocolate purchased from a hotel minibar), or the technical problems of filmmaking (poor focus, dust on the lens, prehardener dirt in the film emulsion). The tone is warm, humorous, self-mocking: "before you start to lose interest in this, I should preface this video by letting you know that I'm actually one of the most

famous experimental filmmakers in the world." Anxious about filming "corny", "romantic" sunsets at the English coastal resort of Margate, the voice explains, "I don't want to get typecast as a sunset filmmaker".

The use of humour, the self-reflexive focus on filmmaking and the concern with the everyday, the personal and the domestic, all identify the work as Smith's; but it is also the voice itself, as much as the thematic and stylistic consistency of his films, that constructs Smith as auteur—a sonic presence inscribed across a body of work shot in and around spaces and places he has either inhabited or visited. Weaving its way through four decades of creative activity, this voice is heard in early films such as *The Girl Chewing Gum* (1976), later works including *The Black Tower* (1985–87) and the more recent *Hotel Diaries* series (2001–07), most often in the form of voice-over narration.

Though not always performed by Smith himself, voice-over has been a key element of his work since he began making his first 16 mm films in the early 1970s. It is in *Associations* (1975), produced while Smith was a student at the Royal College of Art, that voice-over first assumes a central role in his creative formulation of sound-image relations. Here the only sound used in the film is that of a narrator reading extracts from the essay "Word Associations and Linguistic Theory" (1970) by psycholinguist Herbert H. Clark.[1] The text is read by the actor Jonathan Burn, who was cast by Smith for the authority and gravitas of his voice. Burn's polished Received Pronunciation lends the narration a scholarly tone, in keeping with the academic text that serves as the film's script. The choice of voice and the specificity of the delivery also reference one of the dominant models of documentary film and television voice-over of the time, employing as it does the authoritative tones of a male narrator. Theorist Bill Nichols has discussed the ways in which documentarians have responded to the problematic authority of voice-over narration by developing approaches, such as that of *cinéma vérité*, in which it is simply eliminated. However, in Nichols's view, this strategy is in itself problematic: "Such documentaries use the magical temple of verisimilitude without the story teller's open resort to artifice. Very few seem prepared to admit through the very tissue and texture of their work that all film-making is a form of discourse fabricating its effects, impressions, and point of view."[2] For Nichols, the solution to this problem is not to eradicate the voice-over, but rather to create forms of self-reflexivity that foreground the role of the filmmaker in the creation of meaning. Nichols's position on the voice-over points clearly to the effect that Smith achieves in *Associations*, since the film not only references, but also destabilises this particular form of narration. Both the gravitas and the authority conveyed by the narrator's voice are undermined by Smith's choice of accompanying images, whereby words spoken by the narrator are illustrated on screen by a series of witty and sometimes outrageous visual puns. Hence the word "associations" is represented visually by four

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[1] Herbert H. Clark, "Word Associations and Linguistic Theory", in *New Horizons in Linguistics*, ed. John Lyons (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1970), 271–86.

[2] Bill Nichols, "The Voice of Documentary", *Film Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1983): 18.

images: an ass, a sewing machine, the ocean and a group of Asian women, producing the rebus "ass-sew-sea-Asians". While rarely returning to this type of carefully enunciated, highly formal narration, favouring instead the rhythms and sounds of colloquial speech, many of Smith's films nevertheless rely on tightly scripted and carefully produced voice-overs. Examples of the latter, performed by Smith himself, are found in films such as *The Girl Chewing Gum, The Black Tower* and the recent video *White Hole* (2014).

Where voice-over narration often seeks to constrain and anchor the meaning of an image in mainstream film and television, Smith's use of the device works to multiply, extend and complicate meaning, prompting us to interpret an image in surprising, unexpected and sometimes troubling ways. Over one of the many "imageless" black screens that populate *The Black Tower* we hear the film's unseen protagonist, voiced by Smith, recalling that:

> I decided to take another look at the tower near my house when I got back, but by the time I got there it was dark. There was no moon and I couldn't see it over the rooftops. That night I dreamt that I was imprisoned in the tower. My body was paralysed and only my eyes could move. At first I thought that I was in complete darkness but after a while I noticed a greyish speck which remained in the same place when I moved my eyes. I realised that I was facing a flat black wall. I got the feeling that the room was in fact brightly lit but I couldn't be sure.

In most filmmaking practices, a black screen would be thought of as the absence of an image: an empty frame devoid of meaning. But in response to the suggestions of the voice-over, in *The Black Tower* this same black screen represents a moonless night sky, the darkness of an unlit room and the black wall of the tower that haunts the film's protagonist. Thus Smith's voice-over transforms the nothingness of the black screen into an image invested with meaning. Disentangling sound from image, Smith demonstrates the ease with which the narration projects meaning onto the screen, and in so doing creates a moment of potential self-awareness in which the audience may glimpse themselves plugged into the apparatus of cinema, manipulated by stimuli whose form and flow are controlled by the film's maker.

These carefully scripted voice-overs contrast with the more personal and improvisatory tone developed by Smith in a series of works shot on video, beginning with *Home Suite* (1993–94) and continuing through *Regression* (1999), the films of the *Hotel Diaries* series, *unusual Red cardigan* (2011) and *Soft Work* (2012). Many of these pieces are shot hand-held, with Smith improvising a voice-over that falls somewhere between commentary, narration and off-screen sound. The use of hand-held camera, like the improvised voice-over, gives these films a feeling of spontaneity and immediacy, while at the same time reinforcing the personal and sometimes diaristic nature the work (Figure 8.1). Located behind the camera, at the periphery of the visual field, Smith's physical presence is registered on the soundtrack through the sounds produced by his handling of

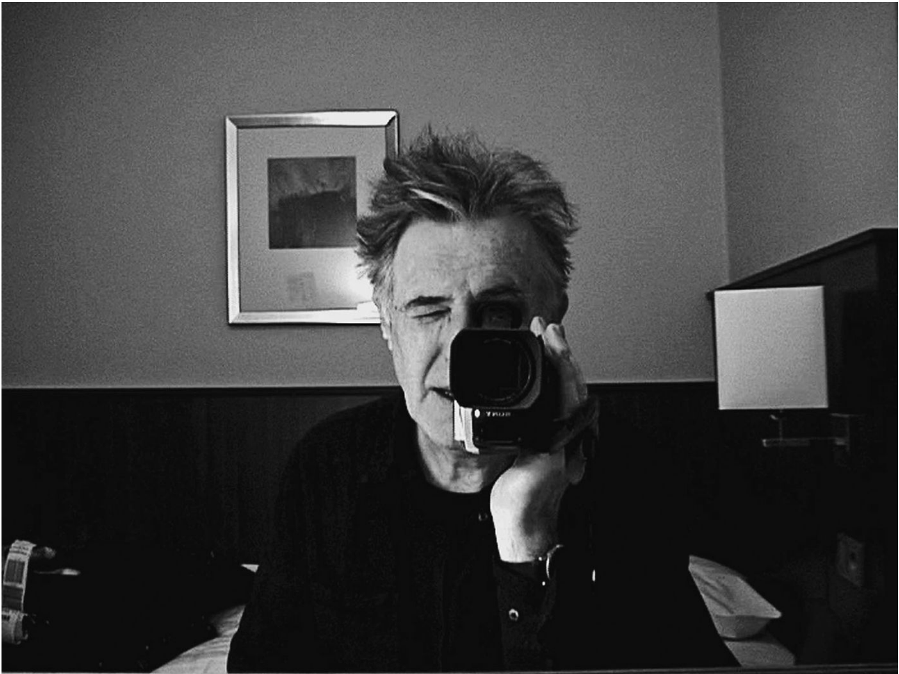

FIGURE 8.1 John Smith, *Pyramids/Skunk* [*Hotel Diaries* 5/6] (2006–07).

the video camera, the movement of his clothing and his own proximity to the microphone. In this way, to borrow Michel Chion's redolent phrase, his voice could be said to have "one foot in the image".[3] Inscribed in profilmic space rather than bearing the flattened spatial signature typical of a studio recording, Smith's off-screen voice departs from the established norms of both voice-over production and performance. However, at the same time his words guide our interpretation of the image, in many ways paralleling the primary function of the voice-over commentary or narration. This is particularly apparent in the videos of the *Hotel Diaries* series, in which Smith's rambling, casual voice-over animates his immediate surroundings, infusing inanimate objects with narrative significance through the power of speech. For example, in *Dirty Pictures* (2007), Smith relates a distressing scene witnessed at a crossing point on the Separation Wall in Bethlehem. As he describes the technology of the checkpoint, his camera plays across the furniture in his hotel room in East Jerusalem. Conjured by the descriptive power of the improvised voice-over, the familiar *mise-en-scène* of his immediate surroundings begins to double and recreate the Israeli checkpoint: the door on a dressing table stands in for a turnstile, the shelf holding his suitcase becomes a conveyor belt transporting personal belongings through an X-ray machine, while his drifting handheld camerawork

[3] Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 24.

mimics the zigzag passage of travellers through the checkpoint facility itself. There, on the previous day, Smith had witnessed a distraught, disabled Palestinian woman being refused access to the other side of the wall after repeatedly setting off the alarm on a security scanner. Following a number of unsuccessful attempts to pass through the scanner she is ordered to remove her orthopaedic shoes and hobbles through the security arch, only to be refused entry yet again. Lying innocently on the floor of his room—in the Western tourist's privileged space of comfort and leisure—his own shoes return and transport us to the plight of the Palestinian woman as Smith explains that he had been waved through the checkpoint, his British passport given only the most cursory of inspections by the Israeli security staff. Here the everyday, unremarkable *mise-en-scène* of travel is made meaningful through the power of spoken narrative, as Smith animates and reframes the mundane surroundings of his hotel room, charging even the prosaic image of a pair of shoes with political significance.

The suggestive power of these voice-overs may appear to rest primarily on Smith's linguistic skills, but this would be to ignore the role played by his own voice. As Chion points out, thinking about what the voice itself contributes to cinema, as distinct from language, is difficult: "we confuse it with speech. From the speech act we usually retain only the significations it bears, forgetting the medium of the voice itself. Of course the voice is there to be forgotten in its materiality; only at this cost does it fill its primary function."[4] That language holds a particular fascination for Smith is evidenced by films such as *Associations, Shepherd's Delight* (1980–84) and *Slow Glass* (1988–91), where it serves as a key thematic element of the work. It is understandable therefore that Michael Maziere, Martin Herbert and Smith himself have all discussed the ways in which the voice-over in *The Girl Chewing Gum* foregrounds the power of language to influence interpretation of the image.[5] However, these critical commentaries rarely consider the specific role played by the voice itself within this context. Aside from Chion, one of the few scholars to consider the importance of voice in cinema, and its relationship with speech, is Sarah Kozloff, who, reflecting on the individuality of voice, makes the point that "The voices of famous movie actors are instantly recognizable, and intimately interwoven with viewers' conceptions of their personae."[6] However, it is perhaps because Smith's voice seems so unremarkable and familiar that it tends to evade scrutiny. The ordinariness of the voice—an appropriate vocalisation of the everyman embodied in his name—means that it does not draw particular attention to itself or the work that

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[4] Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, 1.

[5] Michael Maziere, "John Smith's Films: Reading the Visible", *Undercut* 10–11 (1983–84): 40–44; Martin Herbert, "Mediate the Immediate: On John Smith", in *John Smith*, ed. Tanya Leighton and Kathrin Meyer (Milan: Mousse; Berlin: Sternberg, 2013), 5–16; Brian Frye, "Interview with John Smith", *Millennium Film Journal* 39–40 (2003), accessed 11 December 2014, http://www.mfj-online.org/journalPages/MFJ39/JohnSmith.html; and Tom Harrad, "Interview with John Smith", *White Review* (March 2014), accessed 11 December 2014, http://www.thewhitereview.org/interviews/interview-with-john-smith/.

[6] Sarah Kozloff, *Overhearing Film Dialogue* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 91.

FIGURE 8.2 John Smith, *The Girl Chewing Gum* (1976).

it undertakes on the filmmaker's behalf. Kozloff's analysis of the cinematic voice also considers the way in which actors employ pace, intonation and volume to convey emotion in a performance. These cues, while not entirely absent from Smith's voice-overs, tend to be somewhat muted, replaced instead by the rhythms and intonation of everyday speech. Unlike the actorly tone of Jonathan Burn's voice-over in *Associations*, Smith's voice appears to lack performative polish and thus, importantly, it sounds "natural".

This voice is first heard in *The Girl Chewing Gum*, where it casts Smith in the role of what appears to be a film director ordering extras around on location: "Slowly move the trailer to the left. And I want the little girl to run across, now!" Described by Ian Christie as "stentorian" and by A. L. Rees as "hectoring", the voice here differs somewhat from that heard in later works, which Rees has described, by contrast, as "intimate and personal".[7] The slightly strained quality of the voice-over seems to locate the speaker in the space presented on screen: a busy street corner in Dalston, East London (Figure 8.2). The voice is raised, the speaker apparently exerting himself to be heard above the noise of traffic and the ringing of an alarm bell. Interpreted in this way, Smith's voice, which positions itself as off-screen rather than voice-over, refers the audio-spectator to the

[7] Ian Christie, "English Eccentric", in *John Smith*, ed. Leighton and Meyer (Milan: Mousse; Berlin: Sternberg, 2013), 50; A. L. Rees, "Associations: John Smith and the Artists' Film in the UK", in *John Smith: Film and Video Works, 1972–2002*, ed. Mark Cosgrove and Josephine Lanyon (Bristol: Picture This Moving Image / Watershed Media Centre, 2002), 17, 26.

mechanics of film production, the soundtrack appearing to document the film's own making. However, a number of factors rapidly destabilise the impression that we are witnessing a film shoot in progress. Although the strained quality of the voice appears to locate the speaker on the noisy street corner, this interpretation is problematised later in the film when Smith announces, "I am shouting into a microphone on the edge of a field near Letchmore Heath, about fifteen miles from the building you're looking at." While this seems to be a genuine possibility (and is in fact where the voice-over was recorded) the veracity of Smith's claim is potentially undermined by his declaration that "In a tree about twenty yards away I can see a large blackbird with a wingspan of about nine feet."

While Smith's careful scripting occupies a central role in the film's destabilisation of documentary modes of representation, his voice also plays a key part in the film's deconstructive scrambling of sound-image relations, problematising the naturalistic (and illusionistic) relationship between sound and image that serves as the cornerstone not only of the fiction we term "drama", but also of the fiction we term "documentary". In the simple device of using performance to embed the voice in the space of the scene, and then using language to relocate that voice in space (Letchmore Heath) and time (recorded after the film was shot), Smith sets up an oscillation between conscious awareness of cinema's manipulatory power and engagement with its illusionistic lure. That is, the interplay of voice and language means that while we understand that we cannot take what we are being told at face value, the gravitational pull of the illusion is nevertheless hard to resist. As Smith explains, "Even when you know you're being lied to, it is still very easy to imagine the scenarios being described."[8]

While Smith's films are wary of cinema's power to manipulate the viewer, he nevertheless relies on this power to manoeuvre the spectator into a position where they can subsequently become aware of the constructed nature of representation. This is achieved by first drawing the spectator into the illusion, or narrative, and then pulling them out of that experience to establish a critical distance on it. Smith's voice is illusionistic, forming part of the repertory of devices that set up the dialectic between immersion and distantiation that is central to his work. Thus the slightly nasal quality one hears in Smith's voice-over for *The Girl Chewing Gum*, along with his occasional coughs, helps to stitch his narration into the naturalistic illusion of reality that the film needs in order to question the nature of that illusion.

This use of the voice is further refined in later works—in particular the *Hotel Diaries* series—in which the casual, spontaneous, improvisatory feel of the films helps Smith's voice-over manoeuvre the audio-spectator into position: guiding, nudging and leading them to the point at which they begin to make connections between the narration and the images presented on screen without feeling that they are being directed to do so. In the sequence from *Dirty Pictures* described above, Smith never overtly references or explains

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[8] Smith, quoted in Harrad, "Interview with John Smith".

the metaphorical nature of his imagery, but rather allows the viewer to situate images of the interior of the hotel room in relation to the story being narrated. Distracting us from the manipulatory power of his disembodied narration, Smith's casual tone helps to create a self-reflexive space in which the spectator has the potential to become aware of his or her own imaginative engagement with the film—aware that the scene described by Smith is conjured in their imagination rather than being represented directly on screen. Paradoxically, this type of self-awareness is most acute when Smith reveals his hand, laying bare the filmmaker's control over the audio-spectator, the manipulatory power of cinema and the mediated nature of representation. This is one reason why the punchline that draws *Museum Piece* (2004) to a close evokes such a strong response from an audience: not only because it is a good joke, but also because it jolts the audio-spectator, reminding them that, despite the film's apparently loose organisation and the engaging naturalness of Smith's delivery, there is (of course) a structure and a purpose guiding his nocturnal wandering of the hotel's corridors.

Ambient Sound: *Lost Sound*

Informing Smith's use of voice-over is a desire to reveal cinema's power to manipulate the audio-spectator, and to deconstruct the illusionistic nature of certain forms of cinematic representation. Hence, Smith has described his own work as "anti-illusionist", stating that: "All of my work, whether it does it all the time or intermittently, draws attention to its own construction, its own artifice."[9] Liberating ambient sound from its conventional inaudibility, in part by treating it as a musical resource, Smith's work explores the creative potential of this much-neglected aspect of the soundtrack, while at the same time deconstructing its role in cinema's illusionistic representation of reality.

"Hoxton Street N1 Wednesday March 25th". The rumble of traffic. Footsteps and conversation of passing pedestrians. These familiar sounds of the urban soundscape are accompanied on screen by close-up shots of a short length of cassette tape submerged in a kerbside puddle. As a car passes out of shot, we catch a short snatch of music, muffled and indistinct. On first hearing, the soundtrack seems to consist only of ambient sound; recorded on location with the image, laminated to it. This is the unremarkable, everyday background noise of the urban environment: sounds that we hear, but rarely listen to; sounds that, under normal circumstances, barely inscribe themselves on our consciousness. The location recording helps to give the video a documentary aesthetic, bolstered by the precise details of location and date given on screen. The very mundanity of the soundtrack suggests a lack of mediation—a guarantee of the indexicality and objectivity of the recording. The music we hear could be ambient sound, issuing from a car as it passes by, but in fact has been harvested from the abandoned audiotape we see on

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[9] Smith, quoted in Frye, "Interview with John Smith"; Smith, quoted in Harrad, "Interview with John Smith".

screen. In this way, *Lost Sound* (1998–2001) documents fragments of discarded cassette tape found by Smith and his collaborator Graeme Miller in a small area of East London, combining music from the tapes with images and ambient sounds recorded in the places where the tapes were found (Figure 8.3).

In all but one of the video's twenty locations, the lengths of abandoned cassette tape are shot in situ: wrapped around clumps of grass, snagged by the peeling bark of a tree, stuck behind a satellite dish. The ambient sounds recorded in these locations present familiar and unremarkable urban soundscapes, varying in density depending on location, time of day and proximity to roads, factories, shops and flight paths. However, as the video develops, Smith begins to build formal, narrative and musical connections between the places, events, and sounds that he and Miller have recorded and the music recovered from discarded audiotape.

In the early sequences of *Lost Sound* there is little evidence of artistic intervention beyond framing and composition; however, as the piece progresses, the soundtrack increasingly announces its own construction, audibly transforming its status from documentation to interpretation. In some respects, this parallels Smith's use of voice-over narration to problematise the truth claims of documentary modes of representation. While at first the soundtrack of *The Girl Chewing Gum* seems to present itself as the simple record of a film in production, very quickly Smith's voice-over directs us to the fact that all forms of cinematic representation, whether documentary or drama, are constructions. In the same

FIGURE 8.3 John Smith, *Lost Sound* (1998–2001).

way, Smith's interventions on the soundtrack of *Lost Sound* gradually draw attention to the film's own artifice and prompt us to question the veracity of the film's documentation of the urban soundscape. The careful (re)positioning of specific sounds extracted from location recordings allows Smith to fashion micro narratives from his source materials that open out onto social and political issues. In the sequence titled "Arnold Circus E2 Sunday May 17th", we are presented with the image of cassette tape caught around iron railings. As a breeze animates the previously motionless piece of tape, Indian pop music plays on the soundtrack over the sound of children playing in the street, and both music and ambient sound signal the fact that this area of London is home to a large immigrant population. Suddenly the snarling and barking of a dog erupts on the soundtrack, whereupon the music ceases and the cassette tape becomes motionless once again. This sequence is repeated, establishing what appears to be a cause-and-effect relationship between these two sounds: the inference being that the aggressive barking of the dog silences the music. For Smith, this particular sequence has the potential to connect with a specific social issue by way of the simple narrative generated in the interplay between the music and the sounds of the dog. Smith has described how, on visiting this area of London on a previous occasion, he had witnessed far-right activists distributing leaflets, and that, for him at least, the sound of barking evokes one of the totemic symbols of British national identity: the British bulldog.[10] Thus, for those members of the audience who possess the appropriate cultural knowledge, the fragment of narrative that emerges from this sequence may serve to raise issues relating to cultural diversity, immigration and nationalism.

The narrativisation that results from Smith's intervention on the soundtrack is but one of the ways in which editing problematises the veracity of the documentary aesthetic referenced by *Lost Sound*. In addition, the approach to sound-image relations developed within the project also works to destabilise the seeming objectivity of the film's documentation of abandoned audiotape. In the sequence described above, Smith sutures the playback of the music with the movement of the cassette tape as it is caught by the breeze. Here, he playfully suggests that the tape itself becomes animated by the music—or alternatively, that the movement of the tape somehow creates the sounds we hear. This simple device both emulates and deconstructs the naturalistic model of sound-image relations proposed by the vast majority of documentary and drama productions. Memorably described by Rick Altman as "sound film's fundamental lie", cinema's synchronisation of sound and image habitually works to construct, signal and foreground the apparent integrity of the profilmic event, and to efface the illusionistic foundation of naturalistic modes of audiovisual representation.[11] Chion terms the effect produced by the correspondence of sound and image synchresis, which he defines as "the spontaneous and irresistible weld produced between a particular auditory phenomenon and visual

[10] Smith, quoted in Cate Elwes, "Trespassing beyond the Frame: John Smith Talking Film with Cate Elwes", *Filmwaves* 15 (2001): 17.

[11] Rick Altman, "Introduction", "Cinema/Sound", special issue, *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 6.

phenomenon when they occur at the same time." Importantly, Chion suggests that "This join results independently of any rational logic."[12] Thus Smith is able to fashion an event that we know cannot have taken place, yet which nevertheless appears as though it might have done; an appearance that is further underwritten by the indexicality implied by the video's documentary style.

The creation of sound-image relations that simultaneously draw upon and deconstruct illusionistic modes of representation is a key element of *Lost Sound* and forms part of the broader play between immersion and distance that animates Smith's body of work. This dynamic is also articulated through the musical sensibility that Smith brings to the treatment of ambient sound throughout the project. As *Lost Sound* develops, Smith's editing gradually works to layer and orchestrate sections of ambient sound, with the result that the soundtrack begins to take the form of a subtle, sometimes almost undetectable, *musique concrète* of the environment. However, since these sounds are drawn from the video footage shot in each location, in which sound and image were recorded simultaneously, these same sounds nevertheless remain representational, and anchored in the space depicted on screen. Smith states:

> Nearly all the sound that I use is there because it relates to the image. . . . So even if you don't see a dog barking, it represents a dog barking in a scene. But when I'm working with sound, all the time I'm thinking about how that sounds in an abstract way; how it sounds as a component within a composition. And the composition is, of course, the film.[13]

What presents itself as natural, we come to realise more and more, has been selected, arranged and organised: an orchestration of individual moments sifted from many hours of videotape. By the time we reach the closing sequences of *Lost Sound*, the authorial control that was at first hidden has become wholly evident, as Smith loops increasingly brief sections of footage to create a rhythmic and progressively more abstract audiovisual *musique concrète*. In this way, Smith signals the film's own construction while simultaneously undercutting and problematising cinema and television's claim to the real. The presence of ambient sound in the documentary genre constructs the soundtrack as an unblinking witness to the profilmic event, in which the inclusion of the aleatory and the accidental suggest a lack of authorial manipulation and intervention. In its mundanity, ambient sound often evades conscious audition, quietly deflecting attention from the simple fact that the audiovisual text is a construction that creates the illusion of reality through particular combinations of sound and image. While the use of music and voice-over might draw the attention of those who question the objectivity of documentary,

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[12] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 63.

[13] Smith, interview with Andy Birtwistle, 24 October 2014, private collection.

Smith drills down to the fundamental illusion that underwrites the genre's claim to the real, reminding us that, at some level, all film is fiction.

Music: *Blight*

For a filmmaker wary of cinema's power to manipulate the audio-spectator, conventional forms of film music present something of a problem. Smith's anti-illusionist aesthetic, informed in part by Brechtian ideas, seeks to involve the audio-spectator as an active producer of meaning rather than as a passive consumer. As discussed above, Smith has developed a number of strategies in his use of voice-over and ambient sound to achieve this through a self-reflexive foregrounding of the processes of filmic signification. However, these strategies, underpinned by a critical concern with illusionistic forms of cinematic representation, cannot necessarily be applied to music, whose emotional power and conventional form present Smith with a slightly different set of problems.

Music has rarely been a defining element of Smith's work and is heard only sporadically in his films. In some ways his attitude towards the use of music in cinema might be thought of as active resistance, founded in part on a mistrust of music's power to manipulate the audio-spectator, often on an unconscious level:

> although my films are manipulative in a certain way . . . you know that you're being manipulated. You're aware of these tricks because the manipulation's always in the foreground. What I don't like very often about the use of music in film is it controls how we look at the images. It tells us how we should be reading a particular image, whereas without the music track then things are much more ambiguous. . . . What I really hate about the way music works in film is when it's low level, it's background. Especially with setting up suspense and things like that, where you're not really hearing it.[14]

The inaudibility of the conventional film score, and its function as what David Denby has termed "an enforcer of mood", clearly run counter to Smith's desire to create films that not only draw attention to their own construction but also create a space for the audience to reflect on the manipulative qualities of the medium and the means by which cinema creates meaning.[15] Smith's other key objection to the use of music in cinema relates to the way in which the industrial model of film production situates music within the creative development of a film as a whole:

> One of the reasons why I've never liked to use music is that I always see the development of the picture and the soundtrack as being parallel things—and of

[14] Ibid.

[15] David Denby, *Do the Movies Have a Future?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 38.

FIGURE 8.4 John Smith, *Blight* (1994–96).

> course conventionally when music is used in film it's always very late on in post-production: the composer comes in and sticks some music on the top.[16]

These concerns are in some ways both raised and addressed by Smith's collaboration with composer Jocelyn Pook on the film *Blight*, which focuses on the destruction of East London homes caused by the construction of the M11 link road during the 1990s (Figure 8.4). The soundtrack that resulted from this collaboration integrates the sounds of demolition and the voices of local residents with music performed by Electra Strings and pianist Helen Ottoway. If Smith has always been an ear-minded filmmaker, attuned to the sounds of the environment and the rhythms of speech, then the collaboration with Pook appears to have intensified the musicality that has always been inherent in his approach to the soundtrack:

> The only distinction I would make between what I do when I play with sound and what a musician would do is that I don't usually have a rhythmic structure for those sounds. So they're not put into any kind of repetitive structure. That's the only way I'd distinguish it from conventional music.[17]

[16] Smith, interview by Birtwistle, 24 October 2014.
[17] Ibid.

Smith's sensitivity to the musical qualities of speech, effects and ambient sound, is evident from the very first moments of the film, as the Doppler swish of passing cars gives way to the creaking of wood, the crunch of falling rubble and the repeated phase "Jordan and Kim" (a mother, perhaps, calling to her children). As the sequence gradually builds in complexity, texture and depth, it becomes increasingly evident that sounds are being chosen, placed and combined as much for their musical value as for what they might mean or represent. This integration of the various elements of the soundtrack was achieved partly because the sounds that Smith recorded for use with the image—such as those of falling bricks and splintering wood—were also employed by Pook in the music composed for the film. This produces a soundtrack that draws on both the representational and abstract musical qualities of those sounds normally termed "effects". The same is also true of some of the fragments of speech that feature in *Blight*, which are positioned and sometimes repeated as part of Pook's composition. The majority of these are extracted from recorded conversations with local people recalling memories of former homes and their subsequent demolition. Here, Pook employs the tonal qualities of the spoken word as a musical resource, generating poignant leitmotifs from fragments of recorded speech. The collaborative nature of the film's soundtrack is particularly well illustrated by this use of sound, resulting as it did from the creative interplay between the two artists. Thus Smith explains that while he selected the kinds of words that were to be used in various sections of the film, Pook chose most of the specific fragments of voice and then incorporated these into the music.[18]

In many respects, the film can be seen to align closely with Smith's previous work, not only because its approach to the use of ambient sound and effects is informed by a musical sensibility, but also because of the interplay between representation and abstraction that is heard in the musical use of both 'concrete' sounds and speech. However, where *Blight* departs from Smith's other films is that this interplay does not necessarily create a self-reflexive tension or movement between representation and abstraction, but rather maintains each as separate strands within the overall composition.

The complex integration of the various elements of the film's soundtrack clearly evidences a project in which the composition of the film's music has not been left until the final stages of post-production. What then of Smith's other major criticism of film music, in terms of the way in which it is employed to enforce a particular and limited reading of the image? The fact that Pook's music is sometimes designed to elicit a strong emotional response from the audio-spectator is clearly a potential problem for a filmmaker who inherits from Brecht a desire to engage the spectator in a critical manner (through textual self-reflexivity and spectatorial self-awareness) rather than on a purely emotional level. For Smith, this issue is addressed by the fact that, while Pook's music undoubtedly brings a powerful emotional dynamic to the film, it nevertheless possesses an audibility

[18] Smith, personal communication with Birtwistle, 16 December 2014.

that stands in opposition to the model of the classical film score. Thus Smith comments, "The way in which I justified *Blight* to myself is the music is so in your face that you're really aware of the manipulation."[19] While this may indeed be the case, it is also the originality of the film's integrated soundtrack that helps to guarantee its audibility. Few films manage to achieve the complex integration of speech, music and effects that emerges from Smith and Pook's collaboration, and in this respect *Blight* stands alongside some of the most notable experimental films of the British documentary tradition, including *Song of Ceylon* (Basil Wright and Walter Leigh, 1934) and *Night Mail* (Harry Watt, Basil Wright and Benjamin Britten, 1936).

Smith's long-standing creative engagement with the role played by sound in film and television has been motivated in part by a desire to problematise and challenge pervasive forms of audiovisual representation:

> all of my work is political in that it makes the viewers aware that they are looking at something which is an artifice, so it doesn't attempt to make you believe in what it's giving you, whether ideological or factual, it's something for you to actively engage with and hopefully not just consume.[20]

In Smith's work we witness a form of experimental filmmaking that not only provides a much-needed alternative to the sound-image relations of commercial cinema and broadcast television, but which also offers a critique of the illusionism produced by familiar combinations of sound and image. Thus in his use of voice-over, Smith has devised a range of creative strategies to examine the ways in which language shapes perception. Shifting ambient sound from the background to the foreground of the cinematic soundscape, Smith subjects a largely ignored element of the soundtrack to critical scrutiny, and by adopting an essentially musical approach to its use indicates some of the untapped potential of this underappreciated cinesonic resource. And finally, in developing strategies to integrate music into the soundtrack, rather than treating it as a supplement or addition, Smith's collaboration with Pook challenges the conventional tripartite division of the soundtrack into speech, music and effects. In each of these three areas, it is perhaps the self-reflexive play with the creation of meaning that identifies Smith as an original voice in experimental film and video. However, for Smith, experimentation and reflexivity are never ends in themselves, but rather part and parcel of a critical engagement with the ways in which audiovisual media influence our understanding of the world. In investigating what is at stake in the creation and transmission of meaning through sound and image, Smith brings us back to the social sphere, reminding us that the practice of art is political and has political potential.

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[19] Smith, interview with Birtwistle, 24 October 2014.

[20] Ben Rowley, "In Conversation with John Smith", in *John Smith* [exhibition catalogue], ed. Hazel Stone (Canterbury: Sidney Cooper Gallery, 2014), 13.

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9 Audiovisual Dissonance in Found-Footage Film

Holly Rogers

AT ITS MOST basic, the found-footage film extracts images and sounds from a variety of sources and places them into new audiovisual configurations. Cinema history has thrown up numerous examples of such re-appropriation, from the sharing of stock footage and locational shots between Hollywood films in the 1930s and '40s, to the stitching together of new and original material to form a seamless narrative in more recent films such as *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* (Carl Reiner, 1982) and *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, 1994). While these examples from mainstream culture produce new, yet coherent, visual re-contextualisations of sources by obscuring the different production qualities between clips, however, the experimental found-footage film creates something different. Although making use of compilation, cut-up, free-association, *détournement* and the super-cut, experimental directors also embrace footage taken from mainstream culture. And yet, they seek to highlight and reinforce the different qualities between collaged clips, inviting audience members not only to construct coherence between newly contextualised images, but also to generate critical readings of the original, deconstructed texts. The form of double engagement that such a process engenders can transform culturally iconic footage into a critique of cinema's values and methods of construction, as Michael Zryd writes: "Found-footage filmmaking is a metahistorical form commenting on the cultural discourses and narrative patterns behind history. Whether picking through the detritus of the mass mediascape or refinding (through image processing and optical printing) the new in the familiar, the found-footage artist

critically investigates the history *behind* the image, discursively embedded within its history of production, circulation, and consumption."[1] While Zryd is correct in his understanding of found-footage filmmaking as a metahistorical form, I suggest that such a critical investigation interrogates not just what lies behind each image as an isolated, nomadic excerpt, or its re-situation within a new visual flow, but also what develops within the spaces that lie between the recombined images.

The use of music within and across these spaces can have a profound influence on how we receive the new in the familiar. The ways in which the history behind images can be revealed and reconfigured visually and sonically are diverse. A common method has been to cut up pre-existing films. For *Rose Hobart* (1936), Joseph Cornell re-edited a selection of shots from a single film in order to explore the aura of the eponymous Hollywood starlet; in *Remembrance* (1990), Jerry Tartaglia re-worked images of Bette Davis taken from *All About Eve* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950) "in order to undo the images which dominate my waking and dreaming life"; and Ken Jacobs continually re-imagined and re-photographed a brief 1905 film for *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* (1969) in order to expose and deconstruct the conventions of the cinematic gaze.[2] Matthias Müller and Christoph Girardet, on the other hand, employed the entire output of a single director for *The Phoenix Tapes* (1999), combining scenes from forty Hitchcock films in order to draw attention to the presence of the various leitmotivic tropes running through his oeuvre. Others have found their material from numerous sources: for example, Christian Marclay used clips from many different films for his short work *Telephones* (1995) and Arthur Lipsett used discarded footage found on the cutting room floor in *Very Nice, Very Nice* (1961). In all methods, however, the new collage initiates a critical reaction to each original, de-contextualised source. As a result, the possibilities for new interpretation become manifold, as artist and director Standish Lawder explains:

> Stripped of its original context, the shot becomes veiled with layers of speculation, subjective evocation and poetic ambiguity. Questions of intentionality and meaning become slippery. The true significance of the *a priori* original image hovers just off-screen; we cannot be certain exactly *why* it was filmed. Yet *what* was filmed remains firmly fixed, only now surrounded by a thousand possible new *whys*.[3]

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[1] Michael Zryd, "Found-Footage Film as Discursive Metahistory: Craig Baldwin's *Tribulation 99*", *Moving Image* 3, no. 2 (2003): 41–42.

[2] Jerry Tartaglia quoted in William C. Wees, "The Ambiguous Aura of Hollywood Stars in Avant-Garde Found-Footage Films", *Cinema Journal* 41, no. 2 (2002): 3.

[3] Standish Lawder, "Comments on the Collage Film", in *Found Footage Film*, ed. Cecilia Hausheer and Christoph Settele (Lucerne: VIPER/zyklop, 1992), 113–15.

Along similar lines, William C. Wees argues that experimental found-footage films "present images *as images*, as representations of the image-producing apparatus of cinema and television, but collage also promotes an analytical and critical attitude toward its images and their institutional sources."[4] But what happens when the images chosen are not simply images? When their disjointed flow results in a similarly disjointed sonic tapestry? Or when original sounds are enhanced or replaced with a new soundtrack able to flow across the previously unrelated clips? What happens when the a priori original image is not only de-contextualised, but also sonically re-imagined?

Fiction film that refers to the found-footage style in order to divulge a sense of unedited realism, such as *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999), *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008), *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigalow, 2008) and *Argo* (Ben Affleck, 2012), rarely includes music for fear that a soundtrack may counter the illusion of non-interventionalism being sought: moreover, the sudden changes in sonic texture between the pieces of (apparently) roughly edited hand-held camera footage are used to enhance the developing fear, tension and "realism" of the story. In experimental film, there is often no such illusion. Here, pre-used footage can be collaged in such a way as to bring the conventions of mainstream cinematography and the languages of mass media to the fore. And when the sound and/or music of a clip is changed, as it most often is, the process of détournement relies not only on an image being placed against other images from different scenes or sources but also on the conjoining of each pre-existent image with a new sound. If the new sounds extend across several disjointed clips, our reading of the resultant collage can be fundamentally different from a reading of a collection of images merely *as images* (this is of course a basic function of all screen music). If we think of the found-footage collage as a horizontal compilation of visual clips *and* as a highly charged *audio*visual montage that mobilises a vertical form of deconstruction (between sound and image), then investigation into the resultant "poetic ambiguity" requires a double form of engagement. Understood in this way, the experimental found-footage film becomes capable of critiquing cinema's cultural tropes and iconography, as Lawder and Wees suggest, while at the same time revealing its methods of luring audiences into pre-determined narrative positions through the use of sound and music.

Although there are numerous ways in which music can interact with a film's visual track, Nicholas Cook has identified three primary modes of operation: music can complement the image by bringing to light certain emotional or narrative aspects; it can operate through conformance by matching or replicating certain aspects of the image or its rhythmic construction; and it can provide a contrast to the image by working against it.[5]

[4] William C. Wees, "Found Footage and Questions of Representation", in Hausheer and Settele, *Found Footage Film*, 53.

[5] Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 98–106.

Each type of vertical alignment is created according to a different aesthetic and each initiates a unique form of audience engagement. The first two types are commonly found in mainstream cinema, in which a coherent and complementary flow of both image and music has historically been highly desirable, whether at the level of absolute synchronicity or via a more symbolic form of signification. The third type, however, is relatively rare. Audiovisual dissonance is unusual in mainstream cinema, as it comes with the risk of rupture, both at a filmic level—whereby sound and image push and pull at one another—and at the level of reception, in which an audience must navigate the gap that such a rupture engenders. Michel Chion has outlined two forms of audiovisual distance: "true *free counterpoint*" is "the notion of the sound film's ideal state as a cinema free of redundancy, where sound and image would constitute two parallel and loosely connected tracks, neither dependent on the other"; "dissonant harmony", on the other hand, occurs when music and image work in active opposition to one another, clashing against a "precise point of meaning".[6]

Both types of dissonance are very difficult to find, however, not least because the very idea suggests that there is an absolute 'standard' against which such 'contrast' can be measured; even if a film has established a certain audiovisual context, and then does something musically or sonically that disrupts that context, perceptions quite easily adapt to accommodate what might often be thought of as 'contrast', so that it no longer appears dissonant. Such is the highly attuned ability of the filmgoer. But when a contrast is achieved, it can be extraordinarily powerful. The shock of both forms of audiovisual dissonance on an audience attuned to synchronicity can transform an otherwise coherent visual passage. In mainstream film, such a clash is most often used to provide an ironic commentary on the image—think of Stealers Wheel's "Stuck in the Middle With You" (1972) playing as Mr Blonde slices off the cop's ear in *Reservoir Dogs* (1992)—as it runs the risk of leaving an audience feeling unsettled. In the case of *Reservoir Dogs*, the distance between disturbing image and jolly song leaves the audience with a sense of horror greater than that achievable through image alone (Mr Blonde is enjoying the task; he finds it amusing; it's no big deal). As we struggle to empathise with the character, the torture takes on an even more sinister edge. Aspects of the song that lie latent when experienced only sonically begin to emerge, setting up oscillating layers of audiovisual hierarchy: the music's jerky rhythm begins to suggest a kinaesthetic attitude of the body—a malignant, springy, jack-in-the-box kind of mechanism—that contrasts with the actor's strong and compact physique; at the same time, he dances awkwardly, loping, hunched and full of malignant intent. All of this together creates a strange amalgam, particularly when the song's lyrics are taken into account: loving and dangerous, close and remote, audiovisually ruptured, yet put back together again in a sinister and malevolent way. The issue here, however, is that we

[6] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 39, 38; italics in original.

have come to expect such techniques in the comic-book style films of Tarantino. And if expectation is fuelled, is it still possible to treat such scenes as audiovisually contrasting, or dissonant, at the level of reception?

Whether or not such scenes are experienced as jarring or are readily absorbed by an efficient and accomplished filmgoer, the active state that the distance between sound and image demands of an audience, who must navigate between two contrasting narrative trajectories, has been embraced by many directors of experimental film as a way to expose the conventions of film's syncretic languages. During the early twentieth century, for instance, those experimenting with film often sought to produce unforgiving statements through a clashing and aggressive form of audiovisuality. Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Gregori Alexandrov called for a contrapuntal form of audiovisuality that would pit image and sound against each other, affording them an equality that would force audience members into an activated form of reception ("A Statement", 1928); Hans Richter accused mainstream filmmakers of providing an easy form of consumption—a "sugar-laden" product—and collaborated with experimental and avant-garde composers to create complex audiovisual products able to test his audiences' interpretative juices; and Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel randomly selected music for their dream-inspired images in order to create a form of audiovisual free association and surrealism (*Un Chien Andalou*, 1929).[7]

The experimental found-footage film can oscillate continually among all three types of audiovisual engagement, either drawing together disparate sources to highlight their differences or suturing the new construction to form the semblance of coherent flow. These forms of horizontal and vertical pulsation can fundamentally influence our experience of a collaged composition, as they determine our awareness of original context, draw out particular relationships between clips and construct or repel larger narrative arcs operating with or against the visual progression. With this in mind, it is possible to split found-footage audiovisuality into three types. The first replaces existing sounds with a continual flow of original music that encourages a mode of engagement very similar to that of mainstream film. The second removes original sound in favour of new, yet pre-existent music, which produces a secondary form of found-footage compilation that runs in "harmonic dissonance" to the de-contextualised visual collage. And the third mixes original and new sounds to create a disjunctive and dissonant audiovisual flow that requires an audience not only to re-read, or "undo", images, but also continually to navigate between aural contexts, prompting a hyper-awareness of times, eras and cultural tropes. What is significant about all types of musical play in found-footage films is that there is a clear preference for the re-use, or production, of relatively tonal musical forms and timbres. Just as found-footage film often provides

[7] See, for example, Robert Robertson, *Eisenstein on the Audiovisual: The Montage of Music, Image and Sound in Cinema* (London: Tauris Academic, 2009); Hans Richter, *The Struggle for the Film, (1934–1939)*, trans. Ben Brewster (St. Louis, MO: Wildwood, 1986), 47.

a discourse on its mainstream counterpart through dismemberment and re-voicing, so too is the soundtrack used to comment on traditional uses of music in film and the ways in which it can strongly influence audience perception. There is a difference, then, between avant-garde or experimental music and avant-garde audiovisuality. Here, an experimental form is created from the clash of several re-situated forms of filmic discourse: and all of these can be taken from the mainstream idiom.

Audiovisual Synchresis

The collaging of pre-existent and new material to fashion a refreshed audiovisual text is a common trope of new media, with music video, VJing and video mashups all making good use of visual collation and re-contextualisation. Often, these practices begin with, or are predicated on, a musical framework: in music video, music comes first; VJing is a real-time response to a musical performance; and the eclectic visual progressions of video mashups are often edited to a consistent sonic sweep. The combination of pre-existent images with a new soundtrack has also become popular in films that sit somewhere between music video and feature film, and that operate from within a documentary, or essay, aesthetic: for instance, British Sea Power's low-fi indie response to a string of footage collected from the British Film Institute's National Archive of Britain's early twentieth-century seaside culture in *From the Sea to the Land Beyond: Britain's Coast on Film* (Penny Woolcock, 2012) produces an intense wash of nostalgia that draws awareness away from the different qualities and styles of the montaged clips. Here the concern with highlighting the similarity between shots (and hiding the gaps in between them) in order to develop aesthetic strands is paramount, a smoothing gesture that lessens awareness of discontinuity while leaving plenty of room for viewer participation. The form of synchresis (a word coined by Chion to describe "the spontaneous and irresistible weld produced between a particular auditory phenomenon and visual phenomenon when they occur at the same time") that arises here is familiar.[8] It does not invite overt critical attention, but rather an aestheticisation—or appreciation—of the images, although the power of nostalgia to provoke subsequent critique can quickly turn appreciation into a far more subjective experience.

This provision of a new soundtrack is the least common of the three types of experimental audiovisuality, however. This is partly due to the DIY aesthetic of the found-footage compilation and the fact that many experimental directors work with small, or nonexistent, budgets that rarely extend to the services of a composer or band; but as we have seen, it is also because found-footage film operates according to the aesthetics of undoing and "refinding the new in the familiar".

[8] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 63.

Audiovisual Re-alignment

More in tune with the aesthetic of repositioning the found object is the placement of pre-existent images with found, or re-used, music. In this model, both sound and image can operate according to the same aesthetic of undoing and reconfiguration. Pre-existent music, which comes with its own pre-conceptions, can realign and comment on the images; it can determine how we react to a visual progression and whether we treat the original source with humour, horror or simply a renewed criticality. But, more importantly, it can also comment on its original setting, opening wide the film's interpretative possibilities. When music is placed against an image, the process of détournement begins before the image is received within its new horizontal re-alignment. The first encounter with the de-contextualised shot or scene, in other words, demands a sonic, rather than a visual, interpretation.

As we have seen, a collage of found-footage material produces a series of different sound qualities and points of audition that can highlight the disjointed nature of the images. If several film sources have been combined, the changes in audio quality will be greatly magnified. Some filmmakers have embraced such sonic juxtaposition, treating it as a form of *musique concrète* by dislocating actuality sound from its visual referent and using it creatively to form a soundscape as abstract as the images. If a single film has been cut up and rearranged, these differences in audio mastering may be slight, although acoustic ambience will most likely resonate differently between scenes. Nevertheless, music is commonly used to soften the edges of even the most aurally coherent montages. And yet, whereas music in the mainstream montage takes us into the diegesis, in the experimental film it can ensure that we remain at a critical distance from the new construction by leaving the spaces between shots wide open.

Joseph Cornell's 1936 *Rose Hobart* is one of the most famous examples of an experimental found-footage film that makes use of disinterested, pre-existent music. The short film is a cut-up of a 1931 B-film called *East of Borneo* (George Melford, 1931), a jungle drama set in the fictional Indonesian kingdom of Maradu. One of the first talkies released by Universal Studios, the story follows a heroine played by Rose Hobart, a little-known actress whose fame petered away shortly after the film's release. Hobart's character travels with great bravery to Maradu to bring back her estranged husband, but on the way she encounters a prince with evil intent and an array of ferocious jungle animals. Although there is some confusion surrounding the way in which Cornell came by the print of the film, gallery owner Julien Levy has recalled that the artist acquired it by chance, as it was included in a batch of film being sold by the pound for its silver nitrate.[9] Cornell wasn't the first to plunder the film, however: its stock footage, along with shots taken from other feature films, newsreels and travelogues, reappeared in

[9] Julien Levi, cited in Deborah Solomon, *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), 85–86.

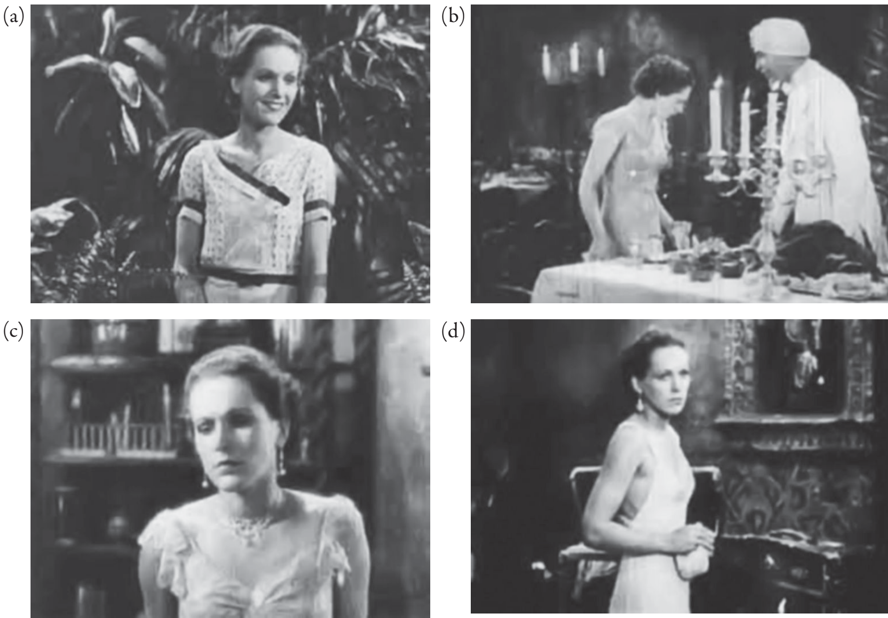

FIGURE 9.1 Four stills from Joseph Cornell, *Rose Hobart* (1936).

another Universal film, *The Perils of Pauline* (1933), starring Pearl White.[10] But whereas *The Perils of Pauline* incorporated the pre-existent stock footage into its new narrative in order to set the scene and provide a cheaply sourced backdrop for Pauline's adventures (with most images of Hobart avoided), Cornell embraced the opposite aesthetic. His interest lay with the actress herself. Although Cornell's short begins with a shot of an eclipse taken from another film, *Rose Hobart*'s gaze lingers almost entirely on selected images—often close-up studio shots—of the heroine (Figure 9.1). With all connective strands and narrative links removed, the result is an oneiric, cubist meditation on the actress. Cornell bathed the collage in a blue or, in the Anthology Film Archives print, violet tint (this was originally achieved by holding blue glass in front of the projector's lens) and projected the film at a slowed rate of sixteen or eighteen frames per second in order to enhance the radiance of Hobart's aura.[11]

While *The Perils of Pauline* used parts of *East of Borneo*'s soundscape, *Rose Hobart*'s entire soundtrack, including, significantly, the voice of Hobart herself, was replaced. For the film's first screening at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York in 1936, Cornell continually flipped between the two three-minute sides of a 78 rpm record, allowing the musical contours to be dictated according to the technological abilities of the equipment.

[10] Guy Barefoot uses this first film to demonstrate that, in the 1930s, the recycling of images was not the reserve of the avant-garde, but also formed a prevalent part of low-budget Hollywood filmmaking: "Recycled Images: *Rose Hobart, East of Borneo*, and *The Perils of Pauline*", *Adaptation* 5, no. 2 (2011): 152–68.

[11] Wees explains the tinting of *Rose Hobart* in "Ambiguous Aura of Hollywood Stars", n14.

Rumour has it that during the premiere, Dalí, convinced that the artist had stolen ideas from his dreams, kicked over the projector in disgust.[12] Perhaps as a result of Dalí's actions, Cornell was reluctant to screen his film again, and it did not reappear in public until 1963, when Jonas Mekas requested another public screening. For this event, and for most prints in current circulation, Cornell settled on three tunes, repeated several times, from *Holiday in Brazil* (1957), an album by Nestor Amaral and his Continentals released twenty-six years after *Rose Hobart*'s visual track. The choice of Amaral, a Brazilian musician, conductor and actor who moved to Hollywood and became known for his accessible style of samba music, is strange, as it has no identifiable relation to either *East of Borneo* or to Cornell's cut-up eulogy. The silencing of the heroine adds to the ghostly effect of the film, which, when played at the requested frame rate, harks back to a silent-film style, although the absence of causal links and intertitles removes any semblance of plot. The resultant confusion is enhanced by Cornell's placement of music, which changes randomly when each song comes to an end. The soundtrack appears to have been formed via a similar aesthetic of cut-up as the image track, then, but with little or no reference to their co-existent flow.

The film opens abruptly with a jumble of out-of-sequence references sutured together by Amaral's upbeat "Corrupção". After the eclipse, we are given a scene from later in *East of Borneo*, in which Hobart meets with the Prince of Maradu (played by Georges Renavent); after a black screen, this is followed by the opening two shots from the original film and a close view of the heroine through a mosquito net. After a brief image of a candle (again from another film), the camera shows Hobart rise and move into the open (the scene is truncated before the roaming camera reveals her co-star in order to preserve attention on the protagonist).[13] As the arresting, yet disjointed, visual track progresses, the Brazilian music continues over the different edits and several instances of Hobart's mutely mouthed words, pursuing its own rhythms entirely. Halfway through a close-up of a dramatic, watery splash in the ocean, for instance, the music changes to the instrumental "Porto Alegre" with no regard for the obvious visual sync points at the beginning and end of the splash. The next musical change is to "Playtime in Brazil", with words in English and introduced by a vinyl crackle as though to highlight the disparity between sound and image technologies. This song is again unconnected to visual events and proceeds to wash over several different locations, outfit changes and ensemble shots. In fact, there is only one musical change that fits loosely with the images. Coinciding with the visual shot of an erupting volcano, the music changes back to "Porto Alegre" in what appears to be an appropriate change of mood, although the synchronicity falls apart once again as we see a group of characters arriving by raft to a torch-lit group of locals.

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[12] The legend is recounted in Michael Pigott, *Joseph Cornell Versus Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003), 5.

[13] Barefoot identifies the original placement of the film's opening moments in "Recycled Images", 159–60.

The next change abandons the parallel synchronicity of mainstream audiovisuality in an even more emphatic way: halfway through a scene of Hobart playing with a monkey, the music returns to "Playtime in Brazil" and continues as we see the characters walking slowly through the torch-lit corridor. On a filmic level, there is no discernible leitmotivic association with the previous time we heard this track, and it fails to lead us into any new understanding of the previous scenes or to draw forth any associations that may change or influence our reading of Hobart's current action (Michael Pigott suggests that the alternation between the two tracks was intended to replicate Cornell's rotation of his 78rpm record during the original screening).[14] On a local level, the music reflects nothing of the worry and wonder clearly displayed in the faces of the characters; in fact, its style, mood and rhythms seem insensitive to the subtleties of the visual track, something the subsequent re-appearance of "Porto Alegre" does nothing to change. Despite the songs returning several times, they do not seem to represent, or draw anything from, the images; the music appears thoroughly disinterested not only in the rhythm of the visual track, but also in its mood and atmosphere.

As mentioned above, a-synchronicity is more common in avant-garde film than in the mainstream tradition. A clash of audio and visual elements has been a popular device among experimental directors to both distance themselves from, and critique, the languages of mainstream cinema. But such clashes have most often been highly considered: Eisenstein's clashing signifiers were the result of significant aesthetic debate, while the mixture of Argentinean tango and segments of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* in *Un Chien Andalou* used the principle of the automatic to allow new, or hidden, meanings to arise. But *Rose Hobart* is different: the audiovisual dissonance is too strong; the gap between the ethereal, slow-moving images and the upbeat, jocular Brazilian samba beats is too great for easy interpretative navigation. In fact, the choice of music distracts from the images and their connection to one another. As we have seen, many found-footage assemblages have unpacked pre-existing works to reveal the aesthetic mechanisms behind them. But a common reading of *Rose Hobart* runs along the lines that Cornell, rather than critiquing the objectification and aura of the female Hollywood star, in fact relished it, a reading supported by Cornell's collaborator Stan Brakhage, who describes the film as "one of the greatest poems of being a woman that's ever been made in film, or maybe anywhere".[15] In his article on Hollywood stars in avant-garde found-footage films, Wees analyses several films that "betray their makers' fascination with the source of their images and show less interest in opposing than in reinterpreting and re-evaluating the images Hollywood produces"; in such cases, "critique merges with admiration, analysis with appreciation, deconstruction with reconstruction to invest the stars' images with ambiguous auras that not only signify the filmmakers' attitude toward their borrowed

[14] Pigott, *Joseph Cornell*, 24.

[15] Brakhage quoted in Catherine Corman, "Theater of the Spirits: Joseph Cornell and Silence", in *Sound Unbound: Sampling Digital Music and Culture*, ed. Paul D. Miller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 370.

images but, in more general terms, reflect the avant-garde's ambivalent and unequal relationship with Hollywood." *Rose Hobart*, he argues, treads these binaries particularly well:

> Rescued from the patently artificial mise-en-scène, stereotyped characters, and narrative clichés of *East of Borneo*, the mysterious allure—the aura—of Hobart's image becomes much more apparent and prompts interpretations, fantasies, and an aesthetic appreciation of an actress with nothing like the widely recognized "star quality" of Bette Davis. Nonetheless, Hobart achieves an equivalent aura, thanks to Cornell's sensitive—one might even say obsessive—reediting of a minor Hollywood film.[16]

In Wees's reading, the fascination with the female protagonist is deconstructed in order to further enhance it. Indeed, visually, Hobart's slow-moving, blue-tinted beauty makes her luminous and transcendent. Both colour and speed allow us time to take in her aura—much like a slow shutter speed enables more information to seep into the image—and to contemplate, without the interference of narrative, her presence. And if we consider only the image as image, then Wees is right. This reading also holds true if we take into account the removal of all diegetic sound and dialogue, a decision that provides the heroine, according to Catherine Corman, with a "glaze of interiority" that allows her to assume an ethereal role: "Joseph Cornell mutes the exterior world to more clearly witness the ephemeral spirit of another person."[17] But if we include music in the analysis, then this interpretation becomes unstable. Faced with the mute protagonist stripped of her rescue mission, a reading of the film based on aura and star quality takes on a more sinister edge. Continuing with her argument, Corman understands the apparently haphazard placement of music as another way in which Cornell moves Hobart into the ephemeral: "If we feel we are approaching her, the scene shifts abruptly, the music flips to the other side of the record."[18] But there is another way to read this. Not only is Hobart's ability to communicate aurally taken away, but her silenced visual actions are overlaid by frivolous and disinterested music that fails to react to visual changes and, in some cases, actually belittles potentially dangerous, or daring, activities. Considered audiovisually in this way, Cornell's film is not a celebration of aura, but rather a reduction of it. As Hobart's beauty and screen presence are enhanced, her ability to initiate action or to voice an opinion diminishes to such an extent that her condition as a plucky heroine, which even *East of Borneo* provides her with to some small degree, is negated by the new soundtrack. While Cornell was undoubtedly captivated by the aura of Hobart, then, his relocation of her image within a new sonic wash can also be read as a derisive

[16] Wees, "The Ambiguous Aura", 4–5, 7–8.
[17] Corman, "Theater of the Spirits", 373.
[18] Ibid., 372.

commentary on the frivolous treatment and objectification of Hollywood's female stars, forged not by an obliteration of original context, but by holding up a magnifying glass to cinematic culture and its conventions. This interpretation does not require any form of particular knowledge of *East of Borneo* as it works with early Hollywood's conventions in order to create associative connections and promote a dual and objective form of audioviewing.

Such an aurally subversive reading of found-footage film is not unique to *Rose Hobart*, but can be found throughout experimental cinema's history, including in works that draw on numerous visual sources for their construction. Like Cornell, Bruce Conner has consistently emphasised the role of music in his work. In fact, the title of "father of music video" has been liberally applied to the artist, despite his frequent refusal of the accolade.[19] It is easy, however, to see how the designation came to be bestowed. Conner's interest in found-footage and music, often taken from mass culture, stemmed from a desire to comment on, and undo, the conventions of pop culture. Accordingly, he set several short collage films to music, including a compilation of industrial, educational film and news footage for Devo's "Mongoloid" (1978) and two audiovisual pieces in collaboration with David Byrne and Brian Eno for their 1981 album *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* ("America Is Waiting" and "Mea Culpa"). But he also worked with composers to create new soundtracks for his films, most famously with Terry Riley in *Looking for Mushrooms* (1967, although in 1996 he replaced this music with the Beatles' "Tomorrow Never Knows" from 1966), *Easter Morning* (2008) and *Crossroads* (1976), which also included an electroacoustic soundscape by Patrick Gleeson.

Pre-existent music appears in several of Conner's films, including the found-footage *Cosmic Ray*, set to Ray Charles's "What'd I Say" (1959) (1961 and re-imagined in 2006 as the expanded *Three Screen Ray*) and *Valse Triste* (1977), set to the waltz from Sibelius's incidental music *Kuolema*, op. 44 (1903). One of the best-known examples of a found-footage film set to a pre-existing piece of music, however, is Conner's *A Movie* (1958), an assemblage of B-movie outtakes, softcore porn, newsreels and educational clips aurally merged by Respighi's *Pines of Rome* (1924), performed by the NBC Symphony Orchestra with Toscanini at the helm. Although Respighi's piece seems well suited to the carriage riding and car racing near the beginning, even at times appearing neatly synchronised, at other times the music—this time a grand symphonic poem to the Italian capital—sits awkwardly against the visual collage. The film can be read as a eulogy to death, as terrifying and daring exploits rub against images of destruction, although, as with most experimental films, it is not as straightforward as this. Like *Rose Hobart*, Conner's film plays with cinematic devices and visual expectation from the start. The opening, taking up over 120 seconds of the twelve-minute film, features the film's title, "End of Part Four" and a countdown, followed immediately by "THE END": the found-footage collage

[19] See, for example, *Bruce Conner: MEA CULPA*, directed by Chris Green, 2013, accessed 1 September 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzqL4G60A58.

then begins. Throughout, "A MOVIE BY BRUCE CONNER" flashes across the screen in ironic acknowledgement that none of the footage was actually shot by the artist; a gesture that, along with the frequent separation of shots by black leader, simultaneously highlights the authorship of editing and the artificiality and stylised nature of film's construction (Figure 9.2). The database narrative exposes the montage aspects of the film, as different qualities and styles jostle against one another, demanding a reorganisation of their original associations within a new journey that builds slowly to a halting visual climax as the images and their juxtapositions grow in significance.

Again, all diegetic sound is silenced—we see Teddy Roosevelt silently mouthing a speech, for instance—in favour of a consistent sonic wash. First heard is "The Pines of Villa Borghese", which helps to soften the impact of the frantic compilation that follows the opening, in which shots of speed—a chase scene from a Western, an elephant charging towards the camera, cars racing, crashing and falling from cliffs—are placed in a flow so quick that the editing itself becomes harmonious with its images. Although the tempo and rhythm of Respighi's music suits the energy of the dislocated clips, its upbeat mood jars with the urgency of the images, washing over their potential danger and propelling the next shot to enter just before each moment of impact. It is as though the soundtrack ventriloquises over the top of the mute images, out of sync and mocking the severity of the visual message.

Next, "THE END" re-appears and the music promptly stops as the screen turns black, forming an abrupt and unexpected point of audiovisual synchronisation. The next section begins with slower music (this time, the "Pini Di Roma") over more serene

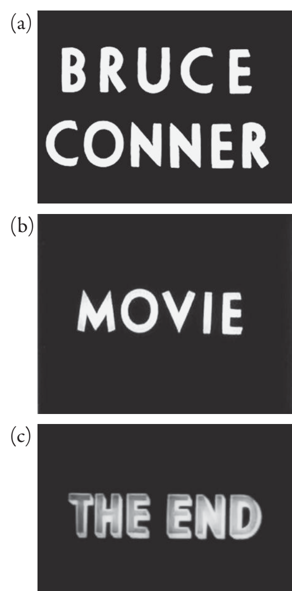

FIGURE 9.2 Three stills from Bruce Conner, *A Movie* (1958).

images and editing style: we see exotic ladies with large baskets on their heads, a blimp crossing a cityscape, a couple slowly rotating high above a street and a tightrope walker, interspersed again with "A MOVIE BY BRUCE CONNER". The iconic montage in which a shot of a submarine is followed by another of an alluring lady, as though the submarine's telescope is directed towards her, before cutting back to the submarine and away to the dropped atomic bomb slowly billowing, enjoys a harp and woodwind wash that defuses the crude comedic suggestion, making it instead quite beautiful. However, there follows another example of audiovisual disconnection. After a surfer is seen falling into large waves, the shots become increasingly humorous: rowers battle enormous waves, a waterskier falls, a funny assortment of bikes is shown, and motorbikes become stuck in the mud. And yet the music's mood changes to a slow lurch as lower wind and brass in the minor, supported by percussion, take over, a change that renders the images almost tragic. Conversely, the musical timbre becomes more optimistic during the last sequence, in which the images become increasingly upsetting and the flow more disjointed as black screens separate each shot from the others, opening wide the spaces between clips in order to give the audience time to reflect on what has just been shown and to develop a strong sense of dread at what the next image might bring: a firing squad, people hanging from a bridge, soldiers lying dead in a field, the atomic bomb cloud, a dead elephant and so on. The result is an unsettled and hesitant progression at odds with the thunderous and over-determining climax of the music, which fills the visual gaps with a conflicting commentary. Becoming more disquieting as they progress, the images in this final montage (with the exception of the terrible slow-moving grandeur of the atomic explosion) fail to reach the same triumphant heights as the music. In fact, image and music move away from each other in true counterpoint to create a structural, vertical dissonance. This makes the ending unclear: as a diver disappears into an underwater wreck, the sun is seen shining from above the water and the music ends. Is this sudden change of heart, in which the visual track falls briefly into line with the musical trajectory, supposed to signal redemption, resurrection, hope, unity? Or, like *Rose Hobart*, is this Conner performing a satirical comment on the happy Hollywood ending, where everything resolves and sound and image work together?

Both *Rose Hobart* and *A Movie* deconstruct cinematic conventions—the construction of the starlet; and the use of editing and visual leitmotifs to build (or dismantle) dramatic arcs—but they also satirise the ways in which music is used to make audiences less aware of these formations and devices. If we return to Zryd's assertion that found-footage filmmakers interrogate "the history *behind* the image", we can see how it is in fact the soundtrack that best deconstructs the original material. The haphazard placement of popular Brazilian tunes against close-ups of a Hollywood star who would disappear from favour shortly after the original film's release highlights the power of big studios to make or break (or silence) their leading ladies; the placement of a symphonic poem about a European city against a rapid-fire of increasingly disturbing images forces an audiovisual rupture that exposes the ability of music to influence the reading of images *as images*.

FIGURE 9.3 The streets of Liverpool in Terence Davies, *Of Time and The City* (2008).

Original and New Sound

While the films discussed above use a consistent musical score—or at least songs or movements by the same musician—to create an aural uniformity that counters the disjointed visual flow (even though it can encourage us to read that flow in a unique, musically determined way), films that retain some of the original, often mismatched, sounds from the chosen clips add yet another layer to the found-footage collage. If we move from the avant-garde outposts towards films underpinned by a more conventional aesthetic, we can find examples of collage film that operates according to a remarkable audiovisual constancy. Terence Davies's 2008 partial found-footage film *Of Time and the City* is a semi-autobiographical essay that lingers over newsreel and documentary footage from his childhood in 1950s and 1960s Liverpool (Figure 9.3). As in the examples above, the soundtrack adds a satirical coherence to the multi-sourced visual collage. And yet it does so in a different way. Davies's laconic, metaphorical and poetic voice-over, which offers opinions and thoughts as well as snippets from the work of Emily Dickinson, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and others, is combined with occasional ruptures of diegetic sound and pre-existent music from Pérotin, Liszt and Tavener to The Hollies and Peggy Lee. Much of the time, the nondiegetic music replaces all onscreen sound, leading the viewer towards a particular, romanticised view of the images. The most powerful audiovisual moments, however, arise when sounds taken from the original footage are combined with newly composed, or differently sourced, sonic elements. Because many of the images were not shot by Davies, their sounds are inconsistent, of low quality (because

they were recorded with early microphones) and lacking in the finesse of fiction film's post-production techniques. And yet the interweaving of these sounds with pre-existing, well-recorded music heightens Davies's sentimental recollection.

Near the beginning of the film, slow-moving shots of the city's terraced streets are introduced to the opening clarinet and horn chords of Popescu Branesti's *Priveghiati si va Rugat* (arranged by Chris Hazell). A scene change to an empty children's playground, the swings moving desolately in the wind, is initiated as the strings take over and the choir enters. The intensely melancholic music lends the following black-and-white clips of early morning activity a nostalgic air. After a short while, we see a group of children playing with hula hoops in a school playground, and their cheerful diegetic voices rise in a chant above Branesti's music. The subsequent entrance of Angela Gheorghiu's soprano voice initiates a duet with the children's song that offers a haunting lament for Liverpool's lost communities. Here, the sound design weaves an elegant path through the different styles and textures in such a way that a remarkable consistency of image, sound and audiovisuality arises.

We are, of course, accustomed to such a mixture of voice-over with diegetic sound and music from mainstream fiction film: and with the use of anachronistic nondiegetic music, which propels films such as *A Knight's Tale* (Brian Helgeland, 2001), *Marie Antoinette* (Sophia Coppola, 2006) and *The Great Gatsby* (Baz Luhrmann, 2013). But here, residing at the more experimental edge of feature-film production, this mixture takes on a new role. While music in the scene above drives the images towards an over-sentimentalised depiction of post-war Liverpudlian life, it nevertheless does so with an ironic nod to the dramatic sweeping scores from Hollywood's golden age. The music is too much, becoming almost comedic as it forces images of desolate streets into a highly romanticised vision of the director's childhood. The gap between idealised and true past is prised open further in a scene in which the diegetic sounds of Liverpudlian teenagers dancing to The Beatles are replaced with Ronald Binge's "Elizabethan Serenade" (1952) in order to represent Davies's dour view of the band and his preference for classical music.

While Davies creates a subtle audiovisual rupture, others have aimed at a clear counterpoint between image and music, achieving either a fragmentary and anachronistic soundtrack that mirrors the bricolaged images, or a parody of Hollywood sound design and musical placement. The first type of counterpoint can be found in many short films by Jonas Mekas. In *Imperfect Film* (from The First *40*, 2006), for instance, Mekas combines visual outtakes from his own work and unidentified found images with distorted real-world sounds such as church bells, his own voice singing a poem by Hannelore Hahn and the improvised piano playing of composer and filmmaker Auguste Varkalis. At certain moments this soundscape pushes and pulls at the images, warping and distorting them into visual elongations of the sounds.

The second type of counterpoint can be found in György Pálfi's *Final Cut: Ladies & Gentlemen* (2012). The feature-length film weaves a relatively coherent love story that is at

once gripping and familiar. By supercutting numerous scenes—many of them iconic—from existing Hollywood films, Pálfi removes key moments and places them against similar moments from other well-known works in order to create a wave-like motion through a new story, with a protagonist played by many different actors. As in *Rose Hobart*, there is a clear respect for the "aura" of the original images, which are not deconstructed but rather used for their original, iconic power to create a super-protagonist from film history's leading men. *Final Cut*'s press release explains that the work is a collection of "images from 450 emblematic films from world cinema, from *Metropolis* to *Indiana Jones*, via *The Godfather, Avatar, Scenes from a Marriage, Psycho* or even *Modern Times*, with a few television series thrown in as well."[20] Despite flouting most of the rules of classical continuity editing, as well as combining film styles from different eras and genres, the film is able to offer a remarkably rational and easy-to-follow tale. Unlike the oneiric world of *Rose Hobart* or the exhaustingly edited journey of Conner, *Final Cut* emulates the narrative style and character stereotypes that it deconstructs. The comment here, then, is on the similarity between Hollywood products; the ability to undo and recombine numerous films, only to arrive at a new narrative strikingly similar to the ones that have been plundered.

The soundtrack operates in much the same way. Many of the clips retain their original sounds, while others are given new nondiegetic music, although the resultant sonic collage is unusually harmonious. The mainstream feature usually aims for a consistent aural track; voices and Foley are recorded afterwards to ensure continuity in both timbre and acoustics. But here, the diversity of musical style and diegetic sound is embraced as much as the variety of visual texture, depth and editing technique. Emotional and narrative flow, however, is helped by the diegetic manipulation of sound designers Tamás Zányi and Gábor Balázs and by the careful and intermittent placement of preexistent music against particularly disjointed, or important, visual progressions. The result is a sonic evenness that belies the craze of visual activity and ensures that the clips gel together according to a single guiding sentiment. Although some of *Final Cut*'s music is taken from music history, much of it is film music; and its point of origin is significant.

Miklós Kiss describes *Final Cut*'s first minute, in which the 'protagonist' is seen waking, as

> a *narrative* exposition that (super)cuts James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), Milos Forman's *Hair* (1979), Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), Alfred Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps* (1935), Károly Makk's *Liliomfi* (1956), Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985), Sam Mendes' *American Beauty* (1999), Danny DeVito's *The War of the Roses* (1989), another Hitchcock, this time *Psycho* (1960),

[20] See "Press Kit for *Final Cut*", accessed 1 September 2014, http://www.finalcut-movie.com/pages/p/presskit.

Garry Marshall's *Pretty Woman* (1990), Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), and Jean-Luc Godard's *À bout de souffle* (1960).[21]

The mélange of seventy years of film history is pulled together and smoothed out by Thomas Newman's "Wow" from *Finding Nemo* (Andrew Stanton, 2003), appropriate for its use of birdsong, although the original diegetic sounds become louder as the clips progress, until the music finally fades away. Although the following scenes of showering and shaving are accompanied by their synced sounds, there is a clever use of acoustic bleed between the clips in order to cover any jagged edges and lessen awareness of different sonic qualities. Sound remains diegetic until the protagonist jauntily leaves the house, at which point the montage is again subsumed by music, this time the Bee Gees' "Stayin' Alive" (1977). When the male protagonist collides with his female interest for the first time, we hear Nino Rota's "Their First Meeting", from *Romeo and Juliet* (Franco Zeffirelli, 1968). As the woman leaves, we are left with Marty McFly's infamous statement from *Back to the Future* (Robert Zemeckis, 1985) that "this has got to be a dream". The musical choices are obvious rather than subversive, their role the same as in the original film, not in specific detail, but in their larger form of commentary.

The bricolage of found-footage demands, according to Kiss, a rethink of the ways in which conventional filmic flow and coherence are created: "*Final Cut*'s opening scene, as well as the whole film, not only violates most of these continuity norms and rules, but, by ultimately providing a relatively smooth experience, also disproves their absolute necessity as components considered to be exclusively responsible for invoking the feeling of narrative continuity."[22] And yet, the "smooth experience" is not only produced from the placement of clips showing similar actions together, but also by the use of sound to reinforce and develop these similarities. To hide geographical and temporal leaps is one of the major achievements of the mainstream film score, and Pálfi embraces these abilities, using his collated musical excerpts to hide the stylistic and timbral discontinuities, and to pull the images along according to dramatic musical arcs. In fact, when placed against the compilation of images, the musical collage of *Final Cut* forges an unusual degree of audiovisual cohesion. The musical snippets may be out of context, but they still operate according to the highly evolved languages of film music, even when placed in new vertical alignments, demonstrating how perceptually attuned to a cut-and-splice screen aesthetic a contemporary audience has become: it is easily possible to make sense of an audiovisual flow despite logical ruptures and continual extra-filmic associations.

In *Final Cut*, then, music operates both as film music, capable of immersing audiences into pre-determined viewing positions, *and* as hypertext, by continually referring

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[21] Miklós Kiss, "Creativity beyond Originality: György Pálfi's *Final Cut* as Narrative Supercut", in *Senses of Cinema* 67 (2003), accessed 1 September 2014, http://sensesofcinema.com/2013/feature-articles/creativity-beyond-originality-gyorgy-palfis-final-cut-as-narrative-supercut/#b13.

[22] Kiss, "Creativity beyond Originality".

to music's use within film history as a discursive and influential device. For its success, the film's audience must continually undo famous images and sounds from their original contexts in order to be swept up in the new narrative, while at the same time remaining aware of the very process of audiovisual re-contextualisation that they are enacting. Indeed, the film relies on this dual ability. To return to Wees's earlier assertion that the found-footage collage encourages us to be critically aware of cinema's "images and their institutional sources", it is clear that here it is the history behind both image *and* sound that is being interrogated.

The Sound-Image

The examples of found-footage film above are taken from many different schools of experimental filmmaking and from different eras and aesthetic contexts. And yet each film offers a sonic constancy very different from that present in many of the other films analysed in this collection. In fact, at first glance, the placement of sound against image appears similar to the many forms of audiovisuality found in mainstream fiction filmmaking: a form of immersion within the film world is initiated by music that stitches together filmic elements to create a more coherent visual flow; it draws out narrative arcs not necessarily clear in the newly collaged images and lures audio-spectators into the diegesis, processes amply theorised by scholars of mainstream film soundtracks. But in the experimental film, music is used as another part of the collage technique, repelling its suturing abilities in order to draw attention to the materiality of the new visual combines. Familiar-sounding or pre-existent music, used in an unfamiliar manner, not only creates a sonic form of de-contextualisation that mirrors the undoing of the visual clips, but also, and most significantly, forms a new and highly critical *audiovisual* collage. The defamiliarisation of sound, as well as image, in other words, questions the appearance of audiovisual synchronicity in order to initiate a vertical (audiovisual), as well as a horizontal (visual, or aural), collision. The result is a "true free counter point", in which neither image nor sound is dependent on the other, although they work closely together in order to participate in, and undo, the cinematic conventions at play in their original sources. The activated form of audiovisual consumption that arises from this process encourages a form of alienated listening. Music does not encourage absorption into the film in the same way that a mainstream soundtrack can. Rather, it retains a coexistent sense of its origin, of its new placement and of the resultant "poetic ambiguity" that lies between these two spaces.

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10 Rebalancing the Picture-Sound Relationship

THE AUDIOVISUAL COMPOSITIONS OF LIS RHODES

Aimee Mollaghan

LIS RHODES WAS one of a coterie of influential, politically engaged, experimental moving-image artists, programmers and educators to emerge from British art schools in the 1970s. While studying at the North East London Polytechnic (NELP) and the Royal College of Art, Rhodes became an active figure in the London Film Makers' Co-operative (LMFC)—a body of filmmakers closely associated with the structural/materialist film movement that came to prominence in England during the early 1970s—serving as a programmer there between 1975 and 1976. Instrumental in the establishment of the feminist filmmaking and distribution collective Circles in 1979, Rhodes has also maintained a distinctive feminist perspective throughout her long career as a filmmaker, programmer and educator.

Although aesthetically diverse, Rhodes's moving-image work questions the hegemonic relationship between sound and image in order to highlight and address inequitable power structures and the suppression of the female voice in music and society. Uniquely, Rhodes grounds these feminist concerns in films that interrogate the dominant audiovisual relationship on both an ideological and a formal level in order to elucidate or redress these imbalances of power. She formally confronts the audiovisual contract by employing images as music in her early direct animation *Dresden Dynamo* (1971–72)

and builds on these ideas within an expanded, performative context in her audiovisual composition *Light Music* (1975). By consciously composing music using images within these two moving-image works, she both actively and allegorically highlights the scant attention paid to women, not only within what she views as the male-dominated canon of Western art music, but also within a patriarchal society at large.[1]

Rhodes's later films, *Light Reading* (1978) and *A Cold Draft* (1988), continue to redress her perceived imbalance of the audiovisual relationship by giving countenance to the female voice, which is presented acousmatically disjointed from the images presented on screen. With these overarching concerns in mind, this chapter explores the ways in which Rhodes actively subverts the relationship between sound and image in order to jolt her audience from the illusory world presented by dominant narrative cinema, thus drawing attention to what she herself deems to be the lack of female presence within society at the time she was creating the works under consideration here.[2]

The radical ideas permeating the LMFC during the 1970s bore critical, aesthetic and ideological influence on Rhodes's moving-image work. While a reasonably diverse range of work emerged from the co-op during that period, the group has become indelibly linked with the structural, or material, film style. Although aesthetically different from the North American incarnation of structural film, the British version nonetheless drew heavily on the condensed moving-image texts of filmmakers such as Paul Sharits, Tony Conrad, Hollis Frampton and Michael Snow. These North American structural filmmakers of the 1960s and early 1970s created simplified, sometimes even predetermined art: for them, it was the shape of the film, often dictated by a system or process, that was crucial, while the content was often only of peripheral consideration. P. Adams Sitney, who first used the term "structural film" in relation to this body of work, identified four formal characteristics of this type of filmmaking: a camera position that appears fixed from the perspective of the viewer; a stroboscopic flicker effect that draws on the concept of the persistence of vision in cinema; the re-photography of existing images; and the use of loops in order to introduce repetition without the use of variation.[3]

Despite the initial appearance of rationality and intellectualism in their work, however, issues of cognition and perception preoccupied many of the structuralist

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[1] Lis Rhodes, "Lis Rhodes: Light Music", *The Tate*, accessed 30 October 2015, http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern-tanks/display/lis-rhodes-light-music.

[2] In an interview in 2012, Rhodes stated that she considers the conditions for female composers that were the impetus behind her work from the 1970s to have changed little since: "I want to just think a moment on the condition that made the piece [*Light Music*] come into being that was that one was extremely aware at the lack of women composers in European classical music. Those questions are absolutely the same as they were to me in 1975"; Rhodes, "Lis Rhodes: Light Music—The Tanks", YouTube, accessed 24 August 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ts5uToPdj4c.

[3] P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943–1973*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 348.

filmmakers. In fact, Sitney refers to structural films as films for the mind rather than the eye, stating that the "often unacknowledged aspiration of the American avant-garde film, has been the cinematic reproduction of the human mind."[4] This connection between structural film and cognition is also endorsed by Annette Michelson who, in her essay "Toward Snow", suggests that certain structural films, such as Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1965), openly "present themselves as analogues of consciousness".[5] Such interest in consciousness was also manifest in the audiovisual structures of these films. For example, Tony Conrad's 1965 structural film *The Flicker* attempts to probe what he describes as the "ambiguous outer limits of human sensation" by taking the audience on a carefully crafted sensory journey.[6] Combining patterns of flickering light produced by an altered 16 mm projector with a homemade electronic soundtrack of relatively indistinguishable tones, Conrad manages to invoke semi-hallucinatory and hypnotic effects. Noël Carroll posits that a structural film such as Conrad's, centered on the stroboscopic flicker effect, may not necessarily have any discernible subject matter, but can still have the aim of "provoking a certain perceptual experience".[7] For Carroll, it is the film itself that promotes the perceptual experience, rather than these films being about perception. To this end, the soundtracks in these films are complicit in creating, or promoting, this perceptual experience.

While Conrad explores the audiovisual relationship on a material level in *The Flicker* by reducing his film to its most basic cinematic elements of clear and black frames, it can be argued that the artist was more interested in the overall perceptual effects of his stroboscopic composition. In the same fashion, Austrian filmmaker Peter Kubelka, with whom I am aligning the structural filmmakers for the purposes of this chapter, also offered up his flicker film *Arnulf Rainer* (1960) as a perceptually affective piece. Composed of alternating patterns of black and clear frames overlaid with a soundtrack of white noise, the film has been described by Sitney as affirming the "absolute equality of importance between images and sound in cinema."[8] This structural investigation into the balance of power between sound and image is, as this chapter will demonstrate, also a core concern of Rhodes's body of work.

This structuralism of the American avant-garde took a more exacting polemical turn when it made its way to the shores of Great Britain, with Peter Gidal, one of the most active members of the LMFC, setting out the conditions of what he terms structuralist/

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Annette Michelson, "Toward Snow", in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 172.

[6] Tony Conrad, "On *The Flicker*", in *Experimental Animation: An Illustrated Anthology*, ed. Robert Russett and Cecile Starr (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976), 151.

[7] Noël Carroll, "Style", in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, ed. Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (London: Routledge, 2009), 271.

[8] Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 289.

materialist film in his influential 1976 essay "Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film".[9] Rather than focusing on the ontology of film in order to allow for an exploration of perception, the British structural filmmakers like Gidal and Malcolm LeGrice instead focused on the materialist aspects of the film form, considering the ontological investigation of film to be an end in itself. As Mark Webber writes,

> The American Structural Films were more cerebral, often setting up systems for the viewer to try and decode, whereas the British films were more sensual; the physical film material is always right there, visibly present at the same time as the image. No longer just the carrier of the image, but an equal part of it.[10]

Much like the North American incarnation of the structural film, the structural/materialist works created in the United Kingdom tended towards non-obfuscatory forms that sought to demystify and draw attention to the film apparatus and its associated processes. Gidal, for instance, states that each of these films is a record of its own making rather than a representation or reproduction of something else: for him, such works do not necessarily represent anything, but instead attempt to destroy the illusory aspect of film that governs the mainstream tradition by decoding and dismantling its traditional structures in order to reconstruct, analyse and evaluate them.[11] Rhodes, who was a central figure in the LMFC, incorporated these dialectical ideas into her body of work. However, rather than merely demystify the materiality of the celluloid image, she extended her investigations of the film apparatus to consider the interrelationship between sound and vision on both an ideological and a material level in order to question the traditional dominance of the image.

Although many of the LMFC films of the 1970s and 80s placed an emphasis on the image, there were a number of filmmakers, such as Guy Sherwin and Andrew Kötting, who directly confronted conventional audiovisual relationships in their work. Indeed, Kötting asserts that sound is the *motor* that drives his work, as he sculpts with dense sonic textures, soundscapes and disembodied voices in order to explore the human psyche and give voice to his unseen acoustic ghosts in films such as *Hoi Polloi* (1990).[12] Sherwin, who taught Rhodes during her time at the NELP, produced a series of *Optical Sound* films (1971–2007) that interrogated the physical relationship between sound and image on a formal level while both he and Rhodes were associated with the LMFC.

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9 Peter Gidal, "Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film", in *Structural Film Anthology*, ed. Peter Gidal (London: BFI, 1976), 18.

10 Mark Webber, "The London Film-Maker's Co-Operative", in *Shoot, Shoot, Shoot: British Avant-Garde Film of the 1960s and 1970s* (London: LUX, Re:Voir, 2006), DVD booklet, 5.

11 Gidal, "Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film", 18.

12 Andrew Kötting, "Trace Elements and Noise Spillage: How Sound has Always been the Motor for my Picture and How a Loud Hailer Might Help", *School of Sound*, April 2013, accessed 30 October 2015, http://www.andrewkotting.com/ak%20web/SCHOOL%20OF%20SOUND.html.

Integrating aspects of both structuralist approaches, Sherwin embraced the LMFC's perceived rigorous ideological interrogation of the film form in order to allow for a disciplined investigation into the material correspondence between sound and image, while simultaneously exploring the perceptual effects of audiovisual synchronisation in his phasing experiments in films such as *Phase Loop* (1971, 2007) and *Cycles* (1972, 2007).

Similar to Sherwin's audiovisual investigations in his optical sound films, Rhodes married sound and image on the same filmstrip in *Dresden Dynamo* and *Light Music* in a process that Sherwin referred to as an "accident of technological 'synaesthesia'".[13] This happy "accident", which required light to decode the mysteries of both sensory tracks, allowed Rhodes to present picture as sound and vice versa through similar physical material processes. However, she did not merely deconstruct this sonic motor. In fact, she has explicitly stated her desire to compose music through the deployment of images in such a way as to highlight the scant critical or biographical attention paid to female composers working within the Western art music tradition.[14]

Dresden Dynamo is the earliest of Rhodes's listed films and was composed while she was still a student. Consisting of dancing layers of red, blue and black grids and graphic shapes that pay negligible attention to the boundary of the frameline, this energetic, camera-less direct animation came about partly due to Rhodes's interest in optical sound and what she—and the LMFC members in general—perceived to be the illusionistic and manipulative implications of audiovisual synchronisation in the documentary and commercial fiction film traditions. Here, the soundtrack is the image and the image is the soundtrack. By applying Letratone and Letraset transfers straight to clear 16 mm film stock, Rhodes created synchronisation at the point of creation rather than in post-production in order to enable a more equitable audiovisual relationship. Through yet another fortuitous technological accident, she discovered that, when applied to 16 mm film and passed through a projector, a certain grade of Letratone produced the sound of a middle C, a discovery that allowed her to compose a soundtrack of discernible musical tones relative to this tonic note. Negative and positive copies were created from the original filmstrip and these were later passed through colour filters to create the vibrant black, red and blue triumvirate of tones that make up the visual track (Figure 10.1).

Dresden Dynamo is a dynamic composition, at once sonically and visually abrasive yet restrained. Rather than merely being a cold intellectual experiment for the mind, the film contains moments of tension and release marked by tinted visual silences, which transform potentially banal source material into something exciting and affective. Although the film seems, on a surface level, to belong to a lineage of vibrant and colourful direct animation works, such as Len Lye's *Kaleidoscope* (1935) and *A Colour Box* (1935) and Norman McLaren's *Dots* (1940) and *Loops* (1940), it is in fact philosophically very different. By deconstructing the materiality and structure of sound

[13] Guy Sherwin and Sebastiane Hegarty, *Optical Sound Films, 1971–2007* (London: Lux, Re:Voir, 2007), 5.

[14] Rhodes, "Lis Rhodes: Light Music", *The Tate*, 24 August 2012,

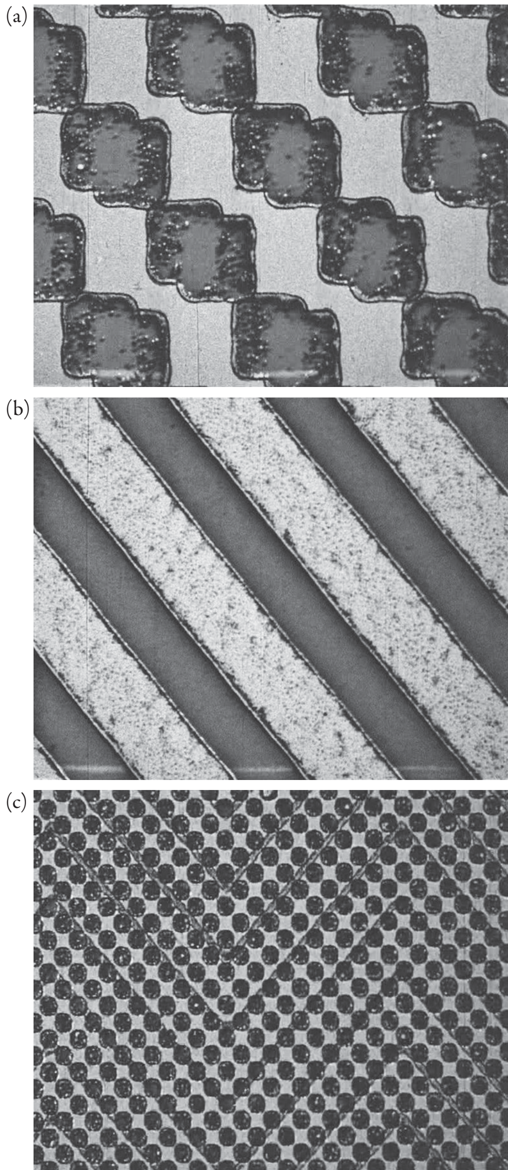

FIGURE 10.1 The play of shapes in Lis Rhodes's *Dresden Dynamo* (1971–72).

and image processes in order to both demystify and analyse the audiovisual relationship, Rhodes presents the images of the sound onscreen to allow an audience to see sound while at the same time probing the relationship between synchronous and asynchronous sound and image.

However, on closer inspection, this is not completely the case. The filmstrip of *Dresden Dynamo* reveals a tangible difference between the images that comprise the

optical soundtrack and those that reside on the image track. For a start, the soundtrack is visually monochromatic, unlike the vibrant tones and details of the image. There is also a natural time lag peculiar to 16 mm film. Although 16 mm sound film is commonly believed to run through a projector at twenty-four frames per second, in fact a process of soundtrack/picture displacement occurs. Because the exciter for the projection of the soundtrack is placed after the lens for the picture within the projector, for the purposes of synchronisation, soundtracks are not placed alongside their corresponding images. They instead precede them by 26.5 frames during 16 mm projection. Playing with typical notions of film synchronisation, Rhodes, as Nicky Hamlyn points out, allows the image to spill into the optical soundtrack and remain in level sync.[15] This means that the aural material sounds 26.5 frames after the corresponding image that produced it. Essentially, although we *are* seeing the sound presented on screen, Rhodes subverts the synchronisation process by withholding the expected points of conjunction, thus allowing the images to function in counterpoint to the sound. Interestingly, there are also points within the cacophony of *Dresden Dynamo* where Rhodes creates simple melodic lines before subverting our expectations of how the melodic pattern should unfold, leaving it unresolved and hanging in the air.

Dresden Dynamo is a relatively closed text. *Light Music*, on the other hand, is open to multiple readings due to its expanded nature. An austere minimalist black and white audiovisual work, *Light Music* employs two projectors located within a smoky room to project the abstract graphic forms of the optical soundtrack onto two opposing screens, thus allowing visitors to see what they are hearing. The images consist of horizontal bands of varying thickness and spacing not dissimilar to those employed by Norman McLaren for his synthetic soundtracks to films such as *Synchromy* (1971), in which he too presented a striated soundtrack onscreen, whereby the shifting pitches are affected by the spacing between lines: the closer the spacing, the higher the pitch.

David E. James has suggested that during the twentieth century, film "became an accomplice to the other apparatuses of sensory fragmentation and reification of the modern world" by adopting a fixed monocular viewpoint through the physical immobility of an audience in set seating directly facing the cinema screen.[16] During the 1970s, politically engaged filmmakers associated with the LMFC served to transform the viewing context for their work by emphasising the *liveness* and performativity of the cinematic experience. *Light Music* is an excellent example of this. The intermediary space between the screens turned the beams of light into immersive animated sculptures. Able to interact with the light beams, the audience played an active performative role in the creation

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[15] Nicky Hamlyn, "Mutable Screens: The Expanded Films of Guy Sherwin, Lis Rhodes, Steve Farrer and Nicky Hamlyn", in *Expanded Cinema: Art, Performance, Film*, ed. A. L Rees, Duncan White, Steve Ball and David Curtis (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 216.

[16] David. E. James, *Allegories of Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 133.

of this work, affecting what was presented on the screens and introducing chance operations into the performance.

In contrast to *Dresden Dynamo, Light Music* went through several iterations before reaching the version eventually presented in the tanks at Tate Modern—subterranean spaces at Tate Modern dedicated to the exhibition of live art, performance, installation and film—between 2012 and 2013. William Raban, a contemporary of Rhodes, recalls that the original version was produced for a single screen, with some of the line patterns filmed directly from a video monitor that varied according to sound signals generated by an oscillator.[17] Black and white grids shot from a rostrum camera were then printed onto the optical soundtrack so that the picture, as in *Dresden Dynamo*, produces the sound. It is possible to hear the points where Rhodes zooms into the grids due to the change in scale of the images printed on both tracks. As a result, there is a discernible musicality to the piece, which is highlighted in the title. In fact, the artist has stated that here she was first and foremost composing a piece of music, in which the sound of physical objects dictates the final form of the images: "the visual aspect of the graphic strip [*sic*] is not enhanced by the soundtrack, rather the particular quality of the images are necessary to achieve specific sounds."[18]

The physical work employs two identical film prints, projected onto the opposing walls of a room. Each projector is placed low to the ground in front of the light beams from the opposite projector, the base of the frame aligned with the base of the wall. Between these two sources of light, Rhodes challenged preconceived notions of cinematic viewing by encouraging the audience to engage actively with the film from the inside. Placing the audience in the physical heart of the work—and literally within the beams of the film—she provided a unique space in which aleatoric processes and chance operations could occur. In the tanks of Tate Modern, participants wandered through the beams of lights, casting layers of silhouettes on the wall and adding the sounds of their voices and physical movements to the bruit of the surroundings. In an interview, Rhodes explained that *Light Music* changes every time it is projected, depending on the context in which it is screened; in Tokyo, for instance, the audience sat down, while in Athens the audience danced.[19]

Light Music also exploits another natural time lag specific to film. An odd quirk of the analogue film apparatus is that film projectors do not run at a constant speed. As a result, they can never truly run in absolute synchronisation. In a work that requires more than a single projector, different audiovisual combinations are serendipitously thrown up each time. In *Light Music*, the projectors almost become generative sources in the work, as Rhodes's small input allows complex permutations to unravel entropically. In

[17] William Raban, "Notes from Light Music", in *A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film*, ed. David Curtis and Deke Dusinberre (London: Arts Council/British Council, 1977), 52.

[18] Rhodes, quoted in Hamlyn, "Mutable Screens", 216.

[19] Rhodes, "The Tanks".

addition, the specific acoustic properties of the environment in which the work is hosted colour the presentation of the sound. The sonically reflective, concrete surfaces of the oil tanks in Tate Modern, for instance, created a barrage of ricocheting sound that manifested differently in every location. This barrage can partially de-synchronise the picture lock, depending on where in the space it is experienced. The image, likewise, changes and is affected by the presence of bodies in the room. In the Plato's cave of the screening room, the visual track can be experienced in a number of different ways: by looking directly at the screens, by watching the shadowy forms of other participants thrown up on the walls, by interacting with the beams of light or by watching others interact with the beams.

Light Music is reasonably representative of the expanded cinema work being undertaken in the United Kingdom by groups such as *Filmaktion* at the time in which it was conceived. Containing performative aspects combined with a sense of immediacy, such work could be made anew on every occurrence. In contrast to the idea of film as a fixed and repeatable object, the screen and projector become active agents within *Light Music*. But while the use of a projector as a live audiovisual instrument was not uncommon within expanded cinema practice, Hamlyn points out that Rhodes's use of the screen in this way is unusual.[20] One aspect of Rhodes's film practice that differentiates her from some of the filmmakers associated with the LMFC and optical sound composition is her overt and unremitting engagement with feminism. Although the LMFC was a politically engaged organisation, Rhodes is distinctive in her explicit and consistent engagement with markedly feminist issues. As we saw earlier, the artist was instrumental in setting up the feminist distribution and filmmaking collective Circles, and much of her work has highlighted how only a relatively small number of women have traditionally been engaged in filmmaking. Moreover, in conjunction with other artists such as Annabel Nicolson and Susan Stein, Rhodes withdrew from the 1979 *Film as Film* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in protest at the lack of representation of female artists. *Light Music*, however, does not merely attempt to redress the scarcity of female filmmakers at the time, but also, according to Rhodes, confronts the dearth of female composers within classical music history.[21]

Light Music, then, is more radical and subversive than simply a piece of expanded cinema; it is a work in which the film apparatus is used as an instrument for conceptualising and performing music. Writing in "A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film", the catalogue for a 1978 touring exhibition curated by David Curtis and Deke Dusinberre, Rhodes asserts that *Light Music* "is not complete as a totality; it could well be different and still achieve its purpose of exploring the possibilities of optical sound."[22] Just as

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[20] Hamlyn, "Mutable Screens", 213.

[21] Rhodes, "The Tanks".

[22] Rhodes, *A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film*, ed. David Curtis and Deke Dusinberre (exhibition catalogue) (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978).

the structuralist filmmakers privileged form over content, the audiovisual material of *Light Music* and *Dresden Dynamo* is, in many ways, irrelevant to Rhodes. Rather, what is important is the interdependency of both the sound and the image through the film apparatus. Moreover, the fact that Rhodes, a female, is composing and distributing these compositions serves to highlight her promotion of female composers in what she views as a traditionally male-dominated milieu.

One can arguably discern from Rhodes's body of work that she is interested in rectifying seemingly unbalanced power structures. This is something that Lisa Le Feuvre points out in relation to the filmmaker's later, less formal moving-image works, such as *Light Reading* and *A Cold Draft*.[23] *Light Music* is particularly democratic in its aesthetic and approach, as it allows for the inclusion of the audience to create its site of meaning. In addition, like John Cage and the structuralist filmmakers, Rhodes maintained an interest in compositional processes that could be easily discerned. She overtly presents us with the source of her musical composition, visually presenting her pictorial sound objects to the audience onscreen in both *Dresden Dynamo* and *Light Music*.

As a feminist filmmaker, Rhodes also interrogates the audiovisual relationship in film, a relationship for which Walter Murch poses a gendered metaphor, whereby "Queen" sound has been dethroned by "King" sight.[24] Although this gendering of the senses is problematic, it is arguably a useful metaphor in relation to Rhodes's moving-image work, in which she facilitates *Queen* sound wresting back her seat to govern the overarching form of these films. This metaphorical tussle is something that continued to permeate the filmmaker's subsequent films. Superficially, those films following directly from her expanded-cinema experiments appear to be markedly different from the restrained asceticism of *Dresden Dynamo* and *Light Music*. Nevertheless, I propose that in fact they share many of the same core concerns. With *Light Reading*, Rhodes makes a logical step from deconstructing film language to the dissection and decomposition of the spoken word. The piece begins in darkness with a woman's voice (Rhodes) reading extracts from a text by Gertrude Stein over a black screen. The woman is talking about her search for a voice. The voice stops when collages of black and white images juxtaposed into a loose narrative appear, returning towards the end of the film in order to read the images as they are moved and replaced.

In the programme notes for the film, Felicity Sparrow posits that the image of a blood-stained bed suggests a crime, but that the closed images of the film throw up more questions than answers.[25] The film has some features of film noir, such as the use of off-kilter monochrome images, the insinuation of a criminal act and the use of voice-over.

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[23] Lisa Le Feuvre, "Profile: Lis Rhodes," *Luxonline*, accessed 17 December 2016, www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/lis_rhodes/essay(1).html.

[24] Walter Murch, "Foreword," in Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), vii–viii.

[25] Felicity Sparrow, "Her Image Fades as Her Voice Rises", in *Films for Women*, ed. Charlotte Brunsdon (London: British Film Institute, 1986), 199.

The female narrator, like the detective in film noir, has an investigative function and her voice seems to be trying to make sense of the images and a particular situation. The constant zooming in and repeating of the same series of still images evoke the thought process that occurs when trying to piece together a collection of clues. The movement of the camera over the image becomes more erratic and fractured as there is an attempt to impose logic and meaning on the images.

On returning at the end of the film, the narrator begins to issue instructions pertaining to the construction of the film, pointing out the end of reels or where to cut, while still continuing with her narration: the soundtrack, in other words, imposes order on the images. In the same fashion, later films such as *Pictures on Pink Paper* (1982) and *A Cold Draft* also feature female voices that, like the narrator from *Light Reading*, are acousmatised, or severed from their bodily form. This is where these texts differ from Rhodes's earlier works. Although in *Light Reading* the filmmaker points us towards the artifice of work by self-reflexively drawing attention to the construction of the film through the narrator's verbal instructions, in both *Dresden Dynamo* and *Light Music* Rhodes renders the source of the sound visible.

In *The Voice in Cinema*, Michel Chion asserts that sound is dualistic. The physical nature of film stock makes necessary a cut between the voice and body, and sound film does its best to reunite and reassemble the two even if the body that is the source of the voice is not present onscreen. For example, if an actor's mouth is not visible onscreen, it is not possible to verify the temporal relationship between its movements with the sounds that we hear. Chion uses the term acousmêtre in relation to the disembodied voice. He defines this cinematic device as occurring "when we speak of a yet-unseen voice, one that can neither enter the image to attach itself to a visible body, nor occupy the removed position of the image presented."[26] In other words, it is dependent on the delayed marriage of sound and image until near the end of the film. Only then, when the audience has been required to exercise great imagination, is the identity of the source revealed. An illustration of this occurs in *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939). When the characters finally reach Oz, the disembodied voice of the wizard seems to come from everywhere and therefore has no clearly defined limits to its power. This gives it empyrean faculties, bestowing it with the powers of omnipotence and omniscience. Once the source of the booming locution is revealed to be a mere mortal man concealed behind a curtain, however, the "great and powerful Oz" is no longer regarded as great and powerful. Murch writes that the re-association of image and sound is the "fundamental pillar upon which the creative use of sound rests, and without which it would collapse", and of course Rhodes disrupts this re-association as the sources for her female voices are never revealed and remain disembodied.[27]

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[26] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 140.

[27] Walter Murch, "Stretching Sound to Help the Mind See", *New York Times*, 1 October 2000, accessed 30 October 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/01/arts/01MURC.html?pagewanted=all.

Kaja Silverman compares the process of de-acousmatisation to a striptease, in which the female genitals are exposed only at the end point, after the process of undressing. She argues that this process of de-acousmatising a voice feminises it by situating "the female subject firmly on the side of the spectacle, castration and synchronisation, while aligning her counterpart with the gaze, the phallus, and what exceeds synchronisation."[28] Silverman criticises Chion for situating the "maternal voice in an anterior position to the paternal word, conferring upon it an original (if not originating) status" and also for associating the female voice with darkness, which she considers to imply primitiveness.[29] Rhodes seems to be making the same connection, but in an insurrectionary manner. In her *Light Reading* and *A Cold Draft*, the female narrators' voices are associated with the darkness of the black screen, devoid of physical bodies in which to dwell. Yet it is this lack of power that provides Rhodes's female voices with power. Her voices retain their powers of omnipotence, omnipresence, ubiquity and panopticism, and undermine this idea of feminisation by remaining disembodied and unshackled to a location on the screen.

Across her body of work, then, Rhodes consistently questions the authenticity and truthfulness of the audiovisual contract and the film apparatus by demystifying, deconstructing and analysing the relationship between sight and sound. This is achieved on a formal level by translating the optical soundtrack into the visual images presented on screen in *Dresden Dynamo* and *Light Music*. Further to this, she highlights the underrepresentation of women within Western art music, but also within a hegemonic patriarchal society. She affords the female voice the power and space to be heard without necessarily being seen. Ultimately she offers us—the prisoners of Plato's cave—the opportunity to unshackle ourselves from the illusory world of the film apparatus by confronting conventional notions of the audiovisual relationship and synchronisation within her work.

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[28] Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 50.

[29] Ibid., 75.

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11 Sounding Decay in the Digital Age

"AUDIO-VISIONS" OF *DECASIA* (2002) AND *LYRICAL NITRATE* (1991)

Nessa Johnston

BILL MORRISON'S *DECASIA* (2002) and Peter Delpeut's *Lyrical Nitrate* (*Lyrisch nitraat*, 1991) are two found-footage collage films made up of decayed silent-era fragments of nitrate film. These two experimental works have been posited in promotion, criticism and previous academic work as tributes to the early years of filmmaking, as resurrections of near-lost archival film material and even as fetishising the material and physical properties of decay. Michele Pierson, Ursula Boeser and Sean Cubitt have engaged critically with the visual qualities and representational strategies of one or both films as part of a wider discussion of the ontology of the film image.[1] However, beyond a few brief points, no sustained attention has been paid to these films' soundtracks. Both works approach the soundtrack in contrasting ways: *Lyrical Nitrate* takes a compilation approach, mainly using old 78 rpm phonograph records of operatic music, complete

[1] Michele Pierson, "Avant-Garde Re-Enactment: *World Mirror Cinema, Decasia*, and *The Heart of the World*", *Cinema Journal* 49, no. 1 (2009): 1–19; Ursula Boeser, "Inscriptions of Light and the 'Calligraphy of Decay': Volatile Representation in Bill Morrison's *Decasia*", in *Avant-Garde Film*, ed. Alexander Graf and Dietrich Scheunemann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 305–385; Sean Cubitt, "The Shadow", *MIRAJ, Moving Image Review and Art Journal* 2, no. 2 (2013): 187–97.

with crackle and hiss; *Decasia*, on the other hand, uses a specially commissioned orchestral score by composer Michael Gordon, and existed prior to its life as a feature film as an elaborately staged theatrical performance piece for orchestra and multiscreen visual projection.[2]

At the heart of this chapter is a comparison of the sonic approaches undertaken by each film and an investigation into the role of the soundtrack within the artistic repurposing of decaying nitrate images. Both *Decasia* and *Lyrical Nitrate* shift the focus away from the widely varied profilmic events captured upon the nitrate stock and place it instead on the material properties of film itself. Although mainly made up of fragments of narrative fiction features, the films are presented as sampling fragmented physical collections without reference to their narrative content. *Lyrical Nitrate* begins with a set of title cards announcing that the images have been taken from "films bought between 1905 and 1920 by [cinema owner and exhibitor] Jean Desmet", which were stored in a cinema's attic until his death. The images, we learn, are exhibited in colour and are perishing "before our very eyes" by virtue of their unstable nitrate base. The physical life of the film stock therefore marks both the starting point and the emphasis of this film, which does not seek to immerse its audience in the narrative events depicted in the remaining fragments. *Decasia* does not include any initial explanatory material: instead, the end titles allude to the film's archival content via its credits.

Both soundtracks have the potential to invite a similar mode of engagement with the material life of sound media. However, neither is explicitly discussed in relation to its physical material qualities from within the film world: while the explanatory information presented in both films makes reference to their use of nitrate film stock, no mention is made of the origins of the sonic material. I suggest that a comparison of the two soundtracks yields an understanding of implicit assumptions around the material life of sound media and electronically mediated listening. A consideration of noise is important here. In his discussion of *Decasia*, Cubitt considers noise in relation to the *image* rather than sound: "random interference in the transmission of a message. . . . Any optical system, mechanical or digital, struggles to overcome noise, to guard, preserve and conserve its messages against the intrusion of contingency." The nitrate stock itself, Cubitt argues, is prone to gradual decomposition and is indifferent to its role as a medium, as a carrier of messages (i.e., filmed images): "understanding only that it is a chemical soup, not that it is also an instrument of passing light from one time to another."[3] Hence, the prints become visibly 'noisy' as they decay, yet it is the affective beauty of this visible noise that is celebrated in both films. I propose an analogous understanding of the sonic noise that can be heard on the soundtracks of both *Decasia* and *Lyrical Nitrate*, two films that offer very distinct versions of noisy soundscape construction.

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[2] André Habib, "Matter and Memory: A Conversation with Bill Morrison", *Offscreen*, accessed 3 November 2004, http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen/interview_morrison.html.

[3] Cubitt, "The Shadow", 192–93.

The brief mentions of sound in earlier articles on *Lyrical Nitrate* and *Decasia* are a good starting point for this discussion. André Habib speaks philosophically about *Lyrical Nitrate* in relation to the wider notion of the aesthetics of ruin. His article includes one brief mention of sound, but only in relation to the semantic content of the lyrics of the film's closing piece of music—the arioso "Che puro ciel" from Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762)—which for Habib underlines the film's "orphic thematic", in which "cinema is substituted for Eurydice, the object of love to be saved, but whose rescue-operation risks transforming the silver salts into dust".[4] Meanwhile, Pierson discusses the formal strategies used in *Lyrical Nitrate*, concentrating on the repetition of visual motifs and performance gestures, which includes a passing mention of the use of music that implies thematic links between visual content in the appropriated silent films and (like Habib) semantic lyrical content of the music—"Let Me Wander Not Unseen" from Handel's *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* (1740).[5] These two observations highlight the theme of seeing as an act of attempted rescue of the images from their precarious nitrate medium, articulating the pathos of film images that seem to demand to be looked at in order to be resurrected. And yet, although both authors' observations relate to the soundtrack, they further underline the primacy of the *image* by relating only lyrical content to image content, leaving unanswered questions around how what we hear—in particular the specific qualities of the sounds themselves, rather than their semantic content—works as part of our audiovisual experience.

However, Pierson also makes several mentions of both films' "appeal" or "address" to the senses, and argues that "through the articulation of music to image [*Decasia*] produces a visceral, multi-sensory experience that keeps spectators in a state of agonized anticipation. Michael Gordon's score ratchets up the tension without offering any comforting hint of final resolution and release."[6] This analysis of the film's sonic qualities moves on from the consideration of semantic listening. Pierson contends that visually, the focus is not on what the people on film are doing, but rather on what is happening to them, a focus that emphasises the analogy between the fragility of the film and the fragility of human existence and analyses the formal play between the visible decay and the visible photographed images. She observes how "violins sound like sirens" and how the music appeals to an "emotional and somatic understanding of time".[7] It is this latter point that is worthy of further development because it moves attention from sound as a carrier of verbal meaning, engaging instead with its affective qualities.

These brief mentions of sound in analyses of *Lyrical Nitrate* and *Decasia* suggest that there is further potential for consideration of their soundtracks. Michel Chion's

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[4] Habib, "Ruin, Archive and the Time of Cinema: Peter Delpeut's *Lyrical Nitrate*", *SubStance* 35, no. 2 (2009): 133–34.

[5] Pierson, "Avant-Garde Re-Enactment", 9.

[6] Ibid., 15.

[7] Ibid., 14–16, 19.

techniques of audiovisual analysis are useful here, as they can produce insights into the contrasting approaches the two films take to sound. A particularly useful technique is 'masking', which involves listening to a film or film sequence without its images, or conversely watching its images without their sound.[8] Listening to *Lyrical Nitrate* and *Decasia* as extended musical works enables a deeper understanding that uncovers characteristics of the soundtrack previously unnoticed. As Chion contends, this exercise allows the audio-viewer to listen and view afresh, and to appreciate the arbitrary choices of sound and image that combine to create the audiovisual experience: "we become conscious of the fundamental strangenesss of the audiovisual relationship . . . the *incompatible* character of these elements called sound and image."[9] What becomes clear by listening to *Lyrical Nitrate* and *Decasia* is the extent to which neither uses music in a way that is especially 'obvious', 'appropriate' or that can be considered to be a 'natural accompaniment' to their decaying found-footage images. Instead, the two films adopt contrasting sonic aesthetic strategies that point towards contrasting conceptions of 'noise'.

Noisy Old Media

Decasia uses a newly composed, performed, mixed and mastered orchestral score, with a contemporary digitally mastered stereophonic sonic quality, whereas *Lyrical Nitrate* uses noisy old monophonic phonograph recordings of arias, which foreground the noise of shellac's crackle and hiss as a complement to the visual noise of the nitrate's decay. To put it another way, *Decasia* appears to musically score the visual decay, whereas *Lyrical Nitrate* compiles a soundtrack evocative of 'past-ness'.

Lyrical Nitrate's soundtrack consists of a compilation of eleven pieces of music, with no added sound apart from five instances of four sound effects (the whir of a projector, the desolate hum of wind, a rumble of thunder and the whistle and clatter of a train, which is used twice). The eleven pieces of music are crossfaded only a few times: usually each piece of music is followed by silence, such that the effect of listening to the film without its images is one of episodic discontinuity. In contrast, *Decasia*'s soundtrack is a specially written score, continuous with no breaks or silence, and does not include any apparent sound effects. The sparing use of sound effects in *Lyrical Nitrate* is particularly curious; all of them (apart from the projector sound) draw attention to the diegetic aspect of the nitrate film fragments, shifting away from the material aspect foregrounded by their visible decay and contrasting with our predominant 'deafness' to the films' diegetic worlds. The contrast is poignant; for example, in the final few minutes of the film, a short sequence ends with a shot of a distant moving train, the diegetic

[8] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 187–88.

[9] Ibid., 189.

sound of which crossfades with a piece of orchestral music. Yet the fragment that follows includes shots of a barking dog, with no associated sound effect—we have reverted to our characteristic 'deafness' to the sound world of early cinema. It is also in these final minutes that the decay of the nitrate becomes most intense, with random patterns increasingly dominating the screen as the captured images fade away. In a second shot of the dog barking, the animal 'disappears' behind the flickering cloud of decay, as though its initial 'muteness' briefly foreshadows its irrevocable 'disappearance'.

In her discussion of silent-era screen performance, Jane Gaines posits the notion of *wordless mimesis*, as a move away from the more limited notions of "speechlessness", "silence" or "muteness". Building upon the work of Mary Ann Doane, who notes that in silent film, meaning is produced via expressivity that is taken from the spoken word and spread over the human body as a whole, Gaines declares that such expressivity is palpable as a result of the absence of the voice as carrier of semantic content, such that expressivity is spread over the whole of the *mise-en-scène*—landscapes, objects, locomotives.[10] As *Decasia* and *Lyrical Nitrate* incorporate the visible decay as an element of *mise-en-scène*, reframing it beyond the diegesis to foreground aspects of the apparatus, we can extend *wordless mimesis* to be inclusive of this interplay of materially heterogeneous sonic and visual elements, an inclusivity that helps to account for their strange pathos.

Beyond the music and sparingly used sound effects, I would like to extend this line of argument further to consider the expressivity of the hisses and crackles audible throughout *Lyrical Nitrate* (and by contrast, the 'clean' digital-ness of *Decasia*'s soundtrack). Awareness of the silences of *Lyrical Nitrate* versus the relentless sonic assault of *Decasia* highlights each film's type of noise. In turn, each individual piece of music within *Lyrical Nitrate* has its own kind of noise. Visually, the decay of the nitrate stock comprising both films always threatens to overwhelm and obscure the captured images, yet we are compelled to watch the filmed action 'through' the visible decay; in much the same way, though the noise of the old recordings is audible and threatens to drown out the music, we listen 'through' the noise. Yet the film's silences on the *Lyrical Nitrate* DVD initially foreground the noise of the recordings: when each gramophone recording starts, we first hear an insistent hiss, before the captured music commences and demands our attention above the hiss and crackle of the medium. The few non-gramophone recordings used in the film therefore stand out through their relative noiselessness: Bruno Hoffmann's performance of Vincenc Václav Mašek's "Six Variations For Solo Glass Harmonica" (a 1982 LP), the Swiss ensemble Camerata Bern performing Puccini's "Crisantemi" (1890) (recording date unknown, but they are a contemporary ensemble formed in 1963) and Léopold Simoneau and René Bianco's performance of Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers* duet

[10] Mary Ann Doane, "The Voice in Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space", *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 33; Jane M. Gaines, "Wordlessness (to Be Continued)", in *Researching Women in Silent Cinema: New Findings and Perspectives*, ed. Monica Dall'Asta and Victoria Duckett (Bologna: University of Bologna, 2013), 290.

"Au Fond du Temple Saint" (1863) (recorded in the 1950s). To put it simply (and almost glibly), the newer the recording, the less noisy it is, hence the crackle and hiss evoke a "past-ness" that sonically frames the decaying images.

Doane has argued that "technical advances in sound recording . . . are aimed at diminishing the noise of the system, concealing the work of the apparatus, and thus reducing the distance between the object and its representation."[11] Yet the gap can never be eliminated. Andy Birtwistle theorises elements of film sound typically neglected in film studies: beyond the usual categories of speech/dialogue, music and sound effects, are noise, silence and "the sound of the technology of film itself".[12] Such sounds of technology are the sounds of Doane's "apparatus", or undesirable "noise", conceived of as a problem to be eliminated, as they are "understood to threaten the representational by interference, disruption and distraction". It is inescapable and intrinsic to any recording and playback medium—ground noise is "any undesirable noise inherent in reproduced sound"—and can include the hiss of magnetic tape, the crackle of optical film sound, as well as the hum of system noise caused by electrical resistance.[13] Yet through Birtwistle's positive consideration of such sounds and noise, we can gain an understanding of *Lyrical Nitrate*'s aesthetic strategy. Much like the visual noise that is unique to the physical quality of the nitrate medium, the audible noise is inextricable from its (mostly) shellac disc playback medium, a medium characterised by its high level of surface noise.[14] As well as the surface noise, it is the narrow dynamic range of shellac discs that gives the medium what Birtwistle terms its "sonic signature".[15] A digital recording with shellac noise added does not make a convincing imitation of a shellac disc; instead the medium inflects the sound as much as the sound inflects the medium, hence recordings of the past are audibly inscribed with the sound of technology.[16] As a result, if we consider noise in positive terms, we can consider more actively its affective qualities: the noise of the medium is not solely a technical problem, or a sonic fog to be listened 'through', but is nostalgically evocative of past-ness and intrinsic to the *sonic* materiality of the recorded and played-back sound.[17]

The DVD of *Lyrical Nitrate* freezes the noise, both aural and visual, by virtue of the nature of digital capture, storage and playback. All analogue media are gradually damaged by their playback, because of their tactile nature: the needle wears out the groove of a disc; the projector damages the film reel as it spools. Digital media lacks tactility, yet the transfer of analogue to digital preserves the tactile, textural noise of the film image

[11] Doane, "Ideology and the Practice of Sound Editing and Mixing", in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 164.

[12] Andy Birtwistle, *Cinesonica: Sounding Film and Video* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 85.

[13] Ibid., 85–86.

[14] Ibid., 99.

[15] Ibid., 89.

[16] Ibid., 91.

[17] Ibid., 122.

and the phonograph disc. The DVD of *Decasia* similarly freezes the decay of the nitrate images; however, the soundtrack comprises a digital recording of Gordon's symphonic score. The sonic signature of *Decasia* contrasts sharply with that of *Lyrical Nitrate*, with its wide dynamic range and stereo imaging providing a 'perfect' digital accompaniment to an 'imperfect' disintegrating analogue film medium.

The Digital Revolution of Noise and Sound

Yet paradoxically, the digitally mixed and mastered soundtrack of *Decasia*, with its apparent 'noiselessless' (i.e., lack of analogue noise, system noise, hiss, etc.), is a very noisy work indeed. Chion remarks that, in cinema, "digital sound truly reduces background noise to zero and therefore allows silences as close to absolute silence as one can get", in contrast with the "poetic fog" of 1930s and 1940s film sound ambience.[18] *Decasia* commences and finishes its soundtrack with a subtle metallic ringing scraping sound—this sound's quietness and high-frequency detail could only be rendered digitally and would certainly not be audible through the noise of a shellac disc or optical film soundtrack. However, the rest of *Decasia*'s soundtrack is a relentless, overwhelming sonic assault, with few (if any) silences. Furthermore, harsh dissonance and throbbing percussion, in contrast with the sweet plaintive melodies of *Lyrical Nitrate*'s arias and *bel canto* vocals, characterise *Decasia*'s score. Paradoxically, though the film's soundtrack allows for the possibility of intense, almost absolute silence, devoid of crackle and hiss, the orchestral score fills this expanded stereophonic digital void with overwhelming sound.

It is telling that comparisons have been made between *Decasia*'s orchestral musical score and noisy machine sounds: as well as Pierson's "violins sound like sirens" comment above, Internet Movie Database user reviews describe the score in both positive and negative terms as sounding like a plane crash, or traffic noises, with some writers even advising prospective viewers to watch the film with the sound off.[19] What Chion terms cinema's "vococentrism" underlines the key departure of *Decasia*'s soundtrack from *Lyrical Nitrate*: the singing voice, which provides a particularly human engagement in *Lyrical Nitrate*, is absent from *Decasia*. Without the voice: "What remains? Noises, and what may be called music."[20] However, the distinction between music and noise is, as Chion points out, "completely relative, and has to do with what we are listening for" and also "depends on the listener's cultural references".[21] Intriguingly, in his analysis of the opening few minutes of Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966), Chion uses the example of a glissando, which could be recognised either as "string instruments" or as "a

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[18] Chion, *Film: A Sound Art*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 151–52.

[19] Internet Movie Database, "Reviews and Ratings for *Decasia*", IMDb, last modified 12 December 2006, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0303325/reviews?ref_=tt_urv.

[20] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 205.

[21] Ibid., 205–06.

sirenlike noise".[22] Similarly, in his work on the history of sound in the arts, *Noise Water Meat*, Douglas Kahn makes special mention of the role of glissandi in twentieth-century modernist composition:

> Technologically, glissandi became associated with the rotary motion of the siren . . . and would eventually be found in the spiraling groove of the phonograph disc and spooling reels of film. Modernist glissandi were first heralded by the siren, particularly the clinical instruments adopted by Helmholtz for his acoustical research but also those sirens that welcomed the new days of industrialism, urbanism and militarism. . . . Sirens cried out in public in an already abstracted sound. . . . It seemed to be the perfect modernist anthem.[23]

Kahn traces the history of ideas around the relationship between noise, sound and music, collaboratively exchanged across physics, mathematics and music: "Many things already belonging to music were considered to be noisy, including dissonance, entire classes of musical instruments (such as percussion), other types of music, and music from other cultures."[24] Noise is a major topic in critical discussion of music and the modernist aesthetic landscape, indeed 'noise' is a genre of music in itself.[25] Much of the broader topic is beyond the scope of this chapter's discussion; however, here we will posit, not unproblematically, noise as the sonic 'bad other' to music. Yet, as Kahn points out, it can also be conceived of as something that permeates music—that is essential to it—with pure musical tone beyond the confines of the laboratory impossible. Noise occupies a contradictory position as something "at once so pervasive and so despised".[26]

The orchestral musical score of *Decasia*, accompanied by visibly decaying scenes of early twentieth-century modernity—cities, machines, mechanised entertainment—can therefore be understood to evoke what Emily Thompson terms "the soundscape of modernity".[27] The music might sound like urban noise partly because, depending on the listening mode of the audio-viewer, or their cultural references, urban noise can sound like music. In other words, sirens can sound like violins as much as violins can sound like sirens. Unlike the sound effects in *Lyrical Nitrate*, such as the earlier example of the train and its accompanying diegetic sound, the sirens and traffic noise of *Decasia* do not merely 'fuse' naturalistically with images of sirens or traffic (what Walter Murch

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[22] Ibid., 206.

[23] Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 84.

[24] Ibid., 82.

[25] Chris Atton, "Fan Discourse and the Construction of Noise Music as a Genre", *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 23, no. 3 (2011): 324–42; Reinhold Friedl, "Some Sadomasochistic Aspects of Musical Pleasure", *Leonardo Music Journal* 12 (2002): 29–30.

[26] Kahn, *Noise Water Meat*, 82.

[27] Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

dismisses as a "relatively flat 'audio-vision' ").[28] Instead, staccato woodwinds evoke train whistles, while car horns accompany a filmed fragment of a couple dancing. This score is not a literal sonic illustration of the noisy environment we might imagine the profilmic events to inhabit, then; it is perhaps better understood to be the expression of a modernist sonic (or listening) condition.

Sound and Time: The Audiovisual Materiality of Cinema

The noise audible on the *Lyrical Nitrate* soundtrack is not necessarily the noise of decay; instead it is the noise of the *medium*. However, we tend to 'read' the noise as analogous to the visible decay, despite the fact that, fundamentally, film sound and film image are materially heterogeneous. I now wish to build upon my argument regarding the two types of noise that permeate *Lyrical Nitrate* and *Decasia*'s soundtracks, and to consider the two films more specifically as cinematic experiences. Matthew Malsky draws parallels between cinema, city life and modernity, with particular attention to modernity's stimulation of the senses. He conceives of a type of modernity that is "a barrage of stimuli" and "a distinct register of subjective experience characterized by the physical and perceptual shocks of the modern urban environment", of which cinema "is an exemplary case".[29] Hence, beyond the modernist listening condition alluded to above, there is further scope to consider these two films in relation to the modernist *audio-viewing* condition.

The film image is one that captures and transmits movement over time, yet paradoxically is still, comprising static images which convey an illusion of movement. Chion points out that a mute image with no visible movement appears still, like a snapshot, yet the same image accompanied by sound seems to become animated and move through time, hence "sound temporalizes images".[30] However, in relation to *Decasia*, Morrison speaks specifically of the temporal qualities of old archival footage, without reference to sound:

> it had this quality of having been touched. Having been touched by time, by a non-human intervention that is organic if you want to be romantic about it, that there's some "Higher Power" that had interacted with the stock . . . there are many things happening between the first time they were registered on the 35mm negative and transferred to a paper intermediary, to being stored, rained on, or being nibbled by rats; the hairs in the specs, the grain and what would have to happen for that to be

[28] Walter Murch, "Foreword", in Chion, *Audio-Vision*, xxii.

[29] Matthew Malsky, "Sounds of the City: Alfred Newman's 'Street Scene' and Urban Modernity", in *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound*, ed. Jay Beck and Tony Grajeda (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 107.

[30] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 13

FIGURE 11.1 A spread of visual decay in Bill Morrison's *Decasia* (2002).

> brought out and to be re-photographed some 60 years later. So each picture has its own dimension of time, its own history. Whether or not you are conscious of this while watching, you are still watching these tiny histories go by.[31]

Hence, both sound and visible decay temporalise images, but the decay temporalises the image-carrying medium. In a crude but ineluctable way, the temporalising effect of sound, as it is wedded to the projected moving image, is one of synaesthetic fusion with this visualised decay. This happens quite dramatically in *Decasia*: for example, a loud piercing blast of brass fuses audiovisually with an overwhelming spread of decay on the left hand side of an image of a merry-go-round at a funfair, operating almost like a dramatic 'stinger' (Figure 11.1). Meanwhile, *Lyrical Nitrate* takes a gentler tone; its final five minutes, for instance, audiovisually fuse the plaintive trills and arpeggiated strings from "Che puro ciel" with the visible disintegration of the images, which appear to 'dance' on screen.

Birtwistle asserts that analysis of sound-image relations in cinema tends to be dominated by significative modes, such as attention to film music's narrative functions. Indeed, I referred earlier to Pierson's and Habib's points regarding the lyrical content of songs used in *Lyrical Nitrate* and argued instead for increased attention to the non-semantic

[31] Habib, "Matter and Memory".

aspects of the soundtrack. Birtwistle makes the case for an alternative *morphological* approach "in the sense of 'shape' as development over time", because "focusing on the morphological profiles of both sound and image, and the relationship between them" allows us to "conceptualise the material dimensions of the audiovisual text in ways that are not possible with significative modes of analysis."[32] The apparent audiovisual fusion of sounds with the shapes and patterns of disintegration in *Lyrical Nitrate* and *Decasia* can therefore be accounted for as operating in a manner that is morphologically congruent.

It is the material and mechanical characteristics of sound and moving image in both films that convey this sense of morphological congruence. Moments of what Chion terms *synchresis*, in which sound and moving image seem to fuse despite their heterogeneous, even incongruous qualities, permeate *Decasia* in particular.[33] The orchestral score's phasing percussive phrases synaesthetically pulse in time with the flickering decay on screen: this is made more acute because the images are projected in slight slow motion, which draws attention to the disparate frames as they follow one another, without entirely breaking the spell of apparent movement in the image. Despite referring to sound and image's strangely incompatible nature, such phenomena as *synchresis* and others observed and defined by Chion occur through our unified audio-viewing of these disparate materials. Not only does this apparently unified, audio-viewed, synaesthetic effect occur despite sound's and image's material heterogeneity, it occurs despite the initially standalone nature of *Decasia*'s score. The film's director, Bill Morrison, has asserted in interview that *Decasia*'s composer worked alone rather than collaboratively, writing a score which Morrison then repurposed.[34]

Chion further emphasises film music's uncannily mechanical qualities, arguing that prior to "providing emotional resonance for a film, music is first and foremost a machine for manipulating space and time, which it helps to expand, contract, freeze, and thaw at will."[35] What the films' soundtracks share is an emphasis upon the cold, automated, mechanical aspect of the film medium, which paradoxically—through its apparent indifference—further emphasises the pathos articulated in the fragments of drama, performance and gesture captured within the deteriorating medium. Chion describes how music in film can progress steadily and undaunted, in a manner which he describes as "anempathetic", which "has the effect not of freezing emotion but rather of intensifying it, by inscribing it on a cosmic background." He further points out that

> all films proceed in the form of an indifferent and automatic unwinding, that of the projection, which on the screen and through the loudspeakers produces a simulacra of movement and life—and this unwinding must hide itself and be

[32] Birtwistle, *Cinesonica*, 190.
[33] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 63–64.
[34] Habib, "Matter and Memory".
[35] Chion, *Film: A Sound Art*, 409.

FIGURE 11.2 The view from the front of a tram in Peter Delpeut's *Lyrical Nitrate* (*Lyrisch nitraat*, 1991).

> forgotten. What does anempathetic music do, if not to unveil this reality of cinema, its robotic face?[36]

Complementing the anempathetic steadiness of both films' scores are recurring visual motifs that further emphasise (to use Chion's words) cinema's "mechanical texture": in *Decasia*, images of human and mechanical spinning and turning, including whirling dervishes, spinning wheels and merry-go-rounds, are overtly paralleled by the score's circular looping repetition of rhythms and melodic phrases.[37] Similarly, a street scene in *Lyrical Nitrate*, which uses the sound effect of a projector, shows the mechanical spinning of the wheels of a bicycle and is shot as a 'phantom ride', in which the camera has been mounted onto the front of a tram (Figure 11.2). This scene of everyday modernity and mechanisation is underlined by the use of the audible sound effect of mechanical film projection, in conjunction with mechanised camera movement.

Decasia and *Lyrical Nitrate*, then, celebrate the texture of decay, even as they express anxiety about it and mourn the loss of old media. The aural and visual motifs of looping, turning and repetition evoke the wear and tear of mechanical playback. However, the

[36] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 8–9.
[37] Ibid., 9.

digital playback of the DVDs of both films insure against any further audiovisual degradation and its associated textural change as the sounds and images played back digitally cannot wear out (they can glitch, or become unreadable, but the tactile textural changes associated with nitrate or celluloid film and shellac or vinyl discs, cannot happen). Both films use sonic noise as a way to foreground and emphasise the visual 'noise' of the prints' decay. Yet more importantly, an attention to sound reveals implicit assumptions, usually unexamined, around the material aspects of sound media. One can point out, as usual, how the status of sound is marginalised, given that both films present information regarding the material life of the images, with no similar explanation regarding the material life of the sounds. Yet analysis of both soundtracks, and comparison of their sonic qualities, reveals that neither merely 'accompanies' the found-footage images and that they use very different aesthetic strategies. An approach to listening which puts sound first reveals dimensions to the soundtrack not immediately apparent, such as the "sonic signature" of different sound media. Presented via the digital medium of the DVD, both soundtracks are revealed as 'noisy', suggesting that the noiseless void of digital audio highlights the tactile noise of analogue media and classical musical instruments, like specks of dust on a pane of glass.

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12 The Sound of Queer Experimental Film

Juan A. Suárez

BY NOW WE have a fairly good idea about what queerness looks like thanks to the considerable body of work that explores the visual representation of queer bodies, desires and worlds. However, we do not have a comparably clear idea of what queerness sounds like in music, in sound art or in interaction with the image, particularly with the moving image. There are important reasons for this. The surveillance and suppression of sexually stigmatised groups have been carried out most often through the printed word and the visual media rather than through aural technologies. Consequently, in reaction to these perceptual biases, the rhetoric of sexual liberation has more frequently invoked visibility rather than audibility. The imperative to come out of the closets and make the repressed visible has not mobilised comparable auditory imagery. In addition, because of its inherent abstraction and ephemerality, sound, in isolation from language, has seldom been studied as a channel for queer expressiveness. This situation changed in the early 1990s with the advent of 'new musicology', a mode of analysis that theorised purportedly abstract musical structures in relation to social and political forces, sex and gender among them.[1]

[1] Some influential early contributions to this trend were Maynard Solomon, "Franz Schubert and the Peacocks of Benvenuto Cellini", *19th Century Music* 12, no. 3 (1989): 193–206; Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Ruth A. Solie, ed., *Music and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California

And yet, beyond this trend, the rising discipline of sound studies tends to steer clear of sexual and gender critique, with very few exceptions.[2]

The neglect of queer auditory culture is even more prevalent in studies of the moving image, where, as scholars of film music and sound routinely point out, ocular-centrism is endemic to the field. And it is further reinforced by the often-remarked focus on visuality in contemporary culture and in sexuality. Modernity has been frequently described as a predominantly visual era—a "hieroglyphic civilization", in the words of pioneer film theorist Vachel Lindsay—and most characterisations of the postmodern—by Frederic Jameson, James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger, Anne Friedberg or Jean Baudrillard, to cite a few—are grounded on scopic, rather than acoustic, structures and perceptions: the immersive experience of architecture, the reduction of historical processes to discrete images, the appeal of window shopping and film and television spectatorship or the inescapability of the simulacrum.[3] Similarly, analyses of gender and sexuality gravitate once again towards the visual rather than the aural. Even though psychoanalysts such as Guy Rosolato and Dennis Vasse have stressed the importance of auditory perception—of the sound of the mother's voice—in subjective ontogenesis, discussions of adult eroticism often remain focused on sight, to the detriment of other senses.[4]

And yet, the auditory is a significant component in queer experimental film and video. The soundtrack has driven, reinforced, nuanced and run in counterpoint to the image in ways that have been studied so far only in relation to a fairly reduced number of filmmakers, film music composers and sound designers—such as Nino Rota, studied

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Press, 1993); Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (New York: Poseidon, 1993); and, most pertinent to my purposes here, the collected volume, *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), especially the chapters by Brett, McClary, Thomas and Wood.

[2] This elision is noticeable in work by Douglas Kahn, Paul Hegarty, Salomé Voegelin and Caleb Kelly, to name a few; this is not to find fault with their thoughtful writing, only to indicate that their focus is simply not on gender. By contrast, gender is factored in in David Bernstein, ed., *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), which takes into account Pauline Oliveros's status as the single woman—and a lesbian—in the center's core group, and is the focus of Tara Rodgers's *Pink Noise: Women in Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

[3] Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: Liveright, 1970; first published in 1922), 7; Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992); James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger, "Six Artistic Cultures", in *Modernity and Mass Culture*, ed. James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1–24; Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983); Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[4] Guy Rosolato, "Répetitions", *Musique en jeu* 9 (November 1972): 33–44; Dennis Vasse, *L'Ombilic et la voix: Deux enfants en analyse* (Paris: Champ Freudien, 1974); on the dominance of the visual in adult sexuality, see Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), 51–52, 58–60.

by Richard Dyer, and Derek Jarman and his frequent collaborator Simon Fisher Turner, analysed by Annette Davison, Steve Dillon, Jacques Khalip and Holly Rogers.[5] These studies provide provocative, broadly applicable insights—I will return to them later—yet comparable work needs to be done on a much larger roster of artists and composers; in addition, queer sound at large must be holistically mapped in relation to existing theories of queer representation. Attempting to provide at least a start on precisely this kind of theoretical reflection, this chapter goes some way towards ascertaining how sound (which I am using capaciously to include also music and voice) and image may play with—and against—each other as they converge on the cumulus of corporeal, sexual and affective unconventionality we have been calling "queer" for over two decades now. Experimental film is an apposite site to explore this convergence; its artistic and social marginality sheltered unconventional social formations and impulses—including queer sociability and affect—while its discrepant aesthetics proved hospitable to sound experiments and to the articulation of unprecedented image-sound relationships.

Listening to Queer Experimental Cinema

During the early decades of the twentieth century, few of the many interactions between the film and sound avant-gardes may qualify as queer since they were largely devoid of specific social or personal reference, as is the case, for example, with the synaesthetic inquiries of Viking Eggeling, Oskar Fischinger or Len Lye. And when formal and auditory experiments channelled social or political concerns—as in films of the Soviet montage school—sexuality was seldom a salient preoccupation. Exceptions came mainly from the French avant-garde: René Clair and Francis Picabia's *Entr'acte* (1924), scored by Erik Satie; Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou* (1928), whose sound version was edited to a fragment of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* and to two tangos by songwriter team Vicente Álvarez and Carlos Otero; and Jean Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un poéte* (1930), with music by George Auric and unusual sound effects. *Entr'acte* and *Chien* have moments of cross-dressing and gender indefiniteness—*Entr'acte*'s bearded ballerina and *Chien*'s hysterical male protagonist and the androgynous young woman who plays with a severed hand in the middle of the street (Figures 12.1a and b). *Le Sang*, in turn, is the psychodrama of a young man whom gay critic Parker Tyler regarded as "evidently homosexual".[6]

[5] Richard Dyer, *Nino Rota, Music, Film, and Feeling* (London: British Film Institute, 2010), esp. 32–39; Annette Davison, "Playing in *The Garden*: Sound, Performance, and Images of Persecution", *Indiana Theory Review* 19 (1998): 35–54; Steve Dillon, *Derek Jarman and Lyric Film: The Mirror and the Sea* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Jacques Khalip, "The Archeology of Sound: Derek Jarman's *Blue* and Queer Audiovisuality in the Time of AIDS", *differences* 21, no. 2 (2010): 73–108; Holly Rogers, "Painted Time: Music and Image in Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio*", in *Visualising Music: Audio-Visual Relationships in Avant-Garde Film and Video Art* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic, 2010), 102–43.

[6] Parker Tyler, *Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1973), 132.

(a)

(b)

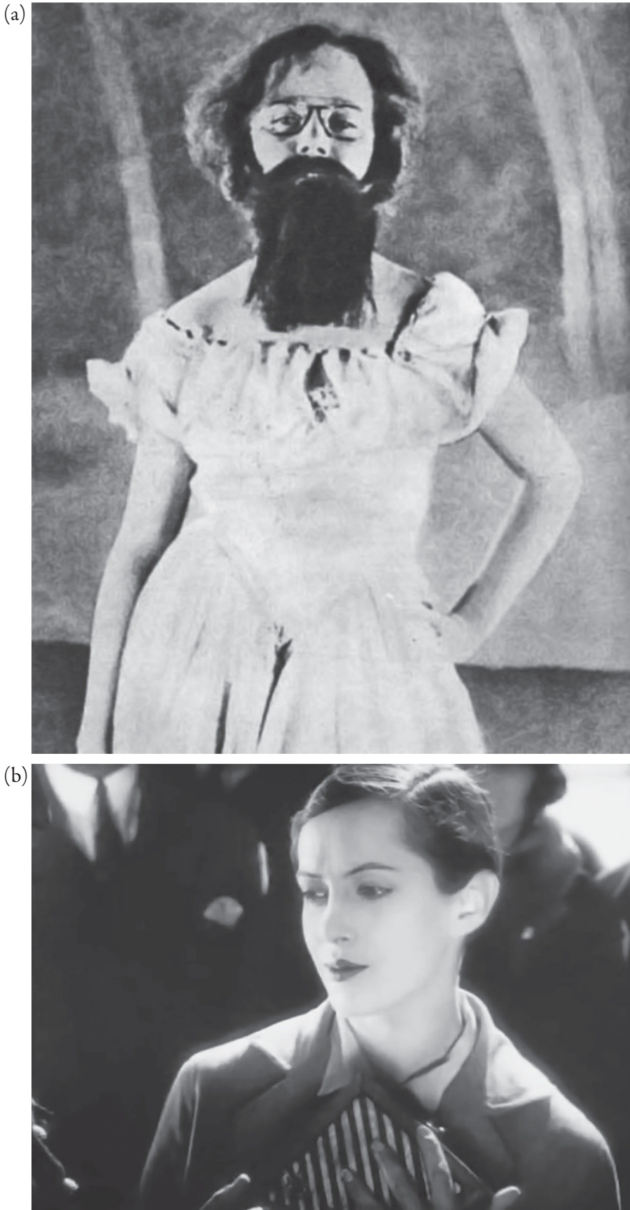

FIGURE 12.1 (a) The bearded ballerina from René Clair and Francis Picabia's *Entr'acte* (1924). (b) The androgynous young woman in Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou* (1928).

As Buñuel and Cocteau distanced themselves from the formalist leanings of the early avant-garde, they anticipated the mood and styles of mid-twentieth-century queer experimental film. Largely influenced by Surrealism and Cocteau's poetic subjectivism, the cinematic avant-garde of the 1940s and 1950s had a confessional character and, unlike its

counterpart of the early decades of the twentieth century, often arose at the confluence of both artistic and sexual subcultures. Despite intense surveillance and prosecution, these subcultures grew progressively visible, articulate and militant after the war years. In this time, experimental subgenres such as "the trance film", the "lyrical film" or the "mythopoetic film" frequently portrayed the inner life of young misfits whose dreams and fantasies were often blatantly homoerotic.[7] Yet their sexual deviance was communicated by means of oblique symbolism and elliptical narratives due to the rampant homophobia of the era. Emblematic films of this period are Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) and *At Land* (1945), whose female protagonists discover the dark side of sexuality and intimacy; Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* (1947), a surprisingly explicit film about a young man's masochistic homosexual fantasies; and Willard Maas's *Image in the Snow* (1948), whose young hero agonises over the simultaneous appeal and revulsion of the flesh. These trances came in unconventional sound envelopes that heightened the sexual marginality and eccentric eroticism of their protagonists. In Anger's film, the triumphant close of Ottorino Respighi's symphonic poem *Pines of Rome* (1924)—according to the composer, suggestive of ancient Rome's military glories—invests its protagonist's masochistic fantasies with a sense of transcendence. Deren's *Meshes* was conceived as a silent piece but was eventually scored by her partner Teiji Ito in a style reminiscent of Japanese *gagaku*, whose staccato tempo and—to a Western ear—unfamiliar timbres heightened the alienating character of the film's interiors. And in Maas's film, the twelve-tone soundtrack by gay composer Ben Weber underlined, through its lack of conventional resolution, the protagonist's spiritual and affective uprootedness.

Like their predecessors of the post-war decades, 1960s underground filmmakers Jack Smith, Andy Warhol, Barbara Rubin and the Kuchar brothers continued using film as a vehicle for both aural and visual experiments, even if it has been their visual contributions that have attracted most attention. Their work abandoned the closeted, cryptic styles of queer representation typical of the 1940s and 1950s in favour of an unapologetic affirmation of untrammelled sexuality, and replaced the sombre tone of an earlier generation with a humorous, ironic campiness. Unlike many of the post-war filmmakers, who often commissioned the music of their films from composers, they resorted to direct sound or found music, and were directly involved in the design of their soundtracks.[8]

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[7] The terms "trance", "lyrical" and "mythopoetic" are those of P. Adams Sitney, who remains the authority on the history of postwar American experimental film: Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943–2000*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 17–42, 155–231.

[8] On the use of sound in these filmmakers, see Lucas Hilderbrand, "Sex out of Synch: *Christmas on Earth*'s and *Couch's* Queer Soundtracks", *Camera Obscura* 28:2 (2013): 35–75; Graig Uhlin, "Sound and Speech in Andy Warhol's Films", *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 26, no. 4 (2009): 322–38; Gustavus Staedtler, "'My Wife': The Tape Recorder and Andy Warhol's Queer Ways of Listening", *Criticism* 56, no. 3 (2014): 425–56; and Juan Suárez, "Three Regimes of Noise in 1960s and 1970s Experimental Film: Jack Smith, Terry Fox, Hélio Oiticica", *Homenaje: Francisco Gutiérrez Díaz*, ed. Rafael Monroy Casas (Murcia: Editum, Ediciones de la Universidad de Murcia, 2013), 297–312.

They benefitted from the availability of magnetic reel-to-reel sound recorders, increasingly affordable since the post-war years, which allowed the easy capture and manipulation of sound. Magnetic tape was easy to cut and splice, could be played at different speeds, which generated odd timbres, and some machines permitted simultaneous play and recording, producing feedback and reverberation.[9] Sound was, for some of these filmmakers, an interest on a par with the filmed image. The Kuchars taped favourite radio programmes and television series, and film music that they later integrated into their films' soundtracks, Smith recorded dramatic improvisations whose deranged sexuality and hilarity recall the atmosphere of his early films, and Warhol was fond of capturing large chunks of the sonic everyday in a fashion that was the aural counterpart of his noninterventionist shooting style.[10]

Experimental filmmakers from mid-century onwards also benefitted from a considerable expansion of the music and sonic vocabularies being articulated in those decades. The period that runs from the 1940s to the 1960s witnessed the introduction of noise and aleatory compositional procedures, pioneered by Henry Cowell and John Cage; the incorporation into Western music of non-Western timbres and scales, propounded by Cowell, Lou Harrison and Colin McPhee, among others; the broadening of the sound palette prompted by synthesisers and electrified instruments; and the growing popularity of vernacular styles that had long brewed underground, such as blues, rhythm and blues, bebop jazz, folk, rock 'n' roll, rock and their varied combinations and offspring.[11]

There was nothing inherently queer in these developments, which resulted from the attempt to overcome what some mid-century musicians regarded as the academicism and rigidity of early twentieth-century modernism; but at the same time, it is worth reflecting on the fact that many of these innovations were promoted by queer composers such as Cage, Cowell, Harrison and McPhee. Clearly not all artists and musicians who delved into noise and unorthodox sound at the time were queer. Pioneer *bruitist* Edgard Varèse was notoriously homophobic, for instance, while a considerable number of gay pre- and post-war musicians composed in fairly conventional idioms. Nadine Hubbs has documented the narrow link between tonal and harmonic orthodoxy and gayness in a core group of 1930s and 1940s American modernists, including Virgil Thompson, Aaron Copland, Marc Blitzstein, Leonard Bernstein, Paul Bowles and Ned Rorem.[12]

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[9] Matthew Malsky, "Stretched from Manhattan's Back Alley to MoMA: A Social History of Magnetic Tape Recording", in *Music and Technoculture*, ed. René T. A. Lysloff and Leslie C. Gay (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 233–63.

[10] Branden W. Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage* (New York: Zone, 2008), 222–26.

[11] On these developments, see Michael Dustin Hicks, *Henry Cowell, Bohemian* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002); David Toop, *Exotica: Fabricated Soundscapes in a Real World* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1999); David Revill, *Roaring Silence: John Cage, a Life* (New York: Arcade, 1993); Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[12] Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). Hubbs comments on Varèse's homophobia, 156–58.

Still, despite this significant counterexample, and despite the legendary fascination of gay men for show tunes and Broadway musicals, and the narrow connection between lesbian culture and folk music, there *are* enough bonds between wayward sound and wayward sexuality to at least try to think through them. Many of the new musical styles that emerged in the post-war years were based on an unprecedented openness to unorthodox and previously marginalised material—noise, incidental sound or the music of ethnic and cultural others—and they were predicated on the rejection of artistic prejudice and on the universal validity of all acoustic phenomena—famously defended by Cage. In turn, these libertarian attitudes may have rendered the new experimental music attractive to queer filmmakers, who sought to underscore the disruptive quality of their images with a similarly transgressive sound.

Filmmakers after the 1970s prolonged and expanded many of the innovations introduced in the post-war years, benefitting, in addition, from further advances in portability (the cassette), fidelity (Dolby) and, from the mid-1990s onwards, from the flexibility afforded by home digital technology. A brief roster of queer filmmakers from this period with a particular investment in sound would include Barbara Hammer, Derek Jarman, Sue Friedrich, Abigail Child, Hans Scheirl and Ursula Pürrer, Jennifer Reeves, Luther Price, William E. Jones, David Domingo, Katrina Del Mar and M. M. Serra, among others. Their visual rendering of sexuality was influenced by the confrontational mode of punk, the defiant queer militancy prompted by the AIDS crisis and the culture wars of the 1980s, the rise of new forms of embodiment—cyber- and post-human sexuality—and the centrality of formerly marginalised ones, such as trans- and bi-sexuality. All of these thematic and stylistic traits have, in turn, been translated sonically into abrasive rock, interruptive noise, low-fidelity mixes or synthetic sounds that evoke realms beyond the normal.

Taken together, the historical field just outlined shows staggering visual and sonic variety. It comprises animation, photographed celluloid and the recycling of found footage, and ranges in genre from formal works, staged fictions, experimental documentaries and diaries to a combination of several or all of these modes in the same title. They use the voice in a variety of ways, different kinds of noise (found or produced) and a broad array of musical styles, from Schoenberg-inspired serialism to various types of jazz to Broadway tunes to contemporary pop schmaltz. At times, soundtracks are permanently matched to the image; other times, they are improvised during screenings—as Jack Smith and Warhol did in the past and Jennifer Reeves and David Domingo occasionally do now. What could be the queer common denominator to such a plurality of modes and resources?

One answer could be “nothing”. The queerness of the musical and aural styles mobilised in queer experimental film may lie less in intrinsic acoustic and structural traits than in their placement, contextualisation and use. After all, as Judith Butler influentially proposed, queerness is less an inherent quality of bodies and subjects than a performative effect. It is an iteration of available constructs of gender and sexuality whose slightly

variant actualisation—which Butler characterises as deliberate misquotation—reveals their contingency and precariousness: the fact that there is nothing immutable about them.[13] Anything plays queer in the right context or given the right—some would say the wrong—inflection. As Elizabeth Wood and Philip Brett point out, "even the opening of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, that quintessential model of heroic masculinity, met its gay destiny when, tricked out with a heavy beat and other accoutrements, it hit the disco scene in the 1970s as 'A Fifth of Beethoven'."[14] Hence, the music and sound of queer experimental film may be less *queer* (an isolatable property) than *queered* (a process, an effect)—by implication or by "contagion" from the socio-sexual unconventionality of the images they accompany and from the lives and social worlds of particular filmmakers, performers or audiences.

At the same time, then, if queerness is a matter of process and actualisation, of the critical repetition and re-location of existing sound and musical idioms, it may be important to outline the procedures, structures and (sonic) materials that facilitate such an effect. Perhaps it is easier to do this in the negative. Sound and music in experimental film are queered when they are made to work against the way these components function in conventional narrative cinema; when they are made to contravene heteronormative biases and conventional gender associations; and when, through unfamiliar sonorities and odd juxtapositions, they foster fluid configurations of sexuality, corporeality and affect.

Queering Film Sound

The abundant literature on the sound and music of conventional narrative film has insistently—often brilliantly—demonstrated the contribution of these aural elements to the narrative cohesion, intelligibility and unity of the film as a whole. Theorists and historians such as Claudia Gorbman, Kathryn Kalinak and Caryl Flinn, among others, have shown that music in classical Hollywood fostered the spectator's absorption in the world of the film and the illusionistic quality of the cinematic experience. Largely unobtrusive yet pervasive, music cued the image semantically and emotionally; it also punctuated the succession of sequences, marking beginnings, endings, transitions and diegetic levels (dreams or hallucinations versus "reality"; memories versus actually occurring events, and so forth).[15]

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[13] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 218–22, and passim.

[14] Brett, Wood and Thomas, "Lesbian and Gay Music", in Brett, Wood and Thomas, *Queering the Pitch*, 371.

[15] Claudia Gorbman, "Classical Hollywood Practice: The Model of Max Steiner", in *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 71–98; Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13–50; Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 66–110.

Sound, in turn, added to the film's intelligibility by helping to locate bodies in space, characterising settings through their aural qualities and providing narrative clues about what might be happening next or looming off-screen. The overall effect of this use of music and sound was, as Mary Ann Doane has suggested, a unity of sense and appeal: a "oneness" of the filmic body that also addresses the spectator as a coherent, unified subject in a position of epistemic dominance over the self-contained diegesis.[16]

The oneness and coherence of the mainstream filmic text and of the spectator engaged by it extend to the gender and sexuality represented on screen. These are cued visually and narratively but also acoustically. Voices are clearly gendered, match the performers' bodies in tone, timbre and modulation, and are synchronised to characters' actions and moods. Musical motifs are coloured differently when attached to male and female characters and they underline romance, passion, sexual consummation or disunion. They also signify sexuality by various means. Kalinak has remarked on the classical Hollywood convention of using jazzy brass instrumentation, syncopation, unusual harmonies and "bluesy rhythms" to signify female promiscuity, for instance.[17] "Gayness" did not have a similarly fixed repertoire, but was still connoted musically. The queerness of Joel Cairo in John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), for example, is announced, before he is actually seen, by his gardenia-scented visiting card and by a glissando in the high strings and woodwinds capped by a tremolo that underlines Sam Spade's surprise when he sniffs it.

Against their standard functioning in conventional commercial cinema, sound and music in queer experimental film disturb textual 'oneness' and clear-cut sexual and gender labelling. Abrupt juxtapositions of heterogeneous acoustic material and deliberate mismatches between sound and image disrupt textual unity and reveal the material heterogeneity of the film, dispelling its illusiveness. In addition, soundtracks cue the images against expected gender and sexual connotations, undermine the purported association of gender with particular desires and sexualities, and invoke alternative sensual and affective investments. Three main strategies through which these aims are achieved are camp, noisiness and dissonance (meaning, in this particular case, using sound and music against the grain of the image).

Camp

Mostly applied to language and to images, camp may also be conveyed by music and sound (by certain inflections of the voice, by timing). In contemporary classical music, the abrupt juxtapositions of Francis Poulenc have been cited as examples of musical camp, yet a lot of nineteenth-century Italian opera and certain types of film music and

[16] Mary Ann Doane, "The Voice in Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space", *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 33.

[17] Kalinak, *Settling the Score*, 120–22, 166–68.

popular song may be better-known examples.[18] In queer experimental film, camp arises most often from the recycling of pre-existing music and is therefore an example of what Andrew Ross regarded as camp's "necrophilic economy": the repurposing of outdated styles and objects after their currency has waned.[19] The materials most often recycled in aural camp are film scores and various kinds of popular music, chosen for their vocal or instrumental excess and eccentricity, their exorbitant emotion or their evocations of gender and sexual heterodoxy.

This form of camp is most audible in the films of Jack Smith or the 1960s work of the Kuchar brothers, whose soundtracks often consist of elaborate collages of dated, corny pop, fragments of film soundtracks, well-known romantic and post-romantic chestnuts—Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* (1888)—popular ethnic tunes (Smith employed Cuban boleros and Spanish pasodobles) and obscure novelty numbers, picked for their absurdity and odd sonorities. Camp is ostentatious about its banality and clichéd quality and it flaunts an exuberant affect and immediate readability. Even when one cannot identify exact sources, one can easily place the atmosphere of the sound—the "Latinness" of much of Smith's music, the trans-oceanic exoticism of some of the Kuchars', or the post-romantic grandiloquence of some of Anger's soundtracks—Respighi's music in *Fireworks* or Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* (1926) for *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954).

Camp also runs on bathos: on the incongruous fit of overdramatic colouring and congested instrumentation to threadbare, poorly produced images or trivial situations. This is the effect of Max Steiner's blasts matched to badly made-up, luxuriantly vulgar performers putting on a lush melodrama in a modest Bronx apartment in many of the Kuchars' early films; or of Pascual Marquina's fiery pasodoble "España cañí" played over a gaggle of slightly dishevelled drag queens pretending to be 1940s movie goddesses in Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963). Camp also unveils tacit queer subtexts in popular music. Jack Smith edited images of drag queens dancing with each other at the end of *Flaming Creatures* to the Everly Brothers' version of Gene Vincent's "Be-Bop-A-Lu-La" (1956, Figure 12.2) and Anger matched images of beefy bikers in *Scorpio Rising* (1963) with Bobby Vinton's "Blue Velvet" (1963). Thus recontextualised, these songs change from purportedly heterosexual to homoerotic, as Vincent's "baby" and Vinton's velvet-clad "she" turn out to be respectively drag queens or prough males. Such repositionings highlight the openness of popular products, whose meanings are often up for grabs rather than closed off at the point of production, and the agency of consumers in transforming their meanings and uses. These modifications are a source of humour and irony. Yet despite these examples, camp is at times less a vehicle of irony than an endorsement of excess, wonder, colour and fantasy—of everything that refuses to comply with the drab everyday and its attendant miseries.

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[18] Brett, Wood and Thomas, "Lesbian and Gay Music", 371.

[19] Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 152.

FIGURE 12.2 Drag queens dancing at the end of Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963).

Mostly associated with pre-Stonewall gay culture and with a time of discretion and encrypted meanings, camp survives well beyond the rise of sexual liberation with a very different range of affect. The soundtrack of Barbara Hammer's witty *Superdyke* (1975) is a medley of well-known classical themes played on a tinkly, at times slightly hesitant, piano that gives the images the primitive quality of early physical comedy and also attenuates the heroic connotations of the musical themes. Johann Strauss's "Radetzky March" (1848), for example, is played to sound slightly childish and homely; composed to celebrate a military hero and often used as marching music, it is matched here to images of lesbian bikers riding against the backdrop of the ocean, losing control of their bikes on the beach, falling and getting up again, full of laughter. More recently, lesbian-identified filmmaker Katrina Del Mar uses punk and hardcore by women's bands—for many of which she has produced music videos—with a degree of irony toward the slightly clichéd quality of the music, whose rough edges and guitar distortion and fuzz suit the lurid wording of her tough-girl narratives and her grainy, slightly damaged images, often filmed in Super-8 and 16 mm. At the same time, Del Mar is also openly celebratory of the power of punk and of the women's sonic takeover of a style—hardcore—usually associated with men. At the opposite end of the musical and mood spectrum, contemporary Spanish filmmaker David Domingo hilariously brings together faux naïveté, nostalgia and sensuality in titles such as *La mansión acelerada* (*The Speedy Mansion*; 1997, Figure 12.3) and *Desayunos y meriendas* (*Breakfast and Snacks*; 2002). His soundtracks, made up of highly melodic cues from 1960s and 1970s advertisements, television programmes, cartoon music and film soundtracks, have a benign banality and evoke simple pleasures of

FIGURE 12.3 Film strip from David Domingo's *mansión acelerada* (*The Speedy Mansion*, 1997). With kind permission from David Domingo.

childhood and adolescence; they are matched to images of friends hanging out at home, dancing, watching porn or fantasising about sex—images captured by means of frame-by-frame shooting and wittily edited to the tempo of the music.

More abrasive is the work of Jennifer Reeves, who makes selective use of camp modes. *The Girl's Nervy* (1995), largely an abstract animation that concludes with a sequence of a typewriter keyboard and flower field filmed a few frames at a time, employs Raymond Scott's "Minuet in Jazz" (1941) and Tommy Dorsey's instrumental version of "I'm Getting Sentimental over You" (1935). The vintage flavour and amiable sonority of these tunes contrasts with the abstract splotches of dancing colour, cracked paint and degraded emulsion; at the same time, the tempo of the tunes is skilfully matched to the pulsing and shifting of the images, and Scott's idiosyncratic timbres and ironic rendering of some of the minuet's melodic gestures have a counterpart in the film's quirky humour. In turn, Reeves's experimental narrative *Monster in the Closet* (1993) uses ragtime piano in a sequence depicting the misadventures of a girl robber gang, a choice that endows the hilarious voiced-over story and the jittery image (assembled from extremely short takes) with the archaic quality of silent slapstick comedy; only, the protagonists of the action now are women, unlike in the world of silent film. The film closes with two young

women celebrating their relationship and dancing in the snow to Guy Lombardo's version of "For Me and My Gal" (1946), a satisfying culmination to the harrowing sentimental education depicted by the film. As is the case throughout Reeves's work, both titles are streaked with noise: with the pop and cackle of old vinyl records, altered voices, synthesised sound or instrumental tones that have been delayed, looped and distorted. Noise generates moments of rupture and disorientation, and communicates aurally the violence and trauma that her films frequently explore.

Noisiness

Noise is a pervasive sonic material in queer experimental film. In a way, there is nothing surprising about the convergence of sexual unconventionality and noise—a relative term of shifting contours used, as Paul Hegarty has pointed out, to designate disruption and disturbance.[20] Noise is indeed intractable acoustic substance hardly amenable to musical tonality, transcription or scoring. It does not comply with the double articulation of language or with the binary modelling that is the basis of modern phonetics. This is certainly the way noise has been conceived in music—whose radical outside it is—and in information theory, where it is what garbles the signal and impedes reception. Jacques Attali gives the disruptiveness of noise a political dimension, regarding it as a form of public dissent, a tear in the social fabric; it stands, for him, on the side of corporeal and communal anarchy, liberation and carnival, which is one reason why, in his eyes, the rise of disciplinary societies coincides with the development of anti-noise legislation.[21] In psychoanalysis, noise has been connected to a sort of primal aural scene: to the bewildering sounds of the parents making love. For Melanie Klein, curiosity about this disturbance, and the desire to dispel its enigmatic character, is at the heart of a taste for music.[22]

In tune with this psychoanalytic register, Henry Cowell, a pioneer in the use of "unclean" sounds in music, similarly proposed an equation between noise and sex. Against attempts to detach music from noise, he adduced that pure tones exist only in laboratory conditions; all musical instruments have resident noise, a swarm of irregular vibrations couched within apparently clean sound. Cowell encouraged musicians to make the most of such sonic parasites and of the sound resulting from knocking, scratching or rubbing the bodies of the instruments. Noise in music, he concluded, is like sex in society: fundamental and pervasive, but repressed and deemed indecorous.[23] Taking up Cowell's cue, Cage linked

[20] Paul Hegarty, *Noise/Music: A History* (London: Continuum, 2008), ix; see also the chapters "Japan" (131–52) and "Merzbow" (153–66).

[21] Jacques Attali, *Noise: An Essay on the Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

[22] Melanie Klein, "Early Analysis", in *The Writings of Melanie Klein*, vol. 1, *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works, 1921–1945* (New York: Free Press, 1975), 102.

[23] Henry Cowell, "The Joys of Noise", *New Republic*, 31 July 1929, 282–88, commented in Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 81–83.

harmonic norm to social normality: "When I really began making music, I mean composing 'seriously', it was to involve myself in noise, because noises escape power, that is, the laws of counterpoint and harmony."[24] Even though he explained this involvement in terms of Zen philosophy—an acceptance of life as is, without intervention or manipulation—one could wonder to what extent his own corporeal and social unruliness as a gay man might have had something to do with his interest in such unmanageable material.[25]

Cage influenced Andy Warhol's all-inclusive approach to image and sound recording, as Peter Wollen, Branden Joseph and Graig Uhlin have substantiated.[26] Both his films and tapes capture largely unedited slices of life and refuse to excise chance elements or to establish clear hierarchies between central and peripheral elements, the meaningful and the meaningless or, in the language of cybernetics, between signal and noise. Actual noise, a constant background buzz brought about by the poor quality of the recordings, pervades the Factory films. Most of Warhol's soundtracks were made up of live sound captured through a single microphone—at first, that of a reel-to-reel recorder and, after December 1964, the built-in mike of the Auricon camera. Because of their haphazard registration, the films contain abundant incidental sound—footsteps, doors slamming, phones ringing, sirens and car horns—that bears no relation to the scene being filmed. At times, ambient noise drowns the voices of the performers, questioning what Michel Chion called the vococentrism of conventional cinema—the subordination of all music and sound to the centrality of the human voice.[27] Just to cite two examples: in *Kitchen* (1965), the sound of a blender covers up some segments of dialogue, and in *Outer and Inner Space* (1965), four Edie Sedgwick's monologues—she chatters away next to a television monitor playing a videotape of herself speaking—are heard simultaneously on two adjacent screens in such a way that it is impossible to make out most of what she says.

But even when not covered over by sound, the voice is still frequently divorced from meaning and treated as another form of noise, as Warhol scenarist Ronald Tavel observed.[28] *The Life of Juanita Castro* (1965), for example, contains a (largely nonsensical) improvised speech in Spanish that was not translated or subtitled and that

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[24] John Cage and Daniel Charles, *For the Birds* (Boston: Marion Boyars, 1981), 187.

[25] Jonathan D. Katz and Caroline Jones have produced excellent readings of Cage's silence in a queer key but have made little of his use of noise along analogous lines: Katz, "Cage's Queer Silence, or How to Make Matters Worse", *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 5, no. 2 (1999): 231–52; Caroline A. Jones, "Finishing School: John Cage and the Abstract Expressionist Ego", *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 3 (1993): 628–65.

[26] Peter Wollen, "Raiding the Icebox", in *Andy Warhol: Film Factory*, ed. Michael O'Pray (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 14–27; Branden W. Joseph, "The Play of Repetition: Andy Warhol's *Sleep*", *Grey Room* 19 (2005): 22–53; Uhlin, "Sound and Speech in Andy Warhol's Films".

[27] Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 9–13.

[28] Speaking of Warhol's entrance into sound film with *Harlot* (1964), Ronald Tavel writes: "However, in keeping with how he attacked, literally, the prevailing visual languages of the medium, it was human sound itself that he wanted at the moment, rather than any particular words"; *Harlot*, accessed 17 December 2016, http://www.ronaldtavel.com/documents/harlot.pdf. As I suggest here, Warhol remained interested in the voice as sound beyond this moment.

probably means nothing to those who do not understand the language, yet it indubitably added to the pretended Latin ambience, not to mention the jocular absurdity, of the film. In most films, conversations frequently overlap and speeches sound dim and indistinct due to deliberately eccentric microphone placement, or they range from inaudible to screechy. In *The Chelsea Girls* (1966), meaning occasionally dissolves into squeals and shrieks, as when eternal Factory underdog Ingrid Superstar, hectored in two different episodes by Ondine and Brigid Berlin, ends up screaming back at them in (fake?) frustration. And *Space* (1965), carefully planned by Tavel as a sort of voice relay with the camera tracking speakers across a room, ended up coming out as a melee of cross talk; the camera often wanders away from the speakers, divorcing sound from image; dialogue is fragmented and voice overlap often yields an opaque mumble.

This constant undertow of noise transposes and amplifies the characters' queerness. For Gustavus Stadler, Warhol's disregard for sound fidelity attempts to suggest alternative styles of intimacy and relationality: while the enjoyment of faithful reproduction is predicated on privacy and absorption—a retreat into bourgeois interiority and individuality—Warhol's flat, murky recordings may be enjoyed collectively and in promiscuous commingling with other sounds of the world.[29] Stadler further relates Warhol's "wet" or "leaky" soundtracks—indistinct, reverberant—to the artist's carnivalesque interest in the sounds produced by "excretory orifices", and regards such corporeal noise as a harbinger of bodies and desires that overstep conventional boundaries of containment and propriety.[30] Warhol's noise, however, can also be seen as an index of the ultimate unreadability of sex and affect. In his films, attraction and seduction are often streaked with rivalry and hostility, and desire circulates freely between men and men, women and women, drag queens and straight machos, drag queens and queenly types, queens and queens—think of the varied erotic scenarios in *Bike Boy* (1967), whose titular character is taunted, cruised, seduced, rejected and belittled by a great variety of potential partners, from queenly shop attendants to loquacious femmes to butch lesbians. To paraphrase Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in the 1960s Factory films everyone enjoys his or her own sexes in multiple permutations and in a sonic ambience full of buzz, interference and static.[31]

Later filmmakers further reinforced the association between noise and queerness. Hans Scheirl and Ursula Pürrer's 1980s and early 1990s titles (shot in Super-8, 16 mm and video) portray the filmmakers' home environments, private games and intimacy—dressing up, masquerading or exploring the tectonics of their bodies and skin. Their work seldom trades in clearly outlined genders or corporeal wholes, offering instead close-ups of lips, faces, hands, feet and bodily effluvia intertwined with enigmatic objects, surfaces

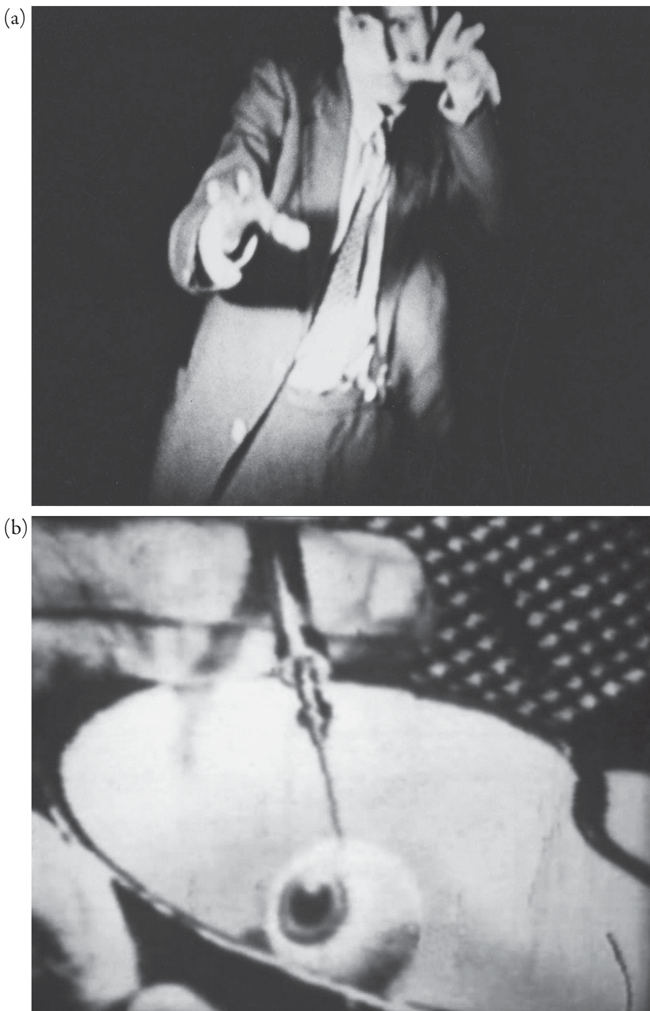
[29] Staedtler, "My Wife", 427.

[30] Ibid., 439, 443, 445.

[31] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 278ff.

and textures. These para- or post-human ensembles are accompanied by peculiar sonorities: intermittent rumbles and heterogeneous acoustic environments that combine the found and the composed, the accidental and the planned, the musical and (most frequently) the non-musical. Aural garbage abounds: accidental scratches, pop and fizz, distorted hum, glitches, radio static. The strangeness, artificiality, heterogeneity, intermittence and sensuousness of these aural atmospheres amplify the queerness of the images.

An example is *Halbe Frösche Ficken Flink* (*Half-Frogs Fuck Fast*; 1994). Part home movie, part visionary porn, it offers a rhythmic dance of the rough and the smooth: shots of women boxing, having sex, masturbating and posing for a photo session in the sun are interspersed with footage of horror films that shows bodies exploding and being torn apart in various ways (Figure 12.4). The soundtrack is made up of snatches of dance



FIGURES 12.4 Two stills from Hans Scheirl, *Halbe Frösche Ficken Flink* (*Half-Frogs Fuck Fast*, 1994). With kind permission from Hans Scheirl.

tracks lifted from the radio and synchronised to the movement of the bodies on the screen; it is a modular rhythmic continuum without clear development or resolution, full of scratches, off-the-beat stops, snags and deliberate mismatches. This aural damage is echoed in the bodily injuries that appear in the fragments from horror films and in the film itself, full of jump-cuts, abrupt transitions, scratches, television noise and the thick-grained texture of Super-8 black and white and video. The bodies in the film and the film itself are dynamic and vibrant—like the danceable soundtrack—yet also perched on the edge of dissolution; at once readable and unreadable. Like in Warhol, noise in Scheirl and Pürrer's work is the auditory correlative for the opacity and unpredictability of the bodies and sexualities visualised on the screen.

Dissonance

In Warhol, Scheirl and Pürrer and Reeves, noise is at times unmotivated and disjunctive with regard to the image. Its volatility and wantonness are forms of dissonance, as the difference in affective tonality between sound and visuals remains unresolved. Dissonance, in a way, is the most general sonic strategy in queer film. It is at play in camp in the mismatches that subvert the received meaning of a musical piece—Vinton's "Blue Velvet" with gay beefcake or *Scheherazade* with delightfully scruffy drag queens. The notion of dissonance—if not the word—animates most discussions of queer film sound. A mild form of it is at work, according to Richard Dyer, in Nino Rota's music, which keeps an ironic distance from the image track and plays alongside rather than with it, following its own musical logic rather than the logic of the narrative.[32] However, this subtle detachment is broken, Dyer continues, in homoerotic scenes, which are scored with unusual tenderness and sentimentality—as in *Fellini-Satyricon* (1969).[33]

More experimental and disjunctive are Simon Fisher Turner's soundtracks for Derek Jarman's films, which combine conventional musical passages—baroque music, flamenco, folk, jazz or tunes from classic musicals—with off-screen, non-diegetic voices, field recordings, found noise and synthesised electronic tones. Sound and music are frequently "de-coupled" from the image—in Annette Davison's term—by hiding their source or motivation, or by wilful anachronism, as in the non-diegetic sounds of chainsaws, trains or motorcycles and the jazz passages heard in *Caravaggio* (1986). For Steve Dillon, such image-sound dislocations generate the kind of open-ended textuality that characterises Jarman's work and that he regards as a central trait of lyric film.[34] "Liberated" from the image, Davison maintains in her analysis of *The Garden* (1990), the Jarman–Fisher Turner soundtracks become vehicles for queer expressiveness; since it

[32] Dyer, *Nino Rota*, 108–27.

[33] Ibid., 32–36.

[34] Dillon, *Derek Jarman and Lyric Film*, 100–31.

has been through the visual media that the queer community has been most frequently slandered and shamed, the soundtrack "presents the potential of the reparation of this community's voice".[35] For her part, Holly Rogers points out that "the supposedly subversive and distancing effects of disunity and conflict" between sound and image in *Caravaggio* are "the driving force of the film".[36] Audiovisual disunity and conflict have a narrative counterpart in the film's beleaguered love triangle between Caravaggio, his model Ranuccio and the prostitute Lena, all of whom are involved with each other at different points of the film, and whose temporary unions lead to dissension and death.[37]

Jarman is far from the only filmmaker who uses sound-image disjunction to signify aggression and discord. Many of Luther Price's early films, made in Super-8, dwell on the dark underside of familiar realities—childhood, family relationships, suburban life, sex, the body; all of them are eventually subject to the eruption of trauma and the undertow of deterioration, decay and death. Works such as *Green* (1988) and *Warm Broth* (1988) explore an uncomfortable unconscious realm in home and childhood. They combine old family pictures, tableaus of bland home decorations and homely rituals (household chores like hanging clothes out to dry, birthday celebrations) with skin lesions, dead animals, rotting flesh, emblems of the ephemeral (cigarette smoke, flowers) and hieratic human figures—the filmmaker in drag or wearing masks and costumes—frozen into uncomfortably proper poses and gestures. *Jellyfish Sandwich* (1994) reflects on the undertow of aggression and trivialisation that haunts encounters with otherness. During most of the film, footage of a football game projected upside down alternates rhythmically with street actualities of Hong Kong filmed in the 1960s, and with newsreel black-and-white images of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Chinese signage, coloured screens and (towards the end of the film) frames of two sailors engaged in sex occasionally flash by; sex appears as a redemptive moment in the unsettling mix but, uncertainly glimpsed, is denied stability or endurance.

The trite triviality of the soundtracks stands in counterpoint to Price's iconography of injury and vulnerability. *Green* starts with a brief wash of white noise followed by a version of Nat King Cole's "Let There Be Love" (1961) edited to a static frame of a dead starling; later on, Patsy Cline's "I See an Angel" (1958) accompanies an extreme close-up of Price's lower jaw and neck covered with boils and a loop of dead and preserved butterflies. And *Jellyfish Sandwich* combines an early 1970s medley of Burt Bacharach's tunes sung by The Carpenters with images of war and sportive aggression. Yet as these films advance, the banality of the soundtracks acquires progressively unsettling undertones. The looped mechanical speech of a speaking doll in *Warm Broth* gradually shifts

[35] Davison, "Playing in *The Garden*", 53. Khalip makes a similar argument in his thorough analysis of *Blue*: Khalip, "The Archeology of Sound", 77–78.

[36] Rogers, *Visualising Music*, 119.

[37] At the same time, the musical treatment of the characters is traditionally motivic; the acoustic dominance of their respective motifs punctuates shifts in their power struggles and their alternating narrative leads; Rogers, *Visualising Music*, 128–30.

from charmingly naïve to irritating and eventually becomes darkly obsessive and manic. And the garbled, slightly speeded-up Carpenters' medley in *Jellyfish Sandwich* becomes a sombre *memento mori*, in part because extended exposure and repetition foreground the damaged quality of the sound, and in part because of the tragedy connoted by Karen Carpenter, whose music and biography have been featured in some of Price's performances.

William E. Jones's *V. O.* (2006) and *Film Montages (for Peter Roehr)* (2006) may be more extreme examples of disjunction. *V. O.*—the French acronym for *version original*, a term applied to undubbed films—puts together the soundtrack of a series of art films and the visuals of porn films from the golden age of celluloid pornography, before the advent of video. Jones pays homage to "a lost era of gay cinephilia": the matching of porn to art movie soundtracks recalls that art cinema—especially the European films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Luchino Visconti or Werner Schroeter—was often a vehicle for sexual unconventionality and enjoyed a considerable queer following.[38] European art film may in fact have been the older, cultured cousin of porn, and offered a sublimated, closeted representation of gay sexuality that found in pornography a more direct, if less sophisticated, outlet. In line with the sublimated, elliptical aesthetic of art cinema, the fragments of porn in *V. O.* show transitional moments that either precede or follow sex. The incongruous coupling of sound bites from *La Chienne* (1931), *Los olvidados* (1950) or *The Death of Maria Malibran* (1972) with pornographic scenarios hovers between wistful lyricism and nostalgia for missing sexuality. Sexuality is in fact doubly missing here: it is withheld by Jones's editing, which eliminates explicit moments, and is connected to a way of life virtually wiped out by AIDS.

In *Film Montages (for Peter Roehr)*, sound is similarly divorced from the image and acquires a life of its own. Like *V. O.*, the film recycles golden-era porn by means of brief loops that imitate those that 1960s German pop artist Peter Roehr fashioned out of advertisement films. Jones's homage to Roehr is in part an excavation of queer history. Roehr's gayness is sublimated in his own work and has been fairly erased in the critical reception of the artist. Jones's film 'outs' Roehr by replacing the German artist's innocuous advertisement iconography with gay porn. The excerpts that Jones selects are, like those in *V. O.*, in-between moments without explicit sexuality. Their insistent repetition attenuates any suggestions of narrative development or sense; thus looped, the image track turns into a dance of gestures, body parts and objects, while the recurring dialogues and music acquire a percussive quality.

Both *V. O.* and *Film Montages* are meditations on loss and recovery: of a prematurely deceased artist, of a form of cinephilia predicated on collective film viewing and of an entire sexual culture. Their recovery is a form of mourning, an attempt to replicate and internalise what has been lost, yet can be restored only as intermittent, fragmentary

[38] William E. Jones, "Notes on 'V.O'", accessed 20 December 2016, http://www.williamejones.com/collections/view/14/.

memories lodged in the material traces of film. Jones's manner of revisiting the past—which he practises throughout his oeuvre—is also a reflection on history's numerous byways and hidden passages, on the faint echoes and resonances that often become perceptible only long after the fact, with the hindsight of temporal distance.

The role of sound in articulating these ideas forces us to confront its queer animacy—a form of agency that arises out of material, rather than human subjects.[39] And this animacy is manifest in sound's ability to destabilise the reproduction and transmission of straightforward, readable, univocal genders and sexualities. Against Christian Metz's idea that sound plays in film an adjectival function as a supplement or qualifier to the substantive role of the image, sound in experimental film acquires a nominative quality; it is often agent, taking on a signifying lead comparable—to stay with Metz's terminology—to the subject of a sentence.[40]

Yet queer 'subjectness' is less stably substantive than—as has been pointed out before—variably performative. It relies less on intrinsic acoustic traits than on placement, context and use; on the way sound is articulated with other components of the image and—this might be a topic for a different kind of inquiry—with the screening situation itself. Three modes in which this articulation takes place in queer experimental film are: stylisation and excess (camp), disturbance and interference (noise) and disjunction and mismatch (dissonance). These modes oscillate between high and low legibility: between the theatricality and recognisability of camp gestures and the opacity of noisy and internally ruptured films. In camp, queerness arises from the parodic replay of familiar idioms and may be regarded a deviant reworking of available signs and cultural styles; in noisy, disjunctive soundtracks, queerness arises out of the blind spots and mutability of bodies and desires. While camp enacts a subtle invasion of the acoustic sign, the less legible modes communicate elusiveness and withdrawal and might be interpreted as attempts to block surveillance and control. Yet common to all these modes is an epistemic uncertainty as to the location and the very matter of what counts as queer, an uncertainty that forces us to explore queerness as an open question or a potential frame of reference; as a possibility that, as this chapter has tried to show, is communicated by sound just as much as by the image.

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[39] I am adopting the term from Mel Y. Chan, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

[40] Christian Metz, "Aural Objects", in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weiss and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press), 154–61.

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13 Avant-Gardists and the Lure of Pop Music

Carol Vernallis

AVANT-GARDE AND EXPERIMENTAL film- and videomakers do not often incorporate pop music. When they do, scholars tend not to write about the results. Readers may be surprised by my first claim. In the post-rock 'n' roll era, both experimental and popular artists are thought to flaunt conventions and to identify as countercultural; one might expect that they would collaborate. This chapter considers the institutional, formal and cultural reasons why such collaborations tend not to happen. It posits that the reasons for not collaborating also colour the audiovisual relations in the works that actually show a connection between experimental film/video and pop music. Pressing further, this chapter seeks a way of thinking about this subgenre. It presents close readings of some celebrated works and a model for thinking about them.

Philip Brophy, Annette Davison, David James, Holly Rogers, Juan Suárez and others have begun thinking about this connection; they have written on some of the works I will discuss.[1] My specific claim is that avant-garde films and videos with pop

[1] Philip Brophy, ed., *Cinesonic: Cinema and the Sound of Music* (North Ryde, NSW: Australian Film Television and Radio School, 2000); Annette Davison, *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice: Cinema Soundtracks in the 1980s and 1990s* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004); David E. James, *Rock 'N' Film: Cinema's Dance with Popular Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Holly Rogers, *Sounding the Gallery: Video and the Rise of Art-Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Juan A. Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

soundtracks emphasise particular kinds of audiovisual relation; sound-image connections within narrative films, television trailers, commercials, YouTube clips and music videos often reveal a family resemblance, but those of the avant-garde/pop strain tend to exist at a far remove from them. Considering this subgenre helps us not only chart the possibilities for sound and image, it expands our knowledge of audiovisual relations more broadly.[2]

What is an experimental artist? What counts as pop music? For purposes of this chapter, an avant-gardist's primary focus resides with experimental media and exhibitions in galleries, independent film-screenings, the art-house circuit and museum shows. By pop, I mean pieces intended for mainstream consumption in the British and American markets.

Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1963) and Andy Warhol's *Vinyl* (1965) may be the best-known examples I discuss. They stand in contrast to work by experimental filmmakers like Hollis Frampton, Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage, who made a point of distancing themselves from popular music. As queer artists, Warhol and Anger may have been more willing to break boundaries through engaging with pop and representing non-heteronormative sexuality—an issue I explore later.[3] Following Anger and Warhol, however, things get murky. There is no canon of experimental films or videos that foregrounds Anglo-American pop music. One thinks of figures like Derek Jarman, Pipilotti Rist, Laurie Anderson and Bruce Conner, but their work, their core audiences and the larger archive of experimental film and video demonstrate little engagement with pop songs.

Crossing between experimental video and pop music can create hazards for videomakers. Simon Frith has emphasised the ways that pop songs are infused with sentiment; they seek to immerse a listener in an emotional experience.[4] But as P. Adams Sitney and Akira Lippit have argued, avant-gardists aim to reveal a system (formal or institutional) and critique it. According to this view, a director should not risk becoming subsumed by a commercial genre or medium, nor facilitate a viewer's seduction by a soundtrack's siren call.[5]

Access and resources are also factors. Directors might want to work with up-and-coming pop musicians, but nurturing such alliances might prove difficult, as would timing a project's release in tandem with a song breaking onto the charts. And by the

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[2] Stated most simply and broadly, experimentalists can be said to attempt new practices while avant-gardists also push the status quo. I use these terms loosely. See Scott MacDonald, *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 15–16.

[3] See Suárez, chapter 12, in this volume. Also, Stan Hawkins, *Queerness in Pop Music: Aesthetics, Gender Norms, and Temporality* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 243.

[4] Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), 112.

[5] P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943–2000*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), xii, xiii; Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Ex-Cinema: From a Theory of Experimental Film and Video* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 2–6.

time a song has sold copies, it has accrued many associations, making its meanings more difficult to shape. Avant-gardists tend to possess meagre resources. Purchasing usage rights can be expensive. As Joanna Demers has written in connection with sampling, creative decisions have increasingly become economic ones.[6] Musicians and companies who grant reproduction rights might feel more suspicious of avant-gardists than of commercial artists.

Pop songs also tend to have strongly articulated forms that may be resistant to an avant-gardist's intentions. The song possesses a grid. It has a pattern, a sense of time and a voice; few artists want to be "slaves to the rhythm".[7] An avant-gardist is expected to show that she can impose a distinctive persona upon whatever material she uses. Interviews with music-video directors reveal a surprising respect for the pop songs they set. More than one director has said "The song has all the answers".[8] This kind of receptiveness to commercial culture is rarely an avant-garde trait.

Success at combining pop music and strong visuals might require training in both music and the visual arts, which is rare. There is exciting work by musicians like David Bowie and Flying Lotus, who have had some traditional art training (often in university) and find innovative visual artists to collaborate with, such as Floria Sigismondi and Mark Romanek, but their videos are not normally tagged as 'experimental'.

My topic needs a well-chronicled history that has not yet been written. Sitney, a key theorist of avant-garde film, places the director and folklorist Harry Smith at the beginning of the story I am seeking to tell here.[9] In the 1940s, Smith put jazz to his films and screened them in San Francisco's clubs.[10] Sitney reports that Smith remembered proclaiming in the 1930s that all sound-image relations work beautifully; the brain enjoys forging meanings between media.[11] According to Sitney, the early experimental

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[6] Joanna Demers, *Steal This Music: How Intellectual Property Law Affects Musical Creativity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 89–91.

[7] I am quoting Michael Jackson's "Slave to the Rhythm" (1991). The lyrics suggest how following music can be tied to abjection: "She dances in his sheets at night / She dances to his needs / . . . She's a slave to the rhythm".

[8] Interview with Marcus Nispel, spring 1997. Floria Sigismondi has also described the way images seem to come without deliberation. "Most of them come at night, but many come just when I'm walking around. . . . It's like putting together a puzzle—things come in little pieces and the video seems to make itself—you almost become a spectator in the whole thing. It's strange, especially when you're being fed stuff visually in mid-sleep and in that period just before you go to sleep. I end up doing a lot of my thinking in the dark—if I turn on the light and start writing while this stream of consciousness, or whatever it is, stream of creativity, comes through, then it's all gone. So I need to write in the dark"; quoted in Carol Vernallis and Hannah Ueno, "Interview with Music Video Director and Auteur Floria Sigismondi", in *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 7, no. 2 (2013): 175.

[9] The material for this paragraph comes from a phone conversation with Sitney on 6 December 2016. He reported not liking pop music, yet he cares deeply about the avant-garde, See P. Adams Sitney, "Film #12: Heaven and Earth Magic", in *Harry Smith: The Avant-Garde in the American Vernacular*, ed. Andrew Perchuk and Rani Singh (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 73–84.

[10] Rani Singh, "Harry Smith, an Ethnographic Modernist in America", in Perchuck and Singh, *Harry Smith*, 34–36.

[11] This was recounted to Sitney in the 1950s, when he supplied Smith with white port for breakfast.

filmmakers' commitment to purity and disdain for pop lyrics' banality may have limited crossings over (until 1947, for instance, Maya Deren screened her films silent).[12] Sitney notes that many central works have important stories tied to them; their contexts, influences and trajectories shape our media today. Another chapter might discuss Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963), Bruce Baillie's *All My Life* (1966), Stan Brakhage's *Christ Mass Sex Dance* (1991), Bruce Conner's *Cosmic Light Ray* (1961) and Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967). Martin Scorsese, after having seen Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (discussed below), chose to foreground a pop song in *Mean Streets* (1973); while Alfred Hitchcock had already done this in *Rear Window* (1954), *Mean Streets* inspired a new generation of auteurist directors to include pop songs in films.[13]

The institutional, formal and cultural barriers I have sketched limit the degree of engagement between avant-gardists and pop music. These fraught relations can be seen and heard in the work itself. Audiovisual relations can seem troubled, even estranged. Their makers express similar ambivalence. This experimental film and video subgenre reveals odd patterns: many of the field's biggest directors chart their success through their distance from pop music; some who clearly love pop music still treat it cavalierly; and others dally with pop songs once or twice before quickly returning to their home practices. But the work they produce often possesses interesting moments.

To conceptualise a corpus of pop music within experimental media, I will describe five characteristic approaches: (1) The use of a whole or nearly whole pop song, incorporated late in the process; these examples are most often resolute, with little direct sync. (2) A musical number within a larger work; these pieces showcase audiovisual relations that are more often distributed and relaxed. (3) Examples that use fragments of pop music as one among several sorts of source material, sometimes in a collage, or in a reduced arrangement; the image is most often fragmented or eroded. (4) Music videos directed by avant-gardists; these are often one-offs—an experimental film- or videomaker making a single foray into the genre. Tending not to compete with the genre's best, these clips often possess a striking tone and memorable moments (successfully or unsuccessfully).[14] (5) Pieces that offer meta-discourses about pop songs and the institutions in which they exist; these often sardonic works extend beyond film and video to a variety of platforms and venues.

When these approaches work well, it may be because they reflect the ways material can be worked—whole, part of a whole, composite, meta- and neighbouring genre. When these approaches fail, it may be because they are insufficiently historicised, prone to engendering overlap, or too blunt. This chapter's close readings seek to show the ways

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[12] After visiting Haiti and becoming engaged with indigenous drumming, Deren started adding a soundtrack. *Meshes in the Afternoon*'s soundtrack was added twelve years after its release.

[13] Such as Corey Arcangel, Chantel Akerman and William Wegman. The list seems extensive but it is a very small proportion of avant-garde practice.

[14] I might have adopted an economic model, or one based on the director's relation with pop music. Directors' relations to pop music might be characterised as respectful, collaborative, disdainful, ambivalent or slavish.

these works cluster ideologically and reflect particular subjectivities. These analyses also aim to capture something about how these pieces feel audiovisually, work within socio-economic and historical contexts and present audiovisual relations different from those of mainstream media.

1. Whole Pop Songs, Added at a Late Stage of the Film's Production

Category 1 became most prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s, when experimentalism's relevance still needed to be asserted. Film and video technologies were more primitive than now—achieving fine sync was harder—and the makers' skills with audiovisual technologies were typically less than stellar. Several clips I discuss—excerpts from *Scorpio Rising, Rose Hobart* and *Vinyl*—present un-empathetic and resolute audiovisual relations; more than a multitude of relations come forward. Since these relations are the most difficult to describe from my examples, this will be the chapter's longest section.[15]

Kenneth Anger's Scorpio Rising

Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* features an army of gay Nazi bikers who experience pain and pleasure, while sexual and sadistic symbols are intercut; or so says Rotten Tomatoes.[16] Though this synopsis captures the film's tone, it neglects basic facts. Anger claims his film's documentary subjects comprised a small group of straight, male motorcycle-club members who worked in the Brooklyn shipyards. Proud of their cycles and somewhat vain, they enjoyed being filmed. After returning from an eight-year hiatus in Europe, Anger was drawn to America's new pop music. Eschewing dialogue, he built his soundtrack from thirteen contemporary songs strung together consecutively.[17] The film is famous partly because it was seized by Los Angeles police during a screening; the case, tried before the California Supreme Court, became a landmark in the fight against censorship. *Scorpio Rising* remains slippery and enigmatic; I am not sure of its greatness, but I will attest to its opacity.

The section I am considering is remarkably bare. A man works with tools and then polishes his motorcycle between glances in the mirror. Another man dons a leather jacket. A third lies on a bed, wearing leather chaps. These three sequences, connected by the Angels' "My Boyfriend's Back" (1963), are a bit inscrutable (Figure 13.1).

Philip Brophy claims *Scorpio Rising*'s "music is unnaturally laid onto film . . . its soundtrack is ontologically Other."[18] Traditional methods for audiovisual analysis get

[15] To give a sense of each category, I will be able to discuss only segments within a work, rather than the work as a whole.

[16] "Scorpio Rising" (1970), accessed 1 July 2016, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/scorpio-rising/.

[17] Kenneth Anger, "DVD commentary", *The Complete Magick Lantern Cycle* (San Diego: Fantoma, 2010).

[18] Philip Brophy, "Parties in Your Head: From the Acoustic to the Psycho-Acoustic", in *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, ed. John Richardson, Claudia Gorbman and Carol Vernallis (Oxford: Oxford

FIGURE 13.1 The enigmatic audiovisual relations in Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1963): three settings suggest (a) resoluteness (b) yearning (c) approachability.

us no closer to the film.[19] *Scorpio Rising* has been described by Jeremy Carr as "pre-music video", but there are few real affinities.[20] I have claimed elsewhere that music-video image aims to draw our attention to aspects of a song.[21] Analysing a clip, I tend to consider visual, lyrical and sonic parameters in isolation—colour, harmony, props, a hook, a timbre—and then see how each connects with another feature within a corresponding medium (music to lyrics, lyrics to image, image to arrangement and so on). Connections happen on many levels. In the process of discovering these connections, the viewer can carry herself through the video as if dancing along with the song—soaring above it, anticipating a peak, collaborating in a slowdown. But this approach is not helpful for *Scorpio Rising*. As with several other avant-gardists' works in this category, audiovisual relations seem too tenuous. They seem to function on a different register—though one feels there must be *some* important connections.

Scorpio Rising encourages an analytical approach I shall employ based on schemes and substitutions. A form of "what if?", this approach functions as an audiovisual equivalent to the ways that academics respond to colleagues' talks or publications. Counter-examples work in service of reducing or expanding claims, tightening or extending boundaries. Philip Tagg has long incorporated some aspects of this approach.[22] Drawing on YouTube and Adobe After Effects, anyone can quickly explore how a work's *mise-en-scène*, camera, editing, lyrics and arrangement contribute to the shaping of time and an intermedial conversation; I hope this approach becomes more common.

University Press, 2013), 310. David James claims that "interactions among these [*Scorpio Rising*'s] conflictual elements retard the major narrative, anchoring it in an ongoing present of contradictory implications"; James, *Rock 'N' Film,* 21.

[19] Methods for analysis include Michel Chion's concept of synchresis (the irrevocable "weld" that happens when image and sound are placed in relation) and Nicholas Cook's models of conformance, complement, contest and gap making; Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 5; Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 98–100.

[20] Jeremy Carr, "Scorpio Rising", *Senses of Cinema*: Cinémathèque Annotations on Film 74, March 2015, accessed 1 June 2016, http://sensesofcinema.com/2015/cteq/scorpio-rising/.

[21] Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Content* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 7–49.

[22] See, for instance, Philip Tagg and Bob Clarida, *Ten Little Tunes: Towards a Musicology of the Mass Media* (Montreal: Mass Media Music Scholars' Press, 2003).

With *Scorpio Rising* (and later with *Rose Hobart* and *Vinyl*), I opened two YouTube windows, keeping the original image in one and streaming a variety of soundtracks in the other. I then reversed the process (maintaining the soundtrack as a constant and running different imagery in the second window). I also stripped down and built up footage and audio in After Effects and ran comparisons again. I chose a range of materials, sorted by what I judged as proximate and increasingly distant from the original source. With each trial, one question remained constant: what does the combination of this soundtrack and this image bring to the fore or suppress?[23]

Here are the results of a few trials with the *Scorpio Rising* clip. I first stripped the image down to a mnemonic (a reduction of its most general features) and ran complementary materials against it.[24] Imagine the man and his motorcycle as a statue of a man, this time holding a sword lovingly in his outstretched arm (as in Jacques-Louis David's *Oath of the Horatii*, 1784), or, even more reduced—both man and machine as one obelisk (like the Washington Monument). Then I reduced the camera movement. Mostly, the authoritative camera slowly tilts up. This gesture could be said to resemble a knife on a whittling stick, or the petting of a cat's fur in the wrong direction. What musical accompaniment might work best, reasonably well and worst with these two schematised visual parameters?[25] Let us begin with the worst. Joni Mitchell's "California" (1971), with its widely leaping, flowing melody and jaunty, light rhythmic approach, was among the least successful possibilities. The Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil" (1968) seemed like a strong choice, but the test revealed its music as too raucous and uncontrolled. Led Zeppelin's "When the Levee Breaks" (1971) also seemed like a viable choice, but it was not right. After trying many more songs, I judged the image track as less empowered *and* less pliant than I had originally imagined.[26]

What is it about the 1960s girl groups that works so nicely? To my surprise, similar songs of the same moment, like the Marvelettes' "Please, Mister Postman" (1961) and

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[23] Tagg runs a version of these experiments in *Ten Little Title Tunes*. Here, he substitutes one genre of music for another, or alters a single parameter, like rhythm. My approach is more aggressive.

[24] The choices here are intuitive. The film as a whole moves between periods of sync and non-sync (so the film's texture is not consistent). For me this clip is the most evocative.

[25] In *Experiencing Music Video*, I write on music video's relations, and in *Unruly Media* I also write about those for post-classical cinema and YouTube. I felt I had a good grasp of what audiovisual relations in moving media might be, but this chapter has greatly expanded the ways I think about sound and image across media; Vernallis, *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[26] Otherwise, music by Led Zeppelin and Joni Mitchell, through a shared mood, would probably 'catch' more. I have written elsewhere about forged audiovisual connections where one medium acts as an amped-up version of the other, and both maintain a connection along a sliding scale of similarity (in *Experiencing Music Video*, I discuss Madonna's "Open Your Heart" [1986] video as taking musical elements and dramatically overinflating them). Cook points to such relations when he notes that sound and image together produce emergent properties; new meanings arise from their juxtaposition. Some of the most evocative audiovisual relations come forward when the two media share a commonality such that their connection facilitates a metaphor; Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, 57–97.

the Shirelles' "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?" (1961), among others, do not work either. Thinking about the music against Anger's depictions, the not so thinly veiled aggression in the Angels' "My Boyfriend's Back" may be its most compelling feature. The song pushes into the space of *Scorpio Rising*, but not deeply. It bounces back against the viewer. The braggadocio seems directed at *us*. This is partly because of the musical arrangement. The song has been recorded in mono in the style of producer Phil Spector's "wall of sound". Instruments and voices are often recorded two or three to a part and much reverb is added.[27] Along with the song's many sharp entrances (accented attacks in the voice, guitar and drums), call-and-response and coarse, shouted lyrics, this sound creates the sense of contained force. The sense of containment derives also from the setting (a narrow, deep, nondescript garage the song does not seem to fully penetrate). The camera, too, comes near, but steadfastly holds its own, straying neither too far nor too close. The camera and image, *with* the music, remain disjunct, contributing to the video's ultra-charged affect.

How might we strip down "My Boyfriend's Back?". Perhaps we should drop most of what makes the song *music*, instead subbing in a girl nastily saying, "My boyfriend's back and you better back off," with a nasal, brash voice. Now what is transpiring seems clearer. All the clip's elements exist in suspension. The man, motorcycle and camera remain unengaged: man and motorcycle seem so desirous of one another but must keep their distance. The camera sidles up against them (blindly and harshly), but never gets close enough. The song seems to observe, but refuses to acknowledge what it perceives, instead demanding the viewer remain at an even further remove from the scene. With other songs subbed in for the *Scorpio Rising* soundtrack, though audiovisual relations are attractive, the film flows more quickly and easily into the next sequence. "My Boyfriend's Back" creates a special charge because the music, image and camera claim the monumental. They stand unwaveringly in the immediate present. Other music adds a sense of forward motion.

The trials with the Marvelettes sequence encourage me to more freely assert claims about audiovisual relations. The next sequence in *Scorpio Rising* incorporates Bobby Vinton's "Blue Velvet" (1963). A man dresses. The song makes his thighs, hips and jeans seem more rounded and fleshy than if the image were accompanied by another song. Visually and audibly, events unfolding during "Blue Velvet" feel languorous. Vinton sings the undulating melody with glissandi; when he stops, the background singers seamlessly pick it up. The performers' open vowels, "blu-u-e vellll-vehht," "oh, oh, oh," "blu-u-u-ehr thahn," create a sense of spreading. For the receptive viewer, audiovisual relations can sometimes create odd synesthetic illusions. Here, the song seems to spread itself like oil over the male subject. It may be a mild shock to see him, in a subsequent shot, thin-torsoed and blonde, tugging on his shirt. The lyrics' fetishism (perhaps never making it

[27] Albin Zak, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 78.

past the fabric, "she wore blue velvet") and undetermined object of desire make the scene more freighted, as does the hovering sexuality in "My Boyfriend's Back".[28] The image takes up a few of the song's details. The walking bassline seems to direct the camera's slow pan up the legs, for instance.

Music videos typically present a multitude of connections. This sequence of *Scorpio Rising* brings forward only a few strong sync points. The "My Boyfriend's Back" sequence also only has one or two moments of tight sync. That sequence momentarily becomes euphoric when the camera pans past the cycle's crowning skeleton puppet and the puppet suddenly seems to joyfully second the background singers' "nah nah nah". That moment is prepared for by another sync point—the loosely bent arms of the cyclist suddenly doubling the shape of his handlebars, with the singer's now victorious "Yeah, my boyfriend's back" (this, the third time, the camera sidles up to him). Two strong sync points also occur here—too few for a music video.

Thus far we have experienced two sequences with impenetrable images. One projects free-floating hostility and the other shows unrequited desire, so it is wonderful to see, intercut with this second setup, a shirtless recumbent man on the bed. He smiles at us. Thus far, features of the recordings have created the illusion that the song has not penetrated the space, only dusted or smeared over it. Suddenly, the music seems to *roll* over this recumbent man (the moment works cross-modally, transferring scene 1's stroking camera movement to the music's running across the man). Of special note are the man's chaps and his cap (always fetishistic things, especially on top).

My situatedness fails to capture other viewers' experiences. A second perspective, from gay pornographer Paul Morris, contributes to a richer interpretation. For Morris, *Scorpio Rising* is saturated with irony and mired in a fetishistic engagement with distanced, linear, heterosexual time. Anger's tortured ironicism reveals itself through several signs:

> "My Boyfriend's Back" means my boyfriend's ass or backside; the distance between "Anger" and the female voices in that song is the same bitter distance the viewer is posited from the imagery and from Anger himself; the director's quoting of Puck—"What fools these mortals be!"—aligns with that distance as well; and the distance between blue velvet and blue denim, the same.

Like me, Morris values running tests. For him, a comparison between the *Scorpio Rising* clip and a YouTube clip from Chicago's Circuit Club in the late '70s (a gay dance venue and haven of the disco era) reveals Anger's ambivalence toward homosexuality. The director "presents a complex system of forefronting but also suppressing the male body, particularly genitalia". Better, advises Morris, to embrace more liberating media like

[28] Concerning gender identity and choice, what is the relation between the female singer in "My Boyfriend's Back" and the male biker? Who is the "she" in "she wore blue velvet"?

Bijou (1972) by Wakefield Poole, or Caravaggio's *Amor Vincit Omnia* (1602) that offer "utopic, orgasmic, extended segments of time".[29]

Joseph Cornell's Rose Hobart

My second example of works emphasising a lack of sync is Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobart* (1936). The director made *Rose Hobart* after buying a copy of Universal's *East of Borneo* (George Melford, 1931) from a junk store; Hobart is the film's leading actress. Cornell added a few documentary scenes from an eclipse and re-edited the ninety-minute film down to nineteen minutes. For later screenings he also removed the original soundtrack and substituted two songs from Nestor Amaral's *Holiday in Brazil* (1957, released twenty-six years after *East of Borneo* was made). Cornell projected the film through blue glass and slowed the projection speed to that of silent film. Stan Brakhage claimed *Rose Hobart* was the most loving tribute to a Hollywood film star ever made.[30]

In chapter 9 of this volume, Holly Rogers claims that *Rose Hobart*'s sound and image fail to connect: the song heads one way, the image another. This seems right to me, but I would like to take her analysis further. It is doubtful that no close audiovisual relations emerge, not only because we habituate to the relations between the music and image, but also because, as Michel Chion claims, viewers *desire* a connection between the two.[31] What holds *Rose Hobart* together? Perhaps it is the cultural associations of its ambiance. The music has a Latin sound and the setting is the South Pacific. Latin America and the South Pacific are not the same. (Shot on a Hollywood lot, the film plays fast and loose. The extras and buildings are not accurate, nor are the alligators.) For casual listeners, everything from the Global South belongs together. Still, less comes forward than we might assume. Why? Rogers is right that Hobart barely moves and the background's settings remain remarkably still as well.

With so few strong rhythmic gestures in the image, it is hard for the soundtrack to forge connections. Substituting one passage of music for another, or a different visual track that is within the same family—the same strategies of substitution adopted for *Scorpio Rising*—tells us something about the film and Hobart the actress. Instead of Hobart's expressivity, we might sub in Greta Garbo's—say, the moment in *Grand Hotel* (1932) when she cries "I want to be alone" (Figure 13.2).[32] With this attempt, Amaral's

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[29] Paul Morris in email correspondence with the author, 29 December 2015.

[30] Stan Brakhage interview on the DVD-ROM: *The Magical World of Joseph Cornell* (Washington, DC: Voyager Foundation, 2003), published as a companion to Linda Roscoe Hartigan, Walter Hopps, Richard Vine and Robert Lehrman, *Joseph Cornell: Shadowplay . . . Eterniday* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003).

[31] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 63.

[32] My choices for trials are intuitive, though on reflection, they can be unpacked. Rose Hobart might be thought of as a poorer version of Greta Garbo; and Amaral of Villa-Lobos. With the new audiovisual pairings, what might be called the soulfulness, luminosity, intelligence and/or artfulness of Garbo and Villa-Lobos transfer over and infuse its thinner partner (Garbo–Amaral, Villa-Lobos–Hobart). The two strong players

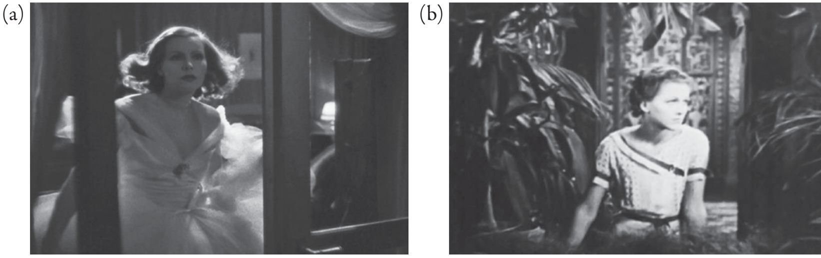

FIGURE 13.2 Audiovisual relations in Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobart* (1936): evaluating Greta Garbo's and Rose Hobart's performances in relation to pieces by Heitor Villa-Lobos and Nestor Amaral.

songs seem to pick up, reflect and even grant Garbo a stronger sense of character. She has extreme gestures, strong physiognomy and intensity of mood. The music now flutters around her, providing additional touches, helping to more clearly etch her movements. We might now take the famous first song from Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5* (1938–45) and run it against the *Grand Hotel* scene, as well as one from *Rose Hobart*. With Garbo, it is not very flattering. It colours her as histrionic. But with Hobart, the music seems to pick up visual details and put qualities *into* her, a sensitivity and interiority we would never grasp about Hobart without the music. Might we now assume that *Rose Hobart* possesses facile music and a not very expressive actress? (Villa-Lobos's music against *Rose Hobart* works exceptionally well.) In *Rose Hobart*, is Hobart a callow figure who fails to project a strong interiority; is the music frothy muzak? Perhaps both are a little stupid, in a very low-key way.

But let us put this aside for a moment and run a few more experiments on *Rose Hobart*. Trying variations in colour can be useful. Cornell's blue-purple is so distant from the environment's natural landscape that we could be watching sci-fi. Green would animate things. If the image were crisper and in its original black and white, the music might sync more tightly. Or better, if we took different shades—blue, green, pink, red—varying them by sequence or shot, might we get a sense of progression the music could play against? Or if we shifted the music backward or forward a touch, or reframed the image slightly, shifting it slightly closer and to the left? Did Cornell deliberately seek moments of non-sync? I think so.

I have argued elsewhere that audiovisually intensified works remain incomplete.[33] The music points but does not name its objects. Lyrics tend to be elliptical; image stands at a remove from us. In a music video or other non-narrative audiovisual work, we vaguely sense a desired object, an attitude or a feeling, but less than one might assume. Is Cornell intent on keeping his material occult? My schematics and substitutions have only shown

(Garbo–Villa-Lobos), when together, seem almost like prima donnas who drown one another out. Some aspects of these choices seem amenable to analysis with Cook's gapped relations and Chion's added value, yet they also seem different.

[33] Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video*, 93

so much. It might matter to the film that Hobart advocated for better working conditions in Hollywood. Tossed in among alligators and monkeys and in front of the camera seventeen hours a day, when shooting *East of Borneo*, she felt angry and exhausted: "This isn't acting."[34] Perhaps her mood had a different tenor than the frothy pop songs Cornell chose. Cornell's lavender tint, slowed-down footage and absence of movement may help bring to the fore what Hobart was really feeling, though in a way that keeps this knowledge obscure.

Andy Warhol's Vinyl

My last example of resistant sync, this time more deliberately casual, is *Vinyl*, a 1965 black-and-white experimental film directed by Warhol at the Factory. *Vinyl* adapts Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). The unrehearsed actors read their scripts for the camera and flub their lines. Action was squeezed into one corner of a room and recorded in three static takes.

One sequence features Martha and the Vandellas' "Nowhere to Run" (1965). On first viewing, this segment might suggest some Factory's denizens hanging out, listening to records. The actors form a group but they are isolated, or in pairs or small clusters. Why then the horror-movie laugh emanating from a man in the midground? Often I have wondered whether fine audiovisual relations are required for a music video or a musical number; perhaps, if an image is rich enough, a viewer will find enough to keep watching, no matter the soundtrack. This seems true of *Vinyl*: on its own, the frame seems engaging. A man in white pants, at the far back, whose thighs divide the frame down the middle, helps buckle the image into clusters of people and planes of activity that press forward or back. The man dancing in the foreground (whom we have to steal glances past), is a violent he-man. In the far left recesses, two men flirt or plan an assignation. Before them, serving as a barrier, are two black-suited, seated men, one of whom laughs maniacally (are they CIA?). Centre and frame right, the enigmatic Edie Sedgwick, her body broken in half, dances with mermaid-like arm movements. Activity picks up. Not only the he-man's gestures but also Sedgwick's swimming become increasingly aggressive. The white-panted man is wrapping a man's head in thick plastic, the latter seemingly being tortured or submitting to bondage; his head drops forward and the body goes limp. Is this consensual? Does it contribute to our pleasure or give the image depth? How complicit are the rest of *Vinyl*'s participants? How does the song play into this? Neither of *Scorpio Rising*'s songs, "My Boyfriend's Back" or "Blue Velvet", works here, but many other songs substitute well, even the community-oriented Martha Reeves and the Vandellas' "Dancing in the Street" (1964). The clip celebrates togetherness more than I had assumed. These young people are simply looking for a bracing beat. The beat allows

[34] Hobart quoted in Myrna Oliver, "Rose Hobart; SAG Official, Blacklisted Actress", *Los Angeles Times*, accessed 31 August 2000, http://articles.latimes.com/2000/aug/31/local/me-13393.

them to hold their own while still participating in a felt rather than acknowledged experience of the group.

Penny Woolcock's From the Sea to the Land Beyond

Not all clips belonging within this first category showcase resolute or detached audiovisual relations. Penny Woolcock's *From the Sea to the Land Beyond: Britain's Coast on Film* (2012) differs from my other examples partly because of its materials and their treatment, but also because of its era. Digital technologies afford finer sync. Woolcock's documentary comprises archival footage of Britons working and playing in and by the ocean, during the course of a century. Its soundtrack includes complete songs by British Sea Power. Avant-garde cred comes from the way these images are present but hauntingly inscrutable: these people were alive back then, we are now. How are the figures in the frame like or not like us? Do they do the same things, do they take the same pleasures? The soundtrack does not demand attention, even as it contributes a sentimental sheen. (As Kevin Donnelly points out, British Sea Power's guitar-oriented songs are "strongly melody-led and insistently memorable, accompanied often by quite basic and disciplined arrangements and little in the way of musical pyrotechnics".)[35] The image's content—swimming, dancing, rowing, promenading—would sync with nearly any regular pulse, and today's digital technologies can improve on this, offering nearly invisible fine-tweaks. The aurally receptive image can be further finessed—an oar periodically dipping into water, waves cresting into foamy tips, a waitress's skirt apron getting swept up by the wind, or people proudly strutting single-file before the camera.

Audiovisual relations in the first three clips I have discussed could be characterised as anempathetic; their songs' and images' autonomy come forward, more than a multitude of relations. I have argued elsewhere that audiovisual relations can resemble human relations.[36] When sound and image refuse to relate, this metaphor seems even more apt. These media can resemble a long-term couple who seek a therapist but resist change. The ways the arrangement, image, camera and lyrics chart out psychic territory, claim physical space and project a tone make them seem like agents.[37]

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[35] K. J. Donnelly, "Irish Sea Power: A New Version of Man of Aran (2009/1934)", in *Music and Sound in Documentary Film*, ed. Holly Rogers (New York: Routledge, 2015), 142. To which of my categories *By the Land and Sea* belongs is not clear-cut. The music is made up of reworked moments from the band's back catalogue, along with specially written material. My sense is that Woolcock at least made a rough edit of the image first, so the image is prior to the largely already extant music.

[36] Vernallis, *Unruly Media*, 209.

[37] Audiovisual analysis might be amenable to psychoanalytic methods. Drawing on Melanie Klein and Wilfred Bion, Mitchell Morris has already used such techniques in the service of analysing Enya's pop tunes. Morris claims Enya's songs resemble, for the listener, the engulfing breast; I wonder if her videos' depicted screens—clouds, fountains, mist—might also resemble a confining, yet comforting uterine wall. Might song fragments from "My Boyfriend's Back" spark visual associations that then activate repressed desires? The "r"s, a revving motorcycle and the skeleton puppet's "nah nah nah"s a "blitz-it!" to overrun the image's

2. Pop Music as Part of a Larger Film

Experimental directors sometimes include prerecorded pop songs in feature-length films. Compared to the rest of these films, the song sequences are more open-ended: they do not need to seek or hold a particular audience, nor function on their own. As clips on YouTube, these sequences function differently, but in their original contexts they offer a respite, some novelty or a place to stretch out. The distinction between avant-garde and Hollywood directors here can be hard to gauge. David Lynch's practice continues to be linked to the avant-garde, while Tsai Ming-Liang and Chantal Ackerman provocatively use threadbare settings to revalorise and defamiliarise musical numbers. Mainstream Hollywood has many experimental moments in musical numbers as well.[38]

David Lynch's Blue Velvet

Ben (Dean Stockwell) lip-syncing Roy Orbison's "In Dreams" (1963) to Frank (Dennis Hopper) and others in an apartment in *Blue Velvet* (1986) may be one of the most beautiful and subversive moments in the history of audiovisual aesthetics. It possesses the same spirited transgressiveness as Luis Buñuel's and Salvador Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). In this sequence, the characters' dispositions and movements describe the song, but in a temporally unfolding, spatially distributed way. Everything seems to emanate from Dean Stockwell's performance (Figure 13.3). As he sings, he appears to glide above the music, much as the song's vocal line coasts on its arrangement. He is more delicate and restrained than the vocal recording; regardless of how ominous he appears, his performance makes room for Orbison's voice. Stockwell's appearance functions like Charlie Chaplin's, as a mixture of signs: for James Naremore, a bowler hat, cane, tattered shoes, baggy pants and curly mustache are a mix of ostentatious signalling that points to everything from hobo to patrician, mime artist to dandy.[39] Similarly, Stockwell's attire and presentation are a combo pack. His shirt and jacket are so ornamented and frilled, they are beyond anything one would see in a funeral parlour, Las Vegas or a high school prom. Suddenly he reveals a long, feminine cigarette holder, while in his other hand he holds a more butch gaffer's

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contents. Mitchell Morris, "Songs of the Container: On Enya, the Maternal Sound, and Fear of Comfort," EZ Music Conference, University of California Berkeley, 12 March 2016.

[38] *Eraserhead* (1993) and *Inland Empire* (2006) are commonly understood as experimental films; scenes from Lynch's other films work similarly. Davison considers Lynch an experimental film director; *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice*, 70. There are moments of experimentalism in mainstream Hollywood. "The Lady in the Tutti Frutti Hat" sequence in Busby Berkeley's *The Gang's All Here* (1943) seems experimental, and the "By a Waterfall" sequence in *Footlight Parade* (Berkeley and Lloyd Bacon, 1933) includes a hybrid of pop and experimental approaches. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers are included on UbuWeb, a site devoted to experimental film and video (their "Let's Face the Music and Dance" in *Follow the Fleet* [Mark Sandrich, 1936] is worthy of special mention), and the dance sequence in Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's 1948 *The Red Shoes* also deserves analysis. Experimental numbers within films can reach a mass audience. Jerry Lewis was famous for taking risks with numbers, particularly in *The Bellboy* (1960).

[39] James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 9–14.

FIGURE 13.3 Audiovisual aesthetics in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986): musical elements are distributed across a temporally unfolding, spatially intensified image. Dean Stockwell functions as catalyst.

searchlight. His curled, manicured hairdo and white painted face resembles Joel Grey's in *Cabaret* (1972). A sconce next to Stockwell resembles a woman's bustier. Frank, on the other hand, is reduced: tight and primly groomed, with three sharply tipped triangles embossed on his shirt and neck tie. Stretched behind Frank, like the mirrors at the end of *Citizen Kane* (1941), are three arch-like awnings—his subconscious.

Frank takes to the music too late (he is a person out of sequence). His slow-to-rise lip-curl suggests extreme pleasure and a repressed sneer. Besides Stockwell's weightless glide (the vocal line) and Frank's rigid, poorly modulated witnessing, other elements pick up aspects of the music. Breaks in Orbison's voice, and its increased tautness as it reaches the higher register, seem matched by Frank's strong desire and the snake dancer's voluptuous rising swirls in the back. The three figures disposed as one clump of a chorus might reflect the song's inner voices, here as horror, bemusement and pleasure. Then Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini) promenades through the back door, followed by a second visitor, picking up the bassline as it accrues energy. The music also has a sense of stasis, which suggests we shall never leave this place; the rest of the figures, propped on couches in the background, look like pottery or gargoyles. I wonder if Lynch was thinking about Warhol's *Vinyl*. Lynch's S&M activity in the background, with characters disposed in a tiny space, euphoric music and everyone listening ecstatically, seems like a remake. And the scene is painterly, also like *Vinyl*. The strangely tinted walls and stilted paintings—a nudie who looks just like Dorothy—do not seem much different from the characters themselves.

3. Pop Music as Collaged Material

In most of the work in this category—including pieces by Bruce Conner and Pipilotti Rist—fragments join to form a disparate but whole work. Questions of causality,

authority and production come to the surface. The fragmented music and image provide an opportunity to critique institutional structures that appear monumental and entire—patriarchy and the military-industrial complex. In the late 1980s and the 1990s, audiovisual works designed for the gallery were often composed of fragments like these; the videos seemed particularly well suited to installations.[40]

Bruce Conner's America is Waiting

One of the avant-garde's most influential videos, Conner's *America is Waiting* (1981), has become nearly unobtainable, even on the web. Its soundtrack seems like a pop song, but it is a borderline case. A collaboration by Brian Eno and David Byrne from their LP *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1981), it includes a rhythm section of drums, electric bass and electric guitar, but what comes most to the fore are mechanical sources that resemble the sounds of machines made of metal and rubber, chopping and banging, squishing and exhaling. Instead of a singing voice, two male voices intone. One flatly claims, "America is waiting for a message of some sort or another," and the second, sounding near hysterical, calls in rising inflections, "Takin' it again, again, again, takin' it again, well now, no, no, now." Contextual knowledge helps deflate some of the voices' mystery: both were bootlegged from the radio, the first from a late-night talk-show host, the second from an auctioneer. But even for a listener who knows these facts, the voices remain powerful and surreal. The two appear to be trying to spook one another. There follows a dreamy, twangy, solo guitar lick, then we are back to the men's repartee.[41] This should not sound like a pop song, but it does. The voices and guitar almost comprise verse, chorus and bridge. Together, the song's disparate elements feel unified, even while the song pulls in multiple directions.

The images, too, are multi-sourced and mysterious—comprising military and commercial found footage from the 1940s and 1950s (Figure 13.4). Like the soundtrack, the visuals are composite. Paired satellite trackers scan the sky, but they get quickly turned back by a jump cut, flash-frames or mechanical sonic punctuations. A subsequent rhyming image of a needle, as it tries to creep up a dial, soon gets tugged back as well. There are plenty of war-oriented images: atomic bombs detonating, men running into bunkers and so on. Also appearing are images of 1950s domesticity: that carefully disposed nuclear family in front of the TV set and a classroom with students and teacher. Two young boys, shot with split-screen, play war games; wearing oversized helmets and speaking through walkie-talkies, they run out of the brush with huge bazookas (the

[40] See Rogers, *Sounding the Gallery*.

[41] Later, the song's lyrics include: "No will whatsoever, no will whatsoever, absolutely no honour", "No will whatsoever, no will whatsoever, absolutely no integrity", and "I haven't seen any, any, any citizen over there stand up and say, 'Hey, just a second' ". It is not clear if the voices are the same as those from the opening, but they seem like riffs on the original.

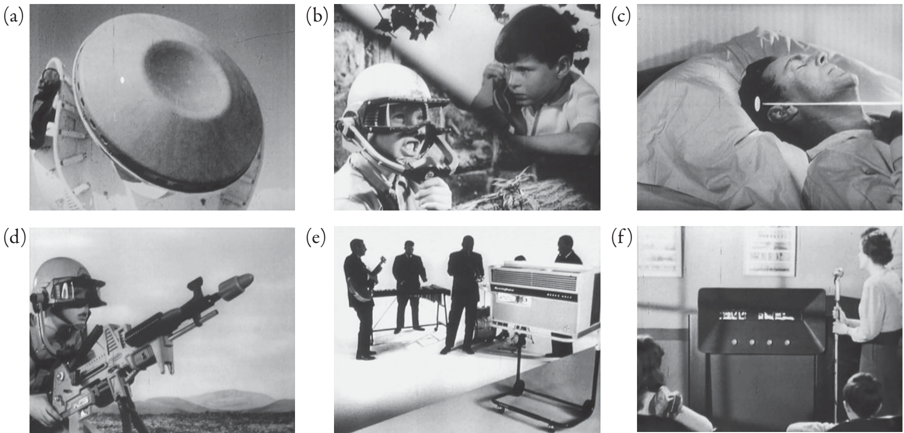

FIGURE 13.4 Bruce Conner's *America is Waiting* (1981): song and image pull in several directions. The video asks, "Is America on the verge?"

clip looks like it's been repurposed from a toy commercial). All of this suggests recoil and strike; an air of paranoia.

What is driving it all? Is it the song's mechanical sounds that seem to trigger the periodic multiplication of images, like the question marks that hover over a recumbent hospitalised man, while a male voice pronounces "no will whatsoever"? Is it the subterranean connections among machines depicted in the images? A white-coated man walks up to a bank of first-generation computers and pushes a button. Next, refrigerators and ovens start parading along an assembly line before an early pop band—the commodities look like people. Or perhaps the video's tone is fuelled by sentiment, an affective, frozen edginess produced as a byproduct of Cold War surveillance. Or is this simply something about America, which we always knew was on the verge. In relation to previous music and images, a late shot of Mount Rushmore feels like the monument is on alert (waiting for something, again and again).

Pipilotti Rist's I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much

Like Conner's, Rist's *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much* (1986) is a composited, although simple, work. Wearing a low-cut little black dress and clunky, high-heeled shoes, Rist repeatedly sings the first line from the Beatles' "Happiness Is a Warm Gun" (1968) in a barren studio. The lo-fi video image shifts frequently, but it is almost all extremely blurry (Figure 13.5). Sometimes the image is played too fast, sometimes too slow. Slow parts have a bit of red tinting and a deliberate analogue glitch rips from one side of the frame to the other, two-thirds into the piece.

The work begins with Rist close to the camera, so we can make out her luridly red lips. She then backs away and starts dancing as the tape speeds up. Her vocals (already sped up) jump up a perfect fifth, then another major third, to span a major seventh (seemingly

FIGURE 13.5 Pipilotti Rist's *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much* (1986). Part dervish, Betty Boop and martyr, Rist is not the girl you think she is.

reminiscent of teens' games at inhaling helium balloons to become giddy and mimic Alvin and the Chipmunks). Further transpositions alongside the tape's speeding up and slowing down feel frequent and sporadic.

In the video's most striking moment, the recording slows and drops two octaves as the video assumes a red hue and Rist's body—arms outstretched like a crucifix—sinks slowly through the bottom of the frame (this is the one point at which John Lennon's sampled voice sounds directly borrowed). For those familiar with the song's aggressive lyrics (which Rist doesn't sing)—"I need a fix 'cause I'm going down . . . / Mother Superior jump the gun"—Rist may seem like a target. Suddenly exhumed from a possible underworld, Rist next reanimates (in fact, she claims that "the use of different speeds is for her an exorcistic dance . . . things in slow motion . . . that's 'reality' ").[42] As her voice jumps again into higher registers, the melody starts fracturing and parts we did not notice come forward. Some pitches sound like pants and dog barks. The melody's opening seems absurdly obnoxious, like a whining kid; the middle becomes a birdsong with well-defined contours, while the closing "doo la loo la loop" devolves into a tweedling warble. As she dances, she flays her arms at 45-degree angles, tipping this way and that, to comical effect. She might capsize. As the dancing speeds up, we hear a graceful but non-rhetorical tapping (unnoticeable at regular speed).[43]

[42] Pipilotti Rist, quoted in Jane Harris, "Psychedelic, Baby: An Interview with Pipilotti Rist", *Art Journal* 59, no. 4 (2000): 74.

[43] Rogers also notes the way Rist uses her own body as material and creates audiovisual ruptures. See Rogers, " 'Betwixt and Between' Worlds: Spatial and Temporal Liminality in Video Art-Music", in *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, 537.

FIGURE 13.6 *Me and Rubyfruit* (1989): Sadie Benning's haptic sounds and images offer a sense of fullness.

The clip is eerie. Rist looks ridiculous, but we know she put herself here. She celebrates an auto-eroticism resembling children's repetitive twirls. As the clip slows, she melts to the bottom of the frame and then lunges forward and starts again like a caged animal. At certain points her arms push back and forth away from the camera, and sped up, the action seems aggressive and forceful, as if she could catapult herself out of the clip. Which actions drive the clip? Who knows? We are watching some new imaginary cyborg-like creature: frightening, archetypal, humorous and threatening. Fragmented visually and sonically, she really is not the girl you think she is.

Sadie Benning's Me and Rubyfruit

Although Sadie Benning's short video clip from 1990 *Me and Rubyfruit* is also a composite, it feels whole. It therefore stands out from the other works in this category. Benning takes fragments from Prince's "Darling Nikki" (1984) and Aretha Franklin's "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" (1967) and gives the sense that the song's entirety surrounds it: we can admire the knowledge and ear required for her to choose that just-right bit. The image is extremely lo-fi, shot on a Fisher Price toy camera. This brings the songs to the fore. Close-ups of eyes, mouths, miniature unscrolling hand-drawn text on paper, a part of a cat, which Laura Marks might call "haptic" images, throw additional weight onto the soundtrack (Figure 13.6).[44] The warmth and immediacy of Benning's work makes it stand out against Conner's and Rist's.

Once we notice individual works clustering within a category (here category 3), we can make claims about the ways they share strategies. Beginning with musical and visual

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[44] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 2.

fragments, Christian Marclay's much-lauded *Video Quartet* (2002) and Mark Leckey's *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999) are both structured through strongly imposed rhythms. Marclay draws on a 4/4 rhythm, with antecedent and consequent phrases and periodic builds to peaks. The video asks viewers to imagine a community of musicians that might coalesce into a "family of man", or should not.[45] Ryan Trecartin has recently re-energised the form, working with even smaller cells: bits of phrases, music, lurid colours and pop-culture detritus that also establish a brisk, repetitive rhythm. He fashions something anew that is meant to critique what seems to be monumental, whether straight culture or the media as an all-encompassing world.

4. Experimental Directors Making Music Videos

A significant number of avant-gardists have directed one or two music videos: New Order, for instance, worked with several avant-gardists and independent directors, including Robert Longo, Will Wegman, Kathryn Bigelow and Robert Frank. But this work remains under-analysed. Most of the crossings between the avant-garde and music video occurred in the 1980s, when the medium was incompletely defined and still had cultural cachet. In the 1990s, MTV mostly screened 35 mm, large-budget clips by well-known directors. Participation by experimental artists dropped to nearly zero. An uptick has recently occurred: now that music video resides on the Internet and is not subject to MTV's censorship, expanding genre boundaries and easier dissemination make music videos attractive again. Andrew Thomas Haung and Björk's "Mutual Core" (2013) and David Lynch and Chrysta Bell's "Bird of Flames" (2012) are examples of this experimental re-emergence.[46] Why did so many of these directors make one or two videos? As burgeoning artists, were they simply experimenting with every medium and genre they could realistically get their hands on? If they did not continue to make music videos, did their experiences enrich their artistic practices in other media? I have selected four examples to show how these works showcase striking moments and push towards the genre's margins.

Videos by Damien Hirst, Derek Jarman, Tony Oursler and Chris Marker

Two music videos directed by avant-gardists jar us just the way we might expect them to. Tony Kaye's "See the Light" (The Hours, 2008), with art direction by Damien Hirst, depicts a woman in a hospital gown running amok in a shopping mall, squeezing herself in among displays and curling up within a coffin-sized Plexiglas showcase for

[45] Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs", *Art Journal* 41, no. 1 (1981): 15–21.

[46] See Rogers, "Twisted Synaesthesia: Music Video and the Visual Arts", in *Art or Sound*, ed. Germano Celant (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2014), 384–88.

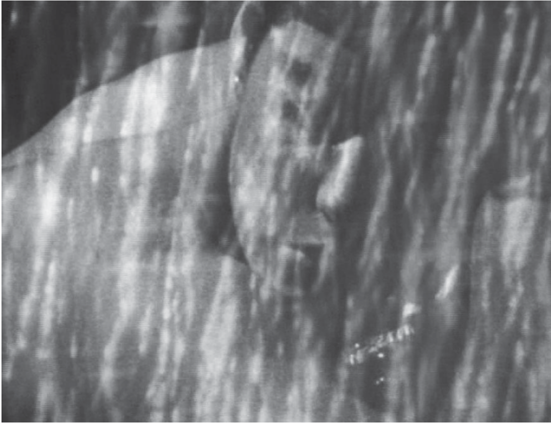

FIGURE 13.7 Derek Jarman's "There is a Light That Never Goes Out" (1986): audiovisual relations suggest loss, intimacy and aloofness.

shoes.[47] She slaps blood-stained handprints next to giant animal carcasses, a Hirstian touch. For the clip's moments of relative quiet she is ferried on a gurney into an MRI machine, lasers etching patterns on her face; this lowering of intensity is a music-video convention. The song is undistinguished indie-rock. The clip's audiovisual abrasiveness creates the distancing we have come to expect from the avant-garde; but is this enough to get the work into the art gallery, or to disqualify it from MTV?

Derek Jarman's compilation of three videos for The Smith's 1986 album *The Queen is Dead* breaks conventions through its larger scope. Willfully nonchalant, the title track is awash with messy chroma-key. Even more than "See the Light", it is frenzied, giving it an experimental edge. The tender second video, "There Is a Light that Never Goes Out", has a simple construct. Against a field of fluttering gold and red vertical streaks (that appear to have fire as their source material), a blue-tinged, nearly still image of an almost undressed, reclining boy is panned and shifted through the frame (Figure 13.7). Superimposed elements also appear, mostly of a silhouetted burning car driving along the z-axis. Why do I find this clip so intensely moving? The video encourages a viewer to work hard to find a whole. Might Morrissey's keening voice express a hope for love, a loss of it or a moment-of-now, when all is swept away but this boy, an arcadian model of beauty? Do we want our loved objects to remain still, to coalesce into something we fully possess (hence the boy's passivity and his tinted funereal blue)? The boy is beautiful, the fire is dangerous, Morrissey's voice is mournful. But the affective characters of these elements begin to cross and blur.

Like *Scorpio Rising, Rose Hobart* and *Vinyl*, Jarman's "There Is a Light that Never Goes Out" seems resolute. Though the boy and the flames bind together, neither consumes the

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[47] See Antje Krause-Wahl, "Why Artists Make Clips", in *Rewind, Play, Fast Forward: The Past, Present and Future of the Music Video*, ed. Henry Keazor and Thorsten Wübbena (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2010), 215. See also F. Javier Panera Cuevas and Richard-Lewis Rees, *This is Not a Love Song: Video Art and Pop Music Crossovers* (Istanbul: Pera Müzesi Yayınları, 2015).

other. They are held in an intimate but polarised relation. We viewers, and Morrissey's voice, remain distant from this compound image; even the burning truck barrelling into the boy fails to pierce us. This clip has sync. Subtly, the camera's panning across the boy often tracks Morrissey's voice (as if the boy might be listening); when Morrissey's voice swells, the boy moves towards us. When the chorus intensifies, an embracing couple appears, later to be mirror-imaged (as the boy will be). The rippling patterns of the yellow-orange field pick up the strings' vibrato, and the jaunty, perhaps ironic flute melody momentarily lifts the mood at phrases' ends (so we might begin again with more unrequited yearning). Perhaps each medium's sense of unreality contributes to this video's distancing effect. The static image of the boy occasionally blinks, rendering his status uncertain. The field of fire is most likely tinted rippling water, first shot on the horizontal, then inverted. The strings that were originally meant to be lush are digital (the band lacked the budget for real strings). I hear Morrissey's momentary hums as the song's most intimate feature.

Tony Oursler's video for Sonic Youth's "Tunic (Song for Karen)" (1990) feels both confusingly wonderful and embarrassingly amateurish, perhaps even proudly stupid. It flaunts its nonexistent budget. The band appears in one of those boxy, anonymous 1980s television studios, with no lighting except for a few blunt Fresnel lenses, directed flatly at the band. The video begins with each band member running out, carrying an enormous foam letter to help spell out the song's title. Then, periodically, the female singer Kim Gordon lies on a divan, garlanded with large, garish paper flowers or plush toy animals. Not very promising, but quirky things transpire. At various distances from the foreground, the band members point their fingers at her from the frame's four corners. Video noise periodically fills the frame; some rough animation of the band, cruder than MTV's *Beavis and Butthead*, also gets time. Is Oursler making a meta-video with some of music video's most unhappy features? Other aspects suggest so. The lead singer's dress changes frequently. And things happen in a way typical for music video. The director's trademark stylistic approach appears more assertively—close-ups of a skeleton and a doll's head superimpose on the lead singer's face. Big heads with even larger lips and miniature bodies appear. Finally there is a puppet show. Like experimental director Will Wegman's video for New Order's "Blue Monday '88" (1988), Oursler ensures his signature appears often.

Further research into the song complicates our reading. One of the most successful avant-garde rock groups, Sonic Youth experimented with unusual forms, unorthodox guitar tunings and prepared guitars that strangely altered their timbres. Lead singer and bassist Gordon wrote the song's lyrics, which she claims share her sympathy with Karen Carpenter's terminal anorexia; Gordon imagines the late star finally happy in heaven—her body growing smaller and her voice growing bigger.[48] But Gordon's singing is so deadpan and drowned out by the other musicians, this is nearly impossible to make out. This backstory gives the video an elegiac character.

[48] Kim Gordon, "Kim Gordon's Open Letter to Karen Carpenter", *Dangerous Minds*, 22 July 2013, accessed 20 August 2016, http://dangerousminds.net/comments/kim_gordons_open_letter_to_karen_carpenter.

In Chris Marker's video for Electronics' "Getting Away with It" (1989), a caped woman resembling a Pre-Raphaelite subject (like Rossetti's 1870 *Beata Beatrix*), wanders in the woods, occasionally wearing headphones, sometimes gently lip-syncing. There's an uncanny connection between her and the animals she encounters—a peacock and a wallaby. The bird's long legs rhyme with her skirt and the marsupial's hop connects with her leaning forward to push branches aside. The clip seems simple and emotionally freighted. It is drab. The image's colour and grain have been stripped. The song seems amenable but also forgettable. A clever gambit joins the woodland walk with the band performing in the studio (leaves start falling on the musicians). The clip is saturated with a melancholy tone that feels authorial. It is hard to say how, but like the other clips I have described, it leaves a strong aftertaste. All the clips I have here detailed reveal a subtle, odd audiovisual turn that sets them apart from most mainstream videos.

5. Towards a Fifth Category and Beyond. Pieces that offer Meta-Discourses about Pop Songs and the Institutions in which they Exist

Reflecting on the ways these avant-gardists have incorporated pop music into their work, my response is mixed. Their atypical and heterogeneous audiovisual relations reveal experimental traits. This experimental attitude manifests itself in explorations of form, critical distance from mainstream media, playfulness and a sardonic tone. But I am also dismayed by the paucity of examples. I have not discussed the few directors who composed both music and image, like Laurie Anderson and Robert Ashley. These could be folded into an additional fifth category, that of meta-discourses about pop songs and the institutions within which they reside. Anderson's and Ashley's work, as well as more purely extra-musical conceptual projects like Banksy's recent guerilla swapping of his own remixes within the packaging of Paris Hilton's, creates new possibilities.[49] Now that out-of-the-box video and audio software is available more widely than ever before, these practices might extend beyond film and video to a variety of platforms and venues, spur new configurations and be adopted on a larger scale.

This chapter yearns for a world in which pop artists and experimental filmmakers collaborate and cross borders. I would like to celebrate the work of some high-art-trained music video directors whose work would adapt well to the gallery—Floria Sigismondi, Mark Romanek, Kevin Kerslake, Hiro Murai, Yoann Lemoine, Chris Cunningham and Michel Gondry, among others—but who have not received the appropriate commissions.[50] I might add the already mentioned musicians who collaborate with these directors (Bowie, Björk, Flying Lotus) and do stunning work. I have tried to capture ways of experiencing

[49] In Banksy's *Paris Hilton CD, 2006*, consumers discover they have bought some Banksy music (and possibly art) with a Hilton cover and barcode.

[50] Floria Sigismondi told me she tried the art gallery experience once and felt she was ripped off. Clips presently on her website could easily be included in the gallery, accessed 20 August 2016, http://www.floriasigismondi.com/film/.

audiovisuality, pop and experimental media in the hope that we might start fresh and build a new canon. What are the most provocative, sublime, beautiful or politically engaged dance clips, movie scenes, vaporwave videos, DIY clips, music videos and interactive installations? What would happen if we placed them against the body of work I have just discussed? What new histories might we chart?[51] I hope for some new social, economic and political configurations.

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[51] It has been often claimed that music video stole its style from the avant-garde, most notably Surrealism. Yet considering how few avant-gardists chose to participate with pop music or music video, this argument looks suspect. Many more, and more successful, music videos have been directed by Hollywood and European filmmakers. Though a large proportion of music video directors would have seen experimental films in college, they also would have been exposed to musicals, Hollywood classics, foreign films, Asian action films and commercials. Music video's imagery and form may share a family resemblance with that of avant-garde film and video (as well as poetry, commercials and the musical), but little theft or borrowing may have transpired between the two genres. See Vernallis, "Music Video into Past-Classical Cinema", in *Unruly Media*, 69–75.

I would like to thank the colleagues who helped me with this chapter: Juan Suárez, Corey Creekmur, Steve Shaviro, Les Brill, Allan Cameron, Margaret Vernallis and Holly Rogers. Allan Cameron deserves a special shout out. The first claims for this piece came out of several Skype conversations with him.

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For you must understand he goes but to see a noise that he heard.

QUINCE, in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, act 1, scene 3

14 The Music of Gustav Mahler in Experimental Film Contexts

QUESTIONS OF VISUAL MUSIC AND INTERMEDIAL THEORY

Jeremy Barham

GUSTAV MAHLER'S CENTENARY (2010–11) took place in the age of digital media, whose technological possibilities afforded strikingly diverse opportunities to mark the occasion. The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, for example, held a Mahler remix competition based on stems of their recording of the First Symphony, the philosophical and aesthetic implications of which I have discussed elsewhere.[1] But also in 2011 the Österreichischer Rundfunk at the RadioKulturhaus in Vienna, together with *departure*, the creative agency of Vienna, held the intermedially themed "lied lab 2011: gustav mahler festival" [*sic*], a "creative laboratory uniting top-level performances of Lieder and the art of visualization."[2] It comprised digitally created, moving-image visualisations or interpretations of Mahler's *Frühe Lieder* (1880–87), *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (1883–85), *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1887–1901), *Kindertotenlieder* (1901–04), *Rückertlieder* (1901–02) and *Das Lied von der Erde* (1908–09), produced by a range of experimental visual artists including Luma. Launisch, annablume, Victoria Coeln, LIA, LWZ and Valence. It also included a

[1] Jeremy Barham, "'Not Necessarily Mahler': Remix, Samples and Borrowing in the Age of 'Wiki'", *Contemporary Music Review* 33, no. 2 (2014): 1–20.

[2] For information, see "lied lab 2011: gustav mahler festival", accessed 7 September 2016, http://www.lia-works.com/theprojects/lied-lab-2011-gustav-mahler-festival-3/.

seventy-minute, real-time collaborative audiovisual remix of Mahler's music by sound artist Fennesz and video artist Lillevan. In the same year, Danish composer Henrik Marstal worked with VJ Dark Matters and the Copenhagen Philharmonic Orchestra to produce a live, multimedia, sample-based performance entitled "Ambient Mahler Remixes". Interestingly, prior to the centenary years there had already been a small burgeoning tradition of Mahler-based digital experimental visualisation, starting with Slovenian video artist Božidar Svetek's "Interakt Studio" (1996–2004) and the work of Austrian visual artist Johannes Deutsch with the "Ars Electronica Futurelab" (2005–06).[3] The fact that not all of the attempts to create visualisations of Mahler's music, or to use and adapt his music to such ends, came about as a result of the anniversary years 2010–11, therefore perhaps indicates a wider and deeper perception of the potential creative rewards attached to "remediating" his music.

Visual Music and the Mahler Visualisations

Though these audiovisual phenomena are probably best understood under the broad banner of experimental film—that is, a usually noncommercial, nonmainstream repertoire with varying disregard for narrative integrity, constructed using a range of techniques often at the margins of industry practice—they may also be more closely aligned with the rich, but not aesthetically uncontroversial, twentieth-century lineage of "visual music" spearheaded by Oskar Fischinger and others in the 1920s and 1930s. As a form of image or moving-image construction, visual music has been defined in different ways by its representatives and curators. Calling on recent theorisations by Paul Friedlander, Maura McDonnell, Jack Ox, Cindy Keefer and Aimee Mollaghan, the parameters of this art form in terms of process and product can be summarised in the following,

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[3] Further information about, and parts of all this Mahler-based audiovisual work can be accessed from the following (all accessed 7 September 2016): Svetek: "Gustav Mahler: Symphony no. 6, Allegro energico (music visualization by Božidar Svetek", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsddsmXvZzA; https://www.si21.com/interakt/.
Deutsch: "Artist's Edition—Johannes Deutsch: Vision Mahler", 2 August 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgS2YzQcjks; "Mahler's Resurrection Symphony Visionized", 2006, http://www.aec.at/futurelab/en/project/mahlers-auferstehungs-sinfonie-visionized/; *Vision Mahler* (WDR mediagroup/Arthaus Musik 101421, 2006), DVD.
Marstal: "The Ambient Mahler Remixes—Starchild #2 in Concert with Cophenhagen Phil", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXnQI6xgN78.
lied lab 2011: "Gustav Mahler Collector's Edition, DVD VI, Track 7", https://vimeo.com/33584220; "lied lab 2011: gustav mahler festival", http://www.liaworks.com/theprojects/lied-lab-2011-gustav-mahler-festival-3/; *Gustav Mahler Lied Collector's Edition*, departure lab, 2011, DVD.
Fennesz and Lillevan: "Fennesz: Mahler Remixed (Excerpt)—Vienna: City of Dreams", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mw_McRXolJg (excerpt of live version); https://fennesz.bandcamp.com/album/mahler-remixed (audio only); *Gustav Mahler Lied Collector's Edition*, departure lab, 2011 (audio and visual), DVD.

sometimes overlapping, modes and categories (in which image may or may not be allied with music or sound, either provisionally or fixedly):[4]

(1) the direct *translation* of image into sound via physical manipulation of the film stock;
(2) the *transformation* of the specific content of a piece of music into visual, filmic language (with or without the use of computer software);
(3) the looser *interpretation* of the specific content of a piece of music in visual, filmic language (with or without the use of computer software);
(4) the creation of a visual, filmic work according to general "musical" structuring principles, whether in the sense of "allegory" or of "correspondence"[5] (sometimes called, or related by analogy to, "absolute film"[6]);
(5) the creation of a painting inspired by and/or exhibiting aspects of musicality (such as flow or movement).

For reasons further outlined below, there are many philosophical and aesthetic problems accruing from these suggested parameters. It should be noted, for example, that earlier theorists as well as more recent practitioners working in the field have both questioned these modalities and introduced issues of performativity into the debate. To begin with, William Moritz alerted us long ago to the "delusion of technology, and the delusion of rhythm" into which visual music artists are at risk of falling, since in the first place computer-based work can so easily lapse into a featureless, inartistic "syndrome" or repetitive pattern that "'does its thing' . . . and then stops, for no particular reason"; and since "[t]oo much of what passes for Visual Music relies on . . . false synchronization", of a type based purely on "beat" to the exclusion of all other aspects of music or sound (timbre, texture, dynamics, pitch, tempo and so on).[7] Mollaghan's valuable contemporary discussion successfully delineates the diversity of work potentially falling under the umbrella of visual music film, and redresses the balance towards consideration of the musicality of such work. This discussion is understandably, but not unproblematically

[4] Paul Friedlander, "What is Visual Music?", 1998, accessed 6 September 2016, http://www.paulfriedlander.com/text/visualmusic.html; Maura McDonnell, "Notes for Lecture on Visual Music" (2003) accessed 6 September 2016, https://www.academia.edu/1740141/Visual_Music_Lecture_-_2003; and McDonnell, "Visual Music" (2007), accessed 6 September 2016, http://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/MUSIC334/VisualMusicEssay.pdf; Jack Ox and Cindy Keefer, "On Curating Recent Digital Abstract Visual Music", Center for Visual Music, 2005, accessed 6 September 2016, http://www.centerforvisualmusic.org/Ox_Keefer_VM.htm; Aimee Mollaghan, *The Visual Music Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[5] Mollaghan, *Visual Music Film*, 12.

[6] See, for example, William Moritz, "The Absolute Film", Center for Visual Music, 1999, accessed 6 September 2016, http://www.centerforvisualmusic.org/library/WMAbsoluteFilm.htm; Mollaghan, *Visual Music Film*, 5–6.

[7] William Moritz, "Towards an Aesthetic of Visual Music", Center for Visual Music, 1986, accessed 6 September 2016, http://www.centerforvisualmusic.org/TAVM.htm.

dependent, however, on a belief in the "visual music film's unique *synthesis* of film, art and music", and on finding methodologies that can "cope with the *hybrid* nature of the visual music film that affords music *equal status* with the visual."[8] For in the first place there seems to be no reason to seek or to assume an a priori equality of status in visual music film between music or sound and image. This would be to impose an artificial uniformity of artistic practice on repertoire in which Mollaghan otherwise acknowledges great diversity. Moreover, picking apart any potential difference between "synthesis" and "hybridity" (or indeed between similar, seemingly innocuous vocabulary such as "fusion", "union", "combination", and "marry") is not mere pedantry but goes to the very core of this art form's entire meaning and significance: the extent to which each medium at work in the presentation retains its essential identity, or subsumes itself into a composite whole which reveals new, homogeneous properties different from those of its constituent parts, or performs mixed, changeable functions. Similarly, the binary of "absolute/programme" music explored by Mollaghan as a backdrop and corollary to the emergence of visual music film out of, or alongside, the abstraction of 1920s so-called absolute film, is contentious.[9] The very category of "absolute music" has a highly complex and compromised philosophical pedigree, which from the start was enveloped in disagreement, obfuscation and denial, and in recent times has been subjected to sustained and penetrating critique by the likes of Susan McClary, Daniel Chua and Lawrence Kramer—a critique that goes as far as to question the very existence of such a form of music, and to argue for an art form that, whatever its disposition or format, is inevitably shot through with layers of communicative cultural meaning.[10]

A similar critique of the concept of visual music itself has been recently proposed by sound artist and composer Friedemann Dähn: "The desire for an artistic connection between image and sound . . . has existed for centuries . . . [but] there are really no deducible objective parameters with which the phenomenon of visual music could be explained." He proceeds to ask what the phenomenon might be:

> Is it visualized music in . . . a Kandinsky or Klee painting? Is it a film visualized to music composed by Hans Richter or Viking Eggeling? Aren't paintings exempt . . . since they deal only with a work inspired by music or a musical form, which has nothing more in common with visual music than a video still has in common with a feature film? And in the case of films, was there a musical piece or at least a

[8] Mollaghan, *Visual Music Film*, 11 and 176; emphases added.

[9] See Mollaghan, *Visual Music Film*, chapter 2.

[10] See, for example, Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) and *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Daniel Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and many subsequent volumes and journal articles.

musical form at the outset, or was content simply associated with music integrated into the film?[11]

Rejecting any "universally accepted synesthesia of colour and tone", which amounts to "determination without any universally applicable scientific character", Dähn admits that "from the musician's point of view, many forms of musical visualization appear rather unsatisfactory", and that "arbitrariness in the connection of the audible and visible doesn't correspond to the essence of an art form".[12] Instead, along with Paul Mumford and Laurent Carlier (practitioners who also contribute to the same volume),[13] he suggests that the real nature and future of any art form worthy of the label visual music will necessarily emerge from the live, performative world of VJing, relying in part on human musical and visual artistic technique, and in part on technologies that allow an "audio-visual work [to] be created in real time . . . that does justice to visual music's demands" because its sound and image parameters are "present in a temporal and spatial context".[14] I will return to the implications of these issues in due course.

Intermediality and the Mahler Visualisations

The type of artistic activity described at the beginning of this chapter involves two or more media (to whatever degree they are fused or juxtaposed) and is therefore associated with concepts deriving from intertextuality and interdisciplinarity such as multi- or plurimedia, interarts, intermedia or transmedia—areas which have been subject to a growing body of critical literature since the late 1990s. This literature has developed complex, yet systematic, frameworks for attempting to clarify such mixed-media practices. Figure 14.1 suggests to begin with how the Mahler visualisations might best be located in Werner Wolf's fundamental diagrammatic representation of the intermedial concept, annotated by additional indications pertinent to the repertoire under discussion here.

A further subdivision applicable to this Mahler-related repertoire would be between those works that retain the music unchanged, and those that adapt, sample or rework the music in some way, thus introducing issues of artistic integrity, authenticity, the "work" concept, commodification, borrowing and the representational dimensions of synecdoche or *pars pro toto* into the discussion.

Using such canonic and globally revered music as Mahler's for the purposes of visualisation or remediation is a process heavily freighted with expectation, cultural meaning,

[11] Freidemann Dähn, "Visual Music. Forms and Possibilities", in *Audio.Visual: On Visual Music and Related Media*, ed. Cornelia Lund and Holger Lund (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche Art Publishers, 2009), 148–49.

[12] Ibid., 149, 152.

[13] Paul Mumford, "Visual Music", in Lund and Lund, *Audio.Visual*, 154–60; Laurent Carlier, "VJing between Image and Sound", ibid., 162–69.

[14] Dähn, "Visual Music", 153.

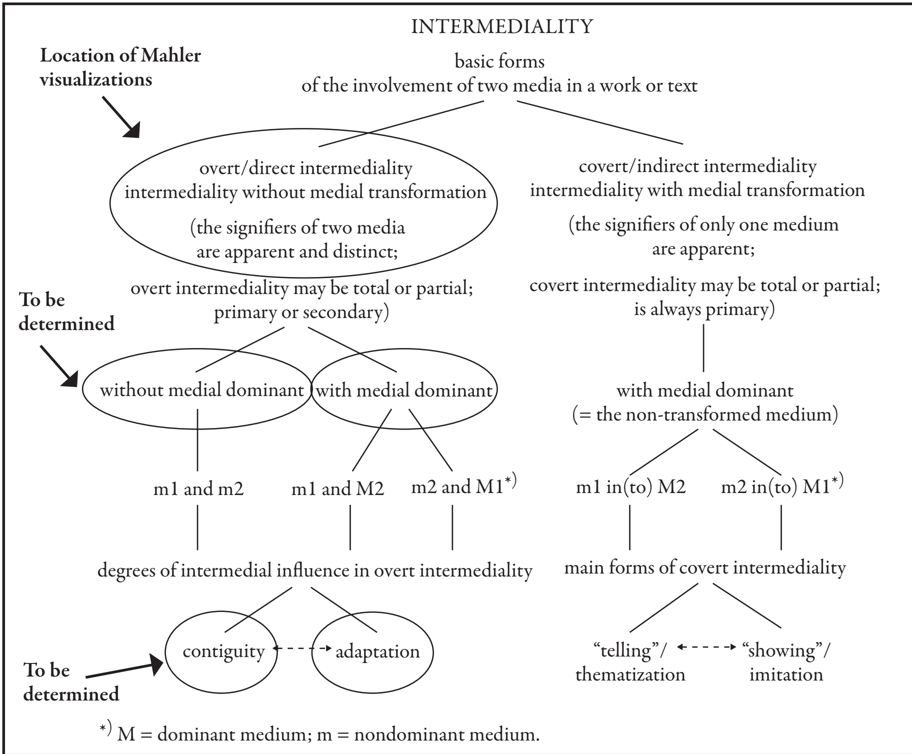

FIGURE 14.1 Location of Mahler visualisations in Werner Wolf's schema of intermediality. *Werner Wolf, The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), 50.

and protectionism. It should also be noted that, as with arguably any music (but perhaps more than most), Mahler's is already potentially intermedial since it may incorporate the visuality of live or recorded performance, not to mention the setting of texts, other references to literature and allusions to stage-based theatrical artistic models. Mahler himself was not averse to giving or receiving visually orientated descriptions and explanations of his music, or to revealing the visual inspirations for some of his music: from the "Huntsman's Funeral Procession" folk picture in relation to the First Symphony's third movement (1884–88), through the vivid apocalyptic imagery in the programme supplied for the Second Symphony (1888–94) and the "composing" of Austria's Höllengebirge in the first movement of the Third Symphony (1893–96), to the cosmic descriptions of the Eighth Symphony (1906–07) as "planets and suns revolving",[15] and the delicate shades of gold, white, green and blue scattered among the texts of *Das Lied von der Erde*. On the other hand his music crucially problematised the very categories of so-called absolute

[15] Letter of 1906 to Willem Mengelberg, in *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler*, ed. Knud Martner, trans. Eithne Wilkins, Ernst Kaiser and Bill Hopkins (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 294.

and programme music (upon which much discussion of visual music is predicated) through his decidedly ambivalent attitude to providing and revoking verbal and other nonmusical descriptions of his works at various stages of his career. Mahler clearly distinguished between nonmusical (including visual) *inspirations* for composition and any putative resultant *meaning* that might be attached to the completed work. He was also against the literalism which programmes tended to elicit from audiences and the narrow confinement of semantic scope that they sometimes enforced. In this he was not dissimilar to Schumann. But it is interesting for the purposes of this study to consider the earlier composer's oculocentric claim that "Once the eye has been led to a given point, the ear no longer judges independently",[16] as well as the following pronouncement of Wagner, one of Mahler's musical and cultural heroes, who of course devoted his creative career to a multimedia musical form (opera) eschewed by Mahler compositionally, though not in terms of his copious work as a conductor:

> Without addressing the eye, all art remains unsatisfying, and thus unsatisfied, unfree. Be its utterance to the Ear, or merely to the combining and mediately compensating faculty of Thought, as perfect as it may—until it makes intelligible appeal likewise unto the Eye, it remains a thing that merely *wills*, yet never completely *can*; but Art must *can*.[17]

It is not necessarily important to know precisely the nature of Mahler's stance towards the visual arts or their relation to music—indeed that may never be fully understood. But the historical confluence of Mahler's cultural context (and indeed the development of his symphonic output) with the emergence of moving-image media out of existing stage and theatrical genres is a point worth noting. Moreover, there is a sense in which the works under scrutiny here can be read, somewhat counterintuitively, as contemporary—perhaps postmodern—extensions of the impossible paradoxes of nineteenth-century "absolute" music. I will return to this point later, but first some examples should be discussed.

Visualisations with Music Unaltered

For many of the artists in question, visual music entails a quest (however mythical) for the transcendence and transgression of boundaries, limits, conventions, monolithic

[16] Cited in Robert Schumann, "A Symphony by Berlioz", in Hector Berlioz, *Fantastic Symphony: An Authoritative Score. Historical Background, Analysis, Views, and Comments*, ed. Edward T. Cone (New York: Norton, 1971), 248.

[17] Richard Wagner, "The Artwork of the Future", in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, vol. 1 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892; repr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 100.

frameworks and the human sensory and perceptual apparatus. Taking his cue from the earliest practitioners of visual music who often rooted their intermedial experiments in a severely structuralist hypersynchronising of music or sound with image, Slovenian video artist Božidar Svetek relates himself to everyone from Plato to Messiaen, and rhapsodises poetically about his attempt to render the invisible visible and to access a state beyond consciousness:

> It is difficult to explain, let alone assert with certainty what actually happens with the physical impulse of sound—listening to music, as [a] time-defined psychoactive substance, affecting our senses. No doubt, such confrontations with the abstract, rhythmic and harmonic contents are strictly subjective. . . . Through . . . projection . . . the image of music literally opens up to the listener and invites them to its inner world. . . . moving contents of tones, expressed in colour with dynamic radiation, in [an] extended field of aesthetics, unburden now also [the] active spectator of the unimportant . . . presence and gravity of the material world.[18]

In 2004 he completed a visualisation of the first movement of Mahler's Sixth Symphony using images entirely hand-drawn on a computer screen, with no automatic generation through software, but based on his own colour spectrum of musical instrument sonorities.[19] The images (subtly conceived hues of mostly green and yellow comprising varyingly dense and bright areas of dots, occasionally crossed by parallel lines, all of which retains a sense of artistry distinct from the "perfect" lines of software-produced work) is mechanically synchronised with the regular tread, texture and dynamic volume of Mahler's strongly rhythmic, march-like music (see Figure 14.2).

As with many of the examples tying image so closely to musical pulse and metre, this would seem at least partially to fall foul of Moritz's proscriptions against facile " 'beat"-oriented visual work. Indeed the copious computer-generated output of the "lied lab 2011 gustav mahler festival" offers similar visual responses to Mahler's (inherently inter- or multimedial) songs (in *Das Knaben Wunderhorn*): ranging from childlike figurative stylisations ("Der Tamboursg'sell" [1901], visuals by LWZ), to entirely abstract reflections, mostly sharing techniques of visual synchronisation to musical event—though some much less obviously than others—usually matching the rhythms and shapes of phrases, moment to moment, with some larger-scale alignment with changes of mood, such as the contrast, in "Verlor'ne Müh" (1892), of soft, round versus hard, rectangular shapes to reflect (in somewhat culturally antediluvian fashion) the "feminine" character's attempt coquettishly to distract the dutiful boy from his labours (visuals by LWZ;

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[18] Božidar Svetek, "Optical Image of Music", *Interakt*, May 2006, accessed 6 September 2016, https://www.si21.com/interakt/.

[19] Svetek's colour spectrum is available to view at https://www.si21.com/interakt/, accessed 7 September 2016. See note 3 above for part of the performance.

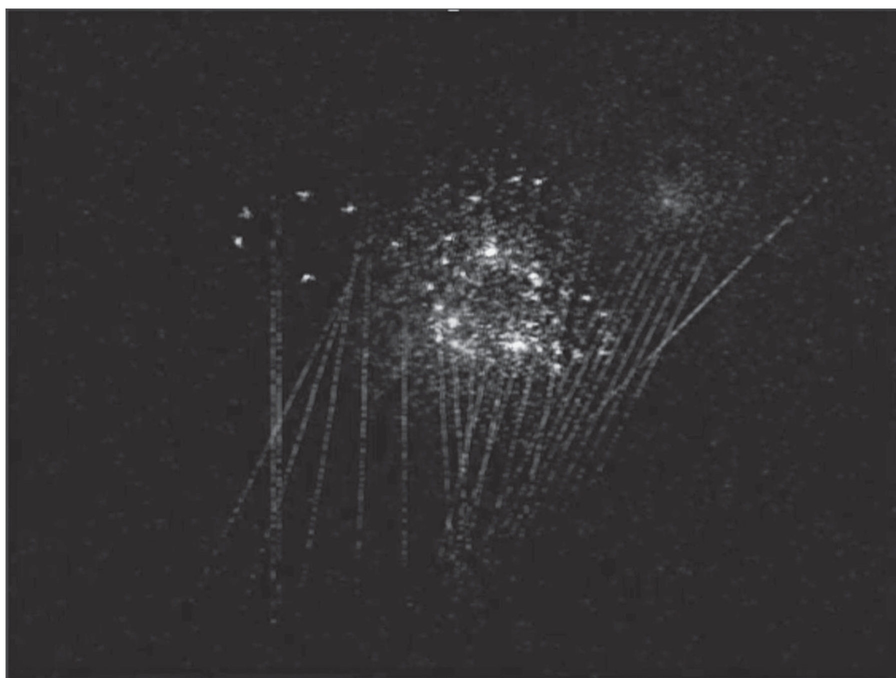

FIGURE 14.2 Still from Božidar Svetek's visualisation (1996–2004) of Mahler's Symphony no. 6, first movement.

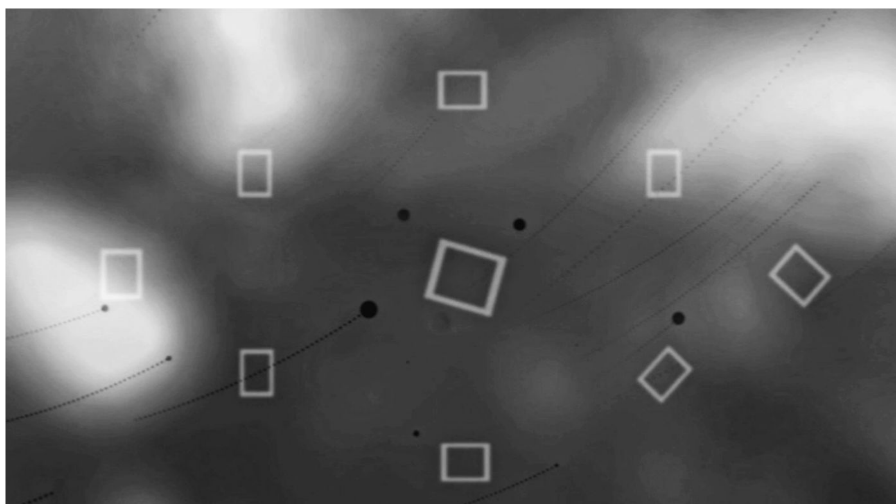

FIGURE 14.3 Still from visualisation by LWZ (2011) of Mahler's song "Verlor'ne Müh".

see Figure 14.3); the angular, stylised eye-like shapes of "Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder" (from *Rückert-Lieder*, 1901) (visuals by LIA; see Figure 14.4); the more vigorous spatial expansion of the overlapped curved-line design in "Von der Schönheit" (from *Das Lied von der Erde*, 1908–09) when in the song's text the handsome lads canter past

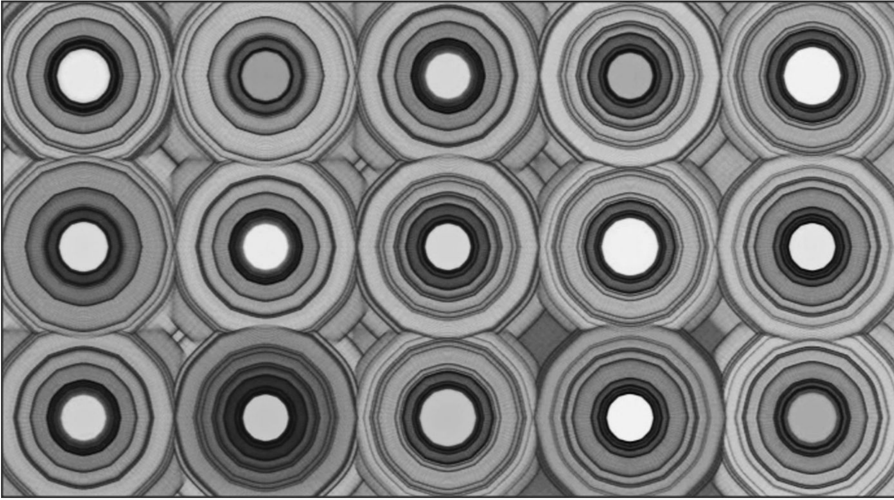

FIGURE 14.4 Still from visualisation by LIA (2011) of Mahler's song "Blicke mir nicht in die Lieder".

the riverbank on horseback at a moment of rhythmically militaristic musical outburst (visuals by LIA); or the slowly metamorphosing rectangular shapes for the intensely meditative, slow-paced "Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen" (*Rückert-Lieder*, 1901) (visuals by LIA).

By far the most ambitious project of this type came outside the anniversary contexts in the form of Johannes Deutsch's monumental visual interpretation of the Second Symphony—one of the most theatrical and scenic of Mahler's symphonies, which combines purely instrumental with texted movements. First performed at the Philharmonie in Cologne in 2006, employing a 50 metre screen, 3D imaging via a complex array of cameras and projectors, and real-time interaction between unpredictable nuances in the music and responses in the visuals, the work is described by Deutsch as follows (see Figure 14.5):

> Eighteen three-dimensional objects constitute a virtual domain that depicts the universe of the Second Symphony on an abstract level. Analogously to the music, the objects . . . undergo a process of transformation that Mahler lets us experience auditorially in five movements. . . . The visuals are generated live and interact with the music that drives the virtual objects like a pacemaker. In this way, the visualization reflects the oscillating, almost excessive depiction of dramatic and lyrical components of the music—to a point that is tantamount to transference into the realm of the terpsichorean or the religious.[20]

[20] Johannes Deutsch, "Johannes Deutsch and the Ars Electronica Futurelab Vision Mahler: The Concept of Interactive Music Visualisation Inspired by the 'Resurrection Symphony'", in booklet notes to *Vision Mahler* (WDR mediagroup/Arthaus Musik 101 421, 2006), DVD, 8, 9. See note 3 above for part of the performance.

FIGURE 14.5 Still from Johannes Deutsch, "Vision Mahler" (2006): visualisation of Mahler's Symphony no. 2, first movement (live performance).

Despite the grandiose objectives in line with the apocalyptic nature of the music, the added value of three-dimensional projection during live performance with a certain degree of real-time interactivity at the software's disposal, and the sheer scale of the images involved, this project nevertheless remains largely wedded to the same aesthetic of close synchronisation of image to Mahler's music begun by Svetek ten years earlier. It is interesting in this regard that, fifty years apart, arch-modernist Adorno and "postcontemporary" VJ artist Laurent Carlier express very similar misgivings about the potential limitations of such syncretic approaches:

> The moment one art imitates another, it becomes more distant from it by repudiating the constraint of its own material, and falls into syncretism, in the vague notion of an undialectical continuum of arts in general. . . . The arts converge only where each pursues its immanent principle in a pure way.[21]
>
> synesthetic art has come to a dead-end, there can be no more "visual music" or any other hallucinatory fusion of the senses, which is nothing but a marketing ploy, a meaningless line. The notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* . . . is just as vulgar and dangerous as any other populist ideology, such as the myths of interactivity and other immersive/absorbing/homogenizing environments.[22]

[21] Theodor Adorno, "On Some Relationships between Music and Painting", trans. Susan Gillespie, *Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (1995): 67. (Originally published as "Über einige Relationen zwischen Musik und Malerei", in *Pour Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* [Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1965]).

[22] Carlier, "VJing between Image and Sound", 163.

Adorno, of course, generally advocated an aesthetic of counterpoint in his writings on film music,[23] and Carlier's promotion of VJing as a "postaesthetic practice", characterised by "live ephemeral fluxes, whether shared or not", and based on "[e]xperimental processes [that] cannot be consumed or assimilated",[24] newly introduces a significant level of unstable performativity into the understanding of such intermedial artistic practice. This leads us to consider approaches of the latter kind that have been adopted in relation to the music of Mahler.

Live Visualisations with Music Adapted

The second principal category—of visualisations built on adaptations (usually sampling) of Mahler's music in either a collage-like or a so-called ambient mode—is more sparsely populated, probably because such practices emerge more often from the popular-music contexts of remix culture, and simply lie at a further remove from the classical world. Danish musician and producer Henrik Marstal began experimenting in 2011 with what he called "The Ambient Mahler Remixes", working improvisationally (and in artistic "confrontation") with singer Hannah Schneider, Danish VJ Dark Matters and eventually also with the Copenhagen Philharmonic Orchestra:

> The concept was to make a kind of battle between me and Hannah on the one side and the orchestra on the other. We did elaborations of movements from various Mahler symphonies at the length of 5–10 minutes, and the orchestra played excerpts from the movements at the same length (for instance the exposition part of the first movement of the sixth symphony and the final part of the last movement of the third symphony). We then performed the music as a kind of battle: first the orchestra, then us, then the orchestra, then us and so on—and in the final part of the concert we did a collaboration. The transitions between the two musical entities proved to be some of the most interesting parts, people said afterwards.[25]

In a DIY approach to listening, selecting and the sampling of preferred Mahler excerpts (principally 78 rpm, or at least very early, recordings of symphonies 1, 4, 5 and 9, as well as 3 and 6) from which he "created new pieces by looping and stretching the samples", and with which he combined sounds performed on electric guitar, noise boxes and effects pedals, Marstal—an artist and producer with a working knowledge of Mahler's music (at least from a sonic perspective) and with high levels of technological ability—thus worked freely to explore interfaces between reprocessed excerpts, his own compositional

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[23] See Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone, 1994), esp. 120–33. (First published Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947.)

[24] Carlier, "Vjing between Image and Sound", 163, 168.

[25] Henrik Marstal in email correspondence with the author, 14 June 2016.

or recompositional method and imagery created by his collaborative VJ. In the resulting performance, we can hear the Mahler excerpts and samples emerge, fade and blend through periods of transition from and to surrounding beds of ambient texture, in a merging of live and electronically produced music and sound, and accompanied by mood-matching, shimmering, flickering, morphing and enveloping light displays.[26]

Austrian sound artist, avant-garde electronic composer and guitarist Fennesz and Berlin-based video artist Lillevan teamed up as part of the 2011 lied lab festival to create a more profoundly and fully digitally manipulated seventy-minute soundscape, which takes the experimental ambient sampling technique to a comparative extreme. This embeds mostly submerged, but occasionally protruding, samples of attenuated, stretched and thinned out Mahler, much less discernible within the continuous electronic ambient texture. The visuals comprise a blue-grey stream of water-related images—rain, ripples, cascades, seascapes (see Figure 14.6). Fennesz described aspects of the sonic process:

> It was really hard to work with music that was already perfect. . . . I have the utmost respect for this composer. . . . Mahler was a precursor of modernity, and yet he was deeply rooted in late Romanticism. I have absolutely no intention to compare myself with Mahler but there is the same sort of tension in my music. Melancholic pop music

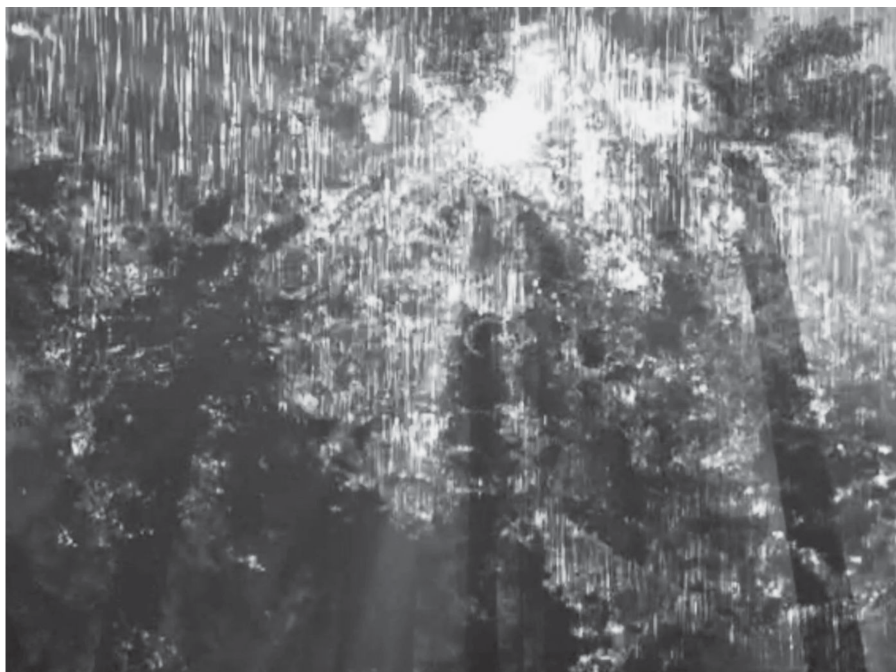

FIGURE 14.6 Still from Fennesz and Lillevan's "Mahler Remix" (2011); near beginning, music sampled from Mahler's Symphony no. 9, first movement.

[26] See note 3 above for part of the performance.

> on the one hand and the experimental, electronic element on the other hand . . . I consider it particularly exciting to move between different styles. And I wanted . . . to build a sort of meta-level of Mahler samples and other material . . . thus letting Mahler's spirit become tangible. Both sides of Mahler, actually, classical harmony and avant-garde.[27]

Lillevan emphasised the nonnarrative and improvisatory character of the performance's audiovisual interrelationships:

> I don't think that I have to illustrate something. Pure texture and light intensity, that's what works with Fennesz. There will be no figurative or narrative elements in this project. [On the live performances] I make live collages on the stage using 300 to 500 visual samples. I produced these clips beforehand in my studio while listening to Mahler's music. . . . Until shortly before the meeting with Fennesz I had not prepared anything . . . so I can get into a project spontaneously.[28]

The performance (which was met with highly polarised reviews[29]) makes use principally of samples deriving from Symphony no. 9, *Das Lied von der Erde* (notably passages that are already temporally extended and long-sustained, as well as protracted harmonic progressions that lead slowly towards major-mode resolution) and the contrasting, more rapid scalic figuration from the Scherzo of Symphony no. 7 (1904–05).

Conclusion in the Form of Questions

What are we to make of these various products of the intermedial impulse, that engage highly illustrative, philosophically orientated and dramatically evocative music by a composer working at a particularly precarious cusp in cultural and artistic history? The challenge of understanding how to interpret or approach this output first invokes a series of subsidiary questions:

(1) Do Mahler's music and the visuals add or reveal any quality to/in each other which each does not have in isolation? Do the two (or more) media become transformed by the other(s) in some way?

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[27] Fennesz, quoted in the booklet notes to *Gustav Mahler Lied Collector's Edition*, departure lab (2011), DVD, 92.

[28] Ibid., 94.

[29] Fennesz's and Lillevan's work was reviewed positively by Tav Falco and Gina Lee Falco, "Gustav Mahler: Remix", *Vienna Review*, 1 May 2011, accessed 7 September 2016, http://www.viennareview.net/on-the-town/on-music/gustav-mahler-remix; and extremely negatively by Martin Bernheimer, "Mahler Remixed, Zankel Hall, New York: Review", *Financial Times*, 10 March 2014, accessed 7 September 2016, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/90fb1a88-a83e-11e3-8ce1-00144feab7de.html?siteedition=uk. See note 3 above for part of the performance.

TABLE 14.1

Table of disciplinarities

Multidisciplinarity	Interdisciplinarity	Transdisciplinarity
Juxtaposing	Integrating	Transcending
Sequencing	Interacting	Transgressing
Coordinating	Linking	Transforming
	Focusing	
	Blending	

Julie Thompson Klein, "A Taxonomy of Interdisciplinarity", in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Julie Thompson Klein and Carl Mitcham (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16; cited in Simon Shaw-Miller, *Eye hEar: The Visual in Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 3.

(2) Is there anything specific about Mahler's music that lends itself to visual treatment? (Some of these artists have produced visualisations of other composers' music as well.)
(3) Does the audiovisual combination result in some new kind of media, a plurimedial product, or hypereloquent form of "absolute film"? Or are the combinations fatally weakened by crass forms of synchronisations, and a cross-media superfluity?
(4) Are these phenomena, according to the recent categorisation of Mats Arvidson, examples of: grouping, cooperation, juxtaposition, fusion, transformation, translation, cross-medial intertextuality?[30] Where might they be they located in the framework proposed by Julie Klein Thompson, in which, from the left to the right of the diagram, modes of intermediality shift from "complementing" towards "hybridising" and from "partial integration" towards "full integration" (see Table 14.1):

Or in Werner Wolf's more complex tabulation of intermediality, adapted in Figures 14.7 and 14.8, which respectively try to elucidate:

(1) (from left to right in Figure 14.7) the sharing of structural characteristics among different media ("transmediality"); the transformation of one medium (or more) into a different singular or composite medium ("intermedial transposition"); types of reference made in one medium to a different medium ("intermedial reference"); and the actual combining of two or more media ("plurimediality")

[30] See Mats Arvidson, "Music and Musicology in the Light of Intermediality and Intermedial Studies", *Svensk tidskrift för musikforskning / Swedish Journal of Music Research*, *STM-Online* 15 (2012), accessed 7 September 2016, http://musikforskning.se/stmonline/vol_15/arvidson/index.php?menu=3.

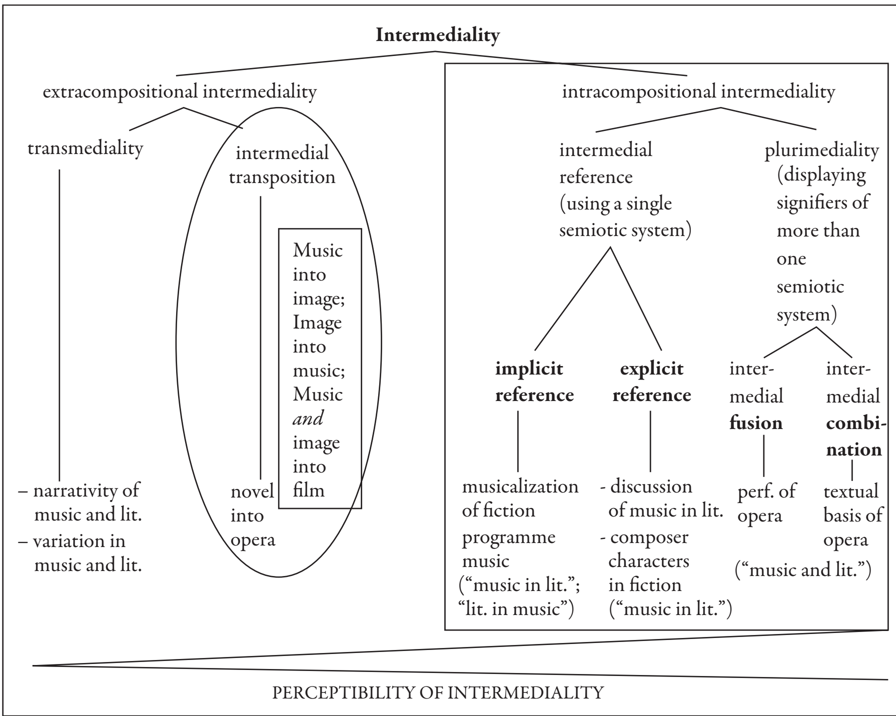

FIGURE 14.7 Werner Wolf's schema of intermediality. System of intermedial relations (adapted: circle and rectangle on the left-hand side indicate possible configuration and location of some of the output discussed above).
Werner Wolf, "Intermediality Revisited: Reflections on Word and Music Relations in the Context of a General Typology of Intermediality", in *Word and Music Studies: Essays in Honor of Steven Paul Scher and on Cultural Identity and the Musical Stage*, ed. Suzanne M. Lodato, Suzanne Aspden and Walter Bernhart (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 28.

(2) how the right-hand side of Wolf's diagram (Figure 14.8) might be adapted to cater for the modes and degrees of plurimedial integration of music/sound and image in film.

Such attempts at rigid categorisation are all very well, and they can certainly offer some clarification of complex interactions. But they tend to be rooted in the operation of a structuralist mindset within the arena of creative phenomena which are far more malleable, recalcitrant and ephemeral, as well as inconsistently beyond the firm grasp of logical frameworks. Indeed it is in the nature of such experimental repertoires as those discussed here and in the previous chapters of this book, that they in turn challenge and complicate aesthetic boundaries and cultural expectations. If, to pursue the argument that pertains in my case, the synaesthetic has finally been revealed as a redundant category, an unattainable fantasy in a postuniversalising world, and the absolute music category has possibly been terminally discredited, what are we to make of Simon Shaw-Miller's

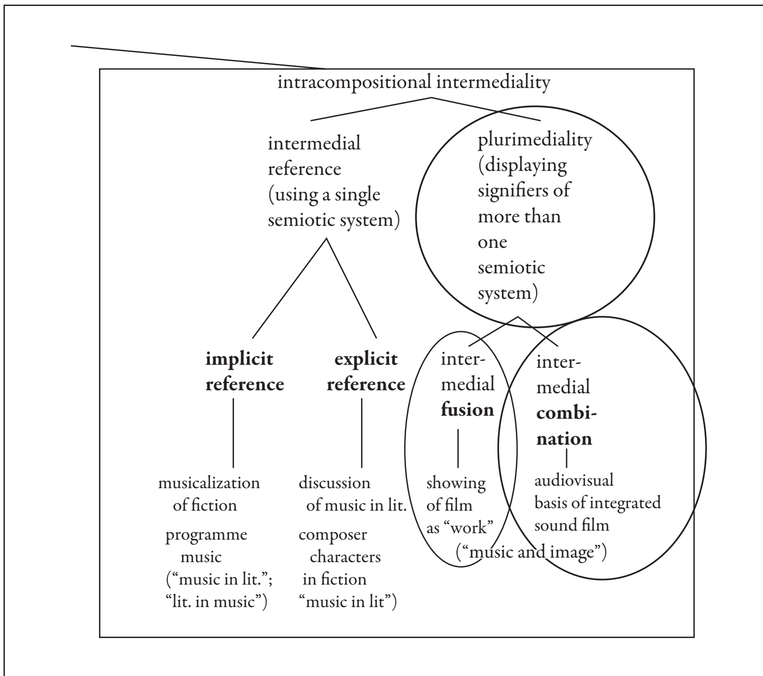

FIGURE 14.8 Werner Wolf's schema of intermediality. System of intermedial relations (adapted): detail of the right-hand side of Wolf's diagram (circles indicate more generally applicable location and description of output discussed above).

recent suggestions that even just the music/sound of creative works such as those discussed above can be described in synaesthetic terms, impelled by music's inherently discursive practice as a "complex of activities and ideas, a network of cultural practices",[31] as a post-Enlightenment revitalising of a marginalised hybridity, whose roots paradoxically lie in the early romantic preoccupation with absolute music? For Shaw-Miller, in understanding the newly minted qualities of "unfathomable" instrumental music, nineteenth-century philosopher-critics such as E. T. A. Hoffmann and Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, for example, "reconnect[ed] music to the discourses of the other arts and develop[ed] a strong and distinctive synaesthetic methodology" built on metaphor.[32] Paradoxically, the "condition . . . of absolute music" remains, for Shaw-Miller, to "sever its connections to other arts and senses, to close its eyes to all but sound", only for it to provide instead "a rich site for all types of imagery and the liberation of the inner eye."[33] This was the aesthetic quandary that Mahler's culturally and historically loaded music, of itself, embodied and struggled with so richly and ambiguously. But can one legitimately avail oneself of the concept of "absolute music" and effectively deny it in the same

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[31] Simon Shaw-Miller, *Eye hEar: The Visual in Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), xiii.

[32] Ibid., 32.

[33] Ibid., 39.

breath? If, as Shaw-Miller recounts, music allowed early nineteenth-century composer and teacher Carl Zelter to "see the invisible"[34]—in a strikingly similar way to that claimed by audiovisual artist Svetek cited above—does this not in the first place invalidate the idea of a non(externally) referential, form-/material-centric category of "absolute music"? Or do metaphor and recourse to the metaphysical have the power and validity to override all such arguments? Do the examples of putative "visual music" discussed here reveal something of that "invisible"; do they render it accessible in ways that the music alone is unable to achieve? If Shaw-Miller, with regard to Heine, Schumann and Liszt, claims that "Music's fullness is in part visual; understanding is achieved by exteriorization of music, of its move from the invisible inside to the visible outside",[35] the question remains as to whether the multiple mediality of these twentieth- and twenty-first-century attempts at visual realisation of the invisible-already-becoming-visible therefore constitutes a meaningless surfeit of sensory saturation, or whether it is able to self-reflect metaphorically and reciprocally between constituent parts (that may be in varying states of flux in their degrees of mutual blending, separation, dominance or subordination), in order to disclose a higher, deeper, or more perceptually enlightening form of creative knowledge and experience. Metaphorical operations applied to the contexts of music, visual music, absolute film, intermedial audiovisual works or latter-day improvisatory VJing, might be considered an all-too-convenient cover story for a relativistic semantic void. Viewed from a different perspective, however, some of these musical, visual, sound-art and mixed-media artists' search for transcendence and transgression picks up, with differing degrees of persuasiveness, on a Hoffmannesque search for the infinite, or ways of articulating it, "as a way of sharing levels of consciousness and perception that produce transforming experiences."[36] Confronted by so many questions, and given the contemporary world's overabundant technological opportunities for media fragmentation, conflation and realisation (predicted by experimental audiovisual animator John Whitney in 1990 to be a "major fine arts development of the twenty-first century, if not sooner"[37]), in comparison with the nineteenth century's greater reliance on the organic inner eye of the imagination, we will somehow have to decide, faced with this intermedial repertoire, more or less whether or not less is more.[38]

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[34] Ibid., 39

[35] Ibid., 42.

[36] Carlier, "Vjing between Image and Sound", 168.

[37] John Whitney, "On Music's Changing Relation to Visual Art", *Computer Music Journal* 14, no. 3 (1990): 11.

[38] For a valuable aesthetic and technological discussion of this question, see Roger B. Dannenberg, "Interactive Visual Music: A Personal Perspective", *Computer Music Journal* 29, no. 4 ("Visual Music") (2005): 25–35.

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