FILM, A SOUND ART

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To Walter Murch,
with admiration and gratitude

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Preface to the English Edition

I AM SO VERY GRATEFUL TO Columbia University Press for their willingness to provide readers in many countries access to a work I consider my definitive book on film as an art of sound, a subject that has occupied me for more than thirty years.

For a scholar, being read in languages other than your own means much more than having the opportunity to spread your ideas far and wide. It's an opportunity to think again on what you have written, as you encounter its reflection in the mirror of a different language; you have the luxury of seeing how rigorously you have managed to formulate your arguments—especially if you have the collaboration of a translator who is as able and exacting as is Claudia Gorbman, whose knowledge of film sound is evident in her own work, which includes the remarkable *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (1987). I have been told that, at least for many readers, it was her sensitive translation of my first book, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, that accounted for its favorable reception in Anglophone countries, and the same goes for *The Voice in Cinema*.

What further does *Film, a Sound Art* bring to my earlier books? As the glossary testifies, the present work contributes much that is new, even though it consists in part of a reprise of previous writings either unpublished in French or no longer available (the latter is the case for *Le Son au cinéma* and *La Toile trouée: La Parole au cinéma*).

Let me retrace the genesis of the present volume.

When I began writing about film sound in 1978, few works existed on the subject aside from a small number of articles that analyzed particular films. Video did not become widely available until the late 1970s, so before that, it was no simple matter to study a film in detail. Among French writers, Raymond Bellour had done superb analyses of Hitchcock sequences to which he had access on 16 millimeter, focusing squarely on the image. Michel Marie,

Claude Bailblé, and Marie-Claire Ropars collectively wrote a magnificent book-length audiovisual analysis of Alain Resnais's *Muriel*. Christian Metz made invaluable observations, and Pascal Bonitzer had begun his sustained reflection on the question of the voice.[1] In the United States, Elisabeth Weis and John Belton's anthology *Film Sound* had not yet appeared. At that time, in the 1970s, I was a cinephile, but I had no idea that I would eventually end up writing about film. I had had various kinds of experience with sound technology, mainly through working in radio: I knew sound recording, mixing, and editing and methods of generating sounds. I had studied composition and piano, and I was doing (and still practice) *musique concrète*, about which I had written several books. I had also made a short sound film. All this served me well when I began to teach film sound.

It was thanks to Pierre Schaeffer that my teaching career began. He was the inventor of *musique concrète* but also a formidable theoretician of sound. Schaeffer had been offered a teaching position at IDHEC (Institut des hautes études cinématographiques), the French national film school, but he turned it down and recommended me for the job instead. This was in 1980, coinciding with the beginning of the VCR era. With the film students I used video to repeatedly and painstakingly audio-view such films as Lang's *Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, Hitchcock's *Psycho*, and Bresson's *A Man Escaped*. These three films became the point of departure for my theorizing, although, of course, my work later opened up to embrace the widest possible range of films. From the start, my method was to observe, and in teaching I seek to train students in observation. I always consider a film as a sensory text, an *audio-logo-visual* text. The paradox of cinema studies in France is that with video and DVDs we have far more practical means than ever before to study audiovisual relations using specific examples to examine with precision, yet many consider it beneath them to have hands-on contact with real films and continue instead to discuss them in generalizations.

I also created experimental assemblages of sounds and images in order to test the ideas I was developing. And I read many books and articles, in French and also in other languages I can understand but not speak well. I interviewed numerous professionals and directors, and of course audio-viewed thousands of films. No idea appears in these pages that has not been examined with respect to a great number of examples.

My teaching of the last twenty-five years, especially at the University of Paris III and at a private school, ESEC (École Supérieure Libre d'Etudes Cinématographiques), has also been helpful in the development of this book. I try out my observations and hypotheses on students, and I benefit from their reactions and their ideas.

Several people have asked me if I have changed positions taken in my earlier works since I have been teaching about audio-visual relations. Let me say here that I remain firm in holding to certain core ideas, because it took a considerable maturing process to develop them. They are not an "opinion" I stake out as a way of standing out from the crowd but the result of a long process of elaboration.

1. *There is no soundtrack.* Although this formulation appears purely negative, it has numerous consequences. I've not been content to state it just once; rather, I reprise it and demonstrate it anew in each of my books.

2. The fact that there is no soundtrack means you cannot study a film's sound independently of the image—nor, consequently, can you do the contrary: you cannot study a film's "image" by itself. On this point, I believe, my negative dictum meets the greatest resistance among my French colleagues.

3. The history of sound in film is not a "heroic" one forged solely by a few creators in isolation (it's always the same directors that are invoked, including ones I have written about: Tati, Malick, Lynch, Kubrick, Welles, Duras). Film sound's history is collective and must be studied through the examination of many cases.

   In many countries, including the United States, my approach meets no resistance. In France, however, it encounters a rather narrow conception of the filmmaker as an all-powerful creator.

4. Contrary to what is traditionally claimed, audiovisual relations have long been richly explored and refined by the sound film from its earliest period; sound is not the "poor relation" of film practice. You simply have to observe films to see this.

5. Cinema must be considered as an art of the simulacrum: an art in which sounds and images do not only seek to translate the strictly *audiovisual* world but all sorts of sensations as well. Hence the importance, in my work, of the notion of the *rendered* and the idea of the *trans-sensory* (see the glossary).

Alongside these principles, which I put forth in the early 1980s, I offer some new ideas. One of the more recent notions I have developed is that sound film is a *palimpsestic art*. It emerged out of the silent cinema, which, as I state in terms that might appear poetic but are actually quite precise, "continues to bellow from behind the gag of the sound film."

I am also indebted to the work of Michel Marie and Claude Bailblé, most of which unfortunately remains unavailable in English.

I am currently in the process of writing two more books that will carry forward the present work, which is by definition never finished:

—A year-by-year *Global Chronology of Sound Film*. This was originally intended to be part of *Film, a Sound Art*, but it would have amounted to too hefty a volume. I hope to find a French publisher who will allow this project to come to fruition.

—An international inventory of terms that serve to describe, name, and classify sounds in about ten languages. This work is approaching its final stages.

Finally, I thank Jennifer Crewe and the rest of the team at Columbia University Press, and again Claudia Gorbman, who together have made it possible for English-language readers to discover this book.

Michel Chion, Paris, August 3, 2008

1. See Raymond Bellour, *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000) (originally published as *L'analyse du film* [Paris: Editions Albatros, 1979]); Claude Bailblé, Michel Marie, and Marie Claire Ropars, *Muriel, d'Alain Resnais, histoire d'une recherche* (Paris: Galilée, 1974); Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Pascal Bonitzer, *Le Regard et la voix* (Paris: UGE, 1976); and Elisabeth Weis and John Belton, eds., *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

Translator's Note

MY CHILDHOOD FRIEND Suzanne Jill Levine taught me long ago that the act of translating is a supreme act of reading. Since then, reading Michel Chion has provided countless riches. It has allowed me to enjoy a front-row seat to Michel's intellectual creativity, clarity, and breadth. Much better still, after fifteen years, is our very special friendship that has developed, born of his graciousness in addressing my every question and the generosity he and Anne-Marie have shown us in Paris.

It is a pleasure to bring *Film, a Sound Art* to life in English for readers who appreciate that film is not merely a visual art and that audio-viewing is the way we "watch" films. I am indebted to C. Jon Delogu, whose earlier translation of this work I thoroughly revised in collaboration with Michel. I also thank Pam Keeley for her bottomless well of support.

Claudia Gorbman

CHAPTER 1

When Film Was Deaf (1895–1927)

THINGS MOVING WITHOUT NOISE

SEA AND SURF, leafy boughs waving in the wind, an insect crawling by—these were among the things one could see moving in the first "movies" behind the animated gestures of the actors. Such inadvertent contributions of nature were part of what enchanted the public in the early days of the cinematograph. The public knew the actors had been hired to play their parts and that the locomotive was awaited by the camera. But that the sea, the leaves, the butterflies, and all manner of large and small things not part of the cast, not intentionally staged or framed, nevertheless participated in the image's movement—this was a striking thing. The image was therefore not hierarchical; it bespoke the democracy of movement, in which everything that moves is cinema.

In addition to this astonishment, well documented, was a second surprise both more obvious and more secret: these things were moving *without making any sound*. Of course there was nothing surprising about photographs being silent, since these were understood to be images frozen in time. But for an event living in time to take place in total silence was more disconcerting. The origin of film music has even been explained as deriving from a need to fill this lack with auditory movement to go along with the visual movement. Subsequently, film music has tended to function as the sound of that which moves without sound: emotions, cigarette smoke, gestures, and so forth.

Hence the expression "deaf cinema" that I put forward some years ago as a better name for "silent cinema": there were words and noises, but they could not be heard.[1]

When Marcel Proust imagines in 1920 the perception of the "totally deaf" person, he does not refer explicitly to the cinematograph, but he does evoke

the sensations that could be experienced at that time in the presence of the silent-film screen:

> It is with ecstasy that he walks now upon the earth grown almost an Eden, in which sound has not yet been created. The highest waterfalls unfold for his eyes alone their ribbons of crystal, stiller than the glassy sea, like the cascades of Paradise. . . . And, as upon the stage, the building on which the deaf man looks from his window—be it barracks, church, or town hall—is only so much scenery. If one day it should fall to the ground, it may emit a cloud of dust and leave visible ruins; but, less material even than a palace on the stage, though it has not the same exiguity, it will subside in the magic universe without letting the fall of its heavy blocks of stone tarnish, with anything so vulgar as sound, the chastity of the prevailing silence.[2]

SUGGESTING SOUND WITH IMAGES

Isabelle Raynauld has noted that as early as Méliès there were already many allusions in cinema to sound and music.[3] The characters in deaf cinema were speaking, sometimes even more than they would speak in a sound film, since they had to make visible the activity of speaking. For modern spectators all the gesticulating in the earliest fiction films (between 1910 and 1915) has no other purpose. The idea was not so much to translate through coded, mimed gestures the content of what was being said—since that could be achieved with a storyteller present in the theater or, later, with intertitles inserted into the film; it was rather to show with the whole body that one was speaking. In sound film one would become able to shoot someone from behind (as Fellini likes to do and, following his example, many Russian directors),[4] and all one would need is a voice to establish the idea of an internal voice, thus making the voice into a "sensory phantom."[5]

In one of the first narrative films, also often called the first western, Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), shots are fired, and the detonations are represented visually by the smoke coming out of the guns. The smoke

represents not just the noise but the action itself: how else could we know the weapon had been fired?

The paradox and charm of deaf cinema resides in the importance it accorded fairly early on to aural phenomena. It could render a continuous sound (such as an insistent alarm, church bells ringing, or a machine operating) by means of a short refrain-shot that would be repeated every fifteen or twenty seconds, alternating with images of those who are hearing it.

The *suggestion of sound* was in the air at the time: it plays an important role in poetry, fiction, even painting, and especially in the music of the early twentieth century. In the work of Debussy, Manuel de Falla, and Ravel the sound of an instrument often replaces a noise. An instrument sometimes even evokes (not imitates) the sound of another instrument. This tinselly string of high piano notes is water, those shivering strings are the wind, this nakedly spare theme played with the right hand is a shepherd's flute, and so forth. In the silent cinema, instead of sound for sound, spectators were given an image for a sound: the image of a bell suggests the sound of a bell, just as Debussy can make a particular theme on the piano suggest the song of a horn.

In Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925) a sequence of a workers' revolt is structured visually by means of insistently repeated closeups of the factory siren going off. The recurring shot has a double function. First, it's a reminder that the noise is constant (because the challenge is to make us understand that the sound is continuous through the scene, not just when we see the images of its source—hence the use in certain films of superimpositions). And second, by becoming a visual refrain, the image of this sound source confers unity on an otherwise chaotic and stormy sequence.

Such refrain-shots that evoke a constant sound become charged with a formal and rhythmic meaning independent of what they actually represent, and they therefore depart from their immediate narrative reference—something that the sound film would have much more difficulty achieving with real sound.

In other words, this shot, once it has delivered its content, is freed from its figurative function and becomes an element of montage. Filmmakers began to write and shoot scenes that included an active sound source as a pretext for having this kind of refrain-image around which to organize the sequence. Similarly, the construction of certain screenplays (detective films, action films, and so forth) calls for certain rhythms and editing effects to produce specific pleasures that supplement the story without overwhelming it.

Note that a scene's refrain-image need not have anything to do with sound. In Jacques Feyder's *Thérèse Raquin* (1928) the image of a lamplighter serves as a visual leitmotif, as do the images of train wheels in Abel Gance's *La Roue*

(1923). As a result, the sound-evoking image used as a refrain-shot in a sequence could resonate with other refrain-images having to do with light, speed, or something else. By the same token, the visual effect that evokes sound, such as the plume of smoke from a pistol, also evokes, translates, or "renders" the suddenness, energy, and violence of a shot being fired. The same would hold true for the real sounds of talking pictures—caught between the rendered and the reproduced and functioning as rhythmic punctuation as much as they functioned realistically.

In silent film all movement, such as the shimmering water behind Janet Gaynor in the rowboat in Murnau's *Sunrise* (1927), is automatically suggestive of sound: there is a continuity between the (noisy) whistle of the steam locomotive and the (silent) smoke of a cigarette. Sound film necessarily raised the following question: must one give a sound to that which is mute? The use of nondiegetic music would be one answer.[6]

Another technique—reprised now and then in sound films such as Bergman's *The Silence* (1963), André Delvaux's *Rendez-vous ã Bray* (1971), and Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) and *Stalker* (1979)—was to show objects that would start to vibrate. We find this in Victor Sjöstrom's *The Wind* (1928) and Hitchcock's *The Lodger* (1926), for example. It's the old trick of the shaking chandelier or the carafe that sloshes: Fritz Lang makes a sort of parting gesture to the silents at the beginning of his second sound film, *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933), when bottles jiggle on a table as we hear the loud rhythmic noise of a machine.

Most often it was not considered necessary to represent the noises of the action, the sound of water, the footsteps and voices of actors, or the doors they would open and shut. Still, the spectator did not forget about those noises, for just as you could internally hear the actors' voices, you could also internally hear or imagine all sounds suggested by the film. There are automatic

associations of perceptions that are not easily undone, and the silent cinema was swarming with implied noises.

And sometimes, thanks to live sound effects, they were not understated at all but really heard.

SOUND EFFECTS IN THE SILENT ERA

"In the happy days of silent cinema, at a showing of *Les Croix de bois* (*Wooden Crosses*), there was a shabby character [who] would imitate the sound of cannons by beating a big drum below the screen. Sometimes, during the fourteenth screening of the day, he would doze off and the drum flourish would come instead at the moment the courageous returning soldier was planting a kiss on a local dame."[7]

Frédéric Dard's recollection is perhaps inaccurate when it comes to the title of the film (*Wooden Crosses*, we know, is a sound film by Raymond Bernard from 1931), but he reminds us of a fairly common practice of the silent era that some claim flourished in France during the early days of fairground cinema, namely the presence of sound-effects specialists who at appropriate moments would produce imitations of various sounds related to the action.

According to a 1930 issue of the review *Mon ciné*, the disappearance of these sound-effects men in France coincided with the First World War. They were less frequently used as the cinema slowly grew more refined, notably with the more "sublimated" evocation of noises via musical accompaniment. But this practice varied in different countries. Some movie theaters were equipped with organs that included special stops for sound effects, thus extending the imitative tradition of the organ, which existed long before cinema.

Sound effects in the movie theater could be produced not only by specialists but also by musicians or by the orchestra's percussionists. Rick Altman characterizes their "non-illusionist" spirit: "His volume precisely matching the music's, the percussionist made the sounds not of horses as they appeared on the screen, but the sound of horses, period. He was not seeking to imitate the clop of a particular horse's hooves, on a particular surface, heard from a given distance under specified conditions. Quite to the contrary, what he had to do was create in the spectators' minds the very idea of a horse running fast."[8] Here Altman is talking about what I call *rendering*.

Sound effects as punctuation seem to have been used mostly in slapstick comedy, or for action and spectacle, but only sparingly in sentimental, romantic, or religious scenes. Here, too, evocative suggestion rather than imitation that tricks the ear was the goal. One shouldn't forget that noises made by the orchestra were common in many plays and operas.

In 1913 a catalog of noise-making instruments for movies was published that inventories an impressive number of devices developed for the theater for producing the sounds of rain, wind, animals, and all manner of sonic phenomena. Their realism and fidelity were praised, but of course no one was really fooled. As with talking cinema, it was readily admitted that the audible punches, slaps, and explosions didn't make exactly the same sounds as they would in real life.

THE FIRST STAKE: LIVE MUSIC

Music in the silent film has been the subject of numerous studies.[9] My own *La Musique au cinéma* (1995) devoted considerable attention to it, so it requires no extended exposition here. Let us simply recall that in certain cases it was possible to have no music at all.

In *Death on the Installment Plan* (1936) Louis-Ferdinand Céline recounts his childhood memories of the Robert Houdin cinema: "We sat through three shows in a row. It was . . . one hundred percent silent—no sentences, no music, no letters, just the whirring of the machine."[10]

The "whirring of the machine" is, of course, the first noise of cinema. This noise that would persist, concretely or symbolically, into the sound film is what I call the fundamental noise, in other words the sound that refers ultimately to the projection mechanism itself. Think of the rhythmic noise of an unseen machine at the beginning of Lang's *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, the roar of helicopters at the beginning of Fellini's *La Dolce vita* (1959), and helicopter blades (again) at the beginning of Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979).

The dominant mode of musical accompaniment in the silent era was the compilation, which cobbled together arrangements of popular and classical pieces according to the requirements of each scene. The original score remained an exception. Even those rare films that did have original scoring were only presented as such in special venues and on certain occasions, but for general distribution thereafter they received the standard compilation treatment. Moreover, "original" scores often borrowed from Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Wagner, and others, as, for example, in the case of the original American screening of Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* in 1915.

In the age of sound film the practice of so-called original scoring for each and every film has not been as all-pervasive as we might think, and it has become even less so with time. Particularly in the 1950s, films began to borrow increasingly from classical repertoires, Jean-Pierre Melville's *Les Enfants terribles* (1949) being one of the first overt examples. Then in the 1960s came the incorporation of preexisting popular songs, especially with *Easy Rider* (1969).

We also find composers who don't mind quoting their own films: Max Steiner inserts into the credits sequence of Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (1942) a piece of his score from John Ford's *The Lost Patrol* (1934), and Maurice Jaubert recycles his waltz from *Hôtel du Nord* (1938) in Marcel Carné's *Quai des brumes* (1938). The very style of many original scores can be a kind of pastiche—Stravinsky, Ravel, Bartók, Prokofiev, Vivaldi, and Wagner being the most heavily imitated. The tendency to borrow from dead composers results in part from the frequent use of temp tracks: the music editor puts preexisting pieces to a scene before the movie composer's newly composed score has become available. But these borrowed pieces then begin to stick in the director's head, and either the composer is asked to write something just like it, or the temporary piece is simply incorporated directly and becomes permanent. Overall, when it comes to music, the sound film continues many silent-film practices.

In the silent era, live musical accompaniment played by flesh-and-blood musicians in the theater gave every screening, even those with modest means, the allure of a true performance[11]—a characteristic that the ritualized conventions of the sound films of the 1960s would appropriate and make their own (as we will see in chapter 7). Aside from that, the sound film quickly took on the musical practices and codes of silent-era film music, with the unique difference that the music was now recorded, linked body and soul with the film.

In sound film, music in effect became part of the film's sound and was no longer a "score." The sonority of a clarinet, the vibrato and tone of a violin, the perfection or amateurism of a musical performance (recall the spindly orchestras of the films of Fellini/Rota, the rumbas-in-the-rough in *India Song* of Marguerite Duras/Carlos d'Alessio, and the blaring fanfares of Kusturica/Bregovic) counted as much as the notes.

People who watch silent films today are often struck by the abundance of scenes featuring dancers or musicians. It was the task of the pit musicians to make this mute music audible—to transpose, translate, and stylize with whatever means were available. Only on special occasions was the image of an orchestra or group of singers faithfully matched with a live performance of the same music and songs. This happened, for example, with the spectacle film *Cabiria* (1914), Giovanni Pastrone's masterpiece. Most of the time a piano, a harmonium, or a chamber duet or trio playing beneath the screen would pass as the onscreen accordion, choir, or orchestra, thus proposing a sort of simultaneous translation, a bit like the way intertitles gave a condensed translation of inaudible dialogue. Thus, the music heard was far from being a simulacrum and was more like a transcription. Spectators did not believe they were really hearing the piano, the singers, or the orchestra shown on the screen

through the live music coming from the pit. Between the two—pit and screen—there existed a poetic distance, an irreducible gap that allowed filmgoers to continue their aural dreaming of the screen's music without ever confusing that with its stylized embodiment.

A THIRD STAKE: THE INTERTITLE AND ELASTIC SPEECH

We know from the work of Noël Burch, André Gaudreault, and Rick Altman that the first narrative films, such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903), by Edwin S. Porter, were not freestanding productions but instead relied on commentary by a live person in the movie theater. Using a text that came with the film, the live commentator—the second "stake" around which the silents grew—set the scene, told the story, sometimes acted out dialogue. Around 1910 this practice was replaced in most Western countries by the intertitle—called "subtitle" at the time—while in Japan the use of live commentators continued into the mid-1930s. The *benshi* were true stars in their own right and were considered an integral part of the show. Akira Kurosawa's older brother was a benshi and committed suicide when the arrival of sound film put him out of work, as the director recounts in his memoirs.[12]

With the authority and freedom that were his, the benshi would often improvise a sort of loosely synched live dubbing, when he endowed the characters with speech, imitating by turns their different voices, accompanied by music. (I have witnessed such a performance by a Japanese woman benshi at the Avignon summer festival, in a reconstruction organized by Christian Belaygue.) Orson Welles, Sacha Guitry, and Jean Cocteau would incorporate into their sound films the spirit of the live commentator and his creative liberty.[13] But in the West this figure was replaced early on by printed titles.

The intertitle became the third important support—after music and the live commentator—for the silent film, which was hardly "autonomous." The very fact that some films sought to forgo intertitles such as in Lupu Pick's *New Year's Eve* (1923) and Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924)—two exceptional examples of the Kammerspiel style—proves by counterexample how thoroughly routine intertitles had become as a rule.

The intertitle did not serve solely to mitigate the inability of deaf cinema to hear dialogue. As sound would do later, it took on a variety of forms and functions. In most cases, even though it was woven into the editing, it remained a foreign body, which is to say that it did not blend with the image. One can easily understand the advantage of this alien status: it provoked dreams of a purer future for the cinema.

Intertitles actually maintained the illusion that silent cinema could one day become pure by doing without them, by freeing itself from words. Words in the silent film do not get incorporated, nor can they be; they are riveted to their place as an inserted text to be read. In talkies, where words existed in a simultaneous amalgam with images, their status became more ambiguous, more erratic, contaminating the cinema itself with this ambiguity.

On one level the intertitle offers a compact version of dialogue, as a text always given to us between quotation marks and therefore marked as a citation, a novelistic excerpt. There is no attempt to hide from the spectator that what she or he is reading is often shorter than the amount of speaking she or he observes onscreen—a deficit that leaves space for the imagination. The spectator can even play at trying to lip-read before the words pronounced are offered up to be read.

Thanks to the conventions of intertitles and quotation marks, the silent film, like literature, deploys what we may call *elastic speech*: it can make characters speak a great deal within the story and summarize their utterances with a few written words, and it can pass from direct to indirect discourse. A film can latch on to a word spoken by a character and cause it to resonate, ricochet, reverberate, and take on life in the image and over time, just the way song functions in opera, but here without a song (even if the presence of live music performed in the movie theater might help create a similar effect). We are familiar with the play of repetition and size of printed words in the silent films of Eisenstein, Paul Leni, Lang, and Gance. This flexibility would go sorely missing in the early sound film. The famous experiments in subjective sound in early sound films (for example, in Hitchcock's *Blackmail* [1929]) or for spontaneous and overlapping speech (in Renoir's *La Chienne*, Duvivier's *Poil de carotte*, or Pabst's *Kameradschaft*) participated in this attempt to preserve the flexibility of elastic speech into the sound era. Despite recent developments

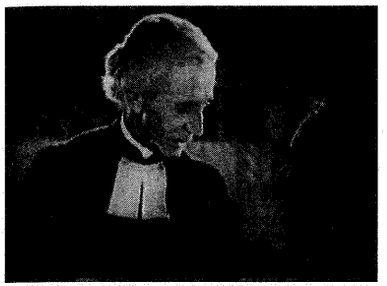
that have led to a new plasticity of time, this earlier flexibility has yet to be completely recovered.

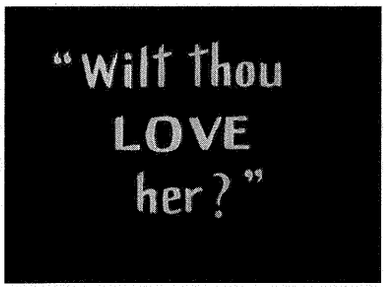
The sound film's inability to summarize and condense speech, or inversely to stretch and extend it—the impossibility of isolating or magnifying a particular word—would remain a real limitation. Some filmmakers were led to use song, not for music but to *make what is said resonate differently.* As I see it, Jacques Demy's bold strategy to have his characters in *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964) and *A Room in Town* (1982) sing in everyday language is overdetermined: what happens is not simply recreating the emotional feel of movie musicals and operetta but also using melody—which can, for example, prolong a sung word through an instrument holding the same note—to make everyday dialogue resonate in our memory and thereby take on emotional value, acting like a pedal point.

In *A Room in Town* Violette's mother tells her daughter that she's free to move out, to go get married and get on with her life. And she punctuates her declaration, singing Michel Colombier's melody, "Me, I got on with *mine.*" The word *mine* is sung on the theme's tonic note, an F that is prolonged by the strings while the mother switches off the light and goes to the kitchen with Violette. This instrumental F that extends the final F in the mother's voice endows the remark with amazing poignancy: now this woman of modest means becomes an emblem for all decent people who have lived to nurture those they have brought into this world. Thus, with an exceptional director and composer and the resources of song, sound film can from time to time, through lyrics, recapture the emblematic dimension created by intertitles in the silent film.[14]

Dialogue intertitles sometimes contain vocal cues: italics can give words an emphatic intonation; bold or larger type suggests a heightened volume and tone. They cannot, however, indicate the spatial distance at which we "hear" the words; rather, the words are presented "in the absolute."[15]

Sometimes the use of a special font or graphic format is intended not as a sign of how a particular word is pronounced but instead signals *how we should understand it.*





In Murnau's *Sunrise* the husband (played by George O'Brien) goes to the city with his wife (Janet Gaynor), whom he has tried to kill and who is attempting to run away from him. Along the way, full of remorse, he seeks to rekindle her love and confidence in him. At one point they go into a cathedral where a wedding is taking place—a poignant reminder to the couple of their own holy vows. The priest addresses the groom, speaking of the woman who will be his wife, and the intertitle transcribes his words this way: "Wilt thou LOVE her?" The capital letters of the verb *love* are not to be understood as signifying a special pronunciation; instead, they dramatize the impact of the word on O'Brien's character, whom we then see bent in shame. Achieving this impact in the sound film—which would require having the word heard selectively louder—is impossible or in any case does not exist as a readable code. Thus the capital letters are, for the spectator, equivalent to saying, "The word sank into him like a knife."

This is precisely the effect created two years later in the silent version of *Blackmail.* From out of the stream of the neighbor woman's prattle, the heroine picks out the word *knife,* the weapon of her crime, and the intertitles enlarge and isolate the word from the rest of the neighbor's chatter. Hitchcock made a valiant effort to find an equivalent in the sound version of the film, thus proving that the graphic representation of how something is heard is quite different from making that impact heard. What functions like a code for the reading eye cannot function in the same manner for the hearing ear.

Moreover, a silent film has the prerogative to evoke sound (with images, texts, or intertitles) only when it needs or wants to, whereas the sound film is obliged to have it "turned on," as it were, all the time.

Whence another important question for sound film when it arrived: how was it going to render the *discontinuity of listening,* the often dramatic variations in attention and hearing, when a particular word or noise resonates differently from those that have come before, not because of a different sound quality but because of a different meaning for the character? I will give a more complete response later, but let me say here that no code seems possible, owing

to the absence of any neutral, third-party judge of how a character hears (such as a microphone). Direct equivalences, such as turning up the volume, garbling the sound, or (often used) layering and repeating a sound, always seem rather crude or at least naïve. It would prove one of the frustrations—one of the castrations, as the psychoanalysts would say—of sound film, this inability to create a code that expresses the affective and perceptual fluctuations of our hearing.

Sound film succeeded in creating codes to translate physiological subjectivity but not psychological subjectivity. In Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946) the distorted voices heard by Alicia (Ingrid Bergman) convey the idea that she is sick, poisoned by her husband and mother-in-law, not that she is psychologically unbalanced. In as recent a film as *Panic Room* (David Fincher, 2002), subjectively distorted sound is used only sparingly to express one character's physiological ills (a girl having a diabetic reaction hears the voice of her attacker as distorted) and never to express the panic that overwhelms the two female characters being stalked.

THE INTERTITLE AND DISTANCIATION

Intertitles have several other roles besides translating speech that is pronounced and heard.

First, they give (often succinct) bits of necessary information about the action. This might be as simple as "Afternoon" or a more detailed account of the setting, characters, or events. For example, in *The Jazz Singer* (1927)—remember that it is still essentially a silent film—we read, "The New York ghetto—throbbing to that rhythm of music which is older than civilization."

At one time intertitles also identified the actor as well as the character being played. Christian Metz notes, for example, that "in Griffith's *Orphans of the Storm* (1921), each of the Gish sisters is introduced with an intertitle when she first appears: 'Henriette: Miss Dorothy Gish' for one and 'Louise: Miss Lillian Gish' for the other. There is a clear interruption of the diegesis. . . . This information that is given about the film, and which interrupts the film, is intended exclusively for the spectator."[16]

Second, intertitles conjure up a "narrator" whose detachment may allow for ironic commentary on the action.

The narrating agency that speaks through the intertitles is, in fact, not always anonymous, impersonal, and discreet. Some silent film narrators do not hesitate to remind us of their existence; there are two particularly distinct types of personalized narrator. On one hand, as with the Japanese benshi, the authors of intertitles were sometimes given star billing in the credits (as would

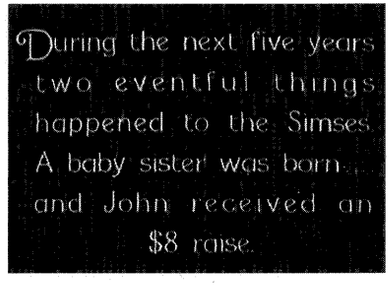
happen with dialogue writers in the sound film in France). Thus in the credits of some American silent films from the 1920s, we might read, "Titles by Ralph Spence."

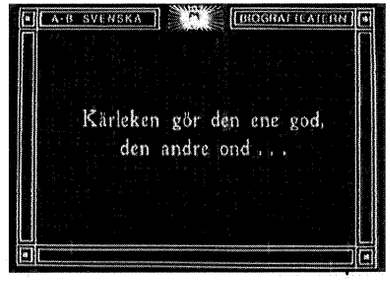
The cinema had a certain advantage in naming the author of the intertitles, as distinct from the author of the film, in the credits. If the intertitles were mediocre, their weakness wouldn't spoil the "purity" of the film. In a 1923 article René Clair defends DeMille's *The Cheat* (1915): he acknowledges the weaknesses of the intertitles but exonerates the work, much as today we might regret the poor dubbing of a good foreign film.[17]

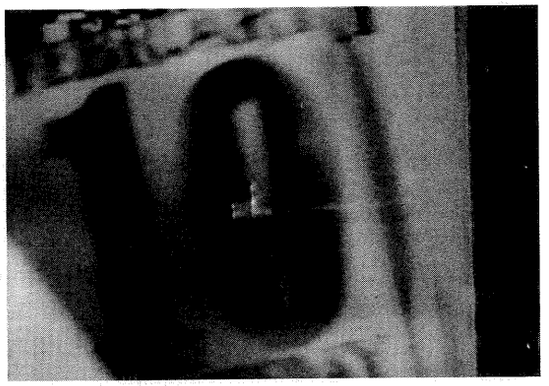
On the other hand, the narrator may willfully make ironic or general statements that distance us from the characters. For example, King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928) tells the moving story of the ordinary fate of Johnny Sims, whose father had predicted a grand destiny for him at his birth. We read Ralph Spence's intertitle: "During the next five years two eventful things happened to the Simses. A baby sister was born . . . and John received an $8 raise." Another example comes in Sjöstrom's *The Outlaw and His Wife* (1917), where parallel editing compares the destinies of two characters: "Love makes one good, the other bad . . ."

Thus silent film often retains and even augments the distance found in the novel between the narrator and the characters—not simply because intertitles are used to comment on the action, or even judge it, as happens in Dickens, Tolstoy, or Maupassant, but because they do so with pointed irony or in a generalizing mode, which Stanley Kubrick revives with the intermittent, sententious voice-over narrator in *Barry Lyndon* (1975).

The distancing intertitle is a luxury of silent cinema. It situates the film as smarter than the characters and comments on their immediate reactions, thereby giving the story more or less the same dignity as the novels of Zola, Hugo, and James—where the storyteller views his or her characters from afar, such as when Flaubert says of Charles Bovary toward the end of his novel, "Then he said a great thing, the only great thing he ever said in his life."







The silent film thus allows us conscious control of our projections. We are Johnny Sims, and we are not Johnny Sims; we associate the characters with types or myths—and we don't identify with them through their voices.

Today we tend to forget the significance of intertitles.[18] They were, however, the subject of much debate in the 1920s, especially in France. Jacques Brunius notes, for example, that "between 1924 and 1928 there were fierce quarrels over intertitles. For a long time, moviegoers had become alarmed at the increase in titles in films of the day. Distributors even added more titles to French versions of American films that originally contained very few."[19] Brunius speaks of some directors' consequent desire to simplify and streamline their screenplays so as to achieve a "pure cinema" without intertitles. But he also notes that in order to do away with the "Several days later" that was so useful for storytelling, visual conventions were invented. For Brunius, "the image of a calendar's slowly flipping pages is no better than the intertitle 'Three months later,'" and he notes with irony "the epidemic of symbolic clocks and calendars that has spread like wildfire through cinema."[20] Certainly these clocks and calendars are the equivalent of a word or phrase and mean exactly the same thing as "On January 5, Mr. So-and-So decided that . . ." or "At three o'clock in the afternoon." The text, although not present as written intertitle, was just as present in these alternative modes of filmic narration.

THE INTRUDER

When, with the talkies, real sound entered the screen, acting like the late arrival who thinks the party can't start without him or her, people realized that the cinema had, in fact, gotten along perfectly well without it (except for speech). What is more, this pitiful real sound was even criticized for being redundant. Redundant how? Not with respect to the image of course—for

how could two sets of perceptions so different in their essence and substance as image and sound duplicate each other? No, people found sound redundant with respect to the sound they had dreamed of, which had been infinitely richer and more malleable, according to each person's mental construct of it. It is in comparison with that *virtual* sound that the arrival of real sound could seem like an intrusion, a rather vulgar appeal to hyperrealism.

This impression was surely not very different from the feeling we get today from 3-D, even when done well, like the Polaroid process in Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder* (1954): we realize that we got along just fine without it, and we may prefer to imagine the depth of the image ourselves rather than have an overly concrete and determined depth perception thrust upon us.

Although one might think that silent film was only a weak, transitional art form—and many did and still do think so—it is remarkable how this early cinema was perfectly constituted and structured around its lack in such a way that the arrival of real sound could only be perceived as an intrusion. So it became necessary for sound to find its rightful place, its places, in all the senses of the word.

1. Films from cinema's early period are called "silent" in English, "mute" in French. Chion's remark is more apt in French, given his argument that *sourd* (deaf) is indeed a better adjective than *muet* (mute).—Trans.
2. Marcel Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, vol. 3 of *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: Modern Library, 1952), 97–98.
3. See Isabelle Raynauld, "Présence, fonction et représentation du son dans les scénarios et les films de Georges Méliès (1896–1912)," in *Georges Méliès, l'illusionniste fin de siècle?* ed. Jacques Malthète and Michel Marie (Paris: Presse de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Colloque de Cerisy, 1997), 201–17.
4. See, e.g., *Russian Ark* (2002), by Aleksandr Sokurov, a very Fellinian film in many ways.
5. See glossary for *sensory phantom*.
6. There is also the question of what is "rendered." The real sound of a fountain such as those of the Villa d'Este near Rome is a shapeless, massive sound that in no way corresponds to the multiple and rhythmically differentiated forms that the eye sees. When Liszt wrote his "Jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este," he *rendered* via the piano the movement of the water, not its sound. We're dealing here with the misunderstanding of "imitative music."
7. San Antonio, *Fais gaffe à tes os* (Paris: Fleuve noir, 1956), 12. Frédéric Dard, using the pseudonym of San Antonio, was a prolific French writer of detective novels as well as screenplays.—Trans.
8. Rick Altman, "Films sonores/Cinéma muet, ou comment le cinéma hollywoodien apprit à parler et à se taire," in *Conférences du collège d'histoire de l'Art cinématographique* (Paris: Cinémathèque française, 1992), 145.
9. In the title of this section I have translated Chion's word *tuteur* as *stake*. The French *tuteur* refers to a plant stake, which supports the plant and allows it to grow up around it. Rather than abandon this

lovely organic metaphor for a more pedestrian translation such as *support*, I prefer *stake*, even with its risk of ambiguity in English.—Trans.

10. See Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Mort à credit* [Death on the Installment Plan] (Paris: Gallimard, edition Folio, 1992), 69.

11. As Sartre points out in his autobiography, *Les mots* [The Words], some cinemas had formerly been regular theaters and conserved the ritual character of a performance with the traditional three knocks to open the show, or an overture played by a live orchestra, etc.

12. See Akira Kurosawa, *Something like an Autobiography*, trans. Audie E. Bock (New York: Vintage, 1983), 84–86.

13. At the beginning of the sound era in France an entertainer who went by the pseudonym "Betove" specialized in reappropriating silent shorts by recording an often wild commentary over them.

14. The opera-film—whose more marvelous examples include *Parsifal* (1982), by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, and *Tosca* (2001), by Benoît Jacquot—raises different questions, since it consists of adapting a preexisting scenic work to the screen.

15. In his detective film *Man on Fire* (2004), with Denzel Washington, set in Mexico and with both English and Spanish dialogue, Tony Scott uses the "expressive" subtitle, capitalizing on font size, repetition, and the position of the subtitle in the frame, echoing silent film traditions.

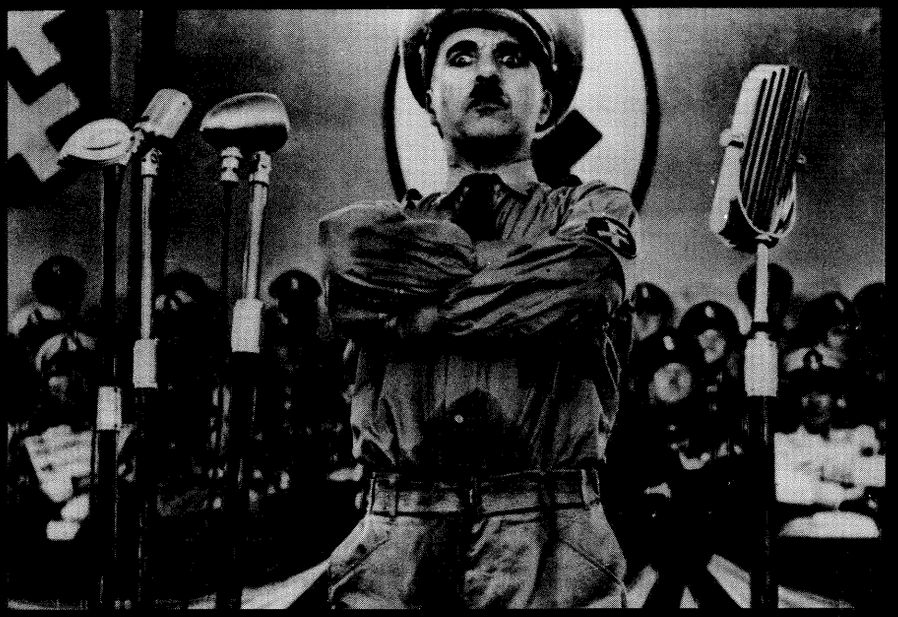
16. See Christian Metz, *L'Énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film* (Paris: Méridiens-Klincksieck, 1991), 66–67.

17. See René Clair, *Cinema Yesterday and Today*, trans. Stanley Appelbaum, ed. R.C. Dale (New York: Dover, 1972), 63–64.

18. See Bernard Eisenschitz, "La parole écrite," in *L'Image et la parole*, ed. Jacques Aumont (Paris: Cinémathèque française, 1999).

19. Jacques Brunius, *En marge du cinéma français* (Paris: Arcanes, 1954), 100.

20. Ibid., 66.



CHAPTER 2

Chaplin: Three Steps into Speech

1.

IT TOOK NO FEWER *than three of his greatest films for one of the geniuses of cinema, Chaplin, to make the successful transition into sound.*

He undertook the first, City Lights, *at the pivotal point between the two periods, but it was not released until 1931, fully into the era of the talkies—and it is a manifesto in defense of the art of silent film. It uses its soundtrack only to provide synchronized musical accompaniment, with minimal sound effects and no audible dialogue whatsoever. What dialogue there is appears on title cards. From the very outset, with the title itself, this masterpiece pledges its allegiance to light, to the visual, and to revelation: the film opens with the unveiling of a group of allegorical statues and closes with a scene of eyes being newly opened. One of the early scenes involves voyeurism, with Chaplin's Little Tramp admiring a nude female statuette in a shop window. The beautiful visual compositions deploy the seductions of light and shadow characteristic of silent cinema. Above all, the heroine is a blind young flower-seller whose sight the Tramp (who she thinks is a millionaire) helps her regain. The final scene, in which the Tramp first goes unnoticed and is then recognized by the young woman he helped, is predicated on touching and looking, and it is one of the most overwhelming sequences in all cinema.*

Choosing a blind girl as the heroine should have given Chaplin the occasion to evoke the world of sounds. The young woman does have a phonograph that seems to be her only companion as she listens to it, but Chaplin never allows the film's musical score to approximate for us what the phonograph plays. The evening at the dance hall with the millionaire, however, offers the opportunity to use synchronized dance music. And if it's because of a sound, the closing of a limousine door, that the little flower seller mistakes the Tramp for a wealthy gentleman (and thanks to Kevin Brownlow we know how hard Chaplin worked

and how many takes it required to get this scene of mistaken identity right),[1] bear in mind still that in this so-called sound film—that is, with recorded and synchronized music—one event is not given a sound effect, not even by orchestral punctuation as the conventions of silent films already allowed, and instead occurs in silence, just like all the other diegetic sounds: the clunk of that limo door! Chaplin had absolutely no interest in rendering audible this sound on which the whole story is built; it sufficed to suggest it. We could say the big rendezvous with sound in City Lights, a film released in the same period as Wellman's Public Enemy, Renoir's La Chienne, and Lang's M—all noisy films where doors close, people shout, cars honk, and guns fire—is both there and not there, conspicuous in its absence.

2.

The second film in Chaplin's trilogy, released five years later, when there was no longer any doubt about the dominance of talkies, took another tentative step toward speech. Though Modern Times (1936) is still essentially a silent film, with 90 percent musical scoring and the dialogue translated as usual by intertitles, it contains more strikingly noticeable incursions of realistic sounds: not just the sound effects of machines and the factory but especially, for the first time, voices. (City Lights had included only a brief caricature of speech made by a nasal-sounding kazoo.) Modern Times has the distinction of being the first and last film in which we hear the voice of the Tramp when, after much suspense, he sings his little song near the end, to the melody "Je cherche après Titine." The fact that it is incomprehensible and sung in a way that borders on parody makes it impossible for audiences to know for sure if they are hearing the hero's true voice.

As we know, the moment the stars of silent cinema began speaking marked the beginning of some cruel reversals of fortune for a good many. Female stars risked losing their auras and finding themselves reduced to the rank of ordinary mortals, as portrayed in Donen and Kelly's Singin' in the Rain (1952). As for the men, exposing their voices to the public ear was tantamount to exposing their virility or lack thereof, like being caught with their pants down. Dan Kamin recalls that "during the silent era [Chaplin] and Doug Fairbanks were fond of stopping their car to ask pedestrians directions in high falsetto voices and noting their fans' disappointment that their screen idols spoke this way."[2] It is no surprise that Chaplin insisted that his Tramp remain a voiceless shadow. His farewell in song to this alter ego at the end of Modern Times marks the beautiful abandonment of the silent film.

In Modern Times certain voices are no longer implied but actually spill from the loudspeakers as synchronized sound. These voices are the ones that within

the story pass through a media apparatus: the proto-video-phone in the office of the factory director, the gramophone horn that plays the recorded text of the worker-feeding machine, and a radio in the episode of the Tramp in prison. There are thus two types of voices in the film: natural ones that speak directly and that, as in the silents, we continue not to hear (with occasional dialogue to be read in intertitles) and those heard by the characters in the film just as they are heard by us watching it, that is, transmitted through loudspeakers. Indeed, the mediated voice is something Chaplin will feature in two of his later films about the modern world, The Great Dictator (1940) and A King in New York (1957). However, the first audible transmission of a voice in Modern Times—and therefore in Chaplin's career—is accompanied by an image. The gigantic sets of the factory, the machine room, and the washroom are like canvases or opaque and neutral surfaces with "peepholes"; we might wonder what they could possibly be for, until we see the face of the factory boss appear in them, demanding that the workers speed up or lecturing someone who is spending too much time at the sink.[3] His voice and his commands suggest the panoptic voice of surveillance, to which Fritz Lang gave visual form in The Testament of Dr. Mabuse, except that Chaplin links the voice to the image from the start and makes of it a pure technological phenomenon, without an ounce of magic. When the factory boss receives his employees in his office, he turns back into a mute shadow like the others, whose words come to us only via intertitles.

In the title Modern Times, what is perhaps most important is the word time: the credits unroll over the image of a clock, and the gigantic machinery of the factory suggests the gears of a watch. This imagery may have something to do with the advent of synchronized sound. It always bears repeating that the impact of synch sound and of the realistic voice in cinema (as opposed to music and song, which had long been integrated into silent film art and liberated from its temporal constraints) resulted from their inscription in real time—time chronographically counted, measured, divided, and fixed. Real time is the central obsession of Modern Times. The young heroine of the film played by the gamine Paulette Goddard is perfectly suited to these modern times. She is a wild young thing, in stark contrast to the contemplative passivity of the blind girl played by Virginia Cherrill in City Lights. The photography for Modern Times is hard and harsh, whereas City Lights looks softer and more inviting. As in the later films The Great Dictator and A King in New York, it would seem that the appearance of the mediated voice flattened the image and eliminated all its shadows, making way for an implacable luminosity.

Nor should we forget that for the spectator in 1936, familiar with live vocal transmissions via telephone and radio, all moving images were still recorded, and they would remain so for several more years. The transmitted or recorded voice in

film, lacking as it did the treble range since restored by modern hi-fi, possessed a certain quality as specific as the telephone: not distant and muffled, as one might think, but often extremely clear, crisp, and present, a quality deliberately chosen to compensate for the technical imperfections of sound reproduction in the theaters.[4] Presenting voices in the action of the fiction film as technically transmitted, just as they were in fact for the spectator, thus in essence making the mode of production of the voice in the filmic world coincide with the real conditions of its reception in the theater, had the paradoxical effect of giving a coefficient of supplementary reality to those voices, a sort of live "presence," an extra sense of "being there" that was concrete, ordinary, familiar, and more direct than the black-and-white shadows that were dancing across the screen. The voice was more real than the images it had come to perforate. And he who gave the name of Nick Shahdov to his last great movie character, in A King in New York, was more conscious than anyone of the ghostly nature of cinematic beings, more aware of the power of the voice to remove the vagueness and the poetry from these shadows and to give them a rawer, more immediate and complete humanity.

3.

Finally, The Great Dictator (1940), even while it makes considerable room for pantomime, does away with intertitles. It's a full-fledged talkie—and about time!—but also a film in which the issue of speech and its mediation is central. As with the previous two films, this concern is announced directly in the title: dictator is linked etymologically to the Latin verb dicere, to say or tell. This film about speaking is organized around two big speeches: Hynkel's at the beginning and the Barber's at the end, when, mistaken for the dictator of whom he's the double, he is placed onstage, while the entire world is waiting to hear him, and he delivers his famous appeal for world brotherhood. In Chaplin's films speech is never friendly conversation or idle chitchat; it surges with violence and carries weighty significance.

The early scene in City Lights involving the dedication of the piece of statuary by the town officials is supposed to be a send-up of sound film. Note, however, that this nose-thumbing is organized around a speech. When the officials begin speaking, all we hear is an unintelligible buzz that suggests vacuous official-speak. Apparently Chaplin himself created the noise by talking through the mouthpiece of a saxophone. Did he know then that some years later he would get up on the stage and speak again, this time bravely and without disguising his voice, telling the truth to humanity?

It is perhaps no accident that each of these three films contains a scene of intestinal noises. In City Lights the Tramp swallows a whistle and disturbs a

song recital with his hiccupping. In Modern Times there is stomach growling when the Tramp takes tea with a very proper minister's wife. The Great Dictator has the gag with the coins in the slices of cake, where the digestive jingle gives away the person who is to be sacrificed. In each case it's as if Chaplin's character is shaken by a kind of speech that demands to come out and express itself against his will—even if it means placing him in danger. This ventriloquism of noises that emerge from the Tramp's gut, traversing the opaque physical border of his own body, would seem to be Chaplin's way of preparing for a grand dramatic liberation of discourse.

On at least two occasions Chaplin confronted the image of his small body with his voice resonating outdoors and even more grandly amplified by electronic recording equipment: a voice that ignores the laws of distance and perspective, annihilates all space and dimensions. This happened in two films that are quite distant chronologically but whose titles bring them into close association: The Great Dictator and A King in New York. In the latter Shahdov is walking down Broadway when the voice of some crooner—Chaplin's own voice in fact—emerges from a loudspeaker and floats above the crowd. Its extraordinary smoothness is no less frightening in seeming to fall from the sky, impelling the king to go inside somewhere, anywhere, to get away from it. In The Great Dictator it's the scene when, after having left the Jews alone for a time as a political ploy, Hynkel changes tactics and delivers a ruthless anti-Semitic harangue over the radio. His outrageous hate speech is then relayed through the streets of the ghetto by public loudspeakers. Hearing this, the little Jewish Barber's body is seized with convulsive spasms that are perfectly synchronized with the unintelligible voice, resulting in a sort of involuntary gestural dubbing. It is as if the voice of Chaplin-Hynkel has taken over and wracked with mad movements the body of Chaplin-the-Barber, but there is also the suggestion that these murderous words have literally been shot out of the Barber's body.

It would seem that The Great Dictator was designed to solve the dilemma that Chaplin faced with the advent of sound film. Once he hit on the idea of splitting himself into two characters, the one permitted him to freely exercise his talents as a mime, whereas the other allowed him to indulge his love of preaching. "As Hitler I could harangue the crowds in jargon and talk all I wanted to, and as the Tramp I could remain more or less silent."[5] The Barber, however, could not leave the evil dictator to stir the crowds unchallenged. At the risk of losing his life as a character, the Barber had to become the dictator's substitute and, in his name, deliver a sermon of love and peace. The audacity of The Great Dictator lies in its disdain for any banal justifications or prudent transitions that would give material or psychological verisimilitude to this radical substitution. When the Barber, who until then shows no signs of being up to such a role,

finds the gutsy inspiration to give his sermon of love and humanity, he has undergone a metamorphosis. How has this happened? Through responsibility, a pulpit given to him by fate, or by God.

The setup of Hynkel's speech at the beginning of the film is far from simple. First, the language in which the dictator speaks is his and his alone. No other character uses this Jabberwocky that lets slip only a few recognizable words (mostly trivial or lewd such as Sauerkraut, Schnitzel, *and* Mädel*). But he only uses it during his speeches and other attacks of fury. The rest of the time he speaks the same language as the other characters, whether "Tomanians" or foreigners, Jews or goyim. The speech sequence never once cuts to the audience, never shows whether they understand or share the dictator's language. The scene does include, however, an audible simultaneous translation by an unseen radio announcer who addresses, it would seem, a global audience, which would include the spectators of the film. Not once does the camera pull away from Hynkel to show him from the point of view of a Tomanian in the crowd. We see, in fact, Chaplin's brilliant refusal to give the least representation of the ordinary Hitler follower, no image of that fan for whom the Führer is only a tiny silhouette with an enormously amplified voice for whom he or she is consumed with devotion. We, the film's spectators, only get to see crude closeups of a roaring dictator televised in camera speech, one who is, in a sense, an aberration.*[6]

Speech here, as elsewhere in Chaplin's films, tends to be directed squarely at the audience in the theater. In these instances he uses cinema as a medium of direct address to broadcast to his public. Imagine a sound cinema that doesn't limit itself to dancing and chattering shadows but thinks of itself as the depository of a text, a bottle in the ocean. However immodest and immoderate it may be, Chaplin's taste for sermonizing strongly suggests that he takes language seriously. Already in The Pilgrim *(1923) there was the silent sermon of the false preacher. But it took the arrival of the voice for the filmmaker to launch into it whenever possible (denunciation of the dictator, satire of mass society or of television); his genius for assimilating and capitalizing on the new and different, rather than resisting change, translated into new opportunities to express ever more fully his truth as a human being. Verdoux, Calvero, and Shahdov might be shameless demagogues, but they are never idealized.*

If the sound films of Chaplin, including the most melodramatic one, Limelight *(1952), are ironic and disenchanted, it is not because of his advanced age but rather because now that his characters have voices, they have taken on a complete humanity, and they can no longer be swayed by illusions that are nourished by vagueness.*

Certain detractors of this period of Chaplin's have seen only a preachy smugness in these late films. In any case Chaplin never exploited seductive tricks of

shadowy hidden voices or the acousmêtre.[7] *The advent of sound for him implied a passage into adulthood, where everything is brought into an equal light. This is one of the differences between Chaplin and the Marx Brothers, who, having arrived with the talkie, bring to their first films the nonsense of language: on one hand, Groucho, the unctuous, mustachioed guy punning faster than a machine gun, and on the other hand, the "mute" Harpo, whose refusal to speak amounts to thumbing his nose at the Law. With Chaplin, however, language is no laughing matter. He prefers to deploy verbiage that is incomprehensible (the mayor's speech in* City Lights, *the song in* Modern Times, *the speeches of Hynkel in* The Great Dictator*) rather than make ambiguous and twisted use of ordinary language. It would not be an exaggeration to rank Chaplin among the great artists of the sound film, as great as the steps he took to break into it.*

These steps take us, precisely, from the end of the first film to the end of the third: the two endings of City Lights *and* The Great Dictator *echo one another, as both display Chaplin and his girl in a relationship of extraordinary intimacy. But in the first this intimacy is a merging through an exchange of looks, while in the other it comes through speech, across a great distance, visited by the Spirit.*

In the silent City Lights *the Tramp comes to be recognized by the formerly blind girl who lowers her eyes on him and to whom he says, "You can see now." "Yes, I can see now," she replies, and the look of the Tramp at that moment is the hopeful look of a child.*

In The Great Dictator, *a 100 percent talking film, Chaplin ends his speech to the world by addressing a woman in a voice that carries beyond spatial barriers, a woman he loves and who bears the same name as his mother, and to whom he says, "Look up, Hannah"—in other words, "Raise your eyes, Mother, not to your son, now grown up, but to something that is greater than us both. You, who recognized and raised up, with the warmth of your look, the small visible being in me, recognize in the present, through the words that I speak and that speak through me, an invisible law of the world."*

1. See Kevin Brownlow and David Gill's television film series, *Unknown Chaplin* (1983), part 2 of 3 programs.
2. See Dan Kamin, *Charlie Chaplin's One-Man Show* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984), 119n.
3. The surfaces that we see in these films become screens through which one sees and is also seen: Chion is comparing them to holes in reality; this metaphor is clearer in French, since the word *toile* designates the surface of the screen, and sometimes the movies themselves (a phrase for going to the movies is "se faire une toile"), and is also the word for a painting—"une toile de Van Gogh."—Trans.
4. In the 1930s the voices of singers on the radio or on records could have an intimate, velvety sound.

5. Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography* (New York: Plume, 1992 [1964]), 387.

6. For *camera speech* see glossary. Marshall McLuhan claimed that Hitler's success, the magical power of his thundering voice, was linked to the radio and would not have been possible with the cold medium of television, which demands sober restraint. See "Radio: The Tribal Drum," in McLuhan's seminal study *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964).

7. For *acousmêtre* see glossary, as well as my study *The Voice in Cinema*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), esp. chap. 1, "Mabuse: Magic and Powers of the Acousmêtre."

CHAPTER 3

Birth of the Talkies or of Sound Film? (1927–1935)

"SINGING" OR "TALKING": *THE JAZZ SINGER*

"ALL TALKING, ALL SINGING," proclaimed the advertisements for new movies in the 1930s, thus distinguishing the two ways the voice had entered the cinema. But it is well known that "talkies" began with a good bit of singing. The first official full-length talkie, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), actually contains much less speaking than it does musical numbers. These numbers appear only intermittently within what is still essentially a silent film, with a prerecorded musical track and intertitles for almost all the dialogue scenes.

In fact there is only one talking scene, the exuberant monologue of Jakie (Al Jolson) speaking to his mother. He promises to treat her like a queen as soon as he has made it big, while she, the poor dear, can hardly get a word in edgewise. In fact, this scene was not even in the screenplay. Some say that the idea for it arose from a spoken improvisation by Jolson, a long aside that preceded his performance of "Blue Skies"; others say it was the director Alan Crosland's spontaneous decision on observing the singer chatting on the set with the actress who was playing his mother.

In the finished film, Jolson has just finished singing; he remains at the piano and continues to strike out a rhythmic accompaniment with his left hand, and to this piano vamping his flood of words pours out—a copious declaration of love for the woman who brought him into the world ("I'll give you a mink coat; I'll take you to Coney Island"). So this first speech in a fiction film is really a monologue with piano accompaniment, in the manner of the chansonniers, and not true dialogue. It's as if the cinema, having happily set out into song—since the ease of playback posed no problem for its fluidity or mobility—hesitated, on the riverbank of dialogue, to set foot on the terra firma of realism, as though synchronous speech implied something vulgar,

an enslavement to realism, which could still be tempered or sublimated by musical accompaniment.

Film historians today tend to minimize the historical significance of *The Jazz Singer*, long considered the first talking picture; nowadays it is common to point out that Vitaphone sound shorts preceded it and that it didn't enjoy a success as great as Jolson's next film, *The Singing Fool* (1928), and so on. Nonetheless, the scene I have described remains enormously important in a symbolic sense because it also involves, as Michel Marie has shown, the invention of silence.[1]

When the father arrives and discovers Jakie playing and singing with abandon, he forcefully shouts "Stop!"—an audible command that instantly freezes his wife and son in their tracks. Then there is a stupefying silence—and I mean absolutely no sound on the soundtrack, not just no one talking in the room—after which the orchestra takes over again and we hear a thunderous excerpt from Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*. There is no allusion to Shakespeare's characters; it is rather the music's passion and tension that are brought into play here. The orchestra performs in a style entirely opposite to the jazzy "Blue Skies" sung by Jolson, and with this music on the soundtrack, father and son lock horns in an intense dialogue once more inaudible to us, with only the intertitles allowing us to follow it.

Nevertheless, in this short scene with its incestuous connotations (Jakie has kissed his mother on the mouth, and the father arrives to break up these effusions with his interdiction), the spoken word has broken through, accursed and thus magnified—spoken words that no one had expected.

THE CONTEXT OF THE BIRTH OF THE SOUND FILM

The events that led almost unwittingly to the talking picture have often been recounted and are the subject of a number of important studies: Warner Bros.' purchase of the rights to a system for synchronizing recorded sound with film; the production of musical and sound shorts, followed by full-length sound

films (with synchronous recorded music and sound effects), then talking films (and/or singing films that brought about the progressive conversion of the entire film industry to "talkies"). It is curious that no one—and no language, it would seem—has ever come up with a completely satisfying name for this new cinema: "talkie" or "talking picture" does not take into account sound effects and music, while "sound film" overlooks the fact that cinema sound most often centers principally on spoken language.[2]

Scholars are in general agreement about some of the enabling factors in this history: the focus on better synchronization of image and music, the then-recent development of electric amplification, and radio's popularization of music transmitted through loudspeakers. But as we have seen, there is no simple explanation for why cinema's acquisition of the means for synchronous recorded sound abruptly and fortuitously created the phenomenon of the *talking* film. Rick Altman also emphasizes that this development was not the result of a purely internal evolution within cinema. "The talking picture," he writes, "did not learn to speak by watching silent films, but by listening to the sound media which made the soundscape of the 1920s into the first modern soundscape." By this he means the "development of public address systems, thanks to new sound technologies that had been developed for military purposes during the war."[3]

This view is substantiated in a first transitional phase. In the years 1927 and 1928,

> most films alternate between intertitles and recorded speech. . . . During this period, synchronized recording of normal dialogue is rare. Instead, it is "megaphone speech," as it might be called, that enjoys this special status. For amplification in film was simply assimilated to a better known mode of amplification via megaphones and loudspeakers, which had been in general use for several years for public speaking. In *The First Auto* [Roy del Ruth, 1926], recorded speech is only used for hailing someone, applauding a victory, or cheering someone on. Ordinary dialogue, for its part, keeps the habitual form of intertitles.[4]

It was also the goal of perfecting the synchronization of music and action, rather than having actors speak, that motivated Warners to gain exclusive rights to the Vitaphone process. The first use of Warners' sound-on-disc system for a feature, Alan Crosland's *Don Juan* (1926), with John Barrymore, was by no means interested in making spoken dialogue audible but merely in synchronizing the musical score (written and arranged by William Axt and David Mendoza) in a way that would be both more precise and more economical in the long term than a live orchestra. Thus *Don Juan*, like Murnau and Flaherty's later *Tabu*, is a silent film whose musical accompaniment is recorded and reproduced by mechanical means.

The delicate problem of synchronizing music and image became an obsession during the 1920s. Achieving optimal synch was the reason variable-speed projectors were used, since they allowed the image to wait for or catch up with the music. During the silent era at least two machines were perfected to resolve the problem: Carl Robert Blum's Rhythmonome, an ancestor of the "bande rythmo," used for voices and music in French auditoriums, and Pierre de la Commune's Cinépupitre, a machine Honegger used for his musical accompaniment to Abel Gance's *La Roue* (1923).

A simple, but important, question: in *Don Juan*, where was the loudspeaker located in relation to the screen? Probably not yet behind the screen, as would later become conventional. Why would it be there? More likely it was placed below or beside the screen, following the tradition of the orchestra pit. What was new was the replacement of flesh-and-blood musicians by mechanized music (as recorded music was then called). And yet this model of presentation was as old as cinema itself, since motion picture shows generally featured accompaniment by phonographs. The Vitaphone process was perceived, even by its promoters, as an improvement, not a revolution.

THE MOMENT THE MUSIC CEASES

In the very year of *The Jazz Singer*, Chaplin began work on *City Lights*, considered by many his masterpiece. At the same time, Lang's *Metropolis*, Murnau's *Sunrise*, and Eisenstein's *October*, some of the greatest creations of the silent era, were released. Two more great silent works came out in 1928: King Vidor's *The Crowd* (whose lead character is, like Chaplin's Tramp, a "little man in the crowd"), and Chaplin's *The Circus*, which he had begun in 1925. Even if the sound film was beginning to gain ground, Chaplin still had no reason to change tactics: in *City Lights* his Tramp and the Blind Girl would remain unheard.

But when the film was released in 1931, Garbo had already said her first words in *Anna Christie* (1930), asking in her husky voice for dry whisky (in English in the Clarence Brown version and in German in Jacques Feyder's); audiences had heard Groucho's wisecracks and Harpo's noisy mutism in *Animal Crackers* (1930), as well as gunshots and the rough voice of Edward G. Robinson in *Little Caesar* (1930); and Pola Illery had charmed Paris with her central European accent in René Clair's *Sous les toits de Paris* (1930).

On the strength of his hard-won artistic and financial independence, Chaplin could have added sound to *City Lights* and reshot all or some of the silent scenes, as other filmmakers had done. He chose not to. And yet it was not exactly the film it would have been had he made it five years earlier—for a reason that is neglected today but was crucial at the time: the musical accompaniment that we hear in the film is not aleatory, but rather it is what the director intended, and composed and synchronized with the images so that it would play—and perhaps more significantly, so that it would *not* play—at the exact moments he wished it to.

Consider again what happens in the final scene that left audiences in tears everywhere around the world. The young flower seller, whose sight has been restored, thanks to a mysterious benefactor whose face she has never seen, looks out her shop window and sees a poor little fellow, taunted by laughing urchins, standing before her. It slowly dawns on her that he is the one who pretended to be a millionaire, that he is the one who saved her. At the emotional peak of this scene, over a subdued rhythm, a solo violin plays "La Violetera," a well-known melody at the time. As Virginia Cherrill's character is on the verge of finally understanding, the violin stops abruptly. We experience a few beats of absolute silence before the string orchestra comes in again, more seriously. This silence is so well placed and synchronized with the moment that we hold our breath, as though witnessing a sublime moment in opera, when the tempo is magical and all falls into place for a moment of grace.

This is what the so-called sound cinema made possible, even when films were not taking advantage of its ability to make dialogue audible. The new cinema standardized film projection speeds once and for all (at twenty-four frames per second, imposed by the demands of sound reproduction), whereas previously both cameras and projectors could run at variable speeds, generally anywhere between twelve and twenty frames per second. Henceforth the cinema could literally count on constancy in the reproduction of actors' movements and gestures. Moreover, it allowed the auteur-director, the era's king (think of Stroheim before his problems with the studios or of Murnau, Gance, Eisenstein, and Clair), to control the music—and the silence—down to the second and to know that all audiences would hear exactly what he desired. In

this sense, what was then called sound film was in fact the last phase in the perfection of silent cinema, and it was under those conditions that Chaplin made his (silent) masterpiece.

THE HETEROGENEITY OF EARLY TALKING CINEMA

If at first speech was rare, things quickly changed. It has often been remarked that the first 100 percent talkies such as Brian Foy's *Lights of New York* (1929) or André Hugon's *The Three Masks* (1929, a film shot in England with French actors) resemble filmed theater. Many films of the time have that feel but not all of them. The most striking feature in these years is the variety of experimentation going on. There are films shot silent with sound added afterward, consisting of recorded and synchronized music, and scenes alternately with or without dialogue (Arnold Fanck's *Storm over Mont Blanc* [1930] and Augusto Genina's *Prix de beauté* [1930], with the postsynched voice of Louise Brooks).[5] Other films are positively loquacious with synch sound from start to finish. Some totally forgo nondiegetic music; others have it in abundance. This heterogeneity of production can be explained by the gradual dissolve from one art to another and by the fact that certain films and images adapted well to the new techniques; of course, this makes the late 1920s and the 1930s a very seductive period for us today, especially when we can pick and choose from the best.

The very earliest sound films, although subjected to critical dismissal for decades, sometimes receive equally inappropriate praise today. One example of this tendency to overestimate films of this period is Martin Barnier's interesting study *En route vers le parlant* (The Road to Sound). In reality, alongside the inventive and sometimes truly ingenious works of Robert Siodmak (*Abschied* [1930]), Josef von Sternberg (*The Blue Angel* [1930]), Fritz Lang (*M*), Julien Duvivier (*La Tête d'un homme* [1932]), Abel Gance (even in the ridiculous *End of the World* [1930], which contains fascinating experiments), King Vidor (*Hallelujah* [1929]), and of course Lubitsch and Mamoulian with the first screen operettas, there were also plenty of undistinguished films, though they had the merit of recording for posterity the actors of the day, such as the first film adaptation of *Knock* (1933), acted and directed by Louis Jouvet himself in collaboration with Roger Goupillères.

What experiments with sound occur in a film such as Jean Choux's *Jean de la lune* (1931) are quite spotty: Michel Simon triumphs in dialogue by Marcel Achard but only for two minutes in an otherwise unremarkable film. And the first sound film by Jacques Tourneur, *Tout ça ne vaut pas l'amour* (1930), a comedy with Jean Gabin about radio, is far indeed from the future American masterpieces of this director.

Finally, perhaps the most enjoyable segment of this enormous output of production is the filmed revues that show us the musicians, the variety entertainers, and the marvelous stage presences of the day—what I would call the television of the 1930s. In any case no film was without value; all made a contribution, the masterpieces as well as the regular Saturday night fare (the latter sometimes becoming the former to our modern eyes as aesthetic criteria change), to the creation of an art.

THE NEW RAPTURE OF SYNCHRONIZATION

Audiovisual synchronization seems banal and unworthy of serious cinematic interest. This is the case especially among those who were brainwashed by the antisynchronization aesthetic of the 1970s, the view that looked down on any correspondence between sound and image and celebrated, particularly in the films of Duras, floating speech and unmoored sounds. Yet it wasn't always this way.

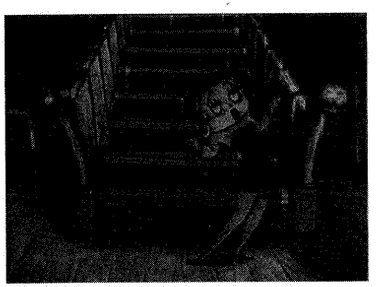
For the first spectators of sound film, synchronism was a marvelous phenomenon. It was touted in advertisements the way the fidelity of high-end sound equipment is praised today. One must conclude that the many scattered experiments in sound film that took place earlier (such as the Gaumont "phonoscènes" shown in Paris between 1906 and 1912) left something to be desired. The synchronous union of sound and image, which technology had not yet made automatic, incited a strong desire that might be compared to a string quartet's pursuit of perfect ensemble playing.

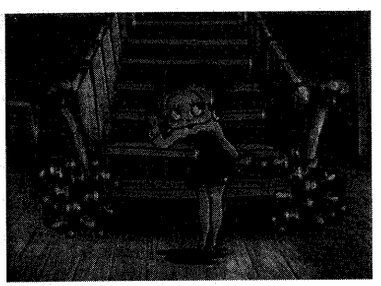
Nevertheless, the idea that a sound should be heard in synch with an observable event is not entirely self-evident, though we may observe such things a thousand times a day. By its very nature, the auditory lags behind the visual, like the *carabiniers* of Offenbach's operetta—always late—and for two reasons.[6] First, sound is often an effect, not a cause, and therefore comes afterward, however minute the delay. Second, sound simply travels more slowly, at the rate of 1,086 feet per second through the air, in other words a million times slower than the speed of light! The apparent union of sound and image, therefore, relies on the *approximate* precision of human perception. But this approximation is the basis of our experience of the world: the baby in its crib is sensitive from the outset to the synchronism of visible and audible phenomena. And in cinema the very principle of sound effects is based on synchronism: a sound that falls at the same time as a visual movement will automatically

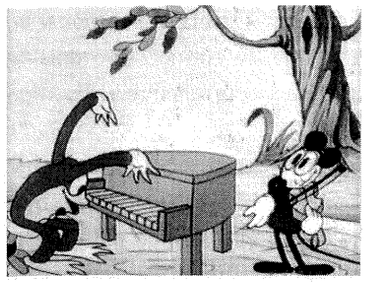
stick to it, even if the sound's consistency, color, and timbre are hardly even coherent with the visual phenomenon it accompanies. This is what I call *synchresis*—a phenomenon that is independent of reasoning and also of the question of power and causality.[7]

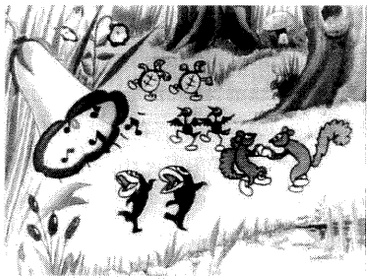
The proof that this synchronism of sound and image in the brand new sound film was still something magical, an enchanted encounter between two entities that produced the spark of life, can be observed in some of the very first musical animated cartoons of the early 1930s. *Betty Boop*, *Flip the Frog*, *Looney Tunes*, and the *Silly Symphonies* of Walt Disney often feature marvelous miniature concerts performed by mice, ducks, frogs, and other animals playing extravagant instruments that sometimes come alive, move about, and begin playing a wild music by themselves in total audiovisual synchrony. And no wonder, since every image was explicitly drawn to correspond to prerecorded sound, according to a technique that was soon universally adopted for animation.

It is entirely logical that the new sound cinema would privilege the spectacle of a concert: nothing seemed better suited to illustrate the law of synchronism than the visual display of instrumental music, which is an exemplary case of the accumulation of perceptible microactions and collisions, each liable to produce a distinct sound. It is no surprise that early sound animation also hailed the wonders of synchronism with animated concerts, especially piano concerts, where the synchronism is most in evidence. *The Birthday Party* (1930), for example, is a madcap birthday celebration for Mickey Mouse that also a celebrates synchresis. Mickey's friends have given him an upright piano, which he begins to play immediately like a virtuoso, with his famous four-fingered gloved hands. Then Minnie sits down at a second piano and the mousey couple plays a frenetic duet back-to-back. We also see in this film, among other marvels, a glockenspiel moving about on its four legs like a horse and playing all by itself by making its flat metal bars of varying length go up and down on its "back" in a way that produces a furious little piece synchronized note for note. Here the parallelism of sound and image runs like the moving parts of a marvelous watch in the new rapture of synchronization.









THE ACOUSMATIC IMAGINARY IN THE CARTOON

The silent cartoon began its existence well before the popularization of radio and sound film. It even had the luxury of representing sounds visually, using the same codes as comic books. By the mid-1920s one could find cartoons with nonsynchronized accompaniments on disc and with sound effects symbolized visually. For the cartoon the revolution of 1927 simply meant adding on the extra benefits of synchronization.

The result was the sort of film mentioned above, where we see a cartoon creature sing and make music with anything, hitting this or blowing on that. The whole world becomes a wind, string, or percussion instrument creating a jazzy music that sets everyone and everything to dancing. At that time this type of musical cartoon was both a popular and critical success among intellectuals and directors such as Eisenstein. Everyone recognized the cartoon's total liberty of imagination, and some would dream of achieving the same thing in live-action cinema.

But the imaginary of the sound cartoon derives part of its force from the imaginary of radio, more precisely from the *acousmatic* imaginary (a word of Greek origin, applied here to signify *sound that one hears without seeing its cause*), an imaginary triggered by the novel and enigmatic effects on the public of radiophonic and telephonic sound.

Because of their narrative indeterminacy, acousmatic sounds leave ample room for interpretation. Imagine you hear people talking, but you don't see them. How are they dressed? What do they look like? What might the setting they occupy look like? Now you hear the voice of someone else there for the first time (we could call this an *acousmatic intrusion*, a common occurrence in sound film): where did this guy come from? Was he there from the start, or did he just arrive? Let's say you're hearing instruments on the radio that you can't see: you are then free to imagine, seriously or playfully, the nature and form of these instruments, as well their players—animal, vegetable, or mineral.

In general what we see in early sound cartoons is a playful response to the question of narrative indeterminacy—and how to connect the dots—a response that reflects the extravagant doodling of our acousmatic reveries when the radio is on.

Deaf cinema was the symmetrical counterpart of radio: it allowed one to imagine sounds by suggesting them with the help of images. The sound film could well be, in the beginning, not just the union of a sighted person (the silent film) and a hearing one (the radio) but also the union of a deaf person and a blind one, thus preserving for a while the imaginary proper to each.

Radio and telephones also play an important role in some of these early sound shorts. In *Battling Bosko* (1932), by Hugh Harman, a parody of the boxing film, little Bosko, who's about to go up against a dangerous opponent in the ring, sings over the phone to his girl about how brave he is, while on her end she accompanies him on the piano. Thus the telephone serves to unite singer and accompanist, and later the girlfriend listens to her beau's boxing match on the radio. *Croon Crazy* (1933), by Steve Muffati, tells the story of Cubby the Bear, who saves the day when the stars of a live radio show don't show up for work. The bear has to play all the roles and do all the voices—fooling his audience with imitations of Mae West, Al Jolson, and other stars of the day. The additional gag for us is that he takes on the costume and gestures of each star, while, of course, the radio audience hears only his voice over the microphone to create the illusion.

In the early years of sound we find more than one example of live-action cinema attempting to approximate the freedom of these visual effects and with music that tries to free the image from its realist obligations. For example, commenting on *The Road to Paradise / Die Drei von der Tankstelle* (1930), director Wilhelm Thiele explains, "cannot two people who are expressing themselves in song escape from the usual forms of life? . . . The music of a filmed operetta movie allows us to cross boundaries of space and time in a way that a silent film can usually only achieve with a long series of images."[8] In René Clair's *À nous la liberté* (1932) the voice of a woman singing emerges from a morning glory just like in the musical cartoons; but to my knowledge this remains an isolated case, restricted to musical films.

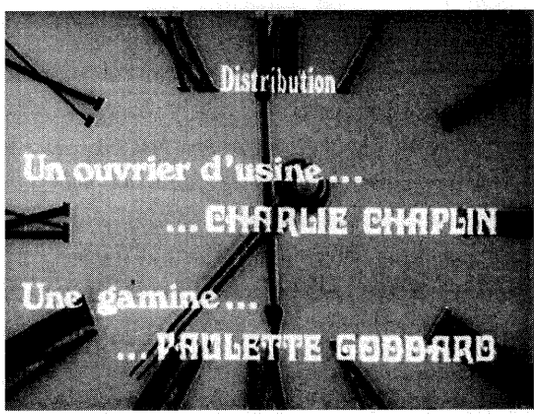
THE DIONYSIAN YEARS

It is also striking to observe in these early synchronized cartoons how the sound—especially the sound of music and rhythm but others as well—surges up with the Dionysian power evoked in ancient myths. After all, there has to be an explanation for the origin of these images and this movement. But in silent

movies the commentator's voice or the intertitles' text (sometimes sparse, sometimes elaborate) often serves as the generating force—what I call the *iconogenic* force. While in some silent cartoons (the *Koko the Clown* series by Dave Fleischer, for example) we see the characters and scenery emerge from the hand of the director-god himself, filmed in the act of drawing, in the sound cartoons of the early 1930s it is the music that generates movement, and this music is itself generated sometimes from a still more primary cause, namely rhythmic sound.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s many art forms, and especially the three related disciplines of music, cinema, and dance, were marked by the celebration of rhythm and the idea of a vital force. Such endemic rhythm was attributed to blacks (this ambivalent fascination certainly not divorced from paternalism and racism) or to machines. The *élan vital* and technology were not represented as opposite categories, as they often are today, but rather as closely connected. Machines are good when they serve to build a better world, and it is in this positive light that they were presented, with or without synch sound effects but often with a musical accompaniment suggestive of the mechanical and the motorized, in the silent or sound films of Eisenstein (*The General Line* [a.k.a. *Old and New*] [1929]), Vertov (*Enthusiasm* [1930]), and Dovzhenko (*Earth* [1930]). What Lang (in *Metropolis*), René Clair (in *À nous la liberté*), and Chaplin (in *Modern Times*) criticized was not machines themselves but the abuses of the Taylorism that they served, especially in the effort to control time (clocks are prominent symbols in all three films).

In the musical cartoons of the period machines are rare, with the notable exception of the automobile. Of course, as we have already seen, musical instruments—a type of machine after all—and especially the piano, a remarkable instrument in the mechanical provenance of its sound—are omnipresent. In an endless double movement we are shown how music emerges from



sources, each more burlesque than the last (skeletons playing their own bones, insect orchestras, steamboat organs), while symmetrically the images that show us each source seem to be the fruits of pure fancy that have evolved from listening to a sound—a sound whose real source, we know full well, is not what we are being shown.

The early 1930s cartoon is one of the rare cases in film history where the separation between noise and music, if not completely dissolved, is at least partly so. Cartoon noises, and bumps and crashes in particular, are posited as possible music—they need only to be repeated rhythmically for music to ignite, just as in prehistoric times fire was made from friction between sticks and stones. Moreover, by insisting, as they do, on the material genesis of each sound, these cartoons show music and noises as having a shared source—real bodies that are struck, scratched, or rubbed together.

To joyfully make the whole world come alive in sound—from the simplest objects to the noblest instruments—this is the mission taken on, to audiences' delight, by all things great and small that populate the cartoon world of the early 1930s.

THE X″ ERA

Outside the animation studios Dionysus also ruled in live-action films. A particular kind of rhythmic noise symbolizes the energy of the early sound cinema. This noise, named X″ in the solfeggio system devised by Pierre Schaeffer and defined as a sequence of "complex iterative sounds," is essentially a succession of brief rhythmic beats with no specific pitch.[9] One hears examples of X″ in a wide variety of films from this period. In *The Testament of Doctor Mabuse* there is the loud acousmatic rhythmic noise heard at the beginning and the tick-tick of the infernal machine that threatens to eliminate Kent and Lilli. There is the rat-a-tat of machine guns in Howard Hawks's *Scarface* (1932) and the tapping of typewriters in *Prix de beauté*. In *Love Me Tonight* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1932) Paris awakens to the rhythmic noises of various ordinary tradesmen. In Bacon and Berkeley's *Forty-Second Street* (1933) it's tap dancing. In the prison films of Mervyn LeRoy, such as *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932), there's tapping against the cell bars and the hammering of the work crews. In the many films about the Great War there are symphonies of explosions and detonations such as the sequence in *Wooden Crosses* (Raymond Bernard, 1931) where French soldiers in a cellar hear a disturbing repetitive noise. X″ occurs in *Kameradschaft* in the form of the noise of the mine and of rescue operations. Everywhere one turns there is rhythmic cracking, trembling, vibrating, and crackling—all complex iterative sounds, or X″ for short.

As we know, in the ensuing years noise became increasingly subtle. By the end of the 1930s, popular music in the broad sense would drop out from both the animated short and the full-length feature. The tunes to which Betty Boop (accompanied by Cab Calloway) and Mickey and Bosko were dancing and singing in the early years of sound were for their time the equivalent of songs today by Britney Spears or any number of rock bands. Then, although the full-length works of Walt Disney starting with *Snow White* in 1937 still contain plenty of songs and dance numbers, these musical numbers have a style generally atypical of the popular music of their time. A gap opened up in the course of the decade, as music in the cinema progressively distanced itself from noise and sought to become respectable. Only since the mid-1970s has this tendency reversed itself.

But there is no cause to lament the passing of innocence and freshness, for freshness always returns eventually, in places we would never expect. The music video since the 1980s, for example, frequently captures in imaginative mise-en-scène something similar to what I described earlier in relation to 1930s animation. But it does so with this important difference: the music in today's audiovisual art is radically separated and cut off from the world of noises. With the disappearance of the direct link between man and machine, music is no longer put forward as the rhythm of the modern world. Our present computerized and electronic world no longer has a pulse that might unite and give rhythm to the multitudinous sounds of life. Even the notion of a rhythm of the world has a different ideological meaning now. Associated in the early 1930s with modernism and the idea of technical progress—and media-driven unanimity: the radio and the telephone uniting distant lands and peoples as one sees in *Allô Berlin? Ici Paris!* (Julien Duvivier, 1931)—it has become a New Age theme, associated with the return to nature.

Finally, as audiovisual media have become ever more pervasive, in an age when music videos give us images as part of the musical experience, the space for acousmatic imagination (a reverie that has always been associated with

audio recording and radio) seems to be shrinking. We can bet, however, that it will never disappear completely.

COLLECTIVE AND SPONTANEOUS SPEECH

The new sound film was not satisfied with simply transposing the theater or music hall to a new venue. Several traits in some of the first sound films demonstrate an effort to do things differently with this art form than merely to film theater.

The first is the effort to create the impression of *natural speaking*, with scenes of collective dialogue that was not necessarily decipherable. Think of all the films about the First World War, with their conversations among German and French soldiers on the front and in the trenches. Or consider the many scenes at fairs, in bars, at construction sites and factories that exhibit a similar pursuit of spontaneous vitality, with more than one person speaking at once or even in different languages. A partial list would include drunks talking in *Anna Christie*, cabaret scenes in *The Blue Angel*, crowds of soldiers in Pabst's *Westfront 1918* (1930), Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), and *Wooden Crosses*, merry drinking around the table, dancing girls rehearsing in the musicals of Lloyd Bacon and Busby Berkeley, the enraptured crowd punctuating the gospel sermons of *Hallelujah* with *Amens*, and scenes of friends meeting up in cafes, shops, and on the street (as in Mario Camerini's *What Scoundrels Men Are!* [1932]). In the early talking cinema any setting or subject matter seemed to serve, at least on some occasions, as a pretext for making audible this kind of "egalitarian" group speech.

In *La Tête d'un homme* policemen lean over the engine of a supposedly broken-down car (to allow their prisoner to escape) and make a torrent of comments offscreen while the camera, in "counterpoint," shows their surreptitious glances at one another: "It's broken, I tell you . . . I had to be at the station at five . . . So? . . . So d'you got gas in it? . . . Of course, I filled it up this morning . . . Your plugs and points might be dirty . . . No way, I swear, I checked 'em just last week . . . No, it's gotta be your sparkplugs." And so on, all delivered in rapid fire.

The problem is that one cannot make a whole film full of collective speech like this, and switching from the kind of scenes I have mentioned (and we could add *M* and *La Chienne* to the list, as well as the school scenes in Vigo's *Zéro de conduite* [1933]) to sequences with more classical dialogue was difficult to pull off, like moving in an opera from aria to recitative or, in musicals, transitioning from song to normal speech. The crackling verbal energy of such scenes lent a rather frozen feel, by contrast, to scenes composed of conventional dialogue.

Some films found a way out of this problem through extreme stylization, by creating a very regulated (if slightly rigid) way to go from group scene to intimate conversation. This is what happens at times in *M*, *Sous les toits de Paris*, and in the musical comedies of Lubitsch with Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald (for example, *The Merry Widow* [1934]). The results in these films were sometimes dazzling, sometimes dry and stilted. It was a rare film (Vigo's *L'Atalante* from 1934 is one) that was able to convey a satisfying naturalness—the grace and agility of a talking cinema that's at once supple, elastic, and precise.

DOES THE SOUND FILM IMPLY NATURALISM?

Not all sound films strove for the same naturalness, at least not right away. Today we are struck by the declamatory style some of them adopted: the tremulous intonations of Jolson in his few spoken lines in *The Jazz Singer*, the bombast in Gance's *La Fin du monde* and also his sound version of *Napoleon* (1932), a film full of imperious language—the manly, resolute voice of Albert Dieudonné tries to have the same power as his piercing eagle-eyes. But in some of these films the effort to produce a declamatory sound cinema—and why not—is foiled by technical obstacles such as mics that give no echo and yield decidedly un-epic timbres. A nondeclamatory code of acting soon took over, a style that disfavored effusive oratory. It is no surprise that the cinema "canned" more theatrical comedies than tragedies during this period. Only later would some directors go back in different ways, including parody, to oratorical grandeur—the British cinema being, for various historical reasons, including the Shakespearean tradition, the most open to this approach.[10]

Is naturalism therefore the very essence of the sound film? We often hear this idea, but I believe there is also a historical factor involved; cinema was

born into an era of naturalism, when fewer and fewer plays were being written in verse and more painters, writers, and other artists sought to represent reality. When sound cinema arrived, films followed the existing trend.

Early silent film was already torn between two contradictory tendencies: the operatic and melodramatic on the one hand, naturalism on the other. This contradiction, which can sometimes be observed within a single work (such as the oscillation between the commonplace and the grandiloquent in Murnau's *The Last Laugh*), was often productive and vital.

Once the talking film really found its bearings and unplugged its ears, the realist tendency seems to have prevailed; audible ordinary speech and real voices became the rule (sometimes brutally so). But in fact it was not quite so simple; the tension between naturalist speech and melodrama often persisted. John Ford's *The Informer* (1935) has dialogue that is written and delivered realistically, while the music of Max Steiner underscores action and characters' inner torments in the manner of opera. This complementarity established the mode of operation of music in classic cinema: the acting style is sober and reserved, but it is often accompanied by torridly emotive musical scoring.

A NEW WAY TO FILM SPEECH

In talkies people talk. But how? More important, how is talk filmed differently from dialogue scenes in silent films? In silents the characters are quite often immobile in the setting while speaking. There might be movement when one character calls after another, as when O'Brien pursues Gaynor in *Sunrise*, but that's calling, not conversation. (We may note that this talking-without-moving mode typifies most dialogue scenes in *2001: A Space Odyssey* [1968], suggesting Kubrick's interest in returning to the origins of cinema in this singular work.)

The sound film created a possibility that was discovered and exploited only gradually: characters speaking as they move around a setting. This setting might be a real three-dimensional space or a constructed set, but it could also include a rear-projected setting via the process screen, as on all those occasions when characters are shown sitting and talking while they drive.

The appearance of talking-while-moving is fascinating to observe in *Anna Christie*. The first part of this work inspired by Eugene O'Neill openly displays its filmed-theater quality. The second part, near the Brooklyn Bridge, includes a conversation between Anna (Garbo) and her father on a boat, against a moving rear-projection showing the docks of New York. Let us recall that this technique was not uncommon in theater and was used in both fantasy pieces and operas (Wagner's *Parsifal*), as well as in prose plays (the first act

of Jules Romains's 1923 play *Knock* takes place in a moving car, thanks to a moving painted scroll of landscape behind the actors).

In two European films of the same period, *What Scoundrels Men Are!* and *La Tête d'un homme*, we find the same idea again with slight variations: characters converse in an automobile using familiar, "natural" language, but we hear them acousmatically, that is, without seeing them. Instead what we see is the countryside going by just as it would be seen by one of the passengers looking out his window. This is a typical example of the era's experiments in "counterpoint," one that did not catch on.

Soon afterward, the process shot became widely used, since this device is as easy to execute as it is wonderful to observe. The characters are in a car or train; we see them, and behind, framed in the windows or the windshield, is projected the moving scenery. The film thus gets the double advantage of an intimate filmed conversation combined with the kinetic energy of a moving outdoor scene.[11]

The exchange between Michel Simon and Janie Marèze as they walk along the sidewalk at the beginning of *La Chienne* may well be one of the first ambulatory conversations in cinema. It is relatively brief compared to so many later ones filmed outdoors, the most famous of which are Woody Allen's couples arguing on the sidewalks of Manhattan (*Annie Hall* [1977]). Let me also mention one of the longest examples, not surprisingly in German cinema, which exploits the tradition of *Wandern*—no less than twenty minutes of conversation between Rüdiger Vogler and Hans Christian Blech while they climb a half kilometer on a mountain road (*False Movement* [1974], by Wim Wenders).

EXPERIMENTS IN THE EARLY SOUND FILM

1. AUDIO DISSOLVES

Audio dissolves became an obsession in early sound films. *La Chienne* goes from a player piano in a cafe to a cuckoo clock in Legrand's apartment. Much of *M* and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* relies on audio dissolves. Because sound mixing was still rudimentary, and did not yet allow for the gradations and blending that would come later, directors sometimes found it useful to match or dissolve the last sound of one scene with the leadoff sound in the next.

The transition might be based on a resemblance or on a rhyme. In *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* a time bomb is ticking in Mabuse's lair where Kent and Lilli are trapped. Following a fade, we hear a similar rhythmic noise, but more delicate, as we see a refined gentleman in his apartment, in a dressing

gown, tapping on the shell of a soft-boiled egg. In the following years, as Rick Altman has observed so well, this type of transition or audio dissolve would remain the specialty of the musical.[12] The technique resurfaced prominently in Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (2000).

Today Michel Deville is one of the few filmmakers outside the realm of musicals to use audio dissolves creatively; in *La Lectrice* (1988) he makes the purring of a cat metamorphose into the purring of a motorbike engine.

The audio dissolve sometimes occurs via the yoking of words. In the two Lang films mentioned above, a word or phrase spoken by a character serves as a pivot between scenes. Thus the word for "child murderer"—*Kindermörder*—pronounced by one character in one scene leads to another scene that either shows the criminal or shows another social group repeating the word, suggesting the thaumaturgic power of a magic spell, where what is named appears. This practice of verbal linkage in *M* and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* also reinforces the paranoid dimension of both films, consistent with their subject matter—the one dealing with rumor and the other with conspiracy. As we will see in the next chapter, textual speech eventually threatens to spread like a cancer with no master narrator to assume control over it and channel it.

The verbal dissolve/transition would survive as a trace in the later sound cinema. In a scene in *Quai des brumes* (1938) a ship's captain asks Jean (Jean Gabin) if he knows anyone in the city, and Jean replies, "Personne." The following image shows Nelly (Michèle Morgan), the *person* in question, at the fair where she met up with Jean.[13] In *Casablanca* soldiers on the runway mention Rick's American cafe ("Everybody comes to Rick's"), and the following scene transports us into the cafe. David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (1981) and *Wild at Heart* (1990) offer more examples. "What are we going to do in this hole?" asks Lula (Laura Dern) on arriving in Big Tuna, and we cut to a shot of graffiti that gives the answer: "Fuck."

The sound film began fairly quickly to invent transitions that were less obvious and rhetorical, and more acoustically smooth and seamless, thanks to technical developments that made mixing increasingly easy. Claudia Gorbman has shown, for example, how nondiegetic music came to play an increasingly important role in narrative continuity, since in a way it frees sound effects and words from acting as pivots for scene transitions.[14]

But words would always retain their privileged power to evoke.

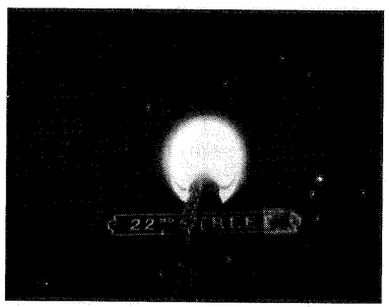
2. THE AUDITORY TRACKING SHOT

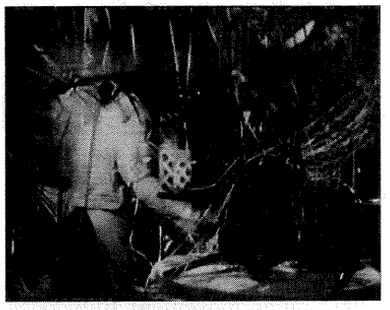
One could idealize the pioneering period of the sound film as easily as one can caricature it: let us keep in view both its promises and its contradictions.

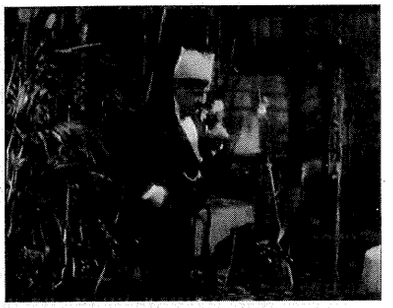
It is an engaging period when people tried to have it all—for example, there coexisted the drive for intelligible dialogue and the desire to take techniques used with the image and transfer them to sound (which doesn't produce the same effects) and in the process violate the contract of intelligibility. Among these efforts were aural perspective and the auditory tracking shot.

Auditory tracking shots can be found in at least five of the most widely known films of the time. In *Sous les toits de Paris* we hear with increasing distinctness a group of people singing the title song, while the camera that began on the rooftops descends to the street in one continuous movement. In *Wooden Crosses* the camera tracks from the choir of a church, where "Ave Maria" is being sung, to a makeshift infirmary in one wing of the church, while the singing gets progressively fainter. In *M* the reedy voice of the little girl who chants the macabre children's song diminishes in volume as the camera pans away and rises up. In *Scarface* a virtuosic opening-sequence shot moves from outside to inside a restaurant and picks up at progressively closer range the conversations of the late-night diners. And in *Hallelujah* there is Zeke's search in different cafes, each with its own music, all heard in succession by a character in a cart. Some of these auditory tracking shots move forward, some dolly out, or as in the last case, they may combine directions of movement. But in all five, the direction of the sound's "movement" is designed to match the movement of the camera. It is possible that all five examples were influenced by a famous moving shot of the silent era, in Murnau's *The Last Laugh*, which moves from Emil Jannings in his upper-floor apartment to a closeup on the bell of a trumpet played by a drunken musician in the street. This silent crane shot may have suggested the later tracking shots with sound.

But these shots have a curious and unexpected effect: by modeling its movement on that of the image, accompanying the movement of the camera, the sound endows the camera with virtual ears, turning the camera perhaps a bit too concretely into a character. Moreover, the spectator can sometimes hesitate about how to interpret this changing sound and the attention it brings to the







manipulation of her or his hearing. Should the sound be taken as subjective or not? Who hears what we hear? For example, when the sound of the little girl's voice grows faint for us at the beginning of *M*, is it becoming more audible for the housewife who calls to the children from her balcony? It is true that this practice occurred less frequently as time went by, perhaps tacitly judged too disruptive of the norms of cinematic representation. However, it returned from time to time—for example in the opening sequence-shot of *Touch of Evil* (1958) as remixed by Walter Murch in 1998 according to notes left by Orson Welles—and its potential remains to be explored. Let me mention also that the famous inside-to-outside tracking sequence-shot that is the penultimate shot of Antonioni's *The Passenger* (1975) is not paired with any auditory tracking effects and therefore does not create the "moving ears" effect I have noted.

Moreover, when language is involved, the auditory tracking shot underscores the all-or-nothing character of linguistic hearing. No gradations are possible—we either understand what was said or we don't. It is hardly ever a simple matter to reconcile the demand that the dialogue be intelligible with observance of sound perspective.

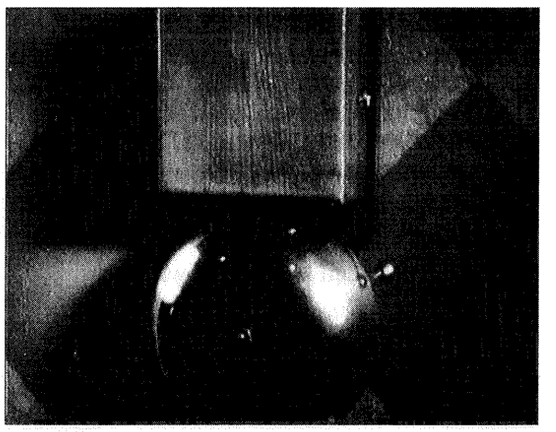
If the earliest sound films didn't allow the camera to dart around in space as easily as before, this tendency toward stasis had less to do with the equipment itself (the separation of microphone and camera was already established) than with a concern for coherence. The screen was seen as a stage, and sound was generally conceived as conserving the scenic space indicated by the image. But that implicit relationship created obstacles as filmmakers worked in direct sound: the rule against showing mics in the frame limited the options of where to place them; in addition, the mic needed to be located closer than the camera to the sound source (most often an actor's mouth) in order to guarantee intelligibility. Very gradually, then, the cinema settled on having the voice in more-or-less closeup all the time, whether direct sound or dubbing was being used; and with that, the numerous experiments in sound perspective that were attempted in the first talking films were rather quickly abandoned. Sound would henceforth serve rather to reinforce continuity in the editing, by giving voices a relatively equal and continuous presence regardless of changes in camera placement. The rapid adoption of the sound overlap (ending a sentence on the following shot) was based on the same idea.

3. MICROEDITING SOUNDS

Technical advances incited the pioneers of sound to try other bold techniques, especially following the development of sound-on-film. Optical sound had not been used in *The Jazz Singer* (which used sound-on-disc), but it soon became standard.

For a long time recording sounds had meant the possibility of transforming them. Ever since sounds were first recorded by phonograph (around 1877)—first on cylinders, then on discs—one could doctor them, either through changes in speed or by playing them backward, thus modifying the sound recorded. Anyone can try it with an old mechanical phonograph, but we all know it already from modern turntables. The first works of *musique concrète* were thus created and recorded on discs in 1948, as well as the first sound films around 1926 to 1928.

But the optical soundtrack (invented in the late 1920s), a costly medium involving heavy recording equipment and used only in the cinema,[15] offered many more possibilities for innovation, since one could edit sounds, select fragments, move them around, and reassemble them in any order. Twenty years later magnetic sound would offer all this much less expensively.



The microediting of sound is abundantly evident in certain early sound films such as *Allô Berlin? Ici Paris!* (which sports seven different telephone rings that form a melody, and later a concerto of locomotive whistles), *The Merry Widow* (the three syllables of the name of the seducer Da-ni-lo, pronounced by three different women in three successive shots), *Enthusiasm*, and of course in Walter Ruttmann's film without images, *Weekend* (1930)—an audio narrative of one weekend, made on optical film, in the unanimist spirit of the time, and which offers the most systematic application of this idea.[16]

The problem with editing sounds rapidly is that a sound requires time to exist and develop, whereas an image can show something in a split second, and this something (a face, an object) can be immobile. Rapid montage in the silent films of Eisenstein (like the sequence with the cream separator in *The General Line*) primarily uses images that are static or that change only slightly. With sound this would make no sense. A second-long image of a horse represents a horse that can be recognized as a horse; a second of whinnying, however, represents nothing and is not identifiable. The microediting of sound often isolates and assembles only fragments of impersonal and devitalized sound for the simple reason that they are deprived of development in time. This problem is evident in Ruttmann's work, as brilliant as it is in some respects and undeniably of great historical significance.[17]

It would be foolish to condemn these experiments because they turned into dead ends. For it is thanks to these explorations that we've been able to identify them as dead ends in the first place—and besides, perhaps someday someone will find in them a pathway previously not envisioned.

Optical sound also makes it possible to manipulate the speed and direction of playback. Jean Epstein explored slow-motion sound, and Jean Vigo gave us in *Zéro de conduite* (1933) Maurice Jaubert's music in reverse, creating different sonorities. Jaubert used the reverse-motion capability again in Duvivier's *Carnet de bal* (1937).

4. THE X-27 EFFECT

Our list of innovations made possible by the sound film would not be complete without the effect that involves picture editing—without a temporal ellipse—within a diegetic music cue. It could occur when a door closes, or on movement from one room to the next, or alternating interior and exterior action. This was one of the truly new techniques of sound film, and Josef von Sternberg was certainly the filmmaker who best explored its possibilities in those early years.

In *The Blue Angel* cuts in diegetic music occur each time a character adjusts a window (professor Rath while his students are writing) or a door (backstage in the cabaret where people come through and as they open and shut the stage door, the music being played onstage turns on and off like a flashlight). In *Dishonored* (1930) Agent X-27 (Marlene Dietrich) is playing Beethoven on the piano, and our auditory perspective alternates between her living room, with the piano, and the next room, where a Russian colonel (Victor McLaglen) is rifling through her things. Thus we get these auditory *leaps of presence* right in the middle of the uninterrupted playing of the piece; this effect was revolutionary for the time and received much comment. I have chosen to call this the X-27 *effect* after Sternberg's masterpiece. It is the effect produced when a music cue, without any breaks in its harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic line, is subjected to instantaneous changes in timbre and volume. It is one of the most

elegant illustrations in cinema of *nondiscontinuity*, that is, continuity affirmed by its apparent opposite.[18]

THE REINTRODUCTION OF PIT MUSIC

In silent film, music came from the orchestra pit, though it might also sometimes be coordinated with musical situations present in the film. But the place from which music would be emitted became a sticky problem once the soundtrack was opened—timidly at first—to synch sounds and spoken dialogue, and the loudspeaker was installed behind the screen. That was when a concern for realism and verisimilitude arose. Because the musical accompaniment was coming from the same real space as the realistic sounds of the film, people decided that the music should have a realistic justification and that the action of the film must make room for it as screen music. Thus screenplays were written to include narrative situations justifying the appearance of music. Marcel L'Herbier's 1930 film *L'Enfant de l'amour* (The Illegitimate Child) contains numerous situations of this kind that quickly became widely acknowledged conventions: piano exercises overheard from a neighboring apartment (*La Chienne*, *Abschied*), pianos or player pianos or small ensembles in cabarets (*La Tête d'un homme*, *The Blue Angel*), street musicians (*M*, *Scarface*), ceremonies and group singing (*Hallelujah*), radio music (*The Public Enemy*), opera (*La Route est belle* [1930], Robert Florey), record players, and of course, scenes of rehearsals and performances of musical shows (musicals—a genre that freely combined diegetic and nondiegetic music). In other film genres nondiegetic orchestral music was routinely accepted over the credits or during an action sequence without dialogue but rarely for sequences with dialogue.

Then, little by little, pit music reappeared, and spectators got used to separating and classifying the variety of sound elements that were all present on a single track and emitted over a single loudspeaker or several speakers transmitting the same signal. With practice everyone could distinguish the sounds justified by the action and context—voices, noises, and occasionally music—from sounds from "the pit"—orchestra pit music and voices of commentary or narration.

The main event at this time when it comes to music is thus the reintroduction of nondiegetic music into film. As we have seen, music never deserted the cinema, except in a few World War I films, where its absence is significant; it's just that for a time it was present only as a concrete element in the action.

Filmmakers at the time were faced with a new question: how should pit music, screen music, dialogue, and sound effects coexist? Claudia Gorbman has presented an excellent synthesis of these complex issues as they arose, for example, in Schoedsack and Cooper's *King Kong* (1933), and I have also considered the subject in detail elsewhere. In *King Kong* Max Steiner's gigantic score pervades and unifies the aural ensemble of the film. But another film of the period adopts a different technique, more of a mosaic, using far less nondiegetic music to achieve a similar coherence. This film, one of the crowning achievements of this first period of sound film, and one that could only have been made in France, is *L'Atalante*.

1. See Michel Marie, "La bouche bée," in *Hors-Cadre*, no. 3, special issue, "La Voix-off" (March 1985): 115–32.
2. Although the most widely used term in English is now *sound film*, French uses *le parlant* (talking film).—Trans.
3. Rick Altman, "Films sonores/cinéma muet, ou comment le cinéma hollywoodien apprit à parler et à se taire," in *Conférences du collège d'histoire de l'art cinématographique* (Paris: Cinémathèque française, 1992), 137–58, 148–49.
4. Ibid., 149.
5. See the fascinating study by Alberto Boschi, *L'avvento del sonoro in Europa* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1994), which offers a thorough comparison of the silent and sound versions of Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (134–40).
6. A French expression for arriving late is "arriving like the police officers," referring to the *carabiniers* in Offenbach's operetta *Les Brigands*.—Trans.
7. In other words, when an auditory phenomenon and a visual phenomenon are associated for our perception through synchronism, which is the cause and which is the effect of the other? Which is "commanding" the other? I will return to these questions in chapter 24.
8. Wilhelm Thiele, "Du style de l'opérette filmée," *Ciné-Journal*, October 17, 1930, quoted in Roger Icart, *La Révolution du parlant vue par la presse française* (Perpignan: Institut Jean Vigo, 1988), 335–36.
9. See Michel Chion, *Le Son* (Paris: Nathan, 1998); and Michel Chion, *Guide des objets sonores* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1983), esp. the articles "Itératif" and "Complexe."
10. In addition to the filmed plays of Shakespeare by Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh, think of the exaggerated and unnatural acting of Brenda Blethyn in Mike Leigh's *Secrets and Lies* (1996).
11. See "Éloge de la transparence," chapter 1.9 of my book *Technique et création au cinéma* (Paris: ESEC, 2002), 71–73.
12. See Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
13. In French *personne* can mean "nobody" or "person." Therefore, "*Je connais personne*" (I know no one) sounds a lot like "*Je connais une personne*" (I know one/a person).—Trans.
14. See Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
15. Today optical sound still exists for film prints to be used in movie theaters and has not been completely replaced by digital sound. In the beginning optical sound was used equally to record sounds during shooting and during the recording of music and sound effects, as well as during the mixing.

16. The French author Jules Romains (1884–1972) popularized the term *unanimisme*, the idea that we are all inhabitants of the same planet and that humanity is unified in its collective destiny.—Trans.

17. See my contribution to the French CD version of Ruttmann's *Weekend*, produced by Jérôme Noetinger on the Metamkine label, Collection "Cinéma pour l'oreille."

18. See glossary for *nondiscontinuity*.

CHAPTER 4

Jean Vigo: The Material and the Ideal

1.

A STAINED-GLASS WINDOW: *using this image borrowed from a hallowed art, Henri Langlois described the audiovisual composition of* L'Atalante, *a film he considered one of the few truly successful fusions of sound and image in the entire history of sound film.*[1]

A stained-glass window consists of distinct pieces of colored glass that combine to form an image, while never hiding the discontinuous nature of the individual pieces of the composition. Whether Langlois is right to call L'Atalante *a film composed of colored pieces, his claim is certainly right with respect to what is referred to somewhat inaccurately as the "dialogue" in this film.*

With its sentence fragments and interjections, L'Atalante, *in accordance with the early sound period's experiments with naturalistic speech, contains much throwaway language, seemingly wasted words that belong to another economy of use than those of so-called verbal communication. Characters can be found soliloquizing to everyone and no one at once, as though the speaker had no intention of convincing anyone present. Everyone makes his or her voice heard in this film, even the young sailor on the house barge, who at other moments one might take for a mute. But each gets a turn. There are scenes where Juliette (Dita Parlo), the bargeman's wife, says hardly a word, and there are others (such as when she wants to do the wash) where she's the talker and the others are obliged to shut up.*

L'Atalante *thus became, in the first years of sound, a film about speech in France—a country where people open their mouths not always with conversing in mind but also to affirm that you are who you are and that you stick to what you say. If Vigo were to come back to the earth, he would see (and hear) that France has not budged on this score and remains, as in his film, a nation where*

everyone gripes, groans, grumbles, bellyaches, fusses, fumes, flaps, protests, vituperates, and otherwise complains—and not always to obtain a result but simply on principle. The film is full of sentences thrown like javelins that never hit the ground, lost words that occasion nothing more than perhaps being echoed by another and leave fundamentally undisturbed everyone else's solitude.

Voices in this film are also isolated from one another because each belongs to a different universe; among other things, each is marked by a different accent. Foreign or regional accents play an important part in early French talkies (in the work of Duvivier, Clair, Renoir, Maurice Tourneur, and others), but to my knowledge L'Atalante *is the only film of Michel Simon's where the Geneva native uses to such excess, even to the point of parody, the popular accent of his home region, even though the character he plays, old Jules, is never specifically identified as Swiss-Vaudois. As for Dita Parlo, she plays a French country girl charmed by a nice fellow, but her German accent comes through in her longer stretches of dialogue. The idea in Vigo is not so much getting the realist picturesque localism right as underscoring the mutual isolation of all the discourses present. Always the discontinuum, the stained-glass window.*

Without having a doctrine as well articulated or a formal system as clearly defined as René Clair, who in Sous les toits de Paris *constructs all sorts of scenes according to specific audiovisual ideas,*[2] *Vigo does what he can to give speech a "no-stick" quality, as one says in cooking, so that speech does not adhere to the superb images of Boris Kaufman and so that it doesn't structure everything around it, as would be the destiny of the great verbocentric classical cinema. With this goal in mind Vigo breaks the verbal continuum with frequent silences between sentences, and when characters speak, they are often filmed from behind, from afar, in motion, or decentered in the frame. Thus there is a minimum degree of lip synchronization, this audiovisual bolting together that normally focuses attention on the source of the words. Fellini, starting especially with* 8½ *(1963), made this approach a systematic part of his style, filming his actors very often from behind or walking, and misaligning dialogue with image in his editing. In this regard* L'Atalante *tends toward what we would call* verbo-decentric *cinema.*

Many lines in L'Atalante *were likely dubbed afterward, as was common at the time, with images shot silent, and this dubbing allows its stuck-on quality to be felt, as with Fellini, with no apologies. One member of the wedding procession at the beginning unleashes a remark: "Come there, mother, no complaining"; this might be an example of one of these added dabs of auditory color common in the early sound film in the mode of those silent films that dubbed sound in after the fact.*

Even though L'Atalante *includes some scenes with conversational exchanges, what one remembers is a film of monologues, an effect largely due to the crushing*

vocal presence of Michel Simon. When he speaks, a chaotic, nonstop internal rumination seems to surge out of him. With village-idiot imprecations he creates colorful sounds and music; his speech extends into his playthings, his accordion, and his gestures; he chews on what others say to him and repeats it as if to digest it, and he never stops talking (note the scene where he "wins" at cards while commenting on his luck or misfortune). His is the first voice we hear in the film, when he reprimands the young ship's apprentice, and he seems already to have been speaking forever when the silent wedding party files past. He's the chorus of one.

The other monologue in L'Atalante*—composed of several pieces—belongs to the traveling salesman played by Gilles Margaritis: arranged and rhymed in the style of the advertising jingles in which the surrealists took such pleasure (e.g., Robert Desnos), with spoken/sung accents of the era (Pabst's 1931* Threepenny Opera *is in the air, and it is also the era of the* chanteurs-diseurs*). "Going once, twice, three times . . . sold!"*

We find this speaking/singing already in some of the first talkies of René Clair (for example, Le Million *[1931]), but the difference with Vigo is the totally fluid phrasing.*

Juliette, the only woman in the film, is caught between these two imposing male vocal presences: the voice of the old salt, repulsive, oppressive, and a troublemaker, and the voice of the itinerant salesman, capable of enchanting the whole world and adding sparkle to any word or object. She is also drawn to the radio and its seductive advertisements for the grand Parisian department stores: "Hello, hello, this is Paris. . . . This year, wearing your hat tipped like a beret is in!" Caught between the drivel of one and the patter of the other, Juliette will be driven back into the arms of a person who hardly says a word and who is in a number of ways her double, her twin, Jean (Jean Dasté).

Elsewhere in the film Vigo establishes a situation of internal vocal obsession (which I call subjective internal voice*), whereby whispered sentences uttered by the salesman and Jean haunt Juliette at night in her bed. Speech used to haunt characters is one of the recurrent sound experiments in the early talkies. Think of the voice-of-the-bad-conscience in* Le million*, the voices that Jeanette (Jeanette MacDonald) hears in* Love Me Tonight*, and the obsessive play on the name "Jean de la lune" in the eponymous film by Jean Choux.*

There is a kind of psittacism or echolalia at work throughout L'Atalante*, which lends a certain musicality to the dialogue and discreetly removes it from naturalism. Often a character rephrases as a question or even as a simple flat echo what has just been said. For example, "I'm going to get the missus"—"You're going to get the missus?" or "You've sure worked a lot of jobs"—"Yep, I've sure worked a lot of jobs."*

This psittacism—very present in Kubrick's final film, Eyes Wide Shut *(1999), though with a significantly different function—does not for all its repetition forge any link between the characters' different worlds. On the contrary, it reinforces their mutual watertight impermeability, as each one appropriates with a particular voice and accent whatever has been said but without extending or sharing speech in a common dialogue. A lovely example of this pattern of echoes occurs in the dinner scene where old Jules, who was pouting, resolves to eat with the others on the barge. When Jean says to him, "Quit pouting," Jules adopts the voice of a brat who will decide on his own when he's going to do something: "I ain't pouting!"*

Thus the characters of the little world of the barge's crew—Jean and Juliette, old Jules, the sailor boy, and a ton of cats—bump up against each other, touch, graze, rub, hit, embrace, and scrap in cramped quarters with few comforts. But vocally each occupies a foreign country far from the others. This contrast between physical promiscuity and affective isolation, broken up by rare moments of collective complicity, strikes me as one of the keys of L'Atalante.

2.

In those places in Vigo's film where speech separates and isolates—although it can charm, too, as with Gilles Margaritis's salesman—Maurice Jaubert's music unites. This is not merely "film music" that falls out of the sky. What happens in L'Atalante *is that the music serves as a springboard from which the film departs from realism and attains lyricism and poetry, since among other subjects* L'Atalante *is about how laborious and disappointing reality is, how absolute love is, and the constant passage between one and the other. In my opinion audiences don't listen as closely as they should to the lyrics of Charles Goldblatt sung by a chorus over the opening credits (granted, they're almost unintelligible even in the remastered version). They begin, "We're not on these barges to get a tan; you've got to work my man." Then, more romantically, they speak of beautiful young maids that boatmen "steal from the land." This passage from the crudely prosaic to the poetic is echoed particularly in the initial wedding scene, when the meager diegetic music of the wedding ceremony whose poverty is quite audible (a lone amateur accordion) opens out to a lyrical, well-composed nondiegetic orchestral cue to accompany the procession.*

The 1930s filmmaking of Vigo and Renoir may be contrasted in this regard. In Renoir's films, with the exception perhaps of Grand Illusion *(1937) and* A Day in the Country *(1936), the music is fundamentally ironic; it is often cut off, stifled, or mechanical. In the music's ideal form Renoir can have it exist only as a description in words, as a lost paradise—there is no way we can hear it. I'm thinking of the story Octave tells about the concert given by Christine's orchestra conductor father, at the end of* The Rules of the Game *(1939). This beautiful music is only evoked in Octave's verbal narration, while the music we do hear includes the player piano and the runaway out-of-tune giant music box. With Vigo and Maurice Jaubert, however, music cues, situated most of the time within the story (dance halls, cafés, radios, phonographs, accordion playing), are often allusive, interrupted, and evanescent but not ironic or parodic in a way that suggests any loss of the ideal. Instead, there's the suggestion of a sort of holy, half-excavated clutter where, as with the collection of objects brought back by old Jules from his exotic voyages, we always anticipate encountering another marvel, and where music does not break with reality but extends it.*[3]

In contrast to Renoir's characters, who have a fundamental amusia, just about all the characters in L'Atalante *either make music or listen to it and really live it; one plays the accordion, another (the salesman) is a one-man band, and Juliette pays to listen to a song from a sort of jukebox. In a deliberately unrealistic and ambiguous gesture, Vigo shows Dita Parlo listening to the film's musical theme through headphones in a commercial music parlor, and the same music that she is listening to for her own pleasure is broadcast outside via the loudspeaker positioned above the shop door, thereby entering public space and eventually attracting the attention of old Jules.*

Over the course of the movie, Jules pieces together an old phonograph and tries to restore it to working order. There's the famous gag, the kind Tati would later dream up, where Jules is the victim of an audiovisual prank: he places his finger instead of the needle onto the grooves of a 78 and to his surprise he hears music—but it's his apprentice who has been playing the accordion offscreen and synchronizing with his gestures. A vexed Jules grumbles, "You ain't got much on the bean if you're busy playin' a record with your finger." But eventually he does get the phonograph working, and the music on the record undergoes a transformation. As at the start of the film with the accordion, the music here goes orchestral and accompanies the images of Jean swimming.

In the sequence where Dita Parlo runs away, Jaubert's music contributes to unite the two separate bodies of Juliette and Jean, each on his or her bed, in an astonishing passage of parallel editing full of eroticism (even bisexuality: Dasté caresses his torso as if it's a woman's body). Upon the final embrace of the reunited couple, a lyrical female humming voice, common in French film music of the 1930s, compensates for the impasse of words.

And what about sound effects, that third audio element of film? If we limit ourselves to a narrow, functional definition of this category, namely that which is not speech or music, then there are certainly not as many in L'Atalante *as we might expect. We get some sounds of the barge, and a few noises of the river's*

work environment, but not the variety of the sounds of the world generally heard in French films of the early 1930s. At the same time, if we know how to listen, we find that L'Atalante *is indeed a noisy film: the raspy voice of old Jules, the ramshackle accordion at the wedding, the mechanical rhythms of the orchestra in the* café dansant *where the salesman calls out to the young couple—these are sound effects, in the sense of being nonsublimated sonic objects, attached to their material cause.*

Often, films such as those of Bresson in which we can detect a certain auditory scansion or an overall rhythm (a quality frequently pursued in the early sound era but rarely achieved before L'Atalante*) have sound that is basically described as being like music; some critics even add, without knowing what they're talking about, that the sound of such films is like* musique concrète. *Let me just say that in the case of Vigo's film, rather the opposite is true: everything we hear—speech, music, sound effects—remains sound; it retains its materiality, but it is a materiality without harshness or aggression, and it doesn't aspire to be a manifesto for an art of noise.*[4]

Of course, we can only hazard such an idea with caution. Vigo's film did not strike the ears of those who first heard it the way it did audiences in the 1950s, when Jaubert's score was restored (and the fashionable song of the day, "Le Chaland qui passe," which the studio had imposed, was dropped). Nor did they hear what modern audiences hear, now that the film has been remastered with cleaner and clearer sound. Every stage of sound production was different then, and the tonal characteristics of amplifiers and loudspeakers—in general more rounded off and not just more muffled—were totally different from today's equipment. Without even dwelling on the necessity of maintaining a cultural and historical relativism (a moviegoer in the 1930s did not "hear" sounds in the same way as the modern moviegoer, either: certain techniques and sound combinations were new to him or her, others familiar), one must acknowledge a difference in sound that was arguably greater than that of the images.

L'Atalante *is a great film, but it stands as isolated in its stained-glass splendor as the characters it depicts. The cinema had begun to enter its classical age and was about to reorganize itself around speech.*

1. See Henri Langlois, *Trois cents ans de cinéma*, ed. Jean Narboni (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma/Cinémathèque française, 1986).

2. Hitchcock is perhaps the only one of the great directors to have made brilliant films based on ideas and concepts that resulted from questions raised in the early sound period.

3. See Michel Chion, *La Musique au cinéma* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), 344.

4. Chion is referring here to the Italian futurist painter and musician Luigi Russolo, author of the 1913 *Art of Noise*, who sought a new form of music with dynamic, aggressive sounds that would be adequate to the dynamism and aggression of the modern world.—Trans.

CHAPTER 5

The Ascendancy of King Text (1935–1950)

THREE KINDS OF SPEECH

FOR A BETTER UNDERSTANDING of the evolution of sound film in its first decade and beyond, I propose the following classification of three uses of the spoken voice in cinema.

1. THEATRICAL SPEECH

The first and most common use of speech is what I call, with no pejorative inflection, *theatrical*, where characters speak words directly to one another that the spectator can hear. The dialogue is significant to the action, and at the same time it provides indications about the human, social, and emotional qualities of those who are speaking—even if they're lying, dissimulating, or being silent. In classic films that employ it, theatrical speech is so central that the *découpage* is organized around its articulation.[1] Changes in camera position and editing highlight and punctuate the play of questions and answers, pregnant silences, and memorable lines that are the stuff of drama. The simplest case of the way découpage submits to speech is the shot–reverse shot pattern, where the editing cuts back and forth between the faces of two people conversing.

Of course the weight of dialogue is not the same in film and on the stage, if only because the closeup, which exists only in film, necessarily creates a counterpoint between the content of the dialogue and the subtlest expressions on the faces of both the speaking and listening characters onscreen.

So-called modernist film also uses mostly theatrical speech, but it is not verbocentric.[2]

2. TEXTUAL SPEECH

The second usage, textual speech, is less common but all the more striking when it does occur. In textual speech the sound of the words has the status of text itself, like the text of a novel that can summon the image it describes simply through the utterance of the words. Textual speech is generally reserved for voice-over narration, but it can also come from the lips of a character in the story. In all these cases the sound is the bearer of the word, or logos, in a flash causing all of Creation to emerge. A voice says, "I shall never forget the weekend Laura died . . . ," and a story begins.

Textual speech generally keeps this omnipotence in reserve. The sound film learned to contain it after having been tempted to let it run wild: textual speech indeed tends to negate the autonomy of the visual, the material presence of the film's diegetic universe, which could become just a sequence of images that one flips through like a magazine according to the directives of words. Except for the examples that I will discuss below, textual speech is used sparingly and only in very specific circumstances, for example only at the beginning, where a voice-over might set the scene and then discreetly bow out.

3. EMANATION SPEECH

The third usage, which I call emanation speech, appears as the exact opposite of textual speech. This kind of dialogue is like a secretion of the characters, a facet of their being, an element of their profile (such as in the films of Tati where dialogue is only heard in bits and pieces); also, even if its content is highly important, it is not the thing that's driving the film forward or determining the découpage. A scene will still have divisions and turning points, but they are produced according to a logic that does not take its cue from what is being said. Only in the work of filmmakers like Fellini or Tarkovsky—or in one-of-a-kind films such as *2001*—do we ever observe pure examples of this rare phenomenon. Even in so-called action movies it is dialogue, when present, that still dictates scene construction and filmic space; the image in such films only regains its autonomy during moments of action that involve little or no speaking. One cannot loosen its grip by merely drowning the voice in noise, as Godard has often done, because then what happens—for example in *Masculine-Féminine* (1966), *Week End* (1967), or *Passion* (1982)—is that all our attention gets sucked into concentrating on this partially submerged text.

Fellini's films really do often decenter découpage away from dialogue. A scene's picture editing can show complete indifference (a calculated indifference, of course) to the articulations of characters' monologues and conversations. This can sometimes even lead to difficulties in following what characters are saying even though their speech is highly wrought, intelligible, abundant, and significant to the story. We even find in films such as 8½ situations that could be called "polylogues," polyphonic dialogues in which many lines by many characters meet and interact. Fellini paid enormous attention to the weight of words in his films (he filed suit against those responsible for the French subtitled version of *Intervista* [1987]). But at the same time his camera setups and shot transitions retain their autonomy. In this respect it could be said that Fellini, along with Robert Altman, counts among the rare filmmakers who "write" films in many voices.

With Tarkovsky the situation is both similar and different: we see his characters philosophize about the meaning of life while they are plunged into a cruel, unpredictable, and enigmatic universe being explored by the camera, a universe in which their words sound insignificant yet remain the purest expression of humanity. In Tarkovsky's films language is not diminished, as in Tati, nor is it the organizing matrix of the images; but it is movingly inscribed on the background of the world.

It goes without saying that in any moment of a given sound film, one would find a different mix of these three types of speech. But the first, theatrical speech, is by far the most common and the third, emanation speech, the rarest, while the second exerts control at strategic points, notably at the beginning and end. Textual speech occurs rather like an eclipse, suddenly and strikingly visible, emerging intermittently at key moments, as onto the surface of a tapestry, while it exerts considerable influence on the warp and woof underneath.

THE TEMPTATION OF TEXTUAL SPEECH

As we have seen, the beginnings of sound film were rich and contradictory. If the arrival of the voice liberated a flood of words, it did not simply bring the cinema closer to a theatrical model but rather presented two diametrically opposed possibilities. Either the narration would carry the viewer via the image (and via sound when it became available) through a temporally continuous scene that we are invited to witness (the purest example being a film in "real time," such as Hitchcock's *Rope* [1948] or Sokurov's *Russian Ark* [2002]); or else it's a voice-over—whether heard or understood—that puts together the images depicting various moments of action into a meaningful sequence that recounts the rise of a character's fortunes or a series of events over several months, or pictures a whole cross-section of society. In this case it is obviously a *text*—a text embodied by iconogenic textual speech, or by an arrangement of

intertitles, or a disguised text completely transposed into images—which allows us to read or which itself "reads" the succession of shots.

Hollywood cinema of the 1930s took advantage of its powerful systematicity to attempt to rival the temporal flexibility of narration in the novel. Lubitsch's *Trouble in Paradise* (1932) is at certain moments (such as when the film shows the situation of Madame Colet, played by Kay Francis) a fascinating demonstration of this limit case of filmic storytelling: the shots escape the usual boundaries of a diegetic space-time continuum, which is based on the notion of the *scene* in real (or pseudoreal) time. Instead, the shots here are merely a succession of signs, perfect equivalents of sentences, that allow for the hidden thread of the text to be even more easily read. Mervyn LeRoy's *Three on a Match* (1932) offers another astonishing example: newspaper headlines, images of crowds, and quotations from news stories seek to create a truly novelistic fabric around the characters' individual stories. But this formula, presenting images of groups, crowds, and settings glimpsed all in a few seconds, would survive in Hollywood only in the very specific form of the montage sequence (a brief sequence that condenses a whole period of happiness or misery through a series of images with no synch sound, soldered together with the help of a music cue or voice-over narration).

The advances in film language made during the silent era, such as a certain way of linking shots as arbitrary signs unhinged from the spatiotemporal continuity of the scene, were thus reaffirmed in numerous sound films and went even further, owing to the possibilities of adding information provided by sound. The newspaper headlines in *Three on a Match* that convey some of the events are essentially an alternative form of intertitles.

Another case: at the beginning of *M*, that great laboratory of experimentation in early sound, a police commissioner and a government official converse on the telephone. The former gives the latter information about the methods being used in trying to hunt down the child-murderer. As they talk, "silent" shots show policemen conducting searches, interviewing witnesses, and so forth; these shots are timed to correspond with what the commissioner says. The sequence gets us to forget that the textual speech is coming from one character speaking to another on the phone; it's even interrupted by a scene of witnesses' contradictory accounts, thus illustrating literally what the commissioner says about the difficulty of getting reliable recollections. In the second part of the "telepheme" that resumes afterward,[3] the images summoned by textual speech, though mute at first as in silent films, discreetly begin to emit sounds. First we hear the barking of a police dog, then the murmur of the crowd when the commissioner's voice describes police surveillance being deployed at train stations and boardinghouses. The last words we hear of the commissioner's speech (hammered out to a higher-up in the film but also to the audience of course) allude to the surveillance going on in the area of the crime, and that's exactly where the images then take us—to a dark deserted street in a bad neighborhood. But this time we hear street noise that lasts a few seconds, and we forget the commissioner's lines that had cued the image and the scene. Introduced by the comma-and-open-quotation-marks of the iconogenic text-voice, the scene begins to exist as an autonomous segment; the film will then "forget" to close the quotation marks.

It is rather rare to see, as we do here in *M*, the power of master of the succession of images being conferred on a secondary character (the commissioner) and not on a voice-over functioning as a master narrator. We also find this setup at the beginning of Duvivier's *Pépé le Moko* (1937), when Inspector Slimane (Lucas Gridoux) describes the Casbah to a newly arrived inspector, and his evocation produces the images for us to see.

The technique is most strikingly at work in Lang's next film, *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, where the remarks of minor characters unleash the magical evocative power of words. Inspector Lohmann exclaims, "I would love to meet the criminal who drove Hofmeister mad"—and we see the guilty Mabuse in the very next shot. At another point a minor henchman of Mabuse's mentions the invisible leader, who speaks to his men from behind a curtain that hides him, and lo! the next shot shows the curtain, again illustrating what was just said. It is as though every word uttered by any character at all in this film possesses, if only for a moment, the power to dictate and control the images, especially the power to conjure into the diegetic world the thing that has been named, as when Baum, reading Mabuse's text aloud, calls forth Mabuse's ghostly image before his eyes.

In silent film, intertitles could convey the discourse of the master narrator and regulate the succession of shots, as in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). But in Lang's *Testament* we have a sound film, with diegetic speech that exerts power over the diegesis itself, a phenomenon that is rather more disconcerting. When one gives a fictional character the right to dictate the sequencing of shots and be their master, at that moment we can see that images and relationships among them might have no logic of their own but are instead at the mercy of King Text and his unbridled power.

The story told in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* involves precisely the revelation of a text analogous to a screenplay. This text is the famous document couched in automatic writing by the jailed Mabuse, who has gone mad, a document whose content announces in advance the events that take place in the film. The film itself proceeds like a script or some preprogrammed series of actions. Lang's mise-en-scène reinforces this scripted quality through extreme stylization: sets with bare walls, sparse and very localized ambient sounds,

lighting so abstract that at certain moments we have no idea if it's day or night. Also the actors' elocution is peculiar, marked by a forceful, implacable delivery, as if to be *read* by the spectators through their ears. This articulation gives less the impression of actors inhabiting live characters than the sense that they are reciting the text of silent intertitles that the spectator in turn reads. The only example of a voice that is really speaking in this film, really belonging to the talking picture, is that of "*der Mann hinter dem Vorhang*" (the man behind the curtain)—and his is a voice that turns out not to be "live" but a recording, much as in *Modern Times*, where the only voices heard are "talking machines."

It is remarkable, in this story built on the idea of a hidden master's voice (in fact it's the voice of one of the characters, the psychiatrist Baum, possessed by Mabuse), that the question of the characterization of this centrally important voice never comes up—no character speaks about its qualities. "*Das ist die Stimme des Chefs*" (That is the Chief's voice), exclaims a character who hears talking behind the door. The Chief's voice, okay, but what kind of voice is it? We are never told. This voice fulfills the idea of an utterance without any particular timbre or accent.

Later Sacha Guitry would have fun posing superb challenges to the dominion of theatrical dialogue in his 1935 *Story of a Cheat*. In this work the director's own smooth voice narrates uninterrupted throughout. It completely flattens the cinematic universe as it conjures up images at will, depriving most of them of synchronous sound, as in a silent film. Few would dare to go so far with this practice. Truffaut, who admired Guitry, used it only in isolated instances in *Jules and Jim* (1961) and *The Man Who Loved Women* (1977).

My argument is that with incursions of this unbridled textual speech, the talking cinema flirted with its own destruction. The systematization of emanation speech, however, although magnificently realized in the case of *L'Atalante*, threatened to open the way to a new naturalist academicism. Classic cinema would find a "third way": a verbocentric cinema of theatrical

speech but one to which textual speech would return occasionally in the form of brief, dazzling interventions.

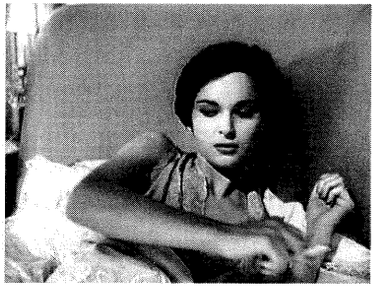
CLASSICAL SOUND FILM, A VERBOCENTRIC ART

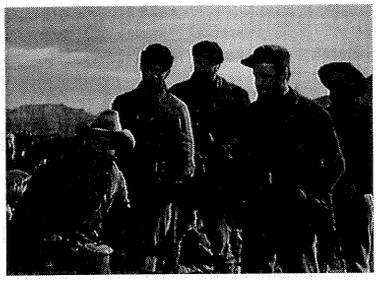
A compellingly "audiovisual" episode of the Gospel according to Saint John, which finds its way into many Bible films, offers an example, *avant la lettre*, of what I am calling verbocentric cinema:

> And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, "Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?" This they said, tempting him, that they might have [cause] to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. (John 8:3–8; KJV)

I use the term *verbocentric* to designate the classical form of the sound film that was established by the late 1930s and is still common today. What is it exactly? a type of cinema where speech is the center of attention without seeming to be, because it dovetails with parallel visual actions.

Take a scene of two characters talking to each other—filmed dialogue. It often happens that while speaking, one of the two is building a castle with playing cards (Huston's *The Kremlin Letter* [1970]); playing pool (Francis Coppola, *Rumble Fish* [1983]) or tennis, cards, or roulette (practically any James Bond film); bowling (René Clément, *Le Passager de la pluie* [*Rider on the Rain*, 1969]); smoking a cigarette or having a drink (*Casablanca*); typing (Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* [1941]); eating breakfast at a restaurant (Otto Preminger's *Laura* [1944]); placing cupping-glasses on the back of an alluring woman patient



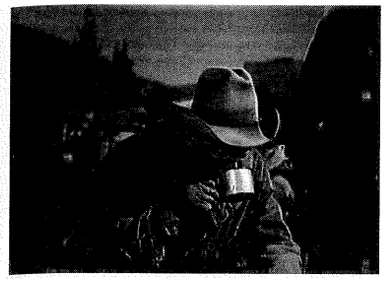


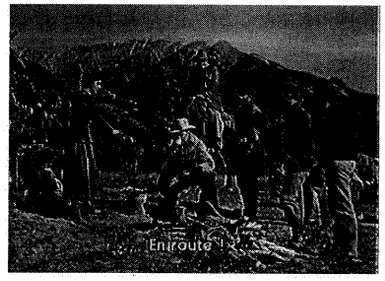
(Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le Corbeau* [1943]); doing dishes (Lawrence Kasdan's *The Big Chill* [1983]); gardening or driving (almost any sound film); playing with a mechanical toy (*Rules of the Game*); dressing, being dressed, lacing shoes or taking them off, primping in front of a mirror (Juan Antonio Bardem's *Death of a Cyclist* [1955]; Marcel Carné's *Children of Paradise* [1945]); looking through binoculars (Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* [1996]); doing dance steps, playing with the phone cord (Antonioni's *Story of a Love Affair* [1950]; *The Birds*); drinking coffee. . . . These are all examples of actions that take place parallel to the dialogue but have no direct relation to its content, which can serve to punctuate this or that remark or silence by virtue of being interrupted, arrested, taken up again, forgotten, or turned to as an escape (a character goes back to his or her "task," refocuses on the road if she's driving, picks up a ball if he's bowling, etc.). By punctuating it, the visual action gives the dialogue a relay or boost. This relay makes the scene look like "cinema," making us forget that essentially the dialogue is the heart of the action.

Such is the ruse of verbocentric cinema.

What all these actions have in common is that they can give rise to a suspended gesture (a suddenly motionless playing card, a drinking glass suspended, a cigarette in hand) or, inversely, a sweeping-off or destruction, symbolizing "end of conversation" that provisionally cuts through the Gordian knot of a verbal dispute. A piece of clothing drops, a house of cards tumbles apart, a player wipes all the chessmen off the board, someone erases what's written on a blackboard, a character douses a campfire's embers with the dregs from the coffee pot, and in doing so, has symbolized a battle of wills and (provisionally) put an end to it. (The scene of argument around the campfire comes from Anthony Mann's 1954 western *The Far Country*, before the characters attempt to cross the glacier.)

With this back-and-forth between what we hear and what we see, always *without there existing a relation* between the (general) content of the discussion and (concrete) visual action—a crucial condition—verbocentric film is nothing less than the creation of an audiovisual style of speech and action





interwoven, the braiding together of the seen and the heard.[4] Spectators can thus follow attentively a dialogue that they could otherwise find very abstract, and they are happy to do so—they're at the movies!

For a long time the starring props of verbocentric film have been the pipe, cigar, cigarette that are put into play. Lighting one, taking the partner's hand to blow out the match it's holding (Hitchcock's *North By Northwest* [1959]), bringing it to the mouth, taking a drag after a sentence, lighting the partner's with one's own (Irving Rapper's *Now Voyager* [1942]), suspending in midair the gesture of putting it to the mouth, stubbing it out in an ashtray or underfoot . . . or in a fried egg (Hitchcock's *To Catch a Thief* [1955])—all these gestures are punctuation, verbo-centration, in the sense that cigarettes involve oral movements that modify or interrupt speaking and give visual form to its punctuation. In addition, while a character is talking or listening, we can choose to watch the plumes of smoke coming out of his mouth as poetic or musical extensions of the words that are spoken or heard.

The same holds for other actions involving the mouth: eating, drinking, pressing one's lips against someone else's, all imply a potential interruption of speech. To stop in the middle of raising one's arm to take a drink as the on-screen interlocutor has said something is to punctuate what has just been heard. A decision to swallow a drink in one gulp gives the interlocutor (and the spectator) time to meditate on what has just been said or allows what was said to sink in. A film like *Casablanca* makes conspicuous, enchanting use of

drinks and cigarettes. Indeed the great tradition of verbocentric cinema is quite alcoholic and hooked on smoking.

This usage was so entrenched that one of the only criteria of French cinematic modernism of the 1950s and 1960s was its impulse to renounce this repertoire of verbo-centering and devices of punctuation. Speech was put forth for and by itself as an activity disconnected from the world. Examples include the long hotel-room conversation in Godard's *Breathless* (1959), the impromptu dialogue between Chico (Albert Rémy) and his rescuer at the beginning of Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960), idle conversations among artists and intellectuals in the earlier films of Eric Rohmer (*La Collectionneuse* [1967]). Quantitatively, there is no more talking in these films than in a "conventional" film, but here the classically verbocentric film's repertoire of parallel visual play does not report for active duty.

Of course the verbocentric cinema—with double and triple plays of looks, gestures, and dialogue—already existed in the theater and in some of the first talking pictures. The most famous example is the card game in Marcel Pagnol's *Marius* (1931), brought to the screen by Alexander Korda, which was seen by one critic as "a magnificent pantomime of coded gestures and glances."[5] Nevertheless, it is classical sound film that developed all its possibilities, making abundant use, of course, of the closeup.

AN ART OF THE CONTINUOUS

The other trait of the sound film's classicism is the creation of audio "hinges" or pivots that mediate between worlds: for example, the end of a nondiegetic music cue is often written to form a bridge to the sounds emanating from the scene.

Near the beginning of *Casablanca*, the orchestral music of Max Steiner dives into the lower register and becomes a muted *sostenuto* in the basses—serving as a bridge to the rumbling propellers of an airplane landing and thus to the first dialogue sequence without music. This famous movie opens with only three noticeable sound effects: the toot of a French police whistle (to arrest a suspect), a gunshot that brings down a fleeing resistance fighter, and this drone of the prop plane that causes various characters to lift their eyes to the sky. But these three noises function like three points organizing everything else. The lush symphonic music prepares the police whistle, builds up to the gunshot (and stops momentarily to make the gun audible), and finally blends into the decreasing noise of the airplane, to give way to a dialogue scene with no music, at the city's airport. The sound effect here is not a continuous ambient texture (the music performs that task); it is the narrative event: the whistle

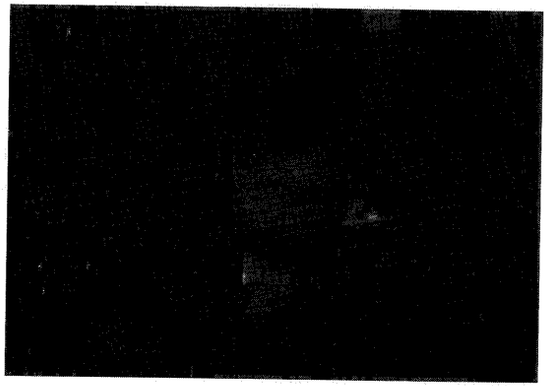
is blown on a suspect, a man is gunned down, and an airplane lands in Casablanca bringing Major Strasser (Conrad Veidt).

The airplane noise also embodies something else, however: it is what I call the *fundamental noise* into which Steiner's music is expressly arranged to lose itself.

The sonic unity achieved by classical cinema is thus ordered hierarchically; ambient sounds and sound effects occupy the lower rungs, functioning not continuously but at given points, as transitions or brief events; often they are incorporated into the music, which locks them into their proper place in the score, as in opera.

Sometimes, however, the classical verbocentric film gives a noise a "solo," in a specific, local context, making for scenes that are all the more striking because of their anomalousness. Think, for example, of the two minutes of rifle shooting without dialogue during the hunt in *Rules of the Game*. These two minutes can make us forget that in the rest of the film there is no auditory world to speak of; at the same time the very talky context of the rest of the film endows these two minutes of carnage with an unforgettable austerity and force.

Another characteristic feature of classical cinema is the imperceptible bridge between diegetic and nondiegetic music. In the sequence of the first kiss in *Quai des brumes* when Gabin and Morgan meet up at the fair, there is a gradual passage, all the while maintaining the same triple rhythm, from a diegetic fairground-type popular waltz, accompanied by noises as though it's coming from a carousel organ, to a nondiegetic orchestral waltz (also by Jaubert), including a humming chorus, to accompany the famous kiss, while the fairground noises have faded down in favor of the characters who begin to move away—a lone accordion serving as another musical bridge. Gabin's famous "*T'as de beaux yeux, tu sais*" ("You've got beautiful eyes, you know") to which Morgan replies "Kiss me"—which also signifies "Let's stop talking"—comes at



one precise moment in this transition, which has the effect of removing the two characters out of time. But only for a handful of seconds, for then, right after the kiss, blaring fairground music serves to break the mood and catapult the couple back into the flow of reality. Such moments are admirably executed in the films of Curtiz, as well as Carné, and people often neglect to observe and savor their artfulness, passing them off as "merely" classical.

More generally, the art of sound in classical film is unjustly denigrated because it is an art of continuity and because the modernist bias consists rather of the discontinuous and respects only this aesthetic. Like certain non-European and Asian musical traditions, classical verbocentric cinema often works at the imperceptible transition, the dissolve, rounding off corners. Just as the art of classical song cannot be reduced to hitting the right notes but also resides in the creation of a *musical line*, so, too, the art of sound in classical cinema resides in the beauty of its line. Its audio transitions, like the one for Grace Kelly's entrance in *Rear Window* (a singer's solfeggio exercise disappears in a high diminuendo, melting into the noise of traffic) and like the scene transitions in *Casablanca*, or the transition from the dance hall to the first kiss in *Quai des brumes*, deserve to be savored and studied. Not that this art has been lost—think of the reunion of Marlee Matlin and William Hurt at the end of Randa Haines's *Children of a Lesser God* (1987)—but it remains underappreciated.

The late 1930s through the 1940s was the period in film history when films were most "continuous." In the best, as well as in the average and the mediocre, it was dialogue, dialogue, and more dialogue pouring out at a constant rate. When there was no dialogue, music filled the gaps and smoothed the temporal flow. The image was a balanced, lustrous black and white. Scenes were constructed according to a rhetoric, with each element assigned its place and its meaning, while acting was rigorously circumscribed and framed. Some of these films were perfect but perhaps too smooth. Why? Perhaps it was on account of speech, which had caused ripples in the silent film, and to eliminate these perturbances, it was necessary to reorganize everything around it, and any suggestion of a void or inequality between what was seen happening and what was heard being said had to be filled in, ironed out.

In the so-called silent era, before speech was heard, a movie was not subjected to a uniform rhythm; it could slow down or speed up its pace, and the moments when characters didn't speak did not produce holes. The movies' pulse could be irregular, as it has again become since then. Then came sound, which already brought the mechanical requirement to stabilize speed and regulate time, both of which had been elastic and flexible. But once we had speaking, we couldn't stop it, nor could we slow it down or accelerate it. Sound films with intermittent dialogue such as *Sous les toits de Paris* made moviegoers uncomfortable. To avoid having a gap between speech and visual mise-en-scène, dialogue was put in constant charge, with boosts from a discursive, narrative mode of music. In this way cinema took on the continuous rhythm of beautiful, harmonious prose. Aside from musicals, which retained the possibility of a cinematic poetry that included breaks in rhythm, the sound film tended to smooth out time. Films could allow for a bit of acceleration as the plot's resolution approached. Or else the music would cease, and the dialogue would be silenced for a "moment of truth" where only noises, looks, and actions would speak. Theatrical speech reached its apogee in that period.

At the same time, out of this very system came the possibility of a fracture or break: it came with the arrival of the voice-over as textual speech, particularly in film noir. At the heart of the dialogue film, the voice-over began to create emptiness, evoke absence. The voice-over, sometimes awkward and sometimes overwhelming, now a little intimate and tremulous, now dry and cutting, through its often minimal intervention—sometimes only a few seconds, but crucial ones—opened up another dimension, and briefly brought film back to its very first narrative system, that of the live commentator for the silents.

THE VOICE-OVER IN *LAURA*, OR THE CASE OF QUOTATION MARKS LEFT OPEN

Though film historians can trace the voice-over to the very beginning of sound (see, e.g., Mamoulian's *City Streets* [1931]), some justifiably prefer to go back even further, to the very beginning, in the figure of the commentator or the benshi. But the difference with the voice-over, particularly in some of the most famous films noirs, including Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944) and Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past* (1947), is its discontinuity, its transience, indeed its illogic. The voice-over in film noir normally leaves the scene very quickly (how long do we hear it, altogether, in *Laura*? three, four minutes?)—but it leaves a trace. The trail it leaves always marks the terrain; its silences are deafening.

How does the system of the voice-over work in a classic like *Laura*? According to the original screenplay, there were to be three different narrators, just as in the novel by Vera Caspary that inspired the film. In the final film only one voice remains, that of Waldo Lydecker, Laura's Pygmalion, played by Clifton Webb. This voice intervenes officially twice, and it sneaks in for a third time as well.

Let us start by considering the second occurrence, the most classical example: when Lydecker tells inspector Mark McPherson (Dana Andrews) how he first met Laura Hunt (Gene Tierney) and guided her to social success. In

this scene in a restaurant, his voice calls forth scenes recalled from the past. It happens with the ambiguity that this classic device always involves. Are we to consider the scenes Lydecker presents as real, or is the film eventually going to demolish these images by revealing their fictional status, as in the case of the famous false flashback in Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* (1950)? But beyond the hesitation between "this really happened" and "this is the narrator's invention," movies raise another question that I think is more important: the problem of "closing the quotation marks" that frame a narration. In a Poe short story or in Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste*, with their embedded narratives, there is often the mark of the storytelling, of a voice, constantly present in the text for us to see. In the cinema these marks tend to disappear (though it would be a simple matter to create a visual code designating an image between quotation marks, as it were, distinguished as a story being told),[6] or more precisely one could say that films with voice-overs have a habit of opening quotation marks for a story but often "forget" to close them.

The narrative status of many sequences we see (are they part of a character's narration? do they exist on their own?) is left ambiguous, and this uncertainty is part of the game. The film does a disappearing act on the closing of the quotation marks with which it has introduced a story; and it changes the narrative situation on the sly, acting later "as if" it hadn't been forgotten that an embedded story was in progress. In this sense the sound film is the leading art among all dramatic and narrative forms (including the novel, short story, epic poetry, theater, and opera) when it comes to this constant elaboration of a double game, played with our consent. The moviegoer accepts to have whatever is given to her or him taken back, reformulated, and represented differently at a later time and according to different narrative rules.

Here, with the scene of Waldo telling McPherson the story, we're in familiar territory: Waldo's voice has taken off from a specific place, the Montagnino restaurant, and it lands back at this same locale to end the story. Shortly afterward, we see the two men go their separate ways in front of the restaurant, and that's the end—almost—of Waldo's voice-over.

In the space of this flashback there has occurred one of these apparently inconsequential details that make the cinema so compelling. We have watched a scene between the gigolo Shelby Carpenter (Vincent Price) and Laura: and unless he's capable of witchcraft or godlike omniscience, Lydecker, who narrates the scene, ought not to have been able to witness it. But this is part of what might be called the classic fudging of voice-over narration, bending the rules in a way that is endemic to movies.

Much more exceptional in the history of the filmic voice-over, however, is the first intervention of Waldo as the film magnificently begins: "I shall never forget the weekend Laura died. A silver sun burned through the sky like a huge magnifying glass. It was the hottest Sunday in my recollection. I felt as if I were the only human being left in New York."

This voice that speaks in the past tense in such a literary mode, where does it come from, from what point in space and time? Unlike other voices, it is not *situated* as a confession Waldo might make to someone else, like we see in the Dictaphone confession in *Double Indemnity*; nor is it the voice in a letter (as in Ophuls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman* [1948]) or in some other written document a character might be holding in his or her hands (will, confession, diary, journal) or be in the process of composing. This voice does not show up again to complete its journey to the place or time from which it was emitted. As soon as it has introduced the story ("Another of those detectives came to see me"), it remains in suspension. The quotation marks are never closed.

In one sense, if this text we hear can be attached to anything, it's to Waldo himself, whom Mark McPherson discovers in the bathtub while he's snooping through Waldo's apartment. In Waldo's typewriter, sitting on a board over the tub, is a text that will never be shown to us. Moreover, there is no other reference in the scene to the materiality of writing: neither the tapping of the typewriter nor the crinkling of paper. What's more, would Waldo write his present in the past tense? Would he say "I could watch him through the half-open door" at the very moment he was doing the observing? In fact that would be just like him, this way of instantly making the present into a literary artifact. Let's just say that the frame of this scene—the typewriter over the bath, where a man is like an island castaway, outside of time and space—is an apt representation of the place of writing, this odd, "off," or "other" place from which Waldo speaks, and where, at the same time that he creates, he suspends both place and time around him.

Waldo's voice, which has entered the film with such an uncertain status, will also leave it in a way that is no less special and almost as magical. I am referring to the radio show that Laura listens to at the end of the film while she brushes her hair and that Waldo himself hears as he prepares to "re-kill" her. Waldo announced it in advance to the characters and the audience by situating it in real time ("Listen to my broadcast in fifteen minutes . . ."), and thanks to the cinematic stylization of time, barely five minutes go by before we hear him on the radio, even though the action has continued uninterrupted. A little less close to the ear, a little less musical and somewhat drier in intonation, it is nevertheless the same voice heard at the beginning and not at all "radio-ized" (i.e., not filtered or mixed with reverb to sound realistically like it's coming from a radio speaker). Thus, as Laura brushes her hair, thinking about nothing,[7] the voice of the radio program that she hears speaks to us

as well, saying directly into our ear, "Love is stronger than Life. It reaches beyond the dark shadow of Death." This voice is also ours, the voice of our contemplation of Laura.

And again, as in the beginning, it is Waldo who interrupts his own voice-over with a dry onscreen voice and permits himself to break the charm that he had lent his separate radio-voice, by uttering a sober line, "That's the way it is, isn't it, Laura?" that comes neither from a magnified past (as at the beginning) nor from an eternal present out of time (in his radio show) but from an arrogant and nervous here-and-now, circumscribed by the limits of his thin, slight body.

Thus, *Laura* has two scenes, one at each end, in which the narrator's voice, heard over a deserted image in one case (Waldo's empty apartment) and a contemplative image in the other (Laura preparing for bed in front of her mirror), breaks the smooth plenitude of the verbocentric dialogue film and creates a void. But all this is organized around a scene right in the middle of the film: a third scene, a pivot—the famous scene *without dialogue* when Dana Andrews walks through Laura's apartment—and whose very silence creates a void, and also the possibility of love. A sort of vacancy overtakes the film here; it overcomes the heavy yoke of highly wrought dialogue, measured acting, and obsessive mise-en-scène, and it acts like wind that fills a sail; it amplifies, stretches, propels the form. The good film *Laura* sails with these three masts on the high seas of cinema.

1. *Découpage*: visual scene construction; the detailed plan for the arrangement of shots to make up a scene. See glossary.—Trans.
2. See glossary for *verbocentric*.
3. See glossary for *telepheme*.
4. See glossary for *braiding*.

5. The critic René Bizet, in *Pour vous*, October 15, 1931, quoted in Roger Icart, *La Révolution du parlant vue par la presse française* (Perpignan: Institut Jean Vigo, 1988), 265.
6. Some films otherwise in color move to black and white, or vice versa. In Preminger's *Bonjour tristesse* (1957) the present is shown in black and white, and the past is in color.
7. How do we know that she's thinking about nothing? This claim is, of course, a purely arbitrary projection on my part, and I admit as much. The only thing we know for sure is that Gene Tierney shows no external emotion or particular signs of being preoccupied.

CHAPTER 6

Babel

FILM HENCEFORTH ANCHORED IN LANGUAGE

IN 1920, AT THE HEIGHT of the film era that was not yet known as silent,[1] the critic and director Louis Delluc made the following observation: "The spectator considers the film as something absolute, that is to say, with no date, origin, or dialect. If you oblige him to hear (*sic*, understood: by means of a certain way of showing and acting) that this drama was shot in English, Italian, or French, he will not be pleased."[2]

Indeed, in silent film, owing to the paucity of written words and the absence of voices, the characters and events could in many cases retain a certain abstract quality and remain pure essences. In the credits and intertitles spectators would often read not proper names such as Garance, Rhett Butler, or Umberto D. but rather epithets such as The Dear One in Griffith's *Intolerance*, The Chinaman in *Broken Blossoms*, The Tramp in Chaplin's films, and The Woman from the City in Murnau's *Sunrise*. The settings were often international or rather a-national in flavor: the House, the City, the Prairie. All this would change with the coming of sound: sound gave the film voices and therefore languages, ethnic identities, and often proper names for characters, immersing them in a more everyday, more *situated* reality.

The talkie thus introduced into cinema the division of Babel. "The technique of talking cinema," noted Benjamin Fondane in 1931, "has split it up into as many productions as there are countries."[3]

We know that the solutions that were adopted in the first sound years for the international distribution of films were numerous and chaotic, reflecting in the films themselves the use of highly varied and composite strategies. Either they were 80 percent silent, with just two or three speaking scenes (as was the case for the first official talkie, *The Jazz Singer*), or they were shot silent

and then partially or completely postsynchronized in the studio in the language of the country; or they were made straightaway in a single bilingual version (e.g., *Allô Berlin? Ici Paris!* whose protagonists are two young telephone operators who call from one capital to the other); finally, there was the frequent but costly solution of filming two or more language versions using the same sets but different actors. Eventually, subtitles and dubbing were adopted. For either cultural or economic reasons, dubbing continues to be limited to certain countries. In Iceland and The Netherlands, as well as much of South America, subtitles prevail as the dominant solution because of the economic constraints imposed by these small markets (dubbing is too expensive) or because of complex questions of distribution, organization of the dubbing business in each country, and national accents and dialects.

The beginning of sound saw the production of numerous bilingual and trilingual films, notably the Franco-German movies about World War I, in which everyone spoke his or her own language. These productions paradoxically convey the message that beyond language barriers, the combatants were equally human on all sides of the conflict (*Westfront 1918*; *Wooden Crosses*). Filmmakers also tried out bilingual comedies (*Allô Berlin? Ici Paris!*) and bilingual melodramas (*Flesh* [1932], by John Ford). The language issue has never been resolved to everyone's satisfaction, and it takes a viewer's willing suspension of disbelief to accept that in Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002) the Poles speak English and the Germans speak German—a convention like any other. Sometimes it is important for the characters to speak their own true languages if the film means to affirm cultural or social identity. An example would be Herbert Biberman's Mexican-American film *Salt of the Earth* (1953), where Spanish-speaking strikers actually speak in Spanish. Another would be Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* (1990), in which Sioux tribesmen speak Lakota, which is subtitled.

According to Yannick Mouren, "In each new scene in John Huston's *The Kremlin Letter*, the characters begin by speaking in Russian, with a translation into English in the background; then after a few seconds the Russian disappears and English takes over. But as this technique is repeated over and over, the spectator, even while hearing English, never forgets that these characters are Russian-speaking."[4] In his 2002 film *Kedma* Amos Gitai seeks to represent the birth of Israel by showing immigrants in boats setting foot on the land that will be their nation. At first they speak many different languages: Russian, Yiddish, German, and Hebrew, and of course they are not all able to understand each other. For the French or American spectator, unfortunately (and unavoidably), the subtitling smooths over and unifies this linguistic diversity.

THE QUESTION OF A FILM'S LANGUAGE

A film's language and the nationality of its actors do not always dictate the nationality of the action. From the 1930s to the 1950s it was apparently not a problem in France to have Frenchmen speaking French as they played Russian characters. Although this practice persists, it happens more rarely, in films like Michael Haneke's *The Piano Teacher* (2001), a film whose action takes place in Vienna and whose Austrian protagonists are played in French by Isabelle Huppert and Benoît Magimel. Jules Dassin's *Topkapi* (1964), filmed in the French studios at Boulogne, takes place in Istanbul and has the Englishman Peter Ustinov, the Greek Melina Mercouri, and the Austrian Maximilian Schell all speaking French. Z (1969) by Costa-Gavras, a film that portrays the military takeover in Greece, was played in French by actors including Yves Montand, Jacques Perrin, and Jean-Louis Trintignant. The same director set other films of his in Chile (*State of Siege* [1973]) and Czechoslovakia (*The Confession* [1969]), tacitly asking us to accept a French cast speaking French. For André Téchiné the Brontë sisters speak French and look like Isabelle Huppert, Isabelle Adjani, and Marie-France Pisier (*The Brontë Sisters* [1979]).

The Greek director Michael Cacoyannis had his *Zorba the Greek* (1964, adapted from the novel by Kazantzakis) played in English by Anthony Quinn, whose career, as we know, accumulated roles as an Eskimo, Arab, Indian, and Italian (in Fellini's *La Strada* [1954]).

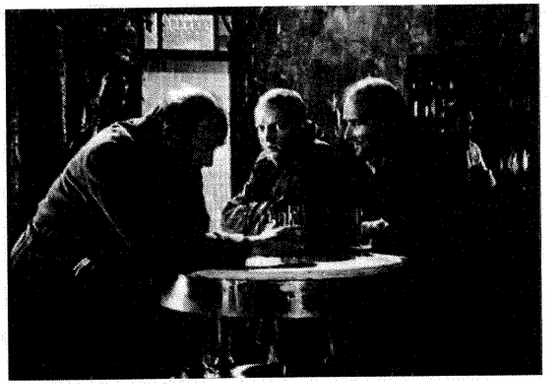
Film buffs, with their understandable obsession with original-language versions, sometimes create odd misunderstandings. For a German audience the action of Pabst's *Threepenny Opera*, based on Brecht and Weill, is correctly understood as taking place in London in the sordid Soho district. After all, the characters are named Jenny, Molly Peachum, and Mackie, and the sets include inscriptions written in English. However, many French spectators who watch the original German version of the film on the cultural television channel Arte believe the action takes place in Germany, since everyone is speaking and singing in German.

STATELESS CINEMA

Less well known is the case of sound films that take pains *not* to situate the action in a particular country yet to which spectators doggedly try to assign a geographic identity nonetheless. These stateless films are more numerous than one would think. Welles's *The Trial* (1962) takes place in an indeterminate country, as Kafka intended.[5] *City of Lost Children* (1995), by Marc Caro

and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, is a story without a country, easily accepted as such by French audiences, but it might be more difficult for Americans or Argentines to understand it this way when they see it with subtitles and observe the Gallic mug of Dominique Pinon. French film buffs, for their part, curiously overlook the fact that three of the seven films of Tarkovsky (*Solaris*, *Stalker*, and *The Sacrifice*) have stories that take place in countries left deliberately unspecified. The director took great care to establish this statelessness through the names of characters (either generic and cosmopolitan or, on the contrary, odd and atypical), the sets and dialogue, the titles, and so on. Certainly the actors are Russian; they speak Russian; the director's soul is Russian, but the story is not Russian or Swedish. For a Russian a film like *Solaris*, whose characters are named Chris Kelvin, Snout, Henri Berton, and Gibarian, does not exactly take place in Russia; but oddly, Western critics and a large part of the moviegoing public of Western Europe refuse to enter into the universalist spirit of this work, possibly because they don't speak the language that provides these cues. In *Stalker* the three characters are named the Stalker (in English), the Writer, and the Professor . . . perhaps to elude Soviet censorship? However, in *The Sacrifice*, a film produced in Sweden and in Swedish (though with an international cast), we find the same deracination of the story. There are no Swedish place-names, no proper names of a particular national inflection: Alexander, Otto, Adelaide, the young boy, Viktor, Martha.

I . . . comme Icare (1979), by Henri Verneuil with Yves Montand, which was filmed largely in the international Paris suburb of La Défense, is set in an unspecified Western country. But where is the story of Luc Besson's *Subway* (1984) situated—which uses the Paris metro as a set, and whose main characters, played by French actors, are named Fred and Helena? Conversely, Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967), despite its generic international title, is absolutely not a



stateless film: the whole idea of the work is grounded in the fact that we are in Paris, even though we only catch tiny glimpses of the city reflected in the glass facades of modern buildings.

AMERICAN FILM: A CINEMA OF VERBAL CONFRONTATION

With the arrival of sound, each national cinema developed its own traditions and particular ways of deploying dialogue and text in the movies it produced. Since space does not allow here for an exhaustive account of the variety of national practices and styles involved in talking pictures, I will limit myself to a rapid overview of three cases considered especially significant—American, Italian, and French.

American film appears to be a paradoxical case, for while it seems to offer the world a model of "action cinema," it relies more often than is commonly thought on voluminous dialogue. The dialogue isn't ponderous, though, because it is always part and parcel of plot, and characters use it to communicate with or confront each other. The American cinema is also an argumentative one, with a fondness for controversy, preaching, speechifying (e.g., Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* [1939]), and of course trials, with their attendant procedural elements of interrogation, investigations, pleas, and testimony. The greatest courtroom dramas are American, like John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939), which tells the story of the first case of the young lawyer who would go on to become president. Think also of a master of dialogue like Joseph Mankiewicz and his *Letter to Three Wives* (1949) or *Sleuth* (1972); one of the latter film's actors, Michael Caine, said Mankiewicz knew how to "make us see the words." His films put speeches, voice-overs, and contradictory testimonies in confrontation with one another like voices in a hugely complex trial. The love of language in American cinema is fundamentally a love of oratory, arising from its belief in a democratic system in which everyone can have his or her say.

The screenplays themselves are often based on a structure of thesis and antithesis. An American film often amounts to ninety minutes of getting one's two cents in, making one's case: "Listen to me," "Wait a minute," and "Let me tell you something" are common remarks in American dialogue. The silence between lines, and the shots that accompany those silences, are charged with intensity, giving resonance to what has just been said or preparing for the reply that is to come. American film's technical perfectionism in the image, sound, special effects, and editing is all in the service of this oratorical focus that is so important to it. Material objects and landscapes rarely have the kind

of presence and substance that is generally felt in a European film; they come across more like evidence or exhibits for arguments. Bodies, on the other hand, radiate the dignified integrity of the total person, socially and ethnically, and are given proper names that specify their origin—Irish, Swedish, Norwegian, Polish, Scottish. Unlike in European (particularly French) films, where characters often have only a first name, Hollywood's characters have a first and last name that they can proudly state before an audience, such as a jury, and even to friends and family.

This can sometimes lead to thorny problems of translation in the dubbing process. In the original version of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) Scarlett's father addresses his daughter solemnly to remind her of her Irish ancestry. "Scarlett Kathy O'Hara, remember you are Irish," says he. For the French version, the dubbers chose to mark the gravity of this address by using the formal *vous* to say "you" with, instead of the familiar *tu*. Thus, the father says, "*Vous êtes Irlandaise, Scarlett O'Hara*" even though up until that point in the French version the father has been using *tu*. The American convention of calling a close family member by his or her family name, especially in a solemn or scolding situation, is odd for French ears, hence the compromise decision to ease its appearance here with the use of the formal *vous*.

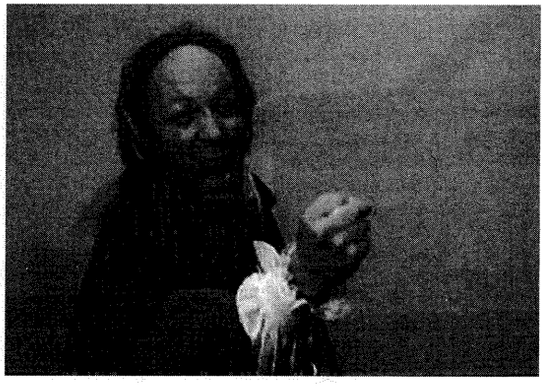
It would be well worth studying how the French versions of American films and TV series have given rise, in France, to a completely artificial new language—a total compromise between markedly different, even opposite syntaxes and styles of communication. The French dialogue in *Gone with the Wind* speaks a new language, which could perhaps be called dubber's Franglais. In its grammatical turns this discourse is exceedingly pedantic, using nineteenth-century vocabulary and turns of phrase (*"En vérité, je vous l'avouerai, vos paroles m'ont bouleversé à un tel point que je ne pouvais penser à personne depuis lors . . ."* [In truth, I confess to you that your words have astonished me to such a degree that I could think of no one since that moment . . .]) while the role of these dialogues, namely to carry on the verbal back-and-forth of argumentation, is typically American.

ITALIAN FILM: ASSIMILATIONIST LANGUAGE

Especially in the postwar period, Italian film earned its own special place in the global landscape of sound cinema, because of the maximal use it makes of the techniques of postsynchronization. This decision has allowed it to bring together the most diverse assortment of international casts to play Italian dramas set in Rome or Sicily. The first so-called neorealist films shot in the street were all dubbed (e.g., Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* [1945]). The dubbing made sense in part because nonprofessional actors were used, often ones who spoke in dialects that had to be dubbed over by professionals afterward. Postsynchronization also permitted outdoor filming without the filmmaker's having to worry about traffic noise and other sounds of the open air.

Even Visconti, who in *La Terra trema* (1948) retained the real voices of his actors, using synch sound with Catanian fishermen speaking in Sicilian dialect, quickly converted to dubbing with *Senso* (1954), whose cast brings the American Farley Granger (in the role of an Austrian) and the French actor Christian Marquand together with the Italian actors. The international casting in Italian film has continued to be a distinctive trademark in world cinema and has made it possible for a good number of French actors and actresses, including Philippe Noiret, Michel Piccoli, Anouk Aimée, Bernard Blier, and Annie Girardot to pursue parallel careers in France and Italy. The situation has not been symmetrical, however, for while the French actors play the role of Italians through the magic of dubbing, their Italian counterparts involved in French films are generally expected to keep their own voices, accent, and nationality. This has been the case notably for Lea Massari, Marcello Mastroianni, Raf Vallone, Aldo Maccione, and Renato Salvatori. One senses here a kind of assimilationist generosity extended by the language of Dante, such that in the films of Monicelli, Fellini, Visconti, and Bertolucci it has become an acceptable convention to have an American like Burt Lancaster, a Frenchman like Alain Delon, or a Canadian like Donald Sutherland all play Italians.

In the 1990s, however, more young Italian directors started making use of the new capabilities of wireless microphones and have shot in synch sound. This *suono diretto* (direct sound) is duly noted in the credits, particularly in the works of the best known, Roberto Benigni and Nanni Moretti.



FRENCH FILM: BETWEEN AFFECTATION AND NATURALIST FOLKLORE

In the history of French sound films, language has held a special status linked to literature, on one hand, and the Gallic taste for delicious language and *le mot juste*, on the other. The idea is not so much to convince the other person, as in American cinema, but rather to show off a silver-tongued command of language. This explains why French cinema is possibly alone in privileging to such a degree the contribution of the dialogue writer, as distinct from the screenwriter. Such *dialoguistes* as Henri Jeanson or Michel Audiard were esteemed in their time not so much for a talent for brilliant plots or making characters come alive but rather for penning terrific lines.

The cult of eloquence has often found its dark side in French cinema, the tendency to pillory smooth talkers as scoundrels. The villains played by Jules Berry in the 1930s and 1940s (Renoir's *Crime of Monsieur Lange* [1936], Marcel Carné's *Le Jour se lève* [1939], Louis Daquin's *Le Voyageur de la Toussaint* [1942]) and the corrupt and cynical characters in *Le Corbeau* are all good talkers—slick might be a better word—and the films often put them in opposition to a plain-speaking working-class hero played by Jean Gabin, who gets worked up enough to say *"Tu vas te taire"* ("Shut up now!") to someone like Jules Berry, Michel Simon, or Mireille Balin.

No other national cinema has as many wordsmiths—poets, playwrights, and fiction writers—who became directors, from Pagnol and Guitry, through Giono and Jean Cocteau, to Duras and Robbe-Grillet. Pagnol and Guitry represent a strong theatrical tendency in early French sound film, a tendency that many have arrogantly praised. The theatrical mode was, of course, contested by advocates of pure (i.e., visual) cinema, although the New Wave would value this early work's originality and its contribution to revitalizing

screen art. Jacques Prévert was another great screenwriter who infused the dialogue he wrote for Carné, Grémillon, and Renoir with the sensibility of a poet. (Prévert's work is often compared to the work of American writers such as Faulkner, who occasionally tried their hands at screenplays but only as a distinct sideline to their careers as "serious writers.") Later, New Wave directors such as Jean Eustache (in *The Mother and the Whore* [1973]) and Eric Rohmer (starting with *La Collectionneuse*) would dare to go against convention and film extended dialogues, even monologues, often spoken by dandies or other hyperrefined individuals; these sequences of talk are not intended to further any action or weigh in on some debate, as in American films, but simply exist for themselves. It's the height of disinterested, "unbraided" cinema where speech is not necessarily more abundant but is articulated with a different relation to the mise-en-scène.[6] Finally, books and words hold a privileged place in the worlds of French filmmakers such as François Truffaut (a great admirer of Guitry) and Jean-Luc Godard.

I have already said that this reign of the Word was neither immediate nor undivided. Henri Langlois was right to emphasize that the first period of French sound film—which he situated between *Sous les toits de Paris* and *L'Atalante*—was "essentially dominated . . . by the desire to not break with the achievements of the silent era, the desire to graft sound and speech onto the silent film while safeguarding its cinematic language, conserving the dominance of the image." Sound would permit Jacques Feyder, for example, paradoxically "to do away with intertitles and thus augment the value of the images, no longer interrupting their flow."[7] For Langlois the success of Pagnol's *Angèle* (1934), a film indissociable from Fernandel's Mediterranean accent and the buzz of cicadas, inaugurates the ascendancy of the French *dialoguistes*.

It is worth noting that this peculiar taste for language in French cinema was initiated by a writer from Provence; indeed, it seems that in France the relationship between the regional accent (almost always Parisian or Mediterranean) and the question of the language are closely linked. The proof lies in a certain washed-out tone in French popular cinema after the era of the star dialogue writers such as Michel Audiard; this disappearance coincides with the abandonment of all local accents, including films shot in southern France. Even the working-class Parisian accent that contributed to the fame of actors such as Arletty and Julien Carette, as well as to the popularity of classical French film in general, was dropped in favor of a neutral elocution with no geographical identity. A film such as *Jean de Florette*, adapted by Claude Berri from the Pagnol novel, was a real event in 1985 when filmgoers heard Yves Montand and Daniel Auteuil affecting a southern accent that was not their

natural voice, whereas in America it goes without saying that an actor will play the role with the accent appropriate to the regional origins of his or her character. Two years before Berri's film, the dialogue in Jean Becker's *L'Eté meurtrier* (1983), a film also set in Provence, didn't let one syllable of local color sneak in. Some years later, certain filmmakers would be creating new folklores with the idiomatic speech of the *banlieue*[8] (e.g., *Hate*, by Mathieu Kassovitz [1995]), French Jews in Paris's garment district (*La Vérité si je mens!* by Thomas Gilou [1996]), and French-Arab youths in Marseille (the *Taxi* series produced by Luc Besson [1998, 1999, 2002]). At the same time, many regions and social strata of France remain unheard in major commercial French movies except for a picturesque touch here or there. Film buffs are not used to hearing certain accents and dialects at the movies, and this has led to absurdities in some studies of the history of French film: a recent doctoral thesis defended in Paris refers to Bruno Dumont's sublime drama *L'Humanité* (1999) and Robert Guédiguian's melodrama *À la place du coeur* (1998) with the reductive label "regionalist," simply because the actors speak in the local accents of the setting (the north of France for Dumont and a Marseille neighborhood in the case of Guédiguian).

It is quite surprising to observe how the films of Georges Lautner, with dialogue by Audiard, again became popular among twenty-something audiences. A certain number of comedies of manners had paved the way for this return of movies with delicious dialogue. But French cinema has also often swung to the opposite extreme. When you go back and watch the most celebrated French comedies of the 1980s, such as Francis Veber's *Les Compères* (1983, with Gérard Depardieu and Pierre Richard), you are struck by their standardized French and their functionalist use of language. No dialogue aims for the pleasure of language play or even the simple pleasure of talk—it's all at the

service of plot situations. Likewise, certain films of André Téchiné carry their refusal of the *bon mot* and down-to-earth language very far indeed; dialogue is stripped of all verbal effects. These cases highlight *a contrario* the particular function of rhetoric in French cinema.

As for the abundant dialogue in noted films such as Christian Vincent's *La Discrète* (1990), Éric Rochant's *Un Monde sans pitié* (Love Without Pity, 1990), and Arnaud Desplechin's *My Sex Life, or How I Got into an Argument* (1996), whose heroes are all unapologetically logorrheic, they, too, are highly abstract and decontextualized, delivered in a "cinematic" or "literary" language, avoiding anything that would anchor the characters in a specific social milieu.

Initially, the French New Wave brought something unquestionably new, a tone that was different and unpredictable. The first films of the movement's directors play out in a space where dialogue is often very close to song lyrics, as though on the cusp of the musical. The characters also take pleasure in manipulating the formulas of everyday speech and the trivia of daily life. In Agnès Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962) the characters Cléo meets often speak in formulas, puns, and rhymes, engaging all manner of ludic and poetic language. Likewise, in *Shoot the Piano Player*, as well as all of Godard's early films, the taste for speaking in aphorisms underlines the characters' juvenile insolence and at the same time participates in the French tradition whereby everyone seems to enjoy the sound of his or her own voice.

Godard generates dialogue in a kind of perpetual impasse. For example, he might have one character react to the way the other speaks, responding to form rather than content. In *Breathless* Michel corrects the foreigner Patricia's grammar when she errs on the French verb for "remember."[9] Often phonetic ambiguities are announced and denounced and, with them, the perpetual possibility for misunderstanding: "*Marie, suis ta voie*" ("Marie, follow your path"), says the Angel. "*Ma voie ou le son de ma voix?*" ("My path [*voie*] or the sound of my voice [*voix*]?"), quibbles Marie in *Hail Mary* (1984), even while the context of the utterance would seem to exclude all confusion. Highly playful at first, linked to both song and fantasy, Godard's system would become by its systematic repetitiveness the expression of quite a bleak worldview.[10]

Jacques Demy, for his part, would reconcile two poles of French cinema—the enchanted and the prosaic—by hitting on the invention of sung dialogue, which I have discussed above, as well as maintaining his concern for truthfulness and precision in the rendering of dialogue. (The dialogues between the mother and daughter in *Une chambre en ville* [A Room in Town] are gripping in their realism.) Others, such as Alain Resnais, clearly—and successfully—experimented in the direction of the libretto, as in *Hiroshima mon amour*

(1959), with its operatic duets, or *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). In the latter film, magnificent in so many respects, Robbe-Grillet's text foregrounds that words are of no importance: "We talked about anything. . . . The conversations were empty, as though the sentences meant nothing. You could pick up from where we had left off or from any other point." On the other hand, Jean Cayrol's screenplay for *Muriel* (1963), an immensely important film that has been insightfully analyzed by Claude Bailblé, Michel Marie, and Marie-Claire Ropars,[11] contains some of the most beautiful and true dialogue written in French that, as with Demy's work, succeeds in overcoming the dualism of affectation and naturalism that hangs over most other French filmmaking.

The preoccupation with libretto-like dialogue in French cinema is not limited to French directors. The filmmaker Andrzej Zulawski turned to a songwriter, Étienne Roda-Gil (lyricist for the French singer Julien Clerc), to write dialogue for *L'Amour braque* (1985), a loose adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*. This collaboration resulted in lines like the following, spoken in breathless bursts by Tchéky Karyo as he runs madly through the streets of Paris: "I am going to make a sailor's cemetery around you / A black diamond in the hollow of the dunes / Cooled venom for the jackals." Bertrand Blier, for his part, takes pains to be clear but makes his actors repeat words and profanities so they become litanies and even rhyme.

The persistent taste in French cinema—no matter what the school, and with no particular difference in this respect between the New Wave and "unaffiliated" directors—for French spoken in a foreign accent rather than in a regional French accent, as though the American, German, Italian accent could reenchant an old, worn-out language by creating a discrepancy between voice and language—is, I think, a symptom of the difficulty that a large portion of French cinema, especially the auteur cinema, has in dealing with the real.[12]

1. But the term seems to have appeared quite soon after the arrival of sound and talking pictures.
2. Yannick Mouren, "Le don des langues," *Positif*, no. 453, November 1998, 67.
3. Benjamin Fondane, "Du muet au parlant," in *Ecrits sur le cinema*, ed. Michel Carassou (Paris: Editions Plasma, 1984), 57.
4. See Mouren, "Le don des langues," 67.
5. The characters' names are mostly Germanic with no other specification, and no names of cities, streets, or countries are given in the novel.
6. For *braided*, see glossary.
7. See Henri Langlois, *Trois cents ans de cinéma*, ed. Jean Narboni (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma / Cinémathèque française, 1986), 261–62.

8. The term *banlieue* commonly refers to the ethnic suburbs of Paris, vast apartment blocks populated by immigrant working-class populations.—Trans.
9. "Tu te le rappelles, tu t'en souviens. Mais pas tu t'en rappelles."
10. On dialogue in Godard see Michel Marie's conference paper "Les dialogues d'*À bout de souffle*," in *L'Image et la parole*, ed. Jacques Aumont (Paris: Cinémathèque française, 1999), 99–111. Marie stresses the importance of Jean Rouch's film *Moi, un noir* (1958) for both Godard and the entire New Wave generation.
11. See Marie-Claire Ropars, *Muriel, histoire d'une recherche* (Paris: Galilée, 1974).
12. See Michel Chion, "Quelques accents d'actrices dans le cinéma français," in *Positif*, no. 495, May 2002.

CHAPTER 7

The Time It Takes for Time to "Harden" (1950–1975)

TECHNICAL MOBILITY OR STABILITY

MODERNISM, WHICH SHOOK THE CLASSICAL CINEMA to its foundations, often gets described as a homogeneous phenomenon in the singular, its general characteristics easy to inventory. In the pages that follow I will outline some of the profound transformations in the cinema after World War II in order to argue, instead, that there are plural modernisms reflecting many nations, languages, contexts, practices, and auteurs.

Another question is whether these modernisms are linked to the advent of technical possibilities that were previously unavailable. My answer is: not really. It's true that in an era when technology is touted as the answer to so many problems, we tend to believe that technical innovation should also drive aesthetic innovation. Note, however, that one of the richest periods in film history for aesthetic upheavals, from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, experienced only one real technological advance in sound—the switch from optical to magnetic recording for shooting, editing, and mixing—and this change was probably not even crucial to the aesthetic developments. In fact, the multiplication of new aesthetic tendencies after the Second World War came from a relative *stability* in technical means over the period from 1945 to 1975. That said, we must not overlook the changes brought about by the advent of magnetic tape.

Once tape recording became common in film, radio, and the recording industry in the late 1940s and early 1950s, one could more easily make complex mixes and multiple copies. One could also listen instantly to the recording on the shooting set, something that had not been possible with optical recording. And, of course, one could erase and rerecord on the same support, an advantage that no previous medium had allowed.

The arrival of magnetic tape allowed filmmakers to enrich the auditory field, to make noises audible and create ambiences through superimposing layers of sound.

It would be tempting to attribute to the new mobility of this kind of audio recording (in contrast to the cumbersome sound cart that came with optical) the incredible density of Hollywood detective films of the late 1940s (especially the documentary-style movies produced by Louis de Rochemont)—the density of urban soundscapes, dockyards, street life, and crowds at boxing arenas, which sound as though they're captured live. Some of these urban films, such as *The Dark Corner* (1946) or Henry Hathaway's *Call Northside 777* (1948), are suffused with even more sound events than are many recent films.

The noise of the tank in Bergman's *The Silence* seems to be a product of magnetic sound—a many-layered pastry of sounds recorded separately, allowing the film to play with dramatic variations and make the tank sound different when it leaves than when it arrived. In a similar way the drone of helicopters at the beginning of *La Dolce vita* is a composite of independent layers (sounds of blades and of motors) that the sound engineer drew on freely, so that through the sequence one might hear now two motors, now one, now deeper, now higher, now more blades, now more motor, and so on.

A less fortunate consequence of the arrival of magnetic sound in certain countries was a break in the chain of production between the sound recording medium (magnetic) and the final film (optical sound track), whose technical characteristics differ. For a good while the chain had been homogeneous: what one heard in the movie theater in optical sound had been recorded and edited in optical too. With magnetic sound, if great care is not taken with the transfer from one medium to the other, and if the magnetic recording is not made with the precision necessary to sound good in optical, a harsh or oversaturated sound can result. How many French films of the 1950s there are—thankfully not all of them—that have a disagreeable, rough sound because of inadequate attention to technical requirements. In Germany and the United States, however, where more care was devoted to technical continuity, magnetic recording did not become synonymous with dry, brittle sound.

Let us note that national traditions in film sound production vary greatly across Europe. Although it is true that there is a relatively strong international consensus regarding the approach to the image, a fact that has allowed European cinematographers (the German Robby Müller, the Frenchman Philippe Rousselot, the Italian Vittorio Storaro) to work in the United States with local crews by simply adapting to their union rules, this is not the case for sound, a domain where each country has its own traditions and practices and knows nothing about those of its nearest neighbor.

Language is one key reason. Sound keeps us in the world of Babel at every level. Moreover, the historian's job of giving an accurate account of these diverse practices is complicated by the complexity of how a film's soundtrack is made—a process spread out over considerable time and many phases, divided among many technicians who often have little contact with each other: from the sound recordist through the editor, including sound effects people and Foley artists, sound editors and mixers, musicians, and of course the actors, who are the principal creators of sound in films.

Differences in the corporate, technical, and aesthetic histories of sound production are as great between Italy and France as they are between France and the United States. The problem is that this fact is largely ignored, and depending on where one works, one tends to believe that the French (or American, or Italian) practices are the standard, with the most solid, "natural" foundations, and that one has nothing to learn from anyone else.

MUSIC: FROM UNITY TO DIVERSITY

Although modernism has taken many forms around the world, we can find some common traits. Its leading feature is the very overt, highly foregrounded rethinking of the presence and intervention of music. This renewal took several forms: the pursuit of new musical styles, either more "modern" (atonal, electronic) or, on the contrary, more "popular" borrowings from previously unexploited domains such as jazz or the classical repertoire; fresh instrumentation, such as limiting the score to one or two solo instruments (e.g., the zither solo in Carol Reed's *The Third Man* [1949]) or to a small chamber ensemble; changes in the music's narrative status (most music heard would henceforth be diegetic, issuing from bars, radios, record players, and so on—as in the early days of sound); and in certain films a considerable reduction or outright abandonment of music—the case for many films of Bergman, Bresson, Buñuel, Antonioni, and Clouzot (*The Wages of Fear* [1953]) in the 1950s and especially the 1960s. Film histories and anthologies rarely document this shift because they don't often take account of the *quantity* of music present in a given work. The voluminous filmography of composer Alfred Newman, who penned the scores for such classics as *Gunga Din* (1939) and *How the West Was Won* (1962), a grand Cinerama fresco by John Ford and Henry Hathaway, also includes the score for Jules Dassin's *Thieves' Highway* (1949). But one has to see this little-known masterpiece, typical of the new documentary film noir tendency of the time, to realize that the only music it has occurs during the opening credits and lasts a mere two and a half minutes. Reinvigorating the uses and functions of music, including partially or totally

excluding it at times, would seem to be the great preoccupation of the postwar era. Why?

The horror of the concentration camps and the looming threat of the atomic age could well have something to do with it. The world could no longer be depicted in the same way. It was probably also necessary for the cinema, now working increasingly in real settings away from the studio, to develop a new kind of music that would fit better with new subjects and images filmed in new locales.

The 1950s is therefore one of the richest periods in film history for musical experiments that gave new life to film music. These explorations were numerous in Italy, Poland, Japan, and France.

The famous and somewhat surprising exception to this overall trend was the work of Renzo Rossellini, who contributed grand symphonic orchestral scores for his brother Roberto's films that were shot in natural settings.

Rossellini's *Stromboli* (1950), a beacon of modern Italian cinema, does not conform to the criteria of modernism for its sound. Renzo Rossellini's lush, semioperatic, semi-impressionistic score is reminiscent of symphonic poems evoking the sea or rivers (Smetana's "Moldau," for example). But it is unobtrusive in the sound mix, and it is coordinated only loosely with the action. Music does not punctuate dialogue or conflicts between characters; it works more in segments, each of which seems to be laid in to a whole sequence rather crudely—the dialogue (probably postsynchronized) being clearly audible and the focus of attention. As for sound effects—and this is frequent in Italian film, with the exception of Visconti and Antonioni—they are often limited to their narrative function; contrary to the French tradition, *Stromboli* doesn't provide a sonic landscape around the dialogue. When we hear the cries of a baby in the poor village where the heroine has been brought by her husband, it is to make a point about her destiny as a bearer of children, and her husband tells her as much shortly after. The music does not blend in with the noises, and the mix is quite perfunctory, with little rounding off of rough edges. This is why Rossellini gives an impression of objective simplicity, despite the relative orchestral abundance and the melodramatic character of the plot situations and behaviors (for example Ingrid Bergman's final monologue).

In Italy in the 1950s and 1960s Michelangelo Antonioni made the most conscious efforts to reinvent film music, in partnership with Giovanni Fusco (who also composed the masterful score for Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour*). The results of this collaboration are sometimes surprising. We should never deride any efforts to depart from well-worn paths, and if in my opinion some of the experiments of Antonioni-Fusco have aged poorly, I say so without the least disrespect. Suffice it to say that in *Il Grido* (The Cry, 1957), *La Signora senza camelie* (The Lady Without Camellias, 1953), and *Cronaca di un amore* (Story of a Love Affair, 1950), the function of Fusco's music became utterly mystifying: why the choice of this instrument here, why a saxophone quintet there, why music at all at this point? It could all simply mean that other filmmakers did not follow in his footsteps; for what appears self-evident is only what has become habitual.

How can we say that a particular music has not aged well? Perhaps when all we can see a few years later is its anecdotal quality, and when we're struck, for example, not by its spirit but by some quite secondary detail (such as a pronounced, dated vibrato in Marcel Mule's saxophone playing). But the fact that a "modern"-ism feels dated means that it didn't catch on and that what it offered remained peripheral or irrelevant. Still, there is merit in having attempted something different.

Antonioni also used electronic music by Giorgio Gaslini in the opening credits of *La Notte* (1961). However, electronic sound is among those sounds that age the fastest, since audio synthesizing technology changes so rapidly, and such is also the fate of certain recent films. Kubrick had already considered this issue when he was deciding on the musical style for *2001*, and he ultimately opted for instrumental music.

One important consequence of these new experiments is that with the partial abandonment, for a time, of musical scores for mass-market pictures, filmmakers were also abandoning what was essentially a stylistic compromise in the 1930s and 1940s between popular diegetic music and highbrow nondiegetic music. The popular waltz in the dance hall of *Quai des brumes* could morph into a noble symphonic waltz, and in *Casablanca* the standard "As Time Goes By" could weave itself into Max Steiner's symphonic tapestry without a glaring rupture between styles. These smooth transitions would no longer be possible, and a gulf gradually opened up between the different kinds of music occurring within a single film.

In *Cronaca di un amore* this gulf appears in full flower. The minimalist contemporary music of Giovanni Fusco for piano and saxophone feels confined, pent up into certain scenes—not only because of its nondiegetic use but also because it drops out whenever the action moves to a bar or a ballroom, and characters dance to the popular South American music of the era, a music strikingly different from Fusco's scoring. These are two entirely different musical worlds. Nino Rota's cues for Fellini would be an exception in this regard, since Rota's music was able to shift styles in midair, resembling bar music or symphonic music according to the needs of the scene, while at the same time retaining its tempo and shape and providing musical unity for the entire film.

At the other extreme, the explosion of popular music in films (rock 'n' roll, for example), as well as the introduction of avant-garde styles into mass-market films, has hidden from some historians yet another phenomenon that I think is even more important: film music abandoned the noble pretense that it could absorb and embrace all musical styles within a single mode.

For example, in Richard Brooks's *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), a successful film in its day about "problem schools," there are only diegetic cues, but they include music of every imaginable type: classic jazz (the math teacher has a big record collection), gospel (sung by the vocal group directed by Sidney Poitier), rock 'n' roll (Bill Haley's "Rock Around the Clock" at the beginning and end), lounge music (chosen by Richard Dadier [Glenn Ford] from the jukebox in the restaurant where he's dining with his wife). These different types of music are not coordinated with any overall style or approach, and they serve as markers for the nearly irreconcilable separation between generations and cultures. The symbolic significance is quite evident when the rebellious students destroy their math teacher's precious records, thus killing any hope of communication between the elder and younger generations. Music here serves to separate and no longer to unite.

Along with this the film attempts to use sound effects for the same dramatic purposes as music. The loud racket in a workshop above Dadier's classroom serves to prepare the movie's most dramatic moment: the confrontation between the teacher and a student armed with a knife. At this climactic moment the noises overhead cease, and we hear only the sound of a clock ticking to underline the menacing silence.

In a way the situation persists today—films dealing with contemporary subjects rarely present a unified or unifying musical universe.[1] Each instance of music in a movie fits into its own cultural and stylistic cubbyhole. The various brands of "world music" that have become popular in many recent films (particularly since *The Mission*, by Roland Joffé, a 1986 film precisely about the question of syncretism, with a famous score by Ennio Morricone, but also Scorsese's 1998 film *Kundun*, with music by Philip Glass) juxtapose, without seeking to blend, harmonies, rhythms, melodic lines, and musical logics that we sense come from different places and should not be combined. The idea of universalism has fallen to pieces.

There's one exception. For a certain time the musical remained the genre for which a composer could conceive a score that embraced all styles, from the most popular to highly sophisticated. The most magnificent achievement of this type is the score of *West Side Story*, which Leonard Bernstein wrote for Broadway and used in the film of 1961. But this was only one of a handful of glorious cases.

Today it seems as though only historical or epic movies such as Peter Jackson's saga *The Lord of the Rings* (2001–3) allow composers to make their mark with a homogeneous original score. But as soon as a film takes place in the contemporary real world, it is quite common to find different musical styles coexisting. In David Fincher's *Se7en* (1995) one hears bebop, pop music, Bach, progressive rock, and a somber score by Howard Shore. CDs of "original soundtracks" are further testimony of this kitchen-sink approach.

MUSIC BECOMES A STAR

Much has been written about the various efforts to integrate jazz into film at the end of the 1950s, either in compilation form or involving live improvisation during shooting—or else, in the form of carefully composed, sophisticated symphonic jazz scoring that contemporary audiences would no longer recognize as jazz. Think, for example, of Alex North's score for *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1952), or Duke Ellington's composition for *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959). Only a limited number of films went this route, such as several by Carné and Vadim in France, as well as *Breathless*. The other main departure from the classical style in this period was a very melodic orchestral style that featured tunes to which lyrics could be added for selling the soundtrack album; it often happened that these lyrics would be added after the film's release. The 45-rpm records of *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, 1952), *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954), *Touchez pas au grisbi* (Jacques Becker, 1954), *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (David Lean, 1957), and *The Island* (Kaneto Shindo, 1961) became commercial successes in just this way.

There are cases of all kinds. In some movies melody is fragmented, varied, transposed by a deliberately formless and lyrical use of jazz and thereby doesn't yield tunes one can recognize, memorize, and hum (in Louis Malle's

Elevator to the Gallows [1958] and in *Breathless*); the score can be athematic too. In other films music gets a starring role. Classical film music had typically been what one could call semimelodic: the themes of Jaubert in France and Steiner in the United States, despite differences in conception and means, had in common the idea of not sounding like jingles that could be instantly identified and made into hit songs. It was a compromise that was no longer viable in the 1950s, when the use of music split into different camps that kept their distance from each other, between films or even within a single film.

A phenomenon that subsequently emerged in the 1960s was the conception of music as a "sound," an idea for which Ennio Morricone is largely responsible. I'm referring not only to sound gimmicks such as the vocal croaking of the music in Leone's *Duck You Sucker* (1971), but also his stripped-down use of instruments or groupings of instruments (player pianos in Leone films, harmonica, electric guitar, piano, string sections), and his way of exploiting distinctive details of resonance, timbre, and other material properties to achieve a "sound." These qualities all highlighted music in film, like a film's other ingredients, as something concrete, solid, and incarnate. In other words, music is something that exists for itself, not just for rhetorical purposes or expressive function, and ultimately, lies beyond the classical notion of music as a written discourse.

RHETORICAL PRACTICES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Another trait of modernism in its different guises is the very exhibiting of audiovisual practices and means as such, resulting in a new prominence of discontinuity. This took on many forms: differences in tone between the literariness of a narrating voice and the ordinary language of the dialogue (Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* [1951] but also Malle's *Les Amants* [1958]), Pasolini's forced insertions of classical music into scenes or circumstances obviously

incongruous with such music ethnically speaking, sudden cutting of sounds and music cues in films of Godard, and ostentatious use of the voice-over of the author-director in a way that trumpets its distance from what is happening on the screen (Cocteau, Godard, Duras, and others).

The abandonment of the verbocentric practices described in chapters 5 and 6 made speech appear more nakedly isolated, as though it were an activity disconnected from the world in which the characters live, and sometimes even gave the sense that the films are more talkative when in fact no one was talking any more.

All of this contributed to the creation of what I call "overexposed cinema," which others refer to as "mannerist cinema" or "*cinéma filmé*" (filmed cinema, in the words of film critic Louis Skorecki)—a cinema where filmic rhetoric itself has become the star. Leone, Bergman, and Kubrick in Europe, Kurosawa as well as the younger Japanese filmmakers Imamura and Oshima, and many others were practitioners. This tendency ranged from the interrupted dialogue and music we see in Godard, to the creation in *2001* of an arbitrary relation between music and image ("The Blue Danube" coupled with futuristic images) or in the case of Imamura (*Intentions of Murder* [1964]), foregrounded auditory effects such as the internal voice and obvious postsynchronization. It could henceforth be said that popular film and experimental film were suffused with the same tendencies.

But the simple fact that filmmakers no longer laid music in where they had placed it before revealed that under the framework of classical rhetoric, real time had had the time to harden.

TIME BECOMES AUTONOMOUS

In parallel with the modernist trends discussed above, a less visible but, I think, equally significant phenomenon occurred, and not exclusively with auteur cinema: namely the hardening of time and the creation of what I will call *ritualized film*. In contrast to the preceding points, which are all intentional decisions, no one sought or advocated for this development.

An important consequence of the coming of sound roughly between 1926 and 1933 was, as I have already said, the imperative to stabilize film speed to twenty-four frames per second, whereas the rates of shooting and projection had been relatively free to fluctuate in silent film. This new mechanical standardization transformed the cinematograph into a *chrono-cinematograph*, an art that recorded time and no longer just movement.

What is interesting is that the first films to take stock completely and consciously of this fixing of time and turn it into an expressive dramatic element

in the full artistic sense—the first films, in other words, where time exists as such enough to *contain* all that makes up the scenes instead of being itself the effect created by the montage, the music, and the rhythm of actors—are, I think, films from the 1950s and 1960s. Examples range from certain suspense scenes in Hitchcock (sequences in *Strangers on a Train* [1951], as well as *Rear Window*), Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (an enormously influential film from the moment of its first screening and prize in Venice), Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957), Antonioni's *Il Grido*, Fellini's *La Dolce vita*, and Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour*.

And even though many film critics and theorists (Gilles Deleuze being the most widely read today) have noted that time entered the cinema as a tangible, material element only after a certain point in history, very few of these scholars have connected this fact to its real origin (an origin with a delayed effect), namely the standardization of camera and projection rates—a move necessitated by sound. It took filmmakers a long time to realize fully the aesthetic consequences of this standardization of time. It's as if the cinema needed time for time to jell or harden; as though the cinema needed an arbor, a splint for time before it could grow into this new dimension. Meanwhile, music, the great timekeeper and organizer of the sensation of time, allowed for the slow hardening of time to occur underneath its protective outer layer.

The ritualized cinema that appears in the 1950s does not necessarily achieve real time solely through the technical guarantee of the continuous take or by a sound that is emitted continuously in real time. But it does aim to bring this feeling in gradually, to construct it bit by bit.

Rashomon, for many years the most famous Japanese film beyond Japan's borders, contributed enormously to highlighting *duration* as a veritable element of expression. The story, we may recall, is set in the medieval period and features a dramatic incident that is recounted in different versions, via contradictory flashbacks, by a group of men protecting themselves from the rain under a ruined temple gate in the countryside. This place from which we go back in time is by no means abstract but is given physical materiality by the noise of torrential rain that threatens literally to drown out the other sounds (it is what I call the film's fundamental noise).[2] Each time we go back in time for another version of the story, told by the wife, the thief, the ghost of the murdered husband, or the woodcutter, we also escape from the rain. When we return to the present, so does the din of the rain. Finally, near the end of the film, the rain stops, and the acoustic tension maintained by the sound thus ceases as well.

Based on this strongly framed narrative structure, each episode makes us feel its length as a constitutive part of the film. The duration of some scenes is

structured and stretched beyond what is customary, more for their function in the overall architecture of the film than for the immediate storytelling needs. Consider, for example, the different shots of the woodcutter walking in the forest at the beginning to the sound of nondiegetic music that's a pastiche of Ravel's "Bolero." This sequence lasts far longer than its narrative purpose calls for, but the spectator has been led to adopt the attitude that this duration exists objectively, that it is one of the elements of the film's form, a temporal frame of storytelling that exists independently of the number of events or amount of information it contains.

When the film is in the present, at the temple gate, there is no music, only the rain. When we are taken back into the past, there is a different narrative music style each time: sometimes strongly "mickeymousing" (the music mimics and punctuates actions), sometimes stretching time out, creating an effect of solemnity, sometimes monotony and ritual. The final version of the story, the woodcutter's account, is without music. In this version, where the husband and the thief fight, there is no valor, no honor, just greed and a struggle for survival; and the absence of music gives the feeling of a last veil or embellishment being removed—so as to unveil time at its purest and most concrete.

La Dolce vita is another film that has certainly been underestimated in this regard. It also contains two sequences with rain, but the second one is a silent rain of feathers. In this intentionally interminable film—if you watch it in parts on home video it hardly makes any sense—the stretching of the sequences often leads to a "natural" meteorological phenomenon, as though lived duration were reasserting its rights. Several times in Fellini's film the day begins not because the script requires it but for the sake of the characters who have forgotten about the diurnal rhythm of day and night: it's as if the reassertion of this rhythm gets them back on track.

The first time rain occurs in the film is on the property where two children claim to have seen the Virgin Mary. A crowd gathers around them, including journalists and television crews. A downpour disperses this human gathering

into chaos, thus imposing its own sense of time. On another occasion it is a silent, simulated "rain" inside a luxurious residence where decadent guests aren't really managing to enjoy themselves. Marcello Rubini (Marcello Mastroianni), the modest provincial who has become a parasite in this social circle, beats cushions until they open up to release a snowy white rain of feathers onto the languid orgy. After this, everyone leaves the house, and dawn has broken in spite of everything, while the sound of waves on the beach imposes its natural rhythm. Even though we are far from real time (the action covers several weeks, while watching the film takes only three hours of our lives), time has been given time to become something more palpably atmospheric, and not merely symbolic.

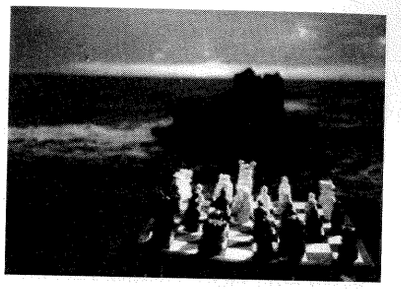
La Dolce vita exhibits a very precise construction, beginning with unstructured sequences that disrupt our sense of time, progressing toward longer sequences and ending up with the sequence of the gathering that goes on a bit longer than the others, deliberately a little too long, and gives the day time to begin on its own.

Near the beginning of the film the lips of Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg, the impromptu bathers in the Trevi fountain, meet, and the noise of the rush of water stops suddenly. A wide shot in CinemaScope reveals that daybreak has come without the characters noticing and that the water of the fountain has shut off. At the end it is the noise of the sea—a noise that does not shut off—that conveys the feeling of a time stretching far beyond the time of the film, in an open ending.

Two years after Fellini's film, in Antonioni's *La Notte*, two married people argue, lose each other, and reunite without any resolution over the course of one day and one night. In the process they become conscious of time that surrounds them, time that has passed without them. Dawn arrives all the same, and for a moment we become aware of time again, a time that is not dictated by the story's needs nor condensed out of a fear of boredom.

In the closing sequence of *L'Eclisse* (1962), Antonioni's next film, we are presented with dusk instead of dawn: the evening advances in a city deserted by the characters who have not gone to the designated place. So the night falls without them in an atmosphere that suggests the Apocalypse.

Bergman's exquisite *Seventh Seal* takes place entirely under the sign of the Apocalypse, beginning with an epigraph taken from the Book of Revelations: "And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour" (Rev. 8:1). The beginning of the film with the famous chess game between the Knight and Death takes place beside the sea, in an atmosphere that suggests both eternity and tangible time, a characteristic feeling in that cold war era haunted by prospects of atomic disaster.



In Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) the total absence of music (except for Melanie's piano playing at the Brenner home and a brief diegetic use of song that we will return to in chapter 10) and the large number of sequences without dialogue give us a very physical sense of time. This feeling is reinforced by the only scrap of information that the characters have been able to piece together about the avian attacks, namely that they take place on their own schedule according to an autonomous rhythm independent of human actions and circumstances. At the end of the film, for example, the heroes flee across a landscape of countless thousands of birds that do not attack but instead let them pass because, well, it's not time. In my view this is a very effective metaphorical representation of how the film's time and the time of the world become autonomous and cease to be tied to characters' actions—time takes on an independent existence. Whereas in movies that came before this, night falls or thunder rolls as a function of the psychological dictates of the story, now time in the cinema has become a cycle that exists in and for itself.

THE BIRTH OF RITUALIZED FILM

With *A Man Escaped* (1956) Bresson proves to be one of the first directors, after Kurosawa, to have systematized what I call ritualized cinema—a cinema where sparse and sober dialogue, as well as the minimal place accorded to music, frees the ear and allows us to hear how sounds and movement in the image organize time.

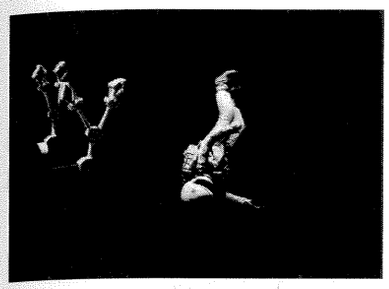
In Bresson's films, if we take note of all the noises (prison sounds in *A Man Escaped*, footsteps on Paris sidewalks in *Pickpocket* [1959], roaring motorcycles and the clop of the heroine's wooden clogs in *Mouchette* [1967], the clatter of armor in *Lancelot of the Lake* [1974]), and if they all punctuate and ritualize time, it is because they are never or almost never mixed in with music. But it is also because they have a presence and density, a material quality that is rare in film.

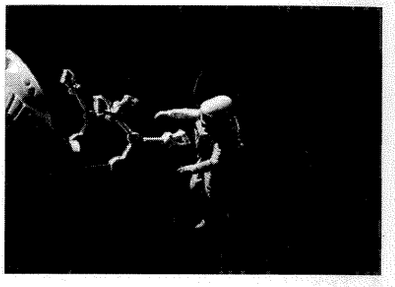
How is it that some think of music when listening to Bresson's films? It is because the sounds they contain are often part of repetitive processes, and repetitive sound necessarily evokes music. A second reason is that the scenes as written or as realized in Bresson's mise-en-scène involve actions that are presented as repetitive: moving in a procession, walking on a sidewalk, going to school, opening doors, giving and taking money. A third reason is that the nonnaturalistic diction in dialogue of these films underscores the ritual aspect of language. In short, Bresson emphasizes everything in life that consists of constant repetition of similar and reversible actions: you open a door, and you close it; you go upstairs, and you come down; you leave, and you return. Musical feeling is not far off, since the perception of a law of repetition intrinsic to the sounds themselves, emerging as a process in time and not from some external causality, suffices to create this feeling of hearing something on the verge of music.

To summarize, we can say that the rhythmic recurrence of certain sounds in Bresson's films generates an embryonic musical feeling, which in fact is the impression of a ritualized temporal form.

The ritualized film did not take clear shape until the 1960s; it was the popular cinema of Sergio Leone with his westerns, at once parodic and solemn and clearly indebted to Kurosawa, that contributed largely to its emergence.

The phenomenon would cut across every genre, including comedy (*Playtime*), action (*Bullitt* [1968]), science fiction (*2001: A Space Odyssey*), the western (*Once upon a Time in the West* [1969]), and the police film (Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Cercle rouge* [1970]). Beyond their differences in genre and reputation in film circles, these films have more in common than their late-1960s release dates. The characteristics they share generally go unnoticed because a sometimes rigid auteurism, coupled with an obsession for slapping labels on films, has impeded the writing of a truly comparative film history. A first trait that these film share is that they are all relatively laconic films. Dialogue is terse and sober, or dense but limited to specific scenes, or spread throughout the film but sparingly, or abundant but distant and barely audible. Second, the films are essentially ceremonials, and each includes set pieces of temporal bravura. Think of the recuperation of Frank Poole's dead body in *2001* (six minutes of technical manipulation without any language or music), the wait at the train station at the start of Leone's western (fifteen minutes of characters waiting in silence with no music, to the sound of a few obsessive or irritating noises),[3] the break-in at Cartier in *Le Cercle rouge* (almost twenty minutes of meticulous operations without a word[4] and, of course, without music), and the long scene of "picture-window apartments" in *Playtime* (ten minutes of silent action in adjoining apartments viewed from the outside through big





windows, as in "deaf cinema," with only the sounds of passing vehicles and pedestrians). Here, then, are four sequences extended far beyond any narrative necessity: they are a pure ritual of time.

In *Playtime*, with the word present in the very title, it is hardly a stretch to say that time is the subject of the film, in yet another bow to Chaplin's *Modern Times*. Tati's magnificent and poetic film also bears comparison to *La Dolce vita*, released eight years earlier: there's an abundance of group situations, and each ends with a very long nighttime sequence that progresses toward disintegration or loss of structure, allowing the time for day to break, as it indeed does every morning. Finally, in both films we see the same habit of placing hundreds of details as though on a large cinematic canvas; both predicate *time as a preexisting framework* instead of having it remain in the service of the story.

Ritualized cinema is liberated, unpacked cinema: cinema has decided to see what it can see by dismantling the armature of musical scoring, voice-overs, and dialogue interwoven with images—and what it has seen is that time, once it is fixed and stabilized at twenty-four frames per second, has become as hard as cement.

It is significant that Jean-Pierre Melville started out with two feature films that made superb use of voice-over narration—*Le Silence de la mer* (1947) and *Les Enfants terribles*—but gradually abandoned the practice (though *Bob le flambeur* [1956] and *Deux hommes dans Manhattan* [1959] still have some voice-overs). Kubrick, who skillfully managed the complexities of the voice-over in *The Killing* (1956) and *Lolita* (1962), had planned to use a narrating voice and an equally narrative score by Alex North in *2001*, but he eventually decided to use neither. Both directors went on the same journey: removing the armature and seeing what there is underneath.

This cinema of ritualized, hardened time was eventually adopted by several directors of different generations, and differing talents, such as Theo Angelopoulos, Andrei Tarkovsky, Miklós Jancsó, Chantal Akerman, and later Jim Jarmusch, Aki Kaurismäki, and Wong Kar-wai. After the 1960s, ritualized

cinema ceased to be a historically specific phenomenon, and henceforth it would persist as a tendency, an absolute, a point of reference.

1. Except, curiously, in the films of Ken Loach and Mike Leigh that belong to a grand British tradition of film music.
2. For *fundamental noise* see glossary and chapter 26.
3. See my analysis of this sequence in Michel Chion, *Le Son* (Paris: Nathan, 1998), 79–81.
4. Except for the name "Plouvier!" tersely spoken by Yves Montand to a concierge.

CHAPTER 8

The Return of the Sensorial (1975–1990)

THE WORKING MASSES OF NOISE

CONSIDER A SCENE FROM a 1978 film in Dolby, Philip Kaufman's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, a remake of Don Siegel's 1956 classic. Matthew Bennell (Donald Sutherland), in great danger and utterly exhausted, falls asleep outdoors on a bench, thereby allowing one of the giant pods from outer space that are menacing the earth to begin the process of substituting an alien Donald Sutherland for the original human. Then begins the most upsetting scene of the film. During the night—it's in San Francisco, and we sense that the air is mild—a sort of vegetal object opens up and with a discreet noise gives birth to a fully grown adult form, still wet and undefined. Donald Sutherland and the vegetal thing, the original and the gradually identifiable imitation, appear together in the same shot. Try seeing the film again on home video: if you remember the exact impression you first had watching that scene in a theater, it is thanks to that little sound effect.

Created by sound designer Ben Burtt—what he used for it is a mystery, but never mind—it's a sound of unfurling, of unfolding organs, of membranes unsticking and crackling all in the same instant. This real and precise sound,

so clear in its high registers and so tactile, is heard as though we are touching it, the way contact with the skin of a peach can make one shudder.

Five years earlier, in 1973, the director would not have had access to the same audio resources, and he would not have gotten a *rendering* with such material texture and presence, so physically piercing in the high treble, so haptic—in other words, so tactile, something so sensorial that it modifies the perception of the world of the film so that it's more immediate and so that there's no distance possible. The movies had not had this before. And once the "working masses" of the upper frequency range entered films (even in monaural versions), they brought with them different material to work with and a different sensation of life. I am not referring to the new ways of dealing with space that came with stereo, nor to the thunderous effects made possible by Dolby, but to the microrendering of the rumor of the world, which situates the film so concretely in the extremely present indicative. Something had changed, and after the fashion of the substitutions that occur in the *Body Snatchers*' story, a change in the realm of film sound—not closely heeded or recorded by film criticism—altered the status of the image in a nonviolent revolution.

If there exists an official history of film, and there ought to be one—with all the cinema's victories and defeats, its heroes and unknown soldiers, its dates that demarcate what came "before" from what came "after" (decisive events such as the coming of sound, neorealism, the New Wave)—a new film history must also be written that now discerns previously unnoticed events, progressive mutations of technical, economic, and aesthetic phenomena—gentle revolutions.[1] One such revolution involves the rendering of the real; this revolution was brewing before Dolby, but Dolby truly brought it about.

We all know what happened to the technical nature of the filmic simulacrum between 1930 and 1975: the grain of the reproduction of the real became finer, at every level. *Temporal grain*, which the demands of sound recording pushed from sixteen to eighteen frames per second in the silents to twenty-four for the sound film (and twenty-five for video cameras), and *spatial grain* became progressively finer with increased definition in film stocks. Sound, for its part, gained in dynamic range and frequency range, as well as in sensitivity and accuracy of capture and reproduction.

DÉCOUPAGE RESTRUCTURED

These changes did not occur all at once. Dolby is not Jesus Christ, allowing for the writing of history in a before-and-after narrative. What happened was more gradual. The soundtrack was compact at first (though often very beautiful), confined to a narrow band of frequencies that had difficulty finding

room for all of its various components—voices, music, and sound effects—but slowly it broadened. At first it was acoustically simplified, made to pass through a miniscule gramophone horn. It was the equivalent of seeing the world one-eyed and color-blind. Whenever a voice spoke, noises and ambient sound had to come to a halt. And in the first French sound films that, unlike their American counterparts, attempted to render the sounds of real life, words were sometimes obscured, unintelligible, muddled.

Gradual quantitative changes involving the widening frequency range and the refining of mixing techniques ended up bringing about unexpected qualitative jumps. A noteworthy consequence was the greater allowance for polyphony, the equal cohabitation of several layers of sound. While the filmic image always remains *one*—except for the occasional experiment in dividing the screen (the split screen found in De Palma and some American comedies) or prolonged superimpositions—sound has always been *plural*. Filmmakers necessarily had to prioritize in the early days, suppressing the murmur of the crowd and dialing down the music in the presence of dialogue. But in some films from the 1980s such as Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), the audio exists in two, three, or four layers with equal presence—the visual image is just one more layer and not necessarily the primary one. In this vast sonic aquarium the image is sometimes found swimming around like just another fish.

But even before Dolby, in the history of the sound film, sound slowly expanded farther into the low and high frequency ranges; it became denser and more refined. This often went unnoticed. No one said at a particular moment that the sound was different. But things on the screen were perceived to have more physical presence, and the film's time became more urgent. The advent of more highs on the soundtrack, and of thin layers of ambient noise and details above the voices, nuanced viewers' experience of the micropresent. Breathing, scratching, clicking, buzzing—a whole noisy underworld waited patiently for its turn, the working masses of sound. In certain cases this noisy "third estate" won out, shifting the center of the film closer to its domain, thus transforming the film frame from its customary status as a privileged place into a frame of surveillance of the action, of detection—a monitor, pulling the whole tablecloth closer without anyone really noticing the dishes move.

On the screen everything looks right, but in the découpage, the construction of screen space, everything has changed. The image no longer *establishes* the scenic space—sound does that—now the image only presents points of view on it. The famous master shot that Hitchcock liked to save for the end of a scene—always a winner—no longer has the same meaning. Sound already defines a stable "long shot" in its own way, ringed by distant ambient sounds.

The process is clearly evident in a film such as Roland Joffé's *The Mission*, which, even when there is no music, is structured by a music video-like space on the basis of the sound. This development represents a tendency only, rarely present in a pure state; most films combine or alternate it with the usual rhetoric of scene construction, all the while undermining the latter little by little.

In fact, the establishing shot and reestablishing shot are no longer needed to define the scenic space, since a film's sound can now do that work. In many scenes in *Blade Runner*, notably during the sequence in which Harrison Ford chases Joanna Cassidy through the streets, general shots that show us the whole crowd are rare; instead, we get a series of fairly close or fragmentary shots that immerse us in the street, while the rich and abundant sound inscribes each component shot into the whole.

The space that sound defines, however, is not the same as the one formerly constructed by the image. Even though it is so full of detail, and even though it is polyphonic, the contours and borders of its acoustic space are still hazy. Sound, as I have said, does away with the notion of a localizable point of view. Equally foreign to it is the notion of Euclidean perspective, despite efforts that were made to impose such aural perspective in the early sound era.

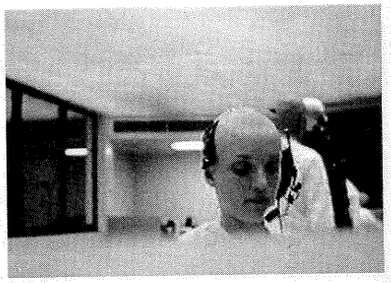
In the multitrack sound spaces of Dolby, as well as in modern cinema, sounds are stacked and arranged like objects in pre-Renaissance visual space; the emptiness that separates those bodies is not structured. But sound's temporal precision (the image, by contrast, makes do with a rough sample of time) permits several layers of sound to work on the moviegoer's attention at different rates of speed.

These developments proceeded dialectically, not without fits, starts, and steps backward and not without the reaffirmation of the importance of the visual on more than one occasion. "Presto," says the image, but as it has to a great extent lost its role as organizer of the scenic space, since classical découpage is no longer the rule, and the progression of shots is no longer its own drama giving meaning to the action shown by these shots, the image that is no longer determining structure—or at least not as it did before—behaves rather like an interesting idler, tempted to become pretty and flirtatious. It may borrow the "look" of old movie lighting and wear it as a sort of retro display. Even if some filmmakers explore and innovate visual *rhythms* and *texture*, the cinematic image of the 1980s was not the stage of great revolutions that it may have seemed but rather was deliberately conservative and prone to quotation. But let us now go back to observe the origins of this phenomenon.

THE BIRTH OF POLYRHYTHM

In 1970 a young unknown American director released a science fiction film, *THX 1138*, that received positive reviews in France but had a limited distribution and no great box-office success. What was striking from the very beginning of this film—besides opening credits moving from down to up, as in Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955)—and then in the first sequence (extreme close-ups of enlarged blinking lights, looks of workers under protective suits and mechanical arms, shots that are difficult to piece together into one homogeneous space)—was the mixture of different sound *tempi*: a slow chorus in a religious style was superimposed over futuristic beeps that seemed to belong to another rhythm and certainly another time. This film's ceremonial and enigmatic character had surely been influenced by *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which had come out two years before, and by Godard too, but *THX 1138* had the intelligence to seek the same effects through strikingly different means. Whereas *2001*, in the lineage of Sergio Leone and Jean-Pierre Melville, was a laconic film, *THX 1138* was at times positively loquacious (note the opposition between the unapologetic chatterbox played by Donald Pleasance and the taciturn dissident played by Robert Duvall). Although there are tons of dialogue, it seems to get the characters nowhere, serves no use. Speech seemed to cancel itself out, particularly in the wrenching scene of the prison without bars.

Though recorded monaurally, this first feature film by George Lucas felt like it had multitrack sound. It has a markedly polyrhythmic character in some sequences, and these collisions of different speed can occur constantly within a single scene or as an effect of crosscutting that opposes contradictory rhythms. Often the audio editing alternates between syrupy elevator music (as anesthetizing as the organ in *Last Year at Marienbad*) and sound effects that are vividly and sharply delineated in time and produce, on the contrary, a sense of urgency. The pattern culminates with the final chase that is paradoxically both accelerated and slowed down: when THX (Robert Duvall), who is trying to



escape from the subterranean world and return to the surface of the earth, borrows a race car and is pursued by the robots, the editing shifts constantly between hurried sounds (dynamic roaring, heard by the pursued) and leisurely sounds (cloying ambient music in the control room of the pursuers). The fugitive is driving fast, but the de-emotionalized and pragmatic organization that is hunting him down is content to apply a computer program and stop trying to capture him when the cost of doing so becomes greater than the cost of losing him. The parallel editing between Duvall's vehicle and the control center, occupied by anonymous placid officers, constantly forecloses any sense of acceleration. At several points, through the use of different speeds in the editing and mixing, *THX 1138* gives the impression of actually being more polyphonic than *2001* even though it's in mono.

When *THX 1138* came out, I remember noting the name of the director but also the name of the picture editor, who also created the film's sound, as well as coauthored the screenplay: Walter Murch. So it came as no surprise to see this brilliant man's name again four years later in the credits to Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974). Over the rhythms of San Francisco the soundtrack superimposes an obsessively repeated conversation between two people (which has been recorded by Gene Hackman's character), a conversation apparently with no end or precise aim, and this superimposition gives rise to constant polyrhythms. As I myself had been making mixtures of *musique concrète* for some time, I was struck by how new these rhythmic mixtures were to cinema, not simply on account of *The Conversation*'s subject matter but also because of its mixing and editing. Here was a film that made its viewer conscious of layers of sound sliding over and under each other, without any one of them imposing a rhythm that dominated over all.

The year before, a huge international audience had discovered *American Graffiti*, the first "disc-jockey" film (see chapter 24) and another George Lucas project with Murch. This film's idea of superimposing about thirty rock 'n' roll songs on scenes, crosscutting among a number of characters, yielded all sorts of innovation.

In my view one of Murch's most important contributions, in many instances before the advent of Dolby, was to use sound and editing to create a new model of polyrhythm and polytonality, founded on the presence of multiple centers of attention—which changed the face of the movies. This does not simply involve a linear contradiction between sound and image, often called counterpoint, but rather a more profound shift, dispensing with the idea of a single rhythmic center to a film.

Robert Altman constantly pursued verbal polyphony in films such as *The Long Goodbye* (1973), *California Split* (1974), and *Nashville* (1975). An important collaborator on these projects was his sound engineer, Jim Webb, who created a system of radio microphones worn by the actors, who were thereby freed to move about and speak, often at the same time as others—hence verbal polyphony. Already in *The Long Goodbye* simultaneous speech and overlapping dialogue occur routinely, for example when the police interrogate Marlowe (Elliott Gould). In France Claude Lelouch was a pioneer in the new polyphony. And in several films of Fassbinder, such as *The Third Generation* (1978), the systematic and deliberately oppressive overlapping of characters' lines with the chatter of a radio or television that's on in the rooms they go through is at once a critique of the characters' revolutionary prattle and a depiction of the world as it is—a new kind of cinema on the horizon, adjusted for a new world.

In the 1960s and 1970s the world of sound changed: the transistor radio and the portable record player introduced both popular and classical music into spaces where they had not been before; music could now be heard along with rhythms of nature and industry, in sonic mixtures that earlier generations would never have thought possible.

With the total democratization of the car radio after the war, for instance, songs routinely accompanied the passing landscape for Americans. We see this at work in the opening credits of *Kiss Me Deadly* in 1955 (a Nat King Cole song plays on the highway at night, heard anempathetically[2] over the terrified panting of Mike Hammer's female passenger), but films didn't use pop songs widely until a few years later. The evolving ease with which we can move about accompanied by our music has made it entirely customary now to have truly random contrapuntal superimpositions of independent elements such as song lyrics, melodic line, and characters' trajectories; these "lines" multiply the occasions for fortuitous crossings and meetings that, when carried out, make for all sorts of temporal vectorizations.[3] The sound aesthetic of many films starting in the 1970s, especially road movies, is incomprehensible without this phenomenon.

But it took the arrival of Dolby for moviegoers to become conscious of this new dimension.

A PHYSICAL REAFFIRMATION OF SOUND

Without going into the technical details of this process that exploded onto the scene in the 1970s, it would be useful to note what the innovation known as Dolby Stereo brought to film:

- wider frequency range, which means the capacity to go much lower in the lows and higher in the highs;
- increased dynamic range, which does not necessarily mean a louder sound but rather a much wider range of contrasts, from the softest to the most powerful;
- multitrack sound—sound distributed over multiple independent tracks that can carry identical or different signals.

Dolby's aesthetic consequences include not just finer distinction in the rendering of sounds but even the capacity to let us hear sounds that previously could not be distinguished on a movie audio channel (the noise of clothes brushing together, small insects, or very fine rain) and the ability to "personalize" sounds much more extensively through greater definition of sonic details. Dolby also brought a much greater range of contrasts in audio intensity, which could give these contrasts more violent but also more refined expressive value (as also happened in the history of Western music starting in the nineteenth century).

The passage from one to multiple tracks had radical consequences, some of which, including the less spectacular ones, often go unrecognized. Multitrack makes it possible to hear certain "offstage" sounds coming from a real situated place (rather than imaginary and constructed) outside the borders of the screen. Multitrack allows sounds to move around the space of the theater (such as the helicopter blades slashing the air in *Apocalypse Now* that so astonished everyone's sense of perception). And multitrack sound allows a far greater number of sounds to coexist on the sound channel without a loss of quality; therefore it grants more importance to *sound effects* as elements of setting, punctuation, and expression. It also favors the generalization of polyrhythmic sound, which Walter Murch had pioneered using monaural technology.

At first Dolby had appeared as solely a vehicle for delivering more bass and "walls" of sound in pop films such as Ken Russell's *Tommy* (1975). However, just as speech in the late 1920s took hold unexpectedly in a place originally created for music, sounds now took advantage of the place originally intended for rock music..

Dolby was also a reaffirmation of the presence of sound. Noises had been palpable as a physical phenomenon at the beginning of the 1930s but then

seemed to get lost in the shuffle as novelty gave way to convention. If we examine films such as *Scarface*, with its sprays of machine-gun fire; *Hallelujah*, with its gospel music; Berkeley's *Gold Diggers of 1935*, with its rat-a-tat of tap dancing—but also *M*, with its crowd noise and Peter Lorre's shouting voice at the end; and of course Vertov's *Enthusiasm*, with its mechanical symphony—our DVD viewings today cannot possibly give an accurate idea of the way these films sounded to people when first released. We have to imagine how revolutionary the new dynamism of these audio montages was as they coursed through packed movie theaters with the volume turned up in force.

At that time this dynamism essentially danced to the beat of jazz, a word that was applied in the late 1920s to any syncopated popular music. In 1975, at the beginning of Dolby, it goes by another name, rock or pop. Afterward comes the great ideological change: this dynamism is no longer associated with one name or musical genre. Sound, as a physical reality in its own right—the power, proximity, and physical presence of sound—no longer refers to a specific musical/rhythmic context. In other words, by the end of the 1970s the dynamism of sound has elided music.

Sensurround was a short-lived but notable technique of "infra-sounds" of very low frequency deployed selectively for scenes of bombings or earthquakes, in such films as *Earthquake* (1974) and *Midway* (1976). For a time, as it made bodies and movie seats tremble, it embodied the myth of sound that would abolish the distance between the film screen and the spectator's body, between the space of the film and the space of the theater, between the inside and the outside of the body.

Even if Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) does not use Sensurround, the arrival of the giant flying saucer in the midst of a stupefying silence, with its far-below-audible sound, plays on the same idea. The whole film seems to have been made to culminate in this moment that announces, "Ladies and Gentlemen, here it is—*the sound*!" Only afterward does the music of John Williams return.

With Dolby a sort of aerodynamic aesthetic of sound also became possible: the intensity gradients were clearer and better controlled. The notion of *sound design* came to designate by analogy something close to the idea of visual design. Ben Burtt, for example, created for the *Star Wars* series (Irvin Kershner's *The Empire Strikes Back* [1980] and Richard Marquand's *Return of the Jedi* [1983]) the whir of light sabers, sounds of spaceship engines, and pneumatic doors that were memorably new audio creations.

Some films recorded in mono had of course already designed superb sound for objects, in the hands of such directors as Bresson (especially in

A Man Escaped, with the loud clicks of its locks) and Tati (the scene of the car pileup in *Traffic* [1971]). Let's just say that Dolby greased the wheels in this direction.

The precision of the new sound, the richness in highs and lows, created another possibility: its opposite. Precisely when you can have sounds that are so rich in harmonics, the use of colorless, spare or indistinct sounds can by contrast create specific aesthetic and expressive effects. This happens in several sequences of Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), where the sound is intentionally muddied and anemic. Deliberately imprecise sound becomes an aesthetic choice, whereas before, imprecision was an unfortunate consequence of the technology of the day.

THE AESTHETIC OF IMPRECISION, BY DESIGN

In *Alien* all the effects of "bad" sound and nonsynched sound have what we can call a diegetic pretext. Near the beginning, for example, the characters are enclosed in spacesuits, exploring the surface of the hostile planet, and we hear the radio interference as they communicate with one another. In the scene where Tom Skerritt, Veronica Cartwright, and John Hurt have a bittersweet exchange, we hear their voices partially filtered, and it's not always easy to know who is speaking. When Skerritt says, "Come on, knock it off," his voice is heard closer-up than the others; his hand gestures inside the spacesuit emphasize what he is saying, but they don't appear synchronized with his words, thus creating an impression of instability and tension in the audiovisual relationship.

Even more oddly, in this scene that cuts among the four crew members who remain in the ship and the three who are exploring the surface, we would expect the sound of the wind that sweeps over this planet (heard by whom?) to cut out completely in the shots in the airtight interior of the *Nostromo*. However, it can still be heard slightly even when the camera situates us inside this cocoon.

Produced by Fox, *Alien* strikes the ears of many critics as very American. I would argue that it is in fact a largely British film, not simply because of the nationality of the director and two first-class British actors, Ian Holm and John Hurt, but also because the way it has recorded voices and captured reality hails from the great English tradition of social and documentary film.

A good part of the sound appears to have been recorded synch on the set, directed so as to preserve the realism of conversations with overlapping and colliding lines. *Alien* is filmed like a documentary in which characters frequently cut each other off. Care was obviously taken to create an effect of truthful immediacy, of ordinariness, for this incredible story situated in outer space in a distant future. *Alien* is also a democratic film in its sound, as there is no master voice. The officer Dallas (played by Tom Skerritt) speaks in a manner that is no more imposing than the others—a weary voice, lost from the start.

Paradoxically, thanks to Dolby, *Alien* lends tangible reality to a future where the equipment is not always in the best of shape. Audio and video communications are full of interference and make the situation stressful; either the characters can manage to communicate by intercom or radio, or their voices are drowned out by the noise of a spaceship in disrepair. A "dirty" aesthetic, full of confusion, is precisely constructed and is certainly no byproduct of flaws in the filmmaking process.

Right from the opening credits, with their pure hooting tones and the muted rumble of the *Nostromo*'s motors, we hear dull, pale, lifeless, and life-sapping sounds throughout the film, but this dullness, rather than being the consequence of "maxed-out" audio technology, is in fact intentionally *created* by technology.

And as for dialogue, *Alien*'s approach does not involve the decentering I described with Fellini. Here the voice remains central; however, it is stuck in the midst of cracks and pops, fades, and other noises, like a fly caught in a pot of jam.

An important aspect of the acting is all the wheezing, breathing, puffing, and panting between words; intertwined with the film's sonic landscape, these sounds help to anchor the voices in a continuum of bodily physicality and to the technological setting that surrounds the actors, which itself breathes and pants. Here, unlike in many classic films, the voice does not effortlessly skim through an abstract world above the bodies of the actors.

In the sound editing of *Alien* we also see the importance of *external logic*.[4] This gives rise to sudden surges of sound, brought about by editing. What is interesting is that they repeat and are redoubled by similar effects in the action itself. On the inhospitable planet where the monster broods, little geysers of steam erupt near the visitors without warning, while inside the ship, the pipes that Parker (Yaphet Kotto) is working on release sudden jets of steam and sound. The film's sound-image editing, and the nature of the sounds and sensations that the characters experience in the film, obey the same laws, namely, effects of surprise discharges, which I will call the "spray effect."

By "spray" I mean a massive, concentrated, and sudden spurt of energy resulting from simple pressure. Obviously, each time it occurs it delivers a small shock to the senses, because the energy does not come on progressively but erupts immediately at maximum level and doesn't really develop afterward. *Alien*'s world is largely dominated by this "spray" principle in both the soundtrack and the visuals.

Finally, *Alien* is a film that plays on the sense of hearing. Its ad campaign was based on the memorable slogan, "In space, no one can hear you scream." A fascinating phrase, since it plays on the ambiguity of "you"—does it refer to the characters or the spectator? "Mother, can you hear me?" shouts Ripley, the only survivor at the end. The onboard computer, Mother, has no voice and apparently no ears. The female voice that utters the two countdowns at the end of the film is constructed not as a specific embodied voice but as an impersonal recorded one. Two passengers, however, are depicted as hyperacousic. The first is a cat, the mascot, Jones: in the shot preceding the astronauts' discovery of a crashed spacecraft, he perks his ear at the very moment when there is nothing more to hear (this is the sole moment of absolute silence in the entire film). The other is the android Ash (revealed to be an android only in the middle of the film), who, just before trying to strangle Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), turns with an animal-like reflex toward something in the setting that's clinking.

As for the monster—all jaws, hands, and tail—it is impossible to attribute either ears or seeing eyes to it.

Alien is paradoxically a film in which the sensorial is everywhere, overwhelmingly so, yet at the same time it is built around a monster whose perceptive subjectivity (unlike in many 1980s films, like *Wolfen* [1981] or

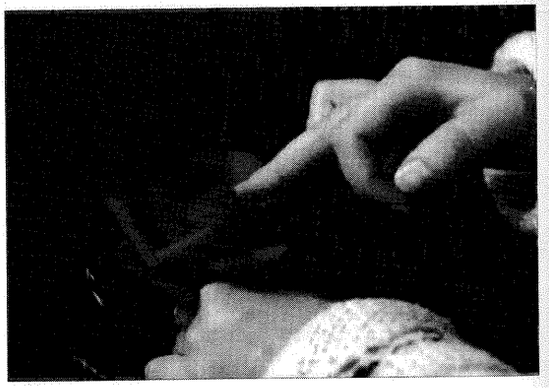
Predator [1988] and of course the robots and cyborgs of James Cameron's 1984 *Terminator* and Paul Verhoeven's 1987 *Robocop*) is never represented in images and sounds. The Alien is literally the "no one" who in the slogan "can hear you scream." It is the character endowed with the Great Ear in a cinema that, thanks to Dolby, offers more sounds to hear, and where there is no one to hear this "more" besides a cat and a robot. As for the Alien, it is the Deaf Ear par excellence.

SOUND AIDING A RETURN TO THE SENSORY DIMENSIONS OF SILENT FILM AND ITS CULT OF MONTAGE

I am not suggesting that it took Dolby to invent auditory sensations. We can find them already in a scene from Jerzy Kawalerowicz's *Mother Joan of the Angels* (1961) where two penitents flagellate each other. Barthélémy Amengual described this scene accurately in 1968: "Underneath the dry cracks of the whip and the grunts and moans of effort and pain, one hears the creak of the laundry line's wheel, the terribly soft creaking of a bed, a cradle, a hammock, or a sailboat groaning to the waves and wind. . . . Later, during the collective attacks of possession and the exorcisms, the soft *shhh* of the young girl's feet on the floor will recall this mysterious rustling—a voluptuous and vaguely perverse sound."[5] One could offer a similar description of Dreyer's *Ordet* (1955) (in which Francis Ramirez has noted "the dull damp murmur" of the white laundry drying at the beginning)[6] or of the films of Bresson or Tarkovsky (especially in *The Mirror* [1975]). In *Les Amants* Louis Malle was already using the technology of his day to establish a sonic sensuality (with sounds of breathing and rustling). Although now dated, *Les Amants* was no doubt as disconcerting for its sounds as for the sexual suggestion in the images. Dolby

simply permits films to multiply these sonic sensations without necessarily confining them to particular sequences, and thus it allows for the creation of a true sensorial environment.

I have already shown how the increased precision in the high treble range helped to render and restore tactile sounds. For sensuality, think of the sounds of fabric in the films of Bertolucci (*The Last Emperor* [1987]) but also in *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991), by Zhang Yimou. As for repugnant effects there's the metallic friction of various blade surfaces at the ends of Freddy's fingers that menace teenage girls in the series by Wes Craven (*A Nightmare on Elm Street* [1984]). Then there is sound for disgusting organic things, helping to render the foul swarming of spiders and scorpions, for example, in Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981). To render the technological and the high-speed, there are the countless bips and beeps that invaded the world of film before their real-life arrival on cell phones, fax machines, and modems. For the realer-than-real, there is the squeaking of bike wheels and park swings, as well as sounds of rust, of cold, and the crunch of footsteps in the snow (Fred Zinnemann's *Five Days One Summer* [1982]). Other examples are the infinitesimal sizzle of a cigarette as someone takes a drag, sometimes followed by violent bursts of sound (*Wild at Heart*), and the snap of leather and the clang of chains in the homosexual SM world of Friedkin's *Cruising* (1980). There are the very concrete noises of daily life in the British social issue films of Stephen Frears, Ken Loach, and Mike Leigh, as well as the delicate and disturbing—almost indecent—(Foleyed) crumpling of a rose by Ema's hand that rummages about in *Abraham's Valley* (Manoel de Oliveira, 1993). Contrary to a legend that persisted in France for a long time, Dolby's capacities did not serve only blockbusters and violent films.



The surprising consequence of Dolby is that this proliferation of the sensual and sensorial has allowed the sound film to reconnect with the late silent era.

Already at the beginning of sound, the German director Wilhelm Thiele aptly underscored the differences between the languages of silent versus sound films, and he expressed his hopeful wish that filmmakers would soon be able to "restore to sound cinema . . . the multiplicity of silent cinema's forms," including the possibility of free play with time and movement.[7]

The recuperation of the forms of silent cinema Thiele hoped for did not really begin to make itself felt until the mid-1970s; this is not that long a delay when considered on the scale of the history of an art.

Crosscutting for which both sound and image cut at once (cut-cut) was already quite common in the 1950s (such as in the suspense film *Cry Terror!* [1958], by Andrew L. Stone); but Dolby accentuates and amplifies the sensory rupture caused by such simultaneous cutting and gives it even sharper prominence, in the impulse to reaffirm montage as the basis of cinema.

Film soundtracks of the 1980s and 1990s make frequent use of flash sensations, sound explosions, and prominent discontinuities, all of which direct renewed attention to the editing of the visuals by punctuating it. Consequently, the cinema has unexpectedly renewed a connection with the orgy of montage that characterized the late silents, especially in the work of Abel Gance, Eisenstein, Jean Epstein, and Murnau. For example, in John McTiernan's *Predator,* each time the editing gives us the point of view of the extraterrestrial hunter, we hear right at the cut a brief sound like the crack of a whip. This device is an accepted technique today, whereby a sound has no diegetic source or musical status, and whose only function is to underline and make us feel the whoosh of a pan, the energy of a gesture, or the "punch" of a cut. Such emphasis through sound—noticeable in horror (e.g., Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* [1982]) and already at work in Japanese films of the 1960s (heard in Kobayashi, Shindo, and Imamura)—became an important feature in action cinema (John Woo) before eventually becoming standard practice.

Much in the same way, the loud pops of midcentury flash cameras in the final boxing match in Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (1980) reinforce the idea of vertical montage points (matching visual with audio) and thus participate in a return in the 1980s to the sensorial and to the foregrounding of montage, two features commonly associated with the flamboyant period of silent film. Two birds with one stone. It tends to be overlooked that the aesthetic of rapid montage in the late 1920s went hand in hand with a sensory lyricism that today we might associate with advertising: the privileging of the *textural* in all kinds of forms—from the metallic and polished (the cream separator in Eisenstein's

The General Line), soft to the touch (the fox's tail in Pudovkin's *Storm over Asia* [1929]), viscous and wet (the rain and Emil Jannings's oilskin coat in *The Last Laugh*), flesh and light (Lil Dagover in Murnau's *Tartuffe* [1925]), and of course speed in the films of Gance (*La Roue*), Epstein (*La Glace à trois faces* [1927]), and Sjöstrom (*The Wind*). None of these are mere accessories or anecdotal details in the flamboyant silent era; they are part and parcel of what I call sensory lyricism, which the post-Dolby cinema, with its new possibilities for sound, actually reconnects with and extends.

It is also tempting to attribute the return of adventure films and sweeping panoramic landscapes that occur in the wake of Dolby (e.g., *Greystoke* [1982] and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*) to the fact that multitrack sound allows for vastly more present audio impressions of nature, largely by opening up the audio field to the high treble: the rustle of insects, the buzzing of flies, the high tweets of certain birds, the audio background of landscapes acquires more presence, even if it is still far from perfect fidelity to nature. A key film for this recognition of the possibilities of Dolby was Terrence Malick's drama *Days of Heaven* (1978).

With Dolby a whole range of new—or rather cinematically renewed—sensations comes on the scene; this development certainly did not turn the cinema into a decadent or mannerist art, any more than the entry of sensations into the novel starting with Flaubert brought on a decline of the novel.

It therefore seems inappropriate to write, as Roger Odin has, that the *Mad Max* or *Rocky* series signals the onset of a cinema in which, "far from acting in the service of the narrator, the visual and musical dimensions start to function for their own sakes."[8] And it is even more questionable to claim, as Laurent Jullier has, that in the George Lucas saga "the story and narrative drive become secondary" and "minimal."[9] Remember that most of the viewers responsible for the success of the *Star Wars* films were believers, following the story of the characters.

Simply put, post-Dolby cinema reconnects with the sensorial dimension that had taken on great importance in the late silent era and early sound but was pushed aside by classical film. Sternberg's films with Marlene Dietrich (particularly *The Scarlet Empress* [1935]) were loaded with material effects, textures, and fabrics that did not prevent Sternberg from telling a story that the audience followed with rapt attention.

It is likewise inaccurate to claim that the technical system "now has the possibility of producing exact replicas"[10] (i.e., the sounds of reality), since it is in fact rare for the sounds we hear in a film to be the same ones we would hear in a real situation. Sound is now no more realistic than it was in the classical era, though it is more sensorial and contains more information. The latter, however, is not always the key to realism, for example when it comes to space.

SPATIAL PROBLEMS IN THE FIRST DOLBY PERIOD

In the classical monophonic period, *spatial magnetization* helped compensate for the lateral immobility of sound: if a car enters the screen from the left or the right, or if characters move across the screen, but the sound doesn't literally move with its visual source, the moviegoer isn't bothered in the least.[11]

It no longer works, however, if these imaginary movements and positionings are made *real* in space thanks to the multiplication of audio tracks and independent speakers. This illustrates an important rule in film: the more one achieves perceptual realism, the closer one gets to the limits of belief or what the English aptly describe as the "voluntary suspension of disbelief." The conventions of film cannot tolerate this excess of realism. A French film from 1981, *Le Choix des armes*, may not be the best work of its director, Alain Corneau, but it serves to illustrate my argument, especially in its more awkward moments.

Two years after *Apocalypse Now*, Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" was heard again in a movie, this time on a road in France. The music is coming out of a car radio, playing at top volume. A girl is at the wheel. A bandit on the run (Gérard Depardieu) forces the driver to stop, pulls her from the car, and takes off in it himself. But the cries of the Wagnerian troupe on the cassette player annoy him, and he shuts them up by putting on some disco music more to his taste.

With this wink to Coppola, Corneau seemed to suggest that even if his film was also equipped with Dolby stereo (one of the first in France after Losey's *Don Giovanni* [1980]), his aim was not to go big with grandiose opera music or with the whop, whop, whop of helicopter propellers traversing the

screen. He was using color, CinemaScope, and stereo to focus on the familiar world of a seedy neighborhood on the edge of the city, with its empty lots and isolated houses. It was a great idea to make use of Dolby to tell a scaled-down, intimate story, but how? One could, of course, make the highly detailed sound correspond to Pierre-William Glenn's sharply detailed photography. Just as the eye could count every wrinkle on Yves Montand's face, the ear could pick up with new acuity all manner of small sounds that had previously remained indistinct owing to the lack of treble: Yves Montand's mare chewing on sugar, the slight rustle of Catherine Deneuve's silk pajamas. But *Choice of Arms* sought even greater realism by using the multiple audio tracks to make the sounds move through space via their audio sources in the theater.

And this is where things went astray. If a character exits the frame to the right and the sound of his voice or footsteps comes not from the center of the screen but from the right speaker, the result is what I call an "in-the-wings effect": suddenly the audio space beyond the boundaries of the screen becomes real. The same thing happens when a series of three cars cross the screen from left to right and the noise of the motors seems to arrive from the left-hand wings, passes through the middle of the screen, and goes off to be heard to the right. When one first hears this, it strikes one as trivial, since it has the effect of localizing a real and precise offscreen space in the theater space itself, in a spot that the ear can identify. In an ordinary monaural film (including the mono version of *Choice of Arms*), however, offscreen sound, coming as it does from the same location as the other sounds in the film (i.e., the central speaker), occupies a purely imaginary place in the spectator's mind through *spatial magnetization*. So making use of multitrack sound as Corneau did here has the effect of turning any of the film's settings, interior or exterior, into a stage that's constantly being entered and exited like the opposite sides of a courtyard. The problem gets compounded by the fact that in film, as opposed to theater, the angles from which we see the action are constantly changing; "logic" would require producing corresponding pivots and shifts in sound to match the landscape since the former is also defined laterally, with a right and a left.

At one point in the film Gérard Depardieu is in a café where the soundscape is clearly stereophonic, with the noise of a pinball machine on the right. When the character turns around in the room and the camera follows his movement by turning around him as he moves, the pinball machine noise remains on the right! The result, if you pay attention to it, is that this stationary background sound heard with a mobile image peels off from the space, as it were; in no longer realistically defining the visual space, it floats independently from it. The same problem arises for the transition between two shots; but here Corneau and his sound mixing engineer were apparently attempting

realism. There is a subjective establishing shot from the point of view of the offscreen Depardieu, who is walking quietly on gravel toward the front door of a house in the country. Like the actor's face, the steps are offscreen, but their corresponding noise runs ahead of the camera, so to speak, toward the right loudspeaker. In the next shot we see Depardieu facing the camera in closeup before the door that he has just opened violently. The sounds he produces suddenly issue from the central speaker, in a jump that was unusual at the time. The spectator has to adjust abruptly. The spatial references for sound and image have both changed at once; and the discontinuity effect of the transition between shots is strongly marked, going against the customary grammar of classical sound film, which normally relies on the stability of sound to create continuity between shots and give the impression of a homogeneous space.

When *Choice of Arms* was released, it was unclear whether this discontinuity effect was an awkward by-product of a desire for realism or a choice in mise-en-scène. It was perhaps not an accident that this particular case appeared in a film mixed in the land of Descartes. American and British technicians, after all, seem to have opted for a pragmatic solution to the cumbersome problem of audio matches, with their inevitable dilemma: if the choice is either sound spatialization that's realistic but at the same time unstable and disruptive or sound that is more stable and continuous though not "real," the Anglo-Saxons chose the latter alternative. It is true that they were able to downplay the spatial logic of their soundtracks because of the burgeoning, excessive quality of many early Dolby films, in which rapid editing and the density and mobility of a soundtrack filled with dialogue, music, and sound effects all quite effectively helped to mask the audio mismatches that arose. Moreover, especially in the treatment of voices, these British and American films avoided overly conspicuous and decentered localization of sounds, anything that would give rise to jumps in space with each shot change in a scene. Instead, the sounds appear centered around the middle of the screen, with the exception of peripheral ambient sound and some specific sounds at given moments.

Thus, the illusion of a surplus of spatial realism brought by multitrack sound was dashed—except for those who might be purists willing to reconceive scene construction and editing from the ground up, a project few are ready to undertake. What multitrack sound has yielded does give a stronger impression of reality, which is not at all the same thing as spatial realism.

Shortly after the release of Alain Corneau's film, a very acerbic piece of mine appeared in *Cahiers du cinéma*, deploring this "in-the-wings effect," which I considered at the time to be totally awkward, and more generally decrying all Cartesian approaches to the implementation of Dolby.[12] Although I stand by the argument and description given in the *Cahiers* essay, since the

first French edition of my book *Le Son au cinéma*, my views on the matter have become more empirical and less normative. It seems wrong to me now to have taken on the subject so academically in 1981. For one thing, the in-the-wings effect as it is overtly deployed in a film such as Sokurov's *Mother and Son* (1997) is not only legitimate but quite interesting. The same goes for the acousmatic sound presences in films such as *Pitch Black* (2000), by David Twohy; *The Others* (2002), by Alejandro Amenabar; *Signs* (2002), by M. Night Shyamalan; *Reign of Fire* (2001), by Rob Bowman; and *Dark Water* (2002), by Hideo Nakata, where ghostly beings or extraterrestrials drift through the movie theater via the play of speakers, making the oddity of the in-the-wings effect into a standard practice. The era of acousmatic beings has arrived. Still, establishing a grammar for sound editing in multitrack films remains a vast question, because it has not yet yielded a clear rhetorical system.

DISTURBANCES OF OFFSCREEN SPACE

With Dolby in the 1980s the status of offscreen sound tended to become disturbed by the multiplication of tracks. It was no longer an "elsewhere" but a "next to"—a realist audio "wings" that no longer seemed to have any function other than to mark the boundary of the place of action with ambient sounds, to incorporate it into the hubbub of a crowd, a city, or a jungle when it was not simply a trashcan to receive everything exiting the screen, such as all the sonic aftereffects of an explosion that took place in the center of the image. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* contains several great examples. This use of *offscreen trash* can already be observed in the stereo "Perspecta" version of Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* (1958), and we find it occasionally in certain magnetic sound films from the 1960s.[13] Blake Edwards parodied it in *Victor/Victoria* (1982), where an apple core thrown offscreen by one of the characters is heard from one of the side loudspeakers.

Another new function created by this ambient sound appears when a film's story includes a spectacle-within-the-film, involving an audience (e.g., boxing matches in the *Rocky* series with Stallone—especially *Rocky II* [1979]—or football games, as in John Huston's *Victory* [1979], or rock concerts, such as in Mark Rydell's *The Rose* [1979]), an audience that makes noise, which the moviegoing audience hears on the speakers in the theater, that acts to stimulate the participation of moviegoers, in a way similar to the laugh tracks of television comedies.

Thus, whether it functioned as ambience, "wings," trashcan, or overflow, offscreen sound in these films is most often acting *passively* as opposed to the *active offscreen* status of classical film's unseen sound, which imposes its enigma from

the very center of the image it inhabits through its absent-presence. It appears to have taken some time for this offscreen sound to find its place as a structuring element in the film's mise-en-scène and overcome its role as a mere effect. But hadn't this aesthetic of the overly full, the immediate, the horror of emptiness, and the flattening of representation already been experienced in the cinema of the early sound era? The reservations and suspicions that this new sound encountered, especially in France, had thus long been formulated in aesthetic terms.

The same problem existed for narrative voices. Voice-over narrators and offscreen voices did not always work well in the Dolby stereo version of many films in the early 1980s for the simple reason that filmmakers insisted on localizing the narrating voices onto just one of the three or four tracks given to them for sound placement, with the result that the voice could no longer be both everywhere and nowhere as before. Thus, for example, among the incomparable abundance of sounds in *Blade Runner* (in the 1982 version), one element is terribly unconvincing, namely the voice-over of Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford), a pastiche of the film noir voice-over, because within the labyrinth of multiple tracks in this film his voice was forced to come out of a specific location, awkward in its arbitrariness. Since then, an alternative "director's cut" has been released that does away with that odd imposition. An even worse treatment occurs in Claude Lelouch's 1981 film *Les Uns et les autres (Bolero)*: the voice-over that speaks during the opening credits is heard alternately from left and right, in a ping-ponging reminiscent of early demonstrations of stereo sound. In fact, as often with this director, the bold and beautiful idea is less of a problem than the lack of technical artistry and discipline required to pull it off.

Since the 1980s, the voice-over has made a vigorous comeback, with a considerable number of films being narrated by one, two, or even three voices. Examples include *The Usual Suspects* (Bryan Singer, 1995), *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999), and Scorsese's *Goodfellas* (1990) and *Casino* (1995), which are perhaps the most dazzling works to use this technique. Note that in *Casino* the context in which the voice-over intervenes is entirely different from its deployment in the typical 1980s film. The fact that its placement varies from occurrence to occurrence isn't bothersome because the contemporary cinema no longer obeys a pyramidal and hierarchical conception of the spectator's attention. Rather, cinema now assumes a scattered, nonselective quality of sounds and impressions, creating a polyrhythmic film universe in which we readily accept hearing song lyrics mixed in with dialogue and voice-overs all at once—something that was formerly inconceivable or else could only have resulted in an incomprehensible mess of sound.

Logically, this tendency toward multiplication of scenic space(s) is no longer confined to sound but is encroaching on the level of the image as well.

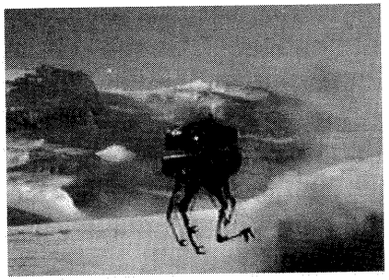
Thus, certain recent films have energetically explored the use of the divided screen, which only yesterday felt like a gimmicky holdover from the 1960s and 1970s. Examples include Peter Greenaway's *The Pillow Book* (1996), Mike Figgis's *Time Code* (2001), and Roger Avary's *The Rules of Attraction* (2002).[14]

AN INCREASINGLY DIVIDED AUDITORY WORLD

Goodfellas offers good evidence that multichannel sound favors a tendency—pioneered by Walter Murch—to superimpose rather than blend nondiegetic music and sound effects, song lyrics and dialogue. The cinema has moved away from the idea of fusing sounds, and often in newer films sound effects, nondiegetic music, and dialogue occupy different scenic spaces; each settles in and no longer necessarily tries to communicate or synchronize its rhythm with the others.

The idea of integrating the different soundtrack elements seems to be a thing of the past. In 1930s monaural cinema, when attempts were made to achieve a continuum among speech, music, and sound effects and thereby create the feeling that all these sounds belonged to one universe, this aesthetic impulse was aided by the fact that background noise in films of the era, sometimes consciously perceived by the moviegoer and sometimes not, played the role of *basso continuo*, a sort of binding agent.

Today, however, everything works to separate sounds from one another: their being assigned to separate tracks, their precision, distinct contrasts and gaps of silence between them. Moreover, no one seems to believe any longer in a world that has a rhythmic unity. At the beginning of *The Empire Strikes Back*—a high point of the entire *Star Wars* saga—the symphonic music of John Williams operates at a mythic, legendary, Wagnerian level that evokes embryonic ideas and forces, while the sound effects engineered by Ben Burtt situate the story in the present and make credible the experience of falling asteroids, noises made by robots, the rumble of spy machines, and the cries of the animal Mark Hamill is riding. We thus have two temporal logics operating on



distinctly different levels, an impression that is of course strengthened by Williams's score, which deliberately limits itself to classical instruments, contradicting the standard ideas at the time regarding musical accompaniment for science fiction.

When the first *Star Wars* film was released, in 1977, Lucas was criticized for this neo-Wagnerian score, the idea being that science fiction required electronic sounds, an "other" music, involving a blurring of the line between sound effects and music. In *Forbidden Planet*, the space opera from 1956 by Fred M. Wilcox, it is impossible to tell if Louis and Bebe Barron's electronic sounds are space noises or musical scoring. In *Solaris* the electronic music of Eduard Artemyev sounds like cosmic noise, and it is intended to blend with the sonic environment—while Soderbergh's 2002 remake, with music by Cliff Martinez that is essentially a pastiche of the Ligeti used by Kubrick in *2001* (i.e., built up of continuously evolving textures and sonorities), preserves the idea of a music apart from diegetic sounds.

The grand idea of the first *Star Wars* trilogy is thus that sound exists as a world in itself, very precise, without being placed in the service of the musical accompaniment. At the end of *Return of the Jedi*, the robot C-3Po recounts the saga's previous episodes to the Ewoks in their language, and his narration includes the sounds as well: the whir of light sabers, the vroom of spaceships traveling at warp speed, the voice and prominent breathing of Darth Vader, the beeps and blips of R2-D2, and so on. This sequence is like a curtain call for the noises of the saga that take a bow as though they were among the films' leading characters, and indeed they are.

Every so often a film comes along that attempts to recover the idea of an organic unity among speech, music, and sound effects. In my opinion, *Blade Runner* is one of the rare films in recent times to have attempted this and to have succeeded. This success is due in part to a kind of material analogy between the electronic sound effects and the synthetic music of Vangelis. In addition, though, the whole film is conceived rhythmically, as a sort of rhythmic pyramid that extends from big waves of sound in low registers to rapid electronic beepings in the ultrahigh range—and it is also conceived symphonically, organically, through the admirable mix created by the British sound engineer Graham Hartstone.

FOLEYED CINEMA

There is a lovely story about the filming of George Lucas's *The Phantom Menace* (2001) that involves the actor playing the young Obi-Wan Kenobi, Ewan MacGregor, who himself had been only a small boy at the time the first films

in the series were released and, like many children, had pretended to be Luke Skywalker brandishing a toy laser sword. On the set he apparently couldn't keep from mimicking the noise of the sword with his mouth while moving his weapon about. So Lucas came up to him and said, "Ewan, don't worry about making that sound, we have enough money to create it in postproduction." This story reveals the truth about this movie and the whole *Star Wars* series: it's Foleyed cinema.

It is important to understand the meaning of this label, which could be taken pejoratively or as a truism, since almost all films have engineered sound effects. But in the case of the *Star Wars* saga, the films openly proclaim themselves Foleyed cinema.

Images with sounds and speech are always suspect, liable to have sound added, to be dubbed. Superimposed onto what we see moving on the screen is our suspicion of sound added like frosting on the cake, and we can always wonder if a shot of an actor walking is paired with the noise of footsteps produced without forward movement. This suspicion arises for the simple reason that the moviegoer hears, physically, stable footfalls emerging from a fixed loudspeaker.

Most everyone knows the funny gag of "sound effects revealed" in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1974), when, after having heard an approaching gallop from behind a hill, we see King Arthur doing a pretend gallop on foot with a hop-step like a child, while behind him his servant Patsy runs along making the clop-clop with two halves of a coconut shell. This gag had already appeared, in a way, in a 1940 Tex Avery cartoon called *The Lonesome Stranger.* The audience hears a rapid gallop offscreen, and the camera pans from right to left to reveal a horse sitting and tapping its hooves rhythmically, making the noise of its own running while sitting still.

Above and beyond gags, however, one of the great discoveries of the *Star Wars* series was the way it allowed the spectator to participate in the pleasures

of sound effects. We are not asked to believe that spaceships roar, trumpet, and whoosh through the ether but rather to *play* at believing they do. The sounds we hear are proxies for the noise-making energy we all had as children when we played at animating vehicles, weapons, and characters with our mouths and bodies.

In this regard, Foleyed cinema reflects a change in the status of sound between the 1930s and 1970s, which could be summarized this way: noise is no longer associated with the pulse of the world; it is a sound effect, an expressive and dynamic supplement emitted by our bodies. This change also reflects the evolution of our environment, where increasingly, beeps and tones are added to electronic devices to make them more readable. These sonic additives underscore and emphasize, but they are not the sound of the action itself.

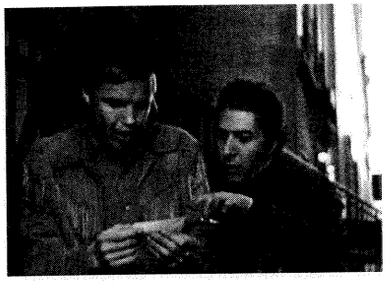
When one hears a mechanical cash register from the 1960s, the noise that punctuates the action is the noise of the keys themselves. But when a cashier today scans the barcode of some product, the actual operation produces no noise, and the synchronized beep we hear has been added electronically. The same is true for the beeps we hear when we use the touch pads of an ATM or "touch-tone" telephones. In place of the sound of the thing (or silence) itself, there is a high-pitched sound effect, generally a pure tone, independent from any mechanical action. Foleyed cinema is a logical reflection of our technical sound-effects-filled world.

And we can also speak, regarding the voice, of a dubbed cinema, which makes conscious that the voice is added on.

DUBBED CINEMA

Three American films from the 1970s are pioneering examples of this changed status of the voice in cinema.

The Exorcist (William Friedkin, 1973), a monaural film, contributed significantly to making audiences aware of the supplemental character of the voice in relation to the body. The film's very subject—a little girl possessed by a demon with multiple voices—puts front and center the idea of a grafting of heterogeneous elements. Moviegoers, hearing many words at once, as well as obscenities and voices-in-reverse ostensibly coming from the body of a good little girl, were persuaded to stop thinking of the voice as something natural.[15] In the musical *Singin' in the Rain*, with its well-known setting in the era of the birth of the talkies, the plot is based on the fact that the natural voice of the actress played by Jean Hagen is vulgar and discordant with the image of the star she embodies on the silent screen. In the film it is Debbie Reynolds who will donate her voice so that the actress can once again become a



harmonious screen presence. The story turns on a belief in the possibility of recreating a natural unity through dream, special effects, or fantasy and of finding the "right" voice for the "right" body. It is this belief that seems to disappear in the 1970s: there is no appropriate voice; every voice is a construction, a specific composition with the body. Each actor can affect different voices according to the demands of the particular role.

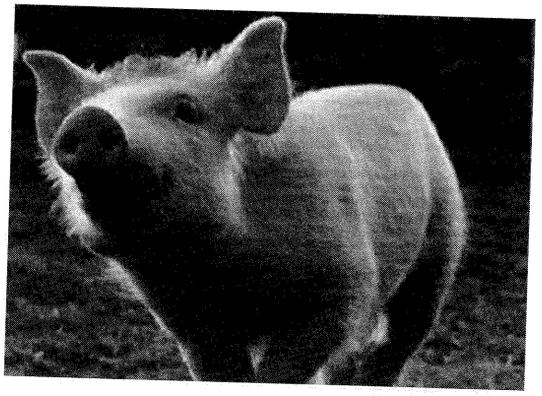
Perhaps the first actor to draw attention to this vocal versatility with every role was Dustin Hoffman, beginning with his little Italian-American in *Midnight Cowboy* (John Schlesinger, 1969).[16]

But the mass audience truly became aware of the notion of the constructed voice with Marlon Brando's 1971 role in *The Godfather.* Don Corleone's husky, intimate voice makes the listener conscious of its presence and its timbre, as well as its fabricated quality. Ostentatiously reorganizing space around itself, it is a voice that obliges one to listen and that one is conscious of listening to. It is a quintessentially cinematic voice, since it exists solely in vocal closeup.

This effect was reinforced when in one of the first great sequels of the 1970s and 1980s, *The Godfather II* (1974), Robert De Niro took up the role of the young Corleone and was forced to invent a voice—speaking almost entirely in Sicilian—that was compatible with Brando's voice in the first *Godfather.* (The French dub of these two films did its best to imitate these two voices, with Michel Duchaussoy dubbing the older Corleone in the first film.)

I am not suggesting that earlier filmmakers had not made use of the vocal closeup or the whispered voice. The resonant, velvety tones of Orson Welles in *Touch of Evil* or *The Trial* and the disorienting dubbing in Fellini's films offer rich examples. But the films mentioned above changed the rules of the game (whether they meant to or not) because they transformed certain previously unnoticed elements into strongly marked effects, in rather the same way Sergio Leone made the popular audience aware of the mechanics of editing and mise-en-scène.

It is probably no accident that this transformation via Coppola bears a connection to Italy. For Italy has both the tradition of marionette theater, where a



voice gets paired with a body without anyone forgetting that it's a graft, and the tradition of opera, in which the relationship between the singing voice and the bodies seen from a distance cannot be taken as natural.

The fashion of cartoons with celebrity voices—Robin Williams doing the Genie's voice in 1993's *Aladdin,* for example, talking animals (Chris Noonan's *Babe* [1995]), and even talking babies (Bruce Willis in Amy Heckerling's *Look Who's Talking* [1989])—also contributed to this new consciousness of the voice as "added." Indeed, even when these films are dubbed into other languages, efforts are made to stick with the idea of celebrity dubbing. Daniel Auteuil, for example, "dubbed" Bruce Willis in the French version of Heckerling's film.

Star Wars is a third key film, along with *The Exorcist* and *The Godfather;* it was striking for its numerous masked characters whose voices came to us like those of talking puppets. Especially memorable are the voices of the talkative robot C-3PO, with his English-butler accent, and the closely miked voice and heavy breathing of Darth Vader in the beautiful bronze voice of James Earl Jones.[17]

In an increasingly effects-driven cinema, working on vocal accents and timbres has allowed many actors, especially Americans, to regain some control and responsibility. The cultivation of voices becomes a way for actors to show they are not merely dolls to be dressed and made up but rather artists capable of recreating themselves and mastering their own techniques, bodies, and voices.

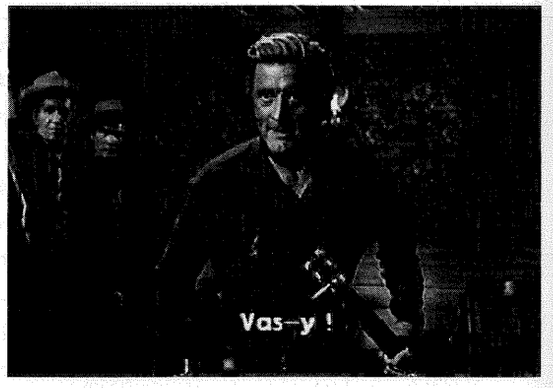
The most spectacular results of this work on vocal composition have come from Anglo-Saxon actors playing sick, handicapped, autistic, and monstrous characters. Think of the teary well-bred voice of John Hurt in *The Elephant Man,* the metallic quality of Dustin Hoffman's voice in *Rain Man* (Barry Levinson, 1986), and the muttering of Daniel Day Lewis in *My Left Foot* (Jim Sheridan, 1988)[18]—artistically creative performances all. For accents we need

only recall examples such as the southwestern accents of Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon in *Thelma & Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1990), the southern accent of De Niro in *Cape Fear* (Martin Scorsese, 1991), and Meryl Streep's remarkable range from Polish in *Sophie's Choice* (Alan J. Pakula, 1982) to Australian in *A Cry in the Dark* (Fred Schepisi, 1989), and endearingly midcentury-Danish-midwestern in *A Prairie Home Companion* (Robert Altman, 2006). Further, we might mention the Scottish accent of Holly Hunter's narrating voice in *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1993), the Russian Jewish accent of Tim Roth in *Little Odessa* (James Gray, 1994), and the varied accents in *Gangs of New York* (Martin Scorsese, 2002).

In France it is still rather unusual for an actor to modify his or her voice and especially his or her accent for a role. Daniel Auteuil is one of the few who have tried his hand at it and met with success, notably in the role of Ugolin in Claude Berri's *Manon of the Spring* (1986).

The result here as elsewhere is that audiences are becoming ever more aware of the voice as an entity distinct from the body, sometimes even coming from the very heart of the image. Unlike in the 1950s, today's moviegoers cannot know in advance what voice De Niro or Meryl Streep will have in their next movie.

Another consequence for us in France is that today when American films are dubbed into French, the old practice of systematically using the same voice to dub a particular star (for example, Roger Rudel used to supply the French voice of Kirk Douglas in every role) no longer prevails. Except for some stars, such as Sean Connery, today the dubbing actor will be chosen for his or her capacity to meet the requirements of the role instead of merely dubbing a voice. Audiences in the larger movie theaters that show French-dubbed versions of American films will not necessarily always hear the same voice for their favorite American actors; as a result they are becoming more aware of the dubbing process itself.



This awareness is only compounded with the distribution of DVDs that offer multiple language versions, as well as extras such as interviews with stars that allow us to hear how they really sound when they're in their own natural voice.

This general public's growing awareness of the voice as radically distinct from the body that adopts it (or that it adopts) in a given film strikes me as one of the most important phenomena in the recent evolution of film, and of television and other audiovisual media as well.

1. It is in this spirit that I prepared the historical chronology that concludes my study *Technique et création au cinéma* (Paris: ESEC, 2002).
2. For *anempathy* see glossary and chapter 24.
3. For *temporal vectorization* see glossary and chapter 16.
4. See glossary, under *logic*.
5. See Barthélémy Amengual, *Du réalisme au cinéma*, ed. Suzanne Liandrat-Guignes (Paris: Nathan, 1997), 765.
6. See Francis Ramirez, "L'Image-parole," in *L'Image et la parole*, ed. Jacques Aumont (Paris: Cinémathèque française, 1999), 159–74, 174.
7. See Wilhelm Thiele, "Pour vous," *Ciné-Journal*, no. 1003, October 17 1930, cited in Roger Icart, *La Révolution du parlant vue par la presse française* (Perpignan: Institut Jean Vigo, 1988), 336.
8. See Roger Odin, "Du spectateur fictionnalisant au nouveau spectateur," *Iris* 8 (1988): 121–39, 133–34.
9. See Laurent Jullier, *Le Son au cinéma et à la television, précis d'analyse de la bande-son* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1995), 116.
10. Ibid., 118.
11. For *spatial magnetization* see below and glossary.
12. See Michel Chion, "A propos du Dolby Stéréo: Le Choix des moyens," *Cahiers du cinéma* 331 (1981): 23.
13. For *offscreen trash* see glossary. Perspecta was used between 1955 and 1961. It was more a system for spatially orienting sounds in mono soundtracks than a multitrack system in the current sense. See Claude Lerouge, *Sur cent années, le cinéma sonore* (Paris: Dujarric, 1998), 192–93.
14. See Chion, *Technique et création au cinéma*, 144 and the concluding chronology.
15. These are perhaps the first ever heard in a mass-market feature film. Horrific onscreen utterances such as "Your mother sucks cocks in Hell" first came out of the mouth of the girl in *The Exorcist* before they were heard spoken by macho heroes in war movies and crime films.
16. The Texan accent of John Voight ("To tell you the truth, I ain't a real cowboy") isn't bad either.
17. This actor, who appears notably in Coppola's *Gardens of Stone* (1987), reportedly refused to be included in the credits for the voice of Darth Vader.
18. But in *The Fly* (1986), David Cronenberg decides not to transform Jeff Goldblum's voice even after he becomes a monster, nor does he ask him to adopt or invent a monster voice.

CHAPTER 9

The Silence of the Loudspeakers (1990–2003)

A SPACE TO EMPTY

WHEN DOLBY MULTITRACK FIRST APPEARED, the reaction was the same as in the early days of CinemaScope. It was treated as a new acoustic space to fill in as much as possible in order to show it off.

There was an inverse dialectic at work at the same time, however. Just as it became increasingly clear that CinemaScope was all the bigger a visual space to clear out (compare the "full" image of *The Robe* [1954]—the first official film in CinemaScope—with the often "empty" frame of Cukor's *A Star Is Born* [1954], also in widescreen), it soon became clear that Dolby had created a new auditory space to be emptied.

The power of silence was understood from the start by some directors, who made use of it in the 1950s for certain films shot in 70 mm with magnetic sound. At the beginning of *West Side Story*, for example, the rhythmic finger-snapping by Jerome Robbins's dancers produces a magical effect in magnetic

sound after the fortissimo finish of the orchestral overture. In *2001: A Space Odyssey* Kubrick often has very rarified ambient sound, thereby emphasizing the silence between the characters; he even dares to allow a total silence of several seconds when Hal murders Frank Poole by remote control. At the time, this scene would have been especially striking in theaters equipped for magnetic sound.

In *Playtime*, made in 70mm and six-track mag sound, Jacques Tati also goes for minimum sound and maximum silence at times. His films show characters who cannot easily communicate their emotions: a father doesn't know how to talk to his son in *Mon oncle* (1958), an elder couple no longer speak to each other in *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday* (1953), and so on. In *Playtime*, as in *Sous les toits de Paris*, there are entire scenes that do not allow us to hear what the characters are saying. It's interesting that the working-class Paris of *Quatorze Juillet* (1933) and *Sous les toits de Paris* is the very place that can be seen in glimpses and reflections, like a ghost, in *Playtime*.

In these three films I have mentioned, the silence of the loudspeakers is striking because it participates in a symbolic framework and a story. In *West Side Story* it is the hostile silence made taut with expectations of a clash between two gangs; in *2001* it is the "silence of thoughts" associated with the theme of dissimulation and deception;[1] and in *Playtime* it is, as I've said, the silence between humans who have difficulty communicating through language.

Dolby caused the cinema to rediscover and systematize this silence anew. Take the example of *Apocalypse Now*, for which Walter Murch did the sound design. If the most famous sequence—the bombing of the Vietnamese village with the whir of helicopters, bombs bursting, and Wagner blaring—magnifies the effect of plenitude or auditory excess, we also already find minimalist sequences where all the loudspeakers go silent, suspending sound, like a large orchestra that's onstage but not playing, so as to allow for a solo sound to make itself heard: for example, the reverberant voice of Marlon Brando in his monologue at the end.

So Dolby cinema introduced a new expressive element: the silence of the loudspeakers, as well as the audience's attentive silence, which is its consequence. Every instance of silence is disarming since it seems to expose our faculty of hearing; it's as if a giant ear were turned toward us ready to pick up the tiniest sounds we make. We are no longer just listening to the film; we are being listened to by it.

In 1980, a year after Coppola's film, Kurosawa made magnificent use of Dolby in *Kagemusha* to make banners flutter and snap, and generals shout their orders against a backdrop of profound and enigmatic silence. When the

film unleashes a clamor of armor and thundering of horses, the noises are inscribed in a kind of fearsome nothingness and take on a Shakespearean weight.

In the sequence where Juliette Binoche and Lena Olin pose in the nude in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (Philip Kaufman, 1988), the silence made conspicuous by rare sounds (the click of a camera shutter, distant thunder), restrained dialogue, and the chamber music of Leoš Janáček accentuates the density of the muteness between the two women, which is not without erotic overtones.

In *Ulysses' Gaze* (Theo Angelopoulos, 1994) Harvey Keitel arrives in a bombed-out Sarajevo. The sounds of explosions, footsteps, and the voice of Keitel asking local residents for directions are distant and muffled, producing an extraordinary impression of life in suspension—because of the clarity of Dolby and what I am calling the silence of the loudspeakers.

If a director such as David Lynch has often been characterized as noisy (a remark frequently made about *Wild at Heart* and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*), it is not because he is always bombarding us with sound but rather because in these two films he deliberately sets up violent contrasts in sound intensities. Lynch's characters often speak as though they were being listened to by others, by some third party lurking in the shadows—which is, in fact, the case since they are listened to by us. But that also means that they seem to be observing us listening to them. So they create a void in their voice, which then gives greater force to the sound that comes after. In *Lost Highway* (1997), Bill Pullman's saxophone solo in his jazz club seems to explode with sound after the softly muffled opening scene in his house.

If in *Thelma & Louise* we are moved when the two eponymous heroines (played by Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon), during their long drive to escape from the law, behold the astonishing mute massiveness of Monument Valley at night (a landscape they had long dreamed of seeing), and silence falls between them, broken only by the quietly idling motor and a few insects, it is because here, too, Dolby is making a key contribution toward conveying this vertigo at the edge of a cosmic void.

The final scene of *Children of a Lesser God* shows the separated lovers, Sarah (Marlee Matlin) and James (William Hurt), meeting at night outdoors by a pond not far from the school for the deaf, where the annual dance is taking place.[2] This beautiful melodrama, adapted from a play by Mark Medoff, is a love story about a deaf woman who refuses to talk and a normally hearing teacher. The film sends ripples through the relationship between what we see and what we hear. The words of Marlee Matlin, expressed in sign language,

are translated out loud for us by her lover, who also speaks his own lines. William Hurt's deep voice envelops the body and image of Matlin, whose words he is audibly repeating while still according them their mystery. At the same time her statements that he translates lead our eyes to look at her to read her gestured utterances for ourselves. Words seem to have become a dance and to have escaped their dry terseness. The muteness or rather absence of orality from the actress—truly deaf, like the character she plays—is underscored by the acoustic presence of her body. Importantly, thanks to Dolby, we hear the different subtle noises that her clothing makes when she signs, gesturing with gracefulness or vehemence.

In *The Double Life of Véronique* (Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1990), Irène Jacob watches a puppet show with a bunch of schoolchildren. Digital sound allows us to hear not only the silence around the piano accompanying the performance but also the subtle noises of a class of attentive little spectators. Here the rustling of the young audience is particularly touching in its discretion and holds up a mirror to the moviegoer's own concentration.

The moments of truth in Mike Leigh's *Secrets and Lies* (1996), a film composed entirely of human conversations, often resonate within a triple silence: that of the characters, that of the loudspeakers, and that of the audience when it is moved (Brenda Blethyn's reflection on remembering when she made love with a black man; Timothy Spall's shock, when he speaks his truth during a family reunion, that the sky doesn't fall as a result of his announcement).

In general, Dolby tends to highlight scenes in which characters have intimate verbal exchanges (such as the confidential girl talk in Lynch's *Mulholland Dr.* [2001]).

Hence the proliferation in Dolby films of dreamed voices, broken voices, and restrained voices that border on whispering and silence: Mickey Rourke in *Rumble Fish*, Kyle MacLachlan in *Dune* (David Lynch, 1984), the husky voice of Harvey Keitel in *Smoke* (Wayne Wang, 1995)—a voice whose fine and precise recording gives so much intensity to his noniconogenic narration.[3]

Of course there are intimate voices in some films of the period from 1930 to 1950: Aldo Ray in *Nightfall* (Jacques Tourneur, 1957) and Jean Gabin in Grémillon's *Gueule d'amour* (1937) and Carné's *Le Jour se lève* spoke this way. *Rear Window* is another film that involves a lot of whispering, and the supple voice of Jimmy Stewart is marvelously adept at giving us the feeling of being up close with the character. But a kind of general poetic fog of ambient sound envelops the soundtracks of 1930s and 1940s films, while sound in the 1970s and 1980s draws on changes in technology to become increasingly analytical, with each element separated from the others, and with that the silence between sounds becomes more palpable. This is especially true starting in the 1980s, with the arrival of digital sound.

TO WHAT EXTENT IS THERE A DIGITAL REVOLUTION?

The arrival of digital sound, often wrongly referred to as a single event, occurred well after the development of multitrack sound. What remained to contribute? The small novelties it brought amount to less than what it is generally credited with. But sometimes small things have large consequences.

By encoding data into abstract values, digital sound allows the copy to be an exact clone of the original. Other recording techniques necessarily introduce hiss (however small) or distortion—a loss that is compounded with each new generation of copies and that thus puts a limit on the acceptable

number of generations. Digital sound truly reduces background noise to zero and therefore allows silences as close to absolute silence as one can get.

On many mixing consoles, digital offers the possibility of saving all versions and every operation, and therefore one can polish and tweak the mix *ad infinitum*. In association with certain widely used editing programs, it allows the filmmaker precisely to align certain sounds in relation to others and to realign or disalign sounds at any moment, giving thorough control of a sound's placement with respect to other sounds and the image. Digital sound brings a near total flexibility to the work of mixing and editing.

Thus we see the reality of digital sound on one hand, and myths on the other. Both are true on a certain level, but they bear little relationship to one another.

One of the myths of digital sound is that it allows one to attain perfect sound, with no loss, and in a way, no origin—the Immaculate Conception of Sound. Another characterization suggests one can have total control over it even when it is cut into miniscule slices of time. Normally restless and wild, sound in the digital world is conceived as wholly submitting to the will of the Master and as somehow removed from time—an illusion at best.[4]

Another myth concerns the alleged dematerialization of sound, its escape from technical limitations: although through digital means it is in fact possible to eliminate background noise, microphones are still a necessary element in recording, and the mics themselves have material characteristics and limitations. The same goes for amplifiers and loudspeakers, each of which has its own color and performance qualities. Therefore digital sound has not brought about a complete dematerialization and neutralization of the technical. The human hand and the technical are still there and always will be.

Moreover, as sound technicians well know, a digital sound has acoustic characteristics that are linked each time to the sample rate and also to specific properties of the recording and playback setup, analog-to-digital conversion, and so on; all of these elements can vary according to software, date of production, and equipment. Digital recordings made twenty years ago are already dated and colored. And twenty years from now, the digital sound of today's movies will have a patina too, a color specific to its era.

Just as there is a big difference between the first films that used computer-generated images (for example *Tron* [1982]) and what we see in *Final Fantasy* (Hinorobo Sakaguchi and Motonori Sakakibara, 2001), so, too, the difference will only continue to increase between what was called digital sound in the early 1980s and what it has become more than twenty years later.

In the past few years many movie theaters have taken to playing digital sound that is read from a disc or other medium independent of the film itself.

This practice offers certain advantages, including better sound quality and protection from the material vicissitudes of the film print. It does not, however, do away with the problems that can arise from incorrect audio settings or from aging audio equipment, especially amplifiers and loudspeakers, including jacks and contacts. In other words the "perfect," immaterial sound is not just around the corner.

That said, what remains as aesthetic consequences of digital sound on the cinema? It is really too early to give a complete account. For now I will simply underscore two elements.

The first, as we have already observed, concerns *the new nature of silence*. Thanks to digital sound, a Kieslowski or a Lynch can make us hear sound like a newborn wailing and proclaiming its miniscule existence in an infinite cosmic silence.

In *Mulholland Dr.* digital silence is also shot through with mystery and terror; the film evokes the question, how does a sound get born from nothing and go back to nothing? How can something be there and then no longer be there?

There is a famous scene involving the theft of digital information in *Mission: Impossible* (Brian De Palma, 1996), where Tom Cruise is suspended upside down and must make as little noise as possible so as not to set off the sound-detecting alarm systems. This scene owes a lot of its impact, I think, to the quality of digital silence.

A second important effect of digital sound has to do with the new possibilities of *microediting* extremely short fragments of sound. Digital technology makes this process easier, even if such editing was already possible in 1950.[5] For example, in George Lucas's *Attack of the Clones* (2002) we can hear what sounds like an extraterrestrial language, rich and seductive sounds, thanks to a very dense edit, but also thanks to a painstaking process of sculpting the dynamic form of sounds (creating gradients of rising or falling intensity across very short durations). So as I see it, computer assisted microediting has opened up intriguing perspectives.

THE ERA OF THE REMIX

There is also the delicate matter of the digital remastering of older films, either for DVD versions or for theatrical rerelease. Sometimes the decision is made to submit the original sound to the "improvements" of digital processing, a decision that can destroy the specific signature of the original. I don't believe we should always clean up the sound of older films, eliminate all background noise, and so forth, since those operations can suck the life out of the original.

Here, as with transfer onto video or computer, one cannot make absolute rules.

But one rule should always stand: making a complete and honest disclosure to viewers about what they are getting, just as I think it is acceptable to colorize black-and-white films so long as the audience is informed. What is needed among all those who work in film and all who go to movies is greater awareness about the history of film sound.

The problem becomes evident when, for example, we read advertising for the rerelease on DVD of two films by Georges Lautner—*Les Tontons flingueurs* (*Monsieur Gangster* [1963]) and *Les Barbouzes* (*The Great Spy Chase* [1964])—that says the sound of this new edition is "certified THX"—while the films were originally made in standard optical monaural sound. "Certified THX" means nothing if we are not told whether the mono original has been retained or if, as often happens with DVD releases, the company releasing the new version has made a fake multitrack soundtrack.[6]

There is a recent version of Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) that has substituted a new digital recording of the Prokofiev score played by a modern orchestra for the one in the original version that was distinctly tinny. The newer version even adds sound effects not present before—so flags snap and the wind blows where nothing was heard in Eisenstein's 1938 film. Ill-informed film critics wrote about the new version as a restoration, as for a painting, when in fact it was really a case of sound "colorization."

As everyone knows, we have entered the era of the remix. What is important is to be forthright about it and open a debate on the complex questions of interpretation and fidelity. When it comes to film sound, everyone is at least up on the issue of dubbing, a necessary practice for linguistic and cultural reasons and one whose continued existence has been accepted as a practical necessity.

EUROPEAN AUTEURS AND DOLBY

What has been the impact of Dolby among Europe's auteur directors? It is true that great filmmakers like Ingmar Bergman (with *Fanny and Alexander* [1982]), Federico Fellini (with *Intervista* [1986]), and Maurice Pialat (with *Under the Sun of Satan* [1987]) made important films mixed in Dolby during this period that only make casual use of this technical supplement, as if Dolby added nothing to the films.

But these were veterans set in their ways. Far more troubling is the case of a new generation of French directors, including Eric Rochant, Christian Vincent, Arnaud Desplechin, and Cédric Klapisch, most of whom scarcely conceal their disinterest in Dolby. Each one has his own particular talent and

rationale, but overall this general opposition caused French cinema to fall further and further behind regarding the aesthetic and technical dimensions of film sound. Although the gap began to decrease somewhat in the 1990s, Dolby in France continued to be almost exclusively associated with massive blockbuster effects (in the work of Luc Besson, for example, and in French thrillers such as *The Crimson Rivers* [2000], by Mathieu Kassovitz), while in America, contrary to all received ideas, the intimist capabilities of Dolby had long been explored.

When Kieslowski arrived in France, he imported new expressive resources of Dolby. In his final films he uses sound to break in with the force of life. In *Three Colors: Blue* (1993) some very lively children noisily descend on the quiet swimming pool where Juliette Binoche is trying to forget the loss of her husband; their resonant shouting and their plunges into the water create a vivid splash of sound. The tiny squeals of newborn mice in a cupboard in her new apartment persecute the heroine but also pull her out of her torpor. And when we hear her breathing as she bites into a lollipop, that sound has the acuity of a feeling fresh from childhood. Kieslowski endows noises and music—a solo flute or a slender soprano voice—with an energy that cuts through the general pall of the world.

These specially charged moments are not accidents; Kieslowski draws from a rich Polish tradition of film sound known since the 1950s for its highly creative and striking use of postsynchronization and sound effects. The sound in Wadja's *Kanal* (1957), Andrzej Zulawski's *Third Party of the Night* (1971), Jerzy Kawalerowicz's *Mother Joan of the Angels* (1961), and all the shorts and features Roman Polanski directed in Poland (such as *Knife in the Water* [1962]) share a demonstrative and prominent use of audio effects.

For his part, using the same digital means as Kieslowski, the great Portuguese director Manoel de Oliveira creates constantly varying expressions from

the same intimate register. In *Abraham's Valley* (1993) the duration of shots is stretched like a very thin veil, through a texture of calm, quotidian, provincial sounds: the tick-tock of a grandfather clock, the pat-pat of a kitten's paws, intermittent canary chirps. These noises have fooled many critics and spectators into thinking that they're seeing lengthy sequence-shots when in fact the film has plenty of cutting. It's just that with little fanfare Dolby can smoothly establish the sense of continuity of real time.

In Takeshi Kitano's *Hana-Bi* (*Fireworks* [1997]), digital sound helps to underline the pathetic quality of small events, such as the sputtering of a small firecracker that doesn't go off and concludes with an anticlimactic pop.

KUROSAWA: THE MOUNTAINS ARE NOT LISTENING

Akira Kurosawa, born in 1910, was one of the only filmmakers of his generation and level of prestige to have quickly understood what to do with Dolby and to give it his own personal accent.

In *Dreams* (1990), a film composed of eight sequences, Kurosawa does not use the new resources for an abundance of sounds—in fact there are very few, and often they occur one at a time, either music, noise, or speech. Rather, remarkably, he takes advantage of the acuity of each sound and the reduction of background noise, which permits voices and especially sound effects to be more highly individualized and to be heard both more finely and more clearly in the context of a more profound silence.

This silence can take on different meanings. In most of the films I have mentioned the silence surrounding whispering or restrained voices leads us to sense the presence of a *space that's listening*, on the alert. On the contrary, *Dreams*, by means of the absolute impermeability between one sound and another, affirms the opposite idea, that the world is not listening to humanity. In this film the emptiness around sounds is not enchanted with supernatural ears as with Lynch, nor is it metaphysical as with Kieslowski. It's just emptiness.

Kurosawa was a passionate hiker, and the character who represents him at different ages in *Dreams* is often walking. There is the clacking of a little boy's wooden sandals, the crunching footsteps on the road of the captain of the dead regiment, the jingling of the harnessed phantom soldiers, the clatter of mountain climbing equipment during the snowstorm, the rustle of footsteps of a solitary hiker walking in the ashes of Mt. Fuji. Those who have hiked in the mountains understand the feeling that *Dreams* renders so well: the sense of incommensurability, the absolute gulf between the local, precise, and familiar noise of your footsteps on gravel, snow, ice, or grass, and the rumbling or silent immensity that surrounds you. One can "psychologize" this sound of the human ant marching across the surface of the earth, dramatizing it by investing it with suspense, expectation, or suspicion: this is what Fred Zinnemann did nicely in the film he made in the mountains of Austria, *Five Days One Summer* (1982). Or else, one allows it to have its own value, no more no less; and with Kurosawa, the faint background rumble in the mountains, or the silence of nature around footsteps, does not feel like someone is listening. The mountains—one of Kurosawa's favorite settings—are not listening.

Two moments in *Dreams*, however, offer unsettling silence as a group of ghosts face the hero who is in the position of the accused: the souls of murdered fishermen, facing the little boy to whom they appear, and particularly, the troop of hollow-eyed phantom soldiers who, emerging from the darkness of a tunnel, stand at attention, facing their captain, who is alive and trembling with guilt. Here the silence does hear and in a sense register the words spoken. What is said seems to be preserved.

In these two scenes Kurosawa maintains an auditory separation between different worlds. To the apparitions he gives a reverberant voice that rolls in space, while to the other individual, the dreamer, he gives a voice with no echo. In general, the audio concept for the eight dreams (which take place mostly outdoors) consists in *compartmentalizing*, with the aid of Dolby and digital technology, the sound spaces that the film superimposes or presents in succession.

Even the music cues in *Dreams* do not communicate with one another. In the last episode, for example, "The Village of the Watermills," we hear some source music—a rather cheerful fanfare accompanying a funeral procession—and then, shortly afterward, a nondiegetic cue that leads into the end credits. Where other directors might have chosen to make a bridge from one cue to the next, Kurosawa places each in its own soundproof bubble. The fanfare music is reverb-free and without amplification, appropriate for music played outdoors. The second piece, written in classical European orchestral style, swims in a noticeable echo that sets it further apart from the earlier cue. The high point of this partitioning aesthetic occurs in the beautiful episode of the snowstorm, when a soprano lullaby "interrupts" the whistling of the wind that is blowing snow into a drift around the mountain climber, who gives in to fatigue—snow that we continue to observe now whirling in silence (an effect of *suspension*).[7] This interruption is a substitution that occurs without brutality but also without any audio fading or effort to make the sounds ambiguous. Unlike what someone like Tarkovsky has done so often, namely couch within

the sounds of nature a subtly emerging music cue or voice, Kurosawa does not bring the soprano voice gradually and continuously out of the nature sounds. And when the rumble of the storm returns in force and rekindles a will to live in the old mountaineer, who manages to shake off the temptation of death, the singing voice does not melt back into the tempest—it stops abruptly. Here again, the graphic clarity and dynamic purity that Dolby makes possible contribute to a rigorous separation of beings from sonic spaces.

In this aesthetic of the clean line of which *Dreams* is the masterpiece, emotion often arises from a poignant detail underlined with great purity. We can, for example, assign a precise meaning to the delicate jingle-bell that in the dream of the "Peach Orchard" embodies the death of one of the hero's little sisters. It seems to me that this jingle-bell at the film's opening and the little bell that the old man shakes at the end when he is about to join the funeral procession for the woman he has loved are, if not identical, at least emblematic of the same thing. In a world that is not listening, in the silence of the loudspeakers, they are the sound made by one small fragile human existence.

ITE MISSA EST

The typical modern movie screening—whether for a big action movie such as *The Rock* (Michael Bay, 1996) or for an intimist work such as *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-wai, 2001) or *Divine Intervention* (Elia Suleiman, 2002)—often begins . . . at the end. Let us go to one of today's ubiquitous multiplexes, or to a traditional single-auditorium theater. We arrive early, but we're obliged to wait (because the tradition of continuous screenings allowing you to enter whenever you want has mostly disappeared). All of a sudden we hear a blast coming out of our theater—a thundering orchestral finale, a pounding rock song, or a nostalgic ballad. The audience from that screening will begin to file out now. It's the ritual of the closing credits, during which several dozen, sometimes several hundred names will scroll down the screen as if on parade. In the theater there are generally three kinds of behavior at this point. Some let their seat flip up immediately as they move to the exit, others linger a minute or two more, and some, to prolong the emotion, won't budge until the very last items have passed over the screen: thanks to the city of N and its municipal services for their cooperation; the film is in Dolby in selected theaters; no animals were harmed during the making of this film. The music continues this whole time, and sometimes there is a noise that erupts out of the final silence—the fundamental noise.[8]

The movie screening proposes in this way a new ritual that we should not take lightly: in a world that rarely allows us time to take stock of things, here is a moment that has been left open, a sort of airlock between the temporality of the film and that of daily life. A precious moment it is, even if it is sometimes purely formal as in the old Catholic mass in Latin when the priest would say "*Ite Missa est*" ("The mass has been spoken"), even though we knew it was not quite over, that we'd have to wait a bit more before leaving, but this waiting also had human value. We would exit from church to the all-embracing tones of the great organ, and this leaving became all the more significant.

When movies are shown on television, and the closing credits are cut off in favor of commercials and promos that apparently can't wait, we experience this amputation as nothing short of barbaric. We *need* this moment, even though it's narratively useless, ostensibly serving only to parade the names of everyone who worked on the film, as well as to air some hit song. What's more, since closing credits typically scroll abstractly against a black background, often with the house lights turned back on, we get a different sense of the film's sound and its circulation in the theater. Since it is no longer "spatially magnetized" by the action taking place on the screen, we no longer reproject it onto the flat screen of the story. The sound can occupy the auditorium's three dimensions for itself; untied from its visual projection surface, it is at last free to fill the whole room.

This is why I take pleasure in seeing, in those closing credits that prolong the film beyond its story, one of the poetic aspects of the modern film screening.

Ordinarily, in France at least, we hear much yearning for the bygone days of the old movie palaces or the small neighborhood theaters, and the golden age of entr'actes and opening attractions—in opposition to the cold functionality of today's cinemas, with their automated projection and empty projection booths. Yet I believe that the magic of the movie screening has been renewed and given a second life.

Having been born in 1947, I belong to a generation that experienced theaters with lots of reverb and hum; you can still hear this echoey sound in many Italian cinemas. For us, the theaters now found in France, with crisp, precise acoustics, are something new. On one hand, they indeed deprive audiences of a certain collective, communitarian spirit of movie screenings, since the sound is no longer picked up by the acoustics of the room, no longer resulting from the mixture of audience noise and sounds coming from the screen. On the other hand, these screening spaces have created a new kind of attention, almost meditative and monastic, that is most welcome.

Just as the gigantic increase in size of the classical symphonic orchestra at the end of the nineteenth century that gave us crashing *tutti*, tragic climaxes, and alpine tempests also made it possible to hear a single instrument all the more clearly in a vaster silence, so, too, there are few things as impressive today as the hush of an audience touched by a given film scene, when the director—a Lynch, Kieslowski, Leigh, or Miyazaki[9]—closes the floodgates of sound and only gives us to hear a little sigh or shiver in a crystalline silence.

During these moments of grace—provided the stillness is not interrupted by chattering neighbors or the ring tones of cell phones—one can literally hear the audience listening. This is especially true in medium-sized or smaller Dolby theaters that achieve the right balance between screen size, the levels and spatial distribution of the sound, and the capacity of the room. A new type of proximity is forged between film and audience. You get the feeling that the audience is concentrating, and happy to be there, without the least affectation—simply by virtue of its fervent attention to the film.

One of the few remaining places where we still can experience something religious in our relation to the work of art is a movie theater.

Perhaps because I am also a composer, few things seem to me as moving as the silence of a disparate group of people gathered together for a communal experience, when this silence isn't from pure obedience or routine. The overwhelming silence that digital sound makes possible (without anyone having calculated these consequences in advance) allows the film screening to deepen our attention, to deepen the emptiness between sentences and between words, to send each of us back closer than ever to the truth of our own silence and our own listening, and to last and last ever longer.

1. Dissimulation is everywhere. Floyd hides his true mission from the Russians; Hal keeps the goal of the mission from Bowman and Poole, who in turn keep their thoughts from Hal. Speech in *2001* aids in this dissimulation, so we wish to "hear the thoughts" of the characters.
2. At this dance the music is playing very loud because, although it is not generally known, the deaf have no trouble detecting the deep covibrations of rhythm.
3. For *noniconogenic* see glossary and chapter 23.
4. See Michel Chion, *Le Son* (Paris: Nathan, 1998), 149–50.
5. In the studios of the Groupe de Musique Concrète, founded by Pierre Schaeffer at the time when professional tape recorders ran at 76 centimeters per second, Karlheinz Stockhausen did a *musique concrète* project based on cutting piano sounds into minute segments of tone. The results in terms of sound were not very interesting, perhaps because of flaws in gradations of intensity, but the idea was there.

6. "THX," an inspection and certification program named after George Lucas's first feature film, *THX 1138*, began in 1989, when the creator of the *Star Wars* series sought to develop and implement quality control criteria for theaters.—Trans.
7. For *suspension* see glossary.
8. For *fundamental noise* see glossary and chapter 26.
9. For Miyazaki think of the arrival on Laputa in *Castle in the Sky* (1986).

CHAPTER 10

On a Sequence from *The Birds:* Sound Film as Palimpsestic Art

MELANIE DOESN'T HEAR

***THE BIRDS* (1963)** is an apocalyptic film, roughly contemporaneous with *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), *La Notte* (1961), *L'Eclisse* (1962), *The Exterminating Angel* (1962), *La Dolce vita* (1959), and 8½ (1963).[1]

In *La Notte*, when Jeanne Moreau, as a well-off woman from Milan, walks in front of the white wall of a new building, three sounds resembling jet engines are heard one after the other. She looks up, but nothing in the image helps make these sensory phantoms any more concrete. Later during her walk she sees men launching toy rockets that go "fffftt" and disappear while a silent crowd looks on.

What is distinctive about these sounds of jet engines and toy rockets in Antonioni's film is that they arise from nothing, emerging from the background noise of the film, and then return to nothing. Islets of sound, made in order to disappear. For me they evoke something that haunted the cold war era: the idea of annihilation and disintegration, and of physical matter's return to abstract nothingness.

The loud noise of helicopters at the beginning of *La Dolce vita*, a film that, like *La Notte*, is shot through with a pre- (or maybe post-) apocalyptic mood, is similarly born out of silence as in the Antonioni film. But subsequently it functions in two ways: as "background noise" that prevents the sunbathing women from hearing the men and vice versa but also as a source of energy, a sort of total sound that gives rise, in waves, to other sounds and other energies.

Quite differently from the Antonioni example, in *La Dolce vita* the helicopter's shadow passes along a wall, giving a visual trace of the sound we hear.

In *The Birds* we also have noises that come from the sky: neither planes nor helicopters but the collective, formless cries of birds. (*The Birds*, in fact, takes

an honored place among films that have pushed the envelope in terms of expressing formlessness through the resources of sound.)

The Birds has an extraordinary scene, invented during the shooting, that depicts a bird attack similarly to Antonioni's planes, almost exclusively by means of sound. The camera is located inside the Brenners' house, where all the characters—Melanie, Mitch, his mother, and his sister—have barricaded themselves in order to survive a nearly invisible attack of birds that we hear but cannot see all around the house. It is as though the sound were attacking the image. The sharp beaks that are picking through the door, associated with the terrible sound of the attackers, suggest the idea of *sound seeking to leave its trace in the image*, of piercing a hole in the canvas of the screen. This sequence is the symmetrical complement to another one that precedes it, one that I will consider in detail.

The Birds is also a film in which on several occasions a woman—Lydia Brenner (Jessica Tandy) leaving the farmhouse where she has seen a dead body, Melanie Daniels (Tippi Hedren) seeing all the birds—is moved to scream, but the scream can't come out.

The penultimate shot in the bird-attack sequence suggests a scream, a woman's scream that the film *could* make audible (since it's a sound film) but that we do not hear. This does not prevent spectators from hearing it in their "mind's ear," just as they "heard" in the silent era. This example doesn't mean that *The Birds*, the story of a small town where humans are inexplicably attacked and killed by an ever increasing number of birds, is a silent film in disguise under a layer of sound. *The Birds* is a true sound film and is, indeed, highly representative of the sound cinema.

The sequence from which this shot of an open-mouthed Tippi Hedren is taken comes after a certain number of bird attacks have occurred and Melanie has driven her sports car to pick up Mitch's little sister, Cathy, from school and bring her to the Brenner house. But class is not yet over (all the schoolchildren are singing songs), so Melanie signals her presence to the teacher, Annie Hayworth (Suzanne Pleshette), and goes back outside to wait. She walks to a bench right near the school, sits down, and lights a cigarette.

When she enters the classroom where Annie is leading the children in song, almost all of them turn to look at the new arrival, yet curiously their singing goes on uninterrupted. It happens too fast for the moviegoer to notice consciously, but image and sound contradict each other for a moment. The children sing without a break, says the sound. The children are distracted by Melanie's appearance at the door, says the image.

So, Melanie is seated on the bench, and from inside the school we hear a song the children are singing in unison, repeating numerous verses like an

infernally irritating nursery rhyme. In the style of popular Irish jigs, "Risselty-Rosselty" is one of those children's songs that makes one count on one's fingers to keep track of all the repetitions. The song does not stop until the end of the sequence, which it solders together into a single bloc—its audio *nondiscontinuity* highlighted all the more by numerous edits and changes of point of view.[2]

Behind Melanie in the school playground is a jungle gym. In putting this scene together, Hitchcock chose to show the jungle gym once, twice, three times: first it is empty, then a crow noiselessly alights on it, later another joins the three that are "already there," and so forth. Alternating with these shots we see Melanie who waits, smokes, and turns her head twice to the left, toward the school, as though she has noticed a sound that we don't hear—but she doesn't see what is going on behind her.[3]

(But how can it be that she doesn't hear the flapping of the crows that land one by one on the jungle gym behind her?)

Shortly before the song—which seems interminably repetitious—does reach an end, Melanie looks up at the sky and observes a black bird flying noiselessly. As she follows its flight, she turns 90 degrees to her right and sees it land on the jungle gym behind her. At that moment she discovers the swarming mass of crows. She opens her mouth for the silent scream I have mentioned, and then she walks toward the school.

As Melanie starts up the school steps, we hear the acousmatic song finally end. Neither interrupted nor cut off by a temporal ellipse, it simply finishes on a cadence, and we hear the teacher inside announcing that class is dismissed. Melanie enters and takes Annie aside to make her aware of the birds massed around the jungle gym.

The children file out, and on the teacher's signal they make a run for it. At the sound of their flight on foot, the crows take off en masse from the jungle gym and descend upon the children with wild abandon. It's horrible.

AN OVERDETERMINED SONG

How can we analyze what has happened up to this point, and what is the clearly diegetic song doing in this sequence of a sound film—a wordless sequence—in the scene before the attack?

A simple answer of the kind "The song serves to do x" means nothing because the "functions" of this song, if we want to use that word, are legion. Let me clarify that my approach to music and sound elements is nonfunctionalist. Enumerating the effects of an audiovisual situation shouldn't end up in a list of how sounds mean or serve. The sound does not serve; it *is*.

Among the various "effects" of the song in this scene—none to be ranked higher than any other—consider the following.

1. TEMPORAL CONTINUITY

In a sequence composed of many distinct shots, the monotonously insistent song maintains a feeling of a temporal continuity with no ellipses, from the time Melanie alights on the bench in front of the empty jungle gym, to the moment she discovers the birds massed there and seemingly waiting, like her, for school to let out.

Time is a factor in the suspense here. The horror we feel on seeing all those birds is linked to our sense of how quickly they were able to assemble. Hitchcock's editing, inherited from the silents (one shot of Melanie, one shot of the jungle gym) represents a temporal continuity. It could harbor among its edits the possibility of ellipses, or the opposite, simultaneity, and thereby could suppress the sensation of time; but because of the song, time is perceived as a single and continuously smooth bloc.

In this sequence the visual scene construction (Melanie enters the school, she is shown inside, she goes back out, and via editing we move from her to what is behind her) could possibly give us the impression of a jump in time, or possibly a "meanwhile," or what Christian Metz calls a bracket syntagma. But that must not happen here. The suspense depends on the impression that the accumulation of birds has taken, by the clock, no longer than ninety-five seconds between the first bird's landing and Melanie's turning to see more than a hundred.

We feel the time also because the sequence has no speech, especially since it follows a long, dialogue-filled exchange between Melanie and Mitch's mother. When dialogue ceases and place is made for hearing the world and its contents, we can recover our awareness of the passage of time.

2. THE EXASPERATION OF WAITING

Naturally the repetitive and monotonous character of the children's song increases nervous tension. We can't follow it as we would a song whose every line gives something new and interesting to listen to; thus it gives one the feeling of going around in circles.

3. MATHEMATICAL STRUCTURE OF TIME

The song is the guardian and guarantor of time—time considered not simply as duration but also as structure. With its repetitions and formulas that force us to keep count, the song creates the idea of arithmetic anticipation. A mathematical kind of suspense is at work, like a math problem we are given only so much time to solve. If there are three then four then *n* crows behind Melanie in the shots alternating with shots of her, how many will be there when she next turns around? If we freeze the image to count them, we can come up with more than a hundred, in other words far more than our logical efforts at calculation, induced by the mathematical structure of the song, would have led us to imagine.

4. UNITY OF SPACE

In addition to providing temporal continuity, the song "functions" to solidify spatial proximity. Here is Melanie seated on the bench, there is the jungle gym, and each is framed without showing the school. The sound of the children unifies the space, however, and constantly reminds us that the school is only a few feet away and filled with children fated to become victims of the birds.

The acousmatic voice of the singing children has the effect of bringing into simultaneous coexistence, through continuous sound, the winged assailants behind the woman, and their human victims, who normally should be the ones on the jungle gym. Two sensory phantoms, the birds and the children, are thus confronted in one space.

5. SPELLS AND WITCHCRAFT

As in myths and legends, where music has the power to cast a spell on monsters, here it is *as if* the children's song were both attracting and warding off the birds that gather around the school. When the music is over, the birds attack—*as if* the music constituted a protective barrier or momentary stay of execution.

I have put "as if" in italics to signal that a certain ontological ambiguity is indeed the crucial characteristic of a movie like this. We cannot be sure if we are in a fairy tale or in reality; nothing can be said to have a precise meaning or status.

Because the art of music often occupies the borderline between order and chaos, it is good at emphasizing what disorder can occur after it stops.

Here we are in the realm of magical suggestion, the logic that Lévy-Bruhl and other ethnologists identified in certain populations but that we all have experienced in childhood and that therefore remains deep within us.[4] Every edit that goes from one place and time to another may be understood as the magical projection of a desire.

6. PRETEXT FOR A "PHANTOM" SOUND

Is this all? No, because I have not yet mentioned a very important element. The presence of the song offers an alibi of sorts for the fact that we don't hear the birds' wings and that Melanie doesn't hear them either. The voices of the children (a sound coming from indoors, while the scene, of course, takes place outside) "seem" to cover over the outdoor noises, and in particular those of the birds, such that Melanie, however vigilant and available to hear, hears nothing.

I've placed *seem* in quotation marks because from the strictly technical point of view of the making of the film, if we don't hear the sound of the birds, or other natural sounds such as the bay nearby, it's simply because none were put in, mixed with the children's song, as the cinema would allow. Film is an art that knows nothing of the natural laws of acoustics and can make tiny and titanic noises coexist on the same soundtrack.

For years I corrected students who would say about this scene, "The children's song is *covering* the noise of the birds." Upon further reflection I realized that although on the level of technical reality they were wrong (a sound in a film does not cover another one that we don't hear), on another level they were right: the sounds we hear seem to cover other sounds. But they were wrong not to know what they were saying and in what way it was true! In any case it gave me much to think about, this obstinate idea of theirs that one might mentally peel off one layer of heard sound to reveal an unheard layer underneath.[5]

This would mean that in a sound film we are always expecting from the image a sound that does not arrive and that can never be the one we actually hear. This would also mean that in 1963, when *The Birds* was released, as well as now, almost five decades later, there is a silent film underneath the sound film, and this silent image vibrates with a sound we never hear.

The schoolyard scene from Hitchcock thus encapsulates many aspects of my theory of sound film:

1. The palimpsest effect, involving the superimposition of two modes of expression. The silent film persists underneath the sound film, and silent découpage is not completely soluble in sound film.
2. The existence, in particular, of a double thread, a *temporal splitting*.[6]
3. The inadequacy of the term *soundtrack* and of the kind of thinking it implies. Among other absurdities, it leads to totally ignoring the sounds suggested by the image that we do not hear but that are as important as the ones we do hear.
4. My nonfunctionalist postulate, according to which the question "What does the sound serve to do?" does not have an answer, nor should it. There is constant overdetermination, such that the audiovisual signifier always holds many meanings at once, without any one meaning worthy of being decreed more important than the others.

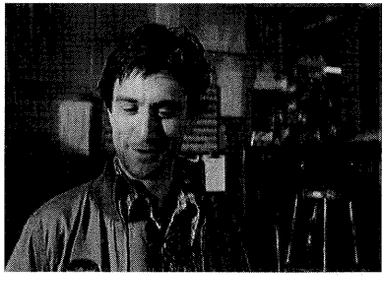
The main idea here is that every true sound film such as *The Birds* (and all of Hitchcock's sound films) carries something of a silent film within. Sound film is partly silent film to which layers of audible and synchronized sound have been added—while not preventing the image from continuing to emit its own inaudible sound. I would even say that the sound film is all the more eloquent when it expresses this implied sound.

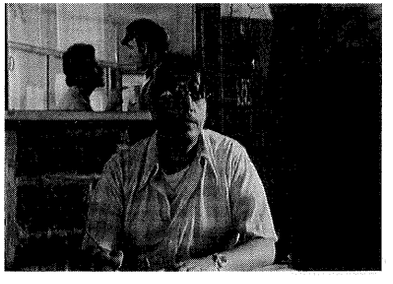
It is in this sense that we can call the sound cinema an art of palimpsest, where one layer covers over another that seems to be trying to be heard—an art where a silent film continues to bellow, despite the gag order of sound imposed by talking pictures.

RETURNS TO SILENT CINEMA, CONSPICUOUSLY OR DISCREETLY

In the opening sequence of *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1975) Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) gets hired as a taxi driver after a brief interview in a cramped office. Travis is standing, and the manager is sitting behind a desk. In addition to these two, we get a glimpse of a fat guy perched on a stool in the corner. The interview is brief and to the point, filmed in shot–reverse shot between Travis standing and the seated manager. We hear their exchange, but in the audio background we also hear a rough acousmatic voice that is impossible to situate, barking orders from callers who want taxis. In turn, each time the camera is on the manager interviewing Travis, behind him and through a glass partition we see two drivers having an animated discussion, perhaps an argument, but we don't hear what they are saying, as though the glass partition were blocking the sound.

What we have here is an intentional symmetry in the audio environment of this hiring scene, between two sensory phantoms that are both diegetic: on





one hand, the unpleasant voice we hear without being able to assign it a precise source (until the end of the scene, when the voice alights on the fat man on the stool in a brief shot, though we wouldn't have matched him with the voice previously); on the other, the silent images of the two taxi drivers talking without our being able to hear what they're saying. Set between these two, the silent argument and the acousmatic dispatcher's voice, as if between pincers, are those we both hear and see talking—Travis and the manager.

Here again: the silent film undermines the sound film.

To start with, the silent cinema was an incomplete sound cinema, which drew from its incompleteness the promise of unity, its ability to instill dreams of unity. At the start, the so-called talking film was not complete either; it was just silent film with sound added, "audio-divided" by the silent film that persisted within it.[7]

There are many other clear, almost too clear, examples such as *Alexander Nevsky*, a work that is officially a sound film but makes admirable use of Prokofiev's music to preserve silent film structure in many sequences, including most of the battle on the ice. Think also of certain sublime musical numbers that glorify the city in Busby Berkeley's *Forty-Second Street* and especially the "Lullaby of Broadway" in *Gold Diggers of 1935*.

In the history of sound film there are many obvious episodic returns to the silents. René Clair, for example, deliberately created all sorts of diegetically motivated pretexts for silence in *Sous les toits de Paris* in his desire to restore the supremacy of the image: showing action going on behind a glass window or setting a scene in a noisy fracas that prevents us from hearing what is said.

In all his sound films Hitchcock was fond of having at least one "silent" scene—whether justified by distance or by some general noise that covers the sound of dialogue, or simply because the scene has no dialogue but only subtle ambient sounds that allow our attention to focus on the visuals. It is as though silent cinema were being rediscovered, while at the same time, thanks to sound, it is inscribed in another temporality, that of a live performance.

In *Rear Window* there are all those playlets of the lives of Jefferies's (James Stewart) neighbors whom he observes from his wheelchair. *North by Northwest* has the famous crop-dusting plane attack but also the scene where Leo G. Carroll talks to Cary Grant on an airfield tarmac; we don't hear this exchange because of a nearby airplane's engine. In *The Birds* it's the scene in the small motorboat that takes Melanie across the bay to Mitch's house.[8] In *Torn Curtain* (1965) there is the explanation scene between Paul Newman and Julie Andrews, witnessed from a distance but not heard by a third party. In *Topaz* (1969) there is the mission of "Dubois" in the Cuban hotel being followed at a distance by the watchful eyes of Frederick Stafford. *Family Plot* (1976) has the cemetery scene, and so forth. The difference between Hitchcock and Clair is that the scenes I've mentioned are included in films that otherwise are quite full of talk.

During the elegant party in *Notorious*, Alexander Sebastian (Claude Rains) keeps close watch on his wife, Alicia (Ingrid Bergman), whom he suspects is participating in a love and espionage liaison with Devlin (Cary Grant). We see them from afar, through Alex's eyes (but not his ears, too far away). Then we see them close up, and unlike him, we can hear their dialogue. However, before this we were placed in the psychological position of trying to ascertain what they're saying from seeing their mouths, and thus we imagine what the husband might guess from afar via a game of lip-reading. Once the image becomes a talking one again, nothing is as before because it was seen in silent-film mode.

Dubbing and postsynchronization also activate this silent layer beneath the postsynchronized sound film, and the silent layer creates additional mystery. The American Farley Granger dubbed into Italian in *Senso*, and the Frenchman Alain Delon dubbed into Italian in *Rocco and His Brothers* (1960), appear transfigured, extraordinary. The genius of Visconti certainly plays a part in this, but perhaps we must also consider whether the actors were aware that they wouldn't have to worry about their own voices, that someone else was going to be in charge of them: might this have allowed them to free up something inside themselves?

AUDIO-DIVISION

Another instance whereby the sound film reconnects with silent film occurs in films narrated by textual speech, when diegetic sound is erased or "covered" by a narrating voice, which functions like intertitles but occurs simultaneously with the image and can be iconogenic to a greater or lesser degree. Examples include *Story of a Cheat* and *The Diary of a Country Priest*.

The conventions of nondiegetic music also permit occasional leaps between the worlds of silent film and sound film, at the very heart of both classical and postwar sound film.

In *Casque d'or* (Jacques Becker, 1951) the heroine (Simone Signoret) has come to meet Manda (Serge Reggiani), the man she loves, and is waiting for him outside his shop. From the inside we see Reggiani exit and go in silence (outside the store window) toward the waiting Signoret. Cut; now the camera is outside. We are close to the couple and see they have met, and their eyes meet,

too; but "because of" the orchestral pit music,[9] we observe their exchange of glances without any real sound, like a silent movie. A door shutting pulls us out of this dream. Manda's fiancée comes out of the shop; this puts an end to the music and brings back all the "real" diegetic sounds and speech. Torn from this brief moment of romantic silent film that was given us, we fall back squarely into the sound film. Again it's a glass storefront window that permitted the play with the silent image that is latent in every sound film image.

But where is the real in all this? Why isn't the real on the side of the silent image? As in the gnostic novels of Philip K. Dick (*Siva*), the real world comes in flashes, revealing itself for a second or two here and there—in this case, the silent reality of sound film gets unveiled in a flash.

In Claude Chabrol's *Alice ou la dernière fugue* (Alice or the Last Escapade [1976]), Alice (Sylvie Kristel) has escaped unhurt from an accident and moves through a world that is both strange and familiar, in and around a French manor house surrounded by fields and sunny woods. In some scenes we hear the precise and reassuring sounds of the real—Alice's footsteps on a gravel path, the whistle of a teakettle in a kitchen—but set against total silence, producing an effect of *suspension* that I've described in other contexts.

When the heroine drives off in an (unsuccessful) attempt to get away from the welcoming chateau, a dramatic orchestral cue by Pierre Jansen plays, but this music is not added to the motor's sound; it takes its place. Because of the music, we can't know for the duration of the sequence if sounds can be heard in the world the heroine inhabits or not. This is part of what I call the *uncertain extent of the auditory field*.

While the shot in silent cinema was filled in mentally with missing sounds, and made the viewer dream of the unity that they would form together, the shot in sound film is divided, separated, by the suspicion that what we are hearing is not all we *could* hear. Any superimposing of nondiegetic music aggravates the situation here. It is what I call *audio-division*.

READ ME

Michel Marie has astutely observed that in *Citizen Kane* numerous shots present us with something to read or show us someone reading. Moreover, "there is only one text that no character reads: the word 'Rosebud' on the sled. Raymond says to the worker who has just picked up the sled, 'Throw that away.' He remains blind to its meaning. Only the spectator gets it, just as with the 'No Trespassing' sign that ends the film."[10]

As we have seen, the silent cinema was full of written materials that moviegoers in the Western world would read silently through a process linguists call

"endophony," that is, the soundless mental enunciation of words (or the mental sounding out of a musical score without playing it).

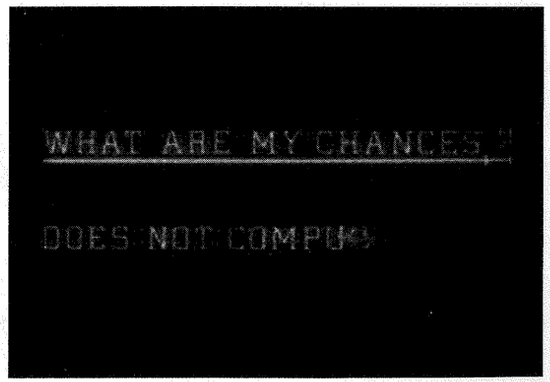
With sound, title cards disappeared but not entirely. They persisted especially in historical films such as *The Scarlet Empress* or, later, *Gone with the Wind*. But they no longer served to represent dialogue, and they took on the solemnity of proclamations. They also took the form of moral warnings in many early sound films; think for example of the introductory title cards of *Scarface* and *Little Caesar*.

Not long afterward, such scrolling texts would be replaced by often sententious voices to serve the same moralizing purpose. At the beginning of *Casablanca* a male voice-over situates the action historically and geographically, using a tone that approximates the voice-over style of newsreels of the period.

We all know that the return of epic adventure films in the 1970s revived the scrolling introduction, and each new episode in the *Star Wars* series would not be complete without its opening text. A variation that has occurred since the 1970s is the presentation of digital data on a real or imaginary computer screen, setting the rules of the game, so to speak, for the adventure that follows.

In fact, the presence of text in the image became standard practice in every 1980s film that showed a computer screen, whereas in the science fiction films of the 1950s and 1960s, "electronic brains," as they were called then, spoke out loud. For example, unlike Hal in *2001*, the computer on the spaceship *Nostromo* in *Alien* has no voice but rather posts its answers on a screen. And when Tom Skerritt types in queries about his chances for survival, he gets his silent textual response in green capital letters: DOES NOT COMPUTE.

In the French version of *Alien* this reply was given audible form with a severe female voice that was supposed to be the voice of the computer.[11] The French dubbers could have put the phrase in the mental voice of Dallas (overheard by the spectator) since it is he who, in French, repeats his own text.



In any event, the bilingualism that results, and the inevitable gap between the English text we read and the French text we hear, retains something of the terrible muteness of the words in English. Nevertheless, the sense of the film was changed with this dubbing process, since a film whose computer had no voice became, in the French version, a film whose computer speaks.[12]

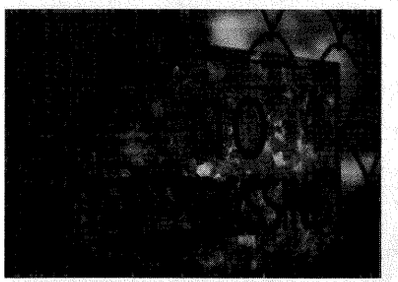
In *Once upon a Time in America* (Sergio Leone, 1984), Noodles (Robert De Niro) gets a suitcase full of money from the baggage claim in Grand Central Station. Wrapped around one of the packets of bills is a (silent) written message: "An advance on your next job." Following a dubbing convention that ensures that the message gets across to viewers who do not read English, the French version adds the internal voice of Noodles saying the phrase in French. In the original version there is obviously no pronunciation of what is written.

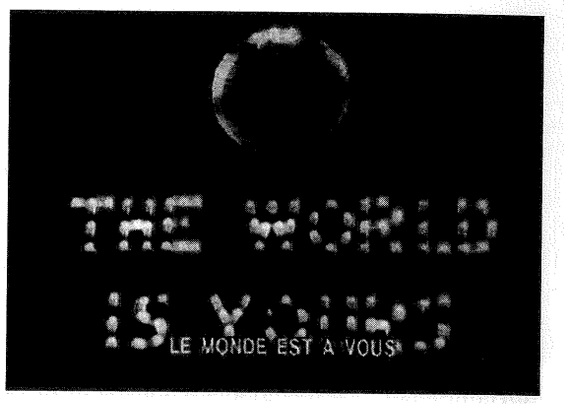
Until the 1950s or so, all textual insert shots (letters, street signs, etc.) were replaced in the French versions with equivalent insert shots in French; but this practice was abandoned in favor of the audio dubbing technique I have described, which is still used today.

NO TRESPASSING, says a sign in *Citizen Kane* on the chain-link fence of Xanadu, a domain that the ascending camera would seem to invite us to enter despite this written interdiction. LUCKY TO BE ALIVE is a giant headline on a tabloid newspaper that Bill Harford has bought but not read, spying from behind it on the mystery man who's following him in Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). Such written statements engraved into the image in sound movies, unpronounced, fairly shout out their silent message to be read.

In a similar vein, recall the end of *L'Eclisse*, where a front-page headline of the newspaper *L'Espresso* reads, *"La gara atomica"* (atomic competition) and then in the subsequent reverse shot a headline inside, *"La pace è debole"* (peace is weak).

How many blinking signs there are in sound movies that act as silent warning cries ("Bates Motel" in Hitchcock's *Psycho* [1960]), how many mute slogans on strange posters in the setting (in Fellini's *Ginger and Fred* [1985]), or illuminated signs ("The World Is Yours" in Howard Hawks's *Scarface*), how





much graffiti have we read and mentally recited that holds a sense of personal fate for a character, or advice or foreshadowing, or ironic commentary . . . which the characters, at their peril, do not read or pronounce.

Silent texts onscreen, which sometimes resonate in our heads like gagged images, thus often convey fateful information or warnings. Think of the three blinking panels in 2001 that read "Computer malfunction," "Life functions critical," and finally "Life functions terminated," during the famous sequence of silent murder.

In Chabrol's *Le Boucher* (1970) the child killer (Jean Yanne) is dying and comes in the night to see the schoolteacher (Stéphane Audran) with whom he is deeply in love. She takes him to the hospital in her little Citroën. On the way he talks to her as he lies in the passenger seat, and in the hospital he continues talking to her even as the nurses are wheeling him to the elevator. She continues to listen, but then the nurses push him on the gurney into the elevator whose sliding doors shut again with a brusque noise.[13] The teacher remains silent and alone by the elevator door, above which a blinking red light reads "occupied." Shots of Stéphane Audran alternate with shots of the blinking red light. When "occupied" stops blinking, we understand that something has happened. The light cries out a silent death agony, quite like "life functions terminated" in the Kubrick film. The mute image-to-be-read implores, as in Lewis Carroll, "Read me."

READ MY LIPS

David Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* (1991) contains a highly ingenious idea consistent with other films of this director, which are all extended metaphors of the act of writing and reading. Ian Holm tells Peter Weller, "Read my lips." For several seconds the obvious lag between the movement of the lips that

we see and the words we hear alert us to what we are *not* hearing, by the very fact that we are hearing at all. "Read my lips" is always saying, "I am saying something other than what the sound indicates I'm saying." Therein lies the whole history of sound film.

Near the beginning of *Blade Runner,* Deckard (Harrison Ford) observes an owl flying in the immense hall of the Tyrell Corporation headquarters where Rachael (Sean Young) has just arrived, and he asks her, "It's artificial?" "Of course it is," comes Young's brief reply as she comes to greet him. According to Paul Sammon's account of the making of this film,[14] Sean Young actually gave a different answer during the shooting, namely what was in the script: "Of course not." The decision was apparently made in postproduction to have her say the opposite, in order to be more coherent with the sense of the film as it was taking shape in the editing. If we pay close attention, we can see the word *not* hidden by the *it is* that we hear.

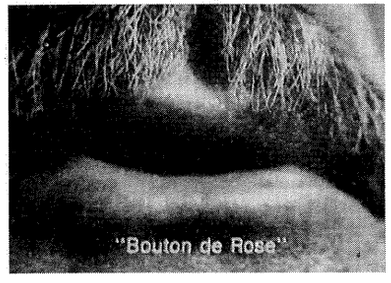
A visible *no* that is hastily made over with an audible *yes*: this can also be taken as a metaphor for sound film.

According to *North by Northwest*'s screenwriter Ernest Lehman, one can see Eva Marie Saint make the equivocal remark, "I never make love on an empty stomach,"[15] to Gary Grant during their conversation in the dining car; but what we hear is the more chaste version imposed by the Hays Office, "fixed" in post: "I never *discuss* love on an empty stomach."

At the beginning of *Citizen Kane* a male mouth with a mustachioed upper lip seems to utter "Rosebud"; and we hear, with reverb, the same word we will read at the end, imprinted on the sled that is burned; we won't hear it then, but will mentally pronounce it, in a case of endophony.

And yet, in the brief shot of the mouth, we can't be sure that what we hear is not something other than what we see being articulated. Is there not a suspicion of dubbing behind every sound and speaking image in the cinema—and since there is suspicion of dubbing, then also the suspicion of palimpsest?

In this famous example the second syllable, *-bud,* is crucial since it's the consonant *b* in *bud* that is visible, that anchors the audiovisual synchroniza-



tion, not the *rose* that is not so readable. Coincidentally, in a striking moment in another film, another *bud* is uttered by a female mouth, but only in mime. This moment at the end of Elia Kazan's *Splendor in the Grass* (1961) exemplifies the idea of a silent film bubbling up from underneath the talking film.

Deanie (Natalie Wood) is desperately in love with young Bud (Warren Beatty), but they never manage to get together. At the end of the film, years after being separated (Deanie has been treated in a psychiatric hospital; Bud became a farmer and married someone else), they meet again and recall their former love. They have spoken, and she is going to return to her friends. Bud walks her to the car; she is already seated inside, about to depart for good, when she fixes her eyes on him with love and utters silently (behind the car window) the monosyllabic name that we have heard her speak so often in his presence, or in his absence—the beloved name that intoxicates her, a name that separates and reunites her lips: *Bud.*

Implicitly, Natalie Wood is silently saying to an awkward and helpless Warren Beatty, "Read my lips."

Another example of endophony occurs in Tim Robbins's *Dead Man Walking* (1995). We read, along with the death row prisoner played by Sean Penn, the silent "I love you too" from the lips of the nun played by Susan Sarandon, from behind the soundproof window that separates the two shortly before his execution.

Walerian Borowzyk develops a beautiful and disturbing idea for sound-image editing in one of the sketches in *Immoral Tales* (1974). The "*Je veux bien*" (I'd like that) of the timid young cousin to whom Fabrice Luchini has proposed an erotic initiation is *heard once* but *seen twice,* from two different angles in what can be called a jump cut. The movement of the lips uttering this acquiescence is repeated: the first time silently, the second time with sound.

Ingrid Thulin in *The Silence* moves her lips without our necessarily hearing anything, and Farley Granger utters his mute cry in *Rope.* These are problematic images for the dubbers responsible for foreign versions of these films; often, in

order not to have audiences believe they've left something out, they're obliged to make these lips pronounce something audible.[16]

AUDIO-DIVISION, A MARRIAGE OF PHANTOMS

In *Pleins feux sur l'assassin* (Spotlight on a Murderer [1960]) by Franju, an entire chateau is equipped with loudspeakers for a "sound and light" show. During a beautiful nighttime scene, we see an audience seated in rows of chairs before the illuminated walls of the chateau, while a recorded voice and sound effects, synchronized with changes in lighting, offer them a spectacle of . . . nothing. The galloping of hooves, sounds of weaponry: it is a spectacle of acousmatic sound. The beauty of the idea is how it thematizes the specifically cinematic phenomenon of acousmatic sound in the story itself.

In Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead 2* (1987), a film that meticulously explores—even if in the mode of clownish parody—all the possibilities of horror, visitors to the haunted house who have already undergone almost every imaginable atrocity hear the sound of nothing passing through the air, in the form of creakings and cackling. Nothing is produced that is to be seen, at least for the characters, because the camera mimes the trajectory of these phantom sounds. The same is true for the extraterrestrials in *Signs* (2002). As we have seen, acousmatic entities rose to power in one sector of horror and science fiction cinema at the turn of the millennium, moving through the air in the movie theater and taking advantage of the real offscreen space they were given to haunt.

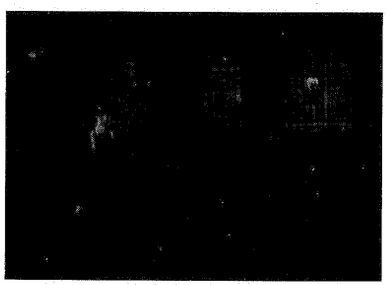
In the 1920s Milena Jesenska (the Milena who had a famous epistolary relationship with Kafka) described in a magazine one of the most remarkable scenes in Chaplin's beautiful silent melodrama *A Woman of Paris* (1923), which she saw in Prague:

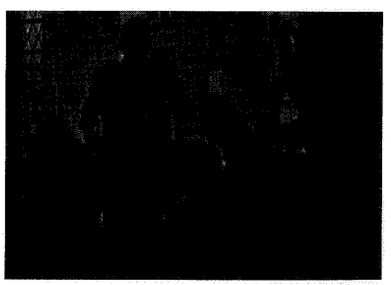
> The most impressive thing I saw in terms of cinematic "writing" is the scene at the train station. It is infused with a beauty that overwhelms me. I still have no idea how I understood that it is a train station. You see nothing, just a blank wall, and yet it is a train station. . . . And a train arrives, yet you do not see it. Only the geometric shadows of illuminated windows fleetingly streak across the heroine's face. She gets in the train—you do not see that either—and yet you sense that she has gone to take refuge in some corner to sob and shed hot tears.[17]

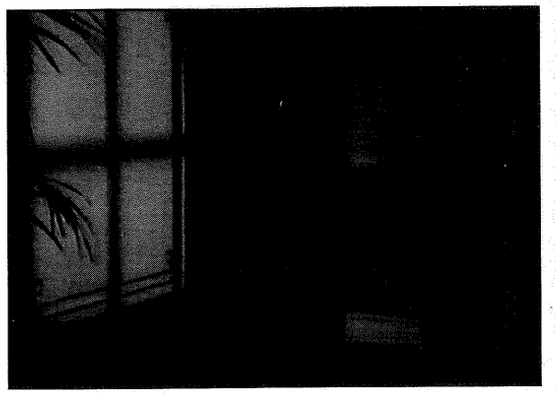
In the scene Jesenska describes, the shadows of the illuminated windows have two functions. They evoke both the train we do not see and the noise of the train's movement we do not hear.

In his memoir *Cinema Yesterday and Today*, René Clair reprints an essay he wrote after seeing a scene from Harry Beaumont's early talkie *Broadway Melody of 1929* and witnessing the now banal effect of superimposing an acousmatic sound onto a face. The heroine listens to a car depart with all her hopes: "The sound of a car door being shut and the car pulling away, which is heard while, on the screen, the anguished face of Bessie Love watches this unseen departure from a window."[18] In this period, which was only just discovering offscreen sound, couldn't one say that the offscreen sound of the car was passing like an invisible shadow over the image, over this face?

Indeed, shadows, the acousmatic voice, and acousmatic whistling are closely associated in this transitional period between the silents and sound. The shadow eventually passes the baton to the sound, when the film wishes to represent someone without showing him or her. Lang's *M*, for example,







famously shows first the shadow of the killer in conjunction with his voice as he talks with little Elsie. Later in the film, the killer, who has been shown, but only from the back, is represented via a whistling tune that emanates from him but that has the property of a "shadow," as though that whistling were the man's evil phantom.[19] The film also shows another talking shadow, that of the ringleader of the thieves, played by Gustav Gründgens.

At the beginning of *Scarface*, at the end of what is surely one of the first sequence shots in sound film, a whistling shadow wearing a hat enters the frame, while acousmatically we hear the voice of a gangster asking to speak with someone on the telephone. The talking shadow says to the gangster, "Hello, Big Louis," in a semi-acousmatic voice, and then fires a shot before it exits, whistling a tune from Italian opera.

Shadows, acousmatic voices, whistling (a sound that is always detached from the one making it): different kinds of phantoms all.

EDITING IN THE SILENT AND SOUND FILM

The sound film reworked the meanings of editing figures that it inherited from the silents, while preserving their initial meaning as well.

In silent film, editing gives the sense of uniting. Even if through comparison and opposition, it composes a space, a time, a causality, a logical connection.

In the sound film, where sound manages on its own to compose spatial unity and temporal continuity among the images—a time we hear and that transcends cuts—edits are all the more marked as edits. The separating function of the visual cut becomes more evident, superimposed on its opposite, namely the assembling function carried over from the silent film. In the silent film the edit unites. In the talking film it still unites, but it also separates.

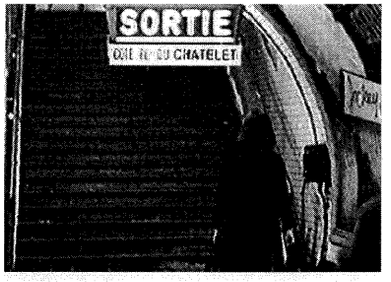
In the prologue to Bergman's *Persona* (1967) the rhythmic sound of dripping from an unseen faucet ties together, within a single space and a single temporal flow, a number of perfectly distinct static shots of body parts, parts of a face, and then the entire body of a young boy under a sheet. The sound of the dripping water has the effect of drawing all these shots together in one diegetic space and linking them in a temporal succession. Yet at the same time, through its very continuity, the dripping underscores the cut that irrevocably separates each of the images.

What about films where an abrupt audio cut is synched with a visual cut to produce, for example, a jump in time and/or space? As I see it, this double cut, called *cut-cut*, unites what it opposes, and, on the contrary, reinforcing the cut audiovisually reaffirms the fundamentally silent structure of cinema. When used in parallel editing (for example in telephone scenes of type 1 or 4[20] or in action-movie chase scenes, as in *Bullitt*, which alternate different roaring engine timbres with the alternation between pursuer and pursued), the *cut-cut* gives back to editing the function of creating continuity through discontinuity.

Parallel editing was born, as we know, during the silents and through the silents. Transported into the sound cinema, it nevertheless recalls and affirms the "abstract" structure of silent editing.[21]

Scenes in sound films where one character tails another (*Cat People* [1942], by Jacques Tourneur; *Stolen Kisses* [1968], by François Truffaut; *Le Samourai* [1967], by Jean-Pierre Melville) offer good examples.

In Benoît Jacquot's *Seventh Heaven* (1997), Vincent Lindon follows Sandrine Kiberlain through the streets of Paris as she goes alone to a meeting. Lindon asks something from a passerby, and we don't hear what they say, as though their words were covered by the traffic. The wordless scene of silent pursuit, or, as here, of words we don't hear supposedly because of distance or saturated ambient sound space, takes on new meaning in sound cinema. Such scenes are inscribed in a pseudoreal temporality that doubles the abstract play



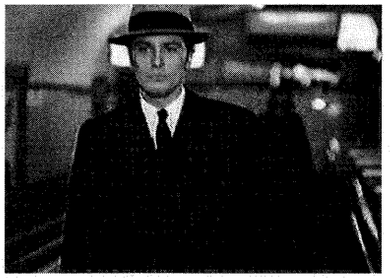
of découpage, and moreover, in the midst of the continuity of sound and speech, they elicit moments of silent cinema.

The laconic film of the 1960s, however, consisted in rarefying music and speech and stripping down the sound editing (much as one can remove sheetrock or flooring to get to the wiring or plumbing), to reveal the silent cinema underneath the sound film. At the same time, it revealed that silent cinema had become *chronographic*.

In three laconic movies from the 1960s—*Playtime*'s scene in the waiting room, Dave's rescue in 2001 of Poole's body from space, and the break-in at the jeweler's in *Le Cercle rouge*—we find the same use of an electrical hum that is the audio signature of an enclosed space; we hear or we don't as the editing takes us inside or outside. Suddenly, visual editing—normally obscured by the effect of the overlapping of sound and image—clearly reappears.

This is what we will attempt to remember in the chapters that make up the second part of this study: there is no pure silent cinema on one side and sound (or talking) cinema on the other; they mutually implicate each other.

1. It is often forgotten that the film that the hero in Fellini's *8½* wants to make begins in a world destroyed by the atomic bomb.
2. For *nondiscontinuity* see glossary.
3. Hitchcock was careful to show Melanie and the empty jungle gym behind her all in one shot; then he shoots Melanie in a tighter shot that excludes the jungle gym, and subsequently, he alternates shots of Melanie waiting and the jungle gym filling up with birds.
4. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939), French philosopher and ethnologist, wrote *How Natives Think* (1910), distinguishing the "primitive" mind from the Western mind.—Trans.
5. There is also the case where someone claims to hear the sound in question, though it is barely audible. An example is the journalist for the American publication *Premiere*, who hears the "noise of the wings" of the birds. This sound exists on no copy of the film in my possession, nor is it present on the DVD, and there is no reason to suppose that a sound would have been subtracted from that recording. The original and French versions have no audible dialogue in this scene. In both versions Melanie and the teacher exchange gestures and articulate words but with no audible sound. American scholars with whom I've discussed this, including Elisabeth Weis, have, like me, never come



across a version of the film with the flapping of the birds' wings in this scene. The writer for *Premiere* must have imagined it or had access to a remixed version that we know nothing about. Hearing the sound one wishes to hear, or that the image suggests, is not that rare.

6. For *temporal splitting* see glossary.
7. For *audio-division* see glossary and below.
8. Raymond Bellour wrote a famous and elegant analysis of this sequence, "Système d'un fragment," which he published in his book *L'Analyse du film* (Paris: L'Albatros, 1979), 81–122. The article was translated by Ben Brewster and reprinted in English as "System of a Fragment" in *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 28–67.
9. A fictive, imaginary cause. Nothing is easier in the sound film than having diegetic sounds and diegetic music heard at the same time; but the music can seem to cover the sounds. A subjectivizing interpretation of this scene (according to which the noises wouldn't be heard because the characters, in their romantic state, don't hear them) strikes me, as do all interpretations that psychologize, as reductive.
10. See Michel Marie, "La séquence, le film," in *Le Cinéma américain*, ed. Raymond Bellour (Paris: Flammarion, 1972), 42.
11. "Programmation impossible" (does not compute).
12. Note that the impersonal voice given in French to "Mother" does not claim, grammatically at least, to be speaking as the mind of the machine but only as an automatic system of vocalization. The initial meaning is therefore relatively well maintained.
13. At the time this film was made, this type of elevator was still reserved for public establishments and was much less common in private residences in France.
14. See Paul Sammon, *Future Noir: The Making of "Blade Runner"* (London: Orion Media, 1996), 126.
15. When the film was made, "make love" could also mean flirt or court, and it is in this sense that Cary Grant uses the expression earlier in the scene; but the same words have a more ambiguous air when spoken by a woman.
16. This is the case in the French version of *Rope*; Farley Granger is made to pronounce the name of his companion in a distressed voice, whereas in English there is no sound at all.
17. See Milena Jesenska, *Vivre* (Paris: Lieu commun, 1986), 122.
18. René Clair, *Cinema Yesterday and Today*, trans. Stanley Appelbaum, ed. R.C. Dale (New York: Dover, 1972), 138. Originally published as *Cinéma d'hier, cinéma d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).
19. For superstitions that associate whistling in certain cases with deathly events, see Eloïse Mozzani, *Le Livre des superstitions* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1999), 1639–40.
20. See *telepheme* in glossary.
21. By *abstract* I mean in the sense of baring the logical relationships between shots (e.g., comparison, irony) that become obscured by the realism that sound imposes.

PART TWO

AESTHETICS AND POETICS

CHAPTER 11

Jacques Tati: The Cow and the Moo

1.

IT IS A MOMENT *in Jacques Tati's* Traffic *(1971) that is not especially well known, no virtuoso sequence like the brilliant scene of the pileup at the intersection where all the hubcaps roll in every direction. Nor is it a sight gag, not even a clever or burlesque effect. It's just an impression of waking up in the countryside.*

The truck for Altra, the small automobile company that Monsieur Hulot works for, has broken down on the way to Amsterdam, where Hulot is supposed to deliver a display model of a camping car to the big auto show. The truck driver, a round and timid little Frenchman who's a bit of a grumbler, has had to spend an uncomfortable night in the garage of a mechanic's shop out in the middle of nowhere. Still only half awake, he walks out of the garage through a squeaky door; he yawns in the sunlight, looking surprised to find himself there, and turns his head. And what does he see in the rear of the shot, planted nicely in the fields, through an opening in a clump of trees? A cow, a lovely cow such as we might see on a postcard or in a children's coloring book, looking somewhat unreal given its perfect placement in the composition.

Barely has the man glanced at the animal and turned away—he hasn't really registered it—when a sonorous moo makes him look again, and only then, it would seem, does he become aware of the newly silent cow. Indeed, the animal is too far away for us to have seen it moo—it's the sound that informs us. That's all there is, just a little thing, a mini-satori.

In case you're tempted to consider this scene insignificant, remember one of the first things you were taught—it's in your earliest storybooks, and your parents seem to have found it important too—which is that a cow says "moo" just as a duck says "quack quack" and a dog says "bowwow." You learned that you mustn't

mix any of those sounds up, except to be funny. At once arbitrary and beyond discussion, these triangular relationships among an animal's visual form, its name, and its emblematic noise, you learned them by heart through endless repetition. You were completely conditioned. To "What does the cow say?" there can be no answer except "moo," as though the secret of life lies within.

Through this early training you learned about metonymy: "bowwow" can be used to say dog, "cluck cluck" stands for the hen. You also gradually realized that the phonemes that make up the onomatopoeia "moo" bear only an approximate and arbitrary relation to the real lowing of a cow. Nevertheless, in the sound of the cow there will always remain the moo—you can never stop hearing these naive imitative phonemes by which those beasts were translated for you as you entered the world of language.

Perhaps you were also told that if objects and beings make noises that are their signals, the link between the object or being and its signal is something experiential, an arbitrary relation if ever there was one, beyond requiring any logical explanation. Moo-cow: that's the way it is. Perhaps in learning about these relationships, the parents and teachers also discovered the drolly contingent nature of these couplings of cow and moo, dog and bowwow, image and sound.

So some people never cease to be amazed, and sometimes amused, at the notion that the relation between the cow and the moo, things to be seen and those to be heard, is simply beyond discussion—because it is clear that there is an abyss between them. Tati is one of those people. As spectators, scholars, or filmmakers, we should be like him. Nothing should strike us as routine or ordinary.

In the shot described above, the cow is far away and the sound is very clear. The sound pinpoints the cow, detaches it from the landscape, with an apparent redundancy whose straightforwardness is itself droll. As if transported into a toddler's world of singsong nursery rhymes and picture books, the Altra driver experiences a gentle hallucination of this bovine beast that's both a bit too real and too generic.

Critics have perhaps not sufficiently explored the ways in which Tati's world is a hallucinatory one—not by virtue of a lack of definition but, to the contrary, in the rigorous clarity of his framing and lighting and in the precision of his sound effects that contrast with the constant comings and goings of those insubstantial voices and dialogues. Many scenes in his films have characters who embody this hallucinatory feeling, through the comically empty stare with which they take in the world. At the beginning of Playtime *there is the fat, mute janitor in the unbearably clean concourse of the Orly airport. Or think of the lethargic young painter in* Traffic *who looks around while distractedly turning the brush in his paint pot. Later in the same film, the head customs inspector looks anxiously at his subordinates, who have taken on decidedly transsexual behaviors—while Altra's petulant*

public relations girl, Maria, thinks there are smudges on the windows of the camping car when actually they are on her glasses. And the driver for Altra is astonished to see a cow as he wakes up.

Tati excels at conveying the queasiness we feel early in the morning, when perception is not quite integrated. But it is through a troubling acuteness *of sensation, not through vagueness, that he renders this impression.*

At the same time, the mooing of the cow in the visual composition I have described sums up Tati's cinema: if we hear a sound that is odd or problematic, the only possible answer is to be found by scrutinizing the visual composition itself.

But the hyperrealism of this "moo" sound may cause us to doubt whether it is in fact what it seems, since it's added afterward. (Is it necessary to be reminded that all the sounds in Tati's films and many others too are postsynchronized?) The birds we hear chirping with this bucolic scene have already been rendered suspect by the director himself, who included them earlier in a tape recording that played in the Altra booth at the Amsterdam auto show. The exhibition space, awaiting the featured camping car that has been held up on the road, so far consists only of a table, a houseplant, a décor of tree trunks painted on plywood, and birdsong playing on a very visible tape recorder. "François, cut the peepers," barks the Altra boss, frustrated with this useless mise-en-scène that is missing its centerpiece.

Thus, since it is shown in parallel with the obviously fake nature of the display at the car show, the authentic country setting where the driver awakens becomes, with these same chirpings, lightly contaminated with artificiality. Alongside this impression there's nothing in the image of the far-off cow to indicate that it moos at one moment rather than another. For the film editor there is no movement of the cow's jaw with which to synchronize a moo, and this makes it possible to redesign the scene such that the moo occurs between the two times the driver looks.

It is in fact probable that the driver's two successive looks in the direction of the cow were not thought out ahead of time and that a sort of stutter in the turning of the head suggested the possibility of placing the moo in the interval. It's not that Tati was especially preoccupied with showing us that this is all fabricated, by revealing the tricks of the trade. Instead, you might say that he conveys his representation of the world in which, in much the same way as a child's crayon work bleeds over the lines in the coloring book, sounds never "fill" the place of a visual object exactly, and so the moo overflows the contours of the cow.

Instead of speaking of the relations between image and sound, we could therefore speak of the relation between the cow and the moo. "Relation between the cow and the moo" is a considerably denser reformulation of the issue and

more ambiguous, too, since the word cow conflates the image of the animal with the animal to which, cinematically speaking, it is identified (the spectator sees cows, not images of cows); and moo similarly condenses the evocation of an animal noise and its generic transcription in human language. After all, what is most interesting in the cinema is not the relation between the image of a cow and the sound of a cow but the relation between the moo and the cow whose image is identified with the animal itself.

2.

A surprising fact: when asked to describe his experiments with sound, Tati, who used sound like no one else, spoke about it in the same way everyone does. Like others, he talked in terms of its capacity to underline—making the visuals and only adding sounds afterward.[1] *This description of a two-stage process is not what many see as the ideal, which is a constant back-and-forth between the two. A two-stage process means that certain films, and some of the greatest, are really "sonorized" (i.e., with sound added) rather than integrally being sound films. They do not offer "slices of reality" captured by filming; instead, they observe the real through a prism that separates and recomposes, without necessarily making the dislocated elements coincide perfectly. The clearest demonstration of this idea in the work of Tati is* Playtime. *It would seem as though the filmmaker constructed soundproof and glassed-off sets for this film, not so much to further the satire of the modern world, which is its starting point, as for the narrative pretexts that they offered him, opportunities to decompose the world into two stages or parts, between sounds and their corresponding objects and people. One of the most beautiful examples is the door that does not slam, exhibited by its German inventor at the house and garden show with the slogan, "Slam your doors in a golden silence." The comical aspect of this door is the way it cancels the effort of the person who wants to express anger via door-slamming. Moreover, we can't help but hear the sound internally, to compensate for its absence. Yet we are not watching a silent film, where a silent door, as with everything and everyone in this deaf cinema, would be perceived as natural. Here we hear the ambient sound of the home show and the speech of passing attendees; alone in the middle of all this, the mute door that has not been resonorized but left to be a sensory phantom, becomes unreal. Playtime contains many similar gags.*

There is something of the laboratory to Tati's world, with these images that are so clear and focused, these sounds reconstituted one by one, these impeccable white or glass-partitioned sets. Tati's movies are experiments in sound film, where relationships between sounds and their visual sources are studied under the most advantageous conditions of hygiene and isolation. A favorite experiment

is designed to address the question, "What happens if we cut out the sound of this thing?"

At night in Playtime *we see from the street the interiors of two adjoining apartments; through their picture windows we see parallel actions taking place. They are silent scenes for us, but their hallucinatory effect comes precisely from the fact that this is not a silent movie. In addition, the nocturnal street noise that accompanies these scenes has a rarefied, clear, and clean quality that does not feel real. Nowhere on Earth is such limpid silence possible, and the city in* Playtime *seems to be on a planet where the density and elasticity of the atmosphere propagate sounds in a unique way. Note that the cars that enter and leave the frame are not preceded by the sound of their motors as they would be on Earth.*

This treatment of car sounds receives its most systematic application in Traffic, *since many of the scenes take place on freeways. Consider the scene in which Hulot is walking in the country along a sparsely traveled road. He is carrying a gas can, hoping to find a gas station. The flat scenery might remind some of the road where Cary Grant gets off the bus for a rendezvous in* North by Northwest, *though with a bit more traffic. Moviegoers rarely realize that there's nothing obvious or automatic about producing the sounds of a car on an isolated road. In real life, if the setting is quiet, a car's sound begins far away at a very low volume and takes a long time to reach its climax, and about as long again to disappear after the vehicle has passed. In the cinema this long delta-profile (i.e., the volume buildup followed by sound decay) has to be spread over a shorter period with the help of the potentiometer and with a more accentuated dynamic curve in time. It's one of the basic tasks of the sound mixer to model this kind of sound on a mixing board to control the duration and fluctuations in volume. In* Traffic *there is no suspense to be created but instead a comic situation. Whereas Hitchcock often frames roads in depth, thus emphasizing how far a vehicle travels to arrive in the shot (again, think of* North by Northwest's *cornfield sequence), Tati often frames smaller sections of roadway, shot slightly on the diagonal; then he drastically shortens the time during which the vehicle announces its arrival with sound before appearing onscreen and, similarly, dials the sound down quickly after it leaves the frame. Sometimes the passing vehicle exists in sound only during the* hic et nunc *of the shot. What we rediscover here via sound film is the existence the silent film gave to things (only here it's with sound added): whatever left the frame was no more, present only in our memories or our anticipation of its possible return. Obviously in silent film it was barely possible for an object or character to exist before being seen onscreen, except in dialogue or by being suggested by the plot. So, in combination with Tati's systematic use of long shots, this device of depriving offscreen sound space of life*

transports us back to the earliest days of the tableaux vivants of deaf cinema, when the entire shot asked to be read and surveyed at once.

Noël Burch has noted that some of the very early films were not presented as linear narratives but instead as a succession of tableaux, to be read topologically.[2] As an example, he cites an image from the famous Griffith short The Musketeers of Pig Alley (1912). This work is particularly difficult for the modern spectator to comprehend because the "principal" action sometimes occupies only a small corner of the frame, which is full of activity; it requires the same type of constant vigilance as in Tati and, also like Tati, the kind of temporality that is not hierarchical. In other words, it's not a temporality that serves to build an emotion or create suspense, which exists beyond the moment as does that of conventional narrative films. What does Tati do with sound added to his arsenal? He uses it both to isolate a detail in the overall visual composition and at the same time to trick us as to its provenance even while leaving the solution visible. In this way he invites rapid exploration of the image. Too bad if we haven't found out where the sound is coming from; the next shot is already upon us and it is not going to answer any questions raised earlier—in fact it is asking new ones of its own.

The standard succession of shots in a film very often functions according to a sort of call and response. A question posed by shot A is followed by an answer in shot B, contributing to the sense that a film is moving forward. Take, for example, a closeup of a character looking. What is she looking at? The answer appears in the next shot. Or consider someone who is speaking whom we have not yet seen; who is it? The answer again arrives in the next shot. Tati rarely edits in this manner. One remarkable exception among a handful of such instances is the wonderful scene in Traffic when the Altra driver, who is idly walking near the garage in the evening, is attracted by some American voices that are coming out of nowhere and seem to be talking in ether. A pan provides the explanation: it's the mechanic's TV set, tuned to a live broadcast of men landing on the moon.

In classical film the shot–reverse shot technique, with its principle of overlapping, gives sound a centrifugal role both in space and time. Offscreen sound in the shot points to an elsewhere. It is a call demanding a response in the form of its visual complement that we imagine to exist in the reverse shot to come, but it also evokes a future by making us wait for the promised response in the upcoming shot. In Tati's films, however, the rarity of active offscreen sound (i.e., leaving aside passive offscreen sound—peripheral ambience, birds, crowd noise, etc.) gives sound a doubly centripetal function: in space, by posing questions whose answers lie within the image, and in time, because no sounds function as anticipation or prolongation.[3] Therefore everything incites the spectator to rapidly survey the visual field to find the trick, the source, that often goes by so fast that

it is often too late, and the fleeting, erotic relation between the seen and the heard is already ended: "ni vu ni connu / le temps d'un sein nu / entre deux chemises."[4] This obsessional fascination leads Tati to question, via his gags, the false evidence of sound attributions, of automatic association triggers, the gluing process that ceaselessly assigns sounds to their source.

3.

One of the most famous running gags in Mon oncle (1958) is a trick that children like to play on passersby in the street. They hide on a rise above the street, and when they see someone walk by, they whistle to make the person think someone is behind him or her. The passerby turns around and—bangs into the lamppost that was in front of him or her. The trick here is to confuse the victim regarding the location of the origin of the sound. There do exist places whose particular acoustics can induce the impression that a sound is coming from somewhere other than its actual source. This dissociation fascinates Tati so much that he has tried out several variations on it. Traffic, for example, has two remarkable scenes that are based on this idea and that echo one another: one in the middle and the other at the end.

In the first of these two scenes an intricate chain of circumstances results in bringing three characters together in one shot: Maria, the American public-relations girl for Altra with whom Hulot will go off arm in arm at the end of the film; Peter, a young Romeo who tries his luck with her; and Hulot, his "rival," hidden within the frame. It is nighttime, in front of a small Dutch house covered by a curtain of ivy supported by trellises. Hulot has dismantled this curtain by pulling on it and is trying to repair the damage. He climbs along the wall, hanging on to the ivy to reach the trellis in order to reattach it properly. Inside the house on the upper floor, we hear the voices of the elderly couple who live there and who are unaware of Hulot's presence (an old saw, the comic character overhearing a "primal conversation" against his will). And then Hulot slips and finds himself smack against the wall, hanging upside down with his feet caught in the ivy. Now comes the little yellow sports car of Maria, who is delivering the suitcases belonging to the old man who lives in the house. Along the route she was approached by the pickup artist, Peter, who, it turns out, is the couple's son. The two stop in front of the house without noticing Hulot, who is still in his embarrassing position and trying to remain unnoticed. Again he is in the position of overhearing a "primal conversation," this time witnessing Peter's seduction attempt, which begins by holding Maria close: "Your hands are so soft and the night is so beautiful." At this point papers begin to fall noiselessly from Hulot's inverted pockets, then coins and then keys that land clinking on the pavement in front of the

house. Peter, who hears but cannot locate these sounds, becomes nervous. His odd behavior, including making awkward gestures, glancing at his feet, and feeling around in his own pockets, suggests that he is wondering if it is perhaps he who has dropped something. His unease interrupts his ardor, and Maria is able to extricate herself and make a getaway in her car.

The sequence is filmed in long shot, showing the whole house, the dark shadow of Hulot in the ivy, and in the lower portion of the screen the couple, Maria and Peter. This scene is predicated on a sound that a character can't pinpoint—he does not see that the solution lies in the very frame in which he himself is an element. It is amusing to notice that in this finely orchestrated scene Monsieur Hulot is transformed into a hidden night owl, although perched more like a bat than a bird.[5]

At the end of Traffic *it is Hulot who's on the ground, and another "bird," this one of the species "whistling painter," perched on high in a second scene of false attribution of sound. The scene takes place in the large exhibition hall in Amsterdam where the auto show has just ended. Altra's demo vehicle has arrived too late, but the rent for the useless booth with its ridiculous forest décor has to be paid anyway. The Altra boss is furious and in need of a scapegoat. He targets his employee Hulot, who is innocently waiting near the door of the hall a few feet away. The boss sees him from behind and finds his laid-back whistling intolerable. He storms over to Hulot and brutally fires him—not noticing that the whistling continues and therefore is not coming from his now dumbfounded, silent employee. A reverse shot that gives a general view of the front of the building reveals (to those who wish to notice) that the whistling came not from our hero but from a worker perched on a ladder outside. This solution is supplied so discreetly that many spectators are fooled, just like the Altra boss.*

Although it is difficult not to note the role played by this type of misunderstanding based on a false attribution of sound in a masterpiece by a director known to Tati, namely Chaplin's City Lights *(the Tramp taken for a millionaire by the young blind woman because of the sound of a car door), the meaning of Tati's misunderstanding gag is different. The point is not the exchange of places or roles in society. What dominates here is the hallucinatory effect.*

Tati is less interested in the errors one can make as to the nature of the sound's source (mistaking, for example, a human noise for the noise of a machine or vice versa) than he is in what results from the doubt or error about who's responsible for a sound.[6] *The Altra boss doesn't take the whistling for anything other than whistling, but he wrongly pins it on Hulot. Peter thinks that the noises of the falling objects, which he identifies correctly, are coming from him. Yet another gag in* Traffic*: Maria, hearing a voice on the telephone speaking to her in Dutch, mistakenly takes it for the voice of the Parisian worker next to her.*

Their spatial disorientation is comic, and disconcerting too, for raising the question of who is responsible for a sound that might be incongruous.

And incongruous sounds there are. If Tati is so interested in the modern world in its clean, soundproof form, where everything is seen and heard with crystalline clarity, it is because the least little noise can take on a bothersome life of its own—such as in the waiting room in Playtime*, where the "pff" given off by some plastic-cushioned chairs whenever someone sits or stands allows Hulot and another visitor who have exchanged silent greetings to engage in a kind of farting conversation. Tati finds boyish amusement in the noises of plumbing, burping, farting, and gargling that occur everywhere in his films, but his focus is not their burlesque or carnivalesque dimension. He is interested in the phenomenon of the emission of sound in itself. He subscribes to the clownish law that assigns every cow its moo; a sound that "underlines," as Tati says, an object or detail, can never do so without trembling, without somehow obscuring the detail that gets underlined, and without resisting being pinned down to a precisely localizable space—thereby leaving a sense of audio-division.*

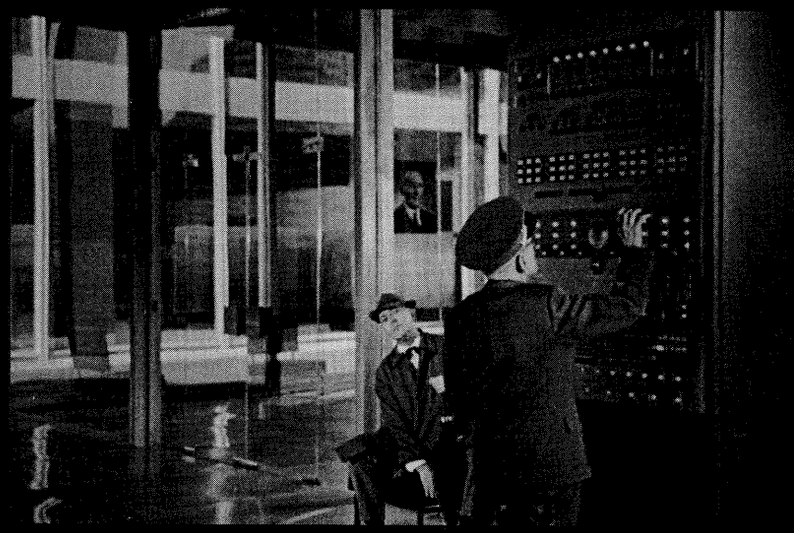
This strange view of the world and its phenomena is also a matter of framing. You select a given angle and field of vision, a "playfield"; you have fun looking at those who don't know they're in the picture and who are the game pieces in the tricks of mistakenly localized sound. But likewise we spectators, by not having been all that attentive either, can fall into a compromising position in the game and find ourselves also gently made part of the picture.

Tati enjoys the order of the world and nature, which is so nicely categorized yet so imprecise too. He enjoys asking, "Whose sound is this?" by creating doubt as to who or what dragged it in. And he waves "the moo of the eternal cow" in the air like one might wave a dirty handkerchief picked up off the ground before the eyes of horrified bystanders.

1. Jacques Tati, interview by Bruno Villien, *Cinématographe*, no. 27 (1977).
2. See Noël Burch, *La Lucarne de l'infini, naissance du langage cinématographique* (Paris: Nathan, 1990), 148–49.
3. For *offscreen sound* see glossary.
4. "Neither seen nor known [without drawing attention]/The time of a naked breast/Between two shirts." (This is from "Le Sylphe," in Paul Valéry's 1922 collection, *Charmes*. —Trans.)

5. The author's observation has the added elegance in French of associating *hulotte* (a species of owl) and *Hulot*, the name of Tati's clownish, owlish hero.—Trans.

6. Still, in *Traffic* the noise of bells that are jingled, making us think of the Elevation at Mass, in association with the image of a priest, in fact comes from a hubcap that is rolling solo after the car pileup.



CHAPTER 12

The Disappointed Fairies Around the Cradle

"ONLY A CONTRAPUNTAL USE . . ."

AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE SOUND era hovered fairies with haughty and severe looks.[1] Some of them bore Russian names, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov—three fairies who coauthored a short text in 1928 that has been invoked so often in the eighty years since, to prove how far the sound film fell short of its promises, that it cannot be ignored.

In essence, this text begins by reminding the reader that montage is the cinema's fundamental means of expression, and therefore it is necessary in the sound film to transpose this principle to the sound-image relationship.

> To use sound in this way [i.e., to photograph and record plays] will destroy the culture of montage, for every ADHESION of sound to a visual montage piece increases its inertia as a montage piece, and increases the independence of its meaning—and this will undoubtedly be to the detriment of montage, operating in the first place not on the montage pieces, but on their JUXTAPOSITION.
>
> ONLY A CONTRAPUNTAL USE of sound in relation to the visual montage piece will afford a new potentiality of montage development and perfection.
>
> THE FIRST EXPERIMENTAL WORK WITH SOUND MUST BE DIRECTED ALONG THE LINE OF ITS DISTINCT NON-SYNCHRONIZATION WITH THE VISUAL IMAGES.[2]

This is all well and good, but there remains the problem of deciding what is meant by counterpoint and "non-synchronization."

Another, less-often-cited essay, by Pudovkin, published the following year, goes into more detail. This text begins by noting progress in synchronization and the sound film but warns that technical development does not necessarily mean progress in expression. The cinema, says Pudovkin, should not be content with enhancing the image's realism by giving us to hear the voice of a

man shown speaking where the silent film conveyed speech via intertitles. Sound and image should not slavishly reproduce each other; instead, each should follow a distinct rhythm and convey different meanings.

Pudovkin gives an example of sound revealing an "inner content," involving a city-bred man who is stranded in the desert and thinks of the city. "In silent film we should have had to cut in a shot of the town; now in sound film we can carry town-associated sounds into the desert and edit them there in place of the natural desert sounds."[3]

But this raises a new problem; namely, how does one get acousmatic sounds to be perceived as mental or symbolic representations while the image represents concrete diegetic reality?

Pudovkin's manifesto continues with examples of nonsynchronization associated with psychologically real experiences of daily life:

> For example, in actual life you, the reader, may suddenly hear a cry for help; you see only the window; you then look out and at first see nothing but the moving traffic. But *you do not hear the sound natural to these cars and buses*; instead you hear still only the cry that first startled you. At last you find with your eyes the point from which the sound came; there is a crowd, and someone is lifting the injured man, *who is now quiet*. But, now watching the man, you become aware of the din of traffic passing, and in the midst of its noise there gradually grows the piercing signal of the ambulance. At this your attention is caught by the clothes of the injured man: his suit is like that of your brother, who, you now recall, was due to visit you at two o'clock. In the tremendous tension that follows, the anxiety and uncertainty whether this possibly dying man may not indeed be your brother himself, *all sound ceases* and there exists for your perceptions total silence. Can it be two o'clock? You look at the clock and at the same time you hear its ticking. *This is the first synchronized moment* of an image and its caused sound since you first heard the cry.[4]

What is Pudovkin's point in imagining this melodramatic scene? To remind us that there is not simply an objective world but also an individual's partial perceptions, a subjective selection of sounds. "The image may retain the tempo of the world, while the sound strip follows the changing rhythm of the course of man's perceptions, or vice versa. This is a simple and obvious form for counterpoint of sound and image."[5]

In fact, sound films from *Rear Window* to *Playtime* to the last shot in *The Passenger* have behaved as Pudovkin proposed; the sounds of the crowd, the city, and nature fluctuate around characters, and the scene he imagined has been done hundreds of times since. The "problem" is that the cinema hasn't developed a code or language that would allow spectators to identify sounds as subjective, filtered through the specific perception of one of the characters.[6]

So where is the failure, if Pudovkin's proposal has been realized? It lies in the fact that no one has noticed. A sense of failure also comes from the realization that the montage model is inadequate to describe the audiovisual relation and the effects of the simultaneous confrontation of sound and image. What transpired may well have been interesting, but it did not correspond to the a priori intellectual plan. Therein lies the entire history of the sound film.

THE FOUR FAILURES

Without having planned it this way, "sound" film, which had been conceived to synchronize music with images, turned out to create the space for speech. Later, in the same accidental fashion, Dolby, which had been developed for rock music and occasional "spatialized" sounds, opened up room for noise and for sensory effects that no one had anticipated. The history of the sound film is, like all true stories, a history of events not occurring as expected.

It could even be said that sound film has been built out of its failures, if by failure we understand the fact of not becoming what someone had planned but something else.

Many more fairies than the Three Russians have also gathered around the cradle of the sound film: theory fairies, director fairies, and some wearing both sets of wings such as Jean Epstein and René Clair; and what they have all predicted or dreamed or attempted to invent did not take place as planned. Which does not mean that the fairies were "wrong." They were right to say what they wanted—they were fairies with a mission, an ideal, a vision. But now it is time to take stock of what really happened rather than what was dreamed of. No more grumbling about sound film's outcome on the basis that people had wanted it to turn out differently, no more endless quoting of Adorno and Eisler, and the Three Russians and Vertov—all still recruited to condemn, eighty years later, the direction the cinema has taken.

Let us now examine these "failures."

1. *The unification of sounds.* The sound film was expected to unify the three disparate families of sounds it engages. Music, words and voices, and sound effects should have become one single stream, an overall musical sound, but it didn't happen that way.

The idea was to erase the gap between words, sounds, and music; Jean Epstein and Marcel L'Herbier were voicing this ambition by the early 1930s, and it was reprised in similar terms forty years later by several writer-filmmakers, including Noël Burch, Michel Fano, François Jost, Jacques Aumont, Thierry Millet . . . and also Tarkovsky, in his theoretical texts of the

1970s. Despite occasional magnificent realizations of the ideal, some which its defenders were not always quick to recognize (e.g., *Blade Runner*), the dream, statistically speaking, has proven a total failure. In the vast majority of movies, including many of the greatest, speech, sound effects, and music continue to be both produced and heard separately.

It is purely a cultural illusion when Michel Fano sees an embodiment of this ideal of the acoustic continuum in Mizoguchi's *The Crucified Lovers* (1954). Only because Fano does not understand Japanese does the dialogue seem blended with the sound effects and music. Anyone who does know the language hears these three kinds of sound distinctly and separately.[7]

The beginning of *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* shows one of many efforts in the early sound era to establish continuity between sound effects and music. After the orchestral overture heard with the opening credits (pit music), there immediately follows a rhythmic pounding noise whose source never appears in the film, but everything leads us to conclude that it is diegetic sound, issuing from some enormous machine.

The principle of Lang's music-to-noise transition is simple. Reduce the orchestra music to a 3/4 timpani rhythm at the lowest possible pitch, and the timpani rhythm "becomes" a machine's rhythm, also in 3/4. The pivotal element of rhythm aids and abets the transition; and the relative unity is achieved syntagmatically, via succession rather than superimposition.

Today we know there is no absolute difference at the acoustical level between the raw materials of speech, noise, and the various forms of expression known as music. Pierre Schaeffer, in his 1966 *Traité des objets musicaux*, developed a universal classification of sounds that does not bother with distinctions between the sounds of noises, speech, or music. For Schaeffer it is in the

way sounds follow one another, and in the way they are heard, that differences appear, but also in the type of sound source: if we recognize a human vocal source, and if this vocal source produces articulated sounds, we deduce that we are hearing words—even if these words are spoken in an unknown or even imaginary language. An example is lettrist poetry, as the only way we can hear and understand it is as encrypted language.[8]

The criteria that allow us to identify sounds as music also partly depend on our recognizing the source of the sound. I often show my students an excerpt from *Persona* that contains a rising glissando. Those who know something about music can hear in this glissando a sound produced by string instruments, and they call it music (this sound was in fact written by composer Lars Johan Werle). Others don't recognize the sound of a violin, and they identify it as the noise of a siren. But what difference does it make, since both groups experience the sequence, formally and dramatically speaking, in the same way?

In most contemporary films we can usually distinguish the use of the three families of sound. The question then becomes: how do they coexist? Should films attempt to unify the three families by making bridges, for example, between music and sound effects, or is it their irreconcilable difference that should be emphasized? We have seen how films have adopted a variety of solutions through the years: either they have affirmed an absolute difference between speech, music, and noise in a nonhierarchical juxtaposition, or they have arranged things as a hierarchy where one element, generally music or speech (particularly voice-over narration), incorporates and dominates the others. In a third approach some films seek fusion and relative continuity among the three elements. In different periods these strategies were dictated partly by cultural context, partly by a more general social context, and of course partly by what technology has allowed. These different factors might converge in the same direction but not always.

For a long time the raw material of optical sound, as well as its monaurality—both of which prevented many sounds from coexisting on a soundtrack at once—nudged the cinema in the direction of a hierarchized unification of sounds. By this I mean that sounds were naturally soldered one to another, mixed into a single texture, and linked by ambient sound; but at the same time each scene tended to have one dominant audio element, either narration, dialogue, or music by turns; sound effects took the lead far more rarely.

It appears that since Dolby and digital processes yield highly defined sounds distributed across a newly deepened audio space, film should abandon, at least for now, any dreams of *fusion* among the sonic elements. The fundamental noise—which can also be represented (as it is in *Mulholland Dr.*) by silence, the negation of total noise—is still ever present, the sound that was

in the beginning and will remain in the end, letting all differences and all dichotomies flow along in its current.

2. *The total replacement of the silent film with a new form of autonomous expression.* It was thought that sound cinema would incorporate, digest, even supplant silent cinema. As we saw with Hitchcock, however, not only did the silent film remain alive beneath the sound film, but sound operated on the image like a pressure cooker lid. Smothered, emitted by the image but not heard, sound boiled and whistled under the pressure of the sounds that actually were heard.

Better yet, in certain cases it is the silent film that triumphed in an apparently "sound" film. Musicals like *The Merry Widow* or wonderful musical numbers of Busby Berkeley's like "The Lullaby of Broadway" in *Gold Diggers of 1935*, as well as certain virtuoso passages in action films, exemplified the cinematic ideal of montage. Montage was an essentially *silent* aesthetic; the synchronization of image and music served to reinforce the editing and to mark out its rhythms.

Sound cinema thus became an art split in two—a palimpsestic art involving superimposed layers—and, therefore, an unsatisfying art.

3. *The controlled integration of the verbal element.* It was thought that sound cinema would make words an optional element that could be omitted whenever one wished, and therefore would not be included in every scene. The goal was to create a type of "natural," mixed speech, that is, mixed in with sounds or other voices, in any case not classically intelligible, theatrical speech. The idea was to relativize and demystify speech either by making it rare or, on the contrary, superabundant.

In 1929 René Clair wrote, "It would not be impossible to endow the image with speech without abandoning the achievements of the silent cinema.

Imagine a film in which the spoken text took the place of the written text of the intertitles, remained the servant of the image and made its appearance only as an 'auxiliary' means of expression; a brief, neutral text to which no efforts toward visual expression would be sacrificed."[9]

We can see this idea at work in *Sous les toits de Paris*. Clair employs all sorts of techniques to prevent words from taking the upper hand: verbal chiaroscuro, a whole crowd talking, using various diegetic pretexts to mask dialogue (characters speak and hear each other, but we don't hear them because they're whispering, or their voices are covered by some general noise, or they're behind a glass window). Clair's pursuit of a "natural" speech of incomplete or masked sentences, which today seems laborious, is a distant precursor of Tati, whose extensive work of experimentation was more successful.

It becomes clear that words are not "soluble" in a film. The rarer they are, the more the words we do hear count—and those we don't hear, even more so. The proof lies in *2001*, where the director makes the word *extraterrestrial* cry out precisely by never having it pronounced. *L'Atalante* is a kind of constant juggling act in the way it prevents words from advancing plot and meaning. Opera has long relativized words by repetition in the libretto as a means of diluting their power; additionally, song has the effect of absorbing language. Cinema, having for the most part gone down the naturalistic route of not singing, cannot work this way.

The three categories of speech I have described—theatrical speech, textual speech, and emanation speech—illustrate this matter. Theatrical speech entirely assumes the weightiness of the verbal but hides its verbocentric bias behind the film's tendency to interweave the auditory and visual (e.g., talking and smoking). Textual speech is even cleverer, since while seeming to yield to the verbal, here the image often thumbs its nose at language even while pretending to play by its rules. Finally, emanation speech is both the best and worst in its attempt to relativize speech. It is striking how diminished or relativized speech can, with just a word here or there, boomerang back with a vengeance.

So it comes as no surprise if we encounter in the history of film periodic efforts to do some housecleaning, to clean up and liberate an art enslaved to language and polluted by music. Aesthetic movements that moralistically champion this kind of purifying housecleaning smack of earnest New Year's resolutions. A few such positions:

- Infrequent use of music, or its total suppression. Certain films of Bergman, Buñuel, Bresson, Clouzot, Kiarostami, Straub, Lumet, and Melville have shown this is possible.

- Infrequent use or total absence of dialogue. Here the challenge is different, since the filmmaker must think up situations that can plausibly do without dialogue, as in the ritualized film of the 1960s (revived in some contemporary Asian films), with its laconic characters, including tight-lipped samurais.
- The exclusive use of direct sound only, that is, the sound recorded during shooting. The Dogme filmmakers espoused this purification of style.

And yet, even these same filmmakers often later revert to "bad habits."

4. *Creation of an audiovisual language.* It was hoped that sound film would create a clear, intelligible rhetoric, appealing to the intellect and developing rhetorical figures that spectators could identify and attribute meaning to. But eighty years after its birth, the sound film still comes off as a savage art without a rhetoric, obtaining its effects by means of insidiously manipulating its spectator.

It was believed that asynchronism, that is, the discrepancy between the seen and heard, would create a rhetoric; but in fact what it created was offscreen space. The fairies called for an expressive cinema that would be lucid as well. Instead, what came to be was a *suspect* art, which seemed able to achieve expressiveness only at the expense of reflection.

Sound film does not consist of codes but rather of effects. When we have the means to pinpoint what produces a given effect at a given moment via a given technical device, we can talk of a code. Spectators are increasingly able to do this, especially in the age of home video, when we can rescreen, put the image on pause, etc. We can associate the feeling or sense we have with a specific technique or process, such as a given camera movement, a cut, a scoring device.

When we get a feeling or sensation from a film but cannot identify the cause as a specific device, an *effect* is produced, more diffuse, not associated with a pinpointed signifier. This remains the case with certain audiovisual (i.e., audio-visiogenic) effects, for reasons that are both cultural and psychophysiological. The effect of *added value* prevents us from locating the origin of the impression we receive, since it leads us to attribute to the image what actually comes from the sound-image combination.

A HANDFUL OF RHETORICAL EFFECTS

Some other effects are both rhetorically classifiable and emotively effective.

1. *The anempathetic effect.*[10] This widespread phenomenon occurs, for example, in Guillermo del Toro's *The Devil's Backbone* (2001), when children kill an adult to the indifferent sounds of a tango sung by Carlos Gardel.

Anempathy, which the Three Russians so often discussed in their manifestos under the name of counterpoint, has been the object of so much esteem in film history and theory because of its visibility. In my opinion anempathy often gets overvalued, compared to finely modulated *empathetic* effects. In other words, a moving scene that sensitively elicits emotion through an empathetic musical cue (e.g., Bernard Herrmann's music in somber or romantic passages in *North by Northwest*) tends to be less widely appreciated than a scene that artlessly applies the anempathetic effect (e.g., the scene of the murder of Régis to the sound of a player piano in *Pépé le Moko*, not the best part of Duvivier's film). This aesthetic that privileges ostentation sometimes leads to the overvaluation of modernist directors such as Godard, whose films often foreground crudely produced effects.

2. *The acousmatization of the unshowable.* A character we see onscreen is going to be killed or commit suicide. At the moment the shot rings out, the editing takes us to an adjoining room or outside, and the sound alone tells us what has happened. Examples include the murder of Tom Powell (James Cagney) in *The Public Enemy* (1931), the suicide of Monsieur Edmond (Louis Jouvet) in *Hôtel du Nord* (1938), and the suicide of Alonzo Emmerich (Louis Calhern) in *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950).

3. *The symbolic use of sounds* has remained rather limited and is not often recognized as such. In *Love Me Tonight*, when Princess Jeanette (Jeanette MacDonald) and her parents learn that Maurice Courtelin (Maurice Chevalier) is not a baron but a mere commoner ("The Baron is a tailor!"), one of the women knocks a vase off a mantel. In synch with the breaking vase we hear a noise that resembles a clap of thunder. The idea is clear: the revelation hits them, and they're "thunderstruck." But often when the film is shown today, spectators do not pay particular heed to this detail: perhaps because we are used to hearing all sorts of noises accompanying images of falling objects, and why couldn't this one be another naturalistic sound effect as conceived in 1930? So we often find filmmakers pushing this effect to burlesque extremes to make sure it gets noticed, and of course then it loses all subtlety.

Throughout *Elevator to the Gallows* one hears rumbling thunder that announces an approaching storm, and because it recurs, the viewer watching the film in its entirety can identify it as thunder each time it returns. However, if in a classroom or at a conference I show only the famous sequence where Florence (Jeanne Moreau) is walking in the street outside the café where she has asked for news of Julien (Maurice Ronet), people can rarely identify the sound of thunder heard in the transition from inside the bar to

outside because of the absence of any signs within the scene that indicate stormy weather. Many hear a "big noise" of some kind, and some occasionally wonder aloud what its cause might be. At the same time, these viewers lacking the larger narrative context easily perceive that the noise serves to close the sequence where Moreau's character is still looking for her lover and to open up the one where, accompanied by the trumpet of Miles Davis, she wanders aimlessly around Paris. In other words, they identify the sound's function as punctuation, even while its cause (thunder) is not understood.

If one shows the whole film, on the other hand, people easily recognize the thunder sound, but its symbolic or metaphorical value (Florence's realization that she is alone hits her like a clap of thunder) will typically be misunderstood. For director Louis Malle the sound was overdetermined, *both* realist and metaphorical.

These two examples demonstrate the complexity of the problem: a sound does not necessarily resemble what it is meant to represent, since context (visual, dramatic, etc.) counts for a lot in identifying it. It can have numerous variants, and, in fact, the distinction between realist sounds and nonrealist ones is often a matter of degree.

4. *Subjective sound.* In the history of sound film we can find a large number of scattered experiments with subjective sound. The ones we remember most clearly are often the most caricatural, such as the symbolization of deafness: a blind beggar in *M* covers his ears with his hands and for an instant we don't hear the out-of-tune street organ that bothers him. In Abel Gance's *Un grand amour de Beethoven* (1936) the composer can no longer hear the village fiddler, and to make us understand this, Gance dials down the sound as Beethoven approaches the musician. An entire book could be written about such cases, and I will return to them in a later chapter devoted to the ear. Here, too, the use of "subjective sound" is often poorly identified as such (although its effects are felt), or else it is correctly identified in cases far from subtle.

5. *The rhetoric of revealing the workings* and the technique of foregrounding conventions are also sometimes employed, either in the mode of the gag or parody or in a poetic manner. The films of Bertrand Blier, Jerry Lewis, Woody Allen, Mel Brooks, the Monty Python films, parodies by Zucker and Abrahams (*Top Secret!* [1984]), and the work of Godard contain many examples of characters who take notice of nondiegetic music (which, of course, they are not supposed to be hearing), indicate their awareness of sound-effects conventions, and otherwise demonstrate that what is onscreen is not necessarily

the source of the sounds being heard. The effect can be poetically moving sometimes, as for example when in *Stage Fright* the heroine's father accompanies and punctuates with his accordion the argument he is having with his daughter. Another example: in *Cléo from 5 to 7* Bob (Michel Legrand) impishly plays rippling arpeggios on the piano in synch with his friend's ingestion of a liqueur-soaked cherry, in a diegetic parody of "mickeymousing." The effect is light and playful and perfectly suited to these two films, but for the most part it rarely amounts to much and certainly does not constitute a language.

The basic problem is that audiovisual rhetoric is, when visible, sporadic and anecdotal (as it is not inscribed within a system, a continuum), or it is efficacious in achieving its effects only to the degree that it hides itself and works subtly (in which case it is no longer really a rhetoric).

6. *Signifying punctuation via sound.* An illustration of this absence of an established coded rhetoric occurs with techniques of signifying punctuation via sound. These effects are considered either vulgar or avant-garde, displaced or displacing when they're out in the open. And if the film does not display them as such, we feel the effect, but we do not consider the film to be aesthetically superior for their use, nor do we perceive them as some kind of refinement of film language.

Take as an example the first appearance of Lisa (Grace Kelly) in *Rear Window* as she moves about displaying her haute couture gown before the eyes of Jeff (James Stewart), her photographer-lover. While pretending to be meeting for the first time the man whom she has just kissed (he plays along by asking "Who are you?"), she declaims her full name as she moves about the room turning on lights: "Lisa" (she lights the first lamp), "Carol" (then a second), "Fremont" (a third). If we listen closely, we hear, after each name and lamp-lighting, three discreet honks of car horns from the street traffic outside. These honks, or tonal sounds, function like musical notes and represent the equivalent of punctuation in an opera score;[11] but they have been edited so as to seem accidental and natural. This example eloquently illustrates the punctuative role (not merely the narrative function) of sound and a certain aesthetic of what might be called "intentional fortuity." The car-horn sound effect, which for some mysterious reason is not heard in either the French or Italian versions of the film, is very rarely noted by critics, film fans, or film theorists and could not be said to constitute a rhetorical device. It takes close observation to become aware of it.

In Josef von Sternberg's *Jet Pilot* (1957), the same effect is highlighted to the point of comedy. The Russian pilot played by Janet Leigh has been captured over Alaska and is brought before an American officer played by John Wayne

who orders her to take off her uniform. Every time she removes a piece of her clothing—onscreen or off—we hear the engine noise of a jet plane passing overhead. (The scene takes place on a military base.) The audience immediately deciphers the coded message: it is as if the woman were being whistled at admiringly by the passing planes or as if by undressing, she and her body are being associated with "bombs" and "bombshells," or as if the noise is figuring the explosive effect her striptease has on John Wayne. Of course, it isn't necessary to choose between these readings. Here, the punctuation effect is such a whopper that it produces something both rhetorically readable and funny.

The absence of a clear rhetoric for sound is also linked to the absence of any symbolic mediator of our hearing, something that would function as the "symbolic microphone" allowing us to participate in the effects and at the same time keep our distance from them, a double position readily occupied by the "symbolic camera."[12]

This absence tends to privilege an audiovisual model that functions according to the principle of hidden influence, of the *éminence grise*: sound that influences the image even as it erases its fingerprints. The effect of added value works this way, for instance—and no one has denied its operation since I first pointed it out—but every time I explain it, it is often felt to be a failure or shortcoming of sound, something aesthetically suspect and perfectly conventional at the same time.

A TRIPLY SUSPECT ART

I came up with the term *added value* to designate the sensory, informative, semantic, narrative, structural, or expressive value that a sound heard in a scene leads us to project onto the image, creating the impression that we *see* in the image what we are in fact *audio-viewing*. This very common phenomenon is most often unconscious for spectators who experience it. To become aware of it and understand how it works, we must deconstruct the audiovisual mix, ob-

serve separately the sound and the image of a given sequence. Only then do you notice that through various means sound ceaselessly influences what you see.

For example, the sound of a rattling, panting motor makes us "see" a tank on the verge of breaking down, whereas to the eye alone the same tank is rolling along smoothly (*The Silence*). Or consider the crowd noise heard while we see a street corner: the sound makes us consider this space, populated by only a dozen extras, as part of an overcrowded metropolis (*Blade Runner*).

Added value is partly bilateral (the image also influences the way we perceive sound), but owing to the spectator's conscious fixation on the screen and the visible, it is definitively onto the *image* that the results of these influences of the opposite direction are often reprojected as a whole.

In a cultural situation of *visio-audition*, however, such as a concert, where we traditionally focus our conscious attention on what we hear, added value functions primarily in the other direction. The sight of an energetic gesture by a musician will make us hear a more powerful sound.

Let us not forget to include among the most radical effects of added value those instances where a printed caption makes us perceive an image in a certain way, using words to point out a given detail or to influence some aspect of what we see.

Just as pointing out and classifying the rhetorical figures of editing will not anesthetize the film buff to their effects, neither will the act of highlighting the workings of added value disillusion viewers. On the contrary, this critical

gesture fosters a deeper understanding and lays the groundwork for real audiovisual analysis.

Though we can speak of a code of editing (one that assigns precise meanings to given types of visual edits), we still need to be cautious about the idea of *a code of added-value effects*. A code exists for only some of these effects. This limited code is well known to sound effects specialists, sound engineers, and certain directors. But added value, when it is noticed (and, again, viewers generally don't consciously notice it), retains a stigma that clings to all such effects.

This is how it happens that, even though it was supposed to be a clear and honest art, sound film came to be seen—on account of this idea of the effect as *trick* and added value as *manipulation*—as an art with an indirect, conniving impulse. A fair amount of film theory and criticism continues to view sound film, for the most part, as a triply suspect art:

- suspected of insidiously manipulating the spectator's perception, particularly through its incorporation of music (Jacques Drillon, who considers film music a "con," is representative of this position);[13]
- suspected of hijacking the image and giving it a different meaning than it would have on its own. This suspicion is justified; however, to demand that the image not contaminate the sound and vice versa is asking for the impossible. One might as well make films with no sound at all—and some have indeed tried this;
- suspected of "covering over," or even "replacing," a hidden natural sound. This is the notion of film as palimpsestic art, which I have discussed in chapter 10.

And all this suspicion arises because the audiovisual relation is based on simultaneity. When there is simultaneity between sounds and images, they blend with each other, and it becomes much more difficult to perceive them separately—in fact, even impossible. The name I have given to this phenomenon is *synchresis*.

SIMULTANEITY AND EDITING

Synchresis is a universal, psychophysiological phenomenon, and it operates as spontaneously as any reflex. It results from the makeup of our nervous system and not from any cultural conditioning. It consists of perceiving as a single integrated phenomenon, manifesting both visual and acoustic components, the concomitance of a given auditory event and a visual event on condition, both necessary and sufficient, that these two events occur simultaneously. Because this phenomenon is uncontrollable, it leads us instantly to establish a relationship of close interdependence and ascribe to a single common source

sounds and images that may be in their essence very different, originate from very different sources, and have little in common in reality. Film makes abundant use of this effect, especially in postsynchronization and the production of sound effects. For example, synchresis makes us believe that sounds that hardly resemble footsteps, when synchronized with a shot of a person walking, are those footsteps. It also enables the dubbing in of voices that are not those of the actors seen onscreen.

Synchresis is also what allows filmmakers to play with effects of contradiction and displacement (the mismatch of a voice and a body, sexual reversal, one sound heard in the place of another—all found in Alain Robbe-Grillet's films), for without it the solidarity between the "audio" and the "visual" would totally break down.

Synchresis happens in daily life, too, either through logic or chance. Of course we experience it ordinarily when what we hear comes from what we are seeing or doing at the same time, but there are also chance moments when the sound heard comes from elsewhere (someone knocks over an object out of sight) and the noise occurs at the precise moment to coincide with what we're seeing or doing. That instant breeds synchresis, whose impact arises from a sort of sensory doubling.

Quite like the perception of continuous movement based on cinema's twenty-four images per second, synchresis is an ideologically neutral and statistically universal fact. It implies no servitude of sound to image.

Some have spoken of *vertical* (simultaneous) *montage* in connection with the sound-image combination of synchresis. But the effect is not the same. Picture editing allows us to see each image separately *in succession*, while also reading what unites them. The *simultaneity* that governs the audiovisual relation, on the other hand, creates a mixed, contaminated perception that does not allow for easy apprehension of each element separately.

Let me put this another way: vertical montage surely exists, but it functions like clockwork, every single time, better than anyone could have imagined. But since it works in simultaneity, we don't notice it. The "at the same time" of the vertical sound-image relation creates conditions of perception and comprehension entirely different from the "one after the other" of horizontal visual montage.

Let us consider a well-known film like *Le Jour se lève*. The odd, dreamlike atmosphere of Carné's classic derives in large part from the actors' smooth diction and voices held in check, especially Jean Gabin's. Few today take notice of this vocal restraint, even though Carné explicitly formulated and directed it this way and the actors consciously subdued their voices. Such vocal restraint permeates the whole film, and because of the process of

projection I have called added value, it leads the spectator to view the images entirely differently. The images themselves are what appear to be generating the film's particular atmosphere.

It often happens that the disclosure of this process is perceived not as an integral aspect of understanding an art but as the revelation of some underhanded trick.

To draw a comparison with music, we could say that the relationship of sound to image often works similarly to the case of harmonized melody. The nonmusician might believe she or he is moved by the melody itself—whether it's the Beatles' "Yesterday," a Thelonious Monk theme, or the last of Richard Strauss's "Four Last Songs"—when in fact what affects the listener is the combination of harmony and melody, a combination in which each note acquires its value by virtue of the underlying harmonic logic. One need not be an expert in harmonic theory to be affected by harmony. In the cinema we can thus say that the image often functions like melody, and sound functions like harmony. They are inseparable, but obviously it is the "melody" of the image that has the lead role, that "carries" the overall effect, and that is what we consciously remember.

In his study of song, Boris Vian, too, remarks that when you whistle a melody or have it going through your head, you might think that only the melody line is involved, but in fact you are "hearing" the chords too.[14] In the same way, when you recall a shot from a movie—the expression on an actor's face, for example—you are also implicitly remembering the sound or the music that went with it.

We can certainly choose to dislike melody with accompaniment or to consider it decadent. The Canadian pianist Glenn Gould preferred the contrapuntal music of Bach, which obliges the listener to follow distinct melodic lines, over the accompanied-melody music of Mozart's sonatas, characterized by vertical agglutination and the apparent submission of harmony to

melody. What does it matter? Submission, power . . . each of us will choose the metaphor that pleases us. We should ask, though, at least of those who reproach film sound for serving the image, or in any case for giving the latter meaning through added value, if they are equally put off when listening to a song or a Schubert *Lied* by the fact that harmony submits to melody.

As I see it, the greatest films are always, at some level, metaphors for these questions of emergence and power.

The sound film is a paradoxical art: it's believed possible to separate out intellectually, in the abstract, what we see from what we hear—even though we have no way of knowing what we would actually understand and feel if we experienced these channels as separate entities.

In experiencing a film, we sometimes mentally single out the music and say that without it, or with a different score, the film would have been better. But how can we be sure we're not throwing out the baby with the bathwater in such speculations?

The existence of multiple versions of a film dubbed into different languages, and the possibility of hearing a film's music in another context (whether it is "borrowed" preexisting music or original music for the film released on CD)—both reinforce the idea that one can separate the sound from the film and mentally improve the film, usually by speculating about a better choice of music.

In fact, just as it is very difficult, once you have seen an entire film at the movie theater, to look at one of its shots in isolation without thinking about the shot's context (i.e., as though you were seeing it for the first time), so, too, it is not at all easy in subsequent viewings to erase from your memory the sounds you originally heard (even if you turn off the actual sound), most of which projected their indelible meaning on what you saw via the process of added value. *Indelible* is indeed the word . . . like a stain.

1. Chion's title alludes to the French fairy-tale tradition, notably Perrault, in whose tales one can find fairies (good or bad) making predictions beside a baby's cradle to tell its fate.—Trans.

2. English translation by Jay Leyda, "Appendix A: A Statement," in S.M. Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 258.

3. V.I. Pudovkin, "Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film" [1929], trans. Marie Seton and Ivor Montagu, repr. in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 86–91, 87. This is exactly what happens in *Sunrise*. The Woman from the City evokes the city's charms when she meets the Man in the marshes. The city is shown first as a superimposition, and subsequently in a "montage" of shots.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 88.

6. Chion is insisting here, as he does throughout, on the difference between a *code* and *effects* (see below). His point is that the sound film failed not to explore and develop sound-image relationships—on the contrary, it did so from the beginning—but rather to create with them a coded language understood as such.—Trans.

7. See the roundtable discussion with Thierry Millet and Claude Bailblé published as "La Musique de film," in *Entrelacs* (Toulouse: Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, January 1998), 9–10). The oddest thing is that Fano himself imagines the possibility of the very objection I am making, while still sticking to his argument.

8. Lettrist or letterist poetry is an avant-garde form that directly combines letters and other visual or spoken symbols, without using existing words. "Lettrism," as a movement in poetry, film, and painting, arose in France and spread to Sweden; it was cofounded in the mid-1940s by the Romanian Isidore Isou and Gabriel Pomerand.—Trans.

9. See René Clair, "A Visit to the Monster," in *Cinema Yesterday and Today*, trans. Stanley Appelbaum, ed. R.C. Dale (New York: Dover, 1972), 145. Originally published as *Cinéma d'hier, cinéma d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).

10. For *anempathetic effect* see *anempathy* in glossary and chapter 24.

11. See *pivot dimension* in glossary.

12. See chapter 18.

13. See Jacques Drillon, "Contre la musique de film," in "Musiques au cinéma," special issue, *Cahiers du cinéma*, hors-série (1995).

14. Boris Vian, *En avant la zizique . . . et par ici les gros sous* (Paris: Livre de poche, 1997).

CHAPTER 13

The Separation

SOUND FILM COMPLETED THE SEPARATION OF TECHNICAL ACT FROM AESTHETIC MEANING

SOUND FILM IS PROBLEMATIC in that it defines itself differently from silent film with respect to technology: it severed the connection between technical causes and expressive effects and between the recording medium and the work. Contrary to what Noël Burch imagined in his book *Theory of Film Practice* about the idea of creating effects of meaning through the dialectical opposition of different practices (direct sound vs. postsynchronized sound, for example), there is no link in a sound film between the filmmaking process and the finished product. One can create the impression of direct sound in a postsynchronized film (for example, in Patrice Chéreau's 1983 film *L'Homme blessé*); conversely, a film can seem postsynchronized (especially since the advent of microtransmitters) when in fact it has been recorded with direct sound.

Of two famous movies set during the Vietnam War, *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978) and *Apocalypse Now*, one was filmed with direct sound and the other postsynchronized. Which is which? To the eye and ear it is impossible to tell the difference, unless we have the expertise of a specialist. We know the answer only from documents, such as accounts by the directors and crew: direct sound in Cimino, postsynchronization in Coppola.

Furthermore, the truth of the filmed settings and the truth of the recorded sound often become confused.

Realism is the word often associated with the coming of synch sound to film. But the gain in the impression of reality that voices and sound effects seemed to give became immediately suspect, because rapid advances in dubbing, sound effects, and mixing processes made it possible to construct so-called diegetic sound a posteriori, thus problematizing—and provoking lively debate about—direct sound, the real sound taken on the set.[1] Because of the press, it did not take the world long to know all about the practice of dubbing—not just translating dialogue from one language to another but also in scenes with singing where one star "borrows" the voice of another or postsynchs his or her own.

In the January 9, 1930, issue of the magazine *Mon ciné*, readers learned that for an American film the British-German actor Conrad Veidt did some long-distance dubbing from Berlin. Through a combination of telephone and radio, he was able to provide dialogue lines that were missing; these were recorded and postsynchronized in Los Angeles. The April 3, 1930, issue of the same journal comments: "It is said, and we know, that while certain actors in talking films appear to have excellent voices, in fact it is a different, unseen person whom we actually hear."

Thus while highlighting a "realism effect," synchronized sound also raises doubts about the real or artificial origin of that effect. This is most striking with the sound cartoon, which not only constitutes a carnival of synchronization, as I have noted, but also makes a spectacle of synch sound as trick effect, as deception.

The history of Italian neorealism offers another precise and ironic illustration of the paradoxical nature of direct sound. Neorealist film could only develop thanks to sound that was not "real"—it was in fact postsynchronized. Postsynchronization made it possible to shoot outdoors in Rome (*Rome, Open City* [1945]) or in a Berlin in ruins (*Germany Year Zero* [1947]) and to use amateur actors recruited in the street, as well as foreign actors. Those who reflexively defend direct sound (and I don't mean in the work of directors who genuinely take the measure of its commercial and aesthetic means and ends, such as Straub-Huillet, Rohmer, and Rivette) tend to forget that this practice that they so admire in the rigorous example of Renoir was easy to do in the 1940s because most films were shot either in studios or in exterior locations not yet disturbed by modern noise pollution. Conversely, the use of real settings (both exterior and interior) that was popularized by the New Wave made a clean direct sound difficult to achieve and often meant postsynchronization, such as in *Breathless*, *The 400 Blows*, and *Shoot the Piano Player*. For various reasons ranging from the economic and cultural to the political and aesthetic (a taste for "real" settings), most films produced in the world today continue to be postsynchronized.

THE RECORDING MEDIUM IS NO LONGER THE WORK

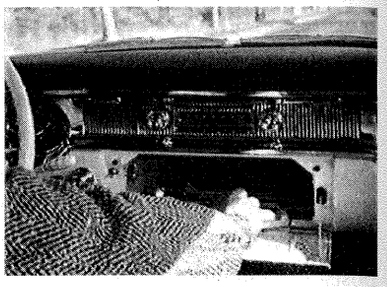
With the coming of sound, *the recording medium was no longer the same as the work*. In silent film the ribbon of celluloid *is* the film. In the sound film the audio channel to the side of the image is not the sound but a code to reproduce it. In the silents one knew where the "film" was: it was on the screen, but it was not in the intertitles inserted between shots, nor was it in the music played during the screening, though these were both necessary supplements. In the sound film, the film is more or less everywhere, but we can't say exactly where, between the sounds and the images. Despite many writers' efforts to identify the sound film solely with the image (to the point of Deleuze calling it "*image-temps*" and "*image-mouvement*," coining the strange term *audiovisual images*, and referring to sound as "a fourth dimension of the visual image"),[2] the sound film does not have a precise and fixed relationship to the image.

Moreover, sound film finalized the divorce between the technical process of editing, on one hand, and the formal and expressive articulation of film, on the other.

Anytime one cuts and then joins visual pieces together, this process will be perceived as such on the screen. It doesn't even need to be intentional. Stopping the camera during a take, making a real cut with scissors or a virtual cut through digital means—all these will mechanically produce separate shots. This is of considerable importance, since the shot's objective "neutral standard" depends neither on the presumed intentions of the filmmakers (*intentio autoris*) nor on the individual filmgoer's perception.

Now, think about cutting and assembling sounds, which yields no such result ipso facto. The editing of sounds does not produce "sound shots" by analogy with the image. Sounds can be spliced together and seem as though they were produced in temporal continuity. There's a gulf that cannot be crossed between how something was done and what is perceived.

Godard cuts into his sounds—but everyone else does, too, so that is not what endows his films with the sense that the sound is especially "worked on."



The reason is rather that he cuts up linguistic syntax, the sequencing of sounds, the logical continuity of musical phrasing. To do so, he has taken into account the level proper to each syntactic chain (the linguistic level for speech, the musical level for music) and asserted difference. The editing of images involves cutting the celluloid, or cutting into video—in any case into the material support more than the syntax.

A notorious cut early in Godard's work occurs on a fragment of a song Brassens wrote to an Aragon poem, *"Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux"* ("There's no happy love") at the beginning of *Breathless*. The pretext of a car radio (Belmondo is fiddling with the dial as he drives a stolen car) allows the last syllable of this line, *"-reux,"* to be cut off. This is a good example of a cut that is noticed because phrasing is interrupted, not because the magnetic or optical track of the film was cut.

THE GAP BETWEEN TECHNIQUE AND OUTCOME: THE CASE OF EDITING

In everyday listening, when we hear sounds, we mentally organize their units according to the particular mode of listening we habitually adopt for each category. If they're sounds of language, we break them down into phonemes, words, or phrases according to linguistic criteria. We also categorize and segment based on what we hear of the sound's source or cause (real, presumed, or imaginary)—we isolate what we hear both *vertically* (we hear several things at once) and *horizontally* (over time), as we draw on a memory bank of figurative sounds that we've built up from birth and are forever adding to and modifying.

The unit of editing for images is the shot, a visual unit created by cinema that is specific to it. The editing of sounds, for its part, did not give rise to a specific cinematic unit; so when we try to break down a film's soundtrack into its composite elements, all we can do is fall back on the same units that we make use of in everyday experience and that are subject to the categories of listening that are not specific to films: verbal exchanges, sentences, words, syllables, musical phrases, instrumental colors, sound events.

The definition of the unit that is the visual shot is quite ambiguous, as it includes both spatial and temporal dimensions: the shot is both what is within the frame and what forms a piece of temporal continuity between two splices. It could be contested as a unit of analysis, a conceptual unit, or even a perceptual one; but even so, it permits us to impose on the filmic continuum a *grid* that is immediately recognizable and accepted by all and whose gridlines form practical coordinates for stating, observing, and conceiving something that at the same time can challenge it as a descriptive instrument.

For example, it was based on the idea of the shot, focusing on its limits, that Tarkovsky could propose another, less formally strict, unit that he called a "cinematic figure."[3]

Nothing of the kind is possible with sound, for very simple reasons. Although in a film we see only one image at a time (with occasional exceptions), most often we hear several layers of sound simultaneously, which call on different types of attention and are perceived in different "units" according to their status as language, music, or sound effects.

While with images it is difficult to achieve an invisible splice (that is, to join two shots filmed at different times in such a way that their seam is invisible), splicing two sounds recorded at different times in such a way that they follow one another naturally with no audible seam between them is easy and, in fact, commonly done. (This occurs all the time on the radio when an interview gets edited down.) In addition, the problem of perceiving the editing of film sounds is more complicated than for the editing of images since, unlike with images, the *fabrication unit* (the fragment of magnetic tape or virtual digital medium) does not automatically constitute a *perceptual unit* in itself.

Further, picture editing is based on a basic logical linkage for which there exists no equivalent for sound. The linkage *looking/thing looked at*, or the linkage *detail/general view*, for example, embodies relations between the perceiving subject and the thing perceived, a containing whole and a contained part, agent and object. The fact that these relations can become vehicles for ideas is what allowed extreme attempts at intellectual editing but also the simple reverse shot—the abstract convention by which we understand that what we see onscreen is what a character shown in the preceding shot is looking at. The relations between two sounds edited together (in succession or superimposed), however, are not amenable to this type of abstraction; we cannot deduce a relation of the sort that unites images joined through editing.

THE NEED TO KNOW TECHNICAL HISTORY

We must know technological history in order to understand aesthetic history as Rick Altman does in his well-researched history of sound in American film. To understand a given film, it is highly useful to know what the state of technology was in its historical moment.

For example, in an essay on speech in the cinema, Christophe Pons writes, "Renoir's *Grand Illusion* (1937) is no doubt one of the first films to show actors speaking among themselves and not for the audience."[4] Reading this, we might wish to blink: wasn't there a series of French films at the beginning of sound (some of them discussed above) that sought the same effect? But in fact they do sound different, and even if Michel Simon in *La Chienne* or *L'Atalante* is supposed to be mumbling to himself, he projects his voice toward the microphone in a different way because recording techniques, and ways in which the actor must take them into account, evolved considerably during the 1930s. A mere four years after *L'Atalante*, at the time of *Grand Illusion*, film sound technology and practices allowed for more natural and spontaneous diction; thus Pierre Fresnay, Jean Gabin, Carette, and Dalio appear to be speaking among themselves much more convincingly than the actors in the first talking films.

With a better awareness of the technical history of sound, Christophe Pons would have been able to write instead that the actors in *Grand Illusion* appear less than before to be "speaking for the microphone" (rather than for the audience)—a phenomenon that points out a critical "disappearing act" regarding the microphone, something I will discuss further.

THERE IS NO SOUNDTRACK

There exists another basic difference between the visual shot and what might be considered its audio equivalent: the visual shot is a *container,* a container of time and space with definite spatial and temporal borders, whereas with sound it is just the opposite.[5] Sound is first of all *content* or "containable," with no actual frame. What is designated by the word *image* in cinema is not the contained but the container: the frame.[6] And within this frame the flow of images is punctuated by breaks that allow us to segment the film into "shots."

The frame's preexistence with respect to the image is specific to film: it does not adapt its format to what is shown. Because the frame preexists the image, we can speak of the image being full or empty, spare or concentrated on one point. We can't say the same regarding sounds. Whereas the frame orients and imposes hierarchy on images and results in *the image* (in the singular), the image

that the frame has totalized and structured (allowing one to speak of an element within this image as being, for example, "in the lower right side" or "center" of the screen), a film's *sound* is not framed. Independent of the image, the sound feels like a formless audio layer.

This absence of a frame for sounds inevitably creates a dissymmetry between what we see and what we hear. But it is a common mistake to interpret this dissymmetry as a hierarchy, and we should not fall into this habit of thinking.

Imagine an aquarium made of glass so perfect and pure that you can see its borders only by filling it with colored water. The *shot* is this aquarium, a container of time and space. However, what some try to theorize as the soundtrack has no edges and therefore no coherent shape. The sound of a film is not contained in any preexisting soundtrack. When at a given moment in a film we hear one or two simultaneous sounds, we could just as well hear ten or fifteen, because there is no auditory container, or more precisely, no frame for the sounds.

However, such a frame could be posited: let us call it the *sound setting.* This sound setting would be a certain consistency of the sounds heard, giving the impression that they all originate in the same given scenic space. Such is the case in Straub and Huillet's *Othon* (1969)—not because of the fact that direct sound is used but because of the particular way it is used. But sound film, primarily owing to its privileging of intelligible speech, has tended to limit the use of a consistent sound perspective; since dialogue intelligibility is paramount, classical sound film tries not to have the spectators ask questions about the distance between sound sources and their ear. Thus, sound film's relativizing of the sound setting with its unified audio perspective has as its main point to avoid disrupting the visual setting. Today a kind of polyphonic cinema does this, not by constructing a homogeneous audio milieu for all the sounds but by indeed multiplying, routinely having heterogeneous sound settings. You can hear this heterogeneity in a film such as *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002); sounds occupy several sound settings simultaneously, just as different acts occupy several rings of a circus without sharing in a single common performing space.

The absence of an auditory frame is one of the many reasons why *there is no soundtrack*—that is, no place where sounds gather and make a unified front.

This notion of the soundtrack has in many theoretical writings long served to define the auditory dimension of film as a special territory, subject to its own laws and thus able to claim relative or absolute "autonomy." This is certainly how Jacques Aumont considered the matter in 1983 in one of the clearest

expositions available, when he stated that we should move toward a cinema where sound would be treated as "an autonomous expressive element of the film, capable of entering into various types of combinations with the image," in contrast to the classical conception whereby "film sound . . . works toward reinforcing and increasing the impression of realism" and is used "as a simple additive to the idea of a scenic space that is offered by the visual elements." Aumont continued, "Thus all the work of classical cinema and its contemporary by-products has aimed to *spatialize sound elements*, by offering them points of correspondence in the image, and therefore assure a bi-univocal bonding between image and sound, what we might call 'redundant,'" with this spatialization being "in step with its diegeticization"; that is, in the service of the film's narration.[7]

In fact the opposite is closer to the truth. A large portion (20 to 30 percent) of the sounds in a classical film are nondiegetic (voice-overs and scoring), while only a very small number of the images even in art films are nondiegetic. Instead of saying that film sound is subservient to the image (the classical formulation) or reversing the equation, couldn't we just say that sounds and images both devote themselves to the constitution of narrative cinematic space-time?

Let me emphasize that a sound that is made diegetic—that is, inscribed within the film's action, justified, made visual—possesses, no less than other sounds, its auditory, formal, rhythmic, or musical qualities, just as the filmic image, even while "representing" something, can function aesthetically through texture, lighting, and composition. It is therefore a false opposition that gets going when critics assume that sound only begins to be used for its formal qualities once it is "detached" from the image.

Although there is no soundtrack, there is, technically speaking, something I prefer to call, so as to avoid confusion, the *sound channel*. By this I mean that in parallel with the flow of images, and synchronized with them, is a flow of recorded sounds of diverse origins and natures, grouped together onto a real or virtual recording medium.

The sound channel is generally made up of a hodgepodge of different elements (sounds recorded during shooting, voices recorded in the studio, original sound effects and others from effects libraries, original or preexisting music, all from a variety of sources) that result from the efforts of diverse technicians, artists, and specialists. The sound elements that all end up layered together after the mixing were not chosen or composed in relation to each other (and why would they be?) but in relation to the picture editing and to the diegesis. So once the film is being projected, the sound channel sees all of its elements reorient themselves in relation to the image, each

acting alone. There is not, to play on the word *track*, any collective train of sounds.

To create a soundtrack, some might believe the image would have to reject all sounds completely from its space. This is the case, or at least the intention, of Marguerite Duras's *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* (1976), in which nothing on the screen—the image visits abandoned places—gives any visible form or substance at all to the voices, music, and noises that come from the loudspeakers. I'm not certain even here whether the "soundtrack" shouldn't be perceived on various independent levels, each one holding a relationship (rhythmic, spatial, dramatic, formal) with the image that is stronger than the relation that the various coexisting sounds have with each other.

This would indeed be the minimum requirement of a true soundtrack if there were such a thing, namely that the relations among the sounds themselves be at least as salient as the relations each sound has with the visual field. Such is rarely the case, even in *Son nom de Venise*, where at every moment a relation between a camera movement and a musical phrase is produced, thus "dividing" the supposed soundtrack.

In another work generally considered radical, Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993), the screen is filled with nothing but blue, an unchanging blue, while we hear the director's monologue, interspersed with sounds and music. But here the screen continues to function as an image (that of a blue frame that we observe), and sounds are positioned variously in relation to it. We can imagine, for example, that the invisible voice of the author sees what we see, since it's the voice of a character, while the other sounds might be participating in a specific physical universe in common with this blue screen. In other words, a relation of figure and ground continues to prevail and to divide the sound.

There are many consequences of this negative claim I have been making that "there is no soundtrack." First, it necessarily explodes any pretense of

establishing an overall theory of film as composed of two complementary elements, image and sound, and instead leads us to an incomplete and fluctuating model of cinema that does not allow for simply transposing the technical model (one channel for images and one channel for sounds, distinct yet parallel) and where a radical break is produced between the technical level and the levels of perception, discourse, effects, and theory.

Another consequence is a renewed focus on the importance of "unheard sounds" that come from the image, are suggested by it, but which seem masked or effaced by those sounds we do hear: in other words, the palimpsestic effect.

THE NONRESISTANCE OF IMAGES TO SOUNDS

Much art video and installation work, as well as the so-called experimental cinema of Carmelo Bene, Werner Schroeter, and Jonas Mekas, has tried out the idea of "free superimpositions," with the intention of sometimes creating tension or reaction—the effect that dissonance produces in classical music. But an unexpected problem arises: audiovisual dissonance is extremely rare, since images put up no resistance to sounds. If the image had a resistance to being layered with nonsynchronous sounds not anchored spatially or diegetically in the image, this resistance, analogous to harmonic dissonance, would communicate to us something powerful in its very violence. The real problem is that everything "works"; there never is any resistance, only a sort of laissez-faire abandonment of sounds and images to this passive superimposing that generates effects erratically, zinging us here and there with momentary pleasures.

Numerous silent-movie concert events presented in Paris during the last twenty years, especially in the auditorium at the Louvre, have supplied ample proof. Audiences have heard modern scores paired with silent films; the scores go to great length to achieve autonomy, and undoubtedly are autonomous—but each could be used with the other films just as well. Any combination works, and therefore no fusion occurs.

Why is this? No doubt in part because the random superimposition of sound and image is familiar to us in real life. What we see and what we hear are neither antagonistic nor blended. I am in a tranquil room, I am writing a book, and a CD player is emitting music that is foreign to what I am doing and to what I see; yet there's no collision, no problem. Or let us say I am looking out the window at an expanse of placid countryside while children behind me are merrily playing; I don't see what I'm hearing and I don't hear what I'm seeing, but it all coexists peacefully.

EFFECTS, NOT RHETORIC

By creating in 1990 the simple concept of *audio-vision* and situating it as an illusion, I crossed a barrier of sorts: now the point is no longer to talk about sound with relation to images but of something else. The title *Audio-vision* embodied a new theoretical position, namely understanding the cinema as an illusionistic whole.[8] In a way that was more direct and more clearly articulated than my earlier work on image and sound (including the first version of *Le Son au cinéma*, published in 1985), I focused on a notion that is rather discredited in contemporary film theory (except when associated with the name of Kuleshov!), namely the notion of *effects*.

Indeed, as I see it, the audiovisual relation is 90 percent a generalized Kuleshov effect, but it is a Kuleshov effect that is "vertical" (through the projection of one element onto another simultaneously) instead of "horizontal" (projection of the meaning or the effect of one element on another that precedes or follows it), such that it is much more immediate and perennially produces an illusion of redundancy.

What is the status of this effect? To name these effects, should we rely on terms as widely known—even if their theoretical definitions have been regularly thrown into question—as *shots* and *transitions*? Instead of these suspect effects, which seem to work via their illusionistic character that slyly hides the strings operating them, will we see the development of an outright rhetoric of the audiovisual relation? One could imagine such a thing, not simply because these effects have now clearly been identified and named, and this conscious cataloging has not made them lose any of their power, but also because the entire evolution of cinema is moving in this direction. I simply remain skeptical as to the liberation that some might claim will accompany ipso facto this sort of full disclosure and especially about the true subversive force of *the rhetoric of exceptions*.

Whatever the case, an *audiovisual language*, if there is one, cannot be envisaged or encoded like a visual language.

Take the canonical shot–reverse shot pattern in a dialogue scene, respecting the so-called 180-degree rule. It is of course because this figure has become so common, classical, banal, fixed, and easily recognized by everyone that the smallest departure from it takes on a fantastic power—as much power as at one time in the history of music certain slight differences in intervals were: a half tone in this or that direction and everything changes. I would say that there is no equivalent when it comes to audiovisual (or rather audio-visiogenic) effects, where we are dealing with continuous gradations. No norms are as precise.

OUTLINE OF A THEORY

Now we can recall the features proper to sound film:

1. *The natural, psychophysiological character of certain signifying assemblages*

The *cultural* edifice of sound film is constructed on *natural* foundations, such as the effect of synchresis, spatial magnetization, and the absence of an auditory frame for sounds.

2. *Signifying processes more influential than meanings*

In the audio-logo-visual ensemble, sounds and images reinforce, illuminate, and influence one another not only by dint of their meaning content but according to signifying processes in which arbitrary and mechanical criteria, as well as formal ones, often hold sway. These include temporal coincidence or noncoincidence, relations of parallelism or rhythmic opposition, the creation of *temporal vectorization* based on the convergence or divergence of their respective predictability (along the temporal axis), the reinforcement or complementarity of textures, and so on.

The figures one is able to identify are therefore not tied to any precise, circumscribed meaning, as we have seen in the example taken from *The Birds*.

3. *Audio-division and trans-sensoriality*

At the same time that they combine in "trans-sensory" dimensions,[9] sound and image prove to be irreducible to each other in their very confrontation; their encounter makes each point to what distinguishes it from the other. This is why the audiovisual relation, as film and related media seem to forge it, can only be unsatisfying and always suspected of arbitrariness, manipulation, and forced superimposition.

4. *The coefficient of misapprehension*

The almost automatic and instantaneous effect of audio-division occurs in such a way that it cannot be understood by the spectator, nor analyzed, nor made conscious, at the moment it occurs. The audio-spectator most often has the illusion of a redundancy that doesn't exist (for example, the sound seems to duplicate what the image already says). In the audiovisual situation, the audio-viewer really no more sees the images as they are than he or she hears the sounds as they are. This fact is revealed by the simple exercise of reseparating the sounds from the images in a given sequence and observing them separately.

5. *Absence of a clear boundary, in the language of audiovisual effects, between "art film" and "commercial film"*

Despite certain theoretical differences of opinion among them, a number of French film critics who have written on the same subject as I, such as Laurent Jullier, François Jost, Véronique Campan, Claude Bailblé, and Michel Fano, take as axiomatic the irreconcilable difference between conventional commercial cinema and a supposedly more creative, adventurous art cinema, and their writings assume that there exists a specific set of audiovisual traits common to this "unconventional" art cinema. But nothing seems to me especially distinctive about the deployment of audio-logo-visual figures in classical or Hollywood film versus their use in works that claim to be modern and/or experimental. Both types of cinema use the same figures, and any differences lie in individual films.

As I see it, this false dichotomy between classic and modern, commercial and art film has hobbled French sound scholarship, which conflates the study of cinematic language—a collective phenomenon—with auteur study. These writers would like to think that film language is under the control of the artist, who is free to recreate it from film to film. My method of studying sound by starting with films and only then moving to their makers (rather than beginning with the auteur) disrupts the more narrowly auteurist perspective of some studies. Since, as I have shown, a film's sound is constructed in a number of quite disparate stages (including the important role played by actors' voices), it is not an aspect of films that specially illustrates the omnipotence of the director.[10]

THE AUDIO-LOGO-VISUAL SYNCHRO-CINEMATOGRAPH

We end up with this admittedly long and awkward-sounding redefinition of sound film. The French term *cinéma parlant*, talking cinema, doesn't do justice to a medium in which sounds and music have such an essential role. The expression *cinéma sonore* (sound cinema) was indeed used in the early days of sound, but it was a term used to designate anti-talking films, which refused synchronous dialogue and generally stuck to musical accompaniment and occasional sound effects. This practice itself confirms, *a contrario*, the central place of voice and dialogue in the cinema—what I call its vococentrism, a quality that happens also to be a universal human characteristic. In any sound-filled situation involving a mixture of music, noise, and speaking voices, the audio-viewer's attention will always turn first toward the voice and set about trying to understand what it is saying.

But this voice occurs within a world of sounds, sensations, and noises.

1. This gain in the impression of reality was famously discussed by Jean-Louis Comolli, based on Bazin's ideas, in Comolli's series of essays "Technique and Ideology," published in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1971 and 1972 (see nos. 229–31 and 233–35).

2. See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: Image-Temps* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985), 305, 329.

3. Tarkovsky's 1989 collection of essays published in France translates this term as "cinematic image"; I find this ambiguous. See Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: The Great Russian Filmmaker Discusses His Art*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989); and Andreï Tarkovski, *Le Temps scellé: De l'Enfance d'Ivan au Sacrifice*, trans. Anne Kichilov and Charles H. de Brantes (Paris: Éditions de l'Étoile/Cahiers du cinéma, 1989).

4. Christophe Pons, "Nouvelles vagues de paroles," *Iris* 3, no. 1 (1985): 71–75, 73.

5. The French terms normally translated as *image-track* and *soundtrack* are *bande-images* and *bande-son*, literally the band or strip of images on celluloid and, by analogy, the band or strip of recorded sound. A "track" is a *piste*—a term normally used in sound recording but not for images. When Chion proposes (below) that we speak of a *piste sonore*, he is inventing a term to refer to the "frameless" sum of recorded sounds for a film, as distinct from a *bande-son*, which he characterizes as the illusory and erroneous notion of a delimited entity making the flow of sound analogous to the flow of images.

   Strictly speaking, *piste sonore* should translate as *soundtrack*. However, to avoid confusion (between *soundtrack* and *sound track*), *piste sonore* is translated in this section as *sound channel*, also a problematic choice but nevertheless clearer here.—Trans.

6. This was still partially the case, by analogy with photography, in the silent film: iris, images surrounded by masking, etc. The coming of sound witnessed the widespread institutionalization of the full-frame image, thus an image permanently structured by that frame. When Ophuls in *Lola Montès* (1955) and Cukor in *A Star Is Born* sought a means to avoid always filling the entire Scope screen that the format imposed, they ended up having to play tricks through their uses of setting and lighting.

7. Jacques Aumont, *Esthétique du film* (Paris: Nathan, 1983), 33.

8. Michel Chion, *Audio-vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman, foreword by Walter Murch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

9. For *trans-sensory perceptions* see glossary.

10. See the original French edition of this book for a section of this chapter, "French Critical Myths," which has been omitted here. In this section Chion argues points made about sound proposed in untranslated writings by Véronique Campan, Michel Fano, Marie-Claire Ropars, and Gilles Deleuze.—Trans.

CHAPTER 14

The Real and the Rendered

THE NOISE OF WEIGHT

IN HIS *NOTEBOOKS* Leonardo da Vinci evinced an amazement whose "naïveté" I treasure, since it raises an issue that normally goes unnoticed concerning auditory realism. He wrote, "If a man jumps up and down on his toes, his weight makes no noise." In the cinema, and not just in action movies, a human body that falls is supposed to make a noise, to make us feel its mass, to render the violence of the fall. Filmmakers therefore give noise to the body through sound effects. Therein resides the whole question of the real and the rendered.

Rendering means, among other things, that since there is transposing or channeling between senses, and since film provides only a summary sensory approximation of perceptions that are in reality much more complex and intertwined, it is not enough merely to film and sound-record an event if you want to convey the event's impact and even its very appearance. It is rare for perceptions in real life to be purely visual or purely auditory. A change in light is often accompanied by a change in temperature. Imagine yourself by the side of a road: a car zooms by. At that moment you have (1) the car in your field of vision; (2) its sound, which extends beyond your field of vision and is heard both before and after you see the car; (3) the vibration of the ground beneath your feet; (4) a rush of air across your skin. All of this forms a cluster of perceptions that constitutes the overall experience of the event. Cinema can try to reconstitute, to render this cluster in black and white, monocularly, and monaurally. But it can only do so by manipulating the simulacrum: for example, one might exaggerate the gradient of the audio crescendo and decrescendo, create stronger variation in the lighting, create a montage effect, and prepare the event with a contrasting segment of tranquility.

The rendered is naturally a product of the film's auditory and visual texture and articulation. But this doesn't mean that a sharper, higher-fidelity image, a more precise simulacrum, would necessarily deliver a better rendering. For example, an overly detailed film image can actually give the impression of less movement; it becomes more inert (hence, perhaps, the sluggishness of certain French action films of the 1970s, weakened by highly detailed settings and textures).

Is rendering a matter of pure convention or even rhetoric, or does it physically reproduce a direct effect? We might answer this by saying that the rendering is somewhere between a code and a simulacrum. And between code, rendering, and simulacrum there may be a certain continuity—one might slip from one into another without necessarily being aware of it.

Consider, for example, the elegant idea for the use of sound in *Double Messieurs* (Jean-François Stévenin, 1986). The film does not go with the sound that would most faithfully reproduce a supposed auditory reality and prefers to create sound that, while not ostensibly breaking with its realist function, gives the idea or feeling of the event. The most successful example is the sequence where the protagonists travel at night in an ambulance. For the sound of the engine, we hear strange noises made from all sorts of things. Far better than the "real" sounds, these render the magic of the vehicle's trip through the night.

It is not easy to pull off. Sounds have their archetypes and stereotypes, and it's easy to fall from one convention into another. The "bizarre" sounds in the ambulance sequence could easily tip over into the clichéd sounds of science fiction. Nor did the filmmakers seek to transform this scene into some interplanetary voyage. The strength of the sequence is precisely that it doesn't go in for a forced transfiguration of physical reality but rather, via sound, it slips into an intermediate, ambiguous space, half abstract and half concrete, half quotidian and half fantastic.

We can also observe from watching *Double Messieurs* that the thing filmed is not as well-suited to this slippage as the thing heard. The visible reality of the Grenoble setting, with its mountainous environment, even while subjected to bizarre framings and cobbled together with cheat cuts and bad edits, creating so many sutures on the verge of unraveling, still doesn't end up being significantly remodeled or transfigured; what we see mostly remains the modern-day reality of Grenoble. So what if the camera's tripod was mounted on the wall to film a given shot? The spectator's eye can rotate everything and mentally reestablish the normal conditions. Not so when it comes to sounds. On hearing a delayed, displaced, or distorted sound, the ear does not restore it to its initial "right-side-up" position but instead takes it as is, modeling clay

reshaped. It is sound's plasticity exploited in even very minor amounts that lends itself to fascinating effects of rendering.

We know that the rendering is obtained most often from something besides a high-fidelity recording of the real cause. The whole enterprise of sound effects in film, which inherited techniques from theater and radio, consists of hijacking some sounds to express others. This is done not just for practical reasons (try getting a herd of horses into a recording studio) but also to obtain a better rendering. The fact that the *visual* equivalent of sound effects (the recreation of life with bits of wood, cloth, or metal) is only possible through terribly expensive and complicated means (think of what it took to create E.T.'s face in a film) clearly underscores the different status of the auditory and the visual, and it reminds us that the ear in certain conditions is an organ that remains infinitely susceptible to illusion.

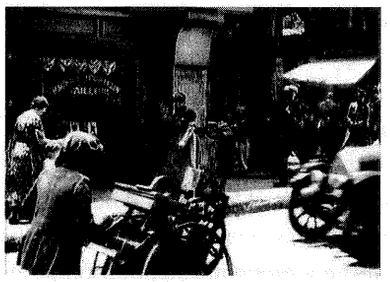
THE ART OF RENDERING WITH SOUND

The art of audio rendering is practiced each time a film uses sound effects. Films rarely use the real sound (less loud and defined) of a punch, gunshot, or slamming door but instead translate the physical, psychological, even metaphysical *impact* of the action on the sender or the receiver.

Adventure and fantasy films routinely accompany night scenes with the sounds of crickets, even when in reality there might not be any there at all. Even though this noise is false on the level of strict realism, it is true on the level of the *cinematic rendering of night*. At night we become aware of a host of microactivities in nature, twinklings and glistenings, motions and dynamics that we ignore by day. Through a cricket's solitary song a film can evoke in condensed form this ensemble of heightened perception that is not specifically auditory, while at the same time suggesting a certain feeling of space and terrain.

In urban films, especially, sounds may well not be translating any particular sensation but serving instead to express, through a design of audible points and lines that might include car horns, rumbles, and noises of subway doors, multiple combined rhythms that sonically constitute the life of a city.

Indeed, the city is a fascinating organism in terms of rhythm. The cliché that compares urban life to a symphony has been around for at least a hundred years. At the beginning of the twentieth century, before they were drowned out by the loud drone of automobiles, the cries of newspaper hawkers and other street merchants were still significant elements in the urban soundscape. Silent film attempted on many occasions to give a visual translation of the "city symphony," notably in Walter Ruttmann's famous *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927), while for its part, orchestral music by Gershwin, Bartók,



Stravinsky, and Ives pursued the same "urban symphony" idea in musical form.

What art was better equipped a priori than film to translate this symphony in the most literal way? Hence the classic sequence of the city awakening (e.g., Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*), which, with the coming of sound, we see again in Mamoulian's *Love Me Tonight*: the first cars out on the street, shutters being opened, housewives rhythmically beating carpets, and so on. If this experiment is less than totally convincing, too schematic and coming up short, it's because people were led to believe by the word itself that the "symphonic" feeling of the city is purely auditory. But it isn't. Our perception and our memory of the world do not make rigorous distinctions between the sensory channels through which they receive the impressions that get stored—or, to use the scientific term, *engrammed* (from the noun *engram*: "the trace left in the brain by an individual event").

This is why film, even when it only employs one audio channel and one visual channel, does not have to be limited to reproducing or imitating purely auditory or visual sensations; how sad if it were. A film's sounds can give us a vast array of luminous, spatial, thermal, and tactile sensations that extend far beyond realist reproduction. Thus, the noises of the city were not always rendered in film by sounds; and these noises themselves were already, in our real experience, more than just sounds.

All of this hardly corresponds with what is believed to be the spectator's desire: what does he or she supposedly want from sound if not realism? But to satisfy this desire, the spectator is ready to accept anything that *seems like* X. He or she will fall for every trick, accept every approximation, every expedient, with only one requirement (sometimes not even that) serving as a criterion of judgment. It is a stupid, arbitrary criterion but a stubborn one that has proven fundamental to human perception: synchronism.

Spectators, filmmakers, and theorists of the early sound cinema (1927–35) were more interested than we are today in the question of the synchronous and the asynchronous. What we now designate by the term *offscreen sound* (i.e., outside the space of the frame), they (for example Eisenstein in 1928) called "asynchronous sound," that is, at a temporal remove from what is onscreen or rather not subjugated to the rhythm of the image. *Asynchronous* was the term used for a simple sound that a character onscreen is hearing at the same time, whereas today we designate such a sound "offscreen." Later, the matter of synchronization was considered closed and was little studied as such. Film theory preferred to take interest in the question of "true sound" (direct sound versus dubbed sound), not true in terms of diegetic reality but in terms of the real conditions of filming. Yet experimental films and videos, as well as standard commercial films, have demonstrated that arbitrary assemblages of sounds synchronized with whatever images one wishes to pair them with completely create, through synchronism alone, cause-and-effect associations that may be incongruous but nevertheless "work" perceptually—just as in linguistics the arbitrary fusion of signifier and signified works.

Synchresis can thus override the perception of realism. Cinema has created codes of "truth"—in fact what *feels true*—that have nothing to do with what *is* true. Cinema prefers the symbol, the emblematic sound, over the sound of reality. The proof is the alarm or siren sound in city scenes.

EMBLEMATIC SOUND OF THE CITY

Since sound came to the movies, a single type of sound effect has sufficed around the world to capture the sense of the city. I am referring to the sounds of car horns and sirens—from early horns, with their black rubber bulbs, to modern electric horns and, of course, the sirens of ambulances and police cars. Whether it's an American serial, where an establishing shot informs us that the story has moved to the city, or a contemporary Chinese film, we can be sure to hear the sound of honking horns (sometimes looped to repeat periodically) to take us there.

We might wonder at the obstinate persistence of this stereotype of the horn, as widespread and seemingly as obligatory for signifying the urban as the ship's toot that says "port" or the birdsong that transports us to "the country." Are there really so few noises filling urban space, and do we not carry in our minds the shimmering memory of a vast variety of sounds there? Any objective recording of urban reality clears up the matter. What dominates in such a recording is the dense, anonymous, and acoustically confused mass of car engines, dissolving and absorbing everything else, particularly any identifiable and discontinuous sounds of voices, footsteps, and other human activity. In this chaos the sound of the horn or siren is the only thing that stands out (that is of course what it was engineered to do), not only because of its volume

but also thanks to its *pervasiveness*, its signal clarity emitted on one precise note or in a glissando; it's a signal endowed with an audio profile that allows it to pierce through the ambient drone without fail.

But that's not the only reason why this family of sound effects is used in film to render the noise of the city. An equally if not more important reason is that, whether as horn, alarm, or siren, the sound can make the space *come to life*. The reverberation that prolongs it allows us to hear the manner in which it bounces off the facades of tall buildings and through narrow streets. Whereas the reverb of motors is easily lost in the mass of sounds that they are coloring and covering over, and are therefore too indistinct, the halo that surrounds and extends the sharp bursts of a horn or the strident glissandi of sirens is clearly distinguishable; its color and duration may give us further information about the size and type of space presented on film.

Acoustically speaking, a city is a container. Sounds that would be dull in open countryside for lack of any surface to bounce off of can "take off" in the city. The sound of a horn or siren in a movie doesn't just evoke its source—police car, fire engine, taxi—but instantly allows our ear to get the feel of the urban landscape.

Ever since the first French sound films that, in the era of bugle horns on cars, sought to render the bustle and hum of Parisian life, the car horn or siren has remained the king of sonic symbols deployed in films to signify the city and acoustically mark its territory, just as an animal does with its call. I am insisting on the term *signify* because the sound is used as an archetype, not as a banal simulacrum of reality. In this respect cinema continued in a tradition inherited from symphonic music; and in a different vein the evocation of discordant car horns and dissonances in orchestral works from the early part of the century, such as Gershwin's *An American in Paris* or the overture to Bartók's *The Miraculous Mandarin*, summoned up the metropolis.

If we look for other urban sound stereotypes, the ones we find are mostly associated with interiors. The atmosphere of the café or restaurant so dear to French cinema and notably in the work of Godard is alive with pinball machines, jukeboxes, espresso machines, orders shouted to the kitchen, and the jingle of change on counters. There is also the ambience of courtyards from *La Chienne* to *Rear Window* that can be summarized by the sound of awkward piano exercises played by the budding musician in a neighboring apartment. In the first sound films, neighborhood sounds (domestic quarrels, radios, parties, etc.) were often used to comic or dramatic effect, indeed as a plot device allowing principal characters to meet.

Nevertheless, no other noise is as symbolically and dramatically effective in marking territory as a vehicle horn or siren: all one needs is a cacophony of

three or four different honks and beeps to evoke multiplicity, the unplanned intersection of individual destinies, the network of anonymous trajectories that characterize city life. The wail of a New York siren, through the degree of its echo and its variations in timbre (the Doppler effect) linked to changes in distance, instantly projects onto the screen of our mental vision a street of a given length and width or perhaps the image of a colossal reflective surface. Such is the power and beauty of stereotypes, which too often get a bad rap: they are realistic and symbolic at the same time. But films that have avoided these clichés are by no means any less interesting or fascinating. Let us consider two.

In *Playtime* Tati conjured up from a vast empty space near Vincennes, as though right out of his imagination, a whole new city of glass and steel. But is it a city, we wonder, this space where our ears hardly ever make out any honking? This city's sound, fabricated entirely in postproduction, has been decanted, purified, and rebuilt out of the normally formless raw material that is the noise of traffic, resulting in an intimate, gentle sonic rocking, regulated by the red-to-green rhythm of traffic lights, ending up feeling more like an abstract rhythmic code. Tati's sounds, pure and clear as they are, often lack any reverb, so they take on the quality of coded signals, as though they were a sort of telegraph of the world. In *Playtime* Tati has clearly refused to give sound to his city in the standard style of the wash of sounds; instead we hear the discrete footsteps, the voluble whistle of a traffic cop communicating in some inscrutable Morse code, or the stops and starts of cars, but without the usual dramatization.

This is as far as could be from the polluted and sweaty megalopolis we encounter in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. In his fictional Los Angeles of 2019 the endless rain is felt in the constant noise of dripping and flowing water. It's a city where people are transported more through the air, between gigantic

buildings, than in the small two-seater vehicles that move along the ground; this mise-en-scène yields an eddying drone as in a jungle. It's a city where, thanks to a superbly symphonic use of multichannel Dolby stereo, the most diverse arrays of sounds vibrate, tinkle, groan, and crackle nonstop, combining into different rhythms. In contrast to our modern-day metropolises, with their gray pall of sound occasionally illuminated by a blasting horn or a piercing siren, the acoustic universe of *Blade Runner* offers a multicolored flow, glinting with sounds that resonate across the entire audible spectrum. Contrasting rhythms overlap and superimpose themselves—from deep bass pulsations (as if the organism-city were a gigantic spouting whale) to tiny high rapid oscillations like electronic insects, coming perhaps from a futuristic vehicle or machine. All these sounds constitute a kind of loose musical score that encompasses the thousand individual and collective rhythms of humans, light, sound, organisms, and mechanisms that make up a city.

Once again, sound doesn't reproduce; it renders. In *Blade Runner* certain high, jagged electronic motifs that populate the film's sonic landscape do not represent actual sounds heard by the characters so much as they suggest the microactivity of machines that make up their world. Years earlier, the blinking lights we saw on machines in all those science fiction films functioned in the same way. We can joke about them, but even today they are effective in creating the impression, through the visual sensory channel, that the metal cases we see onscreen are not inert and empty but have insides, that they are alive with electronic and mechanical activity. Sounds, too (of modems connecting, internal fans whirring, CD-ROM or DVD drives spinning), can function as "audio blinking lights" whose various rhythms do not necessarily convey the sonic reality of the world evoked in the film but the internal life of all that composes it. Here, sound is rhythm, and rhythm is perhaps the most abstract and the most general of signifiers.

MATERIALIZING SOUND INDICES (MSIs)

We also perceive and feel reality through the aid of what we hear of materializing sound indices (MSIs for short). I have given this name to the qualities of a sound that direct our attention to the physical nature of its source, to whatever it is that is blowing, scraping, rubbing—the indices of resistance of the real, reminding us that a voice does not issue from the pure throat of an angel but from a body, that a violin's sound comes not from the air but from horsehair rubbing against taut catgut.

The particular distribution of MSIs in a given film's sound—whether they are totally eliminated, giving a disembodied and abstract result, or whether

they are strongly foregrounded, giving full presence to bodies and materials, or whether their treatment falls between these extremes—is a key means to the rendering process. In cases where a film's sound includes music whose source is invisible, MSIs, especially in the form of wrong notes or cracking voices or irregularities in the beat, will lead to the assumption that the music is being played in the world of the action and is thus screen music, diegetic. MSIs also play a role in the sound of dialogue, since the voices heard in the film can be more or less "materialized" through small details such as slight mouth noises, breathing noises between sentences and words, throat-clearing, hoarseness, and the like—or, on the contrary, may be "pure" and immaterial to varying degrees. Voice-over commentaries are most often kept dematerialized, and at every stage of their reading, recording, and editing, sound technicians are careful to suppress MSIs that might leak in, with the stated aim of deflecting attention from the physical person behind the voice. In *Stalker*, however, the recitation of a sentence of Lao-Tze by Alexandre Kaïdanovsky as an "internal voice" is accompanied by a slight breathing sound, thus maintaining continuity with the character's body.

We can situate as diametrically opposed, at the ends of a wide spectrum, directors like Tati and those such as Bresson and Tarkovsky. With Tati, sounds are frequently dematerialized, made abstract and stylized, marking out a certain scansion and rhythm. With Bresson and Tarkovsky, crinkling, crackling, rattling, and thumps deliver a high degree of concreteness to the rendering.

The question of materializing sound indices is entirely independent of the recording techniques used. Even if one works with direct sound, one can create the feeling of an abstract, purified, nonphysical world through the choice of mics, decisions made in recording, and priorities in editing. The typical sound of studio-made TV shows is a prime example: direct sound is all there is, but we don't hear the space or bodies within it. Conversely, the films of Bresson, which use extensive sound effects, and don't always respect auditory verisimilitude, nevertheless render a very intense feeling of physical reality.[1]

1. In Bresson's *The Devil Probably* (1977) we hear distinctly the footsteps of characters on busy, noisy streets of central Paris, something that would be impossible to achieve "on location."

CHAPTER 15

The Three Borders

SPATIAL MAGNETIZATION

PROUST DESCRIBES BETTER THAN ANYONE the phenomenon I call *spatial magnetization*, an important aspect of sound in film, particularly the question of its emplacement:

> I heard the tick of Saint-Loup's watch, which could not be far away. This tick changed its place every moment, for I could not see the watch; it seemed to come from behind, from in front of me, from my right, from my left, sometimes to die away as though at a great distance. Suddenly I caught sight of the watch on the table. Then I heard the tick in a fixed place from which it did not move again. That is to say, I thought I heard it at this place; I did not hear it there; I saw it there, for sounds have no position in space.[1]

If we try to define the cinematic image, what else can we say but that it's a *place* where anything can show up that the filmmaker wished to put there. In general, this "anything" is something that moves, but not necessarily. There do exist films of static images, even some beautiful ones like Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962). Beyond that definition, each is an individual case. But the essential is a place, a rectangle of various possible proportions, and one that the spectator keeps looking at because that is where it is all happening—a place that in *The Voice in Cinema* I called "the place of not seeing all."[2]

And the sounds in the sound film? Even if in the great majority of cases in film history (monaural) they come from one or more specific points in space, namely from the loudspeaker situated behind or alongside the screen, the analogy ends there. For the loudspeaker that emits the sounds is not the place of their existence or of their operation. The speaker is merely the thing that sends them into the theater where they bounce around, to a greater or lesser

degree, depending on the specific acoustic qualities of the room, before they finally enter the viewer's ears: and it is only here that the sounds truly *take place*, according to what the viewer is seeing and understanding at each moment, and "assigning" their locations on the basis of what the image shows.

Indeed, with monaural sound (or the mono version of a multitrack film viewed on TV), if the sound that comes from the fixed speaker is attributed to an onscreen character, and if we see him or her move to the right, we are going to hear the sound move to the right; if the character exists offscreen, we hear the sound as outside the screen too. This phenomenon of spatial magnetization, whereby our attribution of a sound's location depends on what we see of the real or supposed source, can be observed on countless occasions every day. The realism of sound film is based on this phenomenon. Otherwise it would be impossible to believe in these sounds and voices that are not literally moving around the screen even while the objects and characters in the image that emit the sounds may be constantly in motion.[3]

Spatial magnetization, a universal reflexive psychophysiological phenomenon, works all the more effectively when sounds are synchronized with images; thus, it often relies on synchresis, as well as on the stability of sounds in the space of the movie theater. In theaters equipped with multitrack surround, the location of the loudspeakers (i.e., how far apart they are spaced and how far off the spectator-screen axis), as well as the position of the spectator in the room, will determine whether spatial magnetization works in the traditional way or is disrupted by the real source-location of the sounds being emitted.

The essential point for now is that sound in film has no autonomous place of origin that we could ascribe to it based on specifically sonic factors.[4]

The notion of an auditory field in cinema is itself ambiguous. It's already ambiguous in everyday life since the location of a sound is never really clear. If we apply the auditory field idea to the place of a sound's existence, in the case where the sound is discrete (for example the *pock!* of a tennis ball against a wall), we could describe the place of the sound as a sphere with a central core and fuzzy outer contours. The core is where you'd situate the sound's maximum presence and intensity, the place where the sound is "born." To "locate a sound," as it is called, means deducing from a number of sensory clues, as well as prior experience and knowledge, the spatial coordinates of the core. This inevitably leads to the conflation of locating the sound and locating its source—a confusion that is compounded in everyday experience by the words we typically use in these circumstances, such as "I hear footsteps." Hi-fi specialists are quite familiar with these problems and know full well, for example, that a loudspeaker is not a source but an emitter of the auditory image.

In cinema the notion of the auditory field is completely a function of what appears on the screen. In other words, in film there is no autonomous auditory field; its real and imaginary dimensions are created in collaboration with the image, and at the same time sound is always overflowing and transgressing it. It is in this double movement that film sound operates.

TWO OR THREE WAYS OF RELATING TO THE IMAGE

According to current thinking, sound has two elementary ways of relating to the image. Either it is associated with the sight of the source in the action onscreen (we see the actor whom we are hearing; we see a door close that we hear clicking shut), and is referred to as onscreen or synchronous sound, or the sound's source is not visible in the image at the moment the sound is emitted; there can be a character who continues speaking after a camera movement or a cut eliminates her or him from the image, or think of the orchestra playing the film's music: in French, the sound is *off* (short for the English *offscreen*).

Yet everyone who has made this distinction has remarked that it is not quite complete or accurate and that film scoring does not have the same status as the music of the usually invisible piano-playing neighbor who figures as a character in films such as *Abschied*, *La Chienne*, and *Rear Window*, and a voice-over narrator differs also from the voice of the character who is gone from the frame because of a new camera position even though he keeps speaking in the scene. In the latter case, what we cannot see remains situated in the space-time of the scene, whereas in the former case the invisible source of sound does not belong to the same space-time as the action. If this is so obvious, it is rather odd that, in French film criticism at least, no one bothered to give distinct proper names to these two different cases of acousmatic sound; and this negligence and confusion, though sometimes giving rise to accidentally productive ambiguities, persist whenever the subject comes up and people speak imprecisely of sounds being "off" or offscreen.

THE TRI-CIRCLE

In 1985 I began using the following terms:

- *son in* (onscreen sound): a sound whose source we see (or believe we see) in the image at the moment the sound is emitted.
- *son hors-champ* (offscreen sound): a sound whose cause is not visible simultaneously in the image but that we easily imagine to be still situated in the same time

as the action onscreen and in a space that's contiguous to what's shown in the image (sounds of the surroundings outdoors, Norman's mother's voice in *Psycho*, the old woman branded with the hot iron in Mizoguchi's *Sansho the Bailiff*).

- *son off* (nondiegetic sound—e.g., voice-overs and pit music): sound emitted from an invisible source that in addition belongs to a time and/or place different from the space-time of the action shown in the image.

This yields three cases: one of "visualized" sound and two of "acousmatic" sound, but also one case of "nondiegetic" sound and two of "diegetic" sounds—the interesting thing being that what is diegetic is not always visible and what is invisible is not always nondiegetic.

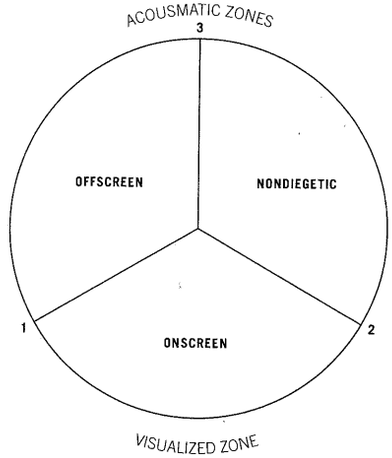
Onscreen sound is diegetic and visualized, offscreen sound is diegetic and acousmatic, and what I call "off" sound is nondiegetic and acousmatic. One can see the structural possibilities of these two different couplings, of these two alliances possible at distinctly different levels.

In drawing these distinctions I intend to focus on a relationship between sound and image, not on the sound itself in its own space and with its particular qualities. In other words, a sound is only onscreen, offscreen, or nondiegetic in its relation to an image—and even this relation is subject to change from moment to moment.

This tripartite distinction establishes a first rough and provisional typology of the relations of time and space. Subsequently, we can extend the analysis to make room for the interior monologue of a character (internal voice), the voice of an actor who is visible onscreen but whose back is turned, and voices of invisible phantoms in films such as *Tendre Ennemie* (Max Ophuls, 1935), *Honey Pot* (Joseph Mankiewicz, 1966) and films of invisible men, one of the most beautiful being also the first, James Whale's *The Invisible Man* (1933). And what to make of the noise of the wind when nothing onscreen moves to give it visual form?

For now, let me place our three categories in a circular pie chart as distinct spaces. I will call these three spaces, with their three borders, the tricircle.

The advantage of this graphic representation is that it puts each of the three zones in direct contact with the two others, allowing us to visualize the circulation of sounds (the passage of a sound from onscreen to offscreen or the reverse), as well as the importance of the border zones or sometimes even the absence of a true border. For the status of sound as onscreen or offscreen is subject to constant modification and recasting as a function of découpage and editing, and it is even possible to characterize certain works and directorial styles by the way they distribute sounds among these three zones—perhaps avoiding one of them entirely, or wandering among all three, or else inhabiting the equivocal frontiers between zones.



Border no. 1: onscreen/offscreen
Border no. 2: onscreen/nondiegetic
Border no. 3: offscreen/nondiegetic

The three zones are implicit and intuitive for the least theoretical of moviegoers. Consider as proof Pudovkin's *A Simple Case* in its sound version of 1932. A young woman has come to a train station with her fiancé, who is going off to war. She stands on the platform, and he is already on board the train that has not yet left. To translate the woman's apprehension, Pudovkin has us hear, while we see her face, the noise of the train beginning to depart. This sound was intended to be her mental hallucination, but the audience interpreted it as the noise of another (real) train leaving from the same station, in other words as an offscreen diegetic sound instead of the subjective nondiegetic sound of what the character hears internally[5]. Surely this demonstrates that the distinction exists for audiences without needing to be articulated and formalized. It is already found in the conventions of opera, where characters singing onstage do not ostensibly hear everything the orchestra is "saying" about them.

When filmmakers wish to create this kind of effect today, unless they are seeking deliberate ambiguity, they make the subjective sound by some deforming artifice such as filtering, increasing the volume, close miking, or reverb, which clearly announces that the sound does not belong to the realist universe of the action; it helps to demarcate what exists in nondiegetic space from what takes part in diegetic sound space.

Note that for the image, inserts of mental shots do not function the same way. In David Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1977), which borrows from silent-film language, the hero is shown in his apartment, and then an insert of a shot of his mailbox on the ground floor suggests that he is "thinking" about his mail.

The insert shot is functioning on two levels: as a real image of the mailbox shown to us while Henry is thinking of it, and as Henry's thought. The two levels coexist and are not mutually incompatible. Why can't it work this way with sound? Because as we've already seen, sound involves simultaneity.

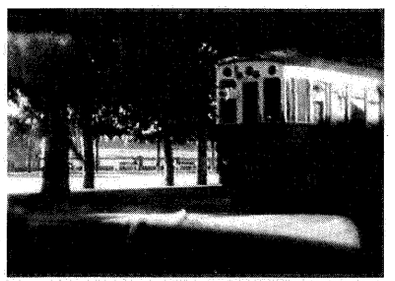
A MAN ESCAPED: TRAM AND TRAIN

Depending on the film, the three borders I have identified can become, on the one hand, stone walls or opaque doors that it is difficult to pass through; or, on the other hand, they can be chain-link fences or dotted lines. Films and certain directors have their own way of delimiting these three zones and of imposing laws that govern the circulation of sounds among them, staking out strong, distinct stylistic preferences that express an aesthetic position and worldview.

In this light we can see how Bresson's *A Man Escaped* (1956) installs its doors between the three zones; getting through them becomes a matter of life or death.

"Lyon, 1943," reads a brief title after the opening credits. A captured resistance fighter is put in the backseat of a car that travels through the streets of Lyon during the German occupation. We see from the man's hands, which are not in handcuffs, that he is preparing to take advantage of a momentary stop to try and escape. Soon, we see a streetcar approaching, after we hear its distinctive bell (*ding-ding*), offscreen at first, then with the tram onscreen. The tram obliges the car to stop and the man seizes his moment to open the door and run. He is immediately recaptured, all in one shot filmed from inside the car; the camera remains immobile, as if to say, "I'll wait until he comes back; he has no chance of escape, and his place is right here on this backseat that I'm focused on."

The man is hauled in, handcuffed, and beaten. Then he is taken, bleeding, off to prison.



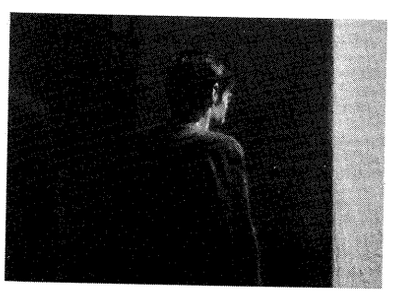
In most of the rest of the film, which is based on a true story, we are shown Lieutenant Fontaine (François Leterrier) imprisoned in Saint-Paul, where he will await his judgment and execution. In his cell, a space where the spectator's eyes are confined as well, he immediately undertakes a long series of labors that will ultimately lead to his escape.

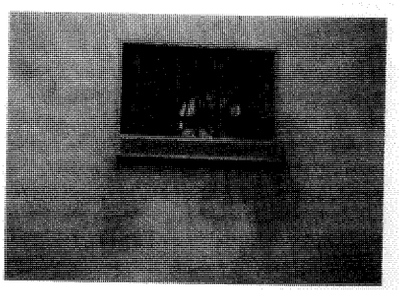
The story is told from his point of view; we never see more than what he sees, and sometimes we see even less. The shots that show Fontaine from the outside, gripping the bars of the cell's small window to get fresh air or to communicate with other prisoners in the courtyard, in no way depart from this tactic. The tight framing of these shots reveals nothing about the exterior of his cell that Fontaine cannot see himself.

The streetcar seen during the escape attempt is heard again regularly, with its clanging bell and its wheels screeching against the rails. We hear it almost every time Fontaine hoists himself up to the bars of his window to keep watch, breathe fresh air, communicate. Each time, the acousmatic sound of the streetcar—mixed with shouts of children on the playground of a nearby school—serves to remind us that the prison is surrounded by the city and that in the city people go about their daily business. It is not a country at war but an occupied country where much of the population is living a normal existence.

Since the streetcar appeared at the beginning, we can say that with Fontaine's imprisonment its clanging sound goes from onscreen to offscreen—it has been acousmatized—and in so being it acousmatically carries with it a concrete image of a specific streetcar (of course, not always the same exact vehicle, but one of the same kind passes frequently within earshot of the prison).

A second acousmatic sound-emblem that reaches the prisoner's ear from the outside works somewhat differently. Bresson has us hear this sound nearly an hour into the film and especially at night (whereas the tram is a daytime sound). It becomes increasingly closer, more concrete, and more insistent,





as though it were this noise, or rather its source, that Fontaine seeks to reach through his escape. The sound is the whistle of a steam locomotive, heard far off, resonating in a fairly wide-open space.

The difference is that this train, although generic like the streetcar, is never seen in the film, nor do we ever see the place where the train sound comes from. The sound represents "trainness," and its symbolic significance is all the greater for never previously being given visual form in the film.

For Fontaine, escaping will amount somehow to making the offscreen train become onscreen, de-acousmatizing it. And he almost succeeds. The noise of this train gets closer and is supplemented by the sound of wheels on the tracks as Fontaine's nighttime escape plan progresses. At one point, the moving-train noise even abets the hero by covering the noise of his footsteps; later it covers up his fight with a German guard, whom he has to get rid of by strangling him.

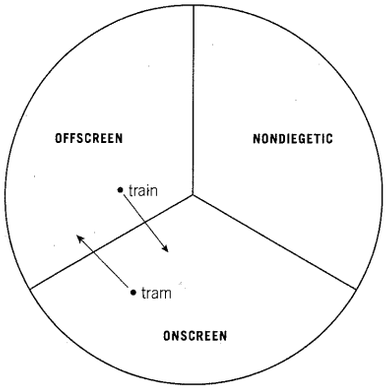
The irregular intervals of the passage of this unseen train are like the arbitrariness of divine Grace (Bresson originally wanted to title the film *The Wind Bloweth Where It Listeth*); this invisible train in its passage seems to call for and justify, by providentially covering the fracas like Noah's cloak, the decisive moment when Fontaine will have to kill in order to be finally free and alive.

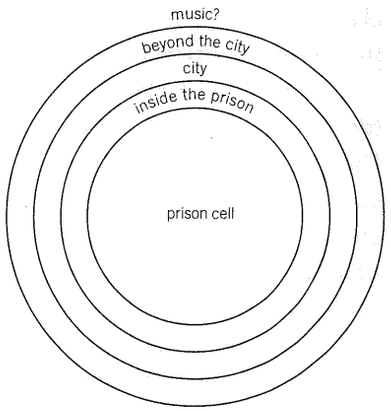
And when Fontaine and his partner, Jost, have climbed over the last prison wall and find themselves in a deserted city street at night, it's to walk across a railroad bridge where they become engulfed in the white steam of a passing train. It's the final shot of the film, coinciding with the heretofore contained choral explosion of the Kyrie of Mozart's C-Minor Mass. What a beautiful touch: the train we have finally gotten to is in the image but only in the form of a trail of smoke—and retains its mystery.

Thus the two sound-emblems that stand for outside freedom for Fontaine function in symmetrical ways:

- The sound of the tram (clanging and grinding of wheels on rails) goes onscreen to offscreen, and if it can sound like an invitation to Fontaine, who hears it in his cell, it's as an invitation to reverse the trajectory, to go backward, to get back to a familiar, nearby city space (local extension).[6]
- The offscreen sound of the train evokes a wider space, and for not having been given visual form calling to be de-acousmatized, it's like an invitation to attain a new, unknown dimension, far from the city and ordinary life (wide extension).

Escape for Fontaine will not mean return to a reassuring, circumscribed daily life but to answer the call of this *other* dimension. The opposing trajectories of these two sounds that cross at the onscreen-offscreen frontier show





that it is not about closing a circle but rather opening a spiral, which widens as it passes through the concentric sound spaces of the film.

Indeed, *A Man Escaped* contains at least four sound spaces embedded within one another, each created and marked by a particular sound, while the image, for its part, nearly always shows a bounded space.

a. Inside the prison cell are the closely miked sounds of Fontaine's slow and painstaking escape work: the sounds of scraping on the cell door, undoing its hinges, making a rope and a hook. Fontaine has to vigilantly contain these noises, rich with materializing sound indices, so that they do not carry out into space. They are most often visualized, onscreen.

b. Inside the prison around Fontaine's cell are the more sonorous, imposing noises of the jailers that punctuate Fontaine's days: the high whistle that commands the prisoners to file out of their cells, the prison doors that open and close, the well-defined footsteps of the guards, the noise of keys clanked mechanically against the bars of banisters, the loud click of keys in locks, orders barked or brusquely spoken. Marked by the strong reverb of a cavernous stone building, these noises are mostly heard offscreen, because the camera places us with Fontaine in his cell when they are heard. They work to render the presence and dimensions of the prison's space.

I first saw this film shortly after it was released in 1956, and since then, I have remembered it in images of Piranesian perspective. But if we watch it closely, we see that Bresson tightly framed the shots of corridors, walls, and stairs through which characters move—so that he could shoot in an extremely reduced space. It's the reverberation of the whistles, the footsteps, and the noise of keys and locks that etched these imaginary spaces into my memory. This observation, which struck me in 1980, at the beginning of my work on film sound, led eventually to my idea of added value and to the realization that the

classical model, which considers the relation of sound and image to be additive in nature, was incorrect.

c. To the city outside the prison correspond dry, relatively proximate sounds: the streetcar, the shouts of children playing, and the occasional automobile. Except for the first presentation of the streetcar, these are all offscreen, heard each time Fontaine is at his window and only then. Along with the sound of guards' whistles and prison-door locks, these outdoor sounds contribute toward *ritualizing* time in the film.

d. A still wider space around the city is signified by the train whistle. Note how, as we approach it, this space becomes progressively more materialized and precise through the noises that describe it.

e. We might say that the nondiegetic (pit) music of Mozart's C-Minor Mass emanates from yet another, fifth dimension, of a spiritual order and even vaster; there's not even the possibility of approaching this dimension spatially; and it serves to set off nostalgia, in evoking the sacred, another space than that of the densely physical world in which the characters struggle. This is especially the case at the end, when the voices of the mixed choir that have been muted and restrained for so long during the tense escape suddenly explode after the last words of Jost, "If my mother could only see us!"

And let us not forget the voice-over of Fontaine-as-narrator, speaking from a time and place beyond the events related in the story. We might think of it as the voice of a dead soul speaking from a space-time where nothing happens any more.

Space in *A Man Escaped* is thus highly compartmentalized, and the passage between zones is strongly marked and dramatized.

Similarly, the two opposing political sides in this film are divided by the way they inhabit the soundscape. On the one hand, just as the noises that Fontaine makes in his cell as he prepares his escape are kept muffled, so, too, the other French prisoners communicate with each other in tight-lipped tones that don't carry, since speaking out loud is forbidden. On the other

hand, the enemy speaks loudly and insistently, so as to fill the sound space—but when they speak, either they are always seen with back to the camera or they are entirely offscreen (think of the scene with the French collaborator); the same goes for the loud resonant noises produced by the enemy's movements, orders, and gunshots. In the entire film we do not see a single frontal shot of a German face.

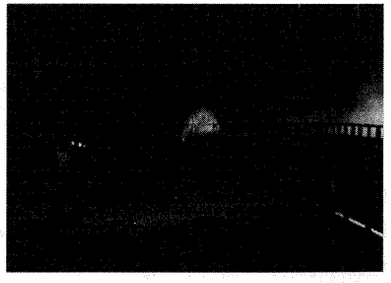
In his subsequent films Bresson dropped this rhetorical opposition (despite its effectiveness in dramatic and scenographic terms) between the dry, nonresonating good guys and the reverb-heavy bad guys. He moved toward an increasingly dry sound, heightened restraint, and stylization, sometimes broken up and invaded by brutal sounds that are all the more terrifying (*Lancelot of the Lake*, *The Devil Probably*).

DISSOLVED BOUNDARIES

In *A Man Escaped* Bresson pushes to the extreme the dramatization that can arise from rigid compartmentalization of the three zones—a division reinforced by the solemn, ritualized, and symbolic quality of their transgression. Other films and filmmakers either limit themselves to one portion of the tricircle or fudge the rules governing the circulation of sounds among the zones.

Jacques Tati, as we have already seen in *Playtime*, stops just short of totally abandoning offscreen sound (its few remaining interventions are always significant).[7] He uses nondiegetic space only for occasional music cues whose rarity again makes them all the more special. Tati knew that it was a mistake to link quality with quantity and that a technique used infrequently can be all the more effective.

Though an admirer of Tati's work, Marguerite Duras adopted exactly the opposite tendency for her film *India Song*, doing away almost entirely with onscreen sound in favor of offscreen voices. Characters are almost never heard from until we have seen them exit the frame. But it's the *almost* that is



important. The film appears to deploy only offscreen sound (voices of characters who have left the screen but also the unseen orchestra at the reception ball) and nondiegetic sound (voices speaking in the past tense about the characters we are seeing, the Beethoven piano variation). At the center of the film, however, there is an illusion of onscreen sound when we see Anne-Marie Stretter and the vice-consul, who speak while dancing together slowly. We almost think we see their lips move, but in fact they do not: the mouths of actors Michael Lonsdale and Delphine Seyrig remain closed. We don't know if this is an imaginary conversation or a telepathic one or if the couple perhaps said these things to each other in another place, another time.

With the exception of this unusual moment, the rule in *India Song* is that characters can speak if they have left the frame, but they must be silent when they return. At the same time, voices and music can circulate freely like wandering spirits, sometimes nondiegetic and sometimes offscreen. Indeed, for some of these voices and music cues there is no way of telling if they are in the present and merely offscreen or if they belong to another time and are nondiegetic; nor can we tell if the voices are present at the reception, for example, or if they are already elsewhere, as though on a balcony, at a temporal remove. The usually clear landmarks that signal present and past in most films are here obscured.

What makes this movie so compelling is precisely this porous quality, the indeterminacy of the borderline that separates the two acousmatic spaces, the offscreen (related to the present image and present time) and the nondiegetic. The indeterminacy is far more troubling than if we were sure of always being in a definitively nondiegetic space and the sound were completely cut off from any relation to the time and space of the image. The ambiguous quality of the sound and of the status of reality it represents undermines the existence of what we see.

The scene of dialogue with closed mouths between Seyrig and Lonsdale works to polarize all the sounds of the film around the onscreen space that they don't truly manage to enter. If Duras had from the outset clearly established the exclusion of sound from this space, if offscreen sounds didn't appear poised to enter the frame at any moment (as the free and casual movements of the bodies of Delphine Seyrig, Mathieu Carrière, and Michael Lonsdale suggest is always possible), or if it were clearly signaled that the sound is not waiting to attach itself to any particular space—under any of those conditions the film would not produce this sense of the sounds' ambiguous fascination for the present of the image that they wish to join. It would all be more reassuring and more definite. The image never contains a single sound, although all sounds seem to press in on its edges. The film frame in

India Song operates like a center of fascination around which voices and music congregate without being able to fuse with it; they struggle in vain to enter the frame, just as a moth at night, attracted to a glowing light bulb within, might repeatedly throw itself at the windowpane until it dies.

In ways less obvious to the eye and ear but no less important, we find in Fellini's films after 8½ a similar principle of indistinct or dissolving borders. But with Fellini onscreen space is quite open to sounds. Of course, Fellini establishes sounds as being clearly situated in each of the three zones, but in addition he allows sounds to wander back and forth along the frontiers. Nino Rota's music is securely rooted in the usual nondiegetic orchestra pit—but now and then we see an isolated musician or two onscreen halfheartedly echoing a motif from the orchestra. Similarly, voices certainly issue from the mouths of Fellini's characters—even if the synchronism is sometimes rather loose—but among those voices there is frequently one more that hangs around, makes comments, and does not seem to belong to anyone on- or offscreen. For example, in the Vernacchio theater scene in *Satyricon* (1969) a voice close to our ears repeats, as though in a dream, fragments of the Latin dialogue uttered onstage. Sound effects are certainly not all attributed to visible sources. And if all this indeterminacy goes mostly unnoticed, even as it contributes to dissolving the contours of the story's space and time, it's because a sufficient number of sounds are situated quite clearly. The rest of them form a peripheral multitude of lingering, strolling, migrant sounds in poorly supervised borderlands.

THE THREE BORDERS

My notion of the tricircle thus defines not only three zones but three borderlines as well. I have aimed to show how these borders may act as watertight containers or, conversely, how they may be neglected or dissolved and how in each case they participate in and reflect particular structurings of filmic space and time.

1. The *onscreen-offscreen border* is the most commonly used. In most films it resembles a swinging door, casually traversed as often as needed, to go between the onscreen living room and the offscreen dining room. This doesn't mean that one can't find films such as Bresson's that forbid certain sounds from moving back and forth.

Obviously the passage from offscreen to onscreen—what I call deacousmatization—is much more likely to be used to dramatic effect than the other way around. When a sound goes from onscreen to offscreen (such as the streetcar in *A Man Escaped*), it carries with it a mentally visualizable trace of

its former concrete and specific appearance. In the other direction, however, the sound may engage the not-yet-revealed quality of its source.

2. The *onscreen-nondiegetic border* is more rarely used and crossed by voices and sound effects; it's easy to see why, since it is the boundary between the here and now, visible as such, and a world that lies outside of space and time. I have shown in earlier studies (*La Musique au cinéma* and *La Comédie musicale*) how crossing this border, or establishing communications over it, is generally reserved for a single privileged sound element: music. As a kind of spatiotemporal switchpoint, music can be nondiegetic pit music, emitted by a phantom orchestra from a place that does not need to be localizable; it can have an echo or a possible source in the image, or it can accompany with a full violin section the singing cowboy as he rides across the open range.

And as I have already mentioned, there is the case of nondiegetic space being inhabited by the as-yet-unsituated voice of a narrator. Crossing the border from nondiegetic to onscreen often amounts to anchoring the film to the place of the narration, by making visible who is speaking, from where, and when.

3. The *nondiegetic-offscreen border* is the most mysterious. It can be crossed without our noticing, but insofar as it is the least tangible of the three borders and the least visible for the spectator (since it involves two zones of acousmatic sound), it is here that the most unsettling things can happen, undermining the film's spatiotemporal foundations in the most radical way, as in Duras. This border between offscreen and nondiegetic exists (gags based on crossing it are proof), but its precise coordinates are impossible to determine. It is this border that constitutes the passageway between the world of absent ones (absent from the image) and what could be called the world of disappeared ones. Opening this border, which amounts to its loss, is just about the most poetically fateful thing one can do in the cinema.

1. Marcel Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, vol. 3 of *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: Modern Library, 1952), 94.
2. Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 121.
3. It has been scientifically proven that auditory localization is enormously influenced by visual localization and that the former is accompanied by reflex movements of the eyeballs. This means that for people who can see, this localization of sound is an autonomic process.
4. Except—as I discovered and discussed in my book *Le Son*—if the sound is moving in space (e.g., in cases where the sound moves from one loudspeaker to another).

5. Chion considers nondiegetic a sound that is supposedly heard by a character, since the sound does not have an "objectively" hearable source in the train station here. Bordwell and Thompson, in their influential textbook *Film Art: An Introduction*, 8th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008), call this case internal diegetic sound. See their analysis of sound in Bresson's *A Man Escaped* (293–300).—Trans.
6. For *extension* see glossary.
7. Such as the incongruous rooster crowing, which one hears in an ultramodern, urban neighborhood, and a partier in the early morning leaving a night of drinking and dancing at the Royal Garden, which has just opened.

CHAPTER 16

Audiovisual Phrasing

TEMPORAL LINEARIZATION

NOËL BURCH SHOWED HOW SILENT CINEMA started out with autonomous primitive tableaux placed end-to-end and evolved toward linear narrative. But silent film retained until the end its capacity to arrest temporal flow in favor of a kind of editing that is nonlinear and kaleidoscopic: a sequence could present its series of shots as fragments to be understood as occurring in simultaneity. Silent film, like literature, allows for descriptive passages that present characters and places outside of time and outside of action, before engaging them in a story. Often at the openings of films such as *Birth of a Nation*, which are quite surprising to modern audiences unfamiliar with them, a series of title cards presents elements of the story: the grandfather, the disobedient girl, and the house, each seen and framed in isolation. Quite typical of films of the 1910s, this mode of presentation persisted as late as Chaplin's *City Lights*; and Truffaut gave it a nod in 1981 in the opening of *The Woman Next Door*, when the two main characters pose in front of their house.

When the realism of sound arrived, the out-of-time opening appeared to be over. The intervention of sound tended to fix temporality into a linear unfolding, one that must always move forward. It no longer seemed possible to pull apart simultaneous facets of an action nor to arrest it, as in opera. Synchronous sound (of voices, footsteps, or ambient sound) would henceforth entail the precise and irreversible registering of time, time that is numbered, weighed, and divided.[1]

This at least was my argument in the first edition of *Le Son au cinéma*; since then I have refined my position somewhat. It seems to me inaccurate to say that one mode of cinema came to replace another. Rather, a splitting and doubling, a coexistence, developed: silent film lives on *beneath* sound

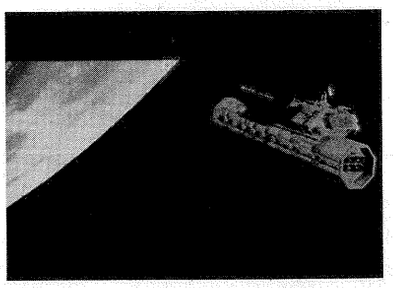
film, and the "after" of sound film was not obliged to replace "at the same time" completely. As in the sequence of Melanie waiting outside the school in *The Birds*, there is a temporal splitting and a superimposition of two logics.

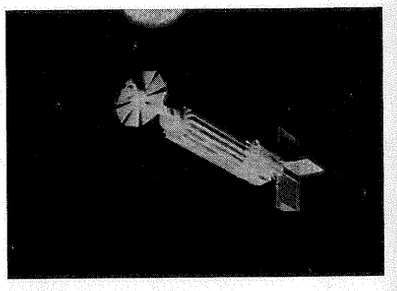
Consider a "banal" shot–reverse shot sequence showing two characters, A and B, who are speaking and listening to each other face to face in a given space. The camera is on A when A is speaking and then on B listening to A, who continues to speak. B absorbs the impact of A's line, then begins to speak herself, and so on. Once we hear the voices speaking in turn and uttering linear sentences, we tend to say that as a shot–reverse shot scene it is organized along a temporal axis. By the concept of *temporal splitting*, I propose that the shot of B listening is *also* seen retroactively as the image that we didn't have of B when we saw A speaking, as well as the view that A had of B—in other words a deferred *simultaneity* that overlays the idea of *succession*.

And so we must think of sound film both as a system that superimposes seemingly incompatible layers of history and as a system where any combination of elements also involves a re-division. Sound film is "audio-divisual," an art of palimpsest.[2]

Sound film even makes it possible to revert almost entirely to the language of silent film, when under any of various narrative pretexts we are not given synchronous diegetic sound. This occurs particularly in montage sequences when we are shown a condensed version of a day or a career, all in a minute or two; another example would be when the main characters make love to the sound of music.

For the sound film indeed retains from the silents a marvelous mechanism for stopping, expanding, and contracting time: music. Often heard while synch sound is temporarily absent (and helping to "fill the gaps"), music provides the sound film a respite from the infernal rule of successivity; it allows a flexible temporality, an elasticity, the capacity to condense a year, to draw out a second, to linger over a fleeting summer before replanting us on the terra firma of real time.





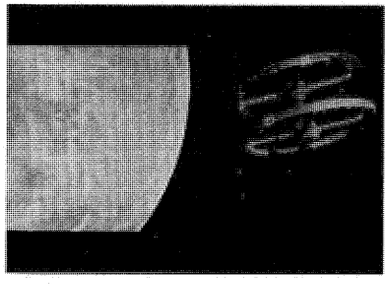
In *Hiroshima mon amour* several transitions from real to imaginary time are marked by either intrusion or disappearance of sounds of real life. There's the familiar cricket that returns us to life after the opening litany of "You saw nothing in Hiroshima" and, in the scene in the café, the slap that brings Elle (Emmanuelle Riva) back to her present reality.

When in *2001: A Space Odyssey* the story moves into the future, we see various spacecrafts rotating or speeding through the heavens, to the accompaniment of an opulent orchestral version of Strauss's waltz "The Blue Danube." Nothing here obliges us to decide if a given spaceship is gliding through space *after* the one we saw crossing the screen in the preceding shot. The question isn't even relevant; in a way we are fully back in the silent cinema.

It is surprising to see in the sound film how music, which, after all, is made of the same stuff as other sounds (i.e., each note of a melody played on a piano is itself a mini-story of explosion and extinction, inscribed in real, mortal time), can function as the narrative element that restores elasticity and stylization to the film's temporality.

The rest of the time, not only between shots but even within them, the sound of dialogue and sound effects imposes a temporalization on the image, penetrating it "deep down" (to invoke detergent-ad speak)—while the rhetoric of editing and découpage allows the idea of simultaneity to subsist beneath the surface of the idea of successivity.

Why, in the sound-image relation, is sound the temporalizing element? First, because the temporal sensitivity of the ear (the minimum threshold for apprehending a phenomenon) is incomparably finer than that of the eye. The ear is capable of identifying and analyzing variations in energy, timbre, color, duration, and of course pitch in very short amounts of time, so short that our eyes, quick as they are, are outdone if subjected to equivalent variables of a visual order. Hence the importance of sound in action films and cartoons in speeding our eyes up, so to speak, or in giving the impression of arresting something that only appears for a split second.



Second, sound is generally directional in time: natural sounds in particular (as opposed to synthetic sounds, but also to sounds of certain musical instruments such as the organ) almost always have an evolution—a "story" of tensions and relaxations (at close or wide intervals), percussive impacts or muffling, explosions and extinctions—so many temporal vectors oriented in the direction from present to future. Many sounds that seem to us fixed and outside of time (e.g., sawing of cicadas) are often crammed with microevents that are each a tiny story that indicates the irreversible direction in which time is flowing. This is what I call a *temporal vector.*

A film image, however, such as a closeup of a face, but also the image of someone speaking (i.e., an image involving the alternating motions of a mouth opening and closing), can very easily have no temporal directionality; and when it is connected to another shot, there is no telling, in the absence of sound, what the shots' temporal relation is: it could be successive; it could be simultaneous. Sound introduces into this chain of images a double dose of added value: as temporal vectorization and as succession.

Today I am inclined to say that only one "layer" of the image is temporalized in this way. Another layer remains untouched and continues to function as in silent film. This temporal doubling is one of the consequences of "audiodivision."

Thus, just as for *space* the image seems in charge of deciding what is "onscreen" and what is "offscreen" by the power it has to show and not show, so, too, for *time* sound can decisively intervene, because its temporalizing power greatly exceeds that of the image.

TEMPORAL VECTORIZATION

Not all sounds carry temporality within them. Here are the most important types of sounds with duration that can create temporal vectorization.

- For all types of sound, any *directional variation in intensity*: for example, the progressive crescendo or diminuendo of cars, trains, or airplanes that are approaching or moving away (in Ozu, Tarkovsky, and Bergman). This variation can be one-way or alternating back and forth.

  A simple sound of percussion and resonance such as hitting and holding a piano key until the sound dies, the striking of a clock bell, the ring of a rotary telephone—these all create temporal vectors.

- For all types of sounds, any *directional variation in speed* in the repetition of a sound event, either acceleration or deceleration.

- With music, a melodic or harmonic arc, allowing the listener to anticipate the moment of coming to a cadence (all cases involving a melodic music cue, or a sequence of chords leading to a conclusion); or any cue with a clear direction in pitch—either toward the very high register or the very low, for example (think of the neighbor in *Rear Window* singing her scales).

- In dialogue, a sentence whose structure builds up to a "last word" (the predicate that follows the verb, for example, or, in German, the concluding past participle of a verb, which can be quite removed from the initial auxiliary verb).

We can also find a sound interesting when it offers no temporal vectors, either because it does not vary over time or because it varies in a chaotic and unpredictable way. Such sounds can contribute to a feeling of fixity, stagnation, or destructuration. For example, since Francis Seyrig's organ music in *Last Year at Marienbad* has no discernible direction, it acts to create the feeling that those long tracking shots in the baroque palace aren't going in any particular direction either and certainly not leading to a predetermined destination. Another type of music—say, a very well-defined melody—could give these same tracking shots a sense of deliberate progression toward a goal.

Most typically, an image that includes little or no motion (a character who does not move, or moves only slightly, in a space that is equally immobile and that is filmed by a fixed camera) becomes oriented in time, through the play of temporal vectorization by sound.

Auditory temporal vectors can also combine with temporal vectors that are created visually by the movement of filmed bodies and objects, as well as camera movements. In *Taxi Driver* Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) strides in the street toward us (the camera remains fixed), while a melodic cue by Bernard Herrmann comes in a bit later. So here we have two types of temporal vectors, one based on the anticipation of the character "colliding" with the camera, the other based on the resolution of the musical phrase. Then, the camera pans around the protagonist's apartment, ending the shot on him writing in his diary at a table, as Herrmann's cue continues and we hear Travis's internal voice reading what he is writing. Here we have *three* vectors, one in the image and two on the soundtrack: the triple anticipation of (a) the end of the pan, (b) the completion of the melodic phrase, and (c) the end of the sentence in the voice-over. These three come together at the start of the following shot, of the taxi moving at night. At other points we might get one or more vectors, solely in the sound or solely in the image.

This intuitive kind of anticipation, which leads the spectator to project forward in time, requires no formal knowledge of music or film language.

THE SYNCH POINT

If sound plays a key role in structuring film time, this is because sound is often what determines the *points of synchronization* in a given sequence.

I have given the name *point of synchronization* or *synch point* to a moment in an audiovisual sequence where there is a marked synchronous encounter between a sound event and a visual event, that is, a moment where the phenomenon of synchresis is particularly evident and acts to create emphasis or rhythmic scansion. The frequency and placement of synch points help shape a sequence's phrasing and rhythm—and also help create meaning.

A synch point can occur as easily between an image and a sound *within* a given shot as it can between a visual cut and a sound cut or dialogue line.

Synchrony itself is necessary but not sufficient for a synch point. In other words, a dialogue scene might have a lot of synchronization of lip movements with voices, but this doesn't mean it has synch points. Synch points are defined as particularly salient and meaningful moments, arising from a variety of factors, including an especially noticeable break (e.g., a simultaneous cut in sound and image), an emphatic visual element (closeup) and audio element (audio closeup or other loud sound), or the perceived emotional or dramatic power of an audio-visual detail. Context plays a role too. For example, the first synchronous encounter between a particular word and the visual presentation of the person uttering it, following extended desynchronization (after, say, numerous shots of a character listening while the speaker has remained offscreen), will stand out as a synch point. A synch point can often be the end result of temporal vectorization.

Based as it is on the idea of the specific temporal impact of certain meetings of image and sound, the notion of the synch point is a pure effect of form but one that carries no determined or coded meaning per se. Because its pertinence may play out at the level of the structure of a sequence, or its meaning, or on the level of audiovisual phrasing (the musical and rhythmic dimension), it literally makes sense, but not always. Or it can have an impact on all three of these levels simultaneously, and this is in fact what happens most of the time.

The very simple experiment of taking a piece of music from an album at random and pairing it with any audiovisual sequence on a DVD demonstrates how the spectator in us craves synchronization and will watch for the least synch point and even mentally create one at the drop of a hat. Such an experiment points up the spectator's need to scan, parse, and punctuate an audiovisual sequence, as well as the tendency to find meaning and intentionality in any encounter of audio and visual.

Why have I insisted that it is often sound that decides where the point of synchronization will be? Since it is more fugitive and focused than the image (which typically involves more fixed elements), sound can more easily create accents through audio events in the environment or actions of the characters.

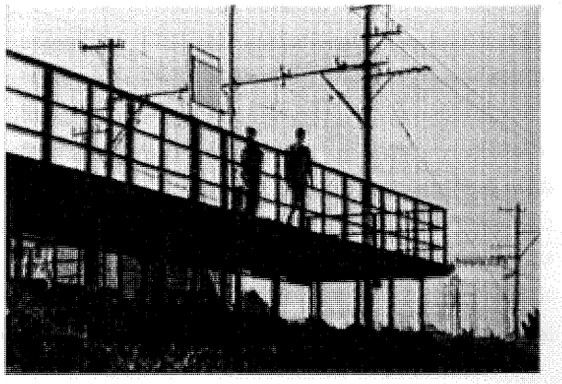
Sound is widely used for scansion and punctuation of time and dialogue. Thanks to sound, we know that one pool ball has hit another in *The Hustler* (Robert Rossen, 1961); that a camera is taking pictures, with or without a visible flash (Antonioni's *Blow-Up* [1966]; Philip Kaufman's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* [1988]; and Andrzej Zulawski's *La Femme publique* [1984]); or that a car horn can punctuate a word pronounced by a character.

Sound events with a more expansive periodicity also contribute to creating a certain kind of temporality.

SONIC SCANSION OF TIME

Everything in a film such as Ozu's *Twilight in Tokyo* (1957) contributes toward the ritualization of time: the noise of shoji doors sliding open or shut, sometimes accompanied by a bell; trains passing; the recurrent musical pieces by Kojun Saitô; the clicking of mah-jongg tiles in the game room run by the mother of one of the characters; train whistles at dramatic moments. All these sounds frame and set a pulse in a magnificent ritualization of time.

The prisoner in *A Man Escaped*, the Milanese laborer working in Sicily in *The Fiancés* (Ermanno Olmi, 1963), the heroine in *Alice or the Last Escapade*, the "Stalker" in the film of the same name by Tarkovsky, the poor young man in *Howard's End* (James Ivory, 1991), and little Chihiro in Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001) all have something in common with the heroes of Ozu's films: they live or work near a train station or railroad tracks. Some even work for train



companies, as in Paulo Rocha's *River of Gold* (1998). In all of these the sound of passing trains gives rhythmic structure to the characters' lives . . . and to the film.

Well before the period of what I call ritualized cinema, sound film was privileging certain settings that lend themselves to a rhythmic scansion of time owing to their intermittent sounds that create expectation, punctuation, and temporal vectorization. Aside from train environments, think of bowling alleys, with their noises of balls rolling and knocking down pins (*Scarface*, and Negulesco's *Road House* [1948]), and restaurants with swinging kitchen doors (*Mr. Hulot's Holiday*). Sound film has long exploited the idea of the apartment near a train station, an elevated train line, a construction site, or an airport. What changed in the 1950s was that the episodic repetition of the environmental sound element gradually lost the rhetorical or psychological value it had originally carried (to designate a state of anxiety or disaster, such as in the scene with Pierre Blanchar in *Un Carnet de bal* [1937], which takes place near a construction site). These periodic sounds came instead to merely mark time itself—time that takes on a life of its own, independent of the characters. In other words, there has been a progression toward depsychologizing and de-rhetorization of time.

For example, in Wenders's *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* (1971), a film rich in sonic details that punctuate time (buses and airplanes passing, other noises of daily life), the sequence in which Bloch accompanies the movie cashier back to her apartment, which happens to be next to an airport, and the next morning has breakfast with her and then kills her, is a sequence organized by the sounds of airplanes. The planes' passage is "sensory-named" in that the characters refer to them, by talking about the difference between the sounds of jets and propeller planes.

At one point in the morning, an airplane has just gone by. The woman is lying provocatively on the bed, in the silence left in the wake of the plane's passing. Bloch, without any apparent premeditation or words, strangles her silently. She shouts and struggles. Fade to black. Bloch is lying on the floor in a ball. There is total silence. Then we hear the subtle noise of a propeller plane passing by as Bloch wipes down everything he has touched. Unlike in *A Man Escaped*, where the train whistle aids and abets Fontaine as he kills the watchman, here the plane sound embodies the nonpsychological temporal continuum in which the characters exist. The sounds demarcate the temporal "container" of the characters' actions, but they do not become personalized or agents of action.

The sequence shot, similarly, has existed since the beginning of the sound era—think, for example, of the wonderful initial sequence shot in *Scarface*—but it would be some years before the continuous time it depicts would separate

off from actions and characters, to have the option of existing simultaneously and independently—in a sense beyond them, no longer only containing them.

This changed attitude toward time is not complete or uniform, however, and some filmmakers—Ernst Lubitsch or Woody Allen in the United States, François Truffaut or Michel Deville in France—would go their way without making any or very little use of this "material time." Time in their films would remain in the service of narration. In *Radio Days* (1987), for example, Woody Allen's voluble voice-over strings together droll anecdotes and scenes; the scenes do not have their own temporality but rather are part of the formal or narrative pattern that frames them.

"Material time" can crop up, however, even in the work of directors we would least expect. Many of Truffaut's films, for example, were influenced by Lubitsch or Guitry, for whom time rarely has the time to exist—creators of intricately structured films, so intricate, in fact, that they can seem like they're choking on their constructedness or perhaps on their fear of being boring or lasting too long. But in any case, if we watch *La Peau douce* (1964) again, forgetting our preconceptions about Truffaut, we may be struck by the number of its concrete audio impressions, by the intensity of sounds' material existence, and by the way they help parse the film's time in a fatal countdown, perhaps unique in Truffaut's work. The wealth of sonic detail accumulates to form a veritable portrait of the era: how a telephone rings and how a rotary phone dial clicks, how an iron elevator grate shuts and how the elevator's motor hums, and how an airplane rumbles at a time when jet engines were still new. The sound of a gas pump pumping, a big clock pendulum that one would hear in a fancy country restaurant, the electric buzzers for the big heavy courtyard doors of Parisian apartment buildings, toilets flushing—and the sudden silence when a door closes or an elevator halts: there's a little of everything here. But also, each sound seems to point up something that will never return. With highly elaborated découpage and a sense of haste especially at the beginning, the film hurtles toward its final catastrophe. Everything that has to do with the sound effects in *La Peau douce* becomes contaminated with the sense of fate, the unforeseeable quality, the brutal banality of the story's "crime of passion."

As for Hitchcock, his power comes from playing on two seemingly contradictory levels: the clarity of the general line and the temporal density of certain scenes. The most famous case, for the way it strips time bare, is the scene where Cary Grant gets off the bus and waits by the road in the middle of vast cornfields in *North by Northwest*. In that silent, unpeopled landscape the sounds of vehicles take a long time to approach and recede into the distance—helping to pare time down to a single temporal vector.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

From the 1950s to the present it has become de rigueur in action movies to build toward one or two scenes of "pure time": break-ins, high-speed chases, deliveries of ransoms, and so on. The virtuosic set pieces in films such as *The Asphalt Jungle*, *Rififi* (Dassin, 1955), *High and Low* (Kurosawa, 1963), *Bullitt* (Peter Yates, 1968), *The Red Circle*, *The French Connection* (Friedkin, 1971), and *Mission: Impossible* (De Palma, 1996) expressly have no musical accompaniment, diegetic or otherwise. Music can occur before the climactic scene as preparation, or afterward as a kind of decompression, or as a rush of energy, a crystallizing.

Certainly, already in 1952 there was a grand swordfight finale in George Sidney's *Scaramouche* and the tournament in Richard Thorpe's *Ivanhoe*; both sequences take place with no music and hardly any speech; all we hear is the clang of metal on metal, the muffled beating of drums, "Ha!"s, and crowd reactions. But not until the 1960s did scenes like these become more fully elaborated and central in a way that they had not been before.

In films with abundant dialogue and music, the *decisive moment*, the climax, the *alea jacta est* or point of no return, the moment of truth and of real time is a moment with little or no speech and usually no music—this is when the film comes to the heart of the matter and when three different kinds of time start to overlap:

- diegetic time (of the action)
- the time of the film on the screen
- the time of day in the space of the movie screening.

This climax is nearly always prepared by first establishing a temporal frame or mould, built of music and dialogue, that provides an armature and then removing the mould: the music and words drop out, and we are left with pure "unrefined" time, signified by the sounds.

Laura, which I have discussed previously, begins in a completely unreal, storybook time created by music and Waldo Lydecker's voice-over; it rarely gives a sense of real duration in any scene. Then at the end, Waldo says to Laura in her apartment, "Listen to my broadcast in fifteen minutes." What follows is supposed to take place without any temporal ellipsis: Waldo pretends to leave but then slips back into the apartment where Laura is preparing to go to bed. She has turned on the radio to listen to her patron's broadcast that we, like her, suppose is being aired live. We get the distinct feeling that the film is

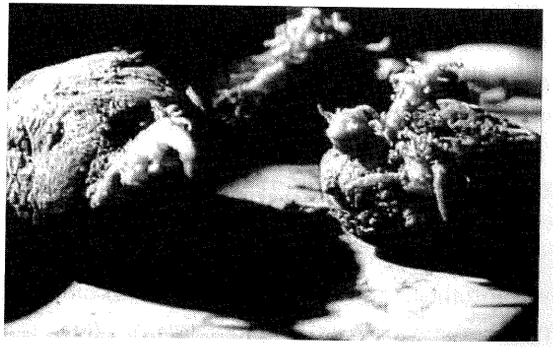
coming to a close. Why? Because as we watch Gene Tierney walking, turning lights on or off, and combing her hair in the mirror, we are in pure duration, neither intentional nor dramatized. We're in real time once the die is cast, when all the cards have been played and there's no more strategy to use—things will happen as they happen.

Real time is the condemned man's glass of rum or his last cigarette, which he smokes as though freed from the weight of time, freed from having to *do* anything.

Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965) is a brilliant film that plays on the idea of losing track of time (an idea that takes material form in a rotting rabbit stew and sprouting potatoes) inside the apartment of a solitary, terrorized woman played by Catherine Deneuve. But the problem with it is that the sounds are not presented first in their realist context; instead, it's as if they're newly mobilized, one by one, to be heard as the script requires. Polanski did not yet manage to give them precise rhythm, something he would achieve more effectively in subsequent films.

A number of scenes in *Repulsion* are fragmented further by the nondiegetic modernist music of Chico Hamilton, a choice that further contributes to our losing the feeling of real time. But then the man interested in the Deneuve character forces his way into her apartment. The door remains open, permitting a woman across the hall to overhear the beginning of their conversation; and the open door also allows us to hear a neighbor practicing scales on the piano. For five minutes we are back in real time, a time when anything can happen.

It is always marvelous when at the very end of a film, when all has been played out and the suspense is over, when there is no more reason to anticipate anything further, real time reasserts itself through sounds that supplant or drown out words: the revving roar of a jet plane on the airport tarmac



where Sonny Wortzik (Al Pacino) stands arrested and defeated (Sidney Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon* [1975]),[3] the noise of the surf that emerges as the exhausted partygoers see that the sun has risen (*La Dolce vita*), the ebb and flow of traffic that returns as the image of the protagonist disappears behind the window of a café (Claude Sautet's *A Heart in Winter* [1992]). In each instance, at the end of films in which all sorts of plot situations have made us forget this pure time of waxing and waning, it is sound that reaffirms it.

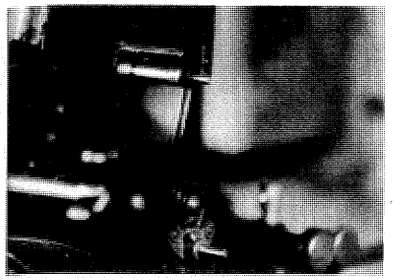
The problem, however, for certain films that unfold entirely in "real time," such as *Rope* or *Cléo from 5 to 7* (90 to 120 minutes of diegetic action with no ellipses), is precisely that we are to believe that this real time is in place from the start, you might say mechanically so, on the premise that all it takes is aligning diegetic time with filmic time. In truth, however, it's easier to create this feeling of real time over several stages: stylization and forgetting of time; an armature of music, dialogue, and sometimes offscreen voices; then you drop the music and voice-over, and you silence the voices; and from underneath reemerges the palpability of time.

EMBEDDED PERFORMANCES: THE SHOW WITHIN THE SHOW

If a *mise en abyme*—a scene showing a film screening, a theater or cabaret show, or a radio or television program—has appeared so often in sound films, it is because it tends to have the effect of creating a "real-time" reference, a temporal frame, that of a performance, a temporality that supposedly unfolds according to its own rhythm, independent of the constraints of filmic narration. It can also create an anempathic situation, because the embedded performance can follow its own path entirely indifferent to the drama of the film's characters.

As early as 1930, in a memorable scene from *Prix de beauté*, the heroine, Lucienne (Louise Brooks), is killed by her jealous lover in the shadows of a screening room while she is watching herself singing in a recent film. As she is being murdered, the onscreen song continues right to the end, like her message that the murderer was deaf to: "I only have one love: you." But the song also creates an anempathic scene, like those in opera that ironically contrast gay festivities with an individual character's private drama.[4] But since we're in the chronographic sound cinema here—*Prix de beauté* was originally planned as a silent film—the scene of the murder is inscribed within a real time "guaranteed" by the movie projection within the film.

In other words, it's as if the chronographic cinema, in which the play of editing and temporal ellipses routinely allows time to be compressed and to



hasten our desires, benefited somehow from affirming within the diegesis something that has its own temporality, which resists the usual acceleration and cannot be stylized.

The sequence in question from *Prix de beauté* was intended for a silent film but ended up being in a sound film, and we hear Lucienne's song "go all the way" in a mechanical recording that is the mirror double of what we ourselves are seeing. The sequence becomes an original chronographic creation.

In short, what we like to forget while watching a film—namely that it is nothing but a mechanical unspooling in a projection booth—is also something we like to find reflected in the film itself, like a guarantee that its time has not been "cheating." This embedding also paradoxically makes the film closer to a live performance; the time during which we watch the performance is not simply watching the past but also living in the present. The present time of our screening the film is of course the real time of a film running in the projection booth (or a videotape going through its videocassette, or a DVD being read in its disc drive). Encountering an equivalent of this mechanical procedure on the movie screen itself (a record player turning at the end of *The Public Enemy*, a movie projection or running a video as in Hideo Nakata's 1998 *Ring*, a jukebox selection, or, more metaphorically, the spectacle of a working factory)[5] acts as a "full disclosure" of this present and gives us the feeling that we are attending a performance and not simply watching a rerun, witnessing a production and not just a reproduction.

In the silent era this sense of a performance was largely created by the live commentator and by live musicians. The sound film, where everything is "canned," had to reintroduce the notion of performance by staging it within films themselves.

It's true that the use of the film-within-the-film was already abundantly present in the silent era. We find it in *Tartuffe* and Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* The chronographic sound film, however, gave the *mise en abyme* the new meaning, that is the temporal reference, and also the possibility for double entendres between the dialogue of the film-within-the-film and the faces of its onscreen

spectators. The dialogue in the film-within-the-film can be paired with the image of these characters watching it, and it seems to apply to them, like a free-floating commentary on their situation (for example, the outdoor movie scene in Tati's *Jour de fête*).

The classic scene of seduction in a movie theater, where a boy dreams of touching the hand or leg of a girl in the dark (Fellini's *Amarcord* [1974]), is linked to this erotics of real time. In a less romantic and cruder vein there is Mickey Rourke's dirty dare in a scene in Barry Levinson's film *Diner* (1984), in which he tries to get his innocent movie date to stroke his member. We might also mention Giuseppe Tornatore's cinephilic reminiscences in *Cinema Paradiso* (1989) and Joe Dante's in *Matinee* (1993). In all these works the movie projected to the characters in the film functions as a gold standard of real time.

The same holds for the extended use, throughout a film, of an ongoing radio or television program. It is on this idea of "unity of time" that Ettore Scola constructed his 1977 film *A Special Day*, a film that takes place against the background of the official fascist radio broadcast of Hitler's visit to Mussolini in Rome.[6] The same idea organizes *American Graffiti*, where a night in the life of a California city unfolds to the sounds of the local FM radio station. Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and John Carpenter's *Fog* (1980) are both constructed on the principle of a local radio show broadcasting along with the action that takes place over fewer than twenty-four hours.

Filmed theater performances also commonly serve similar purposes. Shakespeare is performed in *Children of Paradise*, *Fanny and Alexander*, *The Dresser* (Peter Yates, 1984), and Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society* (1989). There's Ionesco in *Je rentre à la maison* (*I'm Going Home* [2001]), by Manoel de Oliveira, and Musset in *A Nos amours* (1983), by Maurice Pialat. More is going on in these examples than a mere nod to the Shakespearean play-within-a-play: the idea of the performance endows chrono-cinematic time with the scale of real time.

Among the various types of filmed performances, we should not forget all the public and private receptions, contests, award ceremonies, auctions, drama and dance lessons, carnivals, trials, concerts, circus performances, mimes, ballets, and ritual ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. These are all circumstances made to order for the sound film because they affirm temporal continuity, stripping it down to the basics via continuous sound (or more precisely nondiscontinuous sound) while the image, for its part, is likely to separate and fragment.[7] These circumstances are the point of departure for scenes in which time is freed from nondiegetic elements and often makes itself felt by means of diegetic music in what I have called the X-27 *effect* or in nonconversational language (speech, sermon, or song) that we don't have to listen to word for word and that therefore frees us to notice the pure passage of time.[8] Hitchcock illustrated each of these circumstances and exploited them all to create and manipulate suspense.

Such scenes are already legion in silent films, but, as I have said, they take on new significance in the talking, chronocinematographic era because the sound film can create meaning through the split-second timing of edits, the carefully controlled pauses between scenes, between musical numbers, or between pieces of anything. Think of the carnival in Mario Monicelli's *Big Deal on Madonna Street* (1958) and dances in Ford (*Young Mr. Lincoln*), Visconti (*The Leopard*), and Cimino (*The Deer Hunter* and *Heaven's Gate*). There are also Coppola's weddings (*The Godfather*), Fellini's parades, and Communion mass in Ophuls's *Le Plaisir*. Bergman's circus and cabaret shows[9] take on a dramatic and emotional weight from the way they transition, with brief empty periods between each segment or each dance;[10] here, temporal execution becomes an integral part of the work.

Once they have been freed by the nondiscontinuity of sound from the obligation to use the image to signify temporal continuity, we often find these scenes in "real time" situated between two opposite extremes. At one end is time stretched to unbearable lengths, scenes that are deliberately "too long," in Fellini (the final all-night party in *La Dolce vita*), Cassavetes (the drinking sessions in *Husbands*), Godard (only one instance, but a noteworthy one: the bedroom conversation in *Breathless*), and Hou Hsiao-hsien (*Millennium Mambo* [2001]), to name just a few. It's well known that there is a sort of school of "endless" cinema, films in which addicts do drugs interminably (Shirley Clarke, Paul Morrissey, Abel Ferrara), idle chatterboxes talk forever (*The Mother and the Whore* and practically every film by Jim Jarmusch), a woman peels potatoes and does the dishes in real time (Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* [1975]), and all the movies where the camera can stay on two characters slumped before a TV set for ten minutes with only sporadic dialogue lines for punctuation. Some of these movies that slow time down like molasses pull off their big gambles well; others fail miserably.

At the other pole, sometimes in the same film, everything is decided in an instant: a long drawn-out scene reaches an ignition point in a progression we've hardly noticed but that could be brought on by a look, a word, a move. In Oliver Stone's *The Doors* (1990), for example, Jim Morrison (Val Kilmer) is performing the song "The End" as though he were improvising it. This goes on for several minutes before he bursts out "Fuck" (it's about his mother) in a way that suggests he has been working hard to hold it inside him. A scandal erupts; in the space of a second, everything has shifted 180 degrees.

1. A reference to Daniel 5:25.—Trans.

2. Put differently, audiovisual media, by virtue of (1) the very term *audiovisual*, (2) the two separate recording media they employ, and (3) the two senses they appeal to, tempt us to believe that in order to comprehend and study an audiovisual text it suffices to divide it into the "audio" and the "visual" and compare the two. I argue that the presence of an image divides the sounds (into acousmatic and visualized, synchronous and nonsynchronous, etc.) and that sound divides the image. This is what I mean by *redivision*.

3. A remarkable film whose action takes place over three or four hours without any music except during the opening credits.

4. Think of Bizet's *Carmen*, Verdi's *Rigoletto*, or Massenet's *Werther*.

5. Consider Hitchcock's famous idea of showing a car made on an assembly line in real time. This idea was planned for *North by Northwest* and has since been rather brilliantly pulled off by Spielberg in *Minority Report* (2002). See also the wonderful scene in *Soylent Green* (1973) in which the hero discovers in silence and without music the "food assembly line" that nourishes a burgeoning population, a revelation that fills him with horror.

   [The parallel Chion points out between the film projection apparatus and the production line is all the stronger in French, which uses the word *chain* for both.—Trans.]

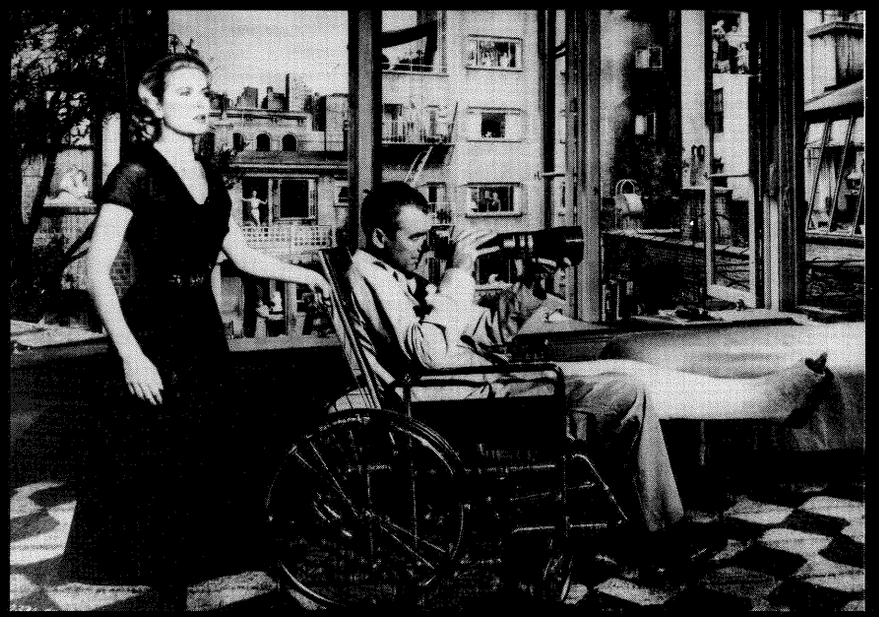
6. Drawing on the Greco-Roman theatrical tradition, Chion is referring here to the three "unities" imposed on the seventeenth-century classic French theater: the unities of space (a play's action must be set in one location), time (the action must represent no longer than twenty-four hours' worth of time), and action.—Trans.

7. For *nondiscontinuity* see glossary.

8. For *X-27 effect* see glossary.

9. In a little-known film disliked by the director himself, *The Serpent's Egg* (1978).

10. We don't get this feeling, however, in the circus scenes of *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952), by Cecil B. DeMille. This great director, who got his start in the silent era, seems indeed never to have completely integrated the "chronographic" dimension of sound film, and this is precisely what lends his films their precious quality.



CHAPTER 17

Alfred Hitchcock: Seeing and Hearing

1.

WE MIGHT WELL IMAGINE *that one of the main difficulties of a screenplay such as* Rear Window *was how to render the spectator complicit in the pure voyeuristic behavior of the protagonists. After all, except at the end, the main characters are not endangered by the presumed murderer, whose movements they observe, nor do they even have to save someone's life since it seems the crime has already been committed at the point when they get interested in the killer.*

The film actually confronts this problem head-on. The very first sequence introduces Jeff (James Stewart), the photographer in his plaster leg cast, with his nurse and physical therapist, Stella (Thelma Ritter). Cutting the ground from under our feet, Stella makes a comment that seems to be an unambiguous condemnation: "We've become a race of peeping Toms." But her negative judgment in fact operates like an authorization; and Stella herself will later prove to be one of the most cooperative players in the game, with the most fertile and morbid imagination regarding the murder behind the window across the courtyard.

There is, however, something that is never articulated in the film, and which mustn't be, for on its foreclosure rests the operation of the whole story. I am referring to the fourth wall of the courtyard, the side that includes Jeff's living room, kitchen, and bathroom, and what must be a whole assortment of other apartments, from which other residents could surely look out and see the goings-on in Thorwald's apartment across the way. The dramatic events in the killer's apartment all take place in plain sight, including Thorwald's (Raymond Burr) violent capture of Lisa (Grace Kelly), who has sneaked into his apartment and for whom he is preparing a bad end. Here, too, the scene is shown as if, across from the three sides of the courtyard that we constantly look at both in long shots and closeups, there were only one apartment and one window, namely Jeff's.

Note also that when it comes to the space of this apartment, the spectator sees only the living room, where Jeff is confined in his convalescence. He never goes into the two other rooms, the bathroom and kitchen that face each other on opposite sides of the main room, though he watches Lisa—already the lady of the house before even having extracted a proposal from him—go into them at will.

All of this is justified at the outset, of course, by Jeff's point of view, anchored in the conceit of his immobility owing to his cumbersome leg cast; as he stays in this one room, we're essentially limited to what he sees, although we do see him too—in accordance with the rather paradoxical conventions governing filmic identification—inscribed in the very space where his look circulates. Applying the rule of point of view in Rear Window *amounts to inviting us to share the hero's small apartment, making us as well as the characters forget that on this side of the courtyard there could be other apartments from which people could see at least as well, if not better, what is going on across the way.*

The soundtrack contributes to this forgetting, since except for the end, when we hear the killer approaching from inside the building, we hardly ever hear the approach of the various characters who come to visit Jeff, nor do we hear any neighbors; the film constantly directs our ears to the action out in the courtyard.

The editing breaks the rule of Jeff's point of view at least four times. One of the four exceptions is wholly explicit, while the others, which are more subtle, may (must?) remain unnoticed by the spectator.

Let me begin with the latter ones. First, as the film opens, Jeff is asleep in his wheelchair, his back turned to the courtyard that we've just been shown through the camera's eye. His head, brow covered in perspiration, is resting near the windowsill. Jeff can hear the courtyard as he slumbers (it is known that the ear continues to function during sleep), a courtyard that is waking up to another oppressively hot New York summer day with its din of radios, different kinds of music, car horns, far-off foghorns, and children's shouts. The courtyard resonating with all these sounds feels like an extension of his skull full of dreams. A sleeping man is, in fact, all ears. Rear Window *is a film born from sound.*

We find Jeff in the same position and the same state of sleep later in the film, when there occurs another apparent escape from his point of view: in the night, from Jeff's window, we see Thorwald leave his apartment with a mysterious woman dressed in black.

There is a particular appeal to films that begin with the awakening of a character and then lead us to adopt that character's point of view. I'm thinking of Welles's The Trial *(1962), Fellini's* City of Women *(1981), and the central portion of Rohmer's* The Aviator's Wife *(1981)—all examples where it appears as though it's the real world that is a dream. In fact it could be argued that there is really no infringement on the point of view when a character is sleeping and some action begins or continues without him or her.*

Rear Window*'s space adopts a completely imaginary shape of a cone, whose apex would be Jeff's living room (or, if you prefer, Jeff's head as he is reclining in his wheelchair with his back to the window); the cone then opens out onto the courtyard and from there onto the world beyond. The film has to keep the spectator forgetting that Jeff's small apartment cannot be all there is that's facing the apartments across the way.*

But there are two moments in the film when we do leave the living room and are allowed to see it, this fourth "forgotten" side. We see it at the very end, when Jeff is forced out the window by Thorwald, but it happens in an intense, rapidly fragmented sequence that doesn't easily allow us to register the discovery (and if we stop the film to examine this fourth side, all we see are windows with their curtains drawn).

The one other "escape," this one, on the contrary, highly noticeable and foregrounded, is the episode of the death of the little dog—when at night, the childless retired couple on one of the upper floors discover the corpse of their cherished pet lying below on the ground. The scream, tears, and distress of the woman ("Neighbors like each other, speak to each other. . . . But none of you do") bring the entire neighborhood microcosm to their windows and balconies: the young married couple who momentarily get up together from their wedding bed, Miss Lonelyhearts on the ground floor, the guests at the composer's party. Everyone except Thorwald, whose presence, shut in at home away from this impromptu reunion, is given away by the little red light of his burning cigar.

(This point of red light, the lowest limit of what the spectator can distinguish on the screen, exemplifies the scrutinizing, voyeuristic impulse that runs throughout the film, an impulse that is not matched by an equal impulse to eavesdrop. All these voyeurs—with the exception of Lisa—hardly ever listen. They merely hear, bathed in a sound that covers them and the whole film, and to which they don't pay much attention.)

"This, incidentally, is the only moment," Truffaut says to Hitchcock, who agrees, "at which the film changes its point of view. By simply taking the camera outside of Stewart's apartment, the whole scene becomes entirely objective."[1]

It's indeed the first time the neighbors across the way are seen not from afar, magnified and flattened by a long lens, but up close, in normal perspective, and from angles other than the one from Jeff's window. There is also an extraordinary shot, extremely brief, that seems to show us the whole courtyard. *But does it? In fact, we get only that part that is opposite Jeff's windows, but the trick is that we believe we have seen the whole thing, and this is what this apparently objective scene seeks to accomplish, while at the same time continuing to*

ignore the fourth wall. And it is likely that the deliberately sketchy communalism of this scene, with its mixture of rapid, broken, and dislocated points of view, functions to make us believe that we're seeing all there is to see of the courtyard—while actually preventing us from having the time to constitute it with a fourth side.

The open fourth side's reference to the theater is not just my interpretation: the film makes it explicit. Lisa alludes to it when she lowers the blinds of the window and in compensation promises Jeff, whom she is depriving of his show, a "coming attraction" in the form of her own womanly self.

Jeff's apartment is manifestly constructed and filmed like a theater stage with four sides (given that we're willing to allow this paradox). This impression is strongly marked by the structure of its space—a room often filmed lengthwise that includes a "courtyard" side (not the same courtyard) and a "garden" side, two doors that lead to rooms that are never entered—and Jeff's immobility adds a further touch to this theatrical constraint.[2] We should keep in mind, too, that Rear Window (1954) came directly after Dial M for Murder (1954) and several years after Rope (1948), two studies in filmed theater.

To carry my idea to the absurd, imagine for a moment a stage version of Rear Window. The characters would be facing us and we would not see the courtyard, whose existence would be understood solely through sound and the remarks and reactions of the characters in the apartment. This might sound like a strange setup, but it does occur in some productions of plays such as Kleist's Prince of Homburg. In this work the gigantic space of battles, ceremonies, and so forth that the characters discover and comment on is "seen" as they look out at the audience: a kind of imaginary cone of space starts from the stage and extends infinitely outward.

In Rear Window the "disappearing act" of the fourth side surrounding Jeff's apartment allows for the strange and magical grafting of a theatrical apartment onto a cinematic courtyard.

2.

The entire deployment of sound in the film clearly helps to direct all our attention into the courtyard. The sounds of radios, incomprehensible snippets of conversation, play, pianos, the street, and the city are all marshaled to relate to what we see across the way. But there is at least one sound in the setting that plays a role that is all the more intriguing for not being anchored visually in any resident of the complex, never referred to in dialogue, and thus, with respect to all other sounds, completely "out of place": the scales sung by an unseen female singer. I take pleasure in thinking that this female voice brings, into the fabric of

the everyday, spatially anchored sounds that emanate from the courtyard as though out of a gigantic orchestra pit, a free element in that it totally escapes being pinned down to a visible source.

It is one of these monotonous sequences of the invisible singer that we hear the first evening, before the silent impromptu arrival of Lisa—and just before the marvelous, overwhelming silence that closes with the kiss of the two lovers, in the amazing and meticulously constructed ebb and flow of the waves of sound that have not ceased their rhythmic return below Jeff's window since the beginning of the film.

The singer is heard on two more occasions, singing different scales, and each occurrence has a precise meaning. The second time comes when Jeff is convinced that Thorwald's wife has been killed, and we see the killer resting his elbows on the windowsill of the couple's apartment now that he is alone. Here the singer's voice becomes the ghost of the absent wife. The third time comes when Jeff's friend Doyle alludes to the existence of another Mrs. Thorwald.

The urban symphony that surrounds the characters may seem aleatory. However, a number of detailed analyses (especially in Elisabeth Weis's excellent study of sound in Hitchcock, The Silent Scream) have demonstrated that it forms a running commentary on the characters' story. When foghorns blow, for example, their sinister echo punctuates Jeff's discovery of the bizarre activities of his murderous neighbor. And when we hear the shouts of children, it is because Hitchcock needs to conjure up, through the sound, the existence of the street corner visible from Jeff's apartment.[3] And on and on.

The spatial system shifts in a major way when Thorwald realizes he is being watched, thanks to Lisa's scheme. Now he turns to look at Jeff . . . and the camera. Everything shifts in terms of sound too. For the first time, we are going to hear sounds coming from inside Jeff's building, namely the heavy steps of the killer coming up the stairs. Elisabeth Weis writes, "When Jeff first notices Thorwald, he can see but not hear him. At the end of the film he can hear but not see him. Sight is associated with security in Jeff's mind, sound with menace. All the interactions that lead to the confrontation of Thorwald and Jeff involve an increase in aural communication and a lessening of visual communication."[4] But there is one place in this brilliant analysis where I disagree, namely with the idea that "it is possible to consider the entire sound track as a subjective extension of Jeff's feelings" (122). In my opinion there is no subjectivity here. When he's sleeping, Jeff is only the fantasized agent of the Great Ear of the sleeper.[5]

Of course if we thoroughly pick the film apart by studying it on video or DVD, we notice that in terms of strict realism the sequence of all these sounds is quite improbable, for instead of overlapping and crowding each other, they follow each other so neatly. The female singer only sings once the radio from

another apartment falls silent; the composer only returns to his piano playing when the radio and the singer have stopped. Making full use of the audiovisual effect of extension, *Hitchcock freely opens out and narrows in the courtyard sounds according to need—either to attract Jeff's attention (and the spectator's) to the exterior or to "concentrate" the scene in the minitheater of the living room. When, for example, he wants to redirect Jeff back to observing his neighbors, notice how the courtyard sound mix, which had just before been either totally absent or limited to faint and diffuse urban background noise, reappears but always selectively reduced to one privileged element. But we hear it as plural and polyphonic, or rather, as spectators hooked on the dialogue, we* passively register *it, in and around words.*

While the verb to see *applies to everything that is inscribed physiologically within the field of vision,* to look *is reserved to designate the active observation of an object or detail within this field. If, along similar lines,* to hear *is used to name all that enters via the ears and registers automatically on consciousness,* to listen *involves the act of paying full attention to a part of what one hears. Thus we can say that for humans, the field of hearing around listening is far bigger than that of seeing around looking. Or put another way, the ocean of hearing is vast compared to the bobbing raft of seeing.*

What Hitchcock does visually is to scrutinize actively all the details of what presents itself to our sight and enlarge them with binoculars and zoom lenses—while keeping them immersed in a vast bath of sound that we receive as an undifferentiated whole; there's no naming of even a tenth of what we hear—the singer's scales, the boat's horn, and so on. This is what is fascinating in Rear Window: *the combination of extreme (visual) tension and loose (auditory) meandering.*

But there are also the muffled tones of voice; the shared confidences among Lisa, Stella, and Jeff; the complicit speculations of the two spying lovers—and around them the flood of reverberating sounds rolled and rounded within the echoing courtyard like a smooth beach stone, a totality that carries us in a ceaseless movement, while the web of observations is being constructed.

Let me return to the dialogue's content. At the beginning of the film, in his phone conversation with his boss, Gunnison, Jeff says he's an invalid, that he has to stay home and hear the sounds of a washing machine and a nagging wife. In short, he's saying that if he looks—an act he can master and direct—it is because he has no choice but to hear and, notably, to hear, powerlessly, a couple arguing (sounds the murderer will free him from). He will also later hear an insatiable young wife calling out for her new husband—"Harry?"—in a kvetchy voice each time the poor fellow leans out the window, in other words, a hellish vision of matriarchy. He will also hear as he sleeps a sudden female scream with no explainable cause. And finally, still powerless, he will hear Lisa's screams for help when Thorwald gets hold of her.

Next to him, Lisa behaves differently. Several times she consciously takes note of the song on which the neighbor-composer is working so hard, and she talks about it several times ("Sounds almost as if it were being written especially for us"; "There's that song again"). She takes an even greater step at appropriating it when she moves about Jeff's kitchen singing the melody to herself. At that moment a brief shot associates the shadow of the woman and her singing. Like in the Harold Ramis film Groundhog Day *(1993), where Bill Murray falls into the dream and voice of Andie MacDowell, here Jeff will fall into the dream of Lisa, because she is capable of hearing and naming . . . and singing what she hears.*[6]

1. François Truffaut, with the collaboration of Helen G. Scott, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 162.

2. "Courtyard" and "garden": Chion is explicitly using traditional French theater terms here. *Côté cour* in English is stage left; *côté jardin* is stage right. The terms arose to address the perennial confusion between the stage's or the audience's left and right in theater, and originally referred to the theatrical space in the Tuileries Garden, where the Comédie française had its home. To one side was the building's courtyard, and to the other side were the gardens.—Trans.

3. See also, among a thousand other details, the use of car horns for punctuation, discussed in chapters 12 and 14.

4. Elisabeth Weis, *The Silent Scream: Alfred Hitchcock's Sound Track* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982), 119.

5. When we sleep, we hear everything around us, in an "objective" way, and we are then representatives of what I call the Great Ear. In *Rear Window*, when Jeff sleeps, he doesn't hear in the same way he sees when he is awake but rather in an impersonal, or depersonalized, way.

6. See my discussion of *Groundhog Day* in chapter 24, where the issue is also two characters hearing the same song and only one of them being conscious of and responsive to its lyrics. Bill Murray's character never names Sonny and Cher's "I Got You, Babe," and true to this situation's use in so many films, as the passive, unconscious listener he is destined to have the lyrics apply to him.

CHAPTER 18

The Twelve Ears

THE "HEARING CINEMA" IS HARD OF HEARING

IN THE MARX BROTHERS FILM *Animal Crackers* (1930), Chico asks in his crazy English if Harpo has a flashlight: "a flash." Harpo replies by first pointing to his cheek (flesh). "No! flash!" insists Chico with his strange pronunciation. Opening his famous coat, Harpo presents a fish, a flask (of whisky), and a flush (of cards). Although the film is borrowing a classic comic routine from the stage here, it's an apt metaphor for what cinema has just become with the advent of sound. It is "hearing cinema" (in opposition to what I call "deaf cinema") and, as such, susceptible to misunderstandings between characters. If Harpo has no voice, it is so he can be the one in the group who hears, which includes mishearing or else pretending to.

We remember the Marx Brothers for their frenetic wordplay. But coming at a time when the movies had just acquired ears, their films also play with the act of listening, riffing on both the one who talks and the one who hears.

In *The Conversation* (1974), Harry Caul (Gene Hackman) is a surveillance expert, and on behalf of a rich client he records the disjointed conversation of a couple strolling one day in a crowded public square in San Francisco. The couple's conversation, which seems insignificant, obsesses him. After much technical manipulation of the audio tapes, he manages to detect, underneath the noise of the street musician playing where the man and woman had walked by, a sentence that he had not been able to make out before: "He'd kill us if he had the chance." "He" is certainly the woman's husband and "us" the adulterous couple whom Harry has been paid to spy on. From that point on, Harry is convinced that the lives of this couple are in danger. He will understand only too late that he ought to have heard the sentence differently: "He'd kill *us* if he had the chance," meaning that the couple is justifying their plan

to kill the husband—a good illustration of the idea that hearing opens the door to mishearing.

In Brian De Palma's *Blow Out* (1981) another sound man (John Travolta) is recording sounds at night in a public park to add to his sound library. He captures the croaking of a toad (which we see onscreen), then a sound like an episodic chirping of insects (but we are not shown the insects), and then the hooting of an owl (we see an owl in closeup). Then he witnesses an "accident": a car plunges into the river with its passengers inside. But Travolta and most spectators have already forgotten about the insect noise. Later in the film we're in a Philadelphia train station and see a murderer fidgeting with the weapon he uses to strangle his victims, a steel wire hidden inside a watch. As he pulls rhythmically on the wire to test it, few viewers, even those watching on DVD today, notice that this movement produces the sound we heard at the beginning, the repetitive insectlike noise. The sound was a signal that the killer was there in the park along with the owl and the toad.

Of course, if an hour later the film did not show the image of the killer testing his weapon, the earlier noise would have remained to our ears the natural, rather reassuring, chirping of a small insect. We must not say, therefore, when it comes to this perfect illustration of the narrative indeterminacy of acousmatic sounds, "What I took for one sound was really another" because it's the same sound.[1] There are times when the noise of a harmless animal and that of a human action can be one and the same.

We have all seen films whose hero miraculously has ears sharp enough to detect a salient clue given a phone recording or sounds in nature. Situations like this occur in Kurosawa's *High and Low* (1963) and Andrew Davis's *The Fugitive* (1993). In scenes in westerns, detective films, and action films, when the plot hinges on recognizing a sound source, there is always a character who comes through. The movies would have us believe in the Great Ear that has memorized the giant dictionary that specifies the unique cause of each and every sound. But this is a delusion. We must also know how to hear, and make

the audience hear, when two sounds that we take to be different (because they have different causes) are in fact the same.

THE INVISIBILITY OF HEARING AND ITS EFFECTS

Unlike certain species with long ears, human hearing has no visible signs. We say we're pricking up our ears by turning our head, but the real work is being done by small internal muscles. This fact is illustrated in Ingmar Bergman's film version of Mozart's *Magic Flute*. For the symphonic overture, Bergman chose to show neither the musicians nor the conductor nor the stage on which the opera will take place but the audience or, rather, the varied faces of individual listener-spectators one by one: women, men, children, Africans, Asians, and Europeans, in accord with the universalist spirit of Mozart's and Shikaneder's opera. As we see each of these closeups, we might ask ourselves if, as they were being filmed, they were hearing what we are hearing at the moment we see them. Of course we know that real and fictional characters on the screen often pretend to see what the editing will make them see in the reverse shot; but at least we imagine each time that they are indeed *seeing* something because we see the direction in which they are looking. When it comes to hearing, however, we have no idea. It has nothing to do with what is being listened to but with the properties of listening itself. We cannot see the direction or the intensity of someone's listening—we cannot see listening, nor by the same token can we see not-listening.

Thus it is not possible to visually objectify a character's hearing, unless we refer to the old cliché, often parodied and associated with the silent era (cf. *Singin' in the Rain*) though in fact rarely used in silent films, namely the hand cupped to the ear.

Hot Shots (1991) stages an excellent gag when Topper (Charlie Sheen), who is on a spiritual retreat, welcomes a representative of the American government inside his tent where there sits a stoic Indian chief, magnificently typecast, who we assume is hearing all and weighing all with his infinite wisdom. When Topper asks his counsel, we discover that the great chief was wearing earphones underneath his feather headdress and was listening to music. He hadn't heard the conversation at all. A small trick that gets big laughs. Knock at the portal of the Great Ear, and you find out no one's home.

THERE IS NO SYMBOLIC MIC IN THE CINEMA

What is more, there is *no symbolic mic* in the cinema. In other words, the cinema does not create a symbolic "ear," by analogy with the "eye" of the camera, through the technical apparatus. Hence there is a major difference between the status of what we see (always mediated by the symbolic camera, which is not always the actual camera)[2] and the status of what we hear. One consequence of this major dissimilarity, as we have seen, is to make a true rhetoric impossible.

In a famous scene in *Rain Man*, Raymond, the autistic character played by Dustin Hoffman, is riding in a convertible with his brother, Charlie (Tom Cruise), through open farm country. Raymond complains about not having on his usual underwear that comes from a particular K-Mart store in a city in Ohio, and then for a while the two brothers talk past each other in mutual incomprehension. During this exchange the camera alternates between showing the brothers through the windshield in medium closeup and filming the passing convertible from a cow's-eye-view in extreme long shot. With all the shots of the two, closeups and long shots, we hear their voices in continuous audio closeup: a classic case of dissociation between point of view and point of

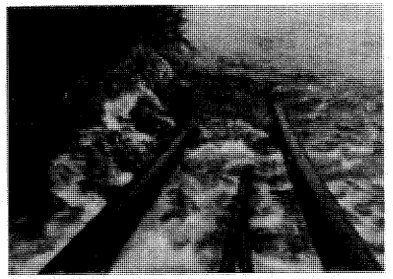
audition. But with the extreme long shots of the car, we are given *more* to hear, at least intermittently and mixed with the closeup voices. We can hear cries of far-off birds and chirpings of insects, which the two men would scarcely be able to hear from their moving car. Who could hear both the brothers' conversation in audio closeup and the bird calls in the landscape they pass through? Nobody in the diegesis. Only we can, and in fact precious few of us take note that we are hearing two sounds that would be impossible to hear at the same time in real life. We could rationalize (as I have done) by saying that the scene gives us two audio scenic spaces, two superimposed audio shots. But really, there isn't even one. Neither are there two symbolic mics, since there is no symbolic mic to begin with.

So the guiding truth of film sound is not just that the microphone is normally not represented onscreen in fiction films (we'll consider exceptions later) but that there is no symbolic representation of the mic as a mediating third party, as an ear that is neither ours nor that of the characters. Our sense of "the mic" in certain films is complicated by our knowing that a given sound might indeed have been recorded by several mics in different locations, producing different "sound images"—and these can be easily fused together into one sound. Therefore, the microphone cannot play the role for sound that the camera (real or virtual) plays for the image, in permitting the fluid symbolic identification called primary identification.[3]

There is no symbolic mediator of our hearing embodied in the cinematic apparatus. Just as there is no symbolic loudspeaker—since several loudspeakers can also blend their sounds—there is no symbolic mic that functions as the mediator of the sounds heard, even though there is a symbolic camera. The camera's eye, localized directionally (it sees as this character, from this angle, at this height—hence the technical terms such as *medium closeup* and *low-angle shot*), allows us to make distinctions between the camera's point of view and that of a particular character (suggested by the editing or by "subjective" techniques) or our own point of view that the camera assumes for us. But to the question *who is hearing*, we cannot answer *the microphone.*

Even when the microphone is visible onscreen (as in Godard's *One Plus One* [1969]), or when it appears at the top of the frame because of a glitch in projection framing, nothing especially makes us hear *through* that microphone, since there may well be other mics on the set or in postproduction that mix together the sounds they are capturing. Sometimes we even get a strangely contradictory effect between seeing the mic and hearing what we hear, which does not seem to be coming from that one visible source.

This feeling is even clearer on sets for TV shows, where very often the mic that gives an audio closeup of each speaker can clearly be seen, yet it's hard to



accept that we are hearing "through" these little cylinders stuck on their lapels and sweaters.

In the claymation short *Creature Comforts* (1989) Nick Park lets us see a mic that is supposedly being held out by an offscreen boom operator to some clay animals being interviewed, and here, too, there is no relation between what we see and what we hear.

Although it appears impossible to symbolize the microphone, the trajectory of sound is a different story. There are films that trace the path of phone circuits, where the camera follows underground phone cables (Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Three Colors: Red* [1994]), glides through acoustic tubes (Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Delicatessen* [1990]), and even mimes the journey of a sound from its source to an ear (in Murnau's silent *The Last Laugh*, and also in the 1956 version of Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much*). Now the question: can we hear through a character?

POINT OF AUDITION AND SUBJECTIVE SOUND

Whereas the question of *point of view* in film was posed early on and explored intensely by all who had an interest in its development and language—from directors and technicians to film critics and scholars—the same cannot be said for the question of *point of audition* that arose with the coming of sound. Bluntly posed, the question would be this: how is the spectator situated with respect to a film's diegetic sound events? Or, from the other side, at what distance from the spectator, what is the trajectory along which the film's sounds and voices supposedly travel? And if an acoustic obstacle such as a door, window, or curtain is interposed between the spectator and a sound source, how is this to be taken into account? These questions might seem naive today, and many people have a ready answer: it seems obvious to them that the point of audition, if there is such a thing, must line up with the point of view. If the sound source is shown as far away or nearby, the sound should accordingly be faint or closely present. If there is an obstacle between us and the sound source, we should be placed on the side from which the camera "witnesses" the actions aurally as well as visually.

Fine, but remember that the notion of point of view is already far from simple. Point of view is anchored not just in the *place* from which the camera watches the filmed subject but also in the *character* in the scene with whom the spectator is invited to identify. Establishing this identification does not require showing numerous subjective shots attributed to the character, but quite to the contrary, it requires frequent closeups of the character's face.[4] It seems that the point of audition does not demand the same precision, and many French audio engineers are content to deal with it by postulating a "realist" correlation between the visual distance from the filmed subject and the apparent distance of the sound emitted by that subject, thus presuming to make a unified couple out of the eye and ear.[5]

Note that to create the impression of equal distance, it would be naive to actually position the mic at the same distance from the subject as the camera. For reasons of acoustics one must place the microphone closer to create the impression of an equal distance for eye and ear. Further, we see this rule of "solidarity"—if it is a rule—clearly being broken all the time, when we hear close up the voices of characters who are visually far away. Characters might be seen in a crowd, or driving a car, or flying in a plane that is a distant point on the screen—but we are right up next to them through the closely miked voice. This (one-directional) dissociation of point of view and point of audition acts to free the camera from its slavery to the intelligibility of dialogue and allows the characters to circulate more flexibly in cinematic space, while maintaining attention and identification through the voice. The uncoupling of point of view and point of audition is standard practice in road movies and other films with vehicles, planes, or spaceships, but it is also just as common in the urban comedies of Woody Allen, with their conversations out on the streets. While the image can give us a spectacular totality in its frame, the soundtrack with its closeup voices maintains our seamless intimacy with the characters. This practice—most often produced during postsynchronization but also routinely with hidden radio mics—has the advantage of guaranteeing the comprehensibility of dialogue. Not that dialogue must always carry the action, but even if the characters are mumbling, spectators might think there is a reason they're being deprived of the sound if they cannot hear it well enough.

We might also say that in some cases the closely miked voice is more realistic than a distant one. In everyday life we incessantly single out the audio signals that interest us from the sound-filled world in which we perceive them and bring those signals into the foreground. This is called the cocktail party effect, where the organs of hearing, in tandem with the brain, work like a

sound-mixing board that can isolate and dial up a signal selected from the environment, while diminishing the subjective volume of the other sounds we continue to hear passively. This process is fully possible only with binaural stereophonic hearing. In film, however, a so-called realist sound recording, which places us at the same subjective distance from characters as the camera, but which does not give us the means to single out and locate the chosen signal that binaural hearing would, cannot merit the label "realist" (aside from a kind of punitive meaning sometimes associated with the term). Therefore, a recording that "artificially" brings voices closer to us seems nearer to the real mechanisms of hearing.

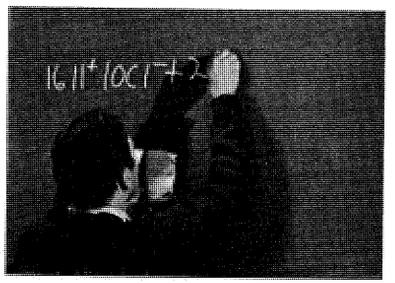
FROM WHERE? AND WHO?

The question of point of audition, like that of point of view, involves not just locating the source but also poses the question of who is listening. In *The Voice in Cinema* I explored this problem by considering the example of telephone conversations. Depending on whether we can hear the telephone voice of the party at the other end of the line, we are either associated with the point of audition of the visible party (if we can) or thrown into a third-party position of outside observer (if we cannot). The point of audition that is adopted becomes particularly evident if the film employs a sound barrier, which could be either a material obstacle that impedes the sound (wall, door, windowpane) or another louder noise that masks it (crowd, storm, wind, train). Nothing works better to plug us into the ears of a given character than making us share in her or his temporary difficulty in understanding an audio signal addressed to her or him.

Think of the end of *La Dolce vita*, where the voice of the girl who calls out to Marcello is obscured by distance and the noise of the surf, or the dialogue between lovers who can't hear each other on the platform of a busy train station in Godard's *Every Man for Himself* (1979). It can thus happen that the chosen "point of audition" (in an objective, spatial sense) can create all by itself the scene's "point of view" in a subjective sense: either by the practices just

described, or more subtly, by having us hear a character's intimate noises such as breathing or swallowing (*2001*, *The Elephant Man*), or by presenting the character's imaginary internal voices (Marion's boss and coworker in *Psycho*), or through transmitting aberrant or deformed sound perceptions when a character is in a state of crisis, sickness, or drunkenness. An example of the latter case occurs in Jerry Lewis's *The Nutty Professor* (1963), where in the famous hangover scene the day after one of his transformations, the unhappy chemistry professor suffers from all the noises he hears in his classroom: chalk grating on the blackboard, a student chewing gum, and a nose being blown become enormous and unbearable for him, and for us too, since we hear them disproportionately magnified.

Along the same lines, the scene of Joe Gideon's (Roy Scheider) heart attack in *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, 1979) is dramatized by the strategy of abruptly cutting out the hubbub of the hero's noisy entourage of banquet guests. All we hear, greatly magnified, are the very small noises that he makes with a pencil and a lighter. Twenty years earlier in *I Want to Live!* (1958) Robert Wise did something similar. We might also mention the final ascent in *The Ballad of Narayama* (Shohei Imamura, 1983), when the son who has stopped to drink at a spring suddenly no longer sees his mother whom he has carried to the mountain and sat down nearby: in an instant, the sound of the spring that we see flowing next to him falls silent. Imamura thus conveys the state in which a thought occupies him so completely that it seems as though the entire universe is struck by auditory paralysis.



The most extreme case of subjective sound has to be the representation of deafness, as in Abel Gance's *The Life and Loves of Beethoven* (1936). Gance makes us experience the onset of the composer's malady by depriving us of the sounds of life before his eyes: a mill wheel turning, a bird's song, the violin of a village musician. But to link this growing deafness even more closely with the subjective suffering of the hero, Gance does have us hear the sounds of mill, bird, and violin at first, in order then to precipitate us into the point of audition of the unhappy hero who can no longer hear them. Consider the amazing long shot that shows the village fiddler in action. At first we hear what he's playing, and in the frame are children who are listening. Then Beethoven (played by Harry Baur) enters the frame, and the closer he gets to the musician, the fainter the music becomes until it disappears. So in a single continuous shot, we go from "objective" listening to "subjective" deafness; other filmmakers would have done this scene by isolating the hero in a closeup. We might wonder how a spectator who does not know this biographical detail of the film's real-life hero would understand the scene. Could he or she not think that the character played by Baur is a magician who can turn off sounds?

A similarly bold example of undoing the camera's objective point of view with a strongly "subjective" point of audition occurs in a film that predates Gance's, namely *Dishonored* (1931).[6] Von Sternberg was proud of his experiments with sound, and he mentions in his memoirs the special prize that he was awarded for sound in *Dishonored*.[7] Colonel Kranau (Victor McLaglen) has climbed through a window into the apartment of Marie Kolverer (Marlene Dietrich), whom he suspects of espionage. Marie meanwhile is in the next room playing the piano. The scene cuts between her playing the "Moonlight Sonata," without the least suspicion of an intruder, and the colonel in the other room, where the sound of the piano becomes suddenly muffled in accord with the point of audition. When the colonel goes behind a curtain at the rear of the shot, the sound becomes even more faint, as though the spectator were moving with the ear of the character, even though the camera has not moved at all and has certainly not gone behind the curtain. Here is thus another

instance of dissociation between (objective) point of view and (subjective) point of audition.

In a scene from *Mother Joan of the Angels* (Kawalerowicz, 1961) we find ourselves with the protagonist, a priest, outside the room of an inn from where the muffled sound of a lute can be heard. Cut to the inside of this room, where the sound is still muffled. The priest enters the room (advancing toward the camera), and with his entry the sound becomes louder and more present. Here is a clear case of dissociation between the position of the camera and the point of audition of a character, a situation that has been very rare since the Sternberg film.

TWELVE EARS AND NONE

How many potential ears, or pairs of ears if you will, are there in the cinema, and what are their relations?

1. *The technical ear*

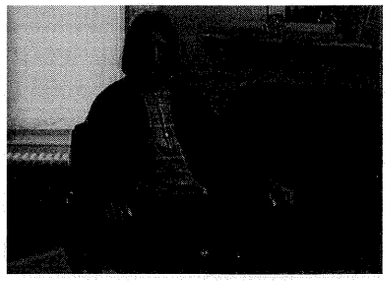
I have said that the "technical ear" is not localizable or symbolizable, since it can result from fusing of sounds coming from multiple microphones on the set or in the mixing.

2. *The ears of characters*

Various situations are possible regarding the ears of characters (including the case of hearing the sounds they themselves make): characters could supposedly be hearing the same thing, or each might hear different sounds (e.g., one character is on the telephone and hears an interlocutor; the other is at a remove and does not hear what the first hears, and they might or might not supposedly be deaf to some of what we hear). The *compartmentalization of hearing*, which we will return to later, is an important issue in film.

Consider the particular case of silent or mute characters, who are assumed to be hearing everything (even when they are posited as being deaf and dumb), because there is no sound of their speech to prevent their hearing. The temporarily mute young boy in Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*, the only character present in both the first and last scene (where he utters one single sentence), is also the only character capable of hearing everything, including the sounds in scenes in which he is not present.

A symmetrical situation involves a character who hears him- or herself speaking through (or rather, especially, by contrast with) the silence of another. In Wyler's *The Collector* (1965) and many telephone-based thrillers, the persecuted woman hears herself speak through the silence of her persecutor. Think



also of the therapy client who becomes aware of his or her voice in the silence of the analyst (in every film involving psychoanalysis, most notably in a great scene in Bresson's *The Devil Probably*); and of *Persona*, where the nurse who is caring for the mute actress listens to herself talking and feels profound disgust. These are all examples in which we realize that the characters hear the stage monitor, as it were, of their own voices.

3. *The ear of the spectator*

The film renders the spectator capable of hearing both what the characters hear and what they don't hear, particularly nondiegetic music, which often functions as a representation of the character's unconscious, and also voice-over narrations. The spectator might also hear what one character hears but not another (e.g., the voice at the other end of the phone, described above). The spectator can even *not* hear any of what the characters hear (e.g., in *Playtime* when Hulot is behind the glass wall in the waiting room, he reacts to a sound we can only guess at). But only under certain conditions is the spectator actually conscious of hearing.

The cinema, it is often said, opens our eyes.[8] If the camera's distinction consists in allowing us to see, can a similar claim be made for the mic's allowing us to hear? We don't get the feeling that we are *allowed* to hear so much as words and music are *imposed* on us. Most often, films do not give us the space or distance with their sound that they can for images. Only when music and speech are heard at a distance—such as in Tati, or in the grumbled or whispered dialogue in *Russian Ark*—do we feel free of this pressure.

It is not the sound itself that exerts such pressure; the feeling of being imposed on comes instead from the loudspeaker and its power to amplify even weak sounds—a development that is only decades old and entirely revolutionary in human history. Never before could quiet, intimate vocal productions have an impact on a whole assemblage of human beings.

The audience is most conscious of its act of hearing in films where dialogue is sparse—as if the presence of dialogue lessens such awareness (music also acts as a kind of anesthetic in this way). Godard and Tati make us aware of listening because we must strain to make out words that are often interrupted, covered over, or indistinct. Tati even seems to be always gently snipping off the thread of listening in order to make us aware of hearing and provide something that would resemble "objective" listening, listening that is not captive to or enveloped in its "object." Along these same lines, recall the sequence in Lynch's *The Straight Story* (1999), where the main character stops at the home of a couple after his tractor has broken down, and we hear them conversing from far off, as a neighbor might hear.[9]

Finally, the film spectator is conscious of listening in this special case: when we see a performance of a musical piece onscreen and a teacher or expert expresses a negative opinion of it. In *Autumn Sonata* (Bergman, 1978), *The Pianist*, *The Man Who Wasn't There* (Joel and Ethan Coen, 2001), and a number of 1940s and 1950s Hollywood melodramas, we hear a piece of piano music whose performance gets criticized afterward by another character, thus disturbing our status as listeners disposed to be "sent" by music.

In other cases characters are listening to a voice, noises, or music on a recording, and this "canned listening" changes our position with respect to the sounds. Jack Nicholson listens to the voice of Robertson, who has just died, in *The Passenger*. In Gance's *La Fin du monde* a character has recorded his last will and testament on a phonograph, and the mourners attend to his posthumous voice. Characters in *La Dolce vita* and *La Notte* listen to sounds on tape recorders, as does Irène Jacob in *The Double Life of Véronique*.

We are unable to process everything we hear at a given moment, and it is only after repeated hearings of a sequence that we manage to identify its various elements. Each time we listen to it, we mentally (not physically) exclude what we choose—consciously or otherwise—not to listen to, even as we are unable to shut our ears; the way we exclude sound has different consequences from exclusions of sight. To look here rather than there differs from our choosing what we listen to since for the visible we can come back to what we didn't look at previously; but we do not have this prerogative for most audio phenomena, because of sound's impermanence and the way it occurs as a series of discrete events. What we do not listen to in time is lost, and at the same time indelible.

What do we listen to first in the cinema, when there are several things to hear at the same time? The voice and, if possible, assuming we understand the language, the meaning of the words spoken. This is what I have called *vococentrism*.[10]

Linguistic listening involves excluding all that is not pertinent; it is listening for meaning and not for the ensemble of sound, through a selection process

that is not even aware of itself. Listening for meaning involves being deaf to the rest. When we listen to someone speak, we forget about the music and are subject to, harnessed by, absorbed by the words.

This does not prevent us from passively hearing what we're not listening to, from being sensitive to it and affected by it. But it is not possible to listen attentively to all the sounds at once—and this is all the more true when they are not inscribed in an auditory frame, as we will consider below.

4. *The ear of a character who may hear through walls or through a diegetic mic*

In *City of Lost Children* (Caro and Jeunet, 1995) one of the clones played by Dominique Pinon speaks in a hushed tone to a live brain enclosed in an aquarium (and has the voice of Jean-Louis Trintignant), saying it is dangerous to be overheard by the "Master" (Daniel Emilfork), who is close by. However, that ear is not signified for us by the dialogue so much as by the tone of voice: it is the ear supposed by the voice.

5. *The ear of a character present in the scene, but asleep*

Sleepers "hear" even though the sound may not necessarily awaken them. In the same scene from *City of Lost Children*, in addition to Dominique Pinon and the brain there is a little boy who is asleep but can hear them in this passive way. Recall also, in *The Conversation*, the bum sleeping on a bench in broad daylight: we hardly see him onscreen, but he is the object of the woman's remarks. In some way he is hearing (how do we know he isn't just resting?), and we unconsciously project our own auditory sensibilities onto him. In fact, symbolically, it is not by means of all his hidden microphones that Harry Caul hears but *through the sleep of the homeless man*; as a listener, he identifies with that place as the place of an absolute ear.

In a beautiful scene taken from the New Testament in Pasolini's *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (1964), Joseph falls asleep to the sounds of blacksmiths and a stonecutter. In *The Passenger* the camera slowly leaves the image of a man lying on a hotel bed and takes us out of the room through a

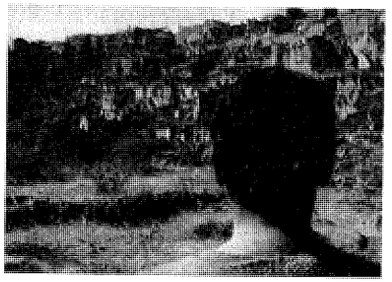
sleight-of-hand whereby it passes through two posts of the fence, and we find ourselves outside, where now, from the exterior, we see the man dead in his room. We never stop listening throughout this sequence: noises of life, people talking to one another in Spanish, cars, unobtrusive bird tweets, dogs barking, a trumpet player practicing a bullfight melody, hammer blows, and so forth. Alive at the beginning, dead at the end—do we still have the ear of the character?

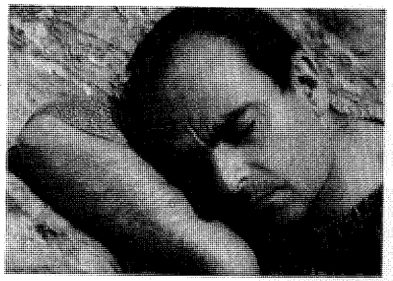
6. *The ear of a dead person*

Here we fall into the magical and the irrational, but isn't that the territory of cinema? At the beginning of *Rope* the two protagonists strangle young David before our eyes with a rope. Then they place him in a trunk that they perversely set in the room where they are hosting a party—a party to which David was invited, and that he attends, "present" to everyone although incognito and in the altered form of a corpse. Throughout the whole film, which is composed of essentially urbane dialogue and takes place in real time and in a single location, David's body is present inside the trunk. Who is to say that it is not David hearing everything from beginning to end?

7. *The ear of a human about to be born*

Some films seem to give us the hearing of someone who is not yet born but who is already present as potential in the narrative of a man and woman who are about to meet, or meet again, and whose story beyond the words *the end* includes his or her hypothetical birth. The question, "How was I born?" might be rephrased: "By what pattern of chance and events did my parents, who might not have met or might not have had me, become my parents?"—and is this not the infinitely fascinating story of stories for every human being? At the beginning of Helma Sanders-Brahms's beautiful *Germany Pale Mother* (1980) the daughter of Lena (Eva Mattes) tells the story of how she will be born and comments on what we might call her prenatal scenes, even her preconception. We have her ear, and perhaps also her sight.





Many films seem to be told to us through this ear, so to speak. There is the notable case of *Eyes Wide Shut*, which I have examined in a separate study.[11]

8. *The ear of someone being talked about*

Each time a third party is mentioned in a conversation between two people, we can imagine that this other person could overhear (we say that his or her ears are burning). In *Wild at Heart* Marietta and Santos speak in hushed voices about killing Sailor, who, as we see in parallel editing, is in a car hundreds of miles away. The editing makes him a potential hearer of this conspiracy. The little boy in *The Sacrifice* is spoken of in the third person in many scenes where he is not present (and assumed to be sleeping in his upstairs room). "The child mustn't hear; let's not wake him," repeat the adults (as the threat of war looms). We'd better believe he can hear, especially each time he is named in the third person.

When we were children, adults spoke about us in the third person in this way, right in front of us, as though we weren't there: "he does this . . . she did that." As a result, whenever anyone mentions a "he" or "she" in a film, we prick up our ears, since it's us they're talking about. Harry Caul makes this transference in *The Conversation*. He listens repeatedly, obsessively, to a conversation that involves two other "he's": (1) the absent husband (the third party in the triangle with the woman and her lover) and the subject of the sentence "He'd kill us if he had the chance," and (2) the sleeping homeless man: "Look at him, he's not hurting anybody." Harry becomes these two "he's" through strong suggestions by the editing of sound and picture.

Throughout the film, with its spellbinding editing by Walter Murch, Harry listens over and over to phrases that emerge from the speakers in his workshop, and we start to apply them to him. They stick to him, especially the ones that concern the bum on the bench in Union Square, when the woman notes tenderly, "Oh look! That's terrible. . . . Oh God. Every time I see one of those

guys I always think the same thing. I always think he was once somebody's baby boy. He was once somebody's baby boy, and he had a mother and father who loved him . . . and now there he is half-dead on a park bench. And now where are his mother and father and all his uncles?"

The Conversation has the effect of rendering time unreal. The present becomes the constantly returning conversation of the couple, and it's as if Harry Caul's linear time is wrapped in the spell of the sound recording's time warp—his body becomes enveloped by the couple's phrases, especially those spoken by the woman, like the bum wrapped in his newspaper.

9. *The ear of a space or place*

There is also the expression "The walls have ears." In a large hotel kitchen in Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), Dick Halloran speaks to Danny in a low voice, as though the entire Overlook Hotel were capable of listening in. In film, all places where voices reverberate give the impression that the walls are listening: prisons (Losey's *The Criminals* [1960]; Bresson's *A Man Escaped*; Konchalovsky's *Runaway Train* [1985]), churches (*Le Corbeau*), courtrooms (*The Trial*), bridge underpasses (Vincente Minnelli's *An American in Paris* [1951]), culverts and sewer tunnels (*Kanal*; *The Third Man*; *The Fugitive*), empty rooms (Sebastian's huge apartment in *Blade Runner*, the abandoned house in *Rebel Without a Cause* [1955], Xanadu in *Citizen Kane*, the house of Tom Cruise's deceased father in *Rain Man*, the empty chateau in *La Dolce vita*, the oversized apartment in *Les Enfants terribles*). In the cinema the echo is contained within the film; it does not belong to the space where the film is being shown.

Filmmakers can render audible the space-that-listens and the echo of that space; some remarkable films show the walls of a particular place and bring alive again the sounds that once resonated there. Think of *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (Terence Davies, 1988), *The Music Room* (Satyajit Ray, 1958), and

Duras's *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* (1976), whose title suggests the resonance, faint yet eternal, of a name uttered in a now deserted place.

10. *The ear of no one*

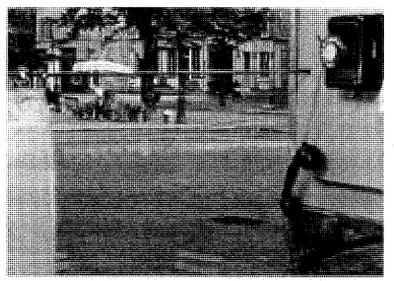
The image in movies of a dangling telephone receiver from which a voice can be heard and to which no one is listening (because there is nobody there or no living person at any rate) is especially eloquent, no doubt because it so effectively symbolizes the cinema itself.

In *Mon oncle* we see the public telephone that Hulot has just let go of, suspended from its swinging cord. The voice of Arpel can be heard, but no one is listening (moreover, this family man defines himself as somebody no one listens to; this is made evident by the rest of the film). In Sacha Guitry's *Faisons un rêve* (1946) a phone receiver with no audience lies on a sofa.

In the pilot episode of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* (1990), Leland Palmer, on learning of the death of his daughter, Laura, drops the phone he was speaking to his wife on, and from the dangling receiver we hear the acousmatic sobbing and pleading of the wife no one is listening to.

11. *The implied ear in the actor's voice*

The "spell" of the voice of an actor or actress consists in nudging us into listening in the way it presupposes for us and in creating the surrounding space.



At the beginning of *Playtime*, in the airport scene, a woman gives her husband some advice for his health in a muffled waiting-room voice, and the husband grumbles back to her. These two voices create the space of a hospital, that is, a space where people don't dare raise their voices, and in so doing they set the tone for the entire film, which will be a lot about listening carefully.

When actors say their lines with restraint, when they speak as though they are being secretly listened to in the dark by malicious ears, or suggest they risk waking some alien force or one that's better left asleep, they are refiguring the entire space, both visual and auditory, around themselves. When Mickey Rourke in *Rumble Fish*, Jean Gabin in *Le Jour se lève*, Jean Rochefort in *The Hairdresser's Husband*, Kyle MacLachlan in *Dune*, or Roberto Benigni in *La Voce della luna* speak in big daylight spaces as though they were in the heart of darkness and night, in voices suggesting they are speaking directly in someone's ear rather than to a person who is yards away, they transform everything around them. *The voice sets the stage.*

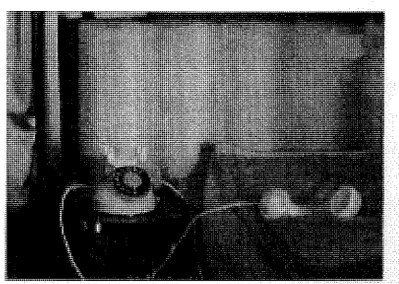
James Stewart in *Rear Window* often speaks in a hushed voice about the spectacle (and sounds) for which his infirmity leaves him "cast" as spectator.

12. *The Great Ear*

And where is God in all this? We may call the Great Ear that which hears everything in a film—the place from which all is heard. What characterizes this place, designated and supposed by the film, is that no one is there. In this sense categories number 10 (*the ear of no one*) and number 12 amount to the same thing.

COMMUNICATION OR BLOCKAGE BETWEEN "EARS"

The play of audition in the cinema consists of compartmentalizing or partitioning off, or else creating passageways between, these different types of



hearing—among characters, between characters and the spectator, and across the variety of types of hearing/listening that I have enumerated.

Often, for example, a sound is part of the overall soundscape, and a particular character points it out, while another does not hear it. In *Sansho the Bailiff*, little Anju hears the Mother calling from afar, but her big brother, Zushio, says that he didn't hear her, that it was only "the sound of the waves." The audience, however, clearly hears and can recognize the voice of Tamaki. In Bergman's *Through a Glass Darkly* Karin (Harriet Andersson) stops because she has heard a cuckoo, while her younger brother, Minus, says he heard nothing. The moviegoer in the theater is not always sure whether he or she has heard the fugitive sound of the bird. This is where modern home movie systems with videos and DVDs are changing the game somewhat, permitting us to eliminate our doubt: we can rewind to the moment when Karin says she heard her cuckoo, and we'll find there is, in fact, no such sound—but we can still honor Karin's claim by attributing it to her hyperacousia.

COMING TO CONSCIOUSNESS AND APPROPRIATION

In Anthony Mann's *The Far Country* (1954), Jeff (James Stewart), a misanthropic prospector, has the habit of riding with a bell attached to the saddle of his horse that announces his approach. For much of the film the hero watches from the sidelines as crimes are committed by the sleazy Judge Gannon and his gang, who are terrorizing a village of prospectors. After his partner, Ben, gets killed by the outlaws, Jeff finally decides to do something. We see him about to saddle his horse and of course the bell rings as usual. Stewart stops what he's doing as though he were hearing the bell for the first time. Later it's evening in the western outpost. The bell announces the arrival of Jeff in the town, and Gannon prepares to have him killed. But the saddled horse carries no rider, and Jeff takes advantage of this sound diversion to surprise and kill the men who were planning to kill him.

What has happened here? While saddling up, Jeff seems to have become fully aware of the bell as something that could give him away, and finally he makes use of it. Associated exclusively with Jeff's egotism until now, the sound here becomes an acousmatic symbol of justice. Through becoming conscious of the sound, Jeff becomes the phantom rider, at the same time restoring his moral authority.

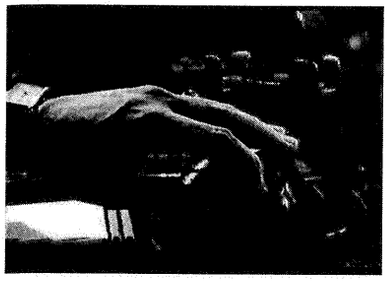
In the prologue of *Persona* we see bodies lying on tables, while we hear what sounds like water dripping from a faucet. Are we in a morgue? Now we see the body of a child lying on his back on a hospital bed with no pillow. A corpse like the others? A telephone rings, once, twice, three times. . . . The little boy moves and turns over; ah, he's alive then. Is he going to react to this ringing or find himself in a new reality, as typically happens when one awakens to the sound of the phone? Neither. The telephone stops ringing, and the little boy has done nothing but turn, without getting up. It is impossible to tell if he heard the phone ring, if this phone is in his reality, if the ringing woke him up.[12]

The sound of a telephone that rings suddenly in a film (often in Tarkovsky, in the empty house of *Stalker*, in the burning house in *The Sacrifice*; and in the cab company office at the beginning of Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*) is the very symbol of the dream that is a film. The characters who pick up the receiver can also be waking up from a dream—like waking up from a film—and sometimes they find themselves in a new reality, but it's only the film-dream that continues on. Hence the famous use of the ringing telephone in *The Matrix* (1999) or in *Ring* (1998). In *Once upon a Time in America* the telephone ring that haunts Robert De Niro, and pierces his opium-induced stupor by ringing for several minutes over a wide range of different images and circumstances, is situated between the real and the imaginary, between the past, the present, and the eternal.

Very often we have no idea how conscious a character might be of the sounds he or she produces or of other sounds around him or her. I find this quite

compelling, but we should resist responding with a subjectivizing interpretation; that is, with the pretension of getting inside characters to decide what they are hearing or not hearing. In *Playtime* the American businessman waiting in a room with Hulot produces various noises. Is he aware that all the sounds he is making in this mute, muffled atmosphere (unzipping his portfolio, brushing his pants, signing papers, clearing his nose with nasal spray) can be heard? In Chabrol's *Alice or the Last Escapade,* is Alice aware that the sunny and bountiful natural landscape through which she is walking makes no sound and that the sound of her footsteps takes place in total silence? We don't know, and it's better this way. In *The Long Goodbye* a single theme by John Williams occurs under different forms, and Marlowe (Elliott Gould) hears it at home in the style of cool jazz, but later, when a syrupy Muzak version plays in the supermarket where he's shopping for cat food, he seems not to recognize it.

More generally, we can ask if characters are aware of the diegetic music that surrounds them. We might think not, and then all of a sudden someone onscreen cries, "Did you hear that?" Sandra Dawson (Claudia Cardinale), at a fancy party in Geneva where piano music is playing, reacts suddenly to some chords that no one around her is paying attention to: from César Franck's Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue (in Visconti's *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa,* or *Sandra* [1965]). However, by the time she gets to the piano, the "magic passage" (the chorale chords) has already gone by just as it actually does in the Franck composition.



In Jean Grémillon's *L'Etrange Monsieur Victor* (1938) Raimu's apartment looks out on a square with a bandstand, and a long scene takes place during an open-air concert that plays military music. Various pieces are heard in succession, and at first the characters present in the apartment comment on each one; then they stop talking about the music, and later it seems as though their actions are motivated by this music that they no longer take note of. Similarly, in Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria* (1957) a famous movie star has brought Cabiria to his place; he puts a Beethoven symphony on his record player, and at some undetermined point the two characters cease being conscious of the music, and the symphony's changing dynamics appear to steer their movements and reactions.[13]

In *Laura,* McPherson, accompanied by Waldo, visits the apartment of Laura, who is presumed to have been murdered. McPherson turns on the record player, and the melody we hear is one that Waldo says was Laura's favorite. Later, having returned to the apartment, McPherson falls asleep beneath the portrait of the "dead" Laura, and the music can be heard again, now nondiegetically, and it is from out of this music, which McPherson does not control—and which he is apparently not hearing and no longer speaks about—that the real, living form of Laura comes forth.

When a character becomes aware, in reality or in appearance, of the sounds around him or her, or of a sound as it starts or stops, there is a powerful

echo in the spectator's sensibility since the character's situation ultimately reflects back on our own hearing.

In *The Nutty Professor* (1963), Professor Julius Kelp is walking down a hallway, and his shoes make a grotesque gargling noise. Does he know it? He stops, takes off his shoes (his feet are offscreen), and keeps walking. The same noise continues although we have no idea how this is possible. Then Kelp looks toward the camera as though to ask us silently, "What do you make of it?" The gag works through a series of realizations: the character seems to become conscious of the noise he is making since he seems to act to eliminate its cause; then, as though it were brought forth by this first realization, he seems to notice that there's a camera present and that he's a character in a movie. But perhaps he knew this already (Jerry Lewis is, after all, identified for us as being not only an actor in the film but its writer and director), and we're the ones who didn't have any way of knowing. The film keeps making us trip over our own assumptions about the characters' awareness or unawareness regarding their environment.

The easiest and best known form of this trick involves catching the audience in the act of making automatic assumptions about different modes of listening. For example, we may believe we have the exclusive privilege of hearing the nondiegetic "pit music," but it turns out a character within the story hears it too (Woody Allen's *Bananas* [1971]; Godard's *Every Man For Himself*; and Bertrand Blier's *Merci la vie* [1991]). We hear the internal voice of a character, and it turns out that the character's partner hears it too (Rob Reiner's *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* [1982]). Or we think we alone are hearing the narrating voice of Orson Welles, but it turns out that an onscreen character is hearing it too (*The Magnificent Ambersons* [1942]).

In *Buffet froid* (Bertrand Blier, 1980), Gérard Depardieu, Jean Carmet, and Bernard Blier are out in the country relaxing in lounge chairs in front of a house at the edge of a forest. In a grumpy tone that's so often heard in French movies (as we've seen in Vigo), Blier fulminates about how uncomfortable the countryside is in winter. Depardieu disagrees and cites the charms of nature. Behind this dialogue we hear birds singing, but we were perhaps not aware of them before since it's an ambient sound that we are so used to hearing in movie scenes with trees. However, not only is Blier's character aware of the sounds, but he hates them and says so. So when Depardieu speaks of nature's "calm," Blier barks back at him, "That's what you call calm? All these goddam birds, he thinks that's calm." Later when the chirping stops, it is Blier who points it out to his friends (and to those of us, too, who may not yet have noticed). The birds' silence has not been served on a platter for us to hear; it has simply happened.

As I noted earlier in the case of Harpo Marx, a silent or mute character in a scene causes words to be heard differently and tends to make us more aware of listening.

Characters *appropriate* a noise when they cease being acted upon by the sound and instead put it to work for themselves, or incorporate it into their universe, either by naming it (a sensory-named sound)[14] or miming it with their mouth or imitating it.

In *Le Cercle rouge* (1970) Jansen (Yves Montand) uses the sounds of his footsteps in a stairwell by the Place Vendôme to mislead the concierge about who he is and where he's going. In the "museum of voices" scene in *City of Women*, Marcello Mastroianni orally produces sound effects—"snip, snap"—for his own footsteps, mimicking the onomatopoeia found in comic books.

Making a character's lips move to the sound of a piece of music is another way to link (or not link) the character to a musical sound in the environment and signify that the character hears it and is taking it in. In *Elevator to the Gallows* Jeanne Moreau moves her lips and nods her head as she walks "with" the nondiegetic trumpet of Miles Davis that of course she is not supposed to be hearing. Louis Malle, who in another scene allows us to hear the heroine's thoughts, is thus suggesting—but only suggesting—that the trumpet is like an interior voice carrying on the infinite internal discourse of this woman.[15] (Note also how at the beginning of the film the effusive romantic telephone dialogue between Moreau and Ronet is both covered over and prolonged by Davis's trumpet.)

Confined in his cage in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1990), Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) unwinds to a piano version of Bach's "Goldberg Variations," which he plays on a tape recorder. We see from the way he moves his lips to the music that he knows it by heart and can play it in his mind. In a way this gives him a sort of symbolic superiority over the prison guards, who are watching him and whom he will kill: they are not sufficiently attentive to this music, which is perhaps contributing to lower their guard. And it's on the very last second of the Bach that Lecter attacks, as though it were serving as his cue.

Inside the police station at the beginning of *Rebel Without a Cause*, James Dean mimics the sound of the police siren—quite like Dustin Hoffman's character in *Rain Man* imitating the rumbling noise that his brother's car makes as it goes over a bridge. These behaviors help depict both characters as childlike (not childish). I see George Lucas's movies as exemplary in getting the audience to share in the pleasure of orally produced sound effects (e.g., the whir and whoosh of laser swords).

WOMEN LISTENING, MEN LISTENING

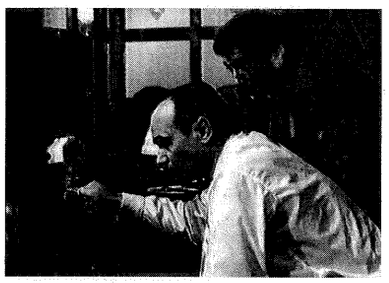
The cinema often makes use of characters' relationship to listening as a metaphor for sexual difference. For example, female characters are frequently endowed with hyperacousia, a hypersensitivity to sounds, including inaudible ones.

In *Three Colors: Blue* Julie Vignon (Juliette Binoche), living alone after the tragedy of losing her husband and child, hears all kinds of music, as well as the tiniest noises that both torment her and restore her to life. In the films of Godard and Blier mentioned above, female characters in the tradition of Joan of Arc—perhaps the most famous case of hyperacousia—hear music that the male characters don't hear.

"Do you hear?" Séverine (Catherine Deneuve) asks her husband at the end of *Belle de jour* (1967), referring to a jingling bell that he doesn't hear, though we do along with her. Inside the stagecoach during the Apache attack in *Stagecoach* (1939), Lucy is the first person to hear the bugle that announces they will be rescued; she can hear it through the blare of nondiegetic music and the gunshots and thundering of horses' hooves: "Can you hear it? It's a bugle. They're blowing the charge." I have already mentioned *Sansho the Bailiff* and *Through a Glass Darkly*, where in each case the male partner does not hear or doesn't want to hear.

Women's hyperacousia can be used by other characters, or by fate, to do them in. In Cukor's *Gaslight* (1944) a husband uses sounds to drive his wife mad by convincing her that she's the only one who hears them. In *La Signora di tutti* (Ophuls, 1934), the unhappy heroine hears a piece of music that no one else hears (in fact the pit music), and this catapults her into depression.

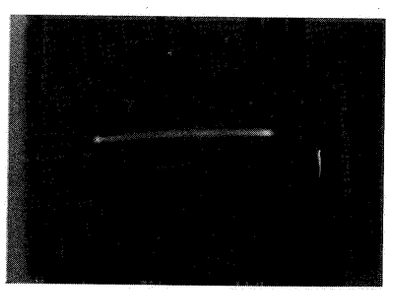
While women in films hear things that are alive and sensory, men crack codes. In the latter case the spectator is reminded of the floating and incomplete character of his or her own hearing, compared with that of the characters, while at the same time we are reassured of the possibility of a Great Ear on which nothing is lost.



In *The 13th Warrior* (John McTiernan, 1999) the learned Arab played by Antonio Banderas slowly acquires the language of the Vikings, and we start to understand it along with him (i.e., we start to hear English). In submarine movies such as McTiernan's *The Hunt for Red October* (1990), there is often a radio operator who upon hearing Morse code signals can immediately translate them for the other characters and for us as well. In the *Star Wars* series Luke Skywalker understands the beep-language of the robot R2-D2 and translates it for us. In *Children of a Lesser God* James (William Hurt) "reads" the sign language of Sarah (Marlee Matlin) and translates it into spoken language for the movie audience. In *A Man Escaped* Fontaine decodes another prisoner's taps on his cell wall. In *Bob le flambeur* an experienced burglar demonstrates for his fellow bandits the trained ear required to crack the combination of a safe. In this latter scene several ideas are artfully combined. There is the impossibility for us to share in the burglar's expert hearing; and there is a German shepherd, with ears erect, as a symbol of an archaic hearing acuity, characteristic of hunters and Indians (see also Jones, the cat, in *Alien*). Also, with the image of an oscilloscope that appears to represent the sound wave, there is the myth of the transmutability of the audible into the visible: even though this visual form is impossible to interpret, it seems to objectivize the nonmaterial and apparently subjective phenomenon that is sound—as if, in order to be mastered, sound needs to leave a visible trace.

In films that deploy such scenes the idea is to lead the spectator to believe that certain characters have special resources for hearing and decoding that the ordinary spectator doesn't have. This convention balances out the special access we have to nondiegetic music and voices that are inaudible to the characters. Finally, we rely on these gifted decoders to be our ears and hear what otherwise would escape us; this situation encourages the related idea that somewhere there could exist the Great Ear of the Big Boss.

Which allows us to forget that at the Portal of the Great Ear, there is no one.

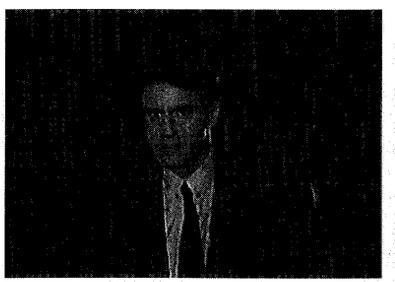


"I COULDN'T HELP OVERHEARING . . ."

A film often implicates us in sound through a shared exclusion: we can't hear a given sound, and a particular character can't hear it either. Or conversely, a character in a film might be forced to hear certain sounds despite him- or herself since the character can't shut his or her ears, nor can we, sitting in our theater seats—for example, hearing a painful marital argument.

In *Un Coeur en hiver* (Claude Sautet, 1992), Daniel Auteuil plays Stéphane, an introvert afraid of his feelings. When the "security" of his life becomes disturbed by the emotions of Camille (Emmanuelle Béart), he drives to the home of a man who is carrying on an intimate relationship with his maidservant—the couple offering a reassuring model for the hero. But when he parks his car not far from the house, he hears a fight between the master of the house (Maurice Garrel) and his mistress (Myriam Boyer). The distant sound of the voices as they pass from one room to another gives us the impression of an endless discussion that has already taken place a hundred times, and it seems to paralyze Stéphane for a moment (making him closely resemble the spectator sitting immobile in his or her theater seat), before he eventually turns around to go home.

In *Rear Window,* as we've already seen, everything starts with the hero's physical paralysis due to his leg cast: his immobility, along with the oppressive heat that keeps the windows open, forces him to hear the domestic quarrel between Thorwald and his wife. In another Hitchcock film, *Psycho,* Marion in her motel room hears an argument between the mother and son taking place nearby in the family mansion; we hear the son's voice as he comes and goes, in what seems to be a never-ending domestic hell. In *The 400 Blows* Antoine Doinel hears from his bed the arguments between his mother and stepfather: "Damn it, I've given him a name, I feed him," says Julien (Albert Rémy), heard at some distance; and Gilberte (Claire Maurier) replies, "Oh, I've had it with your complaining. I've had it!" And we've seen that in *Traffic,* Hulot is caught between two couples, one older and one younger, and he's



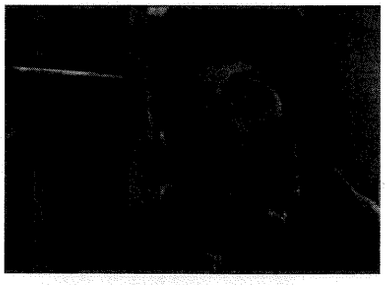
constrained to hear their bickering at night. Even with Tati we can't get away from those voices. . . .

So the guilt of not having listened is met by the curse of hearing against one's will.

But although the sound film pins us down in our theater seats to hear dialogue we're not always up for, and even makes us feel guilty about overhearing, it does have one resource to offer a kind of exit door for hearing. This escape hatch, or what plays at being one, is the image. A film can show any image it wants that is not the face of the speaker—an object, a piece of furniture or landscape, other people, anything at all—as a way of pretending not to hear.

The image that looks off somewhere other than where someone is speaking to us, the image that wanders away, is the very foundation of Fellini's work, beginning with 8½. That film's movie-director protagonist is always fleeing, a coward, avoiding eye contact behind his sunglasses and hat as he is bombarded by voices that demand his attention (his actors), criticize him (his wife), and overwhelm him with chatter (the voluble mistress played by Magali Noël) or with complaining (the assistant). The hero's only escape from these unavoidable voices is through creating magnificent visions; maybe he's indebted to these bothersome voices for helping him construct his fantasies.

At the beginning of *Muriel, or The Time of Return* Resnais chooses to overlay the voice of an antique dealer (Delphine Seyrig) who is praising pieces of furniture to a customer, with shots of the furniture and other objects that flee the imposition of the voice. Is it an accident that just afterward, the son in the household is forced to submit to his mother's complaints and accusations? *After Hours* (Scorsese, 1985) opens with Paul Hackett (Griffin Dunne) in his office, along with other employees, all working at their computers. While



listening distractedly to the new colleague he is training, he escapes a bit by looking around his work environment: the small desks, the family photos that the secretaries tack up near their computer screens or typewriters. This is what the camera eye shows us, and yet we cannot *not* hear what the hero is hearing: remarks that hardly leave him indifferent about how the young recruit wants to get out of his rut, live his life, change his surroundings.

In *Lady in the Lake* (1948) the choices of the constantly subjective camera create this suggestion of distraction while at the same time showing the inevitability of hearing. In one scene Marlowe does not listen to Adrienne Fromsett (Audrey Totter) because he is admiring the legs of a secretary. The camera eye that stands in for his eye reveals to our eyes (and makes us complicit in) his obvious distraction. But Totter's voice quickly interpellates him and requires his glance to turn to the voice's source, a beautiful blonde.

1. See glossary for *narrative indeterminacy*.
2. The symbolic camera is completely virtual in animated films and in 3-D animation with computer-generated images, even though it is present as a camera in the spectator's mind.
3. According to Jean-Louis Baudry, in primary identification the spectator "identifies less with what is represented—the spectacle itself—than with what puts the spectacle in play or stages it to be seen, with what is not visible but allows us to see." See J. Aumont and M. Marie, *Dictionnaire théorique et critique du cinéma* (Paris: Nathan, 2001).
4. The equivalent for audition, which might seem ridiculous but proceeds from the same logic, would be to alternate between closeups of the ear and images of the source of sound. But this would draw attention to the gaping dissymmetry between questions of sound and image.
5. See the interviews with French sound engineers conducted by Claudine Nougaret and Sophie Chiabaut in *Le Son direct au cinéma: Entretiens* (Paris: FEMIS, 1997).
6. See chapter 3.
7. See Josef von Sternberg, *De Vienne à Shanghai: Les Tribulations d'un cinéaste* (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque des Cahiers, 2001).
8. Chion writes, "Le cinéma . . . donne à voir"—literally, "the cinema gives (things) to see," but here the sense is also that of cinema's giving the gift of sight; that is, opening our eyes.—Trans.

9. See Michel Chion, *David Lynch*, rev. ed. (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 2001), 257. There it was noted how sentences heard at a distance "seem to be excerpts from an eternal and reassuring conversation. Moreover, they also place us in the imaginary position of both a child (who picks up all adult conversations near or far) and an elderly person who 'has heard' a lot of things in life, and who receives human speech differently, filtered through his experience."
10. See glossary for *vococentrism* and *verbocentrism*.
11. See Michel Chion, *Eyes Wide Shut*, trans. Trista Selous (London: BFI, 2002).
12. For a detailed analysis of this sequence see Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman, with a foreword by Walter Murch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 198–210.
13. See Claudia Gorbman's excellent analysis in her *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: BFI, 1987), 24–25.
14. See glossary for *sensory naming*.
15. I am using the word *infinite* in both a spatial sense—it's as if the trumpet music is spreading Moreau's internal voice out into external space—and a temporal sense, as we get the impression of a song that never ends.

CHAPTER 19

Orson Welles: The Voice and the House

1.

ACCORDING TO HIS BIOGRAPHER, *at the age of six the young Orson Welles built himself a puppet theater. The puppets were smaller than the boy, so in comparison he was like a god or a giant. What did he put on with them? Shakespeare, we're told. And no doubt, like other children, he spoke all the various parts, projecting his voice onto Iago, then Othello, and the Ophelia puppet as well as the Hamlet.*

Welles is not alone in having spoken as the voice of dolls, figurines, cartoon characters, and other illusions, but rare indeed are those who continue to do so as adults. Welles did, lending his voice through dubbing to secondary characters in The Trial *and* Mr. Arkadin *(he even appears briefly as the female voice in the made-for-TV movie* Fountain of Youth *[1958]). He also took care to post-synch himself, animating with his voice the masked and made-up "puppet" of himself onscreen. He generously acknowledged Sacha Guitry's paternity for this idea, in Guitry's* Story of a Cheat*; but in borrowing it, was he not just taking back what already was his, just as it belongs to all children?*

We may now ask if he who plays this game with intensity, who voices the questions and the replies by becoming the askers and the answerers, doesn't run a certain risk. It could end badly for the person who, in taking the game to the extreme, believes he can with his own mouth pronounce the fundamental word of the Law before which he must himself stand. Recall the lawyer Bannister in The Lady from Shanghai *(1948), who cross-examines himself, interrogating himself in the courtroom like the prosecutor, to which he then replies like the defendant. This performance intentionally provokes guffaws, but it may also have something to do with the way Bannister perishes at the end of the film: shot*

by his wife, whose image mixes with his own in a roomful of mirrors, the bullet being one that he might just as well have fired himself.

And there is that other judicial incident, where Joseph K. in The Trial *appears right in the middle of nightmarish court proceedings, steps onto the podium, and launches into a volley of questions and answers, without even waiting to hear the public accusation against him. The same Joseph K. stubbornly refuses the services of another spokesperson, in this case the voice of the horrible lawyer Hastler, played by Welles himself. No more than for Bannister, this behavior ill serves Joseph K. He fully deserves the same curt sentence pronounced by Hastler's secretary, Leni, in relation to Bloch, the poor defendant: "You talk too much." True, and especially when one tries to play both the voice who speaks in the name of the Law and the voice of the one who appears before the Law; in other words, when one doesn't let the Other get a word in edgewise.*

Let us return to the image of the child-God lending speech to his little inanimate actors and thus channeling through a single vocal organ, his own, the voices of the various characters. The voice is what truly brings them to life, and that voice comes back to him as the voice of others, refracted in the multifaceted mirror of the show he is presenting. This setup, so familiar to children, implies something excluded, a part of the mind and body that remains outside in order to make the characters move, something that will always remain excluded from the theater piece that it organizes, and that mobilizes the all-powerful Word to animate all this play.

We cannot help recalling this figure of the excluded one, this Zeus of puppets, whenever we see the enormous Welles in, say, Filming Othello *(1978)—a seated, eloquent mass, immobile before the miniature screen of his editing table and conversing back and forth with the recorded actors of his little theater.*

Let us imagine Welles directing his films as though he were this paralyzed god on the set, bolted down behind the camera to that spot situated offscreen, from where we hear him narrate in The Magnificent Ambersons*—the same spot from which, as with his radio work, he recites the credits out loud and concludes by pronouncing his own name. No one is surprised that Orson Welles never gets up to appear before the camera. Instead, there is only the frame, entirely empty except for a microphone, in closeup at first, as though right up at the camera lens and under the mouth of the voice-over narrator (a subjective shot that encapsulates the whole project of* The Lady in the Lake*). And then the microphone recedes, becomes smaller, and disappears within the image, leaving the invisible mouth whose place it designated, and whose words it relayed and amplified.*

We shouldn't be surprised if the offscreen Welles, the narrator and director, takes pains to insure that Welles the actor before the camera has makeup and costume that differentiate the actor from the director, so as not to be merely his double or reflection.

If this attitude toward filmmaking calls forth words like demiurge *or* megalomaniac*, remember that we are dealing with the god that is every child, seeking first of all to master his own infantile condition and the prematurity that goes along with it. Welles's precocious language skills (which were even the object of medical study) simply multiplied the prematurity that is common to every human child, who first acquires language and then only afterward the mastery of its body.*

To come back to this boom mic that flies away in the last empty image of The Magnificent Ambersons*, we are inevitably reminded of Orson Welles's long association with radio. We know that the microphone, and its shadow, are taboo in the fiction film's frame if the story doesn't justify their presence.*

In a scene in The Lady from Shanghai*, in the background of a conversation some men are having about the secret of power, a radio plays the song of a crooner. A man says to the hero, "What makes it loud? A microphone. That's his edge."—"Edge?"—"A gun, a nightstick, a razor, something the other guy ain't got. . . . Without an edge, there ain't no tough guy."*

What precisely is the edge the microphone gives to the voice? The microphone lets a close-up voice travel far; it allows the voice to usurp the powers of proximity and intensity. It is precisely when Welles is dubbing his voice or the voices of other actors that he constantly draws on the microphone's advantage in order to speak very close up while his interlocutors must force their voices to make them carry. His voice is favored; without effort it is deep and relaxed, with body and presence. It's a stable voice, as opposed to those that are agitated, unstable, and straining. This is a most common dramatic device with Welles—a power relationship created through the use of an "edge."

It is well known that Welles's natural voice hardly lacked amplitude and weight. And so? So, I'd say that the shown or implied microphone in his films represents not only the technical relay or prosthesis that it is, but it signifies that which in the voice is originally a usurpation of power.

2.

Following the cord out of the microphone, let us go to that other object that is hidden in cinema, the loudspeaker. The speaker, in front of which the sound film placed a screen (if we may reverse the conventional account according to which the loudspeaker was placed behind the projected images) is what channels all the film's sounds, its noises, its voices, just as the mouth of the Zeus-of-the-puppets channeled all the voices of his play.

Loudspeakers have an insistent, dramatic presence in Mr. Arkadin, Touch of Evil, *and other films of Welles.*

Welles's radio work was monaural, as most film sound also was for a long time, with a single loudspeaker that transmitted all and that did not move. With mono, sound can only change in one audible dimension, depth, not in width or height.

In the cinema, however, voices seem to move up and down, right and left, in accord with characters and the movements we see them make onscreen. This is what I call spatial magnetization.

(Some spectators of the very first talking films, who were not yet used to this mental process of moving the voices along with what they saw on the screen, were thrown off by the discrepancy between the mobile onscreen bodies and the immobility of voices in the lateral and vertical directions.)

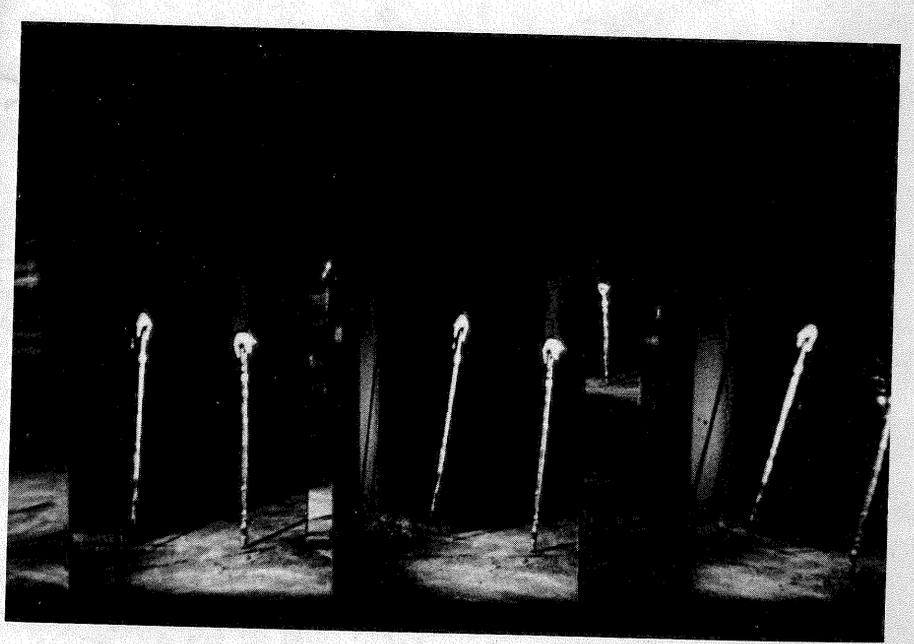
So we could say that Welles's cinema is rare in the way it never forgets this central immobility of the voice *and for having built its movement around that immobility, as if he were doing a radio program "with image added." When Welles says that his cinema is constructed from speech, we need to understand the material way in which he means this: moving images in front of voices that don't move. The physical displacement of bodies, the turbulence of spaces, and perspective and framing are all built out of this central fixed point from which we hear the voices emerge (by* fixed *I mean with respect to the projection plane: Welles's films sometimes play with depth of audio space). It sometimes happens that the visible point of emission on the screen coincides with the real position, central and fixed, of the loudspeaker behind the screen. For example, when the giant lips at the beginning of* Kane, *like a loudspeaker in the guise of a human mouth, pronounce the word* Rosebud.

In Wellesian cinema, along with that of Fellini and Lynch, the voices of the actors don't give the impression of following the movements of their bodies as a dog follows its master and where we continue to hear a voice coming from one fixed radiophonic point. And this is perhaps what gives the impression that everything is moving about even while standing in place. Indeed, with Welles, contrary to cinema's reputation for movement and speed, there's a lot of movement without getting anywhere. Charles Tesson drew an apt comparison between the character played by Welles in Mr. Arkadin *and Tex Avery's character Droopy: always already there, having arrived before the chaser or the pursued, his ubiquity is the very negation of movement.*

*Movie buffs hardly need to be told that the cinema of Welles is filled with impotent and lame figures: the old Kane leaning on his cane, Leland in his wheelchair (*Citizen Kane*), Quinlan (*Touch of Evil*), Bannister (*The Lady from Shanghai*), the bedridden Hastler (*The Trial*). With these lawyers, magnates,*

and police inspectors impotence seems to be the price that must be paid for exercising the power of the written word, for every one of them seeks to make law with his words or writings, by trickery if necessary. One can understand along similar lines the relationship between, on the one hand, the paralysis, immobility, and overwhelming of the body by sheer mass and inertia—common features of the bodies of Welles's characters—and, on the other, the high conductivity and magical mobility of the voice that the body continues to send out. It is as though the body always moves toward stabilization in order to become the house where the voice dreams of coming to rest.

Whence the "imaginary voyage" found in Welles's films. The image, which holds together through the voice of the Zeus-of-puppets, this voice that makes whatever it evokes happen, the image is a moving walkway on which one walks without advancing. Wellesian cinema is conscious of the fixity and inertia of its materials—the stretched fabric of the screen and the central immobility of the loudspeaker. The "ribbon of dreams" of which Welles speaks is this road, this moving walkway that places on the fixed screen and loudspeaker its images and sounds that carry illusions of movement.



CHAPTER 20

The Talking Machine

LACONIC AND MUTE CINEMA

ONE CAN SET OUT BY REFUSING speech, or by making speech the province of the weak, of women, of powerless characters who speak because they can't act. Sound film can put forward the virile hero as one who leaves it to others to talk—the man of few words. In this way it can turn to its advantage what some took to be its weakness, namely its verbal indulgence. "I let certain characters talk," schemes the cinema, "all the better to magnify silence."

Thus in the 1960s and 1970s certain characters in westerns and crime films who are gruffly laconic to various degrees, even wordless (Sergio Corbucci's *The Big Silence* [1968]), represented a kind of hero made bigger than life by the words buzzing around him, which he therefore doesn't have to utter himself. Alain Delon, Charles Bronson, Toshiro Mifune, and Clint Eastwood (sometimes together in movies) were specialists in these laconic roles. But just transport these tight-lipped characters into a milieu that is genuinely without words, into the wilderness, for example, with only beasts for company (think of the character of Tchéky Karyo in Jean-Jacques Annaud's *The Bear* [1988]), and we see their aura disappear. That aura depends for its existence on language-filled human contexts. You're always too talkative if there's a bear in front of you.

A related category is "nontalking" or *mute* cinema (found in many shorts and some comedy). A film can show characters at times when they don't speak—especially when they are watching or being watched, sizing a situation up, working, taking action, moving, and so forth without uttering a word. This differs entirely, of course, from what retroactively came to be called silent film.

The difference between silent and mute film may appear obvious. However, a strange confusion between the two has sometimes arisen. For example,

when Michel Deville gives himself the formal challenge of filming the story of a group of runaway children without using a single scrap of dialogue (*La Petite bande* [1982])—claiming thereby to align himself with good old silent cinema, the misunderstanding has come to roost. What he shows us is a turbulent band of English kids of both sexes let loose in the French countryside, who keep their lips sealed for ninety minutes. In other words, it's the most artificial situation imaginable, but it's hard to tell if Deville intended it that way or if he perhaps got trapped into it by the expression "silent film." More recently in *Libera me* (1993), with entirely different subject matter (inhumanity, torture, resistance), Alain Cavalier, who had been interested in mute film for a long time, carried it to the extreme in *Ce Répondeur ne prend pas de messages* (This Answering Machine Takes No Messages [1979]).

However, the application of this idea is not always so monolithic. Many neo-silent films, in fact, alternate between moments of "deaf cinema" (where characters speak but we don't hear them at all, or else only in murmurs or mumbles) and moments of mute cinema (where characters express themselves through actions, gestures, and looks) as in the astonishing *Themroc* (1973), the regressive, anarchist film by Claude Faraldo.

The narrative music video has favored the development of a form of mute cinema through heavy editing that includes shots of facial expressions and physical gestures. This mutism is to be expected, since the music and sung lyrics take the place of speech. However, in nonmusical mute cinema[1] the absence of speech, often in combination with the presence of synchronous sound effects with greater or lesser degrees of stylization, can (intentionally) create a kind of emptiness.

Some poetic feature films with varying degrees of mutism bear a resemblance to the films of Jacques Tati, an inevitable reference point. Such films include *Yoyo*, by Pierre Étaix (1964); *Dillinger Is Dead*, by Marco Ferreri (1969); *Une journée bien remplie*, by Jean-Louis Trintignant (1973); *Le Jardinier*, by Jean-Pierre Sentier (1980); *Un bruit qui court*, by Sentier and Daniel Laloux (1982); *Hana-bi*, by Takeshi Kitano (1997); *Le Bal*, by Ettore Scola (1983); and *Hukkle*, by György Palfi (2002). But the difference is that with Tati the characters can be quite talkative; we simply can't make out more than snatches of what they're saying, or else we are too far away from them to catch their conversation, and all we see is the gesticulating.

Mute cinema is a genre situated at a crossroads between cinephilic nostalgia for a lost golden age of silent film and a modern-day idea of the human species as shaped by cutthroat competition, drives and appetites, and the relentless fight for survival—and therefore for whom speech can only be an ideological smokescreen, masking cynical hard reality. In this view words are

lies, or at least accomplices to lying, and truth is revealed only by the coded surfaces of dress, facial expression, and the positions staked out by actions.

There does exist a situation in which the character who doesn't speak is portrayed, nevertheless, as having sensitivity and expression, in other words, as a full-fledged human being: when he or she is listening to the speech or music of another. I mean consciously, actively listening, not distractedly. Nothing is more beautiful than the face of someone who stops talking in order truly to listen: think of Bergman's marvelous montage of listeners in the opening sequence of his version of Mozart's *Magic Flute*.

A form not all that different from the mute film, although it would seem to be its direct opposite, is the logorrheic film, where language wears itself out from overuse, as in certain films of Jim Jarmusch.

Finally, mute cinema appears in films devoted to representing daily labor, showing the effort and pains of each day as it passes, such as Kaneto Shindo's *Naked Island* and Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*.

GENESIS OF LANGUAGE: "YOU TALKIN' TO ME?"

It has long been known that what we see and hear on the screen is one selection out of multiple takes. The words we hear in a film are therefore often the document of a gestation process, at once the summary and the erasure of other takes and run-throughs for which the actor repeatedly spoke her or his lines. Hence the particular resonance of movie scenes where a character repeats the same word or phrase, as though all the rehearsals and outtakes resurfaced in the final version.

The most elementary case is the character who repeats a word or phrase in front of a mirror with varying intonations. Antoine Doinel in *Stolen Kisses*

tirelessly repeats the name of his boss's wife, with whom he is in love: "Fabienne Tabard, Fabienne Tabard, Fabienne Tabard . . ." And there's the famous "You talkin' to me?" with all its variations improvised by Robert De Niro in *Taxi Driver*. When Travis Bickle repeats this sentence in the mirror in different modes, for the spectator, too, it's an image of the way speech forever arrives into each separate shot of a film, into each take.

In Truffaut's *Bed and Board* (1970) Jean-Pierre Léaud is using audiotapes to learn Japanese, and in Wenders's *Lisbon Story* (1995) a German sound engineer, played by Rüdiger Vogler, driving south through Europe, tries to prattle in Portuguese by repeating an instructor's sentences from a language tape.

In *Amarcord* a classics teacher tries to teach a student who is maliciously not trying his hardest to pronounce correctly the Greek *psi*. An equally ridiculous teacher in *The 400 Blows*, Pierre Repp, has the same problem with a Paris urchin and the English *th* sound—just as already in 1930, Professor Rath (Emil Jannings) in *The Blue Angel* was making German schoolchildren repeat Hamlet's line "That is the question."

Elocution lessons have a certain presence in the earliest talking films, such as *La Route est belle* (Robert Florey, 1930), since they often involve encounters between characters from different countries who are bumbling their way through elementary words. Duvivier's *Allô Berlin? Ici Paris!* (1932) shows us ten ways to say "I love you" in ten different languages and later shows a French-German couple meeting; since neither of them is bilingual, laborious verbal efforts ensue. In 1932 there is the famous "Me Tarzan, You Jane" (a phrase never actually said, by the way) in *Tarzan the Ape Man*, in which Tarzan (Johnny Weissmuller) learns human speech from the lovely Jane (Maureen O'Sullivan). *Singin' in the Rain* satirizes the elocution exercises actors had to practice as they sought to adapt to the talking picture, and *My Fair Lady* (1964) gives a prominent place to the diction lessons taken by Audrey Hepburn.

First words—whether of a child, robot, machine (2001), handicapped person (*The Mirror*), or monster (*The Elephant Man*)—have always fascinated the cinema. It is almost as though in the process of recording these specific births

of language, the cinema can rehearse that breakthrough moment in human history.

In certain films the director enjoys sending the same lines bouncing from one character to another—this is the psittacism of *Eyes Wide Shut* and *L'Atalante*. Or sometimes the story line of a film incorporates the incessant, obsessively repeated kind of listening necessary to the process of filmmaking itself. In Harold Ramis's *Groundhog Day* Bill Murray, who plays a man endlessly reliving the same day, hears the same jokes and remarks a hundred times. Harry Caul (Gene Hackman), in *The Conversation*, becomes infinitely absorbed (as do we, almost to the breaking point) as he listens over and over to a couple's conversation he has recorded.

A most striking example in this respect is the scene in Bergman's *Persona* when Alma (Bibi Andersson) articulates Elisabeth Vogler's (Liv Ullmann) feelings (disgust at her own child) that the latter does not want to speak. This scene, presented in two nearly identical versions with the same dialogue but from different camera perspectives, was perhaps the model for a similar technique in *Mulholland Dr.*, where Naomi Watts speaks the same lines twice, first to Laura Harring and later to a male partner and an audience at the acting audition, with each delivery performed in radically different ways. Another exploitation of this idea occurs in *La Femme publique* (1984) with frenetic scenes of filming that show the young actress Ethel (Valérie Kaprisky) repeating her lines ad nauseam before her exasperated director. In the theater, speech is a mechanism that is switched on at the beginning, whereas in film, it's as though it needs to start over with every shot.

COMPUTER VOICES

Around the time *The Trial* was made (1962), there began to be talk of "electronic brains," and the public was becoming familiar with the word *computer*. The media would show images of these "brains," enormous metal cabinets occupying vast rooms, and asked: if these machines simulate thinking, will they speak too, and if so, what will their voices be like?

Of course, "talking machine" was the name applied to the phonograph long before.

Fred M. Wilcox's *Forbidden Planet* (1956) was considered a turning point in science fiction film with its character Robby the Robot. Robby's voice is sonorous, solemn, and rounded out with reverb—it projects. Before each of his sentences, we can hear a mechanical noise a bit like an old-fashioned cash register, and when he speaks a light flashes on and off on his shiny metal torso, imitating a jaw opening and closing. In Robby's dialogues with humans,

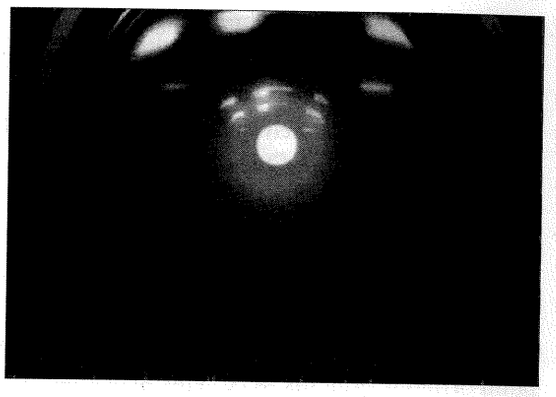
his voice manifestly belongs to a completely different acoustic space. However, the noise that accompanies Robby's voice is not just a sound effect to remind us that he's a robot; it is also the equivalent of something that's ordinarily suppressed—the sound of the mechanism of the human body.

A good number of films in the 1960s featured computers, some of which spoke and some not. At that time it was still impossible to foresee the personal computer, so the computer is always represented as a sort of vast machine capable of determining and centralizing human affairs. This can be observed in three films of the decade, each of which explores the question of the computer's voice in a different way. All three films also make us aware of the cinematic image as mask.

The first is *The Trial*: among the scenes that Welles added to Kafka's novel there is one brief encounter with an electronic brain. This collective brain is imagined as a female creature, a "she-computer," and it so happens that this creature falls silent (as will the computer on board the spacecraft in *Alien*)—a significant detail in a film where the characters, mostly men, are all notably loquacious.

Three years later, in 1965, Godard's *Alphaville, a Strange Adventure of Lemmy Caution*, has several scenes that make direct reference to Welles's work, especially through the eminent Wellesian actor Akim Tamiroff. But here the central brain speaks in a man's voice that is closely miked, cavernous, and out-of-space (i.e., impossible to locate spatially). We should also note that the voice of Alpha 60 is accompanied by a new trait, accentuated breathing. This breath—a typical example of an MSI (see chapter 14)—gives the suggestion that the voice issues from a body, but in its regularity, it reminds us that the body itself is also a machine.[2]

In the very same year as *Alphaville*, Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke were working on the script for *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which would not be



released until 1968. Kubrick hesitated for a long time about what voice to choose for the computer, the HAL 9000. After first imagining a woman's voice, he eventually opted for the Canadian actor Douglas Rain, who would again play this vocal role in the "sequel" *2010* (1984), directed by Peter Hyams.

Hal, in *2001*, is an interesting case of an *acousmêtre*. We never see his body or face, since he has neither. He has eyes or, more precisely, one eye that is everywhere; it never occurs to the humans on the spaceship to cover up or impale that eye, as with those of the Cyclops of Greek mythology.

Hal's speech differs entirely from all previous audiovisual representations of the voices of robots, computers, or oracles: there's no visual modulation with moving parts or on-off lights synchronized with the vocal utterances. Indeed, nothing in the image is coupled with what we hear,[3] unlike in, say, *Alphaville* or *Forbidden Planet*; and there is no use of smoke or steam as in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) or in the lawyer's office in *The Trial*. What's more, no mechanical or organic noise accompanies Hal's voice. It is a gentle voice, even-toned and without any physical trace of breathing, swallowing, wheezing. In short, it has absolutely no MSIs. As in the other examples, however, Hal's voice is distinguished from the human voices by the fact that it belongs to another space, as much in the acoustic space that surrounds it (or one should say the space that *doesn't* surround or contain it) as in its timbre. It is a voice that speaks for itself, a bodiless I-voice, with the exception of one scene that suggests a body for the computer, through "borrowing" a breathing sound from a human character.

THE REAL BODY AS MASK FOR THE SPEAKING BODY

That exception occurs in the famous scene where Dave unplugs Hal inside the "brain room" of circuitry boards.

Logically speaking, the breathing we hear belongs not to Hal but to Dave inside his spacesuit; this seems to be established by earlier scenes in the film where we hear the same breathing over shots of Dave and Frank maneuvering in space. But if we closely observe the moment when Dave says aloud, "Yes, sing for me, Hal," we notice that his spoken voice comes from outside, and at a remove, slightly filtered; we even hear this voice bump against a microphone. The breathing, on the other hand, is heard close up and from the inside. If we were to attribute the breathing to Dave, there's a contradiction or at least a change in point of audition. We would simultaneously have an internal-objective point of audition for Dave's breathing and an external point of audition for his voice. This isn't "logical."

But let us not confine ourselves to such a narrow perspective. In this scene of the murder of Hal, from the audio point of view, the breathing that we attribute to Dave is located in the same *internal* universe as the voice of Hal, who's pleading for his life ("Will you stop, Dave?") and the continuous whistle of air that accompanies him and logically corresponds to the steady flow of Dave's oxygen supply. So we can imagine just as easily that the breathing and whistle are Hal's, representing his internal universe; they could be signaling an air leak and therefore imminent death. The breathing crosses the borders between the two characters; man and computer share the sound between them.

Remember that our own breathing is something about which we are mostly unconscious. It is something objective and nonintentional in us, an Other that inhabits us, a sort of Hal; whereas our voice is the result of intention. Breathing is also the sole bodily process that can switch between being reflexive and unconscious to being voluntary and conscious. The sound of breathing is also *impersonal*—for example, in Kubrick's film we can't distinguish between the breathing of Frank and Dave. It is an ambiguous sound in several respects, between masculine and feminine, mechanical and living, involuntary and voluntary, unconscious and conscious, self and other. So nothing prevents us from hearing the breathing on the side of Hal's voice just as easily as Dave's. It is not even necessary to decide.

Moreover, in breaking with his predecessors in choosing to exclude any visible sign of the speaking voice (no fluctuating lights, no visual suggestion of moving lips or jaws), Kubrick makes of his 70-millimeter image an imperturbable surface where nothing "gives away" the voice; the vast, clear image becomes the mask of the body, of the imaginary face of the talking computer. The face of Keir Dullea, who plays Dave, is also, in conformity with Kubrick's wishes, masklike in its lack of expressiveness.

Later, when George Lucas and Walter Murch wrote the script for *THX 1138*, they imagined a new form of talking machine, by showing it to us in the simple form of a tape recorder unspooling prerecorded words taken for the words of a confessor/psychoanalyst. The voice of this acousmêtre in *THX 1138* is masculine, intimately miked, smooth, and reassuring, like the voice of Hal. Like Hal's, it is associated with an eye—the eye in an image of Jesus—but here it is clearly presented as a prerecorded text that the human confessor is content to hear. It is as though it were deemed unnecessary to substitute the psychoanalyst with an actual person; instead, all we need is a calm voice repeating, "Excellent. Could you be more . . . specific?"

Shortly afterward, Lucas would continue to be fascinated with the acousmêtre; *American Graffiti* has the role played by radio host Wolfman Jack. Subsequently, as we have seen, with the invention of the character of Darth Vader, Lucas recreated the idea of the mask that speaks, behind which we again hear both a voice and the sound of breathing.

Films of the 1980s and 1990s would seem to have made far less use of the acousmêtre than before. They seem even to have gone mostly in the other direction, toward hiding less and less and showing ever more: monsters, machines, and the sources of voices. But in showing more, they increasingly treat the image as a fixed or moving mask of the voice. There seems to be an inexhaustible supply of mass-market films that feature a talking pig (*Babe*), parrot (*Paulie* [1998]), animated mouse (*Stuart Little* [1999]), or a baby with the voice of Bruce Willis (*Look Who's Talking*); and in these films we are all the more conscious, as we saw in chapter 8, that the person making the image speak is not the one we see onscreen. The image becomes both a puppet and a mask animated by the voice. The acousmêtre is still there, but it has changed places: it is no longer in the wings or in front of the screen but behind it.

Recent movies, and not just fantasy films, have therefore mostly worked not on altering the voice (since this has been available for many years and therefore adds nothing fresh), nor on masking the source of the voice, but rather on inventing novel relationships of synchronization between voice and image, producing effects that are either shocking, terrifying, or weirdly funny.

Let me add that today there is a powerful form of audiovisual expression that, based on *lip-synching* (which is far older than cinema, going back to the origins of puppet theater), has generated endless variety in the creation of relationships between the voice and its source: namely, the music video. Whether it's the extreme closeup of lips in perfect synch with spoken or sung text,[4] or the movement of objects or an alteration in their material shape taking place in time to the articulation of lyrics (as in Peter Gabriel's "Sledgehammer" video [1986]), or all the possible relations between a mobile cavity or articulated movement in the image and the enunciation of song or speech

on the soundtrack, the music video has allowed for fascinating experiments with a whole host of relations between voice and image.

Readers may recall the scene in *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (1994) in which Jim Carrey pretends to make his bottom talk, in keeping with a bawdy tradition of associating face and butt, the mouth orifice and the anal orifice. Cronenberg shows this quite literally in *Naked Lunch*. It's possible that in adapting William Burroughs's story to the screen, Cronenberg only hit on the bold invention of having his hero talk with a living and speaking typewriter (which is heard not through a "mouth" but rather a sort of anal sphincter that we see obscenely change shape according to the syllables pronounced) thanks to all the experimenting in synchronization taking place in music videos. This experimentation has demonstrated further that with the psychophysiological phenomenon I call synchresis, human voices, whether speaking or singing, can be paired with anything that moves.

What is also interesting in *Naked Lunch* is a slight resemblance to some other voices we have encountered, namely a subtle insectlike buzzing that surrounds the speaking, giving materiality to the idea of a speaking body or machine.

I'd like to put forth the hypothesis that if the source of the voice cannot be shown, and if the voice, even when closely synchronized with an image, always suggests someone speaking *behind* the ostensible visible source, it is because the human voice has no organ. We humans forget that our speech results from the deployment of a whole assortment of bodily parts, none of which, including what are wrongly called the vocal cords, is principally and solely an organ of phonation: the pharynx, lungs, jaw, lips, tongue, teeth. As Roman Jakobson showed, if an individual can no longer form a given phoneme with the part of the mouth or body normally mobilized for its production, she or he will with surprising quickness mobilize other muscles to

produce it. For example, if you voluntarily block your tongue and prevent yourself from using it, your mouth will make a detour and immediately find other movements that allow you to produce the same phonemes. Elocution will be altered, certainly, and it would take some time to master this new way of speaking, but through concentrated effort it would come rather quickly, and you could manage to make yourself understood. The principal problem would be the possibly embarrassing sound of this new voice and putting up with the possible irritation of its new timbre. At any rate, this example serves to show that anything can be used for speaking, so long as it can be articulated. The speaking body is not the physical body; or put another way, our visible physical body is itself the mask of our invisible speaking body.[5]

THE VOICE AS SPECIAL EFFECT

Speaking as a concrete physical act: this is another province of sound film. There is speaking with something in the mouth (*Razzia sur la Chnouf*, a 1954 film by Henri Decoin—and all kinds of eating scenes in French cinema), while chewing on a cigar (Paulie in *Goodfellas*), while eating a candy bar (Quinlan in *Touch of Evil*), breathing audibly after each sentence—even as an "internal voice" (*Stalker*), breathing out cigarette smoke or exhaling a visible mist in cold winter air outside (Theo Angelopoulos's *The Travelling Players* [1975]; Abel Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant* [1992]), or when it's cold inside (*Blade Runner*; both *Solaris* films [Tarkovsky, 1972; and Soderbergh, 2002]), or sensuously breathing a name to someone's face (*Eyes Wide Shut*). These are all physical details associated with speech that take on considerable significance in the sound film because they extend the voice into the tangible physical world.

Can't we say that the voice is the mother of all special effects—one that requires the least technology and expense? A good actor or comic imitator, and practically anyone who has had some training and practice, is capable of altering his or her voice and giving it all kinds of inflections, using only the natural bodily resources that nature has provided.

Moreover, an individual's voice changes through life much more than his or her face changes (this is particularly so for males, whose vocal timbre changes significantly at puberty). Though it is common to see facial features in childhood photos that survive in the grown adult, there is unlikely to be any relation between an individual's voice as a child and his or her voice in middle age.

We are hardly surprised when certain artists and professionals such as classical singers have radically different work voices and everyday voices. When Callas speaks and Callas sings, two quite distinct voices come from the same

face. The one gives no clue as to the characteristics of the other. The face can of course be altered with makeup, but except in cases involving radical applications or prostheses, the face keeps more or less the same proportions. The voice, however, can change not only in timbre but also in dimension and volume. Imagine someone who in a matter of seconds could double in height, expand like a balloon and retract into a string bean, or change their face from sweet and harmonious to horribly disfigured—that's what the voice can do with no external props or tricks, just through the natural means of phonation.

Two key monster movies in film history plainly illustrate this difference between the plasticity of the voice and face: Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* (1947), with Jean Marais in the role of the Beast, and *The Elephant Man*, with John Hurt as John Merrick. In both films, expert makeup artists (Aram Arakelian for the Cocteau film and Rick Baker for Lynch's) were called in to transform the two actors' faces, whereas for their voices, the talent and vocal techniques of Marais and Hurt sufficed to do the job without any technical intervention.

It is reasonable to think that for the infant there is something frightening about variations in adult voices—making the child imagine caricatural, monstrous, and exaggerated faces, perhaps in the way Tex Avery depicts them in his cartoons. We might therefore advance the hypothesis that the deformed faces and bodies popular in movies since the 1970s represent a transposition to the visual plane of the terrifying impressions we receive as newborns from the disturbing variability of vocal expressions—in other words, a displacement from ear to eye. For the young child, parents and adults have an odor that remains always the same, faces that stay relatively stable, but voices that are radically unpredictable. They whisper, shout, laugh, cry, speak close up or from far away, they rise an octave—and each time it's as though they were becoming someone else.

Consequently the history of altered voices in film cannot be the same as the history of altered bodies. Examining what has been done in recent films reveals that the most striking and memorable examples are not where someone has invented a new vocal timbre or novel alteration of the voice—after all, the resources for such "inventiveness" have been around for a long time, including the technique of faster or slower recording speeds already used in cartoons of the 1930s. The remarkable ones of the past couple of decades, rather, succeeded in creating a strong relationship between voice and body, voice and face. Out of this relationship new things have emerged.

To make his E.T. speak in 1982, Spielberg used several real voices, including that of an elderly lady who had the inimitable rough hoarseness that comes from years of heavy smoking and drinking. In other words life, not technological gadgetry, performed the work that created this voice. Above all, what worked in the film was the marriage between the unique profile of the extraterrestrial with his eccentric gestural vocabulary and long and retractile neck, and this dubbed voice. And dubbing is an art that comes down from very ancient theatrical forms wherein the voice and body are separate—especially the ancestral art of puppet theater.

PROSOPOPOEIA AND MASKS

Prosopopoeia, according to the dictionary, is the rhetorical technique of giving speech to the inanimate, the dead, or the absent. We could say that the sound film offers the possibility of absolute prosopopoeia.

James Whale's *The Invisible Man* (1933), in its choice of subject, is one extended prosopopoeia. It makes the whole image, indeed the set itself, speak, since in all the scenes where the protagonist is not wearing his clothes and bandages, we are meant to believe the camera is continuously following his speaking voice. Of course, the camera is really only filming the empty sets, from which we are to believe the invisible man's voice is speaking.

As we have seen, film is also capable of giving speech to a round light or a human eye (*Alphaville*, *2001*); voices may also come from a brain soaking in liquid (*The City of Lost Children*), a pair of underpants or a sexual organ (in several erotic films inspired to varying degrees by Diderot's *Bijoux indiscrets* [1748]), animals, even stars in the night sky (*It's a Wonderful Life*; Ildiko Enyedi's *My Twentieth Century* [1989]).

Minimally articulated Japanese *manga* animation, where the movements of characters' mouths are deliberately simplified and sparse, plays on the charm of the stage in childhood when one gives voice to figurines and dolls. This evocative charm can be seen in the masterpieces of Hayao Miyazaki (*My Neighbor Totoro*, *Spirited Away*).

Whenever the voice has not been tightly "bolted down" to a body through lip-synching—for example, if we see the human mannequins in *India Song* dancing without opening their mouths although we hear them all the while—that familiar feeling returns, the impression of a human voice "projected onto" something other.

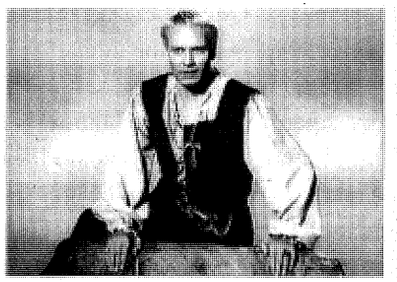
In the opening scene of *The Trial* two policemen let themselves into K's apartment. In a scene ten minutes later K's boss follows his employee, asking him leading questions, and in a third scene K's uncle prepares for him to meet a great lawyer capable of helping him, the advocate Hastler (played by Welles himself). If the voices of one of the two policemen, the boss, and the Advocate seem all rather similar, there's a simple explanation. They all issue variously

disguised from the mouth of Welles, thus adding to the atmosphere of paranoia that surrounds the protagonist.

At Hastler's there is even a mise-en-scène of the voice: the Advocate is lying on his bed like a king, but his face is veiled at first by a hot towel applied by Leni (Romy Schneider). So when the Advocate begins his soliloquy, a swirl of vapors and smoke is given off, and the voice feels obscenely close. In this scene Hastler's voice—a sort of continuous internal monologue heard quite near us—contrasts with the voices of the other characters heard more distantly, especially the voice of Anthony Perkins. Hastler's voice functions as a center around which all the other voices are satellites.

However, it doesn't seem at first like the Advocate's voice is that of a master; it seems masked, incomprehensible—the kind of voice one doesn't listen to. The character is pretending not to see everything; he asks, "Who's there?" But this pose of nonchalance actually makes him come off all the more as the master, insofar as he appears indifferent to the presence or absence of an audience. He's soliloquizing; the voice is not a means for him; he is not speaking to be heard—he *is* the voice, the center, the place.

In sound film it is no longer necessary to project one's voice or make it "carry." In the theater even Richard III and the devil have to project; in the cinema the king or the hero is often the one who doesn't. In the theater the voices of the king, the fool, and the messenger are united by all projecting in a common space, whereas cinema can isolate voices within distinct spaces. This didn't



happen all at once, as we've seen, since in the early talkies all voices were projected toward the microphone. Renoir, though, does have Michel Simon muttering in *La Chienne* (*"de nos obligations . . . de nos obligations . . . "*);[6] and Vigo, too, in *L'Atalante*, has characters who seem to be mumbling to themselves.

In *Samba Traoré*, by Idrissa Ouedraogo (1992), the main character, Samba, has come home to his village with a bad-boy reputation—like Mickey Rourke in *Rumble Fish*—and he speaks in an inner-directed voice, not projecting. As in *The Trial*, Samba's voice tends to make the others, who all speak with voices that carry, move around him like satellites.

THE NONDISCONTINUOUS QUALITY OF OUR PLURAL VOICES

"To be, or not to be: that is the question." At the beginning of Hamlet's monologue in the 1948 Laurence Olivier film, the camera tightly frames the eyes of the prince gazing into the abyss, and we cannot tell if he is speaking these words aloud or not.

Then when we see his mouth move, we realize that he has been speaking out loud.

When he gets to the words "to die, to sleep," we continue to see his whole face, but his mouth closes and we hear the words "inside his head" in a

whispered voice, as though Hamlet is hypnotizing himself to plunge into the void.

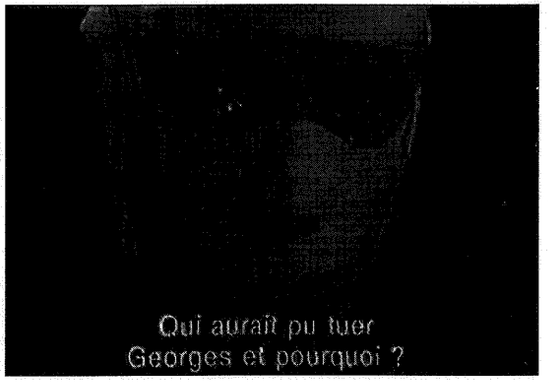
Then he quickly utters aloud the words "perchance to dream," shaking himself as though awakening and pulling himself back from temptation.

So in his filmic treatment of the famous soliloquy, Olivier distinguishes two ways of speaking the lines, depending on whether they are supposed to be resonating in the character's head (like a tempting alter ego or one side of his brain) or lucidly spoken out loud.

Other films play the card of what I call (with an intentional double negative) *nondiscontinuity*. The idea of continuity is indeed only accessible to us in the form of the negation of its opposite. Thus when Flaubert wants to indicate that a certain sound does not stop, he is not being precious in writing that it rings "without discontinuing" (see the description of the boat bell at the beginning of *Sentimental Education*). Nondiscontinuity occurs every time we don't interrupt something even as we refer to, or suggest, the possibility of the interruption.

Consider, for example, the long subjective camera sequence that opens Delmer Daves's *Dark Passage* (1947). When we hear Humphrey Bogart's monologue by the roadside, his voice remains offscreen, for good reason—the camera is basically showing what his character is seeing. But when a car stops and the character walks up to it, Bogart's offscreen voice addressing the driver is the same. The mental voice segues seamlessly to the spoken voice without any break in tone or timbre.

The use of the internal voice becomes quite interesting in the second half, when the film abandons the subjective camera. We see the character from the outside, but his face is hidden by bandages while the new features that a surgeon has given him can heal. This figure, who spoke constantly in the same voice whether it was mental or spoken aloud, is here forced to keep quiet. We



do hear his thoughts when he is alone or examining a corpse; but as soon as he is with another character, we no longer hear either his out-loud voice or his internal voice. This is particularly noticeable in the scenes with Lauren Bacall, where he becomes doubly impenetrable for the spectator: we do not see his face (only his eyes), nor do we know what he is thinking, whereas in the beginning we had been getting his thoughts as fast as he had them.

The first minutes of *The Long Goodbye* play on nondiscontinuity in a highly poetic manner. Philip Marlowe (Elliott Gould) is awakened by his cat one wet night. He speaks aloud to his pet in a serious, calm, intimate voice, mumbling to it as if thinking out loud. Later, as he is leaving his apartment, he exchanges a few words with his neighbors; he speaks in the same sort of voice. And again when he's shopping for cat food in an all-night supermarket, this soliloquizing voice has not fundamentally changed; it's still the same smoothly modulated, jazzy solo. Since the comparison has often been drawn between jazz and the cinema, we would be remiss not to remark on this lovely cinematic poetry.[7]

Another work that plays with vocal nondiscontinuity in a paradoxical way (paradoxical since it involves the use of different languages) is Wenders's *The American Friend*, an impressive film about solitude. There is much talk in it, yet no one seems to be engaging in dialogue. Each character is locked inside his or her own body and language: Bruno Ganz in German, Dennis Hopper in English, and Gérard Blain in French. We get this sense not only from the internal monologue of the Hopper character, who speaks his impressions into a tape recorder, but from everyone who is speaking, with one monologue following another and another. The tone of this muffled, restrained film of people haunted by destiny gives the impression that three-quarters of it is silence and suggestion, when in fact it is filled with talk.

These examples prove yet again that examining films one by one, case by case, is more interesting than applying predetermined classifications according to inflexible criteria. Some films can be thick with dialogue but come across as a sort of continuing monologue; in others there may be a character who speaks alone but in a wide variety of vocal tones as the character debates with him- or herself.

David Lynch also adopts the strategy of nondiscontinuity in *Dune*. Whether the characters are thinking silently to themselves, as is often the case, or they are conversing, or making a speech in public, each of the voices has a uniform even tone, as in a dream.

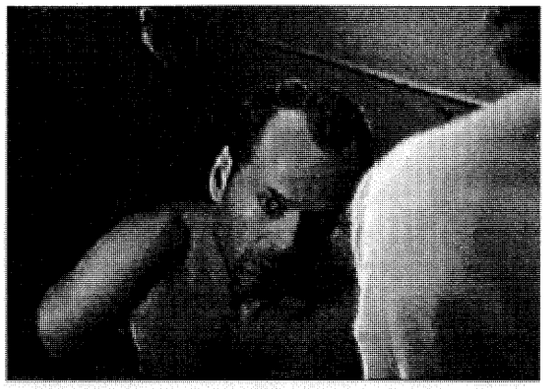
Conversely, at the beginning of *Shoot the Piano Player*, in the scene where Charlie (Charles Aznavour) hems and haws and hesitates to take the young woman's arm, his internal voice is not the same as when he speaks aloud. We

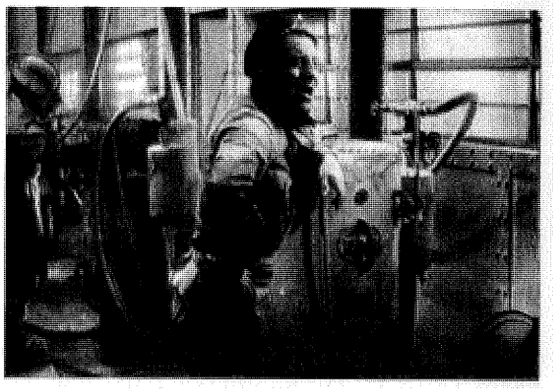
don't get "Charles Aznavour" with his easily identified raspy voice when Charlie is speaking to himself but rather what sounds like another actor inside his head, and the result is quite effective.

SPEECH AND THE WORLD

Films as different as *Cat People* and *Nightfall*, *La Voce della luna*, *Dune*, *The Long Goodbye*, *The Accidental Tourist*, *Rumble Fish*, *Die Hard*, and *Die Hard: With a Vengeance* are not usually considered together. Yet they all share something significant: the tone of the lead character's voice is muted, creating (in very different contexts) the sense of a waking dream. Benigni's character in Fellini's *Voce della luna* is a sort of delighted zombie who is never truly lucid; Paul Atreides in *Dune* needs to awaken, and he experiences everything that happens to him as the fulfillment of a prediction; Elliott Gould in Altman's film carries on smilingly with a sort of permanent hangover; Kathleen Turner and William Hurt in *The Accidental Tourist* live and speak flatly in the aftermath of a terrible loss; the weary breaking voice of Bruce Willis in the *Die Hard* films makes the adventures of his character appear as a stupidly bad dream and contributes, with director John McTiernan's visual genius, to the poetry of those works. At the beginning of the third installment in the *Die Hard* series, *Die Hard: With a Vengeance*, en route to a new suicide mission, Bruce Willis speaks with a cigarette dangling from his mouth in the veiled, dreamy voice of a tired superhero, as if to say "Here I go to save the world again," striking a very effective dissonance with the film's over-the-top spectacle.

Looking for a French film that makes as inspired a use of tone of voice, we could mention *A Heart in Winter*, played *sotto voce* by Daniel Auteuil, and *The Hairdresser's Husband*, which clearly tries to maintain a subdued,





resigned tone. Even when protagonist Jean Rochefort's father speaks in ringing tones, his voice is mixed with a gentle, soft music that renders it less powerful.

One of the greatest "waking dream" films is without a doubt *Le Jour se lève*. Carné mentions in his memoirs that the controversy occasioned by this film when it was released was in part due to "the rather novel way the actors played their parts, as I asked them to."[8] In support of this strategy he cites the critic Paul Reboux, who remarked, "After the silent film and the talking film, the whispering film."

Carné hit on the brilliant idea to have Jean Gabin and Jacqueline Laurent meet for the first time in the din of a factory, which forces them to shout in order to be heard above the noise—"Huh? Your name is François?"—"Nice flowers. Are they for my saint's day?"[9]—whereas in the following scene, when Gabin arrives at her place in the evening, they have to lower their voices so as not to wake the sleeping household. This sharp contrast that occurs over just a few seconds creates the magical space, between cries and whispers, that the story inhabits.

In *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992) Lynch brings back the character of Gordon Cole, who had been created for the television series. This FBI agent, who is supposed to be hard of hearing, is always speaking too loud; what's more, he sometimes moves away from the camera as if receding into dark obscurity, and the resultant sound makes the space he's in seem unreal. In a surprising scene in the FBI office, Lynch, Kyle MacLachlan, and David Bowie are speaking with one another, and if you close your eyes, you hear a space in which the characters do not see each other and have no idea where they are located with respect to one another—as though they were in the middle of a deep dark forest. Open your eyes again, and there are three people who see each other in broad daylight inside an ordinary office.

In the sketch of "The Tide" in *Immoral Tales* (1974), by Walerian Borowzyk, Fabrice Luchini, playing a sexual initiator, speaks over the sound of the sea. This actor, who has since become one of the major "voices" of French film, often does give the impression of speaking above a fracas that we do not hear.

Movie characters are often raising their voices above some real or imagined noise, and in so doing they change our perception of the sounds surrounding them, because it's their tone of voice that provides the baseline. At the beginning of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) some men are in the desert during a massive sandstorm, and their voices shouting back and forth provide the standard against which to measure the violence of the elements. Dolby technology, still new at the time, allowed spectators to hear the howling wind as well as the voices. With mono, the storm noise would have acted to mask the men's voices and other sonic details, and Spielberg would have had to tone it down or risk losing all comprehensibility of the dialogue. The large number of action films (especially Vietnam War films) that came out starting in the mid-1970s accustomed filmgoers to hearing soldiers yelling to each other over the noise of explosions, helicopters, and general panic, all of which highlighted the advantages of Dolby stereo. Terrence Malick's *Thin Red Line* (1998), a film about military operations in the Pacific during World War II, goes even further by not only having soldiers' voices shouting above the sounds of battle but also their internal voices "underneath."

Sound film is also what allows human speech to fold into the fundamental noise of the world. At the end of *Night Train* (1959), by Jerzy Kawalerowicz, the train transporting the characters arrives in the early morning at a seaside station. In place of the train noise that has ceased, we hear seabirds, an insistent foghorn, and the waves that absorb everything, and speech becomes spare and infrequent. The endings of many of Fellini's films are marvelous for the way words and music are lost into the fundamental noise of wind (*Amarcord* and *Casanova*) or waves (*La Dolce vita*), the vroom of motorcycles (*Fellini's Roma*) or rolling train cars (*City of Women*).

And sound film can give us the world filled with human silence, when the characters we've seen speaking fall silent, while they're going down or up a roaring river—which stands for that torrent of words that they could seemingly carry on forever: Boorman's *Deliverance* (1972) or Herzog's *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972). In the films of Tarkovsky, and those of Terrence Malick (*Badlands*, *Days of Heaven*, *The Thin Red Line*), human speech is constantly being reinscribed into the general clamor of the world with its noises and vibrations, often by a tight braiding of moments with speech and moments without, sensations of noises and of words.

Jarmusch's *Down by Law* (1985) and Tarkovsky's *Stalker* are two strangely similar films: each plunges three very different men into nature without any nondiegetic music. The idea in each film is to have them get by in the wilderness without music but with speech, which evaporates into space. Both films suggest the vanity of human speech and the weakness of its echo in the universe. One difference, however, is that Tarkovsky believes in a higher force, mute perhaps but a force nonetheless, while Jarmusch uses the Louisiana bayous as a setting for nihilist comedy, where nature becomes an unwilling accomplice in the mockery of language.

Natural exteriors are obviously a privileged space for sound film in a way that is not possible for the theater. Consider the two young women who talk together while bathing in a river in the marvelous opening scene of Satyajit Ray's *Distant Thunder* (1973); it's the whole essence of sound film—an art where the voice is one of the sounds of the world, while at the same time it can question that world.

But interiors are places in the world too. Human speech in a closed setting, and resonating with that space—whether the sound is captured on location or recreated in the studio—is the simplest effect of sound film: in a mineshaft (*Kameradschaft*), sewers (*Kanal*, *The Third Man*), classrooms and bistros (*La Chinoise*), a vast empty apartment where voices resonate as on a theater stage (*Les Enfants terribles*), or low-ceilinged rooms of Swiss chalets (Yves Yersin's *Les Petites fugues* [1978]).

The sound of things and of the world can also be what prevents characters from "hearing" each other, literally; and film can give these obstacles a metaphorical resonance, such as the battle of the sexes. This idea is clearly in evidence at the beginning of *La Dolce vita*: women on one hand, men on the other trying to communicate over the racket of a helicopter. In Polanski's *Frantic* (1987) Harrison Ford in the shower and his wife on the other side of the glass are separated by the noise of the water before being further separated by a kidnapping. In the middle of *Mon oncle* Monsieur speaks to Madame, who doesn't

hear him because she's vacuuming, and the wife replies to the husband, who hears nothing because he's shaving with his electric razor. This sort of thing is common in Godard's world: traffic noise (*Week End*), café noise (the beginning of *Hail Mary*), a train sweeping like a whirlwind through the Rolle train station (*Every Man for Himself*), and so on; pretexts are everywhere if we want them.

At other times, conversely, the voices of one sex and the other unite and speak in harmony, but this often happens away from reality, in the air above the earth. Take the voices of Anna Karina and Jean-Paul Belmondo in Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1964), and the duo of Janet Leigh and John Wayne speaking in the air by radio from within their respective jet airplanes in *Jet Pilot*—thus gaining both poetic and realistic value in the exchange.

THE TIMING OF SPEECH AS SIGNIFIER IN CHRONOGRAPHIC CINEMA

In *Citizen Kane*, as everyone knows, words often overlap other words, so the film often passes for more "realistic" than others in this respect. Speech with interruptions seems more real, and in that spirit Capra and Hawks claimed to produce more natural and lively dialogue in their 1930s films. But with Welles, as we've seen, the impression of naturalness hides what is most important: someone's speech always gets shut out, starting with the father who is ignored in the scene with Thatcher where Mrs. Kane's decision forever separates young Charles from his parents.

In *Mr. Arkadin* Wellesian technique is particularly noticeable, consisting here in following a question very quickly with a reply and, at the same time, cutting to the next shot a bit too fast and thereby taking the words away from the speaker, as if the character were slipping out, leaving his words behind, fleeing from what he has said.

At the other extreme, in *Eyes Wide Shut* and *Lost Highway*, note how long it takes for characters to speak and respond—intervals that allow objects, time, doubts, and silences to take on lives of their own. Or recall in *Blade Runner* the unbearably long, controlled time that Rutger Hauer takes, in what seems a sadistic intent, to interrogate a poor freezing Chinese fellow (as a "replicant" Hauer is insensitive to cold and heat) but also, in general, how long it takes him to utter the most minimal line.

But let us remember that a major theme of *Blade Runner* is the interval of time before death: "Time . . . enough . . . Time," says Rutger Hauer near the beginning of the film. "How much time do I still have to live?" asks this android

who carries inside himself a biological clock programmed for his death at a precise time; he wants to know how much time he has, and if he can have more. The compelling idea here is that the character who seeks "how much" and "more time" takes his own sweet time to talk and slows down between words. The sound film is supreme among the arts for its capacity to measure the duration of speech and the intervals between, and to give them the weight of meaning.

1. Here I am not going to consider films that pay homage to the silent era; in these, when the characters speak, their words are translated with intertitles, and there is also music. Examples include *Silent Movie* (1976), by Mel Brooks; *Rebelote* (1983), by Jacques Richard; *Sidewalk Stories* (1988), by Charles Lane; and *Juha* (1998), by Aki Kaurismäki. These are not examples of mute cinema.
2. In my view *Alphaville* is a film in which Godard confronts the voice of the Father. His other films that do this are *Detective* (1985), with Alain Cuny's character, and *Nouvelle vague* (1990).
3. This is consistent with the rest of this "unbraided" film. On *braiding* and *unbraided* see the glossary and chapter 7.
4. See, for example, the beginning of Jim Sharman's cult film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), famous for the elaborate audience participation at its screenings, where spectators speak and sing along with the characters.
5. In his famous essay "The Grain of the Voice," first published in the journal *Musique en jeu* 9 (1972), Roland Barthes suggests that the body to which a voice refers is the singer's real body—a rather serious error, in my view.
6. The shrewish wife of the timid Legrand (Michel Simon) has just been talking about "her" financial and legal "obligations" or holdings, as if they belong only to her. Legrand protests, muttering, to say that he co-owns their property.—Trans.
7. I think Altman has managed to do what Louis Malle attempted, without as much success, in *Elevator to the Gallows*, namely to create monologues of a character (by Jeanne Moreau in the Malle film)

that are the equivalent of a jazz solo, such that we establish a relation between the trumpet of Miles Davis and the sometimes lyrical language of the character.

8. Marcel Carné, *La Vie à belles dents* (Paris: Éditions Jean-Pierre Olivier, 1975), 151.

9. The young woman is delivering flowers and stops to ask directions from the factory worker François (Jean Gabin). As a joke, he asks if the flowers are for him because it's his saint's day. The woman's name is Françoise, and she is struck by the coincidence that they have the same name.—Trans.

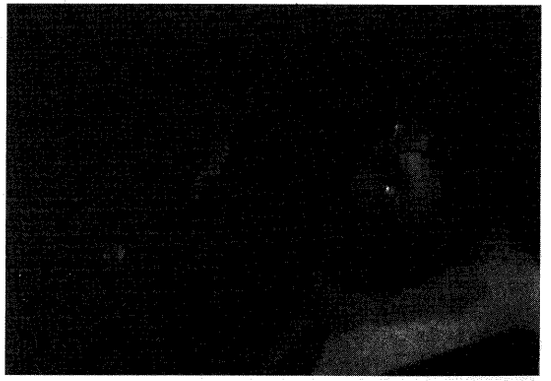
CHAPTER 21

Faces and Speech

THERE IS NO MEANINGLESS SPEECH

"I KNEW THEY WERE WATCHING ME; I could feel it." This is the first sentence uttered by the hero, Fontaine, in *A Man Escaped*, and it is spoken in voice-over. As we hear it, we see a shot of a body that has just been thrown into a jail cell. Until then, Fontaine has not opened his mouth in any previous scenes where he appears—his transfer by car, his attempted escape, his capture and beating. So we first hear his voice as narration, and shortly afterward we will hear him speaking aloud to others, when he tells another prisoner his name.

Of course we only identify this speech as a voice-over thanks to one grammatical detail: the use of the past tense. If the same person said in the same tone of voice, "I know they're watching me; I can feel it," the conventional interpretation would be to take it as an internal voice speaking in the present.



His sentence might appear insignificant, but it casts a curious echo over our own situation as spectators as we watch this body for signs of life. The sentence points to a thematic issue, namely that of looking. The very next moment, in fact, the looking motif returns when Fontaine sits up in the cell and looks himself over, and his voice-over says, "Nothing broken, but I could not have been much to look at." Since the actor is rather handsome, and the camerawork conveys a polished, limpid beauty, another meaning arises: caring about appearances. The motif returns in the very last line of the film, when once they're finally free, outside, in the night of occupied France, Fontaine's partner in escape exclaims, "If only my mother could see us!"

All this serves to remind us that speech is never without meaning in film, and the interplay of showing and telling also depends on how a particular word can point to a thematic issue—no matter what weight is later given to the issue thus raised, often through the simplest lines.

Consider the nighttime scene in *Playtime* when an irritated lady passerby whom we don't see says to a man whom we also don't see (they are offscreen vocal "extras," while the camera is fixed on the lit interiors filmed through large apartment windows), "Oh, you didn't understand a thing I said. I was waiting for you at the burger place. . . . I was there at six o'clock." In this seemingly unimportant exchange between acousmatic figures, there's the issue of a meeting between a man and a woman, and the issue of time. To be (on time for a meeting) or not to be (at a meeting), that is the question around which the whole enormous scenario of *Playtime* is constructed. The movie's organizing principle is first to film in parallel, and then in a brief encounter, Hulot and the young foreign female tourist, who in fact have already crossed paths without knowing it and finally end up with their meeting, prepared by fate and with an uncertain outcome, and all of this within a determined interval of time. Therefore as spectators we mustn't miss our own encounters with any dialogue, no matter how fleeting it seems, such as the acousmatic remark about the burger place, and no matter how banal it might seem even to Tati.

Out of the kitchen of a hotel-restaurant that is the setting for *Mr. Hulot's Holiday* comes this marvelous offscreen exchange between the waiters and the chef:

WAITER: *A melon.*
CHEF: *Okay, that makes two!*
WAITER: *A lamb chop and mixed vegetables for table eight.*
CHEF: *Roger OK!*
WAITER: *More mayonnaise for number four.*
CHEF: *We can do that!*

WAITER: *And a half-carafe of rosé too.*
CHEF: *You've got it!*
WAITER: *One steak rare, one very rare, and bread.*
CHEF: *Coming up!*
WAITER: *And then one veal cutlet, no salt.*
CHEF: *Check!*

You have to appreciate Tati here as a gourmet of sound, and note the verbal imagination he gives of his chef, who's able to come up with something new to say each time he takes an order. All of Tati's work centers on the phatic aspect of communication,[1] and this scene is accordingly not just using dialogue anecdotally: we can see the unity of his oeuvre all in a nutshell.

So all we have to do is listen. Yet it is surprising how many auteur studies still insist on characterizing Tati's films as full of "empty words" and "miscellaneous noises"—perhaps because we are more comfortable believing in clichés about films than in the films themselves and because we are not really listening to the characters *or* the films.

RESISTANCE

The apparent banality of speech in the cinema is not an accident. In a film there is no resistance between the image and speech (or vice versa), which is a problem; this absence of resistance can even lead to their mutual devaluation. What do some words in fact "mean" if the image can instantly diminish them by showing something else, or by showing that the speaker is looking elsewhere, or if the voice trails off into space? What is the value of words if they can be paired with absolutely any image without conflict or rejection? Conversely, what is the meaning of an image if it is obligingly colored with a meaning or connotation conferred, through *added value*, by some words?

So the challenge in the sound film is to give to the speech-image relation a density that it doesn't necessarily have on its own.

The sound film sometimes claims—or seems to want to claim—to be able to relativize or reduce speech, make words into just another sound, an element of no particular consequence, which the spectator could take in just like any other sound in the film. It is remarkable that this enterprise fails and that every word spoken or half-spoken in a film becomes part of its very substance. Words are not soluble in the sea of cinema.

In *Mon oncle* we observe Madame Arpel showing off her modern house to her friends. The house has doors and openings everywhere, and we hear her exclaim with her characteristic vitality, "Oh, it's so practical, everything

communicates."[2] Far from being an insignificant remark, this sentence echoes through the film, for communication is precisely one of its main subjects. Communication at the concrete level: the husband is the director of a pipe factory, which is to say he is in charge of the construction of long hollow conduits for things to go through. But communication also applies to the human level: this suffering individual has difficulty getting his injured-father voice to come through when he is angry and feels his authority being mocked.

Sound cinema is indeed like the Arpels' house: everything is open, and everything communicates (with the exception, sometimes, of miscommunicating characters). One word or remark at the beginning of a film can "communicate" with an image at the end.

What are in fact the last words of this film, words of the father to his son, and a new beginning, one hopes, for a better relationship between the two? "Gérard" (the father addresses the son by name), and "Let's go." This simple "Let's go" that we might easily ignore, even though it is the film's last line, says a great deal. At the beginning of the film, the father drops his son off at school on the way to his factory, but they exchange no words. We see a kind of abstract vehicle with no driver that silently ejects a child every morning at the entrance to the school with the clunk of a car door. During most of the film the father is fretful, depressed, and fatigued. The final "Let's go" signals in two words that the father can now speak to his son, share in the farce, and that he has found new energy to live, to *go* and *do things* with him. What Uncle Hulot has done—schlep little Gérard around on his motorcycle and show him a bit of life—the father can do too. (Along these same lines, think of the loveliest scene in *The 400 Blows*, when young Antoine is so happy driving around with his mother and stepfather during a lighthearted evening of joking and fun.)

WHEN A SINGLE WORD SHIFTS EVERYTHING

Now and then, amid the constant flood of words that the sound film subjects us to and that are a priori watered down by the aleatory character of the audiovisual relation—in which, as we have said, *anything goes*—a single word hits a logjam among the characters.

In *Scarface*, Poppy and the crook Tony Montana are flirting at the bottom of a flight of stairs. "You sure are a funny Mister, Tony," says Poppy. "Yeah? . . . How do you mean I'm funny?" Tony responds. We might wonder if this brief exchange in one of the most famous gangster movies of all time isn't the source of the funny and terrifying scene in *Goodfellas* when Tommy, the dangerously touchy gangster played by Joe Pesci, takes exception to a remark uttered by his young colleague Henry (Ray Liotta). Henry and the other mafiosi have been

laughing uncontrollably at Tommy's stupid stories in the restaurant where they regularly hang out. And then Henry adds as he wipes the tears from his eyes, "You are a funny guy." Silence immediately falls over the group and Tommy, suddenly very tense, asks him, "Funny how? You mean the way I'm talking? Funny how? What's funny about it?" "Just, you know . . . You're funny," says Henry nervously. "Funny like a clown? What do you mean? Funny how? How do you mean I'm funny?" The group is petrified since they know Tommy is capable of killing someone for one word that is taken the wrong way.[3]

Here we see the genius of American English at work, with its capacity to allow the same word to be repeated twenty times with different intonations and nuances each time. It is worth noting that this does not happen in French. In fact, for the French dub of this scene in *Goodfellas*, the translators try to use the same word, *marrant* (a rough equivalent of *funny*), as many times as possible; however, they are sometimes obliged to bow to the genius of the French language and call on synonyms ("Qu'est-ce que j'ai de tellement poilant?").

Within this film, whose camera is so virtuosic, insinuating itself everywhere, roving around and through every space, and in which dialogue abounds, it is in this scene where a single word suddenly takes on such ominous significance that Scorsese adopts a totally different camera style and editing: he suddenly shifts to a rigid and systematic shot–reverse shot pattern of fixed framings. When the camera starts to move again and Tommy and Henry chuckle about the word *funny* and repeat it harmlessly, we know the danger has passed. Here is a way the cinema can give density to dialogue, which comes so easily out of characters' mouths.

Also during this scene, unlike many others in *Goodfellas*, there is no song playing along whose lyrics create an interplay with the words in the dialogue—everything stops. But beforehand, a host of sounds and movements were mobilized to lead up to this dramatic moment of paralysis.

In *Breathless*, a film about verbosity and failed efforts to escape by means of words and wordplay, Jean Seberg says something that I have always been surprised has not attracted more attention: when Patricia (Seberg) tells Michel (Jean-Paul Belmondo) that she may be pregnant. "You could be more careful," he replies with his characteristic brusqueness, and that's the end of it. But in the end, he is killed and she is alive, and the question of her possibly carrying the child of the dead man remains latent.

Here in Godard's first full-length movie, we may pass it over as just a worthless line-by-a-woman that falls by the wayside, but doesn't it determine a good deal of the director's future work?

The sound film has the flexibility to let words just be words, which can be taken back, explained away, soluble in the duration of a film; or else they can

be corroborated by a later trace, or, as here, the absence of a trace that can render them indelible.

WHEN WORDS "FALL ONTO"

Another way to restore meaning and salience to the otherwise shallow and tensionless pairing of speech and images is to make the image the element that keeps a straight face during the telling of a lie or that which stands there under the barrage of words from offscreen that injure, accuse, stab, harass, or stigmatize.

In a classroom in a boys' school in 1950s Paris a teacher is addressing his pupils. In this scene in *The 400 Blows* the teacher's general address falls onto the particular image of Antoine Doinel, the young protagonist played by Jean-Pierre Léaud, and thus singles him out for attention.

In sound film the camera and editing have the power to designate onto which character words will fall, and who will apply the words to him- or herself, and on whom the voyeur/spectator will look for the words' impact. Consider, for example, Ken Loach's *Family Life* (1971), the story of a young woman who is literally covered with words—from her parents and from her psychiatric institution; the sound film is the ideal medium for showing this, through the separation of acousmatic speech and an inhabited body.

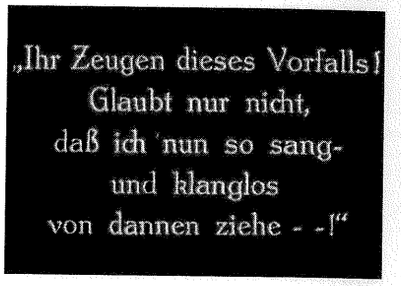
More specifically, the subjective camera, in a film such as Philippe Harel's *La Femme défendue* (1997), allows us to scrutinize a woman's face to see the impact of what her offscreen suitor is saying to her. Here the male protagonist (played by the director himself, whose camera speech is heard in most of the scenes) seems to be scrutinizing the effects of his words on the lovely Elle (Isabelle Carré). The impact there will be on the face of a woman to whom you say, "You're beautiful" or "I would like to see you naked"—this can certainly occupy a filmmaker's gaze.

The interest of the subjective camera is precisely to confront two particular types that are often separate: *camera speech* and *screen speech*.

CAMERA SPEECH / SCREEN SPEECH

I call *camera speech* those instances when a character speaks directly to the camera, and the deliberate omission of the reverse shot places the spectator in the position of his or her invisible interlocutor.

The sound film began with a speech addressed to the camera: the famous filmed-and-recorded address by Will Hays in 1926 introducing the revolution-



ary new Vitaphone process. In this strange document the speaker is addressing the public beyond the camera, and we see him turn to the right and left of a virtual auditorium, the auditorium we are sitting in to watch him. Later, actors learned to look at the camera while speaking, establishing it as the vehicle of their speech—when in fact that speech is transmitted through another channel, situated somewhere entirely different, sometimes above their heads; of course I'm referring to the microphone.

It is worth remembering that camera speech existed already in the silent era. In Murnau's *Tartuffe* (1925) the young hero thrown out of his grandfather's home addresses us directly in closeup, his words provided by an intertitle.

George C. Scott's speech with a giant American flag behind him in *Patton* (1970), dialogue scenes in films done partially or entirely with a subjective camera (*Lady in the Lake*, *Dark Passage*, *La Femme défendue*), and certain speeches to the movie audience modeled on the theatrical aside (*Annie Hall*, Godard's *A Woman Is a Woman*, Scola's *We All Loved Each Other So Much*, and Itami's *Tampopo*) all have one thing in common: most often, the camera speech avoids the reverse shot; that is, the addressee is not shown.

There is also the type of camera speech that involves a character introducing or narrating the film's story (Saura's *Cría cuervos* [1976], Bergman's *Hour of the Wolf* [1968], Truffaut's *The Woman Next Door* [1981]).

Let me mention, too, the case of "false camera speech," which morphs into something else as the camera moves back and enlarges the visual field. At the beginning of *Elevator to the Gallows* the face of Jeanne Moreau fills the screen as she utters words of love. Dollying back, we see that this is a woman in a telephone booth speaking to her lover. Similarly, at the beginning of *The King of Marvin Gardens* (Bob Rafelson, 1971) Jack Nicholson speaks to the camera; then we see that he is in a radio studio addressing his listening audience. In *Bitter Rice* (Giuseppe de Santis, 1949) an elegant, unshaven man speaks to us, like in Fellini's *And the Ship Sails On* (1982), and then the dolly-out reveals him to be a radio announcer (this "overture" is most certainly inspired

by a similar device at the beginning of Renoir's *Rules of the Game*, whose intrepid radio reporter is played by Lise Elina).

Symmetrical to camera speech and sometimes combined with it is what I call *screen speech*—acousmatic speech that is addressed to an onscreen character from offscreen or from outside the diegesis. Screen speech interpellates or comments on the onscreen character, often ironically or aggressively, sometimes as if to influence his or her behavior. There are several examples in *The Story of a Cheat* and brief instances in Jacques Becker's 1954 *Touchez pas au Grisbi* (Gabin's mordant commentary on the dancers at a party). We also find collective screen speech (commentaries by various people on the characters filmed by the camera) in John Boorman's *Leo the Last* (1970) and in Sergei Paradjanov's *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1964), when the women of the village comment to each other about poor Ivan, once so handsome and valiant, while we see Ivan dragging himself along without seeing the gossips we're hearing.

In *India Song* gossipy voices "next to us" comment on what the formally dressed characters whom we see are doing or might be saying to each other at a French embassy ball in India.

There is also screen speech in voyeuristic films such as *Rear Window* or Brian De Palma's *Body Double* (1984). A woman is being watched by a man with a telephoto lens or telescope, and the voyeur comments on the object of

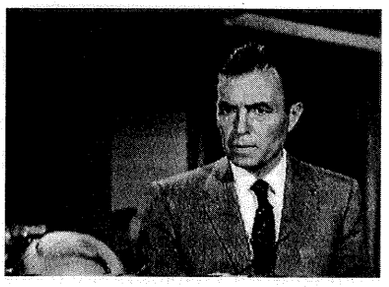
his voyeurism, as if his words will influence that person's behavior: "Do this"; "Don't do that." In *Rear Window* Jeff speaks from afar to Thorwald (who of course can't hear him), "Go on, pick it up." Later, when Lisa has taken the risk of entering the killer's apartment, Jeff implores, "Come on, get out of there." This type of screen speech acts as a transposition of what the spectator would wish to say, and as such it humorously underlines the *absence* of interactivity in film. In *Palombella Rossa* (1989) by Nanni Moretti, we see people watching *Doctor Zhivago* on television, encouraging the characters and trying to influence their behavior; of course the latter, like the figures in Adolfo Bioy Casares's novella *The Invention of Morel* (1940), are fated forever to repeat their actions at the time they were frozen into a representation.

In some cases screen speech can be assimilated to the voice of a gossip or of a Greek chorus. Examples range from Orson Welles's voice-over narration in *The Magnificent Ambersons* to the malicious old lady in Tati's *Jour de fête* (1948).

Sometimes voices are at a crossroads: between diegetic and nondiegetic, between dialogue and narration, voices that habitually adopt the position of powerless—but not opinion-free—observers of the characters and events. Aren't the chatty, voyeuristic characters in *Rear Window* examples of such ghostly gossipy voices becoming embodied—a thematization of all such voices who could one day shift into action and exert an influence on the story as full-fledged characters, risking life and limb in diegetic reality?

THE SURFACE OF A LIE

In the magnificent scene at the auction in *North by Northwest*, a bitter exchange full of insinuations takes place between Thornhill (Gary Grant) and Vandamm (James Mason). Leonard (Martin Landau), Vandamm's henchman, is silently listening in, his dark stare toward Thornhill effectively underscoring Vandamm's threats. Eve (Eva Marie Saint) is also present, seated while the men are standing; she is the implicit subject of their discussion. What Thorn-

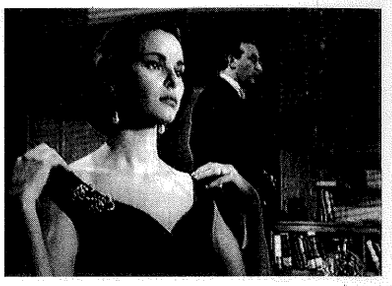


hill says could endanger the trust Vandamm has in her, and she must stay composed at all costs, especially in the face of the accusations Thornhill makes to sully and compromise her. So the spectator, in counterpoint to the dialogue, has an eye fixed on three things that constitute the image's silent response. First, the hand of the standing, possessive Vandamm, which rests on the shoulder of the seated Eve (if this hand is retracted, it would mean he's withdrawing his trust and that she is in danger). Second, the silent stare of Leonard, who scrutinizes Thornhill's reaction to certain key words spoken by Vandamm. And third, the face of Eve, who, we imagine, is hiding her rage at the venomous remarks of Thornhill, knowing that she must suppress any impulse to revolt if she is to avoid betraying herself.

Here speech has all its force, and the confrontation between speech and image becomes crucial, since words are playing the role of *aiming to destabilize what we see.*

In a sound film a character shot in closeup does not have to stop talking to be mute. For this muteness to be felt there only needs to be the suggestion (or our explicit knowledge) that the person is hiding a secret. "There is not enough lying in movies," Eric Rohmer once remarked.[4] And he is right, if he is talking about outright lying that involves inventing imaginary facts or altering truth. If, however, lying is also dissimulation and evasion, we would have to say that the cinema is rife with this kind of lying, which takes on central importance in the sound film. The image becomes the very surface of this lying, insofar as the lie is the foundation of the sacred character of language.[5]

The driving principle of Juan Antonio Bardem's *Death of a Cyclist*—an almost caricatural illustration of this property of film—consists in transporting an illegitimate couple united in (an accidental) murder and adultery into every imaginable context: a chic party, a church, a stadium, all so we can witness the couple's dissimulation in each situation. In this way the film makes use of the image as the foil, the surface of the lie. The sound film transformed



the human face into a mask, from the moment it liberated faces from having to transmit meaning directly.

Filming someone's face, especially the smooth countenance of a beautiful woman who is expertly hiding a guilty secret, and showing how the relentless progress of time wears at it, and bombarding that face with words, sounds, and music until the person cracks—thus creating a kind of analogy between the surface of the skin and the material film surface: some films have been devoted entirely to carrying out such experiments.

In the Bardem film a large share of the shots are given over to showing the exquisite Lucia Bosé in frontal closeups, while she hears remarks that invariably echo her secret—scenes where she's doing her hair, filing her nails, and putting on makeup in the mirror while her husband speaks to her. The face, then, in close conformity to the smooth image of it, appears as the mask of the lie or at the very least as the screen of a mystery.

Whether consciously or unconsciously at first, Hitchcock clearly already understood the phenomenon in *Blackmail* when he juxtaposed the face of Alice (Anny Ondra), the murderess, with the neighbor woman's prattling. And this work of 1929 was actually filmed as a silent picture at first.

Eventually a kind of genre developed—the film of dissimulation, including horror thrillers like Jim Gillespie's *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) and psychological dramas such as Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1990) and *Match Point* (2005), where everything we hear down to the smallest noise becomes incriminating.

In Hitchcock's *I Confess* (1952) Montgomery Clift plays a Catholic priest who has taken confession from an assassin and, out of respect for confidentiality, finds himself accused of the crime. In several scenes the dialogue of his interlocutors has to do the heavy lifting of narration, letting us observe the noble features of Clift, who is sworn to silence and gets covered in mud and calumny, worn down by the stares and words of others. In *Rope* the moving camera's gaze insistently focuses on one of the two assassins, the more

emotional one played by Farley Granger, and suspense builds around a question of time: how long before he loses his composure?

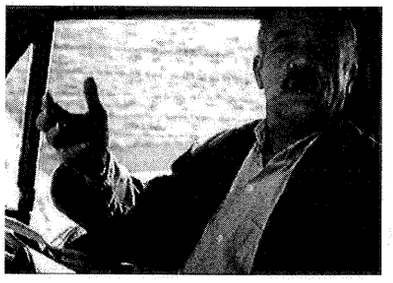
SIDE BY SIDE

How can one film human conversation in a way that avoids having the faces appear as two masks across from each other?

The sound film in the hands of directors as varied as Dreyer (*Gertrud* [1965]), Tarkovsky (*Stalker* and *The Sacrifice*), and Abbas Kiarostami (*A Taste of Cherry* [1997] and *Ten* [2002]), who explore methods other than conventional camera and editing techniques, becomes a terrain for refiguring human conversation and getting out of the vicious circle whereby the image is automatically undermined by speech and vice versa. Not that these directors necessarily seek always to do the reverse and establish reinforcement and authenticity. Rather, they are interested in a logic other than the dialectic of truth/invention, sincerity/dissimulation, and so on, to discover ways in which the image will cease to function automatically as *either* a mask or a confession.

A Taste of Cherry consists of conversations in a car driven by the protagonist. Kiarostami's system here is to visually separate the characters speaking in each scene; the characters converse side by side, not opposite each other, even though one will frequently turn his head to the side to look at the other. There is no shot showing both driver and passenger—for example, in a through-the-windshield shot that would frame them together in medium closeup as they talk.

When the protagonist has an old man in his car and asks him to help with his suicide, and the passenger begins to speak of the beauty of the world and the love of life, we see neither the speaker nor the listener but a long shot of the car snaking through the countryside. It falls to us, bearing in mind the faces of the two men that have been established in previous shots, to listen to these words and gauge the impact they have on us. The long shot rules out the more



conventional and passive spectator role of observing the reciprocal impact of the actors' lines on each of their faces.

Almost all the scenes in *Gertrud*, Dreyer's final film, contain two characters, the eponymous heroine and one of her men: her husband; her young lover who is cheating on her; and an older ex-lover, Axel, who has remained her suitor. The woman and man are shot side by side on benches or sofas; they look at each other rarely, and at most, one looks at the other, who does not return the gaze. Unlike with Kiarostami, both characters in a given scene tend to be together in the same shot.

At the end of the film the aged, white-haired Gertrud receives a visit from her old friend Axel. For the first time, a man and woman in this film are speaking to each other *while looking at each other.* They are filmed in profile, and between them in the background we can make out a fire burning in the hearth.

Throughout the film the characters are not just two faces offering their mutual opacity to one another. The image loses its quality of a mask, and we listen to their words in a different way.

A TYPOLOGY OF TELEPHEMES IN FILM

In the beginning of cinematic storytelling—possibly at its very origin—was the telephone. The phone conversation, where two people speak who are not in the same space, created a "montage of simultaneous locations," which would be the point of origin for Griffith's parallel editing.

For once I do not have to coin a word or put together two words in a novel way; I will simply borrow the charming term coined by an early twentieth-century journalist: *telepheme.* A telepheme is simply a unit of telephone conversation. There are several types of telepheme in the cinema; I propose the following seven classifications, though some actual cases may cross-pollinate among categories.

* * *

Type 0 (because it belongs to the silent era). This telepheme allows us to see, without hearing, the two conversing parties in crosscutting. It is one of the oldest uses for parallel editing (Griffith's *The Lonely Villa* [1909]). Other instances from among countless films include the telephone interview in *A Woman of Paris* (Chaplin, 1923), in which a woman mistakenly believes she has been abandoned by a man and leaves her family to go to Paris. A telepheme in Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925) illustrates the network of political and social collusion, and hierarchies as well, through a sequence of rapid montage. A man standing in a public telephone booth calls another man comfortably seated in his office—and instantly we understand that the first is the hierarchical inferior of the second. Then people are shown dressed in different ways as they talk on the telephone—this person is wearing formal evening attire, that one a military uniform, and we immediately see the complicity of various kinds of power.

Type 0, in the silent era, was already making use of one of the major discoveries of the telepheme in the cinema: it permits us to see and compare people who are relating and conversing but who do not see each other—the cuts in the editing functioning like a screen or partition wall between them. This setup makes us more observant and more conscious than they, since we get a cross section that the characters can't see. We know before they do that they will separate, given that they're turning their back on each other already (without themselves seeing this), or, on the contrary, that they will grow closer, since, again without knowing it, they make gestures that echo one another, that rhyme, or through crosscutting they seem to look at each other. When the heroine in *A Woman of Paris* leaves the man whom she thinks (because of a telephone misunderstanding) has abandoned her, we see her "turn her back" on the man whom she can't see, thanks to Chaplin's choices in editing and camerawork.

Type 1. This telepheme, inherited from silent films, adds sound to type 0. It corresponds to crosscutting in which we hear only the voice of the person who is on the screen. When we see A, we hear A speaking; when we see B, we see B speaking, and so on. Examples include the telephemes in most of the first talking pictures and most of the scenes in Hal Salwen's *Denise Calls Up* (1995).

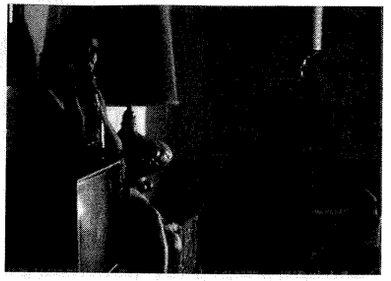
Type 2. This telepheme identifies those cases where we stay with A for the duration of the telepheme, without hearing what B says (Cary Grant in the two scenes where he calls his mother in *North by Northwest*). We can sometimes guess from the gaps in the conversation what is being said, or sometimes we can hear faint sounds as though we were close to the receiver.

Sometimes the editing cleverly combines type 1 and type 2. In Maurice Pialat's *Loulou* (1979) the conversation between the husband (Guy Marchand) and his wife (Isabelle Huppert), who is in bed with Loulou (Gérard Depardieu), begins as type 1 (crosscutting) and ends as type 2, accentuating the husband's solitude in their empty marital apartment.

In *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) Kubrick makes stunning use of type 2. The scene in question takes place in the Pentagon War Room, where the American president, played by Peter Sellers, uses the red hotline to announce to his Soviet counterpart that an American plane equipped with nuclear warheads is en route to bomb Russia because there's been a glitch in the international security system. We do not hear the reply of the Russian president, who has had to tear himself away from a weekend banquet at his dacha, but we can imagine his fury. The comedy of the situation comes from the fact that around the circular conference table with the American president, there are a dozen characters all following the conversation via headphones—American military leaders, the Russian ambassador (presumably the only one who understands). In short, everyone in the scene hears the Russian president's voice, except for us.

Type 3. In the type 3 telepheme we also stay with A, but we also hear the voice of the person that A hears coming over the receiver (Thornhill in *North by Northwest* receiving a call from Valerian in his Plaza Hotel room, and many examples in Wes Craven's *Scream* films [1997, 1998, 2000]). This arrangement, which brings in the mysterious acousmêtre for the spectator, is a standard feature of suspense films that cook up terror with the telephone (*When a Stranger Calls* [1979]): the camera stays on a character or in the space she or he occupies, but we hear what the character hears as though we had her or his ears.

One of the first examples of type 3 in the history of sound film must be in the first version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, when the parents of the little girl who has been abducted receive a call from her kidnappers. In this telepheme the husband and wife, who speak to a woman and then to their child, are not alone but are surrounded by police officers. The latter are in the room but are for a time excluded from the frame while Hitchcock gives us a close shot of the parents; therefore, we don't know how much the police hear of the voices that we hear on the phone. The *uncertain extent of the auditory field* troubles our ability to judge the partitions of hearing in this instance. Less ambiguous is the shot where we see the husband holding the receiver with his wife at his side, and we hear both the acousmatic voice of the kidnapper and the voice of the wife, who asks her husband to tell her what's going on—a clear indication that she is deaf to what we can hear. But in this case we

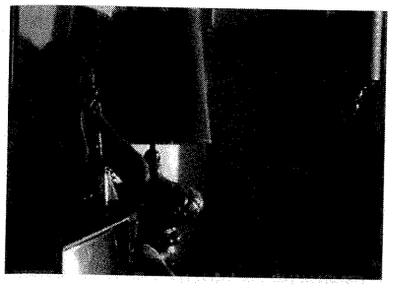


have to distinguish two complementary levels that are not mutually exclusive: the level of logical reasoning and a more magical one. There is no guarantee that everything that we hear during this sequence is not also being heard by all the characters present onscreen.

The type 3 telepheme is often used to affirm the narrative point of view. In a scene in *Rear Window* Jeff receives a call from a police officer who asks to speak to Doyle, who is beside him. When Jeff picks up the receiver, we hear the filtered voice of this policeman; when Jeff passes the phone to Doyle, we stop hearing what Doyle hears—the scene reverts to a type 2 telepheme.[6]

Scream (1996) is famous for its opening type 3 telepheme with the unfortunate Casey (Drew Barrymore). At the beginning of the conversation her persecutor speaks like someone who cannot see: "What's that noise?" he asks, regarding the popcorn that the girl is preparing on her kitchen stove. She no doubt thinks she cannot be seen, but a bit later he makes it clear that he has been following her actions. We don't know the boundaries of his field of vision, however, or under what conditions he is seeing, a setup that's always disturbing. We have here an "acousmêtre with partial vision."

The compelling idea of this film and its sequels was to prevent us from uniting the two incarnations of the killer: his acousmatic voice and his body. When we see him in his bizarre costume—all the more horrible for having inspired some all too real copycat versions—it is a mute, disguised body whose pains and efforts produce shouts or moans, an awkward, accident-prone body rather easy to knock down but that terrifyingly insists on its determination to kill. When we hear him, all we have is a reasoning male voice. Not a single shot in the film connects the disguised body of the serial killer with his speech. Like Mabuse in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, the promised reuniting of the "anacousmêtre," which alone could put an end to his power, is constantly deferred. It is only logical that the parodic and demystifying effect of *Scream* in Keenan Ivory Wayans's *Scary Movie* (2000) involves the de-acousmatization of the telephone voice by showing the killer in his killer's uniform, complete with mask inspired by Edvard Munch, making his phone calls.



Type 4. This telepheme combines crosscutting and the possibility of hearing the interlocutor's voice, filtered, on the other end of the receiver. This is quite common and occurs in infinite variations, and the artfulness with which it is carried out reveals the degree of a director's filmmaking talent. The telepheme between Susan Sarandon and Michael Madsen in *Thelma & Louise* is constructed with a great deal of subtlety.

When Louise (Susan Sarandon) asks Jimmy, "Can you help me, please?" (pursued by the police, she's asking him to get her a large amount of money), and he replies, "Yeah, yeah, of course I can," the camera is on Jimmy both for the supplicating, filtered acousmatic voice of Louise, and for Jimmy's "yeah"—a "yeah" that we see him pronounce directly in front of us and that makes us ever more certain that we have just heard a sincere response. Cut to Louise, who is weeping in relief. Cut to a closeup of Jimmy, paired with Louise's sobbing heard *unfiltered*, as though she were in the same room as he (while at the same time their eyes seem to meet, purely through the cutting). The spectator does not consciously notice that the sobs are not filtered through the phone; their "directness" elicits a feeling of proximity. But Louise, whom we see in the solitude of her hotel room, now asks a second question: "Jimmy, do you love me?" Cut to Jimmy, who hesitates and draws on his cigarette. When he says a second "yeah" to this new question, we hear it while seeing Louise, so it's an acousmatic "yeah," filtered through her phone receiver and thus giving the opposite feeling, of distancing and reticence. The audience at this point never fails to react, as though at that point something about the fundamental nonsynchronization of couples had been revealed. Note that the sense that the second "yeah" comes too late is largely a function of the cutting of image and sound. If the shot of Jimmy had been paired with this "yeah" as it was for his first, we would not get the same feeling at all.

Audio editing for this scene makes skillful use of variations in ambient sound in the environment of each speaker, sometimes to mark a separation between them and sometimes to allow for rapprochement. Louise is in a motel

room next to a highway, and the open window allows us to hear the big semis going by. Jimmy is a hundred miles away, in his quiet apartment. At different moments of the telepheme, depending on whether we're "with" Louise or Jimmy, background sound creates greater or lesser degrees of disruption. Sometimes when the film cuts to Louise, a sound cut to the noisy traffic accentuates her acoustic separation from Jimmy; but when he has just agreed to get her the money, and they are brought together through the editing, the difference in ambient sound in their two environments is hardly noticeable—as if they were occupying the same auditory space.

A psychologizing interpretation of the analysis I have presented, which would attribute these feelings to the characters ("Louise feels closer to Jimmy, and then she feels abandoned"), would be reductive. I have analyzed a particular scene and its editing choices. Analyzing its atmosphere and its composition is not the same thing as entering the characters' heads and hearts. *We* are the ones who feel these rapprochements and separations.

Let us recall the "on-the-air" song that plays throughout this scene, "Part of You, Part of Me," sung by Glenn Frey. This song (which I will return to in chapter 24) contributes to the coherence of the scene as a whole, all while producing meaning—as when the words "part of you, part of me" are timed to occur at the moment of the couple's closest telephone communion.

Type 5. This telepheme presents the phone call in split screen, with the image divided down the middle. It is used mostly in comedies, such as *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953) (one of the first comedies in CinemaScope, encouraging this device), *Indiscreet* (Stanley Donen, 1958), *Bye Bye Birdie* (1963) (with the charming scene of teenage girls chatting with their girlfriends on the phone in a scene that becomes a ballet as the screen gets increasingly subdivided), and *When Harry Met Sally* (Rob Reiner, 1989). But type 5 can already be found in the silent era as well.

The split screen of type 5 produces the effects of type 1 but in simultaneity, not alternation. Some of the effects also hold for type 4 telephemes: characters who turn away from each other "without knowing it," or who look tenderly at each other "without knowing it," are simply taking up those postures of closeness or distance more obvious to us still "without knowing it" themselves—the blindness of the one toward the other being the whole charm of this situation.

Type 6. This is a kind of grab-bag category for some cases of rare or unusual practices, such as in Anne-Marie Miéville's *Lou Didn't Say No* (1994) or Steven Soderbergh's *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (1988), where one hears unfiltered the voice of an acousmatic telephone interlocutor.

The typology I'm offering here should not be taken too rigidly. Each telepheme is its own thing. The first telephone conversation between Brenda Blethyn and Marianne Jean Baptiste (who plays her bastard daughter) in *Secrets and Lies* (1996) navigates every possibility. When Brenda Blethyn apologizes in a teary voice, "I don't think I have a pencil," we are "with" her daughter and hear no filtering of the acousmatic voice, whereas at the beginning of the conversation the filtering is very noticeable.

In Gregory Hoblit's *Frequency* (2000) the hero (James Caviezel), who lost his fireman father (Dennis Quaid) thirty years earlier in a fire, discovers in the family home the amateur shortwave radio that the father used to enjoy. To pass the time, Frank (Caviezel) decides to make it work again, and out comes a man's voice seeking a ham radio correspondent on the other side of the world. It takes Frank a while to understand what the crosscutting between the two radio operators reveals to the spectator right away, namely that the distant correspondent is his own father thirty years ago, who is speaking to his little boy, who is now a grown man in 1999, without knowing it, and without knowing that in this future, he is himself already dead. Many type 4 scenes follow, with the unusual twist that here the two characters call each other *from the same location* and *using the same instrument*; the customary difference of spaces, here canceled, is replaced by a distance in time, itself denied by the diegesis. The effect is fascinating, thanks to parallel editing and its ambiguities. What moves the spectator again here is the sense of nonsynchronization of emotions: two people love each other, yet they can't say so to each other at the same time. *Frequency* is like a fairy tale whose characters receive the power to "do over" sentences they never uttered, those that in reality you cannot say to the other, or that you will never again be able to say because you have died.

CELL PHONES AND VIDEOPHONES

Cordless telephones and of course cell phones, with their even greater emancipation from any specific phone booth or room, permit a total disconnection between the context and content of speech. Cell phones make it easy to have practically any interior or exterior as the setting for private conversations, and this infinite flexibility offers the cinema brand-new resources for creating comedy, anxiety, drama, and terror.

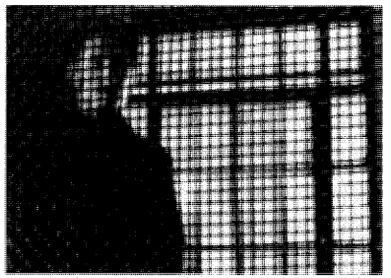
Already in everyday life the cell phone has multiplied and intensified the acousmatic enigma. Not only might I not recognize my interlocutor, but now the location he or she is speaking from, as well as where I am situated, may be constantly in flux. Nor can I construct a mental image of the physical space from which a person whom I know is talking to me.

For a number of years, because they were expensive to own, cell phones in movies were a sign of prosperity and social sophistication, a message that is still being sent as late as 1997 in David Fincher's *The Game*, as Michael Douglas wields his cell.

Tim Robbins's cell phone telepheme in *The Player* (Robert Altman, 1992) attracted a lot of attention at the time and remains disturbing today. The whole idea of this memorable scene—a mixture of type 3 for its sound and type 1 for the image—consists in turning around the usual formula. The guy with a cell phone lurking near a house at night—who calls the woman from the shadows as he watches her move through her well-lit house—appears at first in the well-known position of the classic phone-calling voyeur exerting power over the woman via his gaze. But with three simple words—she reminds him what her husband calls him, "the dead man"—Greta Scacchi reverses the situation. Robbins now seems like a powerless and inoffensive ghost roving and skulking outside, rather than a serious menace.

By transporting us inside the house two times, the scene's editing skillfully lets on that June Gudmundsdottir (Scacchi) can see Griffin Mill (Robbins) out her window but pretends she doesn't, as though he were transparent, invisible to her. He becomes a disembodied, homeless voice. What's more, even when the camera is inside, we hear the voice of Greta Scacchi filtered, that is, from Robbins's point of audition, a choice that further contributes to reversing the usual setup where a man's filtered acousmatic voice threatens a woman who is visible and speaking with no filter.

The connection via videophone appears in movies as early as the 1920s and 1930s (in Lang's *Metropolis* [1926] and Chaplin's *Modern Times*) and is developed in futuristic films such as 2001 and *Blade Runner* (situated in 2019) as the ultimate in modernity. Anyone transported directly from the 1930s to the year 2009, say, and who lands in our world without undergoing, as we have, the gradual naturalizing assimilation of a century of technological changes, would no doubt be surprised at the relative rarity of conversations on videophones. With Kubrick (Floyd videophones his daughter on Earth from the space station)



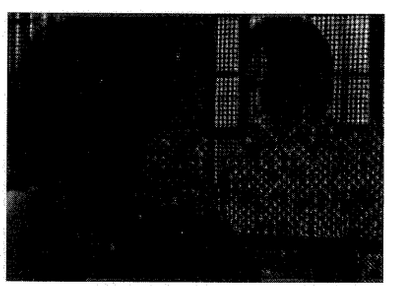
and Scott (Deckard videophones Rachel from a phone booth in a bar) the idea is the same: a type 3 telepheme, with the image of the interlocutor as supplement. But what is interesting is that in both films the characters make no mention of the fact that they can see each other (for example, Floyd doesn't compliment his daughter on her princess dress). Moreover, Kubrick avoids all futuristic sounding neologisms in the dialogue here (as he does throughout the film); thus Floyd says simply to the person who welcomes him to the space station that he has to place a "phone call" to his daughter, not a "videophone call."

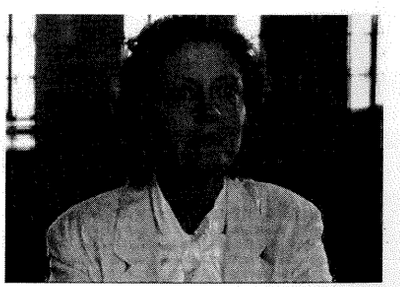
THE VISITING-ROOM EFFECT

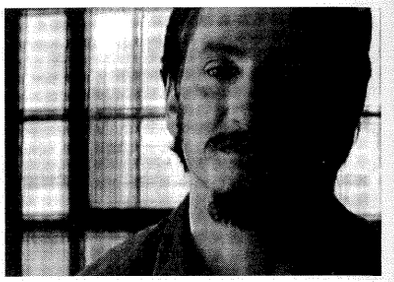
> "Everything that comes out of my mouth, you've got to turn into shit."
> "Well, stop talking then."
> "And you, stop eating."

This bitter slice of domestic life taken from Godard's *Hail Mary* captures one of the obsessions of sound film: to represent human conversation in all its blockages and breakdowns. The silent film of course showed human conversation, but in the talking film, with its capability of sound-image overlap, described early on by Pudovkin (where the words of A continue to be heard as we see a shot of B listening), a new dimension to conversation opens up. When the voice extends across the visual cut, the cut all the more strongly symbolizes the insurmountable separation between human beings. It can also happen, however, that this divide comes to be materially represented in the image where it can symbolize, with varying degrees of optimism or pessimism, the hope or dream of surmounting it. This explains the proliferation in talking cinema of doors, walls, fences, curtains, screens, windows, or simple distance—which serve to visually inscribe the barrier within the story, often with the aim of showing the ways the barrier between characters can be transcended in spite of everything.[7]

The way in which framing and editing can visually isolate speaking characters, even if they are together in the same room, even if they are embracing,







takes on a different sense when this separation is redoubled in the film by an actual material separating-element in the set itself.

Shot–reverse shot syntax is by no means the special invention of sound film, but after the silent era it does take on new significance. It can punctuate human conversation above and beyond the forces of separation. Thus, many talking films make use of what I call the "prison-visiting-room effect"; that is, a circumstance in which characters speak to each other over a physical separation—which itself is the metaphorical translation of the separation created by editing and that paradoxically is the cinema's most effective means for suggesting union, however fleeting. In film, in other words, speech regains its sense of "communication," fragile and illusory perhaps, when an obstacle gives material form to the divide that speech must overcome.

Silvia Sydney and Gary Cooper in Rouben Mamoulian's *City Streets* (adapted from Dashiell Hammett), Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert in Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934) (the two protagonists hang a blanket between their beds for modesty's sake that they refer to as "the wall of Jericho"), the imprisoned Jean-Pierre Aumont and Annabella in *Hôtel du Nord*, Danielle Darrieux and Charles Boyer in Ophuls's *Madame de . . .* (1953), the company president and the imprisoned child kidnapper in Kurosawa's *High and Low*, Harry Dean Stanton and Nastassja Kinski in the peep-show sequence in Wim Wenders's *Paris, Texas* (1984), Anthony Hopkins and Jodie Foster in *The Silence of the Lambs*, Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn in *Dead Man Walking*, Björk

and Catherine Deneuve in *Dancer in the Dark*, the nurse and his friend in Almodovar's *Talk to Her* (2002), all have this in common: in some very memorable scenes, two characters speak to each other across some physical obstacle that blocks either vision or physical contact or both (a blanket, grillwork fence, a transparent or opaque glass partition, the unbreakable Plexiglas of a prison visiting area, or with Ophuls, simply distance). The découpage of these scenes sometimes, on the one hand, underscores the obstacle (with choices of framing and lighting) or, on the other hand, makes it disappear, to the point of creating the impression that these separated individuals have united for a time. The death row prisoner Matthew Poncelet (Sean Penn) stops being seen through the bars and Plexiglas in the visiting areas; Hannibal Lecter seems to have Clarice Starling in the same space with him—then the editing reaffirms the obstacle and at the same time the voice and its speech, which remains as the sole means for traversing it.

There is a famous movie trick, which can sometimes be overdone, that consists in having a man and a woman speak to each other from opposite sides of a fence or other barrier, often while walking (*Death of a Cyclist*). This trick can become mechanical, but it's the kind of cliché that one should not just identify and dismiss, for the precise reason that clichés are intensely expressive. This convention sums up the truth of the sound film, where speech can cross the barriers of editing and découpage and, thereby, symbolized in a material obstacle, can transcend this barrier for a few precious seconds.

1. *Phatic* is one of the functions of language according to Roman Jakobson. The meaning of phatic language is to establish communication itself—for example, "one, two, three" said into a microphone to test a sound system.—Trans.
2. Although "to have or form a connecting passage" does exist as a definition of the verb *communicate*, this sense is far more common in French, and therefore its use creates an easy play on words in the original French line.—Trans.
3. In *Mean Streets* (1973) Scorsese creates the same tension with the insult "mook"—"Don't call me a mook"—spoken by one punk to another. A single word sparks a fight.
4. See Eric Rohmer, *Le Goût de la beauté: Textes réunis et présentés par Jean Narboni* (Paris: Cahiers du cinema, 1984), 39.
5. For what I consider to be the role of dissimulation in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, see my monograph *Kubrick's Cinema Odyssey*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (London: BFI, 2001).
6. More exactly, as Elisabeth Weis notes with her customary precision, we hear only the first three words, "Lieutenant Doyle, sir?" See Elisabeth Weis, *The Silent Scream: Alfred Hitchcock's Sound Track* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982), 124.
7. The "space of the impasse" that is the preferred terrain in Godard's films, a body of work that is not close to my heart as the reader may have already guessed, is characterized by a will to ignore the symbolizing resources, and therefore the possibilities for sublimation and transcendence, offered by cinema itself.

CHAPTER 22

Andrei Tarkovsky: Language and the World

> And yet, there once was a woman standing in the doorway with her soft red hair and the light of her clear gaze, the figure was like a mother, and there was a father who had not yet perished in the war, and a brother named Pierre; there was a house with low walls on three sides and walkways of white gravel, and wind and the rustle of the leaves of banana trees, and a broad opening like a field in front; there were bright sunrises and surprising sunsets and the earth was so soft to the touch and so plainly evident to the regard, and there were reflections of cliffs in the rivers and bridges that spanned the sea, there were open spaces and emily who knew who she was, emily, and for whom.
>
> —Christiane Sacco, *Plaidoyer au Roi de Prusse ou la première métamorphose*

1.

THE WORLD IS THERE IN *Tarkovsky's cinema, always whole; from one shot to the next it is always present, from one end of the film to the other closing its orb. Only the world's surface is visible—the rectangle of the screen is filled to the very edges with terrestrial crust—it is what is called the earth.*

At every point in the world exists earth, equivalent, undivided. Each region of the earth calls to others, which are also the world, merely elsewhere. To be somewhere means to be at an intersection of every line and direction in the world. Every point on the globe where human beings have settled, marking the spot with a house, stake, or fence is inhabited by the world, part of the vast total no-man's land. The world is no man's land; and at the same time it has no exit. Try to go outside the world, to a different planet or to an isolated and privileged region, a zone, and you will rediscover more of the world again, identical, in its absolute uniqueness.

Men pass over the earth, while here and there, in a sheepfold or near a house, a woman is waiting.

The woman seen from behind, as she looks slightly away from the fence to the fields, what is she thinking about?[1]

The mind of the world, like the woman, rolls its fathomless thoughts.

The world has no law. It's not been said where the world stops. It's not been said that day yields to night and night to day in an orderly succession. Each arrival of the night is itself a mood or humor, a whim of the earth, which is the bodily surface of the world. There are no natural forces; everything comes from the world that thinks in its depth and moves on its surface. When it rains, it is not the force of rain that falls on the world but the world on which it is raining, and when there is wind, no force of wind is blowing; rather the world has become windy. The humors and thoughts of the world are in the clattering shutter, the changing light, the walls that vibrate, the curtain that folds, water that flows outward and once dispersed into streams crisscrosses the earth's surface like a secret language.

In The Mirror *(1975) the mother, her face: it brightens, darkens, tenses or relaxes, opens or closes, according to her thoughts, which she does not tell.*

The World is the Mother, and the surface of the earth is like her face, covered with wrinkles brightened or darkened by her humors, which are like the thoughts of the Mother, about which she divulges nothing.

Where do thoughts come from? What is their birthplace, their space? Where do they go?

Wind passes like an unexplained care; light fades as on a face that closes, on this earth furrowed by water that is the bodily surface of the Mother, everywhere.

War is a passing airplane, a tremor that shakes the earth, a whim that tosses it about. Some obscure sacrifice, and upon waking, the earth is satisfied, the war forgotten. The world is pagan, magical, not yet completely humanized.

2.

On this surface there are men of thought and knowledge: geologists, physicists, doctors, guides, astronauts, writers, artists, and madmen. Where do they come from? Balding, stooped, their coats, shirts, cowls, and their kimonos hanging like an unused wing, they amble, meet, and chat as though in a waiting room for hopeful suitors. They are suitors of the earth; they bear an obscure resemblance to one another. On them is sometimes a sign, stain, or bald spot—a mark that they are on the downhill slope of the life of the body.

But the earth, they can roll over and over on it,[2] *and fall on it ten times, bend over it, preferably in shallow water, in the postures of Mizoguchi's women, but still the earth does not receive them so willingly; it throws them back to the surface, and if their bodies, in decline, were to stay there without moving, the earth would leave them there, like a heap, unassimilated. Surveyors of the body of the earth, wandering, waiting, they are the aging lovers of the Mother.*

3.

And the child sees all this, the vampire-child, without speech, but a sponge of sensations, who crawls like a caterpillar, sticks to you, jumps on you, lives like a parasite. The child who perceives and watches the world and its rhythms, catching words at the same time, and the humors of the earth, the unpredictable variations of light and internal sensations, all things that he, a symbol-making animal, will need to try and weave together.

> For a subject, the symbolic function consists in ascribing meaning to an encounter, in the same time and the same place, of certain of his partial sensory perceptions of the external world, linked to a bodily sensation, pleasant or unpleasant. . . . In this way, the child . . . watchful for the return of his mother, the representative of his "him-her" being, can, if he suffers from not seeing her, seek out some hallucinatory sign of her presence in the perceptions that come over him.
>
> For example, the child feels in his body a sensation of hunger, while at the same time he sees the curtain of his room moved by the wind and hears a siren outside.[3]

To make sensations coincide, to correlate events, and even the insecurity of a world barely named, barely humanized, to try and construct one's identity, one's "sameness" of being ("mêmeté," *says Françoise Dolto).*[4] *According to certain rhythms, in the course of time, to weave sensations and words, correlating language with the world—this is the cinema of Tarkovsky.*

4.

Language was parachuted in; it does not come from the earth; it has no hold over the world. Man, the Father, can speak, emit words, make speeches. In the name of the initial of which he is so proud (Andréi, Alexis, Arseni, Alexander) he can speak of the Word that was "in the beginning," while at the same time replanting a dead tree—ready made—that he waters with his incontinent verbal seed. But the earth will not drink his words. Language is something it cannot assimilate.

Man in his ramrod virility can, if he likes, claim responsibility for trees, verticals, words, culture, and the music of Bach—the descendant of human heroes,

spermatic creatures—and make these claims aloud to the world. But as for the world, language can only pass over its surface and leave traces; for it there can be no impregnation.

So the hero sulks and does not wish to talk; he sets things afire and watches, a pyromaniac idiot. This is his act.

5.

A filmmaker takes up language and the world in order to remix them; he grafts abstract words onto concrete rhythms. From beauties he has not created, the beauty of humans, of trees, of paintings of Leonardo or music of Bach, he makes figures and networks. He is a creator of temporal maquettes to construct the complicated illusion of a presence and interrogate it, in order to recreate the obscure language of the earth's thoughts.

Tarkovsky's cinema is the world crossed with language, set in time.

6.

Time is the space for variations, variances that trace an obscure but very precise code.

But a world-in-the-world is necessary that remains this obscure life, speaking through intersecting frowns and furrows and falls, the earth's expression like that of a human face, with sudden unexplained leaps of existence and temperaments, the mysteriously unruly return of rhythms that allow the human subject to seek out his identity with this world, his sameness, his unity.

The images of classic cinema and the sounds that distribute themselves within and around it have long come from language; they did so even in the silent era. Shots made to say, "This man," "This woman," "This house." Sequences of images and sounds to be read, "then," or "because," or "just as," or "so that." Intertitles in silent film, the rhetoric of shots articulated through editing, the linearization of filmic storytelling, even the rules for lighting images and mixing sounds—these aspects have long been assimilated into the core language of cinema. The world in the midst of all that survives only as traces.

But not with Tarkovsky. Which explains the rough, arbitrary, enigmatic, nonhierarchical quality of his shots, as in the very first cinematic images.

In order to produce somewhat complex stories, a certain "primitive" period in the history of cinema (1902–10) required the spoken commentary of a storyteller (bonimenteur)*, though eventually the perfection of codes of editing made him unnecessary.* "The appearance later of what we have called the 'narrator' gave films the internal equivalent of the storyteller. . . . However, this narrator was no longer located offscreen but was on the contrary absorbed by the images themselves and by the way they are joined to each other."[5]

Thus was formed a so-called visual code that only shows the world through relationships, divisions, linkages, and other categories transposed directly from the functions of language. What followed was the cinema as we know it, and its masterpieces.

If at times Tarkovsky's films give the impression of a primitive cinema that has lost its storyteller—a lacunary cinema—it is because his images, even with sound, have not internalized Gunning's "narrator" even though language is there, in the mouths of the characters. What his images speak instead is the obscure language of the world.

The result is a precarious, go-between cinema of juxtapositions that doggedly attempts to recombine in the world (with no hold on that world) the language of men, the earth's lovers, into rhythmically planned networks, nets for catching impressions, illusions of presence, fleeting reflections of a faltering unity.

1. A reference to *The Mirror* (1975).—Trans.
2. A reference to *Stalker* (1979).—Trans.
3. See Françoise Dolto, *Séminaire de psychanalyse d'enfants* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 1:151–52.
4. Françoise Dolto (1908–88) was an influential French psychiatrist and pediatrician. The term *mêmeté*, roughly "sameness" or perhaps "samity," occurs within a discussion of narcissism in Dolto's *L'Image inconsciente du corps* (Paris: Seuil, 1984).—Trans.
5. Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI, 1990), 56–62.

CHAPTER 23

The Five Powers

THE SAID AND THE SHOWN

IN THE SECOND ACT OF *HAMLET* the hero enters "reading on a book": "What do you read, my Lord?" asks Ophelia's father. "Words, words, words," answers the prince. This famous line, handed down for centuries in hundreds of different editions of the play and represented onstage thousands of times, has given rise to every imaginable delivery. Hamlet can flip through the pages of the book, name it, pause—or not—between each repetition of "words," look up toward the heavens, look down. . . . In short, he can give this one line, "Words, words, words," a thousand different "intentions." A modern staging might even have him holding no book at all.

To see what becomes of this in cinema, let us return to one of the many film versions of the play that we have already had occasion to discuss in an earlier chapter: the *Hamlet* directed by Laurence Olivier, who, of course, also plays the prince. When Polonius asks the prince, "What do you read, my Lord?" Olivier, filmed in long shot, chooses to repeat each "words" in an elegant, slightly weary tone, and on the third "words" he turns toward the old man to show him the open pages of his book as though to say, "See for yourself." This admirable staging foregrounds the book's materiality and gives us to understand "words" as something that is fixed on or detachable from a printed page. Moreover, it appears much as we could see it in the theater.

But as luck would have it—luck or design?—at the end of this same conversation the prince of Denmark repeats something else three times: "except my life." As Laurence Olivier utters these words while moving away, the reverb grows more pronounced, enveloping and prolonging each repetition of "except my life." This reverb is a concrete element of the film, soldered into it once and for all, with none of the aleatory character it could have on the

boards of a theater. The echo is not stagecraft; it has an existence as a concrete, realistic, nonpsychological element, a wordless signifier. Is it arbitrary? Does it emphasize the words that have just been spoken? Indeed, it has an ambiguous status between metaphor (giving resonance to important words) and accidental concreteness (Hamlet is passing under an archway). At that moment in the film, the prince does not seem to take notice of this echo that gives his words a different accent and that includes his voice as just another object in a world of objects. Here is an example of the relation between the said and the shown, which I have chosen intentionally, because the "shown" in this instance is auditory in nature and not visual.

I call *the said* in a film that which belongs to the verbal sphere (words read or heard, uttered by a diegetic or heterodiegetic voice); *the shown* consists of the seen and concretely heard elements and, beyond framing, coloring, or staging the said, is the very raw material of cinema.[1] I'd like to claim that one of the great characteristics of sound film is this dialogue it creates between the said and the shown.

The notion of the shown takes on significance from the fact that a film is a closed system, staking out the limits of what is in the work and what is not. The film's visual frame, sounds, and temporality precisely enclose a series of saids and a series of showns, and within this closed milieu, an ecosystem where everything affects everything else, anything that is not verbal is liable to *signify* something in relation to that which participates in language. "Anything" can be a texture as well as a shadow, the passage of a vehicle as well as a camera movement, a shudder as well as a crash. Moreover, many figures of filmic rhetoric, such as figures of designation (the pan, the zoom) and selection (framing), resemble speech acts and have an ambiguous status, since they are not speech in the true sense of the word. This ambiguity is what makes film distinctive among signifying systems.

The question of the relation between the said and the shown was for a long time clouded by the myth of redundancy. The term *redundant* is often still used to describe a situation in which characters are shown talking and we hear what they're saying—even though in most cases what they're saying has nothing to do with the way they look as they are speaking. Besides, how could words, which are part of a language system, be replaced by images or in any way "duplicate" what images mean? If we see a house on the screen and we hear the word *house* pronounced in voice-over, the latter designates a general category, while the one we see is either opulent or modest, a rambler or a two-story, with a given number of windows, and so on. Based on what the voice names, different light or shadows determine what we see and what we hear.

FIVE RHETORICAL FIGURES OF THE SAID/SHOWN RELATIONSHIP

Analysis of the relation between the said and the shown (shown to the eyes or the ears, let me repeat) in film often conflates very different cases, which I prefer instead to distinguish from one another. The five rhetorical figures I will consider below are *scansion*, *c/omission*, *contrast*, *counterpoint*, and *contradiction*. Of course there are also cases that combine several of these figures within the same scene.

1. *Scansion*

Everyone is familiar with this, and we have seen how it applies to verbocentric cinema: *profilmic events*—the wind blowing; someone passing by; a car horn in the street; the song of a cuckoo; a speaker's pause to smoke, drink, or gesture—or *events of filmic discourse*—a shot transition or a change in sound quality, a camera that starts or stops moving—all these things can "scan," mark the rhythms and punctuate the speech of characters or voice-overs. The repetition of "except my life" described above serves as an example of this figure. The case of scansion is obviously very common and allows for infinite variations.

It would be a mistake, however, to believe that all scansion "means" something and that this something excludes all other meanings. Scansion is an effect of the signifier (not the signified) and might well have no precise meaning—but in any case it creates waves of resonance like the proverbial pebble in the pond.

Recall, for example, the famous elevator scene in *Story of a Love Affair.* The woman (Lucia Bosé) and her lover (Massimo Girotti) are in an elevator cage in a bourgeois apartment building. We hear the elevator starting or stopping, while other characters are on the stairs. The scene constantly uses scansion: through the image of the elevator or its shadow, through minor characters crossing paths on the stairs, and through sounds.

2. *C/omission*[2]

C/omission, which can push as far as audiovisual foreclosure, occurs when what is said causes what is not said to emerge in a particular manner, like the phenomenon of the elephant in the room that no one mentions. While characters are talking, some striking event appears to them that is out of the ordinary but that they do not integrate into their speech.

What is important is not whether they constantly iterate everything they are doing or experiencing but rather whether their dialogue ever refers to the realm in which this particular thing takes place.

A loud rumbling military tank arrives from nowhere at night and stops—strange, spectacular, disturbing—in front of the hotel where a little boy is staying with his aunt. In their conversation neither the boy nor the woman mentions the tank when it arrives, stops outside their room, or leaves (*The Silence*).

Bill Harford returns home after a long night of mysterious and disturbing adventures. He enters the bedroom, and next to his sleeping wife, on the pillow on his side of the bed, lies the mask he wore during the orgy he had gone to. Neither husband nor wife talks about it at this moment, nor will they bring it up later (*Eyes Wide Shut*).

A "meteorological" phenomenon of biblical proportions happens unannounced, falling from the sky around our characters, who, in a gesture as extraordinary as the thing itself, don't talk about it, as they clean up and erase all its traces and deal with the aftereffects (Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* [1999]).[3]

Sometimes it's simply a moment of unspoken or unspeakable surprise, as when the young hero is dumbstruck one morning by the nudity of Monika (Harriet Andersson), who appears before him . . . a moment they will not talk about (Ingmar Bergman's *Monika* [1953]).

The proverbial movie kiss often goes unmentioned in dialogue before or after. This makes the kiss much more than an erotic or lovers' secret; it becomes the signifier of a fundamental moment of the suspension of speech.

We should add that the unsaid, foregrounded in film by what is said, which thereby makes this object or that moment stand out, is not particularly directed toward secrets (sexual, criminal, family, or other)—it can take up anything at all.

Indeed, sound film affords characters the opportunity to name the sensory, especially when it comes to sound (this is what I call *sensory naming*), and so the sound film through this kind of willful omission can give particular impact to a sensory element that occurs in the story but about which the character says nothing.

In *A Man Escaped*, in the long scene of escape at night with Fontaine's voice-over narration, we hear a series of sounds, and it has often been remarked that these sounds are named by the narrator.

For example, we hear François Leterrier, who plays Fontaine, say, "The gravel crunched under our footsteps; we had to stop," and spectators hear the crunch of gravel and see the characters stop.

Later on, the narrator names a squeaking noise that we have indeed heard and, like Fontaine, have not yet seen or been able to divine the source of. (It will be later identified as the noise produced by the bicycle of a German guard on his rounds around the walls.) For now, we hear Fontaine wonder, "What was that creaking that we could hear at regular intervals? I could not determine the cause."

Later still, when Fontaine hesitates before launching on his escape, "I heard the bell strike midnight, and then one."[4]

What is the meaning of these apparent pleonasms? Of course we must consider the entire sequence to arrive at a satisfactory answer.

Though it is rarely noticed, we can observe that some minutes later, in what is the end point and true purpose of these three restatements, the ever-cautious Fontaine, crouching in silence, latches on to an electric wire with his metal hook. The wire makes a tone that resounds throughout the prison; how far the sound carries we don't know (because of the *uncertain extent of the auditory field*), and we wonder if it's going to give him away, alert the guards, and ruin the whole plan. The narrator falls silent with respect to the tone, Fontaine and Jost are silent, and something falls silent as well in the space where we watch the film. This silencing that unites the characters, the narrator, and the spectators within a shared complicity resonates.

The sound of the hooked wire is never named, and its wordless echo overflows the film, like a magical sound that has gotten away from Bresson himself and from his usual formal restraint with sound.

Thus the sensory naming of three different sounds acts as the setup for the fourth sound that occurs with no naming and that, for this lack, marks our sensibilities in a specific and strong way.

In the second *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Philip Kaufman, 1978) Elizabeth Driscoll (Brooke Adams) witnesses a strange scene on the streets of San Francisco that she later recounts to Dr. Matthew Bennell (Donald Sutherland). The images of what she saw are superimposed over her verbal "story" in a mini-flashback. But what does she say? That she saw "strange people," that "things" happened. And what do we see to give visual form to her account? We see shots of men in three-piece suits leaving the sidewalks to walk in empty lots, guided by women in nurses' uniforms, carrying under their arms

large objects wrapped crudely in newspaper, and all of this in broad daylight in the middle of the city. This image I've taken several lines to describe (but which in fact contains many more details) imposes its strangeness on our eyes in two seconds. But the fact that Elizabeth just can't analyze and account verbally for this strangeness is significant: characters' inability to verbalize their experience, to put words to things, becomes an important aspect of their weakness.[5]

I hasten to add that what is unsaid, or only named with difficulty, has nothing to do with negation, since denial is itself a type of naming. This unsaid, when in a film it encounters nonsymbolization, touches on the Freudian notion of *Verwerfung*, which Lacan translates as *foreclosure*. In *Alien* the sexuality of the characters is foreclosed or repressed (denied in their habit of naming each other—by last name only and never by first names—and also by their unisex clothing and their behavior toward one another).[6] This leads to the violent return of the sexually foreclosed in a dangerous and hallucinatory form.

Certainly a film's characters are not going to spend all their time naming and describing everything around them, and the unsaid must have a context in order to exist as such. If a character who's drinking coffee during a conversation does not allude to the coffee, this certainly does not qualify as c/omission; something more has to happen. For example, if the coffee cup breaks as

the result of an errant gesture and no one says anything about it, then we sense a certain complicity among the characters. In the examples we've been examining, there are always two or more characters and therefore the creation of a *triangle of complicity* with the spectator.

3. *Contrast*

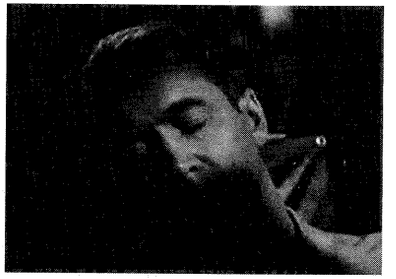
What I call contrast arises when, for example, a character does something tender and glamorous (a gorgeous woman voluptuously kisses an elegant man) and talks about something banal such as whether there's any chicken in the refrigerator (*Notorious*). It is based on this contrast between the said and the shown that Hitchcock created the kissing scenes in *Notorious*, *To Catch a Thief*, *Rear Window*, and *North by Northwest*, where Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint talk about murder while they're making out, thus giving a double meaning to their gestures.

In the scene in *Rear Window* that I've already mentioned several times, a superbly dressed woman arrives noiselessly, leans over the hero-invalid sleeping in his wheelchair, and brings her mouth close to his. But the first thing she says to him, still maintaining all her romantic glamour, is "How is your leg?" "It hurts a little," replies Jeff.[7] "And your stomach?" "Empty as a football." "And your love life?" "Not too active."[8]

With David Lynch the contrast is, on the contrary, built out of excessive speaking over doing. In the long scene in *Blue Velvet* (1987) where Kyle MacLachlan is kidnapped by Dennis Hopper, he hears vociferous remarks and disturbing threats, but what he experiences—a few blows—is nothing compared to what he was threatened with in varying degrees of figurative language. A lot of blows are spoken but only a few are actually delivered.

4. *Counterpoint*

Counterpoint, a subject I will develop further below, is the situation we most frequently encounter. Something is said while something else—neither the opposite nor in obvious contrast to what is spoken—occurs along an



independent track. At the beginning of *The Sacrifice*, for example, the protagonist in the company of his temporarily mute son talks with a postman who is lazily circling around him on his bike through the grass. The camera follows all three of them from a distance, and the distinct trajectories of the characters, the camera's tracking, and the philosophical conversation between Alexander and the postman make for temporal vectors in counterpoint, sometimes intersecting and sometimes not, in any case neither opposing nor contrasting.

5. *Contradiction*

Contradiction, often wrongly identified as counterpoint, is much rarer and, in my view, of more limited use. In contradiction a character says, for example, "I won't hurt you," while acting violently. It is sometimes very upsetting but can also be rather stereotyped if there is no precise dramatic issue at stake.

In Alain Robbe-Grillet's *L'Homme qui ment* (1968) the voice-over narrator, played by Jean-Louis Trintignant, says, "I wandered the streets, anonymous in the crowd of passing people," while the image shows him alone on a deserted village street. The rhetorical effect consists in confronting the necessarily indeterminate and multiple character of an image with focused precision of words, which endow the image with a specific meaning; contradicting the words actually underscores the emptiness of the street. There are other famous applications of this technique where iconogenic stories are undermined (*Singin' in The Rain*; or Jerry Lewis's *The Family Jewels* [1965]): the image shows something in a different light, usually less glamorous, from the way it is being verbally described. Here contradiction is used for comic effect, or at least as a distancing device. At the beginning of *The Lady from Shanghai*, however, we see the main character, played by Welles, beat up three thugs who are attacking Elsa Bannister (Rita Hayworth), while his narrating voice coyly cautions us not to trust what we see: "I start out in the story a little like a . . . hero . . . which I most certainly am not."

Just as counterpoint between the said and the shown is often misinterpreted as contrast, it is common to find contrasts being mistakenly analyzed as examples of contradiction. In the famous exchange about hamburgers in *Pulp Fiction*, there are frequent instances of what I would identify as contrast and not contradiction, as murderers talk about familiar things—or unfamiliar ones, such as the Book of Ezekiel—while they go about committing crimes. The taste of hamburgers and the invoking of the sacred are not the "opposite" of the murders committed by the outlaws, but they do contrast with them.

LOST SPEECH, THE ACT, SPEECH THAT'S PASSED ON

Of these five figures, the reader might guess which I prefer. On the one hand, without the sensibility and genius of a Hitchcock to endow contradiction and contrast with genuine human intensity and drama, contradiction and contrast fall easily into a limited rhetoric and often create effects that are more cerebral than truly lively. On the other hand, counterpoint, c/omission, and scansion (which of course can be combined: Hitchcock's work has admirable examples) are figures that can produce the stronger and richer effects, since they do not presuppose a closed or univocal meaning. On the contrary, they create situations that have the richness and ambiguity of reality. To each auteur, his or her own elaboration of these figures.

Of all directors, Tarkovsky (see chapter 22) took counterpoint to the greatest extreme; his work ceaselessly confronts the said with the shown, with the aim of exposing their absolute incommensurability, all in order occasionally to allow a fleeting and perhaps illusory current to pass between them.

What would total counterpoint between the said and the shown consist of? It would involve the filmic world's absolute indifference to anything the characters might be saying. Cutting and camera movements (which are as much a part of the cinematic shown as are profilmic objects) would never take any account of the said. This would require the expenditure of considerable energy—like two musicians playing separate instruments simultaneously and trying never to fall into any synch or harmony with each other. For we are programmed, as soon as anyone says anything, to perceive scansion, contrast, or contradiction in whatever happens onscreen or on the soundtrack or in the timing of shots.

We seek these relations rather than admit that the world has nothing to do with them.

The Sacrifice shows a father (Erland Josephson) walking with his son in the barren landscape near his house. The space has such presence, with the gentle lapping of waves (of a lake or sea), the intermittent cries of birds—the world, and also events such as sudden gusts of wind that agitate the grass and trees. The son, who has no name, only the nickname "Gossen" (little man), moves and plays, seemingly indifferent to what is said. He plays tricks, such as locking the postman's bike, in apparently absolute counterpoint to what the father is saying, which is some metaphysical discourse. It happens that the son has a bandage around his neck and that a recent tonsillectomy is keeping him from speaking for a while. As if to fill up this silence, the father talks, talks, talks. His boy's silence cruelly reflects back on the father's verbosity and

on his awareness of being a father who merely speaks, his words finding no place to be received, embodied, felt.

This man, Alexander, was an actor before he abandoned the stage.[9] Disgusted with his own torrent of words, he sits against a tree and utters in English Hamlet's line to Polonius mentioned above: "Words, words, words." As he says the line, his little boy to whom he thought he was speaking is no longer in the shot—he has crawled away into the grass, like a carefree child or like a baby. Upon this "Words, words, words" that the man lets fly into space hangs the weight of an indifferent world—and when the wind begins to blow, we do not know if it's the world's reply or, on the contrary, an assurance that the world continues to turn with crushing indifference to what men might have to say. The feeling is made all the stronger since the entire opening of the film has been in long shot, the voice slightly lost in space, and since the shown, at that moment, is the very vastness of the space in which the voice becomes lost.

Shortly after "Words, words, words," the boy, probably as a simple practical joke, jumps on his father's back from behind. Taken by surprise, the father pulls him off as though it were an animal that had suddenly descended on him. The little boy falls and for the first time we see his face, until then hidden by a round sunhat. We see a mute child with a bloody nose but still saying nothing, and the father is unable to say he's sorry or even speak to him at all. The sequence produces a terrible effect of both punctuation and c/omission, like a death wish both deep and unavowed.

Since we are only at the beginning of the film, it will take two hours and an incredible story, it will take the father's sacrifice and his renunciation of speech, for the world to renew its alliance with words, and to be resymbolized and rehumanized. For most of the film's duration Tarkovsky has set the world's rhythms and humors in constant counterpoint: cupboard doors that squeak, unexpected flyovers by war planes that we don't see and that no one mentions (but whose roar we hear), sinuous human meanderings, distant calls, cries of swallows. Alexander will have to commit two acts (sleep with the maid, burn his house) after which he will fall silent forever. At this high price, one of the lines from the rush of words he uttered at the beginning (a remark that is not his own, one passes on what is not one's own)—can finally return at the end, spoken aloud by the son. A simple quotation from the Gospel of John—"In the beginning was the word," proffered by Alexander in that end-of-the-world landscape early on, spoken just as he has gone offscreen in fact—this line can come full circle at the end, repeated now by the boy, who has regained his speech; now it can take on meaning, become flesh: "In the beginning was the Word. Why, Papa?"

But in order for this line not to simply fly away, the film's act of faith was necessary, having us hear human speech in the face of the indifference of a silent world; in *The Sacrifice* the air is traversed by words that for the most part are lost and never return. It was necessary, in order to ground language in the world through the sound film, to commit an act.

The act in the sound film is falling silent (in other words, after one has spoken), on condition that something irremediable and decisive has taken place at that instant. In *The Sacrifice* the act consists of a promise made to a silent God. But the act exists as such only with the suspension of words. The act itself is sometimes no more than a suspension of words—for example, in *Eyes Wide Shut* the silence after Alice pronounces the word *grateful*, and Bill does not repeat it.

SAYING WITHOUT DOING AND DOING WITHOUT SAYING: OVER- AND UNDER-VERBALIZATION

Doing without saying occurs all the time in film. What we find less frequently is saying without doing, as when in *Pierrot le fou* Marianne (Anna Karina) and Ferdinand (Jean-Paul Belmondo) drive at night—he's at the wheel, and she says, "I am putting my hand on your knees. I am kissing you all over," without actually doing any of it.

Speaking without doing, combined with doing (or rather having done) without speaking, is for me the key to the long scene inside the Hôtel de Provence in *Breathless*. Here is a film in which the Belmondo character does not speak about what he has done (kill a man) and does speak about what doesn't happen, or at any rate that we don't see happen (sex).

The other side of the coin of under-verbalization (although it occurs far less frequently), over-verbalization, produces effects that are just as striking.

Take this opening scene: a man rides alone in a compartment of a train speeding through a gray winter countryside. This morose fellow, whom we recognize as Alain Delon, addresses us in camera-speech saying, "Robert Avranches. A man alone on a train. What could happen to him?" In saying this, he has taken the words right out of our mouths, by making remarks that he shouldn't, since he is specifying his identity and objectifying his circumstances, situating himself squarely in the shown, and appropriating the discourse of the screenwriter who created his character. In this emblematic beginning to *Notre histoire* (1985), by Bertrand Blier, we recognize the principle on which almost all of Blier's films are based, including *Beau-père* (1981), *Too Beautiful for You* (1989), and *Merci la vie* (1991): having characters oververbalize the context in which we see them existing. Once these excessive

disclosures have been made, however, the shadow of something unverbalized is cast over the rest. For example, Robert Avranches is riding in first class, but he doesn't say so. He has a destination but doesn't say what it is (in this film the names of places are erased at the outset). The more that is said about the setting, the more it becomes charged with the unsaid.

But a question arises—a question about the power of words, often at issue in much French auteur cinema (by Sacha Guitry, Michel Deville, Claude Miller, François Truffaut) and in the work of Orson Welles too: who makes the world that the character inhabits, who gives birth to the shown via their words, and what happens when the shown seems created or "invoked" by the said?

This is the question of iconogenic speech.

ICONOGENIC SPEECH: POWER, SEDUCTION, AND COQUETRY

"Here's a tall stringbean. A cute little mug. A shapely leg is great, but I'm not opposed to thick ankles."

A man is typing, writing about his tastes in women. While he reads over his material out loud, ideas come to him, his text becomes a voice (a voice that has come from reading), and this voice, because we're at the movies, becomes *iconogenic*—an adjective I didn't have to invent because it already exists in the 2002 edition of the *Grand Robert*.[10] In other words, it's the voice that appears to engender images of women onscreen, shots of various women we might encounter in the street.

These images in *The Man Who Loved Women* (starring Charles Denner) are not only the illustration of the voice that called them forth. Each of the walking women shown in the sequence, simply by being a photographic image of a real woman, can claim uniqueness as an individual who posed for the camera and went along with the game. For example, if Charles Denner's iconogenic textual-voice delights in classifying feminine morphology into tall stringbeans and little mugs, before our eyes we see in rapid montage *specific* women whom we are free to judge as either stringbeans or mugs if we wish, or according to some other system we fancy better. The "implied author" who has assembled these images establishes his distance from the iconogenic voice, manifesting himself as a silent but nevertheless influential supernarrator, *existing through what the voice-over doesn't say about him*. Just as there is an image that appears to illustrate what the voice-over says but really says something else (or an additional something), so too, above that voice the silent supernarrator, master of the assembly and choice of images, seems to follow the directions of the iconogenic voice but at the same time contradicts

them or at least maintains a certain distance from them. For example, when the iconogenic voice of Bertrand Morane speaks of women one encounters in the street who look great from behind but ugly in front, the supernarrator fixes it so that the woman Morane is following at that moment is seen already from the front *by us* before he gets to see her face. This way, the woman appears to us as undecidably pretty or not—that is, neither ugly nor pretty. All the same, nothing in particular will disqualify the judgment of the voice that evokes the passing girl.

In Manoel de Oliveira's *Abraham's Valley* (1993) the heterodiegetic male narrator tells us of the young heroine's hair that falls onto her shoulders in "threads of gold," and we see the long black hair of the actress. This curiously evokes the internal contradictions in Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* (which indirectly inspired this movie via a book by Agustina Bessa Luis), concerning the exact color of Emma's eyes.

Evoke [*évoquer*]: this word has become devalued through usage, and today it means little more than "to make one vaguely think of," whereas originally it meant "to call forth by the voice." One *evokes* demons, while one *invokes* God or the gods. In film, when speech evokes, the image follows, or seems to. Spirits called "characters" appear, live their lives—and often what was evoked no longer obeys the words that brought it forth.

Suscitatio, in Latin, in other words the call to life, is often the speech act in film. This is to say that something changed between the *intertitle* of the silent film that also seemed to *suscitare* or call images to life, and the *voice-over* in the sound film. In silent film the text also retained the status of a caption or title. With the advent of talkies, reconnecting with the silent-film commentators [*bonimenteurs*] of earlier days, something new and more magical occurs.[11]

In the example taken from *The Man Who Loved Women*, many will recognize something seen frequently in films, the game of seduction between iconogenic speech and the image, the latter declaring, "I'll go along, but not give in entirely." French cinema adores these games where the text says, "Submit," and the shown replies, "No way." Or else, "I give up, I'm yours, but part of me has escaped and you will never have me," which we find in Truffaut (see also *Jules and Jim*), Michel Deville (*L'Apprenti salaud, Le Voyage en douce, La Lectrice*), Bertrand Blier (all the titles mentioned above), Arnaud Desplechin (*My Sex Life, or How I Got into an Argument*) and Jean-Luc Godard (*Le Petit soldat, Pierrot le fou*). The purest example, which also directly or indirectly influenced both Orson Welles and Martin Scorsese, is Sacha Guitry's *Story of a Cheat*.

This same type of dual play (the sound film, as we have seen, ontologically favors two- or even three-way games) is at work in the famous opening

sequence of *The Magnificent Ambersons*. The voice-over narrator (Welles) describes in an elegantly subdued tone the changing male fashions of the era of the story, the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. Onscreen, as though called to life by that voice, is a man we recognize as Joseph Cotten trying on different outfits in the mirror. At first he's nothing more than a mannequin in a fashion montage, but soon this man takes on an autonomy as a character escaping from the iconogenic voice and becomes Eugene Morgan, grooming himself to go serenade the woman he is courting, the rich Amberson heiress. The narrating voice pretends not to see Morgan as an individual and continues instead to speak in general terms ("In those days . . . on a summer night young men would bring an orchestra under a pretty girl's window"). Just then Morgan takes a spill with his double bass under Isabel's window. From this small ridiculous moment—the narrating voice does not comment on it when it happens—will arise a series of misfortunes for the Ambersons. Social convention will lead Isabel to refuse her suitor's love, against her true feelings; she'll marry a man she does not love; and she will redirect her love onto her spoiled child, who will bring ruin upon the family. . . . At this crucial moment of Morgan's serenading pratfall, you might say that the narrating voice abandons the character, like a puppeteer abandoning his puppet. The latter, now on slack strings so to speak, bites the dust, and the iconogenic voice has gone silent about his faux pas. The voice has neither pregnantly paused nor changed tone nor overtly named the event; the stupid little slip instead gets encrusted in silence—a cyst of the unsaid in the flesh of the narration.

Along these same lines, quite often a sound film functions in the way certain psychiatrists believe the human body works. Something snags, causing a rupture, and when it is not dealt with, not spoken, the whole organism becomes sick. The incident of the botched serenade would hardly seem so fatal in Welles's story if the loquacious voice, precise and explicit, didn't fall silent at that moment, and if the other characters didn't refuse to deal with it too.

At the beginning of Woody Allen's *Manhattan* (1979) the voice of Isaac Davis (played by the director) tries in vain to find words other than clichés to sing the glories of New York. He starts over several times, while on the screen splendid black-and-white shots of the Big Apple and the music of Gershwin triumph. The idea here is that the voice must render its arms to the prestige of the image—"Words can't express . . ."—but we mustn't be fooled. This abandonment of language's sovereignty has every likelihood of being momentary and insincere.

In *Beau-père* the character played by Patrick Dewaere, a café-bar pianist whom no one listens to, tells us his story in the past tense, from inside the very scenes he's in. This film about depression may well be more successful than

Bertrand Blier's other films, not only because of the coquettish play between the said and the shown (the iconogenic narrator pretends to be subject to the same rules of time and space as the other characters, denying the special powers he possesses) but also because this dual game structure makes sense within the story: the music that comes from the pianist's fingers, too, works actively in narration and creating atmosphere, in much the same way as the narrator's utterances.

The game of iconogenic speech is a game of speed: the speed of the editing in showing what's brought forth by the barrage of words and the speed of the spectator's ability to integrate these dense superimpositions of text and image. A voice speaks of a certain Jules and Jim while we see two fellows thrashing about onscreen. Which is Jules, and which is Jim? The beginning of Truffaut's film, built on this principle of speed, also inspired the voice-overs of *Goodfellas* and *Casino*, where speed undoes the iconogenic power ascribed to the voice and suggests, with the same dual game, a role reversal that would have the voice trailing behind the images.

Not all voice-overs are iconogenic, however, and vice versa. Sometimes it's a mere question of grammar. When the voice in the present tense recounts the action it accompanies (as in Luis Saslavsky's *La Neige etait sale* [The Snow Was Dirty] [1952], adapted from Georges Simenon), we view things differently than if the text were to use the past tense. The voice doesn't seem to be calling forth (*suscitatio*) but merely accompanying, witnessing, taking the role of a reporter.

NONICONOGENIC NARRATION: WORDS ARE ALL YOU GET

When a character in a book tells a story within the story (this is one of the oldest devices of storytelling—see Homer, Petronius, Cervantes, or *The Arabian Nights*) or where she or he reads a book or newspaper, words open onto other words. In a film when a character opens her mouth to tell a dream or recount an experience, any spectator knows that the scene can come to life again visually and acoustically, either in the form the character describes or as it would have taken place or as the film reimagines it (often leaving us in some doubt about what we're seeing). Textual speech, in other words, is always latent, always ready to be activated from theatrical speech.

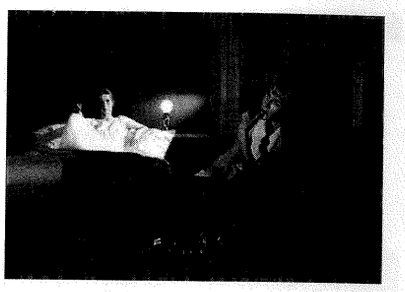
We are so used to films and film scenes that feature characters who testify about a dream or real-life experience they have had causing the visualization of the words, that when *the screen doesn't show* what the words evoke, and instead the camera remains exclusively with the talking face of the storyteller

and the reactions of onscreen listeners, this becomes an event itself, a specifically cinematic one: the effect of the *noniconogenic narration*.

There was a time when risqué subject matter in a story being told was subject to discretion in the use of images, which could be attributed to codes of censorship or good taste. When, for example, in Bergman's *Persona* the nurse Alma (Bibi Andersson) tells of a sex orgy in which she participated—and she does so using crude Swedish language that the subtitles long euphemized—what we see are Alma and the person listening to her, Elisabeth Vogler (played by Liv Ullmann), and no visual representation of her graphic account. We might conclude that in 1967 this is because it was deemed pornographic. Moreover, it was erotic to follow the impact of this story on Liv Ullmann's face. We know that with Bergman one often gets the image of more or less vampirish characters (called "Vogler" as here), paired with the impassivity of the receptive interlocutor. After *Persona*, scenes where characters speak crudely and insistently about sex, but which don't show any, become a genre in themselves. Examples occur in *Carnal Knowledge* (Mike Nichols, 1971), *Une sale histoire* (Jean Eustache, 1977), *The Decline of the American Empire* (Denys Arcand, 1985), *Kids* (Larry Clark, 1995), many television series (*Sex and the City*), and certain episodes of Pasolini's *Salo, or The 120 Days of Sodom* (1975, the stories of Hélène Surgère and Sonia Saviange), and *La Lectrice* (Michel Deville, 1988).

In another way the relation between sexual words and deeds—the mad dash between one and the other—is featured in a disturbing scene in Abel Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant*. Harvey Keitel, a drug-addicted fallen policeman, forces a young female driver whom he has pulled over to mime fellatio while he masturbates in front of her and utters obscenities in the rain. It's cold out, and one can see his breath as he bursts out, "Open your mouth and show me, come on," while the girl goes through the movements of virtual oral sex with him. The scene plays on the relations among words, acts, and mime.

This question of the unshowable—which is no longer an issue regarding sex, or is at least considerably altered in these days of fewer taboos—led to noni-



conogenic narrations in Resnais's *Muriel* and in Claude Lanzmann's monumental documentary *Shoah* (1985), in the matters of dealing with the torture of a young Algerian woman and the genocide of the Jews. Whether involving fiction using actors, or a "documentary" (an unsatisfactory term), it seems that all one can do is show without telling (*Libera me*) or tell without showing and that it's the tension between the two that is upsetting. In *Life Is Beautiful* (Roberto Benigni, 1998) the father's say-anything-but tactic (he speaks to his boy of what is happening to them as a big game, even while they both see perfectly clearly that they're in a death camp) is interesting to me in this respect. In his own way, Benigni is asking precisely the same questions as Lanzmann, or Resnais and Cayrol in *Night and Fog* (1956), even if he answers in a different form.

It has long been evident for the sound film that in this apparent renunciation of the exercise of the power of textual speech that occurs with noniconogenic narration, something important is at stake. It gives a particular density and gravity to what is spoken; it creates a specific real time, that of the storytelling accompanied only by our own individual mental imagery. This occurs in Rohmer's *Tale of Springtime* (1989), when Anne Teyssèdre tells the story of the stolen necklace or of the ring of Gygès; in Terry Gilliam's *The Fisher King* (1990), when Robin Williams tells Jeff Bridges the story of the Fisher King in a half-whisper at night in Central Park; in *The Straight Story*, when in a bar Alvin Straight confides to another war veteran about his war traumas. It also

happens in *Three Colors: Red*, when the judge played by Jean-Louis Trintignant tells Irène Jacob the story that's the source of all his remorse.[12] And there is the story André Dussollier tells Sabine Azéma and Pierre Arditi at the beginning of Resnais's *Mélo* (1986). In each case the absence of visualization of what the character recounts focuses our attention as if to say, "Get serious, listen up, you have to remember this"; it's as though the cinema were laying itself bare and saying, "This is all you get, words with the image of the person saying them, believe them or not." The words are naked, and the textual speech arrives at once at the full extent and also the limit of its power when real diegetic time imposes itself.

In *Mélo* this scene is a turning point, indeed a point of no return for the mise-en-scène, because the set, which until then was overtly presented as a theater set, changes character. Vincent Amiel describes this progression: "a slow tracking shot around Dussollier as he recounts his unhappy adventure, and we know that cinematic fiction trumps theatrical artifice. André Dussollier begins his tale on a theater stage, the camera moves around the characters giving him his lines and then leaves them to zero in on him, such that the background is black; the camera movement covers almost 180 degrees: the text itself and the stage directions have been seized by the cinema, and when the actor finishes, there is no more stage."[13]

In *A Star Is Born* (George Cukor, 1954) Judy Garland's song-and-dance number "Someone at Last" is basically a noniconogenic story set to music. Back at home, Esther Blodgett (Garland), who has become a star, describes and acts out for her husband the sets and action of a gigantic film shoot that we don't actually see. It is the exact reverse of the "Broadway Melody" number in *Singin' in the Rain*, a number that only has a virtual status in the diegesis: Gene Kelly is supposed to be describing it to his producer as an idea in his head, but we see it performed, filmed, and edited, without hearing his words describing it.

In *Smoke* (1995) Auggie (Harvey Keitel) tells his writer friend (William Hurt) the story of what happened to him with a petty thief and an old lady, an incident that he offers the writer as the idea for a Christmas story he's trying to write. Their conversation takes place in a cafeteria, and for several minutes—it's the last scene of the film—there is Auggie's speech and the writer listening. At the end of the scene William Hurt expresses doubt as to the truth of the tale, which sounds like a fable of how good can come of evil, or truth from falsehood. Auggie doesn't answer—he neither authenticates the story nor concedes he made it all up. The variation on the theme that we get here is that as the closing credits to *Smoke* scroll by we are given a partial,

silent visualization of the story about the old lady—which would be incomprehensible without the preceding storytelling sequence.

Lawyer Matthew McConaughey's noniconogenic report to a jury of a rape and an attempted murder of a small girl is a crucial sequence in Joel Schumacher's *A Time to Kill* (1996).[14] It offers a reflection on mental versus real visualizing, as well as on the racism of juries. The lawyer asks the jury to close their eyes, in other words to become like us, deprived of images that the cinema could provide. Then comes the question: can they visualize the ordeal of a child without visualizing her as "a little black girl" instead of thinking "little girl"?

Eyes Wide Shut is built on two noniconogenic stories that Nicole Kidman tells to Tom Cruise. The first is the account of her fantasy (she fantasized about leaving her husband for a Marine officer she saw in a hotel), and the second is a dream in which she finds herself in the middle of a cosmic orgy. Neither chain of events ever actually happens (as far as we know), but she tells the stories. Her husband, however, "lives" some bizarre adventures, erotic flirtations, and orgies (always interrupted), but he does not tell them (again, not as far as we see). When he finally admits them to his wife, the film elides his confession, so we'll never know if he gave sincere or complete accounts. The end of *Eyes Wide Shut* thus retroactively turns most of the preceding scenes into possible visualizing of Bill's confession to his wife. As in *2001*, each time there is something said by a character, Kubrick chose again here never to show any trace in reality of what she or he says.[15] *Eyes Wide Shut* is the supreme example of an "unbraided" film.[16]

Each time it occurs, the noniconogenic narration seems to return the cinema to its origins, since in the beginning was the Word, and only the Word—speech and nothing but, speech that is only what it is, denuded, just

like the cinema, which by refusing the embedding of textual speech, sometimes ends up revealing it.

FROM POWER TO DESTINY: NONDIEGETIC SONGS

Let us not exclude song from this consideration of the said and the shown. In recent years, as I've said, a new type of iconogenic voice-over has developed that is rarely seen for what it is: the lyrics of songs that we hear in road movies, inhabiting the air the characters breathe, as well as the screening space where we watch the film. These American song lyrics[17] provide a new dimension, because through them the film functions at two levels: the general level of a *he, she, I,* or *you* in the lyrics, which presents *all* women and *all* men, and the level of the specific story we're watching on the screen, of *this* man and *this* woman. Well-known films that highlight this arrangement (from Coppola's *One from the Heart* to Resnais's *Same Old Song*, a wonderful film inspired by the 1982 *Pennies from Heaven*) shouldn't make us forget the more numerous but often equally compelling films where the lyrics of various songs accompany and perhaps unconsciously guide characters (as well as spectators) who get their moment on the screen.

In this new form of relationship between the said and the shown, I think, the characters' outcomes are no longer determined by science, conscious decisions, power, but instead there is the acknowledgment of the hand of fate. The song lyrics do not say who is pulling the strings, who is running the show (unless this power is contradicted, defied, or deconstructed).[18] Rather, the lyrics tell us the terms of a destiny that apply both to everyone collectively and to each single individual. There is no exit from individual *power* if you do not allow for *fate*. But that's another story.

1. The sound of the voice, the material of that voice, belongs to the shown—shown sound—no less than the other concrete objects of a film.

2. Chion's term *creusement* conveys the idea of *hollowing-out*, creating a negative space or void; in English it is awkward. He actually uses the idea of *creusement* in two senses; one is the rhetorical effect, which I've named *c/omission*, to capture the idea of the elephant in the room—a "sin" of omission which by its nature is one of commission—to apply to such lapses in dialogue.

   Second, in a related but different move, Chion speaks of sounds that are *en creux*—in the gap, so to speak—to designate sounds that we would expect to hear but that are in fact not heard. These I have translated as *phantom sounds* or negative sounds, by analogy with phantom pain or phantom limbs.—Trans.

3. Or, more precisely, in the film one child does talk about it, but without actually naming it, designating it by the word *it*: "It's happening!"

4. Note here the editing between the shot over which he says it's striking midnight and the shot with which we hear the striking of one o'clock. It seems as though there is no editing at all and that the text and the sound alone indicate the ellipsis. In fact there is a cut, but it is barely perceptible.

5. I should add that the characters never put a name to the "species" that is invading them. On the three versions of this story see my essay "Les Enfants du remake," *Positif*, no. 459 (1999): 82–84.

6. It is worth noting that two scenes in which Lambert and Ripley meet, and which present them as "two women" as against five men, were cut and do not figure in the final film. I'd say the film is better without them.

7. The charm of this scene lies in its ambiguity regarding whether the pair know each other or whether Jeff is seeing this apparition for the first time.

8. One perk of DVD technology is that we can easily compare what the characters say to each other in the original and the French dub. Curiously, instead of the first two lines about Stewart's leg cast, the French version gives us "Bonsoir."—"Bonsoir."

9. The character Elisabeth Vogler in Bergman's *Persona* is also an actress who left the theater and falls into silence, as Alexander will at the end of this film.

10. The *Grand Robert*, the definitive, multivolume dictionary of the French language, identifies *iconogenic* as a technical term that appeared around 1890 and designated a salt used as a developing agent in photography. I use it here in its etymological sense of "creating an image." The suffix *-genic* means either "generated by" (as in *iatrogenic*) or "generating" (as in *lacrymogenic* or *hallucinogenic*). The latter case applies to *iconogenic*—generating icons or images.

11. In his essay "La prose au cinéma ou Quand la voix off impose son rythme à l'image" (Prose in film, or when the voice-over imposes its rhythm onto the image, 1999), Johan Kristian Sanaker notes that in *Diary of a Country Priest* "the characters often . . . seem to be listening to the commentary or to be waiting for it to end" (111). He adds, "This rhythmic particularity adds to our impression of the compositional primacy of the voiceover; the image-dialogue strikes us as having been added to a basic element that has already determined the length of the film." This observation is also valid for a narrated film such as *Abraham's Valley*.

12. See also the noniconogenic stories in *A Taste of Cherry* (the story of blackberry picking) and in *Pulp Fiction* (the story of the watch).

13. Vincent Amiel, *Positif*, no. 307 (September 1987): 35.

14. The title alludes to a passage in Ecclesiastes 3:3 ("A time to kill, and a time to heal") taken quite literally by a large portion of the American people. The French title, *Le Droit de tuer?* [The Right to Kill?], led some critics in France to see this film as an apology for vigilante justice.

15. See Michel Chion, *Eyes Wide Shut* (London: BFI, 2002).

16. Chion's word here is *détressé*, alluding both to the verb *tresser*, the plaiting or braiding of hair, and the noun *détresse*, distress. See *braiding* in glossary.—Trans.

17. Non-English-speaking filmgoers often pay little attention to these lyrics, since subtitles rarely translate them and they are often hard for non-English speakers to decipher.

18. This is the great preoccupation of some 1970s films featuring voice-overs, such as Duras's admirable *India Song*, which all undo the power of text and magnify it in its powerlessness.

CHAPTER 24

God Is a Disc Jockey

MUSIC STRUCTURES TIME

MUSIC FOR SILENT FILMS was very close to being a continuum; in any case it played almost without pause. It's curious that while it had a markedly sequential character (most typically it consisted of pieces with different tempi and moods strung together, like tracks of a compilation album), this diverse music was a constant presence in the film from beginning to end.

In contrast, music in sound films is generally discontinuous; music cues are dispersed throughout, and they are interwoven with other sound elements. These factors allow music to play a more significant structural role and to create "zones" of segments with music and segments without. The fact that music is intermittent appears to enhance its influence on the film's structure, and consequently it is likely to make a difference when it does occur. Its importance in a given film is therefore in no way proportional to the number or length of the cues. The brief excerpt from Henri Dutilleux's first symphony

that is heard in the middle of Maurice Pialat's *Sous le soleil de Satan*, after the priest Donissan has "revived" a child and wanders under a heavy overcast sky as if lost, is as vivid and important for the structure of the film (which is thus divided into two halves) as any film in which a large number of music cues are scattered throughout.

One sector of the early sound cinema wanted to continue with the silent-film principle of 100 per cent music (or close to it), as in Max Steiner's wall-to-wall score for *King Kong*.[1] This was one radical solution to the thorny question: if we're not going to have music all the time, when should it be used and when shouldn't it? Every sound film must deal with this question, unless—as is rarely the case—the filmmaker opts for the other extreme solution and excludes music altogether.

The most important thing about music, then, becomes the point when it starts and when it stops, as well as how the placement of cues structures the entire film's temporality. From this point of view there are basically two modes in which music occurs.

1. Music can intervene in moments of waiting or expectation, where the situation is still uncertain, danger lurks, adversaries are sizing each other up, there's a buildup to action (e.g., the music of Éric Demarsan before the break-in in Melville's *Le Cercle rouge*)—music that alerts the ear, short motifs, creaking sounds, low timbres that create anxiety, short bursts of sounds, and elemental *ostinati*. Children's songs, obsessive or repetitive passages, can also cast a spell; this music's cessation will signal the breakout of chaos, as though it alone has been holding evil at bay. Think of Lalo Schifrin's theme in *Bullitt*, and the diegetic children's song "Risselty-Rosselty" in *The Birds*. There's also the moment before the shark attack on the crowded beach in *Jaws*, when before the famous mechanical two-note motif we hear a child singing a song—a device used many times ever since Peter Lorre's compulsive "Peer Gynt" whistling in Lang's *M*.[2]
2. In the other mode, music holds off until the onscreen situation is well under way, and then it is key in creating the climax and the emotions that go with it (as in *Once upon a Time in the West*, when Morricone's harmonica music comes in only after fifteen minutes). The music detaches or sets off what takes place and gives it a fatal "I told you so" character. Before the music started, we could still imagine that things had a chance of turning out differently. But when it comes, we understand that, indeed, there was only one possible outcome, namely the one we're seeing.

Stendhal compared a novel to "a gunshot during a concert." This striking formulation accurately captures the dramatic principle of certain scenes in movies. A shout that stops a gunshot but cannot stop the ineluctable progress of the performance of a cantata (*The Man Who Knew Too Much*); a round of machine-gun fire that stops the pit music of a lushly orchestrated lullaby and

bursts the voluptuous hot-air balloon in which a man was flying away (*City of Women*); the unlucky informer shot down offscreen, who collapses onto the piano keyboard, where he has been trying to appease his killers with a song (*The Public Enemy*). Sometimes the music stops abruptly; sometimes something else stops while it continues on, as though someone were aiming to shoot and only managed to kill the pianist. Indeed, even when the player is eliminated, music can always seem to continue its perpetual movement.

THE SPACE/TIME MACHINE

Before 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.

And cinema surely needs such a machine, since unlike theater, which operates in long stretches of real time, films typically consist of accumulations of short or medium-length scenes that cover a day or several years and narrate events that are long or short. Settings are often multiple, and durations can vary; sometimes thirty seconds of film suffice to express years of happiness, or, conversely, it might take five minutes to depict a dramatic moment that in reality would only last a few seconds.

As in opera, film music supports and carries moments where action freezes (Morricone in the films of Sergio Leone). It is present also when there is a need to sustain suspense in parallel editing—helping us accept the unreality of the dagger that waits to plunge into the body of the victim, or of the train that is forever approaching the unfortunate girl tied to the tracks, or of the enormous rock in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956) that at any second is going to crush the old woman who saves Moses but dutifully waits for the suspense to be fully exploited and developed before doing so. By making duration so malleable, music allows the sound film to escape from objective temporality and bring us back to the temporal codes of the silent era.[3]

Less attention has been paid to music's roles in creating *space*: for the cinema segments and apportions space as well as time. Through its sonorities and orchestral range, and the horizons suggested by its melodies, music often helps restore the impression of "vastness" that can become lost through the fragmentation of editing and that realist sound normally cannot achieve. When we see, for example, mountain-climbing documentaries done with location sound (hammering on pitons, the crunch of crampons and boots in the ice and snow, dialogue among members of the expedition), we realize that the perception of space seems oddly shrunken. Often music is brought in to restore the missing sensation of immense natural grandeur.

We may wonder if in a more general way music didn't fill this same need in the silent era, to subjectively enlarge the cinematograph's narrow frame and provide a wider mental space for the experience.

Music also serves as a bridge in time and space, as in an example that became well known in *Hallelujah* (Vidor, 1929). The musician and critic Henri Colpi described it in 1962: "The final sequence is led by the song 'Going Home,' sung by the hero as he plays guitar; during the first lines we're in a prison, then with no visual transition the ballad continues on a boat, until finally we find Zeke again on land continuing his song as he returns home to his people. The musical coherence of the song suffices to carry us in only a few seconds over three different and distant places."[4]

Discussing a slightly later film, James Whale's *Show Boat* (1936), René Clair noted the same technique: "A poorly clad woman singer is performing in a little café. The film-maker wanted to show this woman's rise to success in capsule form. While the song is continuing, the singer becomes invisible and swift visions take us all the way to a large concert hall in which the same singer, dressed in an evening gown, finishes the last bars of the song that we have been hearing all along."[5]

We can recognize here the principle of so many musical numbers arranged by Busby Berkeley, as well as of modern-day music videos—two genres that delight in taking huge jumps in time and space without missing a beat. Why? Because music is the turntable of space and time, the place of places that transcends all material barriers.[6]

FOR WHOM THE BUGLES PLAY

When *Apocalypse Now* first came out and audiences saw the scene of a Vietnamese village being destroyed by a horde of American helicopters accompanied by Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries," they shuddered. Here was this old Wagner theme that had served as a trusty mascot in the silents, and has since been used in many sound films (such as at the beginning of 8½), being trotted out yet again, and as ever it proved itself up to the task. But in *Apocalypse Now* the conditions of its deployment were different. Whereas with Fellini, for example, Wagner's music came from an imaginary orchestra pit with no justification in the image, with Coppola it is part of the action of the film: Colonel Kilgore (Robert Duvall) has had loudspeakers mounted on the helicopters so that they can broadcast the Valkyrie music over the countryside at earsplitting volume. Some critics objected; wasn't this a bit of trickery? For whom are the bugles really playing the charge? Is it true, as Kilgore claims, that they are to

frighten the enemy?—for the deafening noise of motors and artillery ought certainly to have rendered the music inaudible. Wasn't it for the audience that the music was playing, since we could clearly hear it "above" the noise that in reality would have drowned it out?

The answer is that when there's a war on and music plays for the charge, no one can say precisely what for, or for whom exactly, the bugles play.

Music is played to communicate coded messages to one's own camp (attack, retreat) and to whip up the warriors' courage. You also play it to intimidate the enemy, to show them who you are and how fierce is your determination. Third, it is possible that bugles are played for another, for God or for another real or imaginary spectator, for the Great Ear. And finally, perhaps, this charge music can be playing for no one, in the name of the place where music is the signifier-to-itself.

In the sea of discourses that surround the practice of film music, critics made at least one distinction early on that they put into clear focus. On one hand, there is music that comes from a source situated in the action itself, whether it is visible in the image at the moment it is produced—that is, onscreen—or offscreen, that is, in a space contiguous to the frame, including cases of music coming from a radio or record player and not from live and present players. On the other hand, there is music emitted from an imaginary place analogous to the orchestra pit in opera, a place that does not communicate directly with the space-time of the film's action.

This difference has been so well noted and categorized by those who have commented on music in the cinema that we find a host of terms being used to describe it. In *Theory of Film* Siegfried Kracauer distinguishes between "aktuelle Musik" (music in the action) and "kommentierende Musik" (commentary music). In his famous book on editing coauthored with Gavin Millar, *The Technique of Film Editing*, Karel Reisz draws the distinction, applied to music in particular, between sound in the action ("actual sound") and sound "whose source is neither visible on the screen nor has been implied to be present in the action," which they name "commentative sound."[7] These terms, plus others not mentioned here, indicate clearly that the distinction between these two orders has been noticed by just about all writers on film music, even if there has not been consensus on how to refer to it. The labels *commentative sound* (or for music, *scoring*) and *actual* or *source* sound are common in the Anglo-Saxon context, while in France there exists no current and widely used terminology.

The terms I have mentioned can sometimes lend themselves to confusion, since these names are based on two different places occupied by music with

respect to the frame. But there is no reason an "actual" music cue could not function as "commentative" at the same time.

In a sequence from *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (Albert Lewin, 1945) the protagonist is playing Chopin's Prelude in D Minor, which the film uses as his leitmotif. The piano theme is heard over a verbal exchange as commentary, heavy with implications and foreshadowing. In the same way, in Visconti's *Conversation Piece* (1975) the concert piece that the young Konrad (Helmut Berger) plays on the professor's (Burt Lancaster) record player does double duty by giving subjective coloring to the scene. Recall, too, the scene in Bresson's *Le Diable probablement* where the young heroes steal from a church's collection boxes to some Monteverdi that comes from a record player they've brought into the building—in other words, yet another "actual" music cue that dramatizes the scene as much as "commentative" music would.

This is why I have proposed to designate these two categories with terms that refer not to their specific functions but simply to the symbolic places of their emission. For "actual," "diegetic" music whose source is in the present time and place of the film's action, I speak of *screen music*, and for the other kind, *pit music*.

The orchestra pit that the latter term alludes to belongs to the world of opera but also to popular genres such as music hall, vaudeville, cabaret, and even the circus. What all these forms of performance with live musical accompaniment have in common (and we might add ballet, mime, and operetta to the ones above) is a specific location for the musicians, distinct from the stage or space of the performance. This place was the grandstand in the circus, the orchestra in the music hall, the orchestra pit for ballet and opera, and in certain musical dramas of other civilizations it could be a ramp or a backstage area.

"The scene changes," we read in some stage directions for plays, opera libretti, and arguments of ballets, and the same is true for the movie screen. The scene changes, meaning what was first a palace becomes magically a forest, a boudoir, or the parlor of a convent. What does not change its imaginary placement for the audience, however, is the music. From beginning to end (or periodically if it's not continuous), the music is emitted from the orchestra pit, the grandstand, from a place beyond all places, that contains all times and all spaces, and leads everywhere: to the past as well as the future, to the sea and the city, to depths as well as to the heavens, a place that has no *here* or *there*, neither *once upon a time* nor *now*. The place of music is both a pit, where the elementary principles of these mean streets called life muck around, and a balcony in the sky, from where we can view as detached observers—out of time, through instantaneous cuts—past, present, and future.

Just as iconogenic speech finds its true significance in the noniconogenic language of speech simply filmed, so film music finds its true test in the filming of instrumental music—when the act of making music is itself the focus of recording and shooting. The problem, simply put, is how can a film make the production of this sound visible?

CHALLENGE: FILMING THE PLACE OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

The cinema seems well suited to showing songs in continuity and seems to find it entirely natural to do so—whereas it cannot bring itself to focus on an instrumental performance, with the same continuity, as if instrumental music were curiously unfilmable. The issue is filming the place of the sound. Think of any televised concert, and notice the constant temptation to cut to different angles, as though the camera cannot quite find the right place to film an instrumentalist or an orchestra. It apparently requires considerable independence to resist this temptation to fidget, as in *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (1968), by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet.

But if vocal performances seem to pose fewer problems than filming instrumental performances, it is perhaps simply because song is in most cases also transmitting a verbal message, and the body is concentrating on its emission, via the column of air emerging up out of the singer's mouth. Filming an instrumental performance, however, is a real and perennial challenge that arises again and again in film and TV, because one must show people absorbed in producing sounds whose place of origin is not directly their own bodies.

The singing human voice has a power that instrumental sound lacks, except perhaps when the latter approaches the magic of vocality, namely the power of entirely inhabiting a given space. Instrumental sound is two-sided: if it remains riveted to its place of emission, which is already not so easy to pin down, it nevertheless cannot be limited to this localization. This perhaps explains why the camera that films a pianist goes from the face, to the hands, perhaps even to a shot of the hammers striking the strings, as though this roving eye were unsure about just where *it* is really happening. And it always seems for the spectator that it is happening somewhere other than the place the instrumentalist is being shown at a given moment.

The moment the camera focuses on the pianist's hands, we would like to see his or her face, and vice versa. And when video resources allow for two points of view through a superimposition, it comes across as disappointing gimmickry, an avoidance of a true choice. But when in *Anna Magdalena Bach* we observe Gustav Leonhardt filmed in continuity and from a distance,

we feel our head has been lashed to the theater seat—we'd like to move, get in closer, change positions. We are constantly fidgety.

So the filming of a classical music performance is essentially the opposite of cinematic mise-en-scène. The latter takes discontinuous pieces of space and time and constructs a scene through them; the scene's meaning and logic arise from this very discontinuity. But when one films an instrumental piece being performed, something takes place in continuity, a bloc of work and musical expression around which the camera circulates indiscreetly, effecting changes in point of view that can only draw attention to the fragmentation they introduce—unless of course the camera sticks with one point of view, but even this stability can unfortunately not erase the thought of other possible points of view nor resolve the camera's incapacity to capture where *it* is happening.

Even a director as temperate as Howard Hawks in his film *A Song Is Born* (1948) gets carried away with spouting his shots out in little pieces to fit the rhythms of the jazz numbers. The editing in this film by a director who is anything but flashy starts to resemble in its rhythm the slickest sort of modern-day commercials! To say that we are dealing with a cliché isn't useful, for it doesn't tell us where this cliché comes from or why it imposes itself. Similarly, when TV broadcasts of concerts ramp up the superimpositions, fades, and changes in camera angle, is this to be interpreted as the image's herculean effort to equal the fluidity and dynamic flexibility of sound? Maybe. All in a few seconds, a musical phrase can elaborate a prodigiously dynamic story by developing an ultra-rapid trajectory of tension and release, launches and returns—a story compared to which the movement of a film or video image is quite static. You could also say that what the camera does is make a naive attempt to imitate the unconscious wandering of the eye and attention of a concertgoer or someone listening to a radio program or music recording, whose mind alternately leaves the music and returns, shuttles between the detail and the whole, focuses sometimes on the score and sometimes on the emotions it evokes.

Although we could argue in favor of the decision adopted in *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* as the only decent strategy—filming the musical performance in long shot, in continuity, with minimal camera movement—it is difficult not to feel as though we are taking part in an exercise in immobility. We cannot wander in and around this image of Gustav Leonhardt playing his harpsichord as we would allow ourselves to do at a live Leonhardt performance. For this is not a concert hall but a film frame, which carries more concentrated, boiled-down information and lends itself much less easily to exploratory reverie.

INTROVERTED AND EXTERNALIZED STYLES; ACOUSTIC SOUND AND ELECTROACOUSTIC SOUND

Clearly not all cases are identical, and we can distinguish two extremes of instrumental playing that pose different kinds of challenges to filmmakers. To put it simply, let us call them the introverted style and the externalized style. In the first, characteristic particularly of Western classical music, the musician is supposed to be totally involved in playing and disregarding what he or she looks like to others. On the one hand, if the musician happens to grimace (something the camera is likely to show in enormous detail), we become a little uncomfortable, wondering what factor of hysteria or exhibitionism is in play. On the other hand, with the externalized style common to jazz and pop performers, the instrumentalist, at the same time that he plays, is making a spectacle of gestures, such that the film of his playing does not give off the same heavy uneasiness. Chico Marx's piano numbers, with their visual gags, droll fingering, and playful mimicry, correspond more to this second type; however, Harpo's improvisational harp numbers are more unsettling when they're devoid of winking gags directed at the audience, and we see him adopt the neutral air of the serious musician focused on his music as though we were not watching him.

Acoustically speaking as well, there are two categories of musical situations involving instruments. First, we have the purely "unplugged" acoustic playing with traditional nonamplified instruments, where the birthplace of the sound is really located somewhere in that strange object we call the instrument. Second, there's the case of instruments that are electrified (e.g., the electric guitar) or electronic (synthesizers), whose sound, wholly or partly the product of electric vibrations, does not exist until a loudspeaker—whose position in space is *ad libitum*—makes it audible. This second case is the domain of rock music, and of all other performances that make use of microphones, whether visible or not onscreen, to relay, amplify, and disseminate the sound through a space, thus wresting it from its original acoustic location or creating that sense of

location everywhere. With this amplified music the camera is liberated from the obsession to film "where the music is produced" and can instead carry on more freely. For musical films in multitrack (Dolby stereo), particularly rock films where musical sound explodes throughout the space, this presence of sound only amplifies something already perceptible in older musicals: the power and definition of the musical sounds, along with their quality of overflowing the boundaries of the screen, tends to displace the "place" of the film from the screen to the movie theater itself or, more precisely, to situate the music in the large auditory space defined by the loudspeakers. In fact, what we see on the screen, even in the long shots, can seem like uncoordinated random samplings of details taken from a whole, of which sound alone helps us feel the dimensions.

In *Hair* (1979) or *Dancer in the Dark*, certain dance sequences (e.g., the spontaneous number in Central Park in the former or the dance in the factory in the latter) are little but a succession of detail shots taken with a telephoto lens and summarily edited together, with no precise reference to an overall image of the spectacle—no general shot that classical musicals always give us at some point or other. A Forman or Von Trier can now shoot musical numbers in such a fragmented way because, with its booming deployment through space, music has become the ever more privileged "place" of the film and the reference point of its editing. The spectator no longer seems to have the same need for the film to construct a coherent, coordinated, and homogeneous visual space.

FELLINI AND THE ORCHESTRA

The impossibility of filming an orchestral performance is also the subject of a little-known film by Fellini, *Orchestra Rehearsal* (1978), a film that unnerves, and there is every sign that this was its intention. But this unease does not derive simply from cruelly showing the cat-and-mouse games between the perverse powers-that-be (magnificently concentrated in the disturbing figure of the orchestra conductor) and the anarchical claims of the "masses" in search of a Master. *Orchestra Rehearsal* is troubling on several levels, not least of which is the music itself, and the way music is represented. In his final project with Fellini, composer Nino Rota was not asked for pseudo-grand music of the sort that he composed for Visconti's *Leopard* and Coppola's *Godfather*. Instead Fellini elicited a bizarre and grating score, rather spindly though not exactly light—a sort of *Nutcracker Suite* with a head cold. The music is played in an auditorium that serves as the setting for almost the entire film, yet it sounds like it's being played outdoors: the violins lack precision

and density, and the orchestra as a whole seems unable to achieve weight or mass. Fellini here reverses the stereotype of music as a weapon, a force, a blaring, grinding machine such as in Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange* (1971). He gives us instead a thin, ineffectual sawing, just barely suited to coloring with its accents some abandoned kiosk in a forgotten park.

And it is to perform this fragile and utterly unpretentious music that we see the German conductor fly into a hysterical artist routine and hurl the customary array of insults and swearing! If this music signifies order, it is an order that comes via its very precariousness and unintimidating character. Fellini avoids the two easy outs that Wajda takes in a film released around the same time on a similar subject, *The Conductor* (1979), namely (a) using an acknowledged masterpiece and object of universal devotion from the classical repertoire (Beethoven's Fifth Symphony) and (b) using that music as true pit music that transcends any lowly servitude to time and space, which eludes the challenge of filming it.

As with Fellini, Wajda's orchestra is synching in playback; but the Polish orchestra is constantly filmed in bits and pieces, such as with a closeup of one isolated musician and music stand, so that the music consistently overflows the film frame and feels like a massive force that is impossible to contain. The Beethoven serves opportunely to underscore, to justify, and to cover up the cinema's weakness in presenting it in any way other than as a patchwork of fragments. It is as if the music preexisted its performance and always transcended it, which of course is the case for Wajda's film. The ostensible subject of this movie—illustrating two conducting styles (the one awkwardly analytic and pedantic, that of Andrzej Seweryn; the other, represented by John Gielgud, generous, inclusive, synthesizing) ends up being somewhat obscured and shown up for what it is: a pretext for an apologia on power.

Such is not the case with *Orchestra Rehearsal*, where the absence of pretension and a sense of freshness (this is not "classic" classical music but an "original" score) show music in all its moving immanence. The numerous long shots (such as the three successive pans during the performance of the gallopade) refuse to yield to the ease of fragmentation and instead confront head-on the difficulty of filming an orchestra. Before Fellini's film countless musical performances had been shown on television and in movies. To film a symphony orchestra, one must necessarily break up the movement of the whole. A long shot gives too wide and unclear a perspective, so filmmakers normally make up for it with closer-up detail shots, artificially isolating this soloist, or that clarinet, trumpet, flute, or kettledrum, as each one comes up in the piece. The result is that the music is cut into slices since each detail is only meaningful with respect to the whole. During a flute solo in a Bruckner symphony, the

silence of the surrounding orchestra is as important as the notes of the flute; and simply having a closeup of the flutist's solo effaces this dimension of the silent orchestral space that gives the solo its significance. In short, this choice atomizes the music. When Fellini constructs his film about this orchestra rehearsal, it is precisely this atomization that he is filming, the difficulty of showing the coordinated, harmonious ensemble, and it does seem as though the music "decomposes" or undoes itself in the very act of being filmed. *Orchestra Rehearsal* effectively reminds us that music walks a tightrope between order and chaos.

THE SECRET CODE OF DESTINY

Nothing is more ordinary in filmic storytelling than associating a melody with some destiny or fate.

The idea that a musical theme would be not just a symbol of fate but also a coded message or kiss of death has served as a "MacGuffin" in the Hitchcockian sense (i.e., an empty object that provides the motivation) in two famous 1930s spy films, Sternberg's *Dishonored* and Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes*.

In the Sternberg film the spy played by Marlene Dietrich is surprised by the Russians while transcribing a musical piece that contains a secret coded message. "Each of these notes means death for millions of men," her enemy, the Russian colonel, tells her when he snatches away the music and plays it on the piano in a style that is strangely chromatic and "modern." The Hitchcock film, for its part, is an initiation story that takes as its principal gimmick and signifying element a little musical theme whose arbitrariness was pointed out by the director himself. "I wonder why the boys in the counter-espionage unit didn't simply send the message by courier pigeon."[8]

Of course, *The Lady Vanishes* is also a political and moral film about the cowardliness of democracies in the face of 1930s totalitarianism. But it is still the initiatory trial by fire and ice that two rather self-centered young people, Gilbert and Iris, undergo after meeting that constitutes the central adventure-lesson.

Like other initiation stories, *The Lady Vanishes* is punctuated by a series of faintings and disappearances, or vanishings as the title advertises (the French verb *s'évanouir,* to faint, recalls more obviously the link between these two kinds of mental and physical absenting). We may recall the metaphor of the train where most of the story takes place, and compare these faintings/vanishings to the "blackouts" and "tunnels" that give access to the second birth.

The process begins with the disappearance of the old lady, Miss Froy, in the train. This vanishing takes place while Iris, who is seated across from her in the train compartment, dozes off (yet another loss of consciousness). The

second tunnel introduces the vacillation of Miss Froy's name, which the lady has spelled out in the condensation on the window of the train—an inscription that remains as the only proof of her existence after her kidnapping, since no one seems to remember the lady when Iris conducts her search. The lady writes her name for Iris because their conversation has been momentarily interrupted by the noise as the train passes through a tunnel; Iris discovers it later in the midst of her despair about ever being able to prove that Miss Froy really existed. But immediately after she spots the name on the wet window, a gust of air caused by the train's entering another tunnel erases the letters that are the only proof of the reality of what Iris experienced. This furtive appearance of the real that vanishes as quickly as it appeared on the window—a neutral material medium that of course alludes to the screen of the cinema—is a sublimely achieved idea, very close to the one Truffaut so admired in Hitchcock's *Under Capricorn* (1949), when Ingrid Bergman sees herself in the window where the man she loves has directed her to look.

Gilbert was with Iris in the dining car when she experienced this momentary reappearance of the name; and if he didn't see it, it's because he was busy gazing at the young woman. He too will have to suddenly rediscover a name on the train window—the name on the label of a tea bag that miraculously catches his eye a split second before it disappears forever. It's the old woman's preferred brand of tea, just as Iris had told him about, and now he will no longer doubt that Miss Froy exists.

After the vacillating names, the disappearance of Miss Froy, and Iris's dozing off, the last instance of the appearance/disappearance motif is the coded melody that Miss Froy, an English spy, has been sent by her secret service to find in this corner of the Alps where the action begins.

Note how Hitchcock uses all other accompanying music sparingly so that the impact of this theme can be all the stronger. He confines the use of music to the opening credits and the first images that situate the isolated and snowy mountain setting that the heroes are leaving behind. However, several clues and gags foretell the important role that music will play. One of the first shots inside the mountain hotel shows a cuckoo clock out of which surprisingly comes a little trumpet that blares out an interminable Lilliputian call. Later, the two English cricket players allude in their conversation to the inordinate length of the national anthem of this place.

Shortly thereafter, enter Miss Froy, who presents herself to the two Englishmen as a traveling governess and music teacher. Behind the ordinary conversation that the old lady has with the two men, we can hear offscreen a tenor voice singing a sad popular tune without words. Miss Froy, confessing her love of music, rises to go and listen to the singing from the window of her room.

This melodious theme, which she attempts to learn and remember by heart, is soon drowned out and obscured by another sort of music, the racket of wind instruments and heavy dance steps coming from the floor above. It is at this point that the young leading man of the film, Gilbert (Michael Redgrave), enters the story. We learn that he is a musicologist who has come to this region to collect local popular music. When a hotel employee sent by Iris, whose room is just below, arrives and asks him to make less noise, we see him playing a shrill tune on the clarinet while inviting local inhabitants to dance along as he takes note of their steps.

A young musicologist and a fake music professor in the same story make for a nice touch, but Gilbert and Miss Froy will not actually meet for some time. First the old lady will have to be kidnapped and "erased" and then rediscovered by Iris and Gilbert. In the meantime, Gilbert does nothing but cause interference on the musical message that is the central focus of the film, by playing a different music, rough and disjointed, that is in its own way another sort of coded message—since it is actually wedding music, and by having given rise to the first stormy meeting between Gilbert and Iris, it also serves to prefigure their eventual marriage.

Later, when silence is restored and the troubadour-spy has resumed his beautiful sad song, Miss Froy can again hear the melody and fix all its notes in her head. But what she does not hear is the small choking noise that the singer makes when, after he has sung his last note, a hand comes out of the shadows and kills him.

And the old lady calmly repeats the melody to herself in a low voice before returning to her room.

Let us note in passing how after showing Miss Froy leaving her balcony, Hitchcock cuts rapidly on a fadeout and quickly diminishes our impression of this music by opening immediately in the following scene (train station, next day, departure) with a generic accordion tune. The technique repeats the way Gilbert's noisy music had turned our attention away from what we didn't yet

recognize as the heart and key of the drama. At the same time, the delicate matter of how to stop the music comes into play here.

The coded melody does not reappear until Miss Froy is seated in her train compartment and starts humming the tune. Here, in the company of Iris, who falls asleep listening to it, the melody acts as a sort of lullaby. But it is also to this tune that Miss Froy literally vanishes, dissipates into notes of music.

Of course Miss Froy could easily have jotted the melody down on paper, thus eliminating the need to repeat it over and over with the attendant risk of forgetting it. Taking this risk obviously heightens the suspense (will she remember?), but we could also say that this purely oral existence of the music is consistent with the overall symbolic rules of the game. Miss Froy's practice contrasts with Gilbert's relation to music that is shown right away to be written, scholarly. When we see him for the first time, it is with his writing instruments to transcribe dance steps. In the train he tells Iris about the big book he is preparing on folk music, and this confirms for us that indeed his relation to music derives less from emotion than from an academic impulse, inherited from his father, to collect and classify.

Toward the end of the film, however, as the fighting intensifies between the heroes cornered in the train and the soldiers who are attacking, it is to Gilbert that Miss Froy chooses for safety to communicate the important message before fleeing on her own.[9] Here again, true to form, she does not give him the score but instead sings it to him once or twice amid the gunfire. And Gilbert, too, instead of noting it down on paper with all his expertise as an ethnomusicologist, sings it obsessively to himself all the way back!

Once he is back in London, in the Foreign Office, waiting with Iris to deliver the message, he suddenly has a memory lapse. "It's gone!" he exclaims, repeating the very words Iris used when Miss Froy's name on the train window had disappeared. In his desperate effort to recall the tune, it is of course the Mendelssohn Wedding March—a neat Freudian slip—that's on the tip of his tongue. Gilbert and Iris become panicky when they then hear a piano in the next room playing the "vanished" piece of music, solemn and complete,

accompanied with chords. The two are led into the room, where they find the old lady, who greets them with open arms and unites them, and of course the vanished/rediscovered melody is their true "wedding march."

So after one last gap, one last tunnel, Miss Froy's vanished musical theme returns in all its harmonized plenitude. To conquer Iris, Gilbert not only had to bring her another name—Harriman, the tea brand—but he also had to risk losing the music (and fail in his mission) by accepting it not based on passive, written conservation but on a living oral relationship to it (and let us not forget that one man already lost his life transmitting this message).

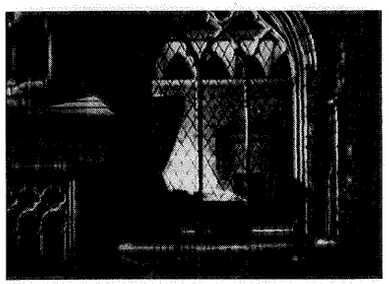
Finally, note that in keeping with his practice of having the "MacGuffin" mean nothing in itself, Hitchcock scrupulously withholds from us any translation of the musical message, the secret code of fate.

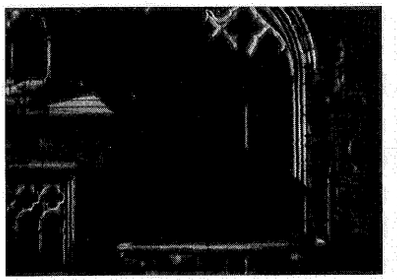
THE SONG AS AUDIOVISUAL EMBLEM OF A POWER STRUGGLE

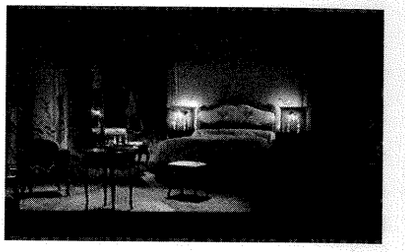
Even though, despite all, the cinema is still popularly defined as pictures to which sound was eventually added, a question arises that has to do with phenomena of superimposition and synchresis: who decides what?

When music follows the actions and gestures of a character (in cartoons, but also in Ford's *The Informer* [1935]), this technique, sometimes called mickeymousing, is often described as an enslavement of music to the image. This terminology suggests that when two instruments play together, for example, we absolutely must decide who is leading and who is following. But couldn't it be the music that is leading the image? Why must there be a leader anyway?

This question does not only concern music. Consider two examples from two very different films, *Citizen Kane* and *Last Year at Marienbad*. In both, a verbal or musical sound event is synchronized with an abrupt change in lighting.







In the prologue of *Kane*, a light goes off in a room, which we see through a gothic window, and this moment is synched with a sforzando chord in Bernard Herrmann's pit music. In *Marienbad*, Resnais synchs the hoarse *"No!"* spoken by Delphine Seyrig with the lighting of two lamps on either side of a large bed. In each case it is impossible to say which of the two events—audio or visual—is the diegetic cause of the other. There is no way we can take Seyrig's *"no"* or Herrmann's chord as the noise of the light switch in either scene, nor can we understand them as the *cause* of these lights turning on or off. The lighting event does not cause the sound, and the sounds do not cause the lights to change. But synchresis is at work, and it leads to that question of who decides what.

The audiovisual field—in a film, but also the field of studies of the audiovisual—is often divided over these questions of problematic causal relations. Rick Altman went so far as to define the Hollywood musical as the genre that sometimes reverses the causal relation, in sequences where the music seems to dictate the movements we see in the image.

Sometimes a film character plays at being *the cause through sound*, in other words the disc jockey of life.

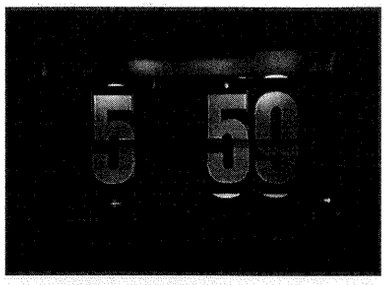
At the end of *Dark Passage* (1947) Humphrey Bogart is in the waiting room of a train station and observes a man and woman each waiting for the train alone and without speaking. Playing the impish cupid, Bogart puts a coin in the jukebox and soft music fills the room. The man and woman, bathed in this music that goes unnamed,[10] begin to speak to one another, and Bogart has an occasion to crack his famous grimacing smile. He has played the DJ who brings the two lonely people together unwittingly with a piece of music and its implied lyrics, since all melodies, we imagine, stand for latent speech.

The DJ as God is put forward in an unforgettable way in the most beautiful scene of *American Graffiti* that features Wolfman Jack. This mythical figure, whom Richard Dreyfuss is not even certain to have seen in person, broadcasts pop songs throughout the entire film that touch various characters and their individual stories, and perhaps (who knows?) steers their fate.

FATE IN A RADIO

Then there is the story of Phil Connors, an unbearably smug and full-of-himself weatherman on a local TV station. He goes to the town of Punxsutawney to take part in the local tradition on the air before giving his weather report: a groundhog—also named Phil—is supposed to predict how long winter will last, depending on his reaction to his shadow. When the ritual spectacle is over, Phil has only one thought: clear out of this hick town as fast as possible. But a freak snowstorm that his weather report hadn't predicted prevents him from leaving, and he has to spend one more night in the bed-and-breakfast that he had hoped never to see again. The next morning, at 6:00, the digital radio alarm clock goes off just as it did the day before, and, just like yesterday, he hears Sonny and Cher's "I Got You, Babe," followed by the same stupid jokes by the local radio hosts. Phil Connors wakes up just as he will many times, always on the same day.

Those who have seen this minor masterpiece, *Groundhog Day* (Harold Ramis, 1993), know that Phil and we along with him are going to hear fifteen or twenty times, each time the radio alarm goes off, the increasingly demonic "I Got You, Babe," sung by a couple, until at last the hero, cured of his pretentiousness and machismo, falls into the arms of Rita (Andie MacDowell) and can at last move on to the next day. But who's seducing whom? Surely she's the seducer—she chooses him and not vice versa. In "I Got You, Babe" the whole question is who's the "I" and who's the "you" that falls into the dream of the other. If we take Rita as the seducer, it would be she who can say "I" at the end of the film and Phil is her "you." In fact the words of the song that he rehears every morning are telling him just that; yet this weatherman, who makes comments about everything, is not picking up on it, and the lyrics stay in the shadowy realm of the half-heard and unnamed.



Whenever characters hear song lyrics that they do not then verbalize and appropriate for themselves, we can be quite certain, as in *Rear Window*, that the song identifies the character's destiny—a destiny that he or she *submits to* rather than actively *forges*.

God is a disc jockey, especially after *American Graffiti*, and this god "spins" the songs that guide destinies, insofar as the characters might hear them but are not really listening.

The Swedish scholar Ulf Wilhelmsson compares the song lyrics in *Thelma & Louise* to a "narrating voice-over." Wilhelmsson points out that the first song lyrics heard in the film, "Little Honey, I'm goin' out tonight/Little Honey, I ain't looking for a fight," set the scene for the story: "the women going off together for the weekend have no intention to provoke a fight."[11]

Making reference to my conceptual framework, Wilhelmsson notes the value that certain songs have as foreshadowing or commentary, and he puts forward the hypothesis, but only the hypothesis, that "the lyrics 'force' the characters to certain actions at certain points in the narrative. The characters are as if caught in a verbocentric world of which they lack all control. They are more like puppets on a string obeying the lyrics. I do not mean this literally. Often they cannot hear the songs which are not all in the diegetic space, but their actions are closely tied to what is sung."[12]

I would extend this hypothesis with one more point: we can never be certain that the characters do not hear the songs. Here we must enter into a magical logic—cine-magic.

This said, Wilhelmsson's precise observations point to uncanny correspondences throughout the film between the song lyrics and what happens onscreen.

What can be said about the lyrics of the Glenn Frey song "Part of You, Part of Me" that are heard during and after the telepheme between Louise and Jimmy, except that the situation of the characters certainly echoes them?

I can feel it when I hear that lonesome highway
So many miles to go before I die
We can never know about tomorrow
Still we have to choose which way to go
You and I are standing at the crossroads . . .

Wilhelmsson also notes that we only hear this song's ending in the final credits, where the words that had been until then "repressed" now surface: "Time has brought us here to share these moments / To look for something we may never find." It would be incorrect to apply these words more to relations between men and women than to the friendship between Thelma and Louise, and vice versa. Indeed, we need not choose, and the logic of either/or needs to be replaced by a logic of both/and.

TO PLAY, TO HUM, TO SING

A whole host of scenarios are possible: one character might be incapable of singing; another might get the song started by putting on a record, but the person might not sing it, or she might.

In *Casablanca* Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman), a veritable Eve figure, urges Sam (Dooley Wilson) to sing the song that Rick has banished from his café, "As Time Goes By." She makes her request in three stages: "Play it" (i.e., on the piano), she says to him first with a smile. Since Sam pretends not to remember, she tempts him more firmly, "I'll hum it for you." When he still refuses, she insists further, "Sing it." Sam's resistance is overcome, the floodgates open, memories come pouring out, and we know that the reunion of the separated lovers is inevitable. Enter Rick.

In Ophuls's "La Maison Tellier," the central story in the three-part film *Le Plaisir* (1952), inspired by Maupassant, Rosa (Danielle Darrieux) first *plays* the song "Ma grand-mère" (or rather makes it play on the player piano), then *hums*

it on the train, and later *sings* the words on her way back to the station, as she picks flowers with her companions.

Thus songs may circulate among several modes: between the melody without lyrics (which are nevertheless implied) and the fully explicit version with the lyrics, but also between the diegetic world and the nondiegetic; for example, when the diegetic tune percolates into pit music, as it does in the Ophuls film, and in *Casablanca* when Max Steiner's orchestra takes over the "As Time Goes By" theme once Sam has played and sung it.

In other films a song may be sung once and then circulate no further at all. This is the case with "Le Tourbillon," the song by Rezvani in *Jules and Jim*. Or a song can contaminate, so to speak, several different characters, who then can't get it out of their heads (*Under the Roofs of Paris*). Sometimes a song is confined entirely to the nondiegetic realm, and sometimes it belongs solely to the diegetic world. In other words, a song emblematizes the very notion of circulation and propagation in a film. This makes sense when we remember that a film is a work of a particular kind, an assemblage of pieces whose divisions are rarely distinct or watertight (unlike the movements of a musical work, the acts of a play, the stanzas of a poem, or the paragraphs of a prose fiction work), so that whatever crosses over these implicit borders and partitions foregrounds the partitioning process itself.

Sometimes a song is just a melody waiting for words, which doesn't prevent words from being imagined or the spectator from thinking of a hidden message. The tune in Jacques Tati's film *Mr. Hulot's Holiday* is just a few bars by Alain Romans that we hear in the opening credits, but later it is played by a girl on her record player, then whistled by some vacationers, and so on. We know that outside the film these bars became the song "Quel temps fait-il à Paris?" ("What's the Weather in Paris?") but only outside the film. Tati liked having us hear musical themes in his films that sound like songs but that never get assigned lyrics. The melodies in his films are like so many sealed messages: the music is the envelope, and the text we never hear is inside.

Often a song may have a *minimal signifying core*, as I call it, a certain assemblage of notes and phonemes, quite brief, and without any meaning in itself. This is the case for many songs based on a woman's name, or a place name (from "Down Mexico Way" to "New York, New York" and "Forty-Second Street") or a magical word. The fate of this minimal signifying core, generally meaningless as I've said, is to become the focal point for the rest of the song in its couplets, refrain, and so forth. As focal point, this signifier comes to embody human destiny; it's a signifier that is made to glint and reflect in every possible direction. An entire life may be symbolized by the minimal signifying core: the names of two children torn from their mother, Anju and Zushio in the song of *Sansho the Bailiff*, or the name of the heroine, Lisa, in *Rear Window*.

Sometimes the minimal signifying core is a familiar expression that belongs to everyone and that everyone can relate to on some personal level. Think of "Porque te vas" in *Cría cuervos*; "Quizas, quizas, quizas" in the Nat King Cole version made famous in *In the Mood for Love* (2001); "As Time Goes By" in *Casablanca*; and "You've Got a Friend in Me" in *Toy Story* (1995).

A song would seem, a priori, to be the opposite of a talking film: the first is set to music while films are mostly spoken; a song is often composed of verse, with rhyme and rhythm, while movie dialogue is in prose. A song posits an I, you, he, and she that are indeterminate, often symbolic or generalized, while sound films present specific characters. A song takes place over a short, highly structured length of time with predictable symmetries and repetitions, while a film is expected to advance without repeating itself. Finally, a song can have extremely varied modes of existence—played with instruments only, hummed, whistled, shouted, la-la-la'd, recited—while dialogue most often comes in only one form.

It is precisely because the song is so different that above and beyond its centrality to musicals, in many films it takes the role of a pivot or turntable, a point of contact. The song opens a horizon, a perspective, an escape route for characters mired in their individual story.

The song is what often creates a link between individual characters' destinies and the human collectivity to which they belong. When we hear a film referring to "you and me," in a scene where two characters are getting together or breaking apart, we think of a "she" and "he" that transcend the woman and man we see on the screen. We leave behind any individual psychologism that often circumscribes the sound film.

In Yuan Mu-jih's marvelous *Street Angel* (1937) the young heroine, obliged by her boss, irritably sings a love song for the patrons of the sleazy restaurant where she works. As she sings, she's redoing her braids, making perfectly clear

that her heart is not in the song. Her reluctance, however, does not prevent this song of thwarted love from calling up romantic images of a woman at a window, moonlight, and so forth, and thus from having *iconogenic* lyrics, even though the singer is preoccupied with something else and not trying to deliver the song with any emotional weight. It doesn't matter. For a brief time the song manages to suspend all confinement, and during those few minutes we are not just in the film's here and now. Not only is there no longer a separation between the diegetic and nondiegetic, but the boundary between film and audience is suspended too (since we're invited to join in with the song on the screen, aided by subtitles and the bouncing white ball on the lyrics). The song has a life of its own and works independently of the girl's willingness or reluctance to sing.

Not infrequently, a song, with its closed duration, enframes and highlights a particularly dramatic moment of a film, such as a murder. A common old street tune can mark a fatal event, as in *La Chienne* and Fritz Lang's *Cloak and Dagger*, or it can be a hit song, as with "Blue Moon," which plays while men metamorphose into werewolves in John Landis's *An American Werewolf in London* (1981).

The idea of an island of fatal time, which can be represented by the mechanism of a jukebox, also appears in a wonderful scene from *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950, John Huston) when old Doc Riedenschneider (Sam Jaffe), knowing he's going to be arrested by the police and waiting resignedly in a bar, devotes his last moments of freedom, as well as his last few coins, to a girl whom he asks to dance for him. All in the duration of the 45-rpm record, he witnesses the vitality of the young girl who naively believes in her immortality, and outside the window of the bar he also sees his pursuers, who have understood and who await him; finally we see reflected in the window the image of this man whose time is up.

Thus the briefest musical form—just a song with a couplet and refrain—can capture within a very short time a series of thematic correspondences, the map of a character's destiny, the arc of a human story; in a movie it can act like a handful of small glass balls: one holds them in the middle of a large room, and they reflect the whole space; but they would reflect whatever space one happened to take them to. A song acts like the image of a destiny, since it is the symbol of an arbitrary and eternal union of certain words and certain notes: and this union is redoubled through audiovisual juxtaposition (the sound film's ultimate weapon) that unites the song we hear with the fate of a character.

EMPATHY/ANEMPATHY

According to the prevailing notion among many film theorists until the 1980s, often relying on Adorno and Eisler's 1947 book *Composing for the Films*, music supposedly has two ways of relating to the emotional climate of a scene. Either it reinforces it in a "redundant" way, by underlining the fear, solemnity, happiness, melancholy, sadness, and so forth already evident in the scene; or—and this is what these theorists and some directors often claim to be the more interesting situation—the music acts in "counterpoint," giving a complementary or even contradictory meaning that supposedly enriches the scene's meaning, or "displaces" it, to use a contemporary term.

I have tried to bring greater precision to this analysis by distinguishing four different cases of semantic and emotive interaction, the first two of which are corollaries of each other.

1. In the first case music—often, but not always, pit music—participates directly in the emotion of the scene, moves in sympathy with it, envelops it, prolongs and amplifies it. I call this *empathetic* music, from the word *empathy*, which designates the faculty of experiencing the feelings of another through identification.

2. The second case is when the music (almost always screen music) registers, with respect to the emotionally intense situation onscreen (physical violence, madness, rape, death), a palpable indifference, by continuing on its own impassive, mechanical course. But this show of indifference—often underscored by having the source of the music be some mechanical instrument or machine (hand organ, record player, jukebox, radio) or the stock figure of the street musician—far from undercutting the emotion, in fact strongly reinforces it while giving it a different inflection. The emotion now no longer comes through direct identification with the all-important feelings of the

characters, through the relay of music; the emotion derives rather from the shifting of perspective from this individual drama to the cosmic indifference of the world, the indifference of the earth, of life, of the seasons, and the movements of the crowd. The effect comes from the fact that when something to which one feels attached ceases or fails—a heart stops, a dramatic accident occurs, the loved one abandons you, a hand falls inert—the music plays in spite of it all, without missing a beat. This music, which I call *anempathetic* (with the privative prefix *an-*) precisely because it "doesn't give a damn," takes on the responsibility in a massive transfer due sometimes to merely being there at the right time, of the entire weight of some human destiny that it simultaneously summarizes and disdains.

We can observe various kinds of anempathetic music at work in powerful moments of films such as *Children of Paradise* (when Baptiste's search for Garance in a crowd is accompanied by carnival music), *Hiroshima mon amour* (repetitive music accompanying the illustrated catalog of horrors at Hiroshima), and of course *The Third Man*, with the famous zither music of Anton Karas that plays amid the bombarded ruins of a Vienna ravaged by absolute evil. And let us not forget murder scenes set to anempathetic music, which I will discuss further on.

Sometimes a repetitive or continuous sound effect within the scene can play the same role, though not quite in the same way. Think of the rhythmic noise of a mill wheel during a rape scene in *Girl from Hunan* (Xie Fei, 1986), the noise of the shower that is heard as Marion is stabbed and continues after she has died in *Psycho*, or the rhythmic noise of a large printing press while Max von Sydow kills Robert Redford's female colleague at the beginning of Sydney Pollack's *Three Days of the Condor* (1975).

3. I use the term *didactic counterpoint* in cases where music's indifference to the situation it accompanies corresponds with an intention to signify some concept, or some complementary idea, that is to be read or interpreted without an emotional dimension. In *Padre Padrone* (1977), by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, pieces of classical and popular music are used as "symbols" for particular ideas: culture, power, social origins. When "The Blue Danube" waltz plays over shots of the naked and unforgiving countryside of Sardinia, there is no affective gut reaction but instead the formation of an idea: it conveys the notion of the classical education that the hero, Gavino Ledda, the son of an illiterate shepherd, will go on to pursue. It is well known that didactic counterpoint has often come up in films with revolutionary and social themes, with the aim of creating the *Verfremdungseffekt*, critical distanciation (dear Spectator, there's more to it than you see), and signifying opposition (we see the

defeat of the revolutionaries, but the music tells us victory is possible). Thus in Slatan Düdow's *Kühle Wampe* (1932, screenplay by Brecht), sharp and busy music playing with images of sordid apartment blocks is a call to revolt. And heard in connection with the depiction of an individual character, music can express the presence or imminent arrival of the collective fighting in solidarity.

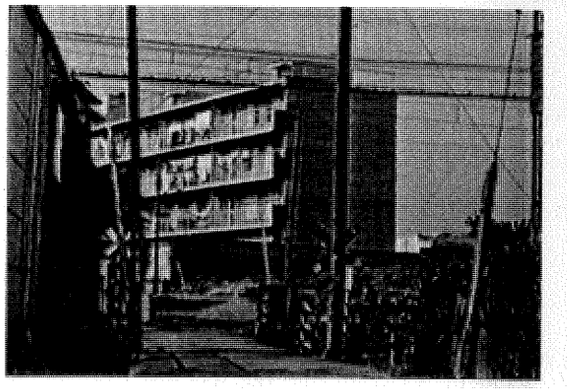
The essential difference, often overlooked, between music for didactic counterpoint and anempathetic music is that the latter is put to an intentionally emotional use and works in immediate, profound, and archaic ways, bypassing "reading" or interpretation. This is not the case with didactic counterpoint, where the chilling effect of the music is not used to reinforce an emotion but, on the contrary, allows for the dispassionate understanding of an idea.

Indifference is a bizarre concept: in this case it's not a matter of lacking affective tension. The indifference of a piece of music is given to the spectator precisely so that he or she takes it as a mirror reflecting his or her own solitude and the insignificance of his or her own fate. This indifference is an emotion—not in the music itself, even though we talk as though it is, but within our poor human state of being that feels this music as the infinite resistance of the real. When poets speak of the indifference of the stars, they do not mean that stars are conscious; on the contrary, they are alluding to the muteness of these distant cold glimmerings to the unanswered messages that we send them.

Ultimately, indifference—and we can include the indifference of music—is always the mother's indifference. The sole being from whom, at the beginning of life, we are forced to wait for everything can consequently represent absolute indifference. The mother's resistance, her delay in responding, the absence of an echo to our cries—this is what constitutes her as unbearably indifferent; that is, she is alive somewhere but not for us, and at the same time she is dead, because dead to us, or treating us as dead.

This indifference of music is not a perverted form of the emotive mechanism but the base or platform from which all emotions derive. Anempathetic music, in a way, consists in a reframing: instead of occupying the whole field with the individual fate of the character, this music allows us to see in the background the indifferent world.

A subtle type of anempathetic music is at work in the films of Yasujiro Ozu, Jacques Tati, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and of course Fellini, generated by soft and generically sentimental cues that seem at first to clothe the individuals' stories in emotion. But in fact, their cheap pathos leaves these characters all the more nakedly alone. With Fellini the carefully anonymous sentimentality of Nino Rota's music progressively peels off from the characters and pursues its own path with increasing coldness, perfusing the film's atmosphere with its K-Mart scent. The pathetic quality of this music becomes all



the greater as the gap widens between its apparent show of feeling and its demonstrated indifference to the protagonists' situations. The music breaks with the pretense that it is attached to a specific character or event, and instead it accepts the idea of becoming the music of everyone, which is to say the music of no one in particular. The last films of Ozu, such as *Late Autumn* (1960) and *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962), with the very sentimental music of Kojun Saitô, create precisely the same effect, the same feeling.

To pull this off one needs music cues without cultural pretensions or complicated orchestration. With Tati, Fellini, and Ozu the music is perfectly willing to resemble the most anonymous of functional music, Muzak of the kind that's piped into train stations, offices, elevators, and malls.

This is not the same thing as in disc jockey movies (see above), when a pop number is used for the simple reason that those songs include words, and these words always create resonances, which can make a big difference.

4. There are cases where the music does not fit any of these three types. In Chabrol's *L'Enfer* (1993) the protagonist, played by François Cluzet, torn by jealousy, is running through the woods by a lake and imagines his wife waterskiing with some hunk. A chamber music piece by Matthieu Chabrol accompanies his running, discreetly marking time and bringing out the obsessive dimension of the sequence. The music, however, does not flout the character's disarray, nor does it identify with him; it simply takes note of the moment's particularity and signals something amiss.

WHAT DO MUSIC BOXES WANT FROM US?

What do music boxes, hurdy-gurdies, and mechanical organs and pianos want from us? How many villains in westerns have managed to set off the

player piano in the saloon while taking their last bullet? On other occasions it was killers who took advantage of the noise of a party to cover up a gunshot or the cries of fear or agony of their victims. Think of the death of Régis in *Pépé le Moko* or of Miriam, in *Strangers on a Train*, who is surprised and strangled by Bruno to the indifferent sounds of a nearby merry-go-round.

This is the same merry-go-round that, in a virtuosic set-piece at the end of the film, flies out of control—and with it, its grinding waltz, accelerating and rising in pitch to alarming degrees, until a courageous workman manages to unplug it, thus stopping the infernal music and the cycle of death it symbolizes. Or recall Jean Grémillon's *Lumière d'été* (1942), in which a fatal hunting accident is riveted into the memories of the cursed lovers by an obsessive piece of mechanical organ music. In *The Dark Corner* (1946) one man surprises another in an apartment, knocks him out, and finishes him off with a fire poker, all while we hear from some nearby radio or record player turned down low the steady and serene "Mood Indigo" of Duke Ellington. In *The Silence of the Lambs* there is the peaceful sound of the Goldberg Variations that accompanies Hannibal Lecter as he slits the throats of his guards. In *Se7en* the recording of an aria for strings, also by Bach, plays while Morgan Freeman pages through horrific images in old books in a library.[13] In *Berlin Express* (Jacques Tourneur, 1948) a man is discovered hanged, while a music box that has almost completely wound down completes the theme that reminded him of childhood or a lost love. And in *Two Rode Together* (John Ford, 1961) the Indian at his lynching hears the tune from the music box that played in his cradle—and remembers that he was, in fact, a "paleface" baby; and so his recollection of his identity coincides with the moment of his death.

The association of music, often mechanical or mechanically reproduced music, with a murderous impulse is a familiar theme to most moviegoers. Think of the waltz theme from *The Merry Widow*, which in Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* is linked to the series of murders committed by Uncle Charlie (Joseph Cotten), or the little hymn sung with threatening calm by the preacher in *The Night of the Hunter* when he is pursuing the children,[14] or the Grieg melody that the child-murderer in *M* whistles when he feels the need to kill again.

There are also instances of a musical theme disappearing into the water, literally or symbolically, and with it some infernal cycle of death or suffering for which it is the signifier. In *Psycho* the instrumental theme of Marion's flight disappears from the soundtrack as soon as her body and her car are submerged in the pond. In a striking film about the musical hell of obsessional characters, *The 5,000 Fingers of Doctor T.* (1953), by Roy Rowland, an atomic

liquid called Musicfix annuls sound waves. In *Three Colors: Blue*, however, the widow of a composer is unable to drown in the pool where she swims, nor grind up in a garbage disposal, the indestructible music that is obsessing her and that remains on the side of life.

Humankind certainly didn't wait for the invention of cinema to tell these kinds of stories, which are as old as music and the world itself. But on the screen they take on new resonance because the music is not merely evoked but really heard, and it exists, like the whole film, in recorded form, in a quantifiable temporality that corresponds to the objective duration of the film. And the film is itself a mechanical reel that progressively empties out, or it is a DVD disc turning round and round on itself. In these conditions there is no longer any doubt that music is related to the repetition compulsion that Freud and Lacan both claimed to be one of the basic principles of human functioning.

To live is to repeat cycles of behavior: amid these behaviors are missed encounters, and music, in its spiraling repetition, holds something we might call the merciless recording of them. Music is signified as the mechanical unfolding of something that is already recorded or written and irremediably linked to a certain fatal event, always already there in the context of the projection of a film, that is, the unwinding of a recorded spiral.[15]

It should come as no surprise that the first musical accompaniments for silent films were apparently done with mechanical instruments such as Limonaire organs, hurdy-gurdies, and phonographs. Not so long ago, all music recorded on disc was called mechanical music or "mechanized music," as if the music were essentially marked by the process of its reproduction and as if it were necessary to pay with one's life for the chance to have music in recorded form.

1. On this period in film history see Claudia Gorbman's *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: BFI, 1987); and my own *La Musique au cinéma* (Paris: Fayard, 1995).
2. Many of my students over the years have marveled at Williams's banal repetitive shark motif, which has fascinated them in the way it conveys the very essence of the inhuman, and I have often puzzled over the sequence myself. I finally realized that the child's song creates morbid anxiety that in our memory gets displaced onto the attack that follows.
3. See the famous breakfast sequence in *Citizen Kane* in which Welles condenses the stages of the gradual breakdown of Charles Foster Kane's first marriage by showing the amorously warm, then cool, then icy relations of husband and wife when they meet for breakfast. Bernard Herrmann wrote four minutes of music for this sequence that takes place as a self-contained unit.
4. Henri Colpi, *Défense et illustration de la musique dans le film* (Lyon: Serdoc, 1962), 91.
5. René Clair, *Cinema Yesterday and Today*, trans. Stanley Appelbaum, ed. R.C. Dale (New York: Dover, 1972), 140–41.

6. Chion is referring to a railroad turntable as a metaphor, which allows for passages between one "track" and another.—Trans.

7. See Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar, *The Technique of Film Editing* (London: Focal Press, 1966), 279.

8. In *Hitchcock/Truffaut* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 98.

9. "The message? It's a tune. It contains a code, of course. I want you to memorize it."

10. While walking through the lobby of the Plaza Hotel toward the bar where he will be kidnapped, Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant), the hero in *North by Northwest*, does not think to pay attention to the piped-in music playing at that moment in an arrangement for piano and violin, though it turns out to be a kind of omen. It's the standard "It's a Most Unusual Day."

11. Ulf Wilhelmsson, "Song Lyrics as Narrative Elements in *Thelma & Louise*," unpublished paper, 1997.

12. Ibid.

13. This is diegetic/screen music, since we see one of the library employees put it on for Somerset (Freeman).

14. See Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. and ed. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 116, 118.

15. What does this become in the era of the DVD? It's clear that films take on a new labyrinthine spatial form that supplements while not supplanting the spiral shape.

CHAPTER 25

Max Ophuls: Music, Noise, and Speech

1.

OF ALL THE DIRECTORS *in the early sound period to cultivate a fluid, flexible, expressive approach to speech, making room for overlapping conversation and half-heard dialogue, Max Ophuls is certainly the one who, from* Liebelei *(1933) to* Lola Montès *(1955)—one of the richest films of its decade in audiovisual experimentation—remained the most dedicated and determined.*

In La Signora di tutti *(1934) the low-definition sound of the era allowed Ophuls to experiment with constant gradations among various sound elements, with numerous variations of acoustics and ambience. In one scene Gabriella (Isa Miranda) admires herself in the mirror and talks to herself in the intimate voice of a lover, while in the background we hear the noisy chatter of other characters. In another scene she thinks she hears, and indeed does hear, the film's nondiegetic music that is persecuting her. In this film the effects of variable acoustic levels and of conversations in multiple spatial planes threaten constantly to engulf speech and meaning and to reduce it all to chatter, as a way of fending off silence.*

I would like to consider one medium-length film in particular here, "La Maison Tellier," one sketch in the triptych film Le Plaisir *(1952).*

Maupassant's short story, the source for "La Maison Tellier," is the tale of a parenthesis. We are at the end of the nineteenth century. The working girls in a brothel on the Normandy coast, run by a certain Madame Tellier (Madeleine Renaud), take a break from their night jobs and travel to the countryside by train to attend the first communion of their employer's niece. Madame Tellier's brother, Joseph Rivet (Jean Gabin), is a hardy country carpenter who seems rather bored between his surly, retiring wife and their only daughter, the one preparing for her communion. During their respite, the women of the Maison Tellier will rediscover the languid calm of the countryside but also troubling

hints of their childhoods. They whiff a nostalgia for their dreams of long ago—especially the dream of the pure life and great love—before eventually returning to their whirlwind existence and drowning themselves in an impromptu celebration . . . in order to forget.

At the beginning of the "Maison Tellier" episode we hear a classic example of iconogenic textual speech. A voice—the beautifully poised voice of Jean Servais—speaking over darkness, is presented darkness is presented as the voice of a writer named Maupassant coming to us from the realm of the dead. Then the image appears, and noises, and music; houses of a nineteenth-century town in Normandy and bursts of speech also insinuate themselves into this "shown," this tableau called forth by the textual speech.

In what follows, part of the action that takes place before our eyes will remain unmentioned by the narrator, notably the idyll between the prostitute Rosa (Danielle Darrieux) and Joseph the carpenter. The voice of Jean Servais/Maupassant focuses rather on groups, major themes, and the big picture: the brothel, the prostitutes on vacation, the mass held in the country church, and the communion meal. But in the interstices of his strongly present, foregrounded narration, the characters who are part of this tableau retain a margin of freedom to invent a private story that remains all their own. We should say that the words spoken by the voice-over are taken mostly from Maupassant and that he speaks of the group collectively, while the idyll between Rosa and Rivet, as well as another more furtive one between the village mayor and another prostitute, are inventions of Ophuls's and Natanson's film adaptation. The voice of Servais/Maupassant has the modesty not to talk about these abortive flirtations, even though the narrator may not be blind to what goes on between the sentimental prostitute and the rustic woodworker.

*What is nicely done here is that the additional subplot of the film version does not disrupt the collective tableau depicted by the voice-over and camera but actually blends harmoniously with it. Just as the titles of certain grand historical or allegorical paintings—*The Flight into Egypt, The Rape of the Sabine Women*—allow us to better appreciate secondary elements that have been added by the painter as potential side stories, so too the shadow of the unsaid cast by the narrator's "said" shelters and protects, we might say, these small intimate stories.*

The same kind of thing occurs in films such as The Saga of Anatahan *(Sternberg, 1953) and* The Greatest Show on Earth *(DeMille, 1952), where the narrators focus on the general setup in the manner of a photo or picture caption: a succinct statement then allows us to notice other elements within the image that have not been explicitly verbalized. Think of the way we tend to interact with children over their picture books—pointing out in the "shown" both what the text says and what it leaves unsaid.*

"La Maison Tellier" demonstrates that the play of voice and images can go beyond questions of power or the division of the spectator's attention as it is called in opposite directions.

Moreover, between the narrating voice in "La Maison Tellier" and its dialogue, there is not just a difference in status but a difference in sound quality too. The narrating voice is recorded in a studio, closely miked, and speaks with precise diction, while the dialogue in the various scenes is recorded with a sort of verbal chiaroscuro. The consistent audio closeup of Jean Servais's voice underscores the imprecise, floating character, by turns well defined or indistinct, of the voices of the characters on the screen.

If this dialogue is often only half intelligible, it is either "because" of the distance at which we hear it,[1] a distance materialized sometimes by the existence of a mask (a window or door) or because it is more or less lost within a hubbub of collective conversation or among the noises made by the characters as they walk or ride in carriages or trains—these noises of movement so important in Ophuls. As was often the case in the early sound years, speech in "La Maison Tellier" rises out of the collective and sinks back into it.

With this in mind, note the strong, mutually reinforcing correlation in this film between the frequently obscured or distanced speech, and Ophuls's systematic visual process of interposing between the filmed characters and the camera's/spectator's eye all sorts of obstacles in the foreground: barriers, railings, banisters, gates, fences and grillwork, foliage, hedges, curtains, windows, and smoke. These numerous interposed elements oblige the spectator to work to extend her or his gaze beyond them to the faces and looks of the characters, just as the ear bothered by the ambient noise that surrounds much of the speech has to strain to make out individual voices and the meaning of words. Indeed, Ophuls was one of few directors to exploit in a dynamic, expressive way the problem of masking created by the coexistence of the varied audio elements on the single soundtrack of a film.[2]

Not all the noises that are collective—the chatter of conversations, the shriek of train whistles, the clatter of carriages—are uniformly dispersed through the film in a mechanical or routine way; instead, they are composed, measured, and modulated. During the central episode of the "escape" to the countryside, collective speech surges in three successive waves: (1) the arrival at the train station and the joyful uproar of reunions, (2) loading the ladies into the carriage driven by Jean Gabin, and (3) the trying-on of the dress for the niece's communion. Each wave is an occasion for choruses of shouts, laughter, and overlapping dialogue. Afterward, as evening advances over the countryside, this general chorus begins to ebb progressively in well-crafted stages until finally there is a silence in the middle of the night that the women from the brothel find unbearable. When Rosa (Darrieux) and two of her wide-awake associates break this silence, they

speak one after another. Within this female chorus of "La Maison Tellier" the voice of sentimental Rosa, the musician of the group, sometimes stands out before melting back into the group.

2.

It might appear as something of a provocation to undertake an extended analysis of the musical organization of this one-third of a film that contains not one note of original music. It's not that I underestimate the intelligence and beauty of scores by Bernard Herrmann, Michel Colombier, or Jürgen Knieper that are expressly written for the cinema. It's just that I want to clearly separate out the problem of composing original film music from issues of music's actual functioning in a film. Though linked in practice, these are two entirely separate matters.

Few films use music as powerfully and richly as "La Maison Tellier." This achievement is most readily apparent in the way the film structures the musical cues taken from the classical repertoire and arranged by Joe Hajos. The selections include Mozart, Offenbach, the operettas of Planquette, Lecocq and Audran, and religious works. As with many films, if there were an "original soundtrack" album of "La Maison Tellier," it would have value solely as an evocative memory aid. It would in no way be able to transmit an idea of the rich significance that emerges with the deployment of the various musical pieces in the film.

We have already seen that the screenplay tells the story of a parenthesis and is divided into three parts. The film's three parts constitute an out-and-back loop, A-B-A—from the city to the country and back to the city. The dramatic and musical divisions of this sequence could be described schematically as follows.

MUSICAL ORGANIZATION OF "LA MAISON TELLIER"

(SM=screen music; PM=pit music; AM=angel music)

A. CITY

1. Overture-presentation . . .

. . . of the Tellier House and its boss	*(Theme song on player piano, SM)*
. . . of the brothel ground floor, reserved for ordinary clients	*(Potpourri of accordion dance music, SM)*
. . . of the upper floor reserved for high-class guests: Fernande, Raphaëlle, Rosa	*(Reprise of the theme song; we see Rosa crank up the player piano again while singing in "La la la" fashion.)*

(Throughout this sequence the musical accompaniment is uninterrupted.)

2. The men and the empty house

The men discover the brothel closed and gather together in front of the pier. They argue and then separate. One of them finds a sign in front of the Maison Tellier that reads, "Closed for First Communion."

(No music in this sequence, except for the shot of the sign, when there's a brief allusion to the religious hymn "Nearer, My God, to Thee" played by a harp as PM.)

B. COUNTRY

3. The train trip

The ladies on the train: Madame Tellier lectures Rosa, who sings in front of other passengers.	*(Theme song, half sung, half hummed by Rosa in "La, la, la" fashion, SM.)*
Rosa dreams aloud of a "distinguished" life in which she would be loved and respected.	*(Theme song repeated, slowly and nostalgically, by string instruments, PM.)*

4. The arrival in the village

Welcome at the train station.	*(No music)*
The women travel in a wagon driven by Rivet.	*(Cheerful orchestral version of the theme song, PM, as the carriage sets off; then a slower version of same.)*
The ladies pass in front of the church; inside, the choir of young people is rehearsing for the communion ceremony to be held the next day.	*(Dissolve without transition to the religious hymn, children's choir, AM then SM.)*
The carriage continues on its way.	*(The religious hymn is replaced by a return to the theme song, played quickly and joyfully, PM.)*

5. At the Rivet house

Madame Rivet's welcome. The niece tries on the communion dress given to her. Continuation of the flirting between Rosa and Rivet begun while passing the church.	*(No music)*

6. Silence in the night

The women go to bed; an uncomfortable silence builds. — *(Theme song, slow and religious, PM.)*

The pit music ceases; there is complete silence. Rosa, feeling nervous, gets up to walk and finds the young girl whom she embraces to comfort (and comfort herself). — *(Near the end occurs the final part of the theme song, played slowly and religiously to the end of the sequence, PM.)*

7. The mass

Procession to the church.
The Mass. — *(Exclusively religious music: instrumental hymn theme with strings and harmonium, SM; "Kyrie" sung by two priests, SM; hymn theme sung by children, SM, with the words "Nearer, My God . . ."; "Ave Verum," by Mozart, played by unseen instruments, AM.)*

8. Rivet house, after the mass

After-dinner conviviality; Rivet, somewhat tipsy, causes a scandal by trying to rape Rosa; Madame Tellier is eager to depart. — *(No music)*

9. Return to the station and departure

En route toward the station, the women stop to pick flowers and sing the theme song of "My Grandmother" with the lyrics. — *(Theme song sung by the women, SM, then Rosa alone, the words in the end becoming unintelligible.)*

Rivet feeling melancholy after the train departs. — *(Last iteration of the theme song played slowly and sadly by the orchestra, PM.)*

C. CITY

10. The party

The Tellier House is having a party, and the men spread the word: the ladies are back! Joy pervades the house.

(This entire sequence is accompanied by uninterrupted music, a potpourri of ambient dance music. When the camera leaves the house to follow a messenger, this ambient music changes from SM to PM, and then returns to SM. Moreover, the player piano and the accordion that had been kept separate in the first city sequence—the piano played only upstairs and the accordion only downstairs—fuse momentarily and play the same tunes.)

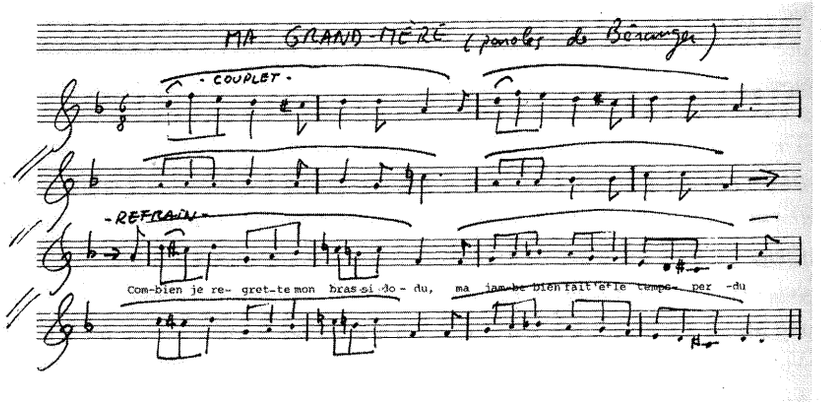
The music in "La Maison Tellier," whether diegetic or not, is based on four distinct musical elements, each with its own meaning and function. I call them (1) the dance medley that is purely instrumental, an agglomeration of sprightly themes borrowed from Offenbach and other "light music" of the nineteenth century; (2) "the theme song," based on a Béranger song called "Ma grand-mère"; (3) the religious hymn "Nearer, My God, to Thee"; and (4) an "Ave Verum" by Mozart, originally composed for chorus and orchestra, arranged here for small orchestra.

1. The dance medley occurs in the first and third segments (A and C). It is associated with the description of the Tellier house and the scenes that take place there. It is in a way the brothel's defining essence. I have deliberately avoided the words theme *or* leitmotif *to describe this element. It ranges across a certain number of wordless melodies, none that stand out, and that are pieced together in no apparent order. What one retains of this potpourri is less a melodic shape or a characteristic rhythmic signature than a general feeling of pleasantly lively, rhythmic agitation, a cousin to the humdrum accompaniment of some of the first silent films. It represents a kind of life and entertainment, both impersonal and undifferentiated.*

2. The theme song, heard without lyrics most of the time, but with lyrics near the end, is the most frequent and most manipulated musical element in "La Maison Tellier"—and the film's leitmotif. Its melody, which alternates a couplet and a refrain, comes from a popular bawdy nineteenth-century song by Béranger. But, as was common at the time, this melody is a "timbre," in other words a popular tune by an unknown composer, in this case "En revenant de Bâle en Suisse" ("Coming Back from Basel in Switzerland"), arranged by L. Bridier, to which Béranger added his lyrics in 1813.[3]

The lyrics, of which the film retains only the "decent" lines (leaving out one famous couplet that refers to female masturbation and others that praise the dissolute life), elaborate on a motif that is directly related to the film. The refrain (spoken by a grandmother) laments the loss of youth and vigor:

How I miss
the good old times
my pretty leg
and my plump arm.



For the sake of clarity, and some comments to follow, I've taken the liberty of reproducing the two musical themes, the couplet and refrain, of "My Grandmother."

In the ninth segment of the film, according to the breakdown above, when Ophuls has Rosa sing the words of a few lines from one of the couplets, he chooses, "Unless God calls me to Him/My confessor will never know." This makes a nice link to the preceding scene of the first communion, not in any way meant as profane but rather as an indication of a union between divine love and human love, an idea that returns in Ophuls's Madame de . . . *(1953).*

As with many songs, the melody of the refrain is brief, distinctive, and well-shaped, whereas the couplet is sung to a musical phrase whose shape is less well defined. Even for those who may not read music, it is easy to see that the melodic structure of the refrain is a descent in stages, first in significant intervallic jumps and then by smaller degrees—in other words, no longer in fifths, but stepwise, with the descent leading to a cadence; that is, to the conclusive resting-point on the tonic. Thus we can see that the theme involves a fall, a regret, a dying out.

And, as in many film scores, the couplet and refrain (sometimes occurring separately, sometimes together) that constitute the theme song in "La Maison Tellier" are put forward over the course of the film in all sorts of ways—with different instrumentations and varying rhythms, from very slow and quasi-religious to light and peppy. There is nothing particularly original in this. What is original, however, is the precise composition of each of the theme's appearances and the way this theme—whether or not associated with the "lyrics" sung with it, though most often quoted in the orchestral score—carries a certain story through the film.

If followed through the schematized description of the film given above, one can see that "Ma grand-mère" begins as an anonymous theme, without identity other than by association with the context in which it appears (the camera's description of the exterior of the Tellier house), in other words a connotation of frivolity and loose living. Then we see that it is associated specially with the character Rosa, who, having been presented by the narrative voice-over as someone more sensitive to music than are her companions, will go on to sing, hum, and murmur the theme on several occasions. Another development that becomes noticeable is that the theme is at first purely instrumental, then half sung on "la, la, la" and finally fully clothed, so to speak, with lyrics. In other words, it becomes progressively more explicit until finally Rosa conveys it to the whole group, who eventually sing it together in the flower-picking scene before the train ride back to the city. This triple evolution from anonymous to personalized, from individual to collective, and from wordlessness to having words reflects a rigorous design.

So the theme has its own trajectory, and along the way it absorbs, like a sponge, aspects of the scenes it appears in; finally, once it has become saturated with emotions and memories and its text has been fully revealed, it is thrown aside and excluded. It is not heard in the final sequence of the party in Rouen. During this celebration priority is given to melodies that have a more anonymous and interchangeable gaiety. This is why we find here the operetta arrangements that were heard in the first part of the film; but while at the beginning their bouncy rhythm in single or duple time alternated with the more melancholic turns of the "Ma grand-mère" theme in triple meter, in the final party scene the operetta melodies do not mingle—nothing remains but an unrelenting mechanical jumpiness. Indeed, reintroducing the theme song here would necessarily dampen the gay spirits of the party by recalling emotions linked to the past; it would, in effect, link the third part of the film to the second, whereas the final sequence is meant precisely as the determined negation of the past, a negation whose success depends on willfully losing oneself in a dizzying present without roots, memories, or regrets.

Quite clearly, the central theme of "Ma grand-mère" is regret. One could also say, however, that this theme of regret, so adaptable, and tinted in so many different ways as it appears in various contexts (by both pleasure and melancholy, enthusiasm and somber communion, the emotion of nightfall and the joy of being together) is the theme of life itself, certainly the leitmotif with the most general and diffuse emotion. It is not a leitmotif in the traditional sense—that is, a theme assigned to a specific character—for if the theme is Rosa's, this is not because it characterizes her but just the opposite. By taking it up, by breathing her life into it, and spreading this theme around her, Rosa makes it human and gives it meaning, until for us, as for her companions, it ends up saying something and exhibiting that life that, alas, passes too quickly.

Finally, we can say that the musical theme of "Ma grand-mère" embodies music itself in the most everyday sense as the accompaniment to life, its consolation. At the same time, however, since of the four musical elements in "La Maison Tellier" it is the most often heard, the most freighted with emotion, and in general the most worked over, the theme song also represents music at its most utilitarian—obliged to express anything it is asked to, as a sort of fantasy of the universal mother/whore.

This becomes all the clearer in comparison with the entirely different use of the two other musical pieces, which are of a religious nature. Let us first consider the hymn "Nearer, My God, to Thee," which is set against the theme song in the central sequence.

3. The hymn theme, associated with the Holy Communion as a kind of emblem, occurs less frequently but with greater explicitness and emphasis.

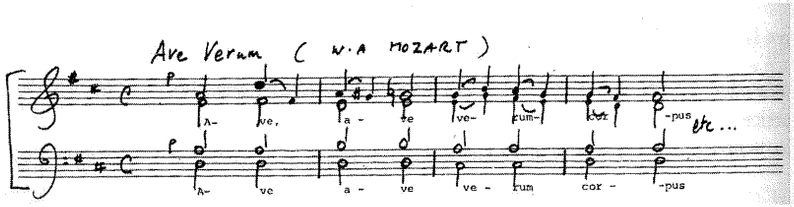
Like "Ma grand-mère," "Nearer, My God, to Thee" appears first as an allusion in the orchestral score, played by the harp as we see the "Closed for First Communion" sign in front of the Tellier house. The lyrics are subsequently heard when it is sung as screen music by the choir of communion participants, interrupting an iteration of "Ma grand-mère" quite unexpectedly. Segueing directly from the last note of the theme song, from which it seems to emerge like a rabbit out of a hat, the hymn pivots on this note and lets fall the heretofore repressed religious sentiment like rain. At this moment the hymn is sung offscreen by the young communion candidates, whom we know are in the church, as the prostitutes' carriage is passing by. But before this cue of the hymn is identified as screen music, there is a magical interval, a moment of floating, *when the voices, heard with a long shot of the countryside, ring in the air like the voices of angels. Moved, Rosa asks to see the children they can hear singing. "Later!" snaps Madame Tellier, as if she's a stand-in for the film director himself. And, in fact, later we do see the children singing the hymn in the first communion sequence. The hymn becomes de-acousmatized but only partially: the children's backs remain turned, a detail that somewhat preserves the angelic quality of their singing. After this moment, with its cycle complete and its mission accomplished, the hymn theme disappears from Ophuls's musical mosaic.*

And what was its mission? Clearly, it was intended to represent religious emotion in opposition to the profane emotions evoked by the theme song, and also via the children's voices, "lost purity." But beyond that, and much more subtly, it serves as a stepping stone toward a piece of music not heard up to then (except in the overall film's opening credit sequence even before the first section), a piece that, unlike all the other music, does not get cut up into fragments/slices, arranged/modeled to fit the circumstances, but that we hear in its entirety (or very close to it) and only once, in association with a single scene.

4. I'm referring to Mozart's "Ave Verum," whose almost complete performance (in a transcription for instruments) falls like a thunderbolt of grace onto the little church, following a series of banal and routine liturgical pieces. Unlike these other selections for the communion, with which we see the singers—frontal, realistic shots of priests crowded together bellowing the "Kyrie"—it's from behind that we see the young communion participants singing, so the effect is more ethereal. Ophuls keeps the phantom orchestra that plays the "Ave Verum" from our sight, and in fact we do not really know if the ecclesiastics and communion participants, or the villagers gathered together for the occasion, or the visiting ladies from the Maison Tellier, actually hear this music. We do, however, see them all react as if they were experiencing its thunderous effect. As though hit by this massive beauty and spirituality, Rosa dissolves in tears, a reaction that spreads to all those in attendance, while over the music, the voice of Jean Servais describes the scene in the words of Maupassant and at the same time, all in one shot, the camera raises its eyes to the ceiling and down again, sweeping over the entire church and in one broad movement linking together all of the faithful as well as linking heaven and earth. In "La Maison Tellier" the "Ave Verum" is the keystone of the dramatic edifice conceived by Ophuls. Just as the musical continuity of the large melodic arc that constitutes this three-minute piece seems to have been cut from a single block by Mozart, the broad aerial trajectory of the camera seeks to weave an equal continuity in space, offering a fragile and trembling web that holds the communion participants and the prostitutes. You could even say that there is an intended subtle affinity between the expansive, excessive, almost quavering vibrato of the strings playing the Mozart and the trembling and halting flight of the camera.

The "Ave Verum" is never referred to again in the film. It is the "foreclosed" event of the scene, beyond language. Moreover, the ending of its cadential arc is prematurely spirited away when the priest begins his sermon. The Mozart piece passes like a heavenly visitation.

Thus the various themes and musical elements are assigned very different roles and are relatively separate from each other; they are by no means placed or treated randomly. Each has not only its own particular significance but also its own degree of plasticity, malleability, or what I will call viscosity. At one extreme there is the theme song, which is the most massaged, the most mobile and polysemic, and also the most circulated in the film-musical tradition of the Wagnerian-style leitmotif. At the opposite end in its plenitude, immobility, uniqueness, and granitic indivisibility stands the "Ave Verum." The theme song



is infinitely adaptable, boundless in its willingness to serve, but at the same time always in solidarity with our human condition. Highly melodic and sentimental (if it were a classical symphony, we might speak of a "feminine theme"), the theme song weaves together past, present, and future, in contrast to the phallic/rustic qualities of the dance potpourri, a rhythmic musical agglomeration that works less on the level of memory and the links between different parts than on the level of animating the present moment with an elementary dynamism, ever forgetful of itself. The hymn theme, as we have seen, is circumscribed within a limited space where it does its work and is used up and does not recur, and at the same time it functions to make us believe for a moment that it is the pivot, the center of religious feeling—before revealing itself as the warm-up act, so to speak, for the unexpected spiritual thunderbolt that occurs subsequently in the form of the "Ave Verum." Such an unforeseen inclusion is a stroke of genius, consisting, after we hear the entire performance of the religious hymn, of a massive shift of the center of gravity toward this new music that has not been prepared for.

Note, however, that this new center of gravity has both a short life span and no direction, no memory (except perhaps of another life)—it takes time and yet is strangely outside of time, like a chunk of eternity that has fallen into human time.

1. I am using quotation marks here since, in fact, the opposite is closer to the truth. Ophuls makes certain choices in script and staging precisely in order to have the opportunity to gain perspective and distance with respect to what is being said.
2. Godard is the other, but in my opinion Godard exposes the problem as a metaphor of love's impasse and hammers that point home, whereas Ophuls uses it as a springboard to go elsewhere.
3. For the complete lyrics see Martin Pénet, *Mémoire de la chanson* (Paris: Omnibus, 2001), 413.

CHAPTER 26

Like Tears in Rain

IN THE BEGINNING / AT THE END . . .

AT THE END of *The American Friend* (Wim Wenders, 1977), Jonathan Zimmer (Bruno Ganz) is dead in his car beside his wife, and each of the other characters—Tom Ripley (Dennis Hopper) in Hamburg, the mobster (Samuel Fuller) in New York—has returned to his solitude. The closing credits roll, accompanied by the insistent, tragic music of Jürgen Knieper. But the music is shunted aside before it has a chance to conclude, and at that point there is a good chance that everyone in the theater audience has already gotten up to go or that the solitary spectator in her or his living room has pressed "Stop" on the VCR or DVD. Should these spectators keep watching, however, they will hear over the last few seconds of the credits an additional unexpected sound: a gentle lapping of waves as upon a lakeshore. It's the last noise, the fundamental sound, and in this film where characters travel so much, it's the sound that says that everyone has arrived at their destination.

In chapter 25 I mentioned in passing *La Signora di tutti*, a little-known film that Max Ophuls made in Italy in 1934. At the beginning the heroine, who has swallowed pills to kill herself, is about to undergo an operation in a

last-ditch effort to save her, and we see a montage of her life as a star, marked by failure and solitude. We hear the smooth, fluid sound of the gas coming into the anesthesia mask. And the reversal of time initiates the story, as though it is arising from this sound that will also give rise to other sounds. It is the *fundamental noise*, which other sounds sometimes try to cover up, and then it gets uncovered again. It is heard once more at the end of the film, the final sound in the character's unhappy life.

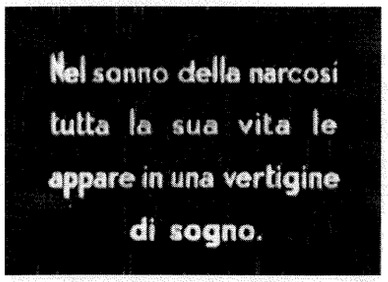
In *The Wages of Fear* there is a terrible scene of suffering and humiliation between Mario (Yves Montand) and the fallen boss, played by Charles Vanel. The setting is an enormous pool of oil formed from a broken pipeline that is noisily gushing the black viscous liquid, engulfing Vanel. The sound of this flowing oil is the film's fundamental noise.

In the final sequence of *Fellini's Roma*, after intoxicating us with words, accents, random utterances, and street music, Fellini concludes with a single loud noise: a faceless motorcycle gang roaring through the capital. As for *City of Women*, it ends (or rather doesn't end) on the sound of a moving train—the fundamental noise of many other films as well.

These fundamental noises are like reminders of the sound of the movie projector, the mechanical place from which the film unwinds to begin and then returns at its end. The fundamental noise—always a *complex sound mass*[1]—is the emergence of the background noise of the film's apparatus; it represents the sound out of which everything emerges and into which everything melts back and is reabsorbed.

COVERING THE NOISE OF THE PROJECTOR

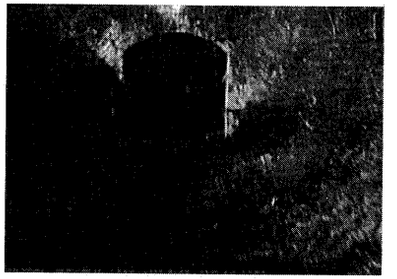
There is a legend about the origin of music in the cinema, for of course it requires an explanation, and there has been no shortage of writing about why music was there from the start.

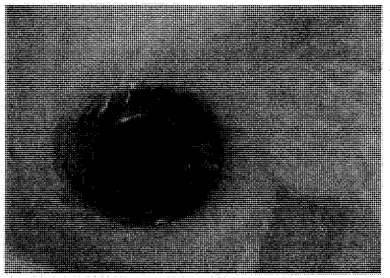


Music was already present on December 28, 1895, the official birthday of the first film screening for a paying audience. A pianist was there in the Grand Café, playing along with the Lumière brothers' images. Who hired this pianist? More important, who invited him back? Why were these keyboard players necessary, these quartets, organs, and even orchestras, or in some cases Limonaires and Orchestrions, playing pieces from the grab bag of the common musical treasury?

According to Kurt London, who is considered the first historian of film music, musical accompaniment arose from "the dire need of something which would drown the noise made by the projector. For in those times there were as yet no absorbent walls between the projection machine and the auditorium. This painful noise disturbed visual enjoyment to no small extent." Thus cinema proprietors used "an agreeable sound to neutralize one less agreeable."[2] Always there is this idea of a mask, a sound over another sound. London could well have been acquainted with the beginnings of film, but does this oblige us to accept his theory? In any case, his singular thesis has prevailed, and many other scholars have adopted it as gospel.

According to this notion there is a primordial noise in the cinema that music is supposed to mask, namely the noise of projection, of the mechanical, indifferent unreeling of images of realities already in the past. This noise, manifestly forced under by the pianist's music and later by the chatter of talkies, constantly threatens to reappear. And it indeed does so now and then, either literally as projection noise (think of the sounds at the beginning of *Persona* or at the end of *The Serpent's Egg*, or the scenes of film-viewing in the editing room in *The Passenger*), or in disguise (the opening machine noise in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*). And we should hear it in the sound of the shower that continues through the murder scene in *Psycho*, that indifferent noise that's no longer interrupted by screams or by streams of blood. The noise of the projector is the horizon of all noise in the cinema, much as the internal noise of the heart and the rest of the bodily machinery is the horizon of our hearing.





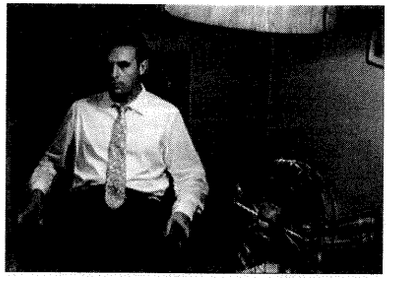
We could also consider film music itself, in its placid routine of serving up its regular beat, as referring to the mechanical noise of the projector. The primeval gallop of music for the silents, this regular, light, neutral time-marking through interchangeable music also serves to cover the noise of projection by reconstituting it in a more human, articulated, metered form. We might also perceive as this kind of routine accompaniment the innocuous and heartbreaking music that permeates many films of Tati, Fellini, and Ozu.

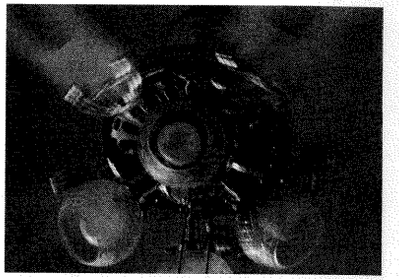
THE FUNDAMENTAL NOISE CAN BE RHYTHMIC OR PERIODIC

Sounds that are both continuous and fluctuating, often associated with a gyratory phenomenon, are also avatars of this fundamental noise, I think. There are windmills in *Once upon a Time in the West* and especially in *Days of Heaven*, where a windmill above the farmer's (Sam Shepard) house makes the sound of beating air. Fans serve as a key noise in a whole series of films where they are associated with tension, heat, and obsession: *The Proud Ones* (Yves Allégret, 1953), *L'Eclisse*, *The Passenger*, *Apocalypse Now*, *When Father Was Away on Business* (Kusturica, 1985). Automatic sprinkler systems pervade a number of films, including those of Antonioni (*L'Eclisse*). Obviously, the sound of trains is another incarnation of the fundamental noise; many are the films that begin with trains in motion (*The Silence*, *City of Women*, *Notre Histoire*, Jarmusch's *Dead Man*).

Rain Man starts out with vague noises of outdoor construction, followed by a regular ticking; it matters little that this ticking is later revealed to be an *ostinato* in a popular song, "Iko Iko"; what's important is how it establishes the obsessive and mathematical side of the autistic protagonist—and reflects the filmic mechanism as well.

The sea, with its ebb and flow of surf, comes in at the end of *La Dolce vita* (and echoes the helicopter noise of the beginning), *The 400 Blows*, *Night Train*, *Tales of Ordinary Madness* (Marco Ferreri, 1981), and at least a hundred other films. Its urban equivalent is the continuous noise of traffic, which in the late films of Robert Bresson (such as *L'Argent* [1982]) tends to be the fundamental noise.





Breathing is another one of the periodic and fundamental sounds from which everything begins or ends, and countless films make use of it. Two films by Richard Brooks end with a death rendered through rhythm, as a return to the noise and the mechanism of the projector: the heartbeat of a condemned man (*In Cold Blood* [1967]), and the clicking of a light (*Looking for Mr. Goodbar* [1977]).

Some films begin with a sound that is periodic and creaking. The credits of *Serpico* (Sidney Lumet, 1973) start with a siren noise to which breathing is added, plus a rhythmic squeaking later identified as that of windshield wipers. The latter also figure prominently in Philip Kaufman's *Rising Sun* (1993), and they mix with the sound of rain in the last scene of Jacques Tati's final fiction film, *Traffic*. Remember that Tati's previous film, *Playtime*, starts with the intimation of rain that never comes.[3]

The sound of rain is of course one of the most salient fundamental sounds in the movies and not only because it has been mixed in, for all eternity, with Gene Kelly's song and dance in *Singin' in the Rain*.[4] Films by Kurosawa (*Rashomon*, *Dreams*), Antonioni (*La Notte*), Satyajit Ray (*Pather Panchali* [1955]), Scott Hicks (*Shine* [1996], where the torrent of notes from David Helfgott's piano playing dialogues with sounds of water), Tsai Ming-Liang (*The Hole* [1999]), and Hideo Nakata (*Dark Water* [2002]) all deploy rain as a fundamental sound.

Let me return to *Blade Runner*, a film about the future in which it rains a lot, especially during the final confrontation between Roy Batty and Rick Deckard. All the sound in this film—speech, music, electronic beeps—subscribes to this idea that the sound of rain can absorb everything and spit up everything, that all sounds can come from or return to it. It is therefore

entirely fitting that one of the most famous lines in the film, invented by Rutger Hauer himself according to Paul Sammon, has the replicant Roy Batty say as he is dying, as though he's dissolving in the raindrops that stream off him, "All those moments will be lost in time, like tears . . . in rain."

Like tears in rain, the multiple and differentiated sounds of a film can be subsumed by a single sound, analogous to the noise of a machine, the "hissing of steam," which Flaubert places at the beginning of his novel *Sentimental Education* when the boat carrying Frédéric Moreau prepares to depart. It's a novel that begins where so many films conclude, with fusion, with a process of *equalization*.

EQUALIZATION

"Sound, image," "the said, the shown": in this book I have often used dichotomies when faced with two elements that tempt the film analyst (or spectator) to place them in competition or opposition; people already engage in such binary thinking with form and content, dialogue and action, character and plot, and so on. It would seem as if the impure art of film—the most composite of all arts, borrowing as it does from painting, music, theater, literature, and architecture, and even borrowing entire pieces, direct quotations, and samples of humans, landscapes, and monuments from reality itself—as if this art has to be perpetually leading us to the question, Who's in charge of all this heterogeneity? For my own part, I continue to write and teach that that is not the main question, that there is no predominance in the cinema. But this question still gets asked at the outset, at least in discussions of emergence.[5]

Words explode; they enter from offscreen; a detail strikes us; a character reappears onscreen; a revelation shakes everything up—the sound film seems to be an art in which one thing springs up and another stands in relief, and visual, verbal, or sound events cut through the temporal continuity; and particularly through the dynamics of camera movement and editing, a film ceaselessly points to new objects and transports us to new centers of attention.

It is understandable that these instances of emergence that are typically cinematic (at a given moment the spectator's consciousness is strongly solicited by dimension *x* of the film—a phrase of dialogue, a framing, a musical theme) get mixed in with questions of hierarchy, power, and "predominance"—especially in an era when in a culture such as ours, *the erasure of the idea of destiny* tends to reduce our lives to discussions of mastery and power.[6] Note that it doesn't take much to achieve the audiovisual effect of emergence: it is almost automatic whenever one films something, since doing so always implies framing it, and then a given element commands our attention inside that frame through its color or form. Of course, this effect is fabricated endlessly in television, where the medium must constantly revive viewers' attention as they threaten to change the channel.

The only useful response to something that negates both art and intelligence—and I mean the senseless and indiscriminate flood of shock sensations through audiovisual media, especially television—would seem to be a hierarchical ordering, an authoritative taking over. Film certainly involves ordering, but not so as to make one element dominate another—a text over the images (or the reverse), one sound over another—but an order that unifies and equalizes, that places us in the world as it is. Film certainly has emergences and ruptures, but it has them in order to then better smooth out these anomalies and roughnesses in a new integrated continuity.

Humanity's life story is strange: we must grow up, and to progress we must learn to recognize and deal with signs, to distinguish what's important from what is not, to produce sounds (human signals, language, music) that do not merely blend into the general rumor of the world, to erect monuments and blaze paths that stick out or carve into the continuum of the world, and to see and hear *x* rather than *y*. In this social existence human beings attribute important functions to places and moments; we detach, build hierarchies, prioritize.

At the same time, human beings have created art and meditation, and yes, prayer, for precisely the opposite purpose, namely to show how we are part of

the world, to disassemble the hierarchies of perception, and fold the exceptional moment back into the grand flow of things.

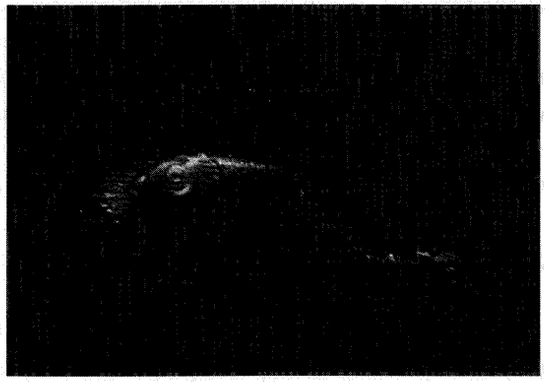
Cinema, like the other arts, plays its role in this process of dehierarchizing the world. A film can be a road toward this "no more and no less," this smoothing-out of sensations and emotions.

Equalization is found at the end of many literary and dramatic works. Melville's gigantic modern epic *Moby Dick*, for example, concludes with the shipwreck, in these words: "and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago." At the end of Richard Wagner's tetralogy *The Ring of the Nibelungen* (four operas, twelve to fourteen hours of performance, the largest theatrical work ever conceived and staged in Western civilization), after all the dramatic events, the frenzied enthusiasms, the building and the collapses (think of Valhalla, the castle of the gods), the Rhine begins to flow again as it flowed at the beginning. But this flowing no longer has the same meaning.

The cinema has its own ways of attaining equalization, sometimes through what may seem the very opposite.

First of all, film has a formidable power in the objective inertia of the camera and the microphone, which record everything they are given without sorting or ranking. In every film, even the most intense and action-filled, this mechanical inertia is palpable, and the real film artists are those who make use of it. At the end of *La Dolce vita*, a manic film brimming with images, hopes, arguments, miracles, and suicides, a group of lost characters end up together by the sea. A gigantic fish has just been caught, and it stares at everyone with its cold eye while we hear the regular breaking of the waves on the shore. This stare (seen also in *Casanova*) is, of course, that of the movie camera.

Cinema has another asset: the rectangular frame of the image, stable from beginning to end, is absolutely indifferent to what takes place within it. The frame preexists the images themselves and erases them as they go by. This



implies neither contempt nor distance. So cinema is sometimes all about the frame, and observing how it remains the same throughout a film, even when the world depicted in the film is shaken by all manner of upheavals, whether minuscule (Tarkovsky) or enormous (Lynch).

The *mise en abyme* of a film within the film, or a play within the film (which is another form of theater), is a device that lends itself to these effects. For example, as we have seen many times, a film can show a stage where a "live" opera or play is occurring, with voices that affirm, eructate, and yell, and where bodies shove, punch, or hug—and at the same time, the découpage and camera movement can be emphasizing inactivity or suspension, drawing attention to the indistinct hum in an auditorium, faces, people whose minds are elsewhere, or simply a given detail of the setting or of a face that is given equal weight. The scene of the performance of "Salammbô" in *Citizen Kane*, during which we hear Susan's reedy little soprano voice recede as the camera rises vertically into the flies of the theater, is an excellent example, which I think it would be wrong to interpret as merely a satirical way of saying that Susan Alexander is a bad singer. Think also of *Senso*, where the opera performance shown at the beginning of the film serves not just to give an extravagant, pompous resonance to the story of love and ruin between the handsome, weak officer and the Countess Serpieri, who are both present in the audience: this performance also invites us to feel the drama filmed in closeup as already "equalized," distanced, muffled, like the acoustical effect of plush theater seats and heavy curtains.

The power of theater within a film, for example when the story takes place in a context of war and/or bombardment (*The Dresser*, Angelopoulos's *Travelling Players*), comes from seeing the human drama relativized by noise, but in turn we witness the sounds of sirens and explosions being relativized by words—in an alternating pattern of ruptures, eruptions, and equalization. The camera has only to remain fixed on the most horrible scene to create this feeling, and to return the image to its inherent flatness, restore to time its continuity of which it was stripped for one moment.

War films are obviously privileged territory for creating these effects: think of the battles in Kurosawa (*Kagemusha* and *Ran*), Malick, and Visconti (*The Leopard* and *Senso*).

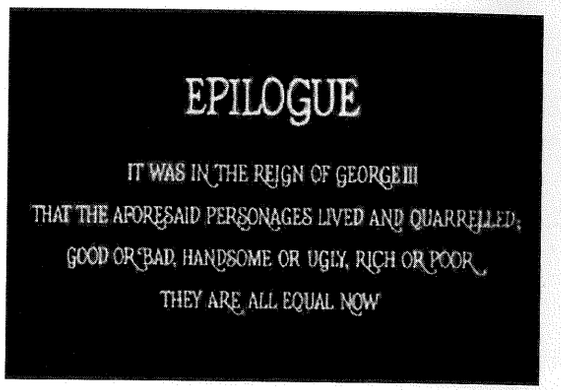
Those who advocate an exclusively severe, sober, reserved, lean, and modest cinema, or the films they claim fit that description (such as the work of Jean Eustache, Fritz Lang, and Raoul Walsh), seem not to understand that films they consider to be lax, flabby, unrestrained, pompous, overblown, pretentious, and melodramatic (by Visconti, Fellini, Branagh, Lynch, Scorsese) are at best aiming for this sort of "equalization."

Every film either tends toward equalization or is overtaken by it. Largely because of the aging and dating of a film's style, images whose contrasts seemed so strikingly new at the time of release sometimes feel more uniform and limited a few decades down the road, for better or worse. In this regard sound has an important role: in the mono sound of the 1940s to the 1960s, the dynamic range is highly compressed, giving us not much difference in actual dynamics between the blare of an orchestra and a lone birdsong. In a classical-era film the sound of a gun firing is not that much louder than the tranquil conversation it might interrupt; a shouting match doesn't make much more noise than people whispering. Sound is averaged or planed down, in contrast to sound in real life.

When these films were released, there was no particular awareness of this relative equalization of the sound spectrum. In the years since the advent of all the developments subsumed under the term *Dolby* (which permits far greater contrast in intensity and can zigzag through sound space created by moving sound sources), we can better feel the beauty of the visual and auditory continuity in classic mono films, where sudden sounds and explosions quickly get reabsorbed. No doubt the cinema will evolve in a way that will make today's films appear as different as older films appear to us now.

Aesthetic dehierarchizing too: in this book I have—at the risk of surprising those who believe in a "higher" cinema of auteurs or some particular aesthetic school—quite deliberately considered all films and all genres in the spirit of a kind of critical equalization process, though of course I don't like them all in the same way. After all, why should we have to establish hierarchies when we seek to describe a given country or area of inquiry?

Of course we don't appreciate all films equally. My disappointment with some, the feeling that they have not allowed this movement of equalization to run its course, owes perhaps to their being already founded on a distance



established already at the outset and a general relativization (a problem I find with the important filmmaker Robert Altman, such as in *Gosford Park*).

Sometimes there are films that from beginning to end manage to sustain an enormous distance between us and the characters and subject matter and great proximity when it comes to the pathos of human destiny. This is the impression given by *Barry Lyndon*, for example, with very few closeups of the hero, a distancing voice-over, and so on. Kubrick chose to conclude this work with an intertitle that does not come from the Thackeray novel. "It was in the reign of George III that the aforesaid personages lived and quarrelled. Good or bad, handsome or ugly, rich or poor, they are all equal now."

"They are all equal now." Art's stubborn undoing of hierarchies of the world is not motivated by disillusionment or pessimism. Art tries to allow us to rediscover the world, to give us back our childhood, when everything was interesting and nothing was divided into categories. This loosening of hierarchies is also art's move toward being master of its fate. Man knows he is mortal, and he dearly wants to be the one who will pull the shroud that will cover him, and make of his ravaged body a peaceful landscape.

1. See *complex mass* in glossary.
2. Kurt London, *Film Music* (New York: Arno Press, 1970), 27–28.
3. Let me note in passing that it is a pleasure to see Shigehiko Hasumi, in his essay on Ozu, also treat weather in the cinema with the importance it deserves. See his *Yasujiro Ozu* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1998).
4. In the history of musicals there are several other "meteorological ballets" where the actual sound of rain is superimposed on music that both imitates and transposes it. Examples include *Folies-Bergères* (1935), by Marcel Achard; the number "Petting in the Park," staged by Busby Berkeley in *Gold Diggers of 1933*; and the "Stormy Weather" number in the film of the same name (1943).

5. Emergence: the process of focusing attention on an element that takes the foreground of perception, letting the rest become background. Emergence occurs all the time: in a relatively colorless visual field, a patch of color will easily emerge. In everyday life, emergence is natural and useful; from the sound continuum, a parent will hear her child. Art delivers us from this hierarchy of perception; this is what I call equalization.

6. In feudal and monarchical regimes the ruling class explains one's lot by chalking it up to "destiny." Contemporary culture sees clear causes and power relations everywhere. Perhaps there is room now, as well, for the notion of destiny, even as we continue to struggle against disease, suffering, and injustice through knowledge and will.

GLOSSARY

EXCEPT WHERE INDICATED, the terms listed here were coined and implemented over the past twenty-five years of work on film sound, beginning with my first publication on the subject, *The Voice in Cinema*.[1] The English translation of *Audio-Vision* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) also contains a short glossary, but many terms appear here for the first time.

acousmatic (coined by Pierre Schaeffer, 1952) Pertaining to the auditory situation in which we hear sounds without seeing their cause or source. This is one of the defining features of media such as the telephone and radio, but it often occurs in films and television, as well as in countless auditory situations in everyday life when a sound reaches us without our seeing its cause (because the latter is out of sight—behind us, behind a wall, obscured in a tree, in the fog, etc.)

The effects of acousmatic perception vary widely, depending on whether or not we have previously seen the source of the sound. If the source has been seen, the acousmatic sound carries along with it a mental visual representation; when the source has not been seen, the sound strikes us more abstractly and in some cases can become an enigma. In most cases, however, in film and elsewhere, the cause of acousmatic sounds is precisely identified.

See *acousmaton, acousmatization, de-acousmatization, offscreen sound, nondiegetic sound, visualized sound.*

acousmatic intrusion Phenomenon that occurs when, through their voice or the sounds they produce, characters suddenly "appear" offscreen as already present without other characters having been aware of them. In *Le Corbeau* the voice of Héléna Manson, who plays a surly nun, says, "Do not speak that way in the house of the Lord," surprising three characters who are arguing in a church.

See *acousmatic, offscreen.*

acousmatization A dramatic technique that consists in transporting the spectator outside or far away from the action (or simply changing camera angle) at some crucial moment in the plot, thereby leaving us with the sound only—now acousmatic sound—to imagine what is happening. In other words, acousmatization is a process whereby we are made to hear without seeing, after having first been allowed to see and hear at the same time.

acousmaton A sound that is imaginary or one whose cause or author is not seen.[2] Issues either from a source that is onscreen but hidden, or from an offscreen source, but which in any case exists in filmic space as an invisible character. Griffin, the "invisible man" in the film by James Whale, is the quintessential acousmaton from

the moment he sheds his visible clothes and speaks in the voice of Claude Rains.

Recent horror films have made extensive use of acousmatons placed in *real offscreen space* (i.e., coming from loudspeakers in the surround system that are away from the screen) and heard traveling through the space of the movie theater.

Whenever film characters listen to a sound recording such as from a tape recorder, acousmatons are created, bringing into existence, in the air onscreen, acousmatic beings and auditory presences extracted from their place of origin.

Certain symbolic sounds, invisible traces of the presence or activity of a being, mark some films, such as the invisible ax in *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*.

See *acousmatic, acousmatization, de-acousmatization, sensory phantom.*

acousmêtre An invisible character created for the audio-viewer by means of an acousmatic voice heard either offscreen, or onscreen but hidden (behind a curtain or other obstacle). The voice must occur frequently and coherently enough to constitute a true character, even if it is only ever known acousmatically and so long as the bearer of this voice is theoretically capable of appearing onscreen at any moment. In film the acousmêtre is distinct from the voice-over that is clearly external to the image: an acousmatic character is defined by the edge of the frame, a space where it could appear at any moment, but whose position outside that frame seems to confer on it certain powers over what is inside the frame (e.g., Norman's mother in *Psycho*, Mabuse in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*). The cinematic imaginary regularly bestows on the acousmêtre the powers of ubiquity (being everywhere), panopticism (seeing all), omniscience (knowing all), and omnipotence (being all-powerful).

Interesting and disturbing cases: when the acousmêtre possesses only partial vision, or is not omniscient, or has only limited powers, such as in *The Saga of Anatahan* or *Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man* (Bertolucci, 1980).

See *acousmatic, acousmaton, de-acousmatization.*

active offscreen sound see *offscreen sound: active.*

added value A sensory, informational, semantic, narrative, structural, or expressive value that a sound heard in a scene leads us to project onto the image, so as to create the impression that we *see* in the image what in reality we are *audio-viewing*. Added value is a common phenomenon; its effect tends to go unnoticed.

Added value can go both ways: the image in turn influences our perception of the sound. But because of the spectator's conscious focus on the screen and the visible, it is definitely *on the image* (in movies and television) that the results of these reverse influences are most often reprojected.

In the cultural situation of *visio-audition*, however—for example, at a concert during which our conscious attention is traditionally concentrated on listening—

added value operates principally in the other direction. For example, the sight of some energetic gesture by a violinist will make us hear a more powerful sound.

See *audio-vision, visio-audition.*

ambient sound (or **territory sound**) Sound that envelops a scene, inhabits the space without raising the question of the location of its specific source(s) in the image. Examples include chirping of birds, collective buzz of insects, church bells, and general city noise. It is sometimes called *territory sound* because it serves to delineate a particular locale by being continuously present.

In contrast to ambient sound, *elements of auditory setting* can also include intermittent or isolated sounds to signify a particular place or setting.

See *elements of auditory setting* (EAS), *extension, passive offscreen sound.*

anacousmêtre The body-voice "complex" formed by a character whom we see and hear in a film, particularly when the body-voice whole is reconstituted by de-acousmatization. This has nothing to do with whether the voice we hear is truly that of the actor we see or is dubbed. The double negative built into this term and its air of complexity (though it identifies something quite ordinary) are intended to foreground the unstable, contradictory, and nonfusional character of the body-voice entity.

See *acousmêtre, audio-division, de-acousmatization, sensory phantom.*

anempathy or **anempathetic effect** The effect of a diegetic music cue's (or sound's) ostensible indifference to the pathetic or tragic quality of the scene in which it occurs. Examples include player pianos, insouciant waltzes, light music, music played on a record player or tape recorder, street singing, the rhythmic noise of an electric fan or a mill, or the regular rhythm of waves—heard during a scene of murder, rape, torture, or other grave and terrible action. What all anempathic music and sounds have in common is that they're present before the dramatic event occurs, and they continue during and afterward without being affected by it, *as if nothing has happened.*

See *empathetic* (music).

audio-division The audio(-logo)-visual relation considered not as a neatly contained complementarity or as the reconstitution of an imaginary natural totality but rather as a generative concomitance that yields audio-visiogenic effects—of association, added value, rendering, audiovisual phrasing, and scenography, as well as new gaps and lacks, *c/omission*, and various divisions within the image and between sounds. The allusion to audio-vision playfully cautions that the audio-visual relationship is not the creation of a seamless whole; rather, the image is *divided* by sounds, since some of the image's elements are reinforced by sounds, others not, and because the image divides sounds (into onscreen and offscreen, and so on).

In other words, the sound, even realistic sound, does not fully complete or answer the question posed by the image; rather, sound divides the image and vice versa. An example would be a case where the sound we hear makes us all the more sensitive to the sounds the image suggests but that we don't hear. Moreover, the image divides the ensemble of sounds we hear into several zones, thereby preventing the constitution of a soundtrack as a unified ensemble.

See *audio-vision*, *soundtrack (there is none)*, *concomitance*.

audio-logo-visual A term I propose as a replacement for "audiovisual," since it more accurately describes all the cases that include written and/or spoken language. For language transcends the strict spheres of the visual and auditory. *Audio-logo-visual* usefully reminds us that the situation is most often triangular and not binary. The music video, for example, typically combines not merely images and music, but images, music, and words.

audio-logo-visual synchrono-cinematograph The descriptive formula I propose to name the newly appeared cinema of the late 1920s that generally goes by the name of sound film. In this form, recorded sound and the moving image (cinema), as well as language for which they often serve as vehicles (logo), are inscribed in mediums (graph) synchronized with each other (synchronic) at a stable temporal rate (chronograph).

audio-viewer A term more accurate than *viewer* or *spectator* to emphasize that the experience of films, television, or other audiovisual texts involves sight and hearing in interaction.

audio-visiogenic effects Effects created by associations of sounds and images, and often by virtue of *added value*, projected onto the image, taken to be a power of the image. Audio-visiogenic effects can be classified as follows:

- Effects of *meaning*, atmosphere, and content.
- Effects of *rendering* and of materiality (*materializing sound indices*) that create impressions of energy, textures, speed, volume, temperature, and so on.
- Effects of *scenography* that concern the construction of imaginary filmic space (particularly via the play of *extension* and *suspension*, and of onscreen, offscreen, and nondiegetic zones).
- Effects concerning *temporality* and the construction of temporal phrasing: manipulating the temporalization of the image by sound, creating temporal *vectorization*, noticeable *points of synchronization* that alternate with looser sequences, and so on.

See *added value*, *audiovisual phrasing*, *extension*, *materializing sound indices*, *point of synchronization*, *rendering*, *suspension*, *temporalization*, *temporal vectorization*.

audio-vision The type of perception proper to the experience of film and television, but often in real life as well, wherein the image is the conscious focus of attention but to which the sound supplies at every moment a series of effects, sensations, and meanings that often, by means of a projective phenomenon I call *added value*, are credited to the image and seem to emanate naturally from it.

If the projection of the heard onto the seen is, in the case of film and TV, more striking and systematic than our real projection of the seen onto the heard in everyday life, it is because of the visual presence, reinforced by the term "scene," of a visible frame for the visible that is the screen; the frame preexists the appearance of the image and survives its extinction. On the other hand, the loudspeaker, even where visible, is no more the auditory frame of the audible than the projector lens is the frame of the image. This lack of a sound frame for sounds is all the more striking in the usual case of several loudspeakers, which emit sounds that fuse together in spectators' perception.

See *auditory frame of sounds (there is none)*, *added value*, *visio-audition*.

audiovisual concomitance see *concomitance*.

audiovisual dissonance see *dissonance, audiovisual*.

audiovisual phrasing Everything in a film sequence that concerns the organization of time and rhythm, including breathing, the timing of salient elements, punctuation, rests, temporal crystallizations,[3] temporal vectorization, tension and relaxation. Audiovisual phrasing is determined by:

1. Temporalization, linearization, and vectorization of the image by sound;
2. The distribution of any *points of synchronization* that may occur, the rhythm of linkings or breaks between sound and image, which can be alternately synched and unsynched, parallel or divergent;
3. The construction of temporal vectorization and the play of expectation.

Audiovisual phrasing combines with audiovisual scenography (the construction of space) to build a meaningful space-time for the film.

See *temporal vectorization*, *linearization*, *point of synchronization*, *audiovisual scenography*, *temporalization*.

audiovisual scenography Everything in the conjunction of sounds and images that concerns the constructing of a fantasmatic diegetic "scenic space" through the interplay of onscreen, offscreen, and nondiegetic—particularly through the use of entrances to and exits from the auditory field (a character or vehicle entering the frame, heralded by a sound), through the contrast or sameness between sound extension and visual framing, and through the comparison between the magnitude of characters in the visual field and, for the ear, the proximity or distance of their voices and other sounds they produce.

On this last point, audio perspective rarely matches visual perspective, or it does so only in a very approximate way.

Two examples of audiovisual scenography in well-known films:

In *Blade Runner* the setting and characters are most often shown in close shots, while their environment is acoustically suggested by sounds with a broad extension. We get a kind of complementarity and compensation between the visual closeups and the audio long shots.

In Fellini's *Satyricon*, however, several scenes (for example the one of the Vernacchio theater) combine a visual scenography based on emptiness and the decentering of characters in the frame (they are often shown in long shot or in the lower part of a vast CinemaScope composition) with an audio scenography in which the voices of these same characters are close up, invasive, and intimate, speaking right into our ears; they're not at all at the same distance from us as the bodies emitting these sounds.

See *ambient sound*, *extension*, *onscreen*, *offscreen*, *nondiegetic*.

auditory compartmentalization Occurs when we cannot hear what some characters are hearing or when they don't hear all we are hearing. Auditory compartmentalization also names the situation in which characters among themselves don't all hear the same thing, and we in the audience may or may not be privy to hearing one of them.

Auditory compartmentalization can make use of diegetic elements such as headphones and earbuds or a windowpane as a transparent obstacle to sound. But it can also obey symbolic codes; in a good many cases, the characters are not supposed to be hearing pit music, voice-overs, or internal voices of other characters—and the breaking of these conventions yields gags when characters reveal that they are hearing something contrary to our assumptions.

Under the Roofs of Paris, *La Notte*, and *Playtime* make frequent use of the windowpane as a sound obstacle that creates auditory compartmentalization.

See *porosity*, *system of audition*.

auditory frame of sounds (there is none) In film there is no auditory frame of sounds; in other words, there is no equivalent of a container that holds the sounds together within bounded spatial limits and structures them via their very place in that frame. Such a frame does exist for the images of course—a visible, visual frame. Sounds can only be framed by the image itself, which helps assign them a location (via the effect of *spatial magnetization*), anchors them, and may attach them to a given object in the visual space, or else the image refuses to incorporate them and instead determines their existence on another invisible stage or in a contiguous offscreen space. Moreover, unlike the image that's enclosed in a frame, the sounds of a film can pile on top of one another, with no limit on quantity or complexity of this accumulation, and these sounds are exempt from any laws of realism. Film

music, voice-overs, dialogue, realist ambience, and other sounds can all be superimposed in a single film.

See *spatial magnetization*, *soundtrack (there is none)*.

avoided reverse shot Occurs when two characters speak facing each other or next to each other, but even while we hear the second interlocutor we only see one of the two speakers during much or all of the scene. Examples include the dialogue between the nurse and doctor at the beginning of *Persona* and certain scenes in *Ten*. Films using a subjective camera (the first part of *Dark Passage*, *Lady in the Lake*, Michel Deville's *Le Dossier 51*, *La Femme défendue*) most often rely on the technique of the avoided reverse shot in a systematic way.

braiding There is *braiding* among sound elements, or of one sound element of any type (verbal, musical, etc.) with all or part of an image, when there is a response or transfer between the two—the impression that the one is being continued or relayed (even via denial) by the other. This occurs especially in certain forms of the relationship between the said and the shown: scansion, contrast, and even contradiction.

Classic verbocentric sound film often makes use of braiding between dialogue and stage movements. So-called modern cinema of directors such as Eric Rohmer and Jean Eustache, however, seems to avoid it. Each film is a different case.

Eyes Wide Shut, for example, entirely avoids braiding between what the characters talk about and what we see; this film never gives any visual or material indication of what is said, nor does it give any disconfirming evidence (and thus exemplifies what I call *unbraided* film).

See *contrast*, *contradiction*, *scansion*.

camera speech Words spoken by a character who faces the camera and addresses "us," either with or without the mediation of a diegetic addressee or the presence of a camera in the world of the story.

See *screen speech*.

causal listening (Pierre Schaeffer, 1967) Listening for the clues in sounds that point to the sound's cause; the listening activity in which the auditor asks what object, phenomenon, or creature is making the noise, where it is located, or how it's behaving and moving. Causal listening is frequently subject to errors in interpretation, since it is strongly influenced by context and because the sound is generally vague or uncertain, not in itself but with respect to the cause that it encourages us to guess at (see *narrative blurring*).

Schaeffer makes no distinction between what he calls causal listening and what I would call *figurative listening*: a type of listening that seems identical to the former but focuses less on what *causes* a sound and more on what it *represents*. Thus when listening to a noise of footsteps or waves that we know was made with

a synthesizer, we can recognize the form or schema of the noise of footsteps or waves without necessarily being tricked as to the sound's real origin.

See *narrative indeterminacy, reduced listening, semantic listening.*

chronographic art We can term chronographic the arts such as sound film, some video,[4] and *musique concrète*, which all work with time at a constant speed and can use that constant rate as an expressive dimension. Of course small variations are possible: first, film projections can allow small rates of distortion (changes in speed—which are more noticeable in the sound than in the image—with older projectors and editing tables), and second, projection speeds have long been slightly altered for TV broadcast (up from twenty-four to twenty-five frames per second in France), which speeds up movement, raises voices, and shortens the film.

Silent films were shot and projected at speeds that were not constant or standardized, so in this sense the silent era was cinematographic (since it fixed and restituted movement), but it was not chronographic.

See *fixing (of sounds).*

co-audition Listening shared (whether consciously or not) by two characters or between a character and the spectator vis-à-vis another character.

A man and a woman who have not yet met both hear the same sound—a policeman's whistle—when they are still some distance from each other, and for the spectator this creates a mysterious link between the two, as though they were each looking up at the same star (*Playtime*).

There can also be shared acousmatization, when a character hears noises without seeing the source and we do too: in the hotel room in the Coen brothers' 1991 film, *Barton Fink*, or with Fontaine in his cell in *A Man Escaped*. This situation creates complicity and identification through co-audition between the character and the spectator insofar as they ask the same question: what's that sound?

Alternatively, hearing may be compartmentalized to an extreme. Often in Godard, two characters in the same setting don't hear the same things.

See *acousmatization, auditory compartmentalization, system of audition.*

c/omission One of the five relationships between the said and the shown, the case where dialogue (or a voice-over) is conspicuously silent about an event or a significant concrete detail in the environment of the characters. The term suggests both the "sin" of omission and its opposite because of the deafening silence.

See *contrast, contradiction, counterpoint, scansion.*

compartmentalization, auditory see *auditory compartmentalization.*

complex mass (Pierre Schaeffer, 1967) A sound is said to have complex mass when it does not enable us to hear a precise and recognizable pitch in it. Sounds with complex mass can be high or low, but we can't identify precise intervals among them or between them and a given tone. The *fundamental noise* always has complex mass.

See *fundamental noise, tonic mass.*

concomitance, audiovisual A situation of simultaneous perception of sounds and images, which may or may not intentionally give rise to effects. This term, which literally designates the simultaneous occurrence of two facts or phenomena, seems to me to be the most *neutral* designation for what is frequently called the "audiovisual relationship," a phrase that necessarily implies a conscious *intention* of meaning, perception, contrast, or encounter. Such an intention could be present in an audiovisual concomitance but is not necessary for effects to be produced all the same.

See *synchresis, vertical relationships.*

consistency Descriptive term to designate "the degree of interaction of different audio elements (voices, music, noise). They may combine to form a general texture or, on the contrary, each may be heard separately, legibly" (Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 189). For technical reasons—the presence of considerable background noise, mono recording, the use of the same equipment for recording all categories of sounds—there is a highly consistent general texture in many of the first sound films. This is also true in later classic cinema, but for aesthetic reasons (the preference for continuity and fusion). Since the 1970s and Dolby, film has sought rather to detach sounds from one another, both technically and aesthetically, though there are some notable exceptions, such as *Blade Runner*, with its very "fused" sound.

contradiction (between the said and the shown) The name of one of the five relationships between the said and the shown wherein what the voice-over narrator *says* is belied by what we *see*, which supposedly shows things as they really happened (e.g., Robbe-Grillet's *L'Homme qui ment*, 1968). This contradiction of the said by the shown often makes for comedy: a character talks tough, while the image called forth by the iconogenic voice shows him as a coward or a fool.

See *contrast, counterpoint, c/omission, scansion.*

contrast (between the said and the shown) One of the five relationships between the said and the shown; it occurs when what the characters say contrasts with what they do or are going to do, without necessarily being the opposite. For example, a man and woman speak of trivial matters while kissing languorously (*Rear Window*).

See *contradiction, counterpoint, c/omission, scansion.*

counterpoint (between the said and the shown) One of the five relationships between the said and the shown, wherein what the characters say and do, or what they say and what goes on around them, proceed in parallel, the actions not punctuating the utterances, and without any particular contrast or contradiction.

See *contradiction, contrast, c/omission, scansion.*

de-acousmatization Term (with a deliberate double negation) to designate the process whereby an acousmêtre visually materializes into the frame to become an anacousmêtre; i.e., a discrete body in visual space. This transformation is usually

accompanied by a loss of powers—of panoptic sight, omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence that were formerly attributed to the acousmêtre—unless, as in the case of *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, the de-acousmatization process reveals, behind the curtain that hid the source of the voice, a technical apparatus that indefinitely defers the reconstitution of the anacousmêtre.

In coining a negative formulation of what may seem like the positive process of revelation and completion, I mean to remind the reader that something is lost (the powers linked to the privileged acousmatic status) but also that what is constituted is not a full entity but a split being, *audio-divided* between voice and body, sound and image—thus revealing itself as something that can never be wholly complete or sewn up again.

See *acousmaton, acousmatization, acousmatic, acousmêtre, anacousmêtre, audio-division, offscreen.*

Debureau effect A character has been silent or mute in a film; his or her voice has not yet been heard; when the character does speak, the revelation of his or her voice produces an effect of surprise, disappointment, contrast. The name I have given to this effect alludes to the true story of the famous mime retold in *Children of Paradise*. The Debureau effect is used for comic purposes in *Singin' in the Rain*, when the silent star Lina Lamont's unglamorous voice is heard.

decentered narration Describes the situation where what a voice-over narrates does not exactly account for what we see, and even offers a different version of things, at variance with what's unfolding on the screen. Sometimes, as in *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven*, this narration is in the hands of a secondary character (an acquaintance or companion of the protagonists) who does not grasp the seriousness of what is happening; sometimes it can result from the narrator's total exteriority as a heterodiegetic storyteller, not a character in the story at all, who does not see what is happening onscreen and instead follows a path independent from the film's action; think of the montage with Joseph Cotten wearing different outfits at the beginning of *The Magnificent Ambersons*.

See *iconogenic voice, nondiegetic (voice-over).*

découpage Scene-construction, the ordering and sequencing of shots for a scene or sequence. The term emphasizes the conceptual planning of a scene's shooting and editing, while its counterpart, *montage*, in French stresses the postproduction process of editing.—Trans.

diegetic sound Sound whose apparent source is in the space-time continuum of the scene onscreen. Diegetic sound is sound that the film leads us to believe the characters can (or could) hear. Screen music is diegetic music.—Trans.

See *nondiegetic sound, pit music, screen music.*

discordance The effect caused by brief or prolonged superimposition of pit music and screen music when they're not in the same key and clash with each other. An example occurs in *The French Connection* when Jimmy Doyle (Gene Hackman) and Buddy Russo (Roy Scheider) are waiting outside in the street while the dealers they're tailing are having lunch in a fashionable restaurant. The crosscutting between the cops outside and the bad guys inside is accompanied by a strident nondiegetic cue, but the portions of the sequence inside the restaurant also have diegetic piano lounge music that clashes discordantly with Don Ellis's scoring. Similar effects occur in Godard's *Every Man for Himself* and Minghella's *The English Patient*.

A subtle variant: someone delicately plays diegetic piano music that is slightly off when heard with the nondiegetic scoring. Two examples are Harrison Ford's piano playing in *Blade Runner* and Adam Sandler's trying out a tune on a harmonium in *Punch-Drunk Love*.

The extravagant, pitiful picnic thrown by Kane and Susan toward the end of *Citizen Kane* is different because the blues performed by the hired band is deliberately discordant and rhythmically loose, and the singer who repeats "It can't be love" is a bit out of synch with the players; what results is a kind of parodic musical chaos that echoes Susan's decidedly weak opera performances elsewhere in the film.

dissonance, audiovisual Effect of diegetic contradiction between a distinct sound and a distinct image or between a realist sound ambience and the framework in which one hears it. For example, in *First Name: Carmen* (1984) Godard pairs the cries of seagulls and ocean surf with a night shot of the Austerlitz bridge in Paris. Patrick Schulmann's comedy fantasy *Rendez-moi ma peau* (1980) swaps the voices of the hero and heroine. Think also of the dissonant pairing of a loud, rough voice with a delicate, small body in several cartoons by Tex Avery, including *The Cat That Hated People*, in which a kitten roars vehemently. When the contradiction hinges on size, what results is not so much dissonance as monstrosity.

Dissonance strikes me as a more apt term than the common—and problematic—*counterpoint*, which in music refers to the superimposition of melodic lines. Note that the effect of audiovisual dissonance is almost always limited to situations that are highly coded rhetorically: gender opposition, contrast between voice and body, and rural versus urban in the Godard example. Other oppositions include nature/culture in *Padre Padrone* and historical past vs. science fiction future with "The Blue Danube" waltz in *2001*. Dissonance can be difficult to achieve because of the spectator's easy acceptance of many sounds as realistic when they're associated with images and also because of the power of the psychophysiological process of *synchresis* that effortlessly fuses together what she or he hears and sees.

effect See *audio-visiogenic effects; added value, anempathetic effect, Debureau effect, empathetic effect, "keep singing" effect, masking effect, on-the-air sound,* Shining *effect, visiting-room effect, X-27 effect.*

elements of auditory setting (EAS) In audiovisual scenography this term refers, in opposition to *ambient sounds* that are continuous and prolonged, to sounds that are momentary, isolated, and intermittent and that help to construct and populate a given space with distinct and localized touches: the distant bark of a dog, the ring of an office telephone. In keeping with the principle of overdetermination found at all levels of film language, an EAS, at the same time it identifies a place, can also provide an effect of extension if it is far off (a spatial audio-visiogenic effect), contribute to a scene's *scansion*, give emphasis to a line of dialogue, interact with a character's glance (audio-visiogenic effects of phrasing), and so on.

EASs and ambient sounds contribute to differentiating settings of scenes, in conjunction (or not) with visual and rhythmic details.

See *ambient sound*, *extension*, *audiovisual phrasing*, *scansion*.

emanation speech The type of dialogue that exists as a sort of secretion of the characters, an aspect of their way of being, an element of their profile. It does not contribute to advance the film's story, nor does it govern découpage (the ordering of shots), having little to do with the scene's divisions and strong moments; the order of shots proceeds according to a logic that is independent of emanation speech.

Emanation speech is often only partially intelligible, but it can appear in other forms as well. In the work of Fellini or Tarkovsky the words are comprehensible, yet they are not reinforced by the découpage (shot scale, framing, order) or by details of acting. The result is a style that can be called *verbo-decentric* and *voco-decentric*.

Emanation speech makes spoken words into just one expression among others in the sensory world, via choices in the découpage that decenter attention from the dialogue instead of reinforcing it (Tarkovsky, Fellini) or by using various distancing techniques for the dialogue text, such as degrees of unintelligibility or polyglot mixtures of language (Tati, Iosseliani, Ophuls, and sometimes Visconti). In no way, however, contrary to what is often written, does this mean that the words spoken are mere noise or that they have no significance.

See *textual speech*, *theatrical speech*, *verbo-decentric*.

embedded listening Refers to those situations where a character in a film listens to a sound recording (with or without images) on a tape recorder, editing console, or other playback medium—thus foregrounding the spectator's own experience in the movie theater. This act of embedded listening reactivates a time and space that is other than the space-time inhabited by the character/s, and as such can prompt a flashback that's not a flashback, a sort of reactualization accompanied (or not) by images and visualization. Examples include scenes from *La Dolce vita*, *La Notte*, *The Conversation*, *The Double Life of Véronique*, and Jacques Doillon's *La Puritaine* (1986).

empathetic effect The effect created by music that is or seems to be in harmony with the emotional climate of a scene: dramatic, tragic, melancholic, etc. The opposite of the *anempathetic effect*.

The empathetic effect might not arise from the music considered on its own but may arise entirely from the particular relation created between the music and the rest of the scene.

See *anempathetic effect*.

extension Audio-visiogenic effect concerning the degree to which a scene's diegetic space is relatively confined or stretches out into depth and width; this construction of scenic space is aided by ambient sounds and elements of auditory setting (EAS) in conjunction with the visual field. The degree of extension aids in constituting the audiovisual frame that serves as the scene's geographic, human, and natural space. Consider, for example, the case where the setting of a scene is limited to an interior space from which the camera rarely or never strays (*Rear Window*, *A Man Escaped*, *Panic Room*). In these films the extension will be *restricted* when the sounds heard are limited to those produced within the enclosed space; it will be *broader* if we hear offscreen sounds from a neighbor's landing or apartment; and broader still if street noises are present; and even broader if we hear distant noise, such as a harbor foghorn or train whistle. These decisions are up to the director, sound editor, and sound mixer and are generally made according to the expressive requirements of the scene. Whatever choices are made are sure to be accepted as "natural" by the spectator, but they will contribute to shaping what she or he sees from moment to moment within a reality whose dimensions have greater or lesser reach, and they will help coordinate one moment in the action with another according to the formal, dramatic, emotional, and narrative objectives.

See *offscreen*.

external logic See *logic*.

fixing of sounds More commonly called *recording*, fixing of sounds is the term I prefer to apply to all processes that serve to capture existing sounds (a concert performance, everyday events, historical events) but also, during shooting, to produce sounds specifically intended to be inscribed on the material recording medium. The fixing of sounds not only revolutionized music; it also revolutionized cinema from the moment a system of synchronization between the motion picture camera and the phonographic recording was introduced. This synchronization necessitated the standardization of the filming and projection rate and thus made cinema a chronographic art. Starting in 1927 this gave rise to what I like to call an *audio-logo-visual synchrono-cinematograph*, a new genre more commonly known by the name *sound film*.

See *chronographic art*.

Foleyed cinema Movies whose pleasure derives from the fact that their sound effects aren't disguised and recall the play of children who make sound effects with their mouths to go with toy planes, trucks, or cars. A prime example is the *Star Wars* series, with its noises of weapons and spacecraft. Another is all the noises that accompany camera movements and zooms in many action films.

fundamental noise The continuous and undifferentiated sound into which symbolically all the other sounds of the film can fall or dissolve; the sound into which everything in a given film tends to be reabsorbed and pacified; either by covering over all other sounds at a given moment or by revealing itself as the background noise we hear when all the other noises fall silent or return to it. A film's fundamental noise (which always has "complex mass" to use Schaeffer's term, i.e., no precise pitch) is often both a metaphor for the noise of the movie projector and a metaphor for the background noise of life. It is a metaphor of *equalization*, in that it creates the feeling that all the film's sensations and feelings will become lost in it, "like tears in rain" (see chap. 26).

See *complex mass*.

horizontal relations Those aspects of the audiovisual relationship that are horizontal—as opposed to vertical—are those that involve the perception of sounds and images in evolution and movement in time, based on the notion that each element be considered in its temporal development, particularly with regard to any *temporal vectorization* to which it might give rise.

See *temporal vectorization*, *temporalization*, *vertical relations*.

iconogenic voice A voice that seems to conjure up the images that then "illustrate" (with greater or lesser fidelity—even contradicting) the words spoken. This effect is not limited to voice-overs; it can be bestowed on a character on the screen when he or she names a place, a person, etc. and the film moves immediately to another time or place to show what has been named.

iconogenic voice, contradicted The "illustration" conjured up by the iconogenic voice can show something that contradicts what was said, and the effect is often comic (as in *Singin' in the Rain*). But not always: in *Hiroshima mon amour* the Japanese lover repeats, "You saw nothing at Hiroshima," yet these affirmations are paired with images of the horror at Hiroshima.

See *noniconogenic*.

in-the-wings effect This effect is created in Dolby multitrack by a sound in "absolute offscreen" space, which is positioned in the real physical space of the movie theater to the left or right side of the screen and goes on long enough to create the impression that the screen has a contiguous space, like the wings of a theater stage. This effect, which was very noticeable in some of the early Dolby stereo films, particularly in France (*Choice of Arms*), would be reined in much more carefully soon afterward. Exhibitors learned to avoid installing the theater speakers too far from the screen, and in the sound mixing, greater care was taken to avoid having an overly long sound effect in the audio setting or entering sounds (such as the sound of a car heard before it appears onscreen). Interestingly, the in-the-wings effect made an overt and systematic return in the 1990s in films such as *Mother and Son* and in a number of different genres, notably horror.

See *acousmaton*, *offscreen sound*.

internal logic See *logic*.

internal sound Sounds heard or imagined by a single character and that we assume cannot be heard by any other characters who may be present.

We can distinguish two types: *objective* internal sounds (a character's own breathing or heartbeat) and *subjective* internal sounds (mental voices, aural memories, and imaginary conversations, as in *Psycho*).

It is characteristic of objective internal sounds that we have no precise indication whether they are in fact being heard by other characters as well. In *The Elephant Man*, for example, does Dr. Treves hear as loudly as we the nervous breathing of the Elephant Man under his hooded mask? This example of the *uncertain extent of the auditory field* that leads to problems of distinguishing internal from external, real world from subjective world, is one of cinema's defining features.

See *auditory compartmentalization*.

iterative sounds (Pierre Schaeffer, 1967) Sound characterized by the rapid repetition of brief, distinct sounds ("impulses") that form a sort of dotted line of sound.

I-voice A type of vocal presence in a film or video—generally but not necessarily a voice-over narrator—when he or she speaks with maximum proximity to the spectator's ear (this impression created by certain audio properties: close miking, absence of reverb in the voice). Indeed, a voice prolonged by reverb is likely to be "perceived as a body anchored in space," whereas the I-voice that resonates to the spectator like his or her own voice "must be its own space unto itself" (Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, 51). The I-voice generally lacks materializing sound indices (breathing noises, mouth sounds) that would suggest a material body to generate it.

"keep singing" effect When a piece of diegetic music—often a song—seems to have the power to momentarily hold evil or chaos at bay, as a kind of spell or charm. Examples include the song sung by Lillian Gish in *The Night of the Hunter*, the children's singing in school in *The Birds*, Lalo Schifrin's piercing music before the chase in *Bullitt*, and the bull scene in Ken Russell's *Women in Love*. The name for this effect comes from a line in *Women in Love*.

logic (external/internal) ***External logic*** of an audiovisual sequence is that which foregrounds effects of discontinuity and rupture, as external interventions with respect to the represented content. Editing, in cutting the flow of an image or sound, and other kinds of breaks, abrupt changes in speed, etc., are frequent in

films organized according to external logic, and these features are attributable to choices in mise-en-scène and decisions regarding narration.

Internal logic of audiovisual sequencing is a way of crafting the sequence of images and sounds to appear as though they partake in a continuous organic process of development, variation, and growth, which arises naturally out of the narrative situation and the sounds it inspires.

Countless film sequences alternate between these two logics, for reasons of rhythm and phrasing among other motives, since this alternation gives to editing the same variety and expressive suppleness as music, with its ability to pass between *legato* (linked) and *staccato* (detached).

masking The masking effect occurs when one sound disrupts our hearing of another, or when the impression is created that were the sound not there, we would hear another one suggested by the image but not heard. The masking effect allows for the creation of *phantom* sounds and *sensory phantoms*, and also enables certain sounds to function as fundamental noise. Every sound has the potential of masking another.

See *fundamental noise, phantom sound, sensory phantom.*

materializing sound indices (MSI) Aspects of a sound that make palpable the materiality of its source and of the concrete conditions of its emission. The MSI can suggest the sound source's solidity, airiness, liquidness, or another material consistency, as well as accidents or flaws in the process of the sound's production. A sound can have a greater or lesser presence of MSIs, to the point of none at all.

See *rendering.*

narrative indeterminacy (of acousmatic sound) Most of the time, a sound on its own gives only weak or imprecise information, or none at all, as to its cause. This fact enables a sound that is not visually identified to create acousmatic enigmas and audio puzzles. Moreover, very different events or causes can create similar or even identical sounds. Narrative indeterminacy is therefore not solely attributable to our limited ability to decipher sounds (an ability that varies with education and experience) but also to the conditions in which the sounds were produced; i.e., by specific events, which themselves affect the objects that "cause" them, and not by the objects themselves; sounds do not depict the objects that produce them. In a forest the creaking of tree trunks as they move in the wind or rub against other trees can sound surprisingly similar to the creaking of a hammock; and the sound of one can very well be used to dub the other.

See *acousmatic, causal listening.*

nondiegetic sound In the audiovisual relation, sound whose apparent source is not the space-time of the scene depicted onscreen. The most frequently encountered examples of nondiegetic sounds are voice-over narrators or commentators and musical accompaniment. Nondiegetic music is here called *pit music.* Nondiegetic sounds are acousmatic.—Trans.

See *diegetic sound, pit music, screen music.*

nondiscontinuity A neologism with a deliberate double negative (as in *de-acousmatization*) that designates the establishment of an impression of continuity (of time, of action, of perception) achieved by means of its interruption or its intermittence, especially regarding sounds.

See *X-27 effect,* Shining *effect.*

noniconogenic (voice or narration) Noniconogenic describes the situation where a film character is telling a story and we are shown only the storyteller and his or her audience, and no other images intervene to "illustrate" or follow up on the narration, even though the cinema offers this possibility and tends to make abundant use of it. The noniconogenic narration often occurs at a film's "moment of truth," or relates to a foundational scene for the characters, and is transmitted through language alone.

See *iconogenic voice, textual speech.*

offscreen sound In the audiovisual relation, and according to the specific use I've introduced, this term describes sounds (voices, sound effects, etc.) whose source is not visible on the screen at the same time but that supposedly exist in the space and time of the scene. Examples would be the voice of a diegetic character who is speaking from outside the frame and who is listened to by an interlocutor onscreen, or noises of the street outside the room where a scene is taking place.

On one hand, we may speak of *mental offscreen* sound when we recognize a sound we hear only mentally or logically as offscreen, as its source is absent from the image, when in fact its source is the same loudspeaker as the sounds that are onscreen or nondiegetic: this is what happens in monaural film. On the other hand, we may speak of *real offscreen* sound (or absolute offscreen sound) when the sound is truly acoustically heard emanating from a speaker situated outside the borders of the screen, when its fictional source is supposed to be situated "in the wings" of the screen space. The latter becomes possible with Dolby stereo and all other multichannel systems.

See *acousmatic, onscreen, diegetic, nondiegetic.*

active offscreen sound. Those offscreen (i.e., acousmatic and diegetic) sounds that, by their nature or by their relation to characters, elicit reactions from the characters or the spectator's expectation to find out the source of these sounds. For example, a noise of a scuffle coming from the ceiling, signaling new neighbors, in *The Lady Vanishes* and Visconti's *Conversation Piece.* In the découpage of a scene, active offscreen sound often leads to a follow-up shot that will answer the question it raises or relay it to yet another question.

See *acousmatic.*

passive offscreen sound. Sound that "describes" the audio environment of a scene (city noises, factory noises, country noises) and does not elicit any questions from characters or spectators regarding its source. Dolby, allowing a larger number of ambient sounds and elements of auditory setting in the loudspeakers all around the theater space, has often contributed to a relative increase in passive over active offscreen sound.

There is no negative connotation in the term *passive* here, nor should it be confused with "neutral" which it is not. Passive offscreen sound makes an active contribution to the diegesis and changes the conventions of visual editing since it can often serve the function of what would otherwise be done with an establishing shot, i.e., establish the setting; thus there can be more fragmentary shots and tight framings. Passive offscreen sound can also play a role in creating effects of *extension* and *suspension.*

See *acousmatic, ambient sound, extension, suspension.*

offscreen trash In multitrack cinema the offscreen trash is the real offscreen space created momentarily when we hear the noise made by the fall or impact of something thrown, launched, or shot, an explosion of debris, etc. coming out of the loudspeakers situated to either side of the screen. An early example comes in the 1958 "Perspecta" version of Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress,* when a character throws a tree branch into the offscreen space and as it lands, a surprising jingling sound reveals that there's gold in it.

onscreen sound In the audiovisual relation, this term designates those sounds whose concrete source is visible at the same time in the frame, and both sound and source partake in a visible, present diegetic reality.—Trans.

See *offscreen, nondiegetic.*

on-the-air (music, sounds) In an audiovisual fiction or documentary, sounds or music are said to be *on-the-air* when their diegetic source is shown to be some electrical mode of transmission (radio, telephone, intercom, amplifier) that allows them to go beyond the so-called natural mechanical laws of sound propagation and travel freely in space yet still remain anchored in the real time of the scene. This is particularly the case with music (especially songs), which can shift easily from the status of screen music to pit music. A frequent practice is to get the spectator to formulate and revise hypotheses about the music over the course of a scene by playing on the degree of presence of the song, the extent of its autonomy with respect to the picture editing and the diegetic space.

In *Thelma & Louise* we speculate that the song playing during the telepheme between Louise and Jimmy is probably coming from a radio in the motel room (hypothesis 1). No, we then think, it must be nondiegetic, because we're hearing it on both "sides" of the crosscutting between the two characters talking long distance (hypothesis 2). But couldn't it be a song heard by a third person, Thelma, through her earphones as she's relaxing by the pool (hypothesis 3)? No, it must be a nondiegetic song because we're hearing it in the audio foreground, and we no longer hear any other diegetic sound (hypothesis 4).

The important thing to notice is that each new hypothesis, as we revise and adjust our thinking, does not retroactively disqualify the preceding ones: they're all true, because they've all been elicited from us at just that moment.

See *screen music, pit music, telepheme.*

passive offscreen sound See *offscreen sound: passive.*

phantom sound or negative sound In an audiovisual sequence this is a sound that the image suggests but that we don't hear; the audible presence of other sounds associated with the scene contributes to underscore the conspicuous absence of the missing sound (by analogy with phantom pain from a bodily limb that no longer exists). In Fellini we hear the voice of characters who are talking while they walk but not the noise of their footsteps. In beach scenes in Tati's *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday,* the sea, visible in the background, cannot be heard, even though we can hear the shouts of bathers. The birds in Hitchcock's avian horror film gather behind the heroine, yet we don't hear the noise of their wings when they fly or move about.

Likewise, the *phantom image* is a precise image suggested by the sound but that does not appear. For example, again in Tati's *Hulot,* there's that audio mise-en-scène of children playing and calling to each other, but we never see a shot of them doing so. In another scene from *The Birds* we hear the birds attacking (from inside a house with its shutters closed), but we don't see them.

Phantom sounds are sensory phantoms that must be taken into account in audiovisual analysis, and their existence confirms that there is no "soundtrack" composed of all the sounds taken together and separately from the images.

See *audio-division, soundtrack (there is none), sensory phantom.*

phrasing, audiovisual see *audiovisual phrasing.*

pit music Also called *nondiegetic music,* pit music, as opposed to *screen music,* is music perceived to be coming from a space and a source outside of the space-time depicted onscreen.

Very often screen music turns into pit music, or there's collaboration between the two, and often a playful manipulation of the spectator's likely interpretation of the music's provenance, when she or he is led to take as pit music what is revealed retroactively to be screen music, etc.—and thus, consciously or otherwise, formulate and revise hypotheses.

See *screen music, on-the-air music.*

pivot dimension A common feature of sound elements considered different in nature (speech, music, sound effects) that permits either a progressive passage from one to another or making one resemble another.

The three true pivot dimensions are *pitch*, *rhythm*, and *register*.

Pitch. Diegetic sound effects and nondiegetic musical sounds can be linked together when they both are "sung" on a shared or closely neighboring tone. Many pivots in musical comedies exploit this use of shared pitch. An example is the number "By Myself" in Minnelli's *The Band Wagon*, for which the orchestra takes off from the pitch of the grating wheels of a train. Another example occurs during Jeanne Moreau's nocturnal urban meandering in *Elevator to the Gallows*, when Miles Davis's trumpet sounds at first like a car horn, continues by adding vibrato, and holds until it turns into the beginning of a solo. In both examples the music emerges out of diegetic reality.

Rhythm. One can dissolve from orchestral music to the noise of a machine when the latter has the same rhythm as the music (e.g., at the beginning of *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*).

Register. One can pivot on register in extreme cases to "fuse" either very high or very low sounds that belong to the diegetic sound space or to the music. Max Steiner's symphonic score dives into the bass range to blend with the roar of an airplane in *Casablanca*; and the very high stabbing violin notes in *Psycho* pivot into an evocation of both birds and a human scream.

See *tonic mass*.

a place of images and of sounds The cinematic situation can be called *a place of images and sounds*, a formula that in spite of its brevity brings out a number of precise factors.

1. *A*; i.e., *one* place of images and not more. When faced with multiple projections or video installations that make use of many places of projection, we no longer have cinema per se but multimedia—certainly an artistic expression but no longer corresponding to the definition of cinema, which relies on a single privileged space for images.

2. A *place* of images. This ordinary term, *place*, is what causes the most problems. What is a place if not a symbolic notion? There is a place for human beings within an everything-everywhere, that is a name for confusion, if we can inhabit some zones and not others in a privileged way:[5] zones of the body of the other, zones of one's own body, distinct zones on or in this body, the notion of the body differentiated from what is outside it. What is Genesis expressing symbolically when it recounts that God said, "Let the waters that are beneath the sky gather into a single place," if not the *differentiation of places* out of an original magma that we can only define retroactively and in negative terms? The French *Robert* dictionary gives *place* [*lieu*] a formal definition: "a determined portion of space considered in a general and abstract manner."[6] Place cannot be reduced to that which it encloses. Thus the place of a film cannot be reduced to the content of the images.

   Nor is the place of the film the material space of the screen onto which it gets projected. Its place is a mental thing, *cosa mentale*, and it is the same no matter what the physical dimensions of the projection are (miniature screen of a portable TV or cell phone, gigantic screens in big theaters); it is defined as a proportion (image format) and as the découpage of real filmed spaces.

3. A place of *images*, yes, but images that might not always be inhabited. In the famous cases of the black screen (such as the Marguerite Duras film *L'Homme atlantique* [1981]), it still remains visible for the spectator as the rectangle projected onto the screen by the projector lamp through the frame of contentless black film.

   Nor is it necessary for these images to have motion. Indeed, another limit case in cinema is the succession of still images, as in Chris Marker's *La Jetée*. It is necessary and sufficient that these images be inscribed in the time of the projection, of an unreeling of film. It's the difference between a photograph you hold in your hands and a film that consists solely of projecting that photo for a given amount of time. In the latter we have not only the photographed object but the act, the performance of its projection in time. Moreover, as long as the image is projected, we would have this place of projection, this window as some call it, in which, even if we keep seeing the same thing, the idea is that any other image could immediately follow.

   Thus in the formula *a place of images*, the notion of *place* is as important as the notion of the *images* that come to occupy it.

4. A place of images *and* of sounds. I prefer the conjunction *and* over any formulas such as "in relation to," "with," or "combined with," since *and* remains neutral with respect to the type of relation that gets established. It can equally imply inert coexistence, or combination, or active interaction, or a total inclusion of sound in the images.

5. A place of images and *sounds*. Let us insist on the indefinite, open aspect of the actual sound portion of a film, in that it is not united into a homogeneous entity that one could call a "soundtrack." Because of the variable fluctuations in magnetization of sound by the image, which depends on what the latter is showing or not, and because of the diegetic link between sound and image, or the elemental link created by synchresis, sound is, when it comes to its localization, in a constantly unstable state with respect to the image. Either it is included, or it includes, or, in a third possibility, it "roams the surface." One could say that sound in the cinema is "that which seeks its place." And this seeking process is played out for each sound in a specific way—only rarely do all the sounds heard at the same time participate in the same emplacement.

   See *spatial magnetization*, *soundtrack (there is none)*.

point of audition I use this term to designate the following in an audiovisual sequence:

(1) The spatial position from which we can say we hear a sound at a given distance from us. This point either appears to match with the location of the camera or differs from it, as in the frequent case of a character distant in the shot but whose voice is heard close up. This is the *spatial* definition of point of audition.

(2) A character through whose ears it is suggested that we are hearing a sound. For example, if she is speaking on the telephone and we can hear her interlocutor

distinctly just as she supposedly hears the person. This is the *subjective* meaning of point of audition.

A scene in *Dishonored* mobilizes the contradiction between spatial and subjective points of audition: the sound of a piano playing in the adjoining room diminishes in volume at the moment the character moves away from the camera (which stays fixed) and goes behind a curtain—as if we are hearing through his ears, even though we're not following him in space.

These two aspects of point of audition can coincide, or create various combinations (consider the case of telephemes). The analysis of this complicated matter shows that it is not analogous to the notion of point of view, owing to fundamental differences between image and sound, as well as between seeing and hearing.

See *telepheme*.

point of synchronization A point of synchronization in an audiovisual sequence is a salient moment of synchronous encounter between concomitant audio and visual elements. In other words, it is a moment when *synchresis* is particularly marked and accentuated, creating an effect of emphasis and scansion. The frequency and distribution of points of synchronization over the duration of a sequence contribute to its phrasing and rhythm and also create effects of meaning.

A synch point can occur between image and sound *within a shot*, between a visual cut (shot change) and a sound cut, or on a significant line of dialogue synched with the cut to the character uttering it.

Synchronism alone, however, does not automatically yield a synch point. A dialogue scene with a lot of lip synchronism does not particularly abound in synch points. The latter are the *more salient and significant* moments that occur as a result of various criteria that can include the following: the magnitude of a perceptible break (simultaneous cut in sound and image), the presence of an effect of visual reinforcement (closeup) and audio emphasis (closer and/or louder sound), the emotional or dramatic importance of the synchronous detail. Context also plays a role. For example, the first synchronous encounter of an uttered word and the speaker's face after a long period of nonsynchronization (say, after extended shots of someone listening to a speaking character who is offscreen) is foregrounded as a synch point. A synch point can also be the end point of a line of temporal vectorization.

The synch point is based on the idea of a specific temporal impact of coordinated meetings between sound and image and, as such, is purely an effect of form. On its own it has no fixed coded meaning—since it may be pertinent via the structure of the sequence, via the audiovisual phrasing (the musical and rhythmic dimension), or at the level of meaning. Or it can operate on all three levels, which is most often the case.

The very simple experiment of creating a random pairing of any piece of music off a CD with an audiovisual sequence from a DVD demonstrates how "synchronization-prone" we are as spectators, always on the lookout for the slightest sign of synch. It also demonstrates the need to have punctuation and scansion in an audiovisual sequence, and it underlines the human tendency to find meaning and intentionality in any instance of audiovisual concomitance.

See *concomitance, temporal vectorization, audiovisual phrasing, synchresis.*

porosity/compartmentalization There is porosity among the real and imaginary spaces of a film when communication and circulation can occur among them—for example, when the (nondiegetic) pit music repeats the themes that have been heard in the (diegetic) screen music or when the scoring provides orchestral backup to the diegetic music (e.g., in a musical where a lone piano player is accompanied by an invisible orchestra). Porosity also names situations where a film tries to create a recognizable continuum among audio elements of speech, noise, and music (often making use of one or more *pivot-dimensions*).

Partitioning or compartmentalization is the opposing tendency. The juxtapositionist aesthetic[7] that started in the 1970s often involves compartmentalizing: between nondiegetic music and sound effects, between the different styles of music in the same film (songs on one side and original scoring on the other, with no stylistic or thematic crossover), and so on. The classical sound film frequently gravitated toward maximum porosity, however, as a way of guaranteeing fluidity, continuity, and transparency.

See *auditory compartmentalization, pivot-dimension, pit music, screen music.*

reduced listening (Pierre Schaeffer, 1966) According to the author of the *Traité des objets musicaux*,[8] this is listening in a mode that intentionally and artificially ignores causes and meaning (and, I would add, effects) in order to concentrate on the sound in itself, in terms of its sensory properties including pitch, rhythm, texture, form, mass, and volume.

We all practice a kind of unconscious, primitive reduced listening (especially at the movies), as a way of providing material for interpretation and deduction to the two other types of audition—causal listening and semantic listening. Spontaneous reduced listening bypasses language and therefore cannot exceed a certain level of intersubjective precision and development. The only aspect of sound for which we practice reduced listening regularly is pitch, namely with regard to precise tones. Pitch, a quality that inheres in a sound, is often received independently of the source of the sound and of the meaning that it conveys.

Reduced listening is not a censoring activity. It does not imply repressing or denying our figurative and emotional associations. It merely requires placing the latter temporarily to the side of our activity of observing and naming.

See *causal listening, complex mass, semantic listening, tonic mass.*

redundancy (illusion of) An illusion created by *added value*, which gives the impression that certain sounds merely reiterate the images with which they are paired and vice versa. The most ordinary thing that is cited as an example of redundancy, dialogue that is filmed and heard, is emphatically not a case of redundancy. Except for a deaf person trained in lip reading, and then only if the language is known and the actors are facing the camera, the sound can in no way be deduced from the image, nor can a text be read off from what we see. Likewise, the faces of characters, their clothing, gestures, and the setting can rarely be guessed at from sound alone. In principle, then, there is really no such thing as audiovisual redundancy, even in sequences that include empathetic music. Redundancy, a notion perpetrated by noted film theorists, is both an audio-visiogenic illusion and, among critics, a received idea that belies the specificity and complexity of the audio-visual relationship.

See *empathetic*.

rendering Rendering means that "the film spectator recognizes sounds to be truthful, effective, and fitting not so much if they *reproduce* what would be heard in the same situation in reality, but if they *render* (convey, express) the sensations—not necessarily auditory—associated with the situation."[9]

Let me insist, regarding this definition I formulated in 1990, on the point that rendering is "not necessarily auditory." Sound lends itself well to rendering (and not reproducing) because of its flexibility with respect to causal identification (see *narrative indeterminacy*). Sound is very forgiving in that the spectator is quite tolerant when a sound does not resemble what one would hear in a given real situation, since there are no laws that rigidly unite a given sound with its cause.

As an example of rendering (i.e., of a sound that "translates" not another sound but speed or a force, etc.), think of the sound effects that punctuate action scenes in many movies: the whirr and clank of swords and sabers in martial arts films translate agility; the sounds of punches in fight films translate the violence the characters experience (whereas in reality the impact of bodies might make less or different noises). There are also sounds that are intended to translate impressions of materiality or immateriality, fragility or resistance, sensuality or austerity, hollowness or fullness, heaviness or lightness, something threadbare or brand new, luxurious or spartan. They are created with this in mind and not the reproduction of the real sound of the object or character in question. *A rendering is always the rendering of something.*

Remember that the rendering we are talking about here is created in the context of the audiovisual relationship. The rendering is projected onto the image, and the spectator gets the illusory impression that it is expressed directly by what she or he sees (hence the illusion of redundancy).

See *narrative indeterminacy, redundancy (illusion of), added value.*

reverse shot, avoided See *avoided reverse shot.*

ritualized cinema A type of film in which simple and repetitive actions (opening a car door, climbing stairs, crossing a road, doing a task) take on the character of ritual, where the precise duration and tempo of actions assume significance.

scansion (between the said and the shown) One of the five kinds of relations between the said and the shown, wherein what a character does (or does not do) while speaking, or an event in the auditory setting (car horn, animal cry) or visual setting (a car passing), has the effect of marking or punctuating the discourse and aids the spectator in taking it in. The scansion of the said by the shown is one of the favorite techniques of verbocentric cinema.

Some filmmakers, such as Eric Rohmer or Manoel de Oliveira, refuse or limit scansion. Jean-Luc Godard tends to exaggerate it and even destroys it in the process, with hyperpunctuated dialogue. For example, in *A Woman Is a Woman* the nondiegetic music of Michel Legrand is one of the numerous elements of scansion.

See *contradiction, contrast, counterpoint, c/omission, verbocentric cinema.*

screen music Also called *diegetic music*—music that (apparently) issues from a source within the present space and time of the film's story. When there exists doubt about whether these conditions obtain, as when for example there is no clear sign that characters are hearing a particular song coming from a radio, or if music in some public place onscreen is being "piped in" and heard, I use the term *on-the-air music.*

See *pit music, on-the-air music.*

screen speech Acousmatic speech addressed to a character onscreen, either from offscreen (diegetic space) or from a nondiegetic source. Screen speech interpellates or comments on the onscreen character, sometimes with irony or aggression, or with the idea of influencing the character's behavior.

See *camera speech.*

semantic listening (Pierre Schaeffer, 1967) Listening for "meaning"; the mode of listening in contexts involving coded audio signals (most usually spoken language, but think also of Morse code or a code between prisoners), where the listener focuses on decoding that signal to arrive at the message. I would prefer to speak of "codic listening" in these situations, but I have stuck with Schaeffer's term in order not to further complicate matters.

Note that two modes of listening can occur simultaneously with regard to the same sounds. For example, one may listen to what an unknown person says over the telephone (semantic listening) and at the same time try to determine characteristics of the speaker (sex, age, body type, health) from his or her voice (causal listening).

Sound film often plays on a discrepancy between our semantic listening and that of a character in the film's story. The latter often hears and understands directly a piece of Morse code, prisoner code, or the language of Indians, space

aliens, or robots. In the *Star Wars* saga Luke Skywalker hears and understands the language of electronic beeps spoken by R2-D2, and Han Solo understands what are for us the undifferentiated groans of the hairy giant Chewbacca. These are classic examples of auditory compartmentalization.

See *causal listening, auditory compartmentalization, reduced listening.*

sensory doubling The effect produced when a visual event is accompanied synchronously by a sound phenomenon—or the reverse—and results in a reinforced sensation. Sensory doubling relies on *synchresis* to give a weight of reality, a specific impact to the situation, object, moment, or signifier at hand. It might have no other purpose than to set apart or emphasize more distinctly a moment, action, or word and thus produce at the same time an effect or meaning and a synch point in the audiovisual phrasing. An isolated instance of sensory doubling can also serve to foreground a *sensory phantom* effect that occurs later.

See *sensory phantom, point of synchronization, synchresis.*

sensory naming (sound or image) A film character is not supposed to name what he or she sees or hears in common with us but only his or her feelings, the characters, etc. Thus a particular effect, erroneously considered redundant, occurs when a character does mention them and thereby makes us compare what he or she hears with what we hear, what he or she sees with what we see. Examples include the protagonist's voice-over identifying sounds in *A Man Escaped*, or sensory naming in *Un jeu brutal*, by Jean-Claude Brisseau (1982), and naming of colors in Wenders's *Wings of Desire*.

See *c/omission, redundancy (illusion of).*

sensory phantom That which falls exclusively under a single sense in a context where it could engage two senses at once. In sound film an object or person that moves onscreen and issues no sound or an acousmatic, diegetic sound whose source cannot be seen are examples of sensory phantoms. Amateur video (using a video camera with built-in mic) commonly produces the effect of two sensory phantoms superimposed.

See *acousmatic, audio-division, phantom (or negative) sound.*

***Shining* effect** The *Shining* effect (the name comes from the Kubrick film that used it in striking ways) refers to the emphatic shift in sound caused when footsteps or the wheels of a vehicle pass from one surface to another. In one episode in *Dreams* a soldier is walking with regular steps on a road; he goes into a tunnel and comes out several hundred feet farther on into the open air, and the sound of his even gait is colored with variations in reverb and other qualities.

The Shining includes a scene that always elicits rapt attention. Little Danny is pedaling in his car-tricycle throughout the hallways of the Overlook Hotel. The camera follows him at his eye-level; when his trike moves from polished wood flooring to carpeting, the noise of the wheels is dampened; then more wood and the sound changes back in volume and timbre. In sound film, because of the "double temporal line" of image and sound, the *Shining* effect, which can be diegetic or result from crosscutting, is, like the *X-27 effect*, a representation of nondiscontinuity.

See *nondiscontinuity.*

sound recording medium The name for the material medium that serves as the technical base for the film's sound when the latter is coterminous and synchronized with the film. At different times this medium has been a disc, an optical track parallel to the image, a magnetic track, a compact disc read synchronically with the film, etc. The existence of a sound recording medium—often multitrack—does not imply the existence of a "soundtrack" as that term is usually understood.

See *soundtrack (there is none).*

soundtrack (there is none) The formulation "there is no soundtrack" means that the various sounds that occur in a film (speech, noises, music), and that contribute to the creation of meaning, form, and various effects, do not constitute an integrated, homogeneous entity in themselves for the simple fact of belonging to the world of sound. Their copresence with an image categorizes and divides them (by the process I call *audio-division*); in the presence of this image the relations of meaning, contrast, agreement, or divergence that speech, sound effects, and musical elements have *among themselves* are much weaker (and sometimes nonexistent), compared to the relations that each audio element has with a given visual or narrative element in the image.

The fact that there is no auditory frame for sounds (a frame that could unify the sounds by virtue of their shared presence in a real and symbolic place) is what makes this situation possible.

See *audio-division, auditory frame of sounds (there is none).*

spatial magnetization (of sound by image) A psychophysiological phenomenon that results when we see a sound source (human, animal, machine, object) in a certain point in space, and for various reasons (e.g., reflection of sound off walls, electric amplification, the circumstances of audiovisual projection), the sound that comes from it, or supposedly comes from it, comes mostly from elsewhere in space and yet the image of the source attracts the sound, as though magnetically, and leads us mentally to situate the sound where we see its source.

Thus in the experience of watching an in-flight movie, the sounds of the voices of the actors seem to come to us from the small screen three rows away, when in fact they are coming to us through our headphones.

Spatial magnetization made the classical sound film possible: we accept that in monaural cinema the actual voices of the actors do not really move about to

correspond with the characters' onscreen motion, especially their lateral motion (left to right and vice versa). Likewise, "offscreen" sounds are only offscreen in the mind of the spectator who projects onto those sounds the visual movements seen on the screen (such as a man leaving a room while talking: a case of *added value* of image to sound). Spatial magnetization is disrupted or blocked when the sounds really do move in the space of the movie theater, between loudspeakers, whereas it remains stable if the sound comes from one loudspeaker at a remove from the screen so long as it doesn't move around.

See *added value*, *auditory frame of sounds (there is none)*.

suspension Dramatic audio-visiogenic effect, in a fictional scene that normally has certain ambient sounds (sounds of the country or city, etc.): suspension consists of interrupting those sounds, even suppressing them from the outset, although the causes of those sounds continue to exist in the image and action. The effect is often mysterious or menacing, sometimes a sort of poetic suspension or rendering the world unreal. Take as an example the scene where two lovers are walking together toward the end of *Nights of Cabiria*: a sunset, marvelous landscape and trees—but we hear no birdsong. This suspension creates an eerily quiet anxiety; the man wants to kill the little prostitute he has brought to the edge of the cliff.

In *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* the sounds of the night fall silent for a moment, just after the first appearance of the extraterrestrials. In *Dreams* the snowstorm, always visible in the image with swarms of snowflakes, becomes inaudible when the mountain climber, on the verge of exhaustion, has the vision of the long-haired woman inclining toward him.

synch point See *point of synchronization*.

synchresis A spontaneous and reflexive psychophysiological phenomenon that is universal and works because of the makeup of our nervous system, not from cultural conditioning. Synchresis consists in perceiving the concomitance of a discrete sound event and a discrete visual event as a single phenomenon. There is synchresis when the audio and visual events occur simultaneously, and concomitance alone is the necessary and sufficient condition for synchresis.

The impression created is involuntary; it attributes a common cause to sound and image, even if their nature and source are completely different and even if they have little or no relation to each other in reality. Cinema makes abundant use of synchresis, and it is what makes both postsynchronization and Foley possible.

See *point of synchronization*, *sensory doubling*.

system of audition The logic created by the compartmentalizations and porosities of listening in a film, and by the relationship the characters maintain with the sounds of which they are (or are not) the source—a relationship that may be conscious and verbalized or not, active or passive.

In the film's system of audition we can list the following factors:

1. the characters' degree of awareness of sounds, the effects of sounds on them, and the extent to which the characters speak of these sounds (*sensory naming*);
2. the characters' consciousness (verbalized or not) of being heard, the extent to which their voices express this awareness (modulation of audition by tone of voice); the way they take account of this and perhaps use it to deceive; whether they verbalize their auditory awareness;
3. the spectator's awareness of sounds and silences, of certain sounds, or of his or her own listening;
4. the role of sound or its absence in the story (sounds that encourage, sounds that deceive, sounds that mask, sounds that go away and thus make other sounds audible that were previously *masked*);
5. the way the film sets up barriers or openings between the different aspects of sound awareness mentioned above; characters differentiated by their listening: a hyperacousic character, a quiet one, an unconsciously noisy one, a hyperacousic woman with a man who doesn't want to hear anything;
6. the way a given character relates to an emblematic sound: a doorbell, cane, wheelchair motor, etc.;
7. the manner and degree of give-and-take between a film's acousmatic and visualized audio elements;
8. the presence of a "listening machine"—a listening relay (any apparatus that allows characters to listen to broadcast or recorded sound), an animal, or sound-detection device.

See *acousmatic*, *auditory compartmentalization*, *sensory naming*.

telepheme Scene of a telephone conversation in a film. The term was invented by a journalist in the early twentieth century to designate a "unit of telephone conversation." I have classified telephemes into six kinds according to their audiovisual relations, numbered 0 to 6:

Type 0: typical of silent films, it shows the two interlocutors in alternation, but we don't hear what they're saying.

Type 1: we alternately see each interlocutor, and as we see each person, we hear what he or she is saying.

Type 2: we see (and hear) only one of the interlocutors and stay with him or her for the duration of the telepheme, without hearing what the other says. A variant is the telepheme in which we hear the other party's voice indistinctly or just barely, as though we were in the room alongside the first character.

Type 3: we see and hear one of the two speakers, but we hear the filtered voice of the other speaker, whom we don't see.

Type 4: we see first one then the other of the two characters, and the voice of one is either paired with his or her own image or with the image of the other person listening over the receiver.

Type 5: a telepheme filmed in split screen, allowing us to see and hear both speakers, without having either voice sound filtered.

Type 6: includes various cases that are deliberately aberrant or paradoxical to one degree or another, often resulting from combinations of the preceding types. In *Mon oncle* (the phone call from Arpel to his brother-in-law, Hulot), the acousmatic sound of the place where the business director, Arpel, reaches his brother-in-law (ambient sound of popular accordion music) invades the director's office via the office telephone's external loudspeaker, but the voice of Hulot on the other end cannot be heard. In *Lost Highway* the protagonist calls a man from home who is supposed to be the very man who is facing him, and we hear his voice filtered à la type 3.

The type of telepheme can change over a scene's duration, and this variation contributes to the construction of the scene. In *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* the conversation between police commissioner Lohmann and Hofmeister begins as a type 1 telepheme and ends as type 3.

See *acousmatic*.

temporal linearization (of images by sounds) Audio-visiogenic effect that concerns the sense of temporal sequencing, a feature specific to sound film. In silent film a sequence of images could be understood as not being successive but rather an atemporal series (for example, in Eisenstein's closeups of workers laughing in a meeting). However, when accompanied by realist sound, the same sequence of images takes on the sense of occurring in succession—the character in the second shot laughing or looking *after* the character in the first shot.

My hypothesis is that linearization is superimposed onto the previous perception of nonchronological perception of the sequence of shots, without suppressing it, and thus engendering a double temporality of both all-at-once and succession.

See *temporal splitting*, *temporal vectorization*, *vectorization*.

temporal splitting In a sound-film sequence that is supposed to depict one continuous action with no ellipses, the common practice of superimposing sound with no ellipses or interruption onto a sequence of many shots creates, in fact, a double temporal thread, not a single temporality. The temporality of the images can raise the suspicion of temporal ellipsis or suggest a sort of "meanwhile" with crosscutting, while the sound assures the successivity of nondiscontinuity.

See *nondiscontinuity*, *temporalization*.

temporal unpacking The tendency in the 1950s and 1960s to remove certain conventional elements that served to hold scenes together and unify their temporality (pit music, voice-overs, braiding of dialogue and image, and the use of verbal "invocation" to link one scene to the next). In the classical mode, temporality seemed to be foundational, fixed, and solid, a raw material on which the story was built.

See *braiding*.

temporal vectorization When a number of sound elements and/or visual elements are superimposed and constituted in a way that allows the spectator to anticipate their crossing, meeting, or collision just ahead. This expectation is then either satisfied or unfulfilled, and the crossing can occur earlier or later than when it was expected. Of course a sound or sound sequence must last long enough to create the expectation. A crescendo or decrescendo, a melody with a distinct arc, an accelerating rhythm, a sentence being spoken that is moving toward an end all create temporal vectorization.

See *temporalization*.

temporalization Audio-visiogenic effect that is a case of *added value*, wherein sound gives duration to the images that have none on their own (totally still images such as in *La Jetée*, or shots of an empty setting or immobile characters such as at the beginning of *Persona* in the morgue scene). Or else, sound influences and contaminates the sense of time inherent in shots that contain movement.

Temporalization depends particularly on the presence or absence of temporal vectorization in the sound. The sound can impose a linear and successive sense of time on shots that do not in themselves presuppose an idea of temporal succession (*linearization* of images by sound) and can also vectorize shots; that is, it can orient them in time, invest them with a sense of expectation, progression, advancement, imminence that they do not possess on their own (*vectorization*).

At the beginning of *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* the camera sweeps around the interior of a basement littered with objects. Without sound, this exploration in a pan from left to right appears disinterested, objective, random. With the sound of a strongly pulsating machine offscreen, the shot becomes tense, oriented toward a goal: the discovery of the source.

See *temporal splitting*, *temporal vectorization*, *temporal linearization*, *vectorization*.

textual speech Spoken words become a text that can mobilize images or whole scenes just by being uttered. This type of text is usually reserved for voice-over narrators, but it can also come from the mouths of characters. This iconogenic speech tends to alter the consistency of the diegetic film world, which risks becoming no more than images that we flip through in response to the words or sentences.

Sound film, although fascinated at first by its possibilities, came to use textual speech more sparingly and carefully, exceptional cases (such as *The Story of a Cheat*) notwithstanding. Since the 1990s there has been a spectacular resurgence in the use of textual speech in films such as *Toto le héros* (Jaco Van Dormael, 1991), *Goodfellas*, *The Usual Suspects*, and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie* (2001).

See *iconogenic voice*, *emanation speech*, *theatrical speech*.

theatrical speech The classic and most widespread mode of speech in cinema. Theatrical speech names those words spoken by characters who exchange dialogue that is completely audible for the spectator and meaningful with respect to the story, though it has no power over the reality shown (as does textual speech). Theatrical speech can reveal the human, social, and affective dimensions of the character uttering it, even if it consists of lying, silence, or dissimulation. It is so central to most films that its articulations organize the scene construction. Theatrical speech is found in verbo-decentric as well as verbocentric cinema.

See *emanation speech, textual speech, verbocentric cinema, verbo-decentric cinema.*

tonic mass (Pierre Schaeffer, 1967) Said of a sound that allows us to hear a precise pitch, as opposed to what are called complex sounds or sounds with complex mass.

Tones often serve as the pivot-dimension between speech, music, and noise. They also serve to create effects of discordance. They emerge, in particular, within a context of complex sounds.

See *complex mass, pivot-dimension, discordance.*

trans-sensory perceptions I call *trans-sensory* those perceptions that belong to no one particular sense but that may travel via one sensory channel or another without their content or their effect being limited to this one sense. Everything involving rhythm may serve as an example. But other cases involve spatial perceptions, as well as the verbal dimension. A word that is read or spoken belongs to the same sphere of language, even if the modes of its transmission (handwriting, vocal timbre) run in parallel sensory channels.

Rhythm is the essential trans-sensory dimension, since we experience it before we are born. The fetus encounters rhythm in the form of variations in pressure on the body wall, parsed with the combined beats of the mother's heart and its own. Rhythm is everywhere. For example, at night in the days before electric lights, it was present in the subtle pulsations of candlelight, in one sensory variation that we have lost and have replaced with others.

Texture and grain are another category of trans-sensory perception.

trash, offscreen See *offscreen trash.*

unbraided See *braiding, temporal uncasing.*

unpacking See *temporal unpacking.*

uncertain extent of the auditory field A defining feature of audiovisual experience, since the audio field has no frame analogous to the discrete rectangular border of the visual frame.

See *internal sound, audiovisual scenography, extension.*

vectorization (of images by sound) An audio-visiogenic process of temporalization by which a sound imprints a *temporal direction* on shots that contain movement, but a type of movement that presents no particular directionality, or movement that is reversible in time, which is in fact the case with many visual phenomena. For example, one can run a shot backward that shows a character speaking, and no one will know the difference since speech movements are not vectorized for the eye. Or consider a shot showing trees moving in the wind: nothing in what you see indicates a sense of precise time or any evolution. Now you hear a car approaching—and suddenly the image is inscribed in a linear temporality and expectation, oriented toward a future. Sounds are much more often oriented in time than are visible phenomena.

See *temporalization, added value.*

verbal chiaroscuro There is verbal chiaroscuro when we alternately understand and do not understand what the characters are saying. Verbal chiaroscuro is either deliberately deployed as a means of expression, or it is the unintended result of technical conditions or flaws in production, the upshot being dialogue that is only partly intelligible.

Verbal chiaroscuro can also be created deliberately through diegetic pretexts: overlapping and superimposed conversation and mixtures of languages (Fellini), static interference or other obscuring factors during phone conversations, a sound in the environment interfering to "mask" speech or other sounds, movements of characters whose voices get periodically "lost" or distanced, and so on.

See *emanation speech, verbo-decentric cinema.*

verbocentric cinema The standard formula in classical sound film, wherein the mise-en-scène, acting, and sounds and images are consciously or unconsciously oriented with the general goal of intelligible (and abundant) dialogue whose purpose is to advance the action. Dialogue in such films is the (often invisible) linchpin that scenes turn on and that anchor the editing, lighting, acting, etc., all of which are designed to facilitate our hearing of the dialogue and dramatize what is being said, while at the same time effacing the perception of dialogue per se. The "consenting" spectator of classic verbocentric film does not take note that she or he is listening to a torrent of speech around which everything else is organized. The spectator is convinced that she or he is watching a complex story where dialogue is but one element among many, maybe even of negligible importance.

Verbocentric film often makes use of *braiding* and *scansion* between the said and the shown.

See *braiding, scansion.*

verbo-decentric cinema The opposite of verbocentric cinema. We may note the following instances.

1. There is the seemingly paradoxical case where dialogue is abundant, but its abundance is not obscured or absorbed by the mise-en-scène and instead is foregrounded, as such, for lack of other filmic elements such as acting to make it easier to listen to. We can find this copious, undramatized dialogue in the films of Eric

Rohmer (who rejects frequent gestures and movements by actors to supply punctuation), Manoel de Oliveira (immobile speaking tableaux in *Francisca* [1981]), and Tarkovsky (the characters' verbiage butting up against their powerlessness before nature, and the sobriety of their gestures, in *Stalker*). Let us not forget the many collective scenes in Fellini and the central prison episode in Lucas's *THX 1138*.

2. More specifically, there are cases where the visual and auditory style of a film relativizes speech and treats it as *emanation speech*.

Verbo-decentric film often avoids *braiding* and, instead, makes frequent though not systematic use of emanation speech.

See *emanation speech*, *braiding*, *verbocentric cinema*.

vertical montage (myth of) A myth of film theory, which arose in the speculative writings of Eisenstein and Pudovkin, concerning the montage effect that a simultaneous image and sound could produce.

The superimposition of an image that shows one thing and a sound that tells us something else does not produce an effect analogous to visual montage, for at least three reasons:

1. This editing involves superimposition and not succession, thereby making impossible any separate perception and noncontamination of one perception by the other.
2. The sounds and images are partially absorbed into the same space-time.
3. Sounds and images are intrinsically too different to be commensurable.

The manifesto of the three Russians—Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Alexandrov—advocated confronting something seen with something different heard at the same time. The problem is not that this idea was jettisoned and that cinema stayed locked in a permanent audiovisual redundancy, as many still believe. It's rather that so-called vertical montage has become on the contrary so common and ordinary that no one even notices it any more. No TV viewer following the dialogue of his or her favorite show, even while admiring the set and the actors' bodies, thinks for a second that what he or she is hearing cannot in any way be deduced from what he or she is seeing, and vice versa.

vertical relations By analogy with traditional music vocabulary, a *vertical relation* describes a relationship established between two simultaneous phenomena—for example, a sound and an image. The opposite case, *horizontal relations*, are those created in a temporal succession. Thus we can say that often in the superimposition of auditory and visual sequences, vertical relations (sound with image) tend to predominate over horizontal relations (those we discover in following independently the sound sequence and the visual sequence), except in certain cases—for example, when use is made of temporal vectorization.

See *horizontal relations*, *synchresis*, *temporal vectorization*.

visio-audition The symmetrical counterpart of *audio-vision*. Visio-audition is the type of perception that consciously focuses on the auditory (as in the case of a concert performance, or a film scene showing a musical performance, but also when we are listening attentively to what someone is saying); and our listening is accompanied, reinforced, aided—or deformed or contaminated—in any case, changed—by a *visual context* that influences what we hear and may lead us to project certain perceptions onto it.

See *audio-vision*.

visiting-room effect When we see two characters speaking to each other across some barrier that obstructs their vision or physical contact, such as a windowpane, screen, curtain, or fence. The visiting-room effect (frequently encountered in scenes of prison conversations between inmates and visitors who meet across a divide) thematizes the principle of shot–reverse shot editing construction, which visually separates characters in the same filmic space. In duplicating the shot–reverse shot construct, the visiting-room effect symbolizes it.

visualized sound In film, the name for the hearing of an audio event when we see, onscreen, partly or completely, its real or presumed source; the opposite of *acousmatic* audition.

See *acousmatic sound*.

vococentrism Process by which, out of a mix of sounds, it is the voice that attracts and centers our attention above all, in the same way that for the eye, a shot draws greatest attention on a human face.

Vococentrism can be canceled or attenuated by several specific devices. In the films of Tati, for example, our natural tendency to focus on voices becomes impeded by fluctuations in audio levels and reduced intelligibility of spoken lines. In addition, the director takes pains to ensure that dialogue is not essential to the *action* itself (while remaining important at other levels); and, of course, his camera is often placed at a distance from speaking characters.

This does not mean that in classically vococentric films the other sounds (noises and music) are not important. They are, on the contrary, equally important; it is just that they operate at a less conscious level. An analogy would be the inner tenor and alto parts in a string quartet or four-part vocal ensemble: only when these middle parts are absent or different do we sense that something is missing, even though the melody we're paying conscious attention to remains the same.

X-27 effect Named after its striking use in Sternberg's early sound film *Dishonored* (in French, *Agent X 27*), this effect, which has since been used in numerous films, consists in having a piece of diegetic music (played by characters or heard on a radio or record player in the scene) be heard at different apparent distances. It can

be alternately close or far, heard from inside where it's being played and from outside where we hear it muffled, with jumps in timbre, reverb and volume to match the visual editing, but with no interruption of the music's continuity. The X-27 effect appears briefly in the first 100 percent talkie, *The Lights of New York*, and is an expression of nondiscontinuity.

See *nondiscontinuity*.

1. Michel Chion, *La Voix au cinéma* (Paris: Editions de l'Etoile, 1982). Translated by Claudia Gorbman as *The Voice in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
2. References to the word *acousmate* occur in *Larousse Universelle*, vol. 1 (1922), s.v. *acousmate*; and in Apollinaire, *Alcoöls* (1913), which has two poems entitled "Acousmate." Also, the sound heard when Caliban is speaking in act 3, scene 2 in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is a model for acousmaton. See *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 3rd ed. (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1980), 1515 (lines 128–29, 137–42).
3. At a given moment in a film, something may occur—a look, a movement of a character or the camera, a shot, a word—that seems to sum things up, to make for a privileged moment. This is temporal crystallization, which is heightened by the treatment of sounds and images.
4. That is, single-tape video, as distinct from multi-monitor or multi-image installations.
5. We make a space for ourselves before we begin to feel our body as different from the environment, our limbs as distinct from one another, our self as different from others. The notion of "place" is symbolic. There is no *place* in nature, only constant exchanges. The book of Genesis begins not with nothingness from which God created the world, but with a state of confusion, when the earth was "without form, and void." In the Bible, God puts an end to confusion by separating out the elements. As we grow up, we acquire the notion of a distinct *place*.
6. See *Le Grand Robert de la langue française*, s.v. "lieu": "portion déterminée de l'espace, considérée de façon générale et abstraite." Paul Robert, *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogigique de la langue française* (Paris: Societé du Nouveau Littré, 1973), 991.
7. By *juxtapositionist aesthetic* I mean a tendency like that we see in George Lucas to delimit one kind of sound clearly from another, for example in the choice of lush symphonic music for the sci-fi world of *Star Wars*, distinguishing and juxtaposing the music and the futuristic audio mise-en-scène. This stylistic approach differs from that of *Blade Runner*, for example, which tends to run one into the other.
8. Pierre Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux* [Treatise on Musical Objects] (Paris: Seuil, 1966).
9. Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. and ed. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 109.

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