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**SONIC ELONGATION:  
CREATIVE AUDITION IN DOCUMENTARY FILM**

By Holly Rogers

Biography

Holly is senior lecturer in **Music** at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is author of *Sounding the Gallery: Video and the Rise of Art-Music* (2013) and editor of *Music and Sound in Documentary Film* (2014) and *The Music and Sound of Experimental Film* (2017). She is a founding editor for the Bloomsbury book series **New Approaches to Sound, Music and Media**.

Abstract

This paper investigates documentary films in which real-world sound captured from the location shoot has been treated more creatively than the captured image; in particular, instances when real-world noises pass freely between sound and musical composition. I call this process the sonic elongation from sound to music; a blurring that allows the soundtrack to keep one foot in the image, thus allowing the film to retain a loose grip on the traditional nonfiction aesthetic. With reference to several recent documentary feature films, I argue that such moments rely on a confusion between hearing and listening.

Paper

Imaginative sound design that stretches into musical texture can press at the fragile border between the fantasies of fiction film and documentary's fraught engagement with real-world footage. In narrative fiction film, the creative blurring of sound and music can suggest fictional worlds and question our reading of an image; it can form complicated and

contradictory forms of engagement that can lead us deep into the heart of a story. But when audio elements collide in documentary feature film, the fantastical rendering of the world portrayed can undermine many of the already problematic lynchpins of the genre: truth, objectivity, authenticity and clarity. I suggest that sound and image have held a mutable and at times innovative relationship throughout the history of documentary filmmaking and that investigation into the moments when the audio track has been treated more creatively than the captured image may reveal new ways of thinking about the documentary aesthetic. These moments can occur when sound and image become disconnected from one another to create an audiovisual clash, or when audio and visual elements are so tightly intertwined that one can press at the fundamental structures of the other. Occasionally, the line between these two types can become blurred resulting in a dissonance paradoxically forged from tight synchronicity. This is particularly apparent when real-world sounds captured from the location shoot are manipulated into compositional material. Although often enhanced and rendered in post-production, location sound that undergoes a transformation so radical that the connection with its associated image is troubled encourages a process of creative audition, by which an audience is encouraged to use interpretation and imagination to construct new audiovisual relationships.

Rather than represent a larger tendency that drives a particular documentary genre or style, radical audiovisual stretches provide moments of significant and profound emphasis within otherwise synchronous textures. Yet because these moments harbour the potential for audiovisual rupture, they can threaten—or aspire—to de-stabilise conventional modes of film consumption. As a result, creative audition manifests most often in films that lie at the more experimental and poetic edges of the documentary genre. Here, the exploration of two contrasting documentaries provides a launch-pad for discussion of this emerging audiovisual practice. Although both deal with ecological issues, their unique sonic approaches

demonstrate different manifestations of poetic soundscape composition. First, the soundtrack for Jennifer Baichwal's feature-length poetic documentary *Manufactured Landscapes* (2006) by electronic musician and sound designer Dan Driscoll demonstrates the ways in which traditional documentary aesthetics can be at once upheld and yet drastically reconfigured by the manipulation of location sound. The film, captured on 16mm film, follows photographer Edward Burtynsky as he captures the struggling industrial environments of China and Bangladesh. Although largely synchronous, the sound outstrips the image by morphing, at several significant moments, into an electro-acoustic score. As the film's musicality increases, so too does the need for an interpretative response. This process is taken to an extreme in the second example. *Leviathan* is a 2012 experimental eco-documentary about the deep-sea fishing industry by Lucien Castaing-Taylor and V  r  na Paravel (Harvard Sensory Ethnography Lab). In this high energy impression of life at sea, audiovisual footage garnered from twelve small cameras, GoPros and microphones placed in unusual positions on a fishing boat offers an almost haptic experience. The cameras get close to subjects without distortion and yet it is not always clear what we are looking at as point of view is continually thwarted by movement, changes in focus and depth and a disorienting oscillation between long takes and ragged jump-cuts. When the image is stable, sounds captured at the scene are consumed in a familiar and synchronous way. Yet, at other times, visual confusion is matched by sonic ambiguity, as captured sounds are used by electroacoustic composer Ernst Karel and sound designer Jacob Ribicoff to form a creative soundscape. The result is an abstract, rhythmicised, musical wash that quickly moves away from its connection with the images. While *Manufactured Landscapes* subtly transfigures and broadens common documentary film sound practice, then, *Leviathan* offers a more sustained, sensorial approach. Both, however, question the traditional visual emphasis of the documentary genre, reaching instead towards a form of visualised experimental music that can be read either as re-imaged sound

art, or as a type of *musique concrète* in which the remnants of the visual source are left to gather new associations.

The creative transfiguration of sound into music reaches deep into the debates that animate both documentary theory and film music studies. As we shall see, documentary theoreticians have long upheld the view that nonfiction film sound should help to construct an illusory realism through tight synchronisation and subtle—if any—postproduction manipulation. When this process is disrupted, most often within experimental or modernist practices, the materiality of the film is revealed. This not only exposes the mechanisms behind documentary representation, it also creates an interpretative space in which cultural and symbolic signification can manifest. Previous analyses of disturbed documentary audiovisuality have tended to focus on voice. While Pascal Bonitzer's influential essay on the use of third-person voiceover in documentary film, closes the possible rupture that an 'other' of a disembodied, un-visualised voice may induce by imbuing it with universality and knowledge, when an external voice replaces an onscreen utterance, the results can be disquieting.<sup>1</sup> In her work on Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* (1989), for instance, Amy Lawrence problematises gendered and cultural forms of representation that arise when the voices of the interviewed Vietnamese women are replaced with those of Californian actresses.<sup>2</sup> Lawrence argues that this gap between image and sound not only destabilises the coherence of synchronicity, but also the clarity of a viewing position. I want to take these ideas further. A focus on extended location sound rather than voice opens the discussion to the consideration of soundscape, a topic that has recently received productive critical attention in relation to the fiction feature. While useful as a starting point, these discussions are nevertheless predicated on tenants very different—at least at first glance—to those that drive documentary practice. It is commonly believed that music in fiction film helps the audience to relax and better engage with the fiction unfolding before them, for

instance, and treating onscreen sound as a poetic device, rather than simply an indicator of cinematic realism, can enable it to assume a more musical role. Yet in documentary features, music can sit uncomfortably with images presented and portrayed as a reliable representation of the world beyond the camera. Creating music from the sounds recorded on location can help to close this conceptual gap: once disembodied, these sounds can be used as compositional material, before being placed back, fundamentally altered, onto the image track to produce a sonic remodelling of the ‘authentic’, or ‘real’, documentary image.

I call this reaching of a film’s aural material away from its visual counterpart *sonic elongation*. The nomenclature here is significant: to elongate—to extend, broaden, enlarge—suggests a reconfiguration of audiovisual material in order to reach beyond borders and between disciplines. Unlike stretching, elongation does not suggest distortion, or a thinning out of material as it is pulled through space and time, but rather a process of augmentation and growth from one thing to another: it indicates a transformative process. As such, sonic elongation arises when film sound is treated creatively to such an extent that it dissolves into musical timbres and structures yet retains a strong and quasi-synchronous hold over its home image. The result is like a homonym; the sounds are almost those we would expect given the visual information, and yet close aural attentiveness renders them strange.

Through a comparison of soundscape construction in fiction and documentary practice, I suggest that the poetic possibilities of a fluid sound-music movement are technologically—and thus also historically—contingent. Recent developments in filmmaking equipment and post-production software have troubled the traditional philosophical boundaries of sound as separate from noise and music in audiovisual media, resulting in a radically altered aesthetics of sonic realism. The following explores the ways in which the augmented aesthetic possibilities born from technological advancements have engendered new modes of aural attentiveness; modes that require refreshed understandings not only of

the slippage between sound and music in film, but also of the different functions of hearing and listening that such slippage generates. Sonic elongation raises conceptual issues that require a multidisciplinary approach that extends previous investigation. The questions that arise are very different from those driving investigations into documentary voice. Sonic elongation operates neither through the otherness of an omniscient voiceover, nor via the shocking rupture of Minh-ha's audiovisual ventriloquism, but rather rejects the idea of externality altogether. It is therefore necessary to introduce the ideas of stretched reality, augmented sound and the simultaneity of expression into previous documentary sound discussion. But while recent soundscape theory can provide useful tools for this addition, its sole focus on fiction film traditions limits its applicability, and it is here that the scholarship on sound art, noise and acoustic ecology can provide a useful framework for analysis, although, in turn, its focus on sound must be stretched to include audiovisuality. It is in the gaps and collisions between these disciplines that a theory of sonic elongation can take shape. What happens to our traditional ways of listening when documentary synchronicity is reconfigured but not foregone? When sonically-elongated sound retains its connection to the image, while also generating an abundance of association, signification and musicality? When point of audition becomes so diffuse that the parameters between noise and music collapse entirely?

### **The Homeomorphic Shift**

The interpretive pressure generated by a sonically elongated soundtrack highlights the issues commonly associated with the aesthetics—and ethics—of documentary filmmaking. And yet these aesthetics are already multi-faceted, controversial and highly contested. As an umbrella heading for many divergent styles and methods, documentary feature film (as opposed to the multitude of documentary types made for television) comes with an abundance of sometimes

contradictory definitions, explanations and reactions: as Werner Herzog warns, “the word ‘documentary’ should be handled with care”.<sup>3</sup> At its simplest, and most traditional, the form can be boiled down to three essential elements, as Bill Nichols explains: documentary images and sounds are taken, without manipulation, from the ‘real world’; they “stand for or represent the interest of others”; and they are in place to help “actively make a case or propose an interpretation to win consent or influence opinion.”<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, however, he acknowledges the fallibility of precise definition, writing that documentary film “mobilizes no finite inventory of techniques, addresses no set number of issues, and adopts no completely known taxonomy of forms, styles, or modes.”<sup>5</sup>

Such contradiction and confusion, however, is appropriate to a form predicated on the shifting sands of philosophical reportage. From the observational fly-on-the wall and *cinéma vérité* traditions to glossy and big-budget “docutainment” features, the connection between what is documented and its presentation can flex to such an extent that recorded footage can—and often does—yield to the fictional.<sup>6</sup> But the borders between the real and the imagined have always been porous: pioneer documentarian John Grierson embraced the etymological basis of documentary—as *docere*; to teach—when he described documentary film as a “creative treatment of actuality”, for instance, while Herzog’s experimentations with the genre frequently dissolve into wild escapades as he searches for the “poetic, ecstatic truth” revealed through the heavy manipulation of profilmic (that which lies in front of the camera) material.<sup>7</sup> The embrace of creative, poetic and ecstatic responses to captured image and sound bridges the gap between the aesthetics of observation and those of interpretation or, rather, reveal this gap to be illusory. Nichols has written extensively on this slippage. Documentary, he postulates, offers a “representation of the world we already occupy” rather than a “*reproduction*” of it.<sup>8</sup>



Michael Renov goes further, arguing that the history of documentary film presents numerous “moments at which a presumably objective realisation of the world encounters the necessity of creative intervention” as though the spheres of fiction and nonfiction “*inhabit one another*”.<sup>9</sup>

This tension can be even be found in the nonfiction styles built most resolutely on the observational, non-interventionist aesthetics that dominated American documentary filmmaking for several decades from the 1960s, a style that arose from the availability of light-weight cameras and tape-recorders, and synchronous sound developments that enabled, for the first time, noises from the location (profilmic, or actuality sound) to easily be recorded (before this, documentary sound was most often added during post-production). Significantly, both the direct and *vérité* aesthetics demanded the total rejection of additional sonic effects or music and the post-production manipulation of actuality sound, a restriction resolutely upheld in the work of the Maysles Brothers, D. A. Pennebaker and Richard Leacock. Michel Brault, Direct Cinema pioneer and hand-held cameraman, for example, explains that “music is an interpretation, it’s the filmmaker who says, alright I’m going to make you listen to music here on top of these images to create a certain impression. It’s impressionism. I don’t think documentary is a form of impressionism. It’s realism, and music has no place there.”<sup>10</sup> According to this view, music holds the potential to undermine the documented events, even in their represented form. The exception has been synchronous, or diegetic scenes of music making or listening, which can be found in abundance throughout the many histories of documentary filmmaking. Taken from the real world and located in the diegesis, onscreen music can help to embody and substantiate the captured image by providing a scene with a sonic ambience—even commentary—without recourse to the narrative ambiguities of a nondiegetic voice.

Yet, despite these steps towards visual and sonic nonintervention, interpretative and creative mediation is locatable in most examples of documentary filmmaking: the placement and duration of the camera's gaze, for instance; the choice of lighting and *mise-en-scène*; the formation of narrative arcs and flow constructed in the editing room; and the ways in which people change their behaviour when confronted with a camera. As soon as an aesthetic decision is made, the line between interpretation and fiction begins to bend. When a documentary includes the "impressionism" of creative sound design or music, the distinguishing parameters between "representation" and "*reproduction*" become more permeable still. Soundtrack is an element of postproduction, an "impressionistic" voice added from a different place and time that can jar with the immediacy of images; a voice, moreover, that has no clear grounding in the diegesis. What are we hearing and where is it coming from? The images and sounds of fiction film both arise from an imagined world and can thus connect in an aesthetically-viable way: but in nonfiction works, where image pertains to the profilmic real, music points towards a completely different, fantastical space.<sup>11</sup> Music in fiction film is a powerful device that can operate in numerous complex ways: it able to create empathy with one character or situation within a crowded image, to prompt intense emotional responses to the unfolding drama, to conceal the technological basis of the diegesis and to form profound connections between audience and film. This voice, when employed in documentary film, not only calls into question the apparent validity, spontaneity and naturalism of what is being shown, but also operates as a transformational stimulus. The decision to embrace or avoid this transformational—even revelatory—quality of music (which is, after all, never neutral) differs between nonfiction styles and eras. While observational styles rejected dramatic—or nondiegetic—music, as we have seen, other forms of documentary have embraced additional sound. John Corner has noted that music tends to be found most often in "programmes which operate confidently within a sense of themselves

as artefacts, as authored ‘works’. This need not mean a claim to high aesthetic status, it simply indicates a level of self-consciousness about the crafting and styling of the account, the degree of creative and imaginative freedom exercised in its construction.”<sup>12</sup> Early work, for instance, was often awash with music (think of the lush orchestral scores by Benjamin Britten—Harry Watt's *Night Mail* in 1936—and Gail Kubik—William Wyler’s 1944 *Memphis Belle: The Story of a Flying Fortress*), as were the transgressive “poetic” experiments of that began in the 1980s, such as Godfrey Reggio’s ruminative tone poem *Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance* (1982), a disorienting visual collage held together by a relentless driving score by Philip Glass, or Ron Fricke’s more recent *Samara* (2011), whose intense non-narrativity is countered by the eclectic music of Michael Stearns, Lisa Gerrard and Marcello De Francisci. Similarly, the political “essay” documentary of the 1980s and ’90s, made frequent use of dramatic music to heighten reconstructed flashback scenes: Errol Morris was particularly fond of this technique, which features prominently in *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), which also has a score by Glass. More recently, highly-authored, large-budget docutainments such as *Spell-Bound* (Jeffrey Blitz, 2002) and *Mad Hot Ball Room* (Marilyn Agrelo, 2005) have matched effusive, highly filmic scores with glossy, smoothly edited images to forge narrative arcs highly reminiscent of popular fiction features.

In all the examples above, “creative and imaginative freedom” is signalled via an original score able to smooth the angular textures inherent in quickly captured documentary footage and provide a consistency that draws filmgoers into attentive and immersive modes of reception. Used in such a way, the captured image becomes less rugged and more clearly processed and “authored”, as Corner would have it. This process is particularly important when different methods of capture are used. Colliding visual textures steer Jonathan Caouette’s *All Tomorrow’s Parties* (2009), for instance, a documentary about the English music festival of the same name in which pre-used Super 8 images are combined with new

digital footage and fan-captured mobile phone material received from over 200 contributors. Sometimes differently-sourced images share the same screen (figure 1). The result could have been difficult to watch but, as Jamie Sexton points out, the specific use of sound helps to stabilise the “fragmented kaleidoscope of edited images by bridging cuts.”<sup>13</sup> This is particularly apparent at the start of the film, when images from numerous sources, edited together in quick succession, are blended by the nondiegetic constancy of Battles’ “Atlas” (2007). Here, an attempt is made to conceal the fissures of the visual montage; to produce an

{PLACE FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE} Figure 1. The split screen during the opening of *All Tomorrow's Parties* (Jonathan Caouette, 2009).

immersive audio track familiar to fiction film audiences despite running the risk of undermining the apparent spontaneity and naturalism of the crowd-sourced documentary footage.

However, several documentarians have embraced the aesthetic possibilities of a fissure between documented sections that run without music, and those of imaginative play in which visual footage can be reconstituted to follow the structure or rhythm of an audio track: between observation, and revelation, commentary or recollection. One of the most striking examples of this oscillation can be found in Joshua Oppenheimer’s 2012 film, *The Act of Killing*, a work that consciously treads the boundaries between narrative and documentary filmmaking styles. Produced by Morris and Herzog, this disturbing, expanded form of documentary interrogates the minds of several figures responsible for the execution of more than a million alleged communists in Indonesia around 1965. One death squad executioner responsible for the genocide of hundreds of people began his violent career as a gangster selling cinema tickets on the black market to fund his more sinister activities. Obsessed with

film, Anwar Congo looked to violent American gangster movies for inspiration on how best to extinguish his victims. Responding to Congo's proclivity for the movies, Oppenheimer explains that he initiated:

a journey into the memories and imaginations of the perpetrators, offering insight into the minds of mass killers...we challenge Anwar and his friends to develop fiction scenes about their experience of the killings, adapted to their favorite film genres – gangster, western, musical. They write the scripts. They play themselves. And they play their victims... We hoped to catalyze a process of collective remembrance and imagination. Fiction provided one or two degrees of separation from reality, a canvas on which they could paint their own portrait and stand back and look at it.<sup>14</sup>

During the process of telling their story, the gangsters display an array of emotions from boastful heroicness to saddened remorse as their move from actuality to imaginative reconstruction encourages them to reflect upon their actions in a variety of ways.

The film is full of music, from the original theme by Danish composer Karsten Fundal to several instances of pre-existent film music, including the theme song from an Indonesian docudrama based on the 1965 30 September Movement coup, *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (Arifin C. Noer 1984). These additional voices help to fictionalise and thus soften the events depicted. But there are two scenes that are choreographed to music, which have an altogether different resonance: "The process by which we made the musical scenes (the waterfall, the giant concrete goldfish) was slightly different again", explains Oppenheimer: "But here too Anwar was very much in the driver's seat: he chose the songs and, along with his friends, devised both scenes."<sup>15</sup> In one disturbingly kitsch scene, the characters stand in front of a waterfall, surrounded by girls in flowing costumes performing a choreographed dance to a

version of Matt Munro’s “Born Free” (John Barry with lyrics by Don Black), a song originally used for James Hill’s 1966 film of the same name. At first, the protagonists stand in relatively inert postures, but as the song progresses, two of the gangsters, here playing the deceased victims, slowly remove circles of wire from their neck. One then produces a gold medal medallion and places it around Congo’s neck: “Thank you for executing me and sending my soul to heaven”. Paradoxically, the cinematic excess provided in this opulent scene produces a particularly uncomfortable reminder of the unutterable truth that lies beneath the music that even Congo seems embarrassed by as we see him watching the footage on a small TV screen as the song draws to a close (figure 2).

{PLACE FIGURES 2A and 2B ABOUT HERE} Figure 2A. The dance scene choreographed to Matt Munro’s “Born Free” in *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012).

Figure 2B. One of Congo’s victims shakes his hand during the “Born Free” dance scene. *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012).

Halting narrative flow, these musical tableaux create space for intense self-reflection that moves the film from third person telling—or actuality—to a first person flight of fantasy—or imagination. The move into interiority is reminiscent of the temporal shift of an operatic aria, where a character uses melody to temporarily side step the teleology of plot and embrace contemplation. By performing two types of declaration—immersive interviewed sections and self-conscious fantastical response—Congo highlights the oscillation between different forms of documentary engagement: the drastic, immediate in-the-moment experience of nonfiction footage and the gnostic, hermeneutic response to the gathered information.<sup>16</sup> And yet, because the response is orchestrated by Congo himself, the move from actuality to imagination can in fact be understood as one from the real to a form of

authenticity more heightened than that possible from a purely objective—and visual—viewpoint.

*The Act of Killing*, then, exposes the traditional use of music in documentary film to sensationalise and signify a move into a more interpretative state. But such musical self-reflexivity—and its ability to lead an audience into the mind of a character—can also occur in films that maintain a sense of the present tense rather than oscillating between real-imagined binaries. It is here, within the immediate, experiential form of poetic documentary, that sonic elongation can arise. If a film eschews added music—either pre-existent or composed—for a creative treatment of location sound, a different form of audience engagement is engendered. When diegetic sound is pulled into the realm of music composition through the process of sonic elongation, it fulfils a double role by remaining strongly connected to its visual source, while at the same time pulling away from it to become sonically—and audiovisually—unrecognisable. The result can be unusual: sound taken from the shoot location is preserved as a harbinger of the profilmic connection between sound and image in a clear “representation” of reality. But, by using these same sounds as compositional material, the connection between profilmic audio and its visual referent can stretch to produce a dual form of audiovisuality. At once localised within an image and pointing towards a sonic elsewhere, the sound in such films—simultaneously diegetic and nondiegetic—can merge the objectified present tense with a personal, highly charged reaction to events *as they are occurring*. Although a merging of the profilmic and its interpretation is always present in documentary film, in cases of creative elongation, this sonic mapping initiates a topological change from one audiovisual space into the dimensions of another. Just as geometric shapes can be transformed, through stretching and twisting, from one object into another without rupturing or adding to the original dimensions or volume—a process known as a homeomorphic shift—

this transformation stretches the unmediated material into new and re-imagined sound-shapes.

### **Sonic Remediation**

Until recently, sonic homeomorphic shifts—or sonic elongations—made only rare appearances in documentary film because the technology needed to produce such fluid elongation was cumbersome, difficult to use and resisted the easy re-synchronisation with an image. Most often, mimicry proved a more efficient alternative, as can be heard in Benjamin Britten’s instrumental imitations of machinery that abound in Alberto Cavalcanti’s 1935 documentary *Coal Face*. Of those examples that can be found in documentary’s early years, most reside at the genre’s more experimental edges, where soundscapes were heavily influenced by concurrent technological innovations that were shaping tape and electronic music: the work of Walther Ruttmann, for instance, or the experimental analogue fusion of sound and voice in the work of Daphne Oram, Tristram Cary and Basil Wright.<sup>17</sup>

However, the digital revolution had a profound impact on the ease with which sound and music could be captured and manipulated, giving rise to new sonic complexities not only at odds with the direct and *vérité* traditions outlined above, but also with the essay films and big budget docutainments that sought audiovisual textures reminiscent of those commonly found in fiction features. *Manufactured Landscapes* is a good example of this dichotomy. The film moves slowly, at times documenting Burtynsky as he shoots his footage, at others coming to a complete halt to linger on his mediated, photographed scenes themselves (figure 3). Presented with such protracted cinematography, audience members are encouraged to

{PLACE FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE} Figure 3. Edward Burtynsky sets up his camera in *Manufactured Landscapes* (Jennifer Baichwal, 2006).



dwell on images that may have gone unnoticed in a faster moving-image sequence. The visceral impact of stillness allows room for emotion to accumulate and develop. And with the aura of the image wide open, there is ample space for sound to command attention, as Baichwal explains:

sometimes melody or rhythm would emerge from that soundscape and you couldn't tell am I hearing, is this music or is it just the rhythm of some hammer or machine and then it would go back down into that soundscape and come out and go down without ever, only a few times emerging as a clear distinct element before subsuming itself back down into the sound.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike *The Act of Killing*, whose sectionality is crystallised by the alternating presence and absence of music, Driscoll's soundscape for *Manufactured Landscapes* destabilises and blurs the boundaries between the real and the creatively rendered. At first, the documentary appears to adhere to a traditional audiovisual aesthetic, and the opening 8-minute pan shot that passes through the production line of a Chinese factory is closely linked to the profilmic sound. However, at other times, sound is released from its referential status and takes instead the form of music. These moments of sonic elongation command varying degrees of attention. The first elongation is relatively subtle and emerges slowly from a bed of real-world sounds as we see Chinese workers sifting through debris at a rubbish tip (20'50''). Isolated rhythmic interjections slowly gather pace as the image abstracts into close-ups of twisted metal interspersed with Burtynsky's photographs. Eventually, diegetic sound morphs entirely into a piano-like melody punctuated by glitch, static and mechanical drones. No sooner is the transformation of noise into music accomplished, however, than it begins to dissolve "back down into the sound" (23'35'').

By the time Burtynsky starts capturing images of a decaying Bangladeshi ship yard, the sonic process of abstraction is more sustained (33.55). Although Driscoll's electronic wash is present during the establishing shot of the yard, it quickly subsides, leaving almost ten minutes of clean profilmic sound before the process of sonic elongation begins. During a section filmed in black and white, ambiguous drones quietly re-enter as the now-familiar industrial sounds undergo subtle ambient transformations (42'15''). These transformations develop quickly, growing in volume until the moving image again stutters into motionless photographs. Crafted from the ship yard's chimes, clangs, hammerings and bangs and held together by a strong, metallic, 4/4 beat, the *musique concrète* dominates, only relinquishing its hold when the camera regains its mobility (44'30''). Taken from the location, the sound helps to bring the photos to life, providing them with a temporality and a third, sonic dimension.

Creating de-familiarised soundscapes that remain anchored to image while simultaneously pulling away from it can challenge the way in which we listen, or respond, to environmental sound. During these moments, it is not that real-world sound is silenced: rather, the broadening of its sonorities prompts a process of de-familiarisation that draws attention to the environmental sounds that lie at the heart of the documentary, while *simultaneously* revealing their potential for creative commentary. Here, noise—that “emerges out of the industrial landscape”—instantly stretches from the profilmic into a politically active form of commentary on the ecological impact of human intervention. As a result, the film progresses via a self-referential loop, remediating its own materials in order to comment on itself as it unfolds rather than separating the past from the present through music, as we saw happening in *The Act of Killing*. Emanating from the same source, this form of sonic elongation can close the gap between the (apparent) immediacy of the captured image and an

“impressionistic” composed score that comments on the documented world from another time and place.

### **Sonic Convergence**

Sonic elongation, then, enables music to grow directly from actuality sound. In *Manufactured Landscapes*, the relationship remains close as the recorded industrial sounds develop, through rhythm, into experimental noise music. This ability has been technologically determined. The ease and speed of digital technology has had implications for the ways in which documentary images can be sounded. With an array of different methods of capture, from camera phone sound to professional, high-end microphones that are conducive to single-person operation, digital sound is as simple to secure as the digital image. Yet the soundtrack revolution really manifested through developments in post-production manipulation that enabled sounds, previously stored on magnetic tape, to be saved and edited in digital formats. Documentary film is often the work of small creative groups: aside from aesthetic considerations, the skills—and therefore financial outlay—required to compose music and manipulate sound may have prevented its inclusion in small-budget projects. Digital technologies, however, have opened up new and accessible alternatives to the customary and highly-skilled division of labour in soundtrack construction.

Traditionally, the departments of music and sound design in major movie studios have been kept apart and creative manipulation of both elements into the resultant soundscape (which also includes dialogue) happens only at the final editing stage, as sound designer Randy Thom laments: “People often ask me how much collaboration there usually is between the composer and the sound designer. There is almost never any collaboration between the composer and the sound designer, or between the composer and the supervising sound editor. And that's a shame.”<sup>19</sup> The technological developments in the 1960s that gave rise to an

emerging cinematic sound design practice which saw pioneers Walter Murch (*Apocalypse Now*, 1979) and Ben Burtt (*Star Wars*, 1977) assume creative control over all sonic elements are perhaps the most notable deviations from normal practice. However, digital technology has made such aural conflation the norm. Unlike magnetic or optical sound, digital code is easy to manipulate; it does not need physical intervention in the form of cutting and splicing, and it can be fluently combined with other sounds. The move from magnetic tape to digital formats began in the 1980s with the evolution of digital audio workstations (DAWs) such as Pro Tools and gathered speed through the late 1990s when commercial studios embraced the possibilities for mixing together music and sound in multiple layers without losing fidelity. As a result of these new technologies, Kevin Donnelly has identified a process of creative convergence since the turn of the millennium in the spheres of music and sound: “In recent years an increasingly *aesthetic* rather than *representational* conception of sound in the cinema has emerged”, he writes. Traditionally, sound designers focused on the “clarity and intelligibility of dialogue, alongside uncluttered but functional composition of diegetic sound elements. Nondiegetic music occupied an unobtrusive position in volume and pitch, except at privileged moments.”<sup>20</sup> By contrast, digital technologies have encouraged what Donnelly describes as a more “unified aural field of music and other sounds”, where the roles of sound effect and music can merge thanks to the “musical software”.<sup>21</sup> William Whittington uses the work of animation sound designer Gary Rydstrom to show how this sonic merging has given rise to a new form of hyperrealism:

... it is understood that sound design does not simply capture reality, but rather constructs an entirely new ‘cinematic reality’, augmenting it through attentiveness to considerations such as sound perspective, localization, psychoacoustics, and spectacle.<sup>22</sup>

An aesthetically, rather than representationally, conceived soundtrack can result in the individual audio elements of the soundtrack taking on an ambiguous role. The traditional theorisation of the fiction film soundscape has focused on the way in which the interaction between sound, dialogue and non-diegetic music has been constructed in order to help an audience suspend their disbelief: Murch, for instance, has famously asserted that the re-association of image and sound—and the resultant audiovisual synchronicity—is the “fundamental pillar upon which the creative use of sound rests, and without which it would collapse”.<sup>23</sup> Along similar lines, Rick Altman notes that “We see a door slam, we hear a door slam; the sound intensifies the sense of reality initially produced by the image ... but all in all nothing entirely new is contributed by mimetic sound...”.<sup>24</sup> But, as we have seen, such synchronisation doesn’t just create a realistic effect; it forms a certain type of “cinematic reality” with a great deal of control over our emotional response. Two things are significant here. First, when the synchronous sounds are created in the Foley room, they are often formed through trickery—Rydstrom digitally constructed the T-Rex’s ferocious roar in *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) from the growls of several different animals, for instance.<sup>25</sup> Second, such manipulation can move beyond the simple mimesis outlined by Altman, into what James Wierzbicki identifies as an auditory moment that, while working with the image to ensure against rupture, nevertheless draws attention to itself in order “to trigger in its listeners emotional responses, or affects, at least as deep as those stirred by a film’s extra-diegetic music”.<sup>26</sup> In these moments, sound is not used simply as the “fundamental pillar” of audiovisual logic, but rather as a harbinger for semiotic excess: “Whereas well-executed sound effects help make a story seem credible, sound affect helps tell a story”.<sup>27</sup> Significantly, though, affect sounds operate within the accepted contexts of “cinematic reality”, their hyperreality easily consumed within the parameters of audiovisual viability.

While the three auditory inputs are dynamic and open to flux and change, however, if the traditional systems distort too much, attention is drawn to sound and an audience establishes a different connection with the image. In film, environmental noise is often used to fill out and substantiate the image. In some cases, drawing attention to onscreen sounds can help to secure the sound-to-sound coherence of the film without jarring an audience from their suspended disbelief. But when attention is drawn to them beyond their relationship with a visual source, or when the relationship with a visual source is challenged—the heard but unseen monster in the horror film, for instance—the effect can be unnerving. This emphasis on sound, and its distance from image, lies at the heart of sonic elongation.

### **Sonic Slippage**

Although sonic elongation shares similarities with several modes of aurality in contemporary narrative film, there are important distinctions between the creative audition that each engenders. The first arises from the contrasting way in which the original sounds are captured, or created; the second is the method by which the processed sounds are recoupled with the image. As Whittington and Donnelly have argued, the soundworlds of contemporary fiction film are artificial, coming, in most instances, from the Foley studio operating, like Jean Baudrillard's understanding of hyperreality, as "the generation by models of a real without original or reality".<sup>28</sup> But when the initial sounds are profilmic, captured from the shoot itself, a more fluid form of sonic slippage occurs. The process of sonic elongation enhances and transforms actuality sounds to such an extent that they almost become unrecognisable; we can say that in such sonically-driven documentaries, the process moves not from the fictional towards the plausible, but rather from the real to the imagined; from document, to a highly mediated "poetic, ecstatic truth". Here, we can articulate a clear distinction between the processes of hyperrealism and affective sound that

have changed the current soundscapes of narrative film and big-budget docutainments on the one hand, and the fluid forms of sonic elongation found in more experimental documentary work. While narrative filmmakers employ trickery to forge plausible forms of audiovisuality, nonfiction artists invert this process, stressing the boundaries of plausibility by fracturing pre-existent—and real—audiovisual connections. The nuanced ways in which these sounds are made and manipulated, even in postclassical film, heighten the unfolding “cinematic reality”, creating moments of affect that are nevertheless subsumed by our proficiency in suspending disbelief.

The difference between these affective, hyperreal sounds that point only towards an artificially-constructed sense of reality and sonically elongated ones is that the original sounds in the latter *are* real. Captured on the shoot, their manipulation is not so much in the construction of a cinematically coherent reality through heightened mimesis, but rather in their transformation of actual, real-world sounds into imagined and almost transcendental soundworlds. While narrative film sound moves from the Foley room into a plausible and hyperdetailed version of realism, then, sonic elongation in documentary film moves the other way; from actuality sound to a clearly imagined, subjective and responsive musical flow. This difference can not only be articulated in terms of sound-to-sound relationships, but also in audio-visual ones. As the authors above have consistently found, even within the intensified aesthetics of postclassical cinema, the vertical sound-image relationships remain intact in order to avoid “any distancing” that an audiovisual rupture may initiate even when, as Wierzbicki argues, moments of clear sonic affect draw attention to themselves. By contrast, sonic elongation, although operating via a homeomorphic shift, embraces this distancing in a reversal of narrative film practice. While many documentarians, despite readily employing digital technologies, have formed their visual tracks in such a way as to efface the distance between the profilmic and the recorded, the sound and music of recent

nonfiction works have often been afforded a new and highly expressive freedom. Real-world sounds are creatively augmented until their relationship to other sounds overtakes the synchronous hold of the image so prevalent in the fiction film tradition. However, the shift in focus from vertical relationships to horizontal ones is not as foreign to the traditional documentary form as it might at first appear. Sonic elongation hovers between the reductive idea of the early Direct Cinema practitioners that all documentary sound should be confined to the microphone and the sonically “authored” approach to big budget docutainment, which shares its scoring practices with popular narrative film. Sitting between these extremes, elongated soundtracks transform actuality sound into compositional realms without fundamentally rupturing, or rejecting, strict observational techniques. This is possible, in part, due to the peculiarities—and unpredictability—of sound captured on location.

### **Location Sound**

Big-budget soundscapes, then, are often formed during postproduction. Documentary sound is often very different. Created in the moment and responding to live events, documentary is often reactive. Without recourse to Foley (with its painstakingly constructed clarity), actuality sound (*actual* sound effects) caught in a real-life situation can be of low quality, resulting in what Michel Chion describes as a “loss of intelligibility”.<sup>29</sup> Even with the use of shotgun and directional microphones, moments of auditive confusion are nevertheless a common trait of documentary footage, as Jeffrey Ruoff points out:

One of the major stylistic characteristics of documentaries that use sounds recorded on location is the lack of clarity of the sound track. Ambient sounds compete with dialogue in ways commonly deemed unacceptable in conventional Hollywood practice. A low signal-to-noise ratio demands greater attention from the viewer to decipher spoken words. Slight differences in room tone between shots make smooth



sound transitions difficult. Indeed, listening to many of the scenes of observational films without watching the screen can be a dizzying experience. Without recognizable sources in the image to anchor the sounds, we hear a virtual cacophony of clanging, snippets of dialogue and music, and various unidentifiable sounds, almost an experiment in concrete music... While Hollywood sound tracks are typically easier to understand than sounds in everyday life, documentary sound tracks are potentially more difficult to follow than sounds in everyday life.<sup>30</sup>

The “virtual cacophony” is often clear, even in bigger-budget films (several of the spoken interviews in *The Act of Killing* get buried beneath street noise and bells, for instance), while more experimental works can actively embrace aural confusion (think of President Nixon’s secret recordings that drive Peter W. Kunhardt’s *Nixon By Nixon: In His Own Words* [2014], where the frequent unintelligibility of the taped voices places emphasis instead on the emotion and volume of his voice).<sup>31</sup> Typified by jittery and sometimes unfocused camerawork, footage caught on the go is often at odds with the clear points of audition that characterise the manipulated sound worlds of fiction features. The sound designers of fiction film use a variety of techniques to ensure that the relevant information is always audible and at the forefront of our perception. And yet, as Whittington contends, although film sound is often considered an indicator of realism, what we receive is in fact a highly constructed form of aural hyperrealism. Along similar lines, Chion acknowledges that “Sound that rings true for the spectator and sound that *is* true are two very different things. In order to assess the truth of a sound, we refer much more to codes established by cinema itself, by television, and narrative-representational arts in general, than to our hypothetical lived experience”.<sup>32</sup> The ability of advanced sound technologies in cinema, then, has enabled the development of a greater illusory realism through heavy mediation and pretence.

By contrast, the unmediated state of sounds captured under the mobile conditions of documentary filmmaking appear, paradoxically, confused and unrealistic. Significantly, profilmic location sounds frequently run the risk of becoming dissociated from their points of visual reference, or anchorage; if the microphone is located on the camera, the point-of-audition will remain with director and viewer, and yet may be too far away from the action to record events coherently; if an external mic is used, the point-of-view may become dislocated from the point-of-audition, leading to a “dizzying experience”. Not only does actuality sound run the risk of becoming “more difficult to follow than sounds in everyday life”, then; it can also paradoxically appear less realistic to ears attuned to the artificial sonic clarity of the fiction film. As ambient sounds coalesce into what Ruoff calls the “middle ground”, they can move away from clear actuality and into the non-referential realm of music. With much documentary footage, in other words, the sonic “middle ground” offers a primary track in which the convergence of sound and music—and their problematic relationship to the image—is already underway. Interestingly, such sonic convergence is embraced at the two extremes of nonfiction filmmaking; in fly-on-the wall films, and in more “authored” art features. Marion Leonard and Robert Strachan, for instance, find such an extension in the poetic landscape documentaries, *sleep furiously* (Gideon Koppel, 2008) and *Silence* (Pat Collins, 2010), arguing that volume and changing audio qualities highlight ambient soundscape to such an extent that real-world sounds take on a musical quality able to signify emotional and thematic intent. Such transference requires filmgoers to listen to the landscape attentively; even aesthetically.<sup>33</sup> Like the transference from documentary’s reproduction of reality to its representation identified by Nichols, in such instances, sound significantly outstrips the representational impulses of image. At such moments, Murch’s “fundamental pillar” of synchronicity does not collapse, but rather expands from the prosaic into the imaginative.

The “middle ground” of profilmic sound offers an already ruptured form of audiovisuality. The technological advancements outlined above allow a director to easily take full advantage of sound’s floating signifiers: to creatively extend the disconnect between captured sound and its corresponding image. As we saw in *Manufactured Landscapes*, once dislocated from their visual referents, real-world noises are able to pass freely between sound and musical composition. At the same time, however, the soundtrack keeps one foot in the image, thus allowing the film to retain a loose grip on the traditional nonfiction aesthetic. Such films, in other words, achieve fidelity to the profilmic while also including an integrated musical commentary formed from sonic information gathered at the shoot. This process is taken to an extreme in *Leviathan*. Here, we only experience audiovisual synchronisation intermittently. Without voiceover or any clear narrative arc, the film proceeds via sensory snippets and, depending on the location of the camera, it can be difficult to tell what is in shot, and whether the sound is connected to, or abstracted from, the image. This ambiguity resonates most strongly in the scenes shot underwater, where the untreated profilmic sound is already at its strangest. During the middle of the documentary, a long sequence taken from outside the boat’s hull alternates between audiovisual textures as the cameras and microphones dip in and out of the waves (35’53’’). The sequence is visually arresting, moving from shots of bloody water rushing from the boat, to opportunistic seagulls circling above the water before finally alighting on the boat’s green bow (figure 4). Throughout, the

{PLACE FIGURES 4A and 4B ABOUT HERE} Figures 4A and 4B. Two shots taken from a camera located in front of the ship’s bow in *Leviathan* (Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel, 2012).

point-of-view lurches wildly, moving from shots taken above the waves, which are accompanied by clear watery sounds, to submerged images where the soundscape becomes claustrophobic and referentially murky. This is most apparent when the scene returns to the water (40'), after a brief movement back onto the boat for a shot of a man showering. Here, we remain under the gloomy green water: impaired vision is matched by the resonant, muffled sounds of a net being raised through the water by large machinery. As it rises, star fish and small sea creatures escape through the gaps and the mechanical drone sound begins to take a different shape, increasing in density to accommodate new higher tones, ambience and electroacoustic timbres that lack a discernable source. However, unlike Driscoll's beat-driven timbres of *Manufactured Landscapes*, *Leviathan's* soundscape pulls away from the image without coalescing into clear musicality. Rather, by retaining a residue of the raw material, it remains suspended between locational synchronicity and composed score; an indication of just how far audiovisuality can stretch before the relationship is broken.

Sonic elongation, then, is different from the narrative film textures mentioned above; it is not as simple as "enhanced" sound as there is a synchronous slippage that arises from the creative, compositional treatment of the material along a horizontal, not just vertical, axis. Nor does it designate a transgression of filmic space, in which location sound is unhooked from its visual object and applied in a non-diegetic way because the homeomorphic movement between actuality and elongated sound ensures that audio and visual elements remain strongly aligned. Rather, the confusion of real-world sounds, which are ordinarily heard, with music, which demands to be listened to, encourages complex modes of attention and engagement unique of the documentary format.

## **Listening to Documentary**

The slippage between sound and music is not, of course, unique to documentary film, nor even to film more generally. Noise, a by-product, an unwanted, or unintended sound (“noise is any sound one doesn’t like”, wrote Varèse in 1962)<sup>34</sup> has maintained a volatile relationship to music. As Varèse implies, classification is subjectively contingent. With this in mind, Paul Hegarty suggests that noise and music are not distinct categories, but rather the two ends of a single continuum: “[n]oise is not an objective fact. It occurs in relation to perception—both direct (sensory) and according to presumptions made by an individual. These are going to vary according to historical, geographical and cultural location.”<sup>35</sup> Chion voices a similar sentiment to Hegarty’s sonic continuum when constructing his framework for analysing film sound: the distinction between music and noise is, he points out, “completely relative, and has to do with what we are listening for”; the way in which we listen “depends on the listener’s cultural references”.<sup>36</sup> The radical variance in reception during the twentieth century and the malleability of what constitutes noise is clear to trace through Luigi Russolo’s noise machines, Pierre Schaeffer’s *musique concrète*, Cage’s work with environmental sound and silence through to the development, from the 1970s, of noise music acts like Throbbing Gristle and Merzbow. These different strategies of musical composition and the ever-growing choice of musical material are useful for our consideration of the fluid soundworlds of recent documentary, which can be reconceptualised as an audiovisual form of the new sounds that pepper twentieth- and twenty-first-century music composition.

With this in mind, the question becomes not only how music can be part of the documenting process, but also what happens when it becomes a disruptive voice from *within* the diegesis able to interrogate the very syntactical structures and systems that constitute the genre itself?

What is it we are listening for? Thinking again about Chion’s question above, an idea begins to emerge that could hold the key for how a transgressive and elongated use of sound in documentary film can paradoxically become one of its most unifying elements. Brandon

LaBelle locates the “expanded sonic palette” of experimental music within “an intensification of listening experience—in volume, in location, and in procedure...”.<sup>37</sup> Such an intensification also lies at the heart of the contemporary film sound discussions. Although Wierzbicki speaks of affect sound as initiating a heightened moment of audiovisuality that nevertheless operates from within the parameters of accepted cinematic discourse, for instance, this idea relies on a movement between different forms of listening. So far, our understanding of sonic elongation has been technological, but if we now extend this idea beyond the practicalities and into the new forms of reception that they enable—and upturned listening strategies in particular—we find a symbiotic relationship between technological advancement and new forms of listening capacity.

Hegarty explains hearing as “less reflective” than listening, “a physical process we can do nothing about.”<sup>38</sup> For auditory neuroscientist Seth Horowitz, the difference between hearing and listening is attention; listening is not simply the perception of sound, but our reaction to it.<sup>39</sup> Hearing is an automatic biological process, whereas listening requires an interpretative action by the brain, as Roland Barthes explained: “Hearing is a physiological phenomenon; listening is a psychological act”.<sup>40</sup> In life, sounds are often heard and processed unconsciously in order to gain important information about our surroundings. It is only at times of possible danger—a car horn, someone shouting—or particular beauty—the unexpected song of a blackbird—that we begin to pay close attention in order to decipher what has been heard; to listen.

This distinction between types of attentiveness famously formed the basis of Pierre Schaeffer’s four “modes of listening” that range from objective, subjective, peripheral and emotional forms of engagement.<sup>41</sup> In particular, his exploration of reduced listening problematises the binary of hearing and listening, as it asks the audience to fully abstract sound from source in order to experience it as an independent and embodied object. These

different modes of listening open up almost limitless levels of possible perception that are fluid and subject to continual reordering according to their relationships not only with each other, but also to other sensory inputs, and it is here that these ideas become useful for cinematic forms. Unlike the activated listening strategies of experimental music and sound art, film consumption requires an *audiovisual* mode of engagement, something that initially appears at odds with the very notion of reduced listening. Chion's three modes of listening are more nuanced and take into account the experiential mutability between different types of audiovisual focus. Causal listening seeks information about a sound's source, he suggests: "in cinema, causal listening is constantly manipulated by the audiovisual contract itself, especially through the phenomenon of synchresis. Most of the time we are dealing not with the real initial cause of the sounds, but causes that the film makes us believe in." By contrast, semantic listening is "that which refers to a code of a language to interpret a message" while, finally, reduced listening is Schaefferian in nature.<sup>42</sup>

The slippage encouraged by such audience-focused engagement brings us back to "affect sound", whereby attention is gently refocused, without rupture, from a visual to a sonic moment. Here, the audience listen for what is relevant within the *mise-en-scène*, reordering the traditional audiovisual hierarchy in the service of a narrative context, as Wierzbicki explains: "In the real world, the separation of sound that is somehow significant from inconsequential background noise is always done—consciously or not—by us. In the fictional world of narrative cinema, the separation is typically done *for* us, by the filmmakers".<sup>43</sup> Notably, then, both Chion and Wierzbicki openly acknowledge the artifice of filmic listening (as part of a "cinematic reality"), which plays with our capacity for interpretive fluidity in the name of narrative coherence. Such attentiveness is deeply significant for film listening. A good deal of film music scholarship, the early psychoanalytically-grounded approaches in particular, considers the ways in which we

consume a film's soundtrack. Thinking specifically about music, Claudia Gorbman, Caryl Flinn and other early theorists noted the paradoxical "inaudibility" of a film's score, in which audiences often hear music they would ordinarily listen to, the idea being that music's power is operational at a subconscious level.<sup>44</sup> If the music is composed, or placed, in such a way as to draw attention to itself, an audibility is encouraged that requires a different form of attention; a movement from hearing into listening. Sonically-elongated sound that has been dislocated, broadened into musical textures and placed back on its corresponding image defamiliarises environmental sounds and their cultural histories to such an extent that inaudibility and synchresis are threatened. In this sense, the sonic elongation of documentary footage comes closer to a grounding in sound art than the Foley-based and artificial forms of sonic attentiveness garnered in fiction film consumption. In fact, the "dizzying" qualities of quickly-captured sound, further rendered strange by creative intervention, fundamentally confound Chion's categorisation: causal listening, heightened until synchresis is subtly muddled, encourages not semantic decoding but rather a form of experiential *comprendre*.

### **Sound Re-Seen**

Unlike Chion and Wierzbicki's fluid and discrete movements between modes of aural attentiveness, sonic elongation—through the rupture of expectation—draws awareness to our processes of listening and perception and, in so doing, questions the cinematic codes that we have learnt so deftly to navigate. Yet, while the self-conscious and heightened listening engendered by sonically-elongated sound invites comparison with the *acousmètre*—"a sound that one hears without seeing what causes it" (Schaeffer)—there are obvious barriers to a shared understanding.<sup>45</sup> In his application of the term to cinematic textures, Chion identifies two forms of possible acousmatic dislocation of sound from image: "visualised", or "embodied" sound operates like Schaeffer's process of direct listening, as a sound-effect is



first presented as a synchronised audiovisual gesture before continuing without the visual source; by contrast, sound that is heard first without a visual source undergoes a process of de-mythologisation when its visual source is later revealed (a process Chion refers to as “de-acousmaticization”). This movement, he argues, “between visualised and acousmatic provides a basis for the fundamental audiovisual notion of offscreen space” and is thus a significant tool in the construction of cinematic reality. This transference can result in an auditory situation similar to Schaeffer’s notion of reduced listening (what Chion refers to as “indirect listening”), in which a sound is removed from its context to become a sound object with its own aesthetic integrity.<sup>46</sup> The difference is, of course, that in film we constantly strive to allay the anxiety such dissociation causes and long for an audiovisual reconnection; this play between tension and release has made the *acousmêtre* a popular feature of horror and suspense films.

In sonic elongation, on the other hand, the sound that one hears is always linked to the image that caused it, albeit as part of a sonic “dizzying” texture noted by Ruoff. And yet, significantly, the sound is not heard in its original form. What then happens to the anxiety of the *acousmêtre* when sight is maintained, yet the connection between sound and image is distorted; when there is a conceptual fissure in the audiovisual fabric? The “sound object” in de-visualised listening “is never quite autonomous”, argues Brian Kane in *Sound Unseen*. Rather, a persistent anxiety over the absent source of an autonomous sound, and a lack of information within an auditory effect that may accurately identify its cause, carves out a space in which a “surplus-meaning” can arise.<sup>47</sup> This idea has significant ramifications for an understanding of mechanisms by which sonic elongation operates: “one central, replicated feature of acousmatic listening appears to be that under-determination of the sonic source encourages imaginative supplementation”.<sup>48</sup> To substantiate his argument, Kane refers to Steven Connor’s notion of the vocalic body, in which “a surrogate or secondary body”

manifests as “a projection of a new way of having or being a body, formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice”; Kane appropriates this taxonomy to configure “a *sonic body*”: “Acousmatic sounds encourage the imaginative projection of a *sonic body*”.<sup>49</sup>

If we transport these ideas onto film, some useful parallels develop. As Chion has noted, acousmatic sound in narrative film arises when the connection between a sonic and a visual source is temporarily thwarted, releasing sounds from their vertical synchronicity to form important horizontal relationships in the form of tension and release; if we extend these ideas via Altman’s concept of the *mise-en-bande*, we can also suggest that, as the horizontal gains in importance, the soundscape assumes a more musical trajectory. In the instances from fiction film above, the transition from Foley sound to nondiegetic music marks a move deeper into the fiction. As we have seen in our case-studies, however, in documentary the slippage signifies very differently. The homeomorphic shift that occurs as real-world sound is not uncoupled from its image, but rather subtly re-configured, thwarts the original parameters of synchronicity and realism and the familiar arrangement of foreground and background listening: audiovisuality slips sideways, forwards and upwards and profilmic sound becomes estranged from itself. Creative audition is required to navigate such slippage. But at the same time, sonic elongation, precisely due to its expanded synchronicity—or at least residual relation to image—is not as audible as a pure acousmatic occurrence. This refreshed and liminal listening practice not only asks us to hear anew, however, but also to see afresh. Kane’s notion of the sonic body does not quite fit here, of course, as documentary’s elongated sounds are neither acousmatic nor discrete objects; remaining visualised, it is sound, rather than image, that becomes the locus for “imaginative supplementation”. This initiates a reversal of Chion’s “causal listening” to engender a form of causal viewing; how do these sounds map onto these images; what does this audiovisual slippage signify? To attend to these questions, we are asked to perform two tasks at the same time: to note the

audiovisual synchronicity of the direct sounds, yet also to acknowledge their partial *acousmêtre*; to de-familiarise raw sounds in order to encourage attentive listening to things ordinarily only heard. Sonic elongation, then, can be considered as acousmatic sound *and* its semantic excesses *re*-visualised. Or rather, as sound *re*-seen.

Both *Manufactured Landscapes* and *Leviathan* encourage us to change the way we see, by putting the senses back together while leaving the strangeness to vibrate loudly in the audiovisual gaps; between what we expect and the emotional, “imaginative supplementation” extracted from what we are given. However, the process of re-seeing is particularly apparent in *Leviathan*. Selmin Kara and Alanna Thain read the film as a form of sonic ethnography, as the strange camera angles draw attention from the images and place it instead on the other senses, initiating a disconnect between seeing and listening.<sup>50</sup> But thinking instead about an intermedial elongation allows us to read the film in a more contextual way. Elongated sound pulls at the image, plying its representational qualities with sonic dissonances. Unlike the steady base images of *Manufactured Landscapes*, *Leviathan* destabilises visual meaning to confound the connection between observation and intervention. Sound complicates this even more. As both sound and image are set adrift, we are left wondering where the point-of-audition is and where we are placed within the diegesis. The destabilising effects of sonic elongation are here rendered in their purest sense. Hearing is continually pushed into the realm of listening as the filmgoer has to interpret the sounds, whose semantic structures are threatened by visual distortions that press far beyond the hyperreal. As a result, the movement between sound and music draws attention to the self-awareness that a re-visualised *acousmêtre* engenders. *Leviathan*’s sonic traces, then, do not aim to retain their objective connections to a visual source, but rather highlight the subjective construction of acoustic perception itself; the movement, in other words, from hearing to listening.

This brings us back to our opening discussion of documentary aesthetics: the manipulation of actuality sound, acousmatic ambient noise and synchronous dialogue can form a soundscape that teeters on the boundary between noise and music just as documentary film straddles the divides between real and fictional, the observed and the interrogated. At first glance, it appears as though shared sound, music and image digital technologies have enabled a practical manifestation of Renov's theoretical "enmeshing" of narrative and documentary film. Viewed in this way, creative audition in contemporary nonfiction work offers a fundamental revision of the aesthetic and practical considerations of the early observational styles to accord with Nichols's preference for an understanding of these works as *representations*, rather than reproductions, of our world. But with its retained hold over the host images, sonically elongated sound in fact points towards a different form of expression.

### **Sonic Elongation**

Both *Manufactured Landscapes* and *Leviathan* contain moments where sound is used, as it has been from the earliest days of sound cinema, to add depth and a sense of multidimensionality to the images. But when sonic elongation arises and actuality sound reaches towards the condition of music, an active, psychological form of listening is engendered. Often, this shift between hearing and the culturally subjective process of listening initiates a move from the familiar, objective flow of documentary film, to still and self-reflexive audiovisual spectacle. In *The Act of Killing*, pre-existent songs create moments of musical tableaux that stall the narrative and give the protagonists *and* the audience time to reflect on events from "one or two degrees of separation from reality". But through the elongation of real-world sounds, attention is drawn not only to the musical end of the sonic spectrum, but also to the environmental sounds: we are encouraged to listen to both the real and the mediated soundscape at the *same time*. Although the move between attentive states is

subtle, the link to the profilmic always clear. It is not whether or not this stands within or beyond, parallel to or in opposition to, the diegesis, but how the film organically emerges in both directions simultaneously; this world is not separate from us, it is an intermedially re-configured version.

If we return to our original question—what is it that we are hearing, or listening to—we can attempt an answer that is as simple, yet obtuse, as any attempted definition of the documentary aesthetic itself. The sharing of technologies between image and sound creatives, and between sound and music departments, has enabled a musical soundtrack to be easily forged from sound; the simplified nature of digital media has meant that this process can often be performed by a small team, or even by the same person. In fiction film, soundscape is predicated on imitation and illusion. The result can be an audiovisual over-abundance that takes us to unusual worlds and positions of consumption, a repositioning common in sci-fi and horror film. Stretching from a genre founded on transparency, documentary's elongation is more fraught: arising from actuality sound, its associative connections are clear and less easy to rupture. Instead, the homeomorphic process gives rise to an audiovisual flow that is at once located in documentary's realist aesthetic, while at the same time embraces the interpretative process of documentary filmmaking and soundtrack composition. The outcome is a *simultaneous* disconnection and reconnection of the captured images and their sounds. As a result, one audiovisual space can bend and stretch homeomorphically into another while preserving the topological properties of the original. Yet such displacement always leaves an audiovisual fissure. Sonic elongation explicitly questions the categorisation of sounds into binary oppositions, such as diegetic and nondiegetic, the boundaries of objective and subjective, of representation and reproduction, of recording and interpreting and of hearing and listening.

Documentary sound, in its purest form, can paradoxically sound less real than the fiction film soundtrack; when sonic elongation arises, it interrogates our listening behaviour further and initiates a process of creative audition. Although constructed in ways similar to those of electroacoustic music, *musique concrète* and noise music, the sonically-elongated documentary soundtrack does not lose touch with its referent—it does not encourage reduced listening. Rather, once reunited with its host image a complicated and political form of audiovisuality arises. Each interpreted sound retains its connection to its captured image, operating vertically as a signifier of profilmic reality. It is these sounds that we ordinarily process at a physical level, or hear. But at the same time, this reality is displaced: dislocated from its original source through creative design, the sounds produce a remediated simulacrum, signifying non-referentially, operating horizontally as part of a coherent and musical *mise-en-bande*. It is this musical flow that grabs our attention; that makes us listen.

Documentary films that operate in this way become spatial, open forms, with ample room for an audience to inject their own reading or interpretation. As a result, listening becomes a synthesising activity that arises in the present tense and requires an attentive filmgoer to gather evidence and extrapolate experience in a new way. The ebb and flow between hearing and listening in this type of documentary film displaces attention from the image to the audiovisual. This initiates a dialogue between listening and viewing rather than an audiovisual synthesis. Sonically-elongated sound travels the same path as the image and thus remains respectful of what lay before the camera, but at a distance, which allows a “poetic, ecstatic truth” to be revealed without completely shattering the boundaries of many documentary codes. The result is a site of great hermeneutic plenitude in which the spontaneity of diegetic, profilmic sound is privileged and music is not added, but sublimated from image. Such manipulation can move documentary footage from the past tense into the

present, by engendering a form of real-time performative meta-critique while still being respectful of profilmic events.

In this way, sonically-elongated documentary film embraces the very nature of its own form as something transient and observational, without completely abandoning the narrative shape we've become familiar with in our filmgoing. When the creative flow of sound outstrips that of the image, documentary moves away from the capture or representation of the profilmic 'truth'. Rather, as natural sound becomes hypersensitive and heightened, it permeates and enlarges it. Attentive listening to this elongated reality opens up a coherent space for audio-viewers to navigate the tensions between recorded and presented, real-world sound and music, objective and subjective representation and, perhaps most significantly, the documented and the document.

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<sup>1</sup> Bonitzer, "The Silences of the Voice" (1975), trans. Philip Rosen and Marcia Butzel, in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 319—34.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence, "Women's Voices in Third World Cinema", in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 178—190.

<sup>3</sup> Herzog, "Minnesota Declaration", at <http://wernerherzog.com/main/52.html> (accessed 17 April 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010), 43—44.

<sup>5</sup> Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ruby Rich uses the term "docutainment" in "Documentary Disciplines: An Introduction", in *Cinema Journal*, 46:1 (2006), 110.

<sup>7</sup> Grierson quoted in Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 6.

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<sup>8</sup> Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Renov, “Introduction: The Truth About Non-Fiction”, in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Renov (Routledge, New York and London, 1993), 2—3, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Brault quoted in *Capturing Reality: The Art of Documentary* (Pepita Ferrari, 2008), 1’19”.

<sup>11</sup> This conundrum is explored further in Holly Rogers, “Introduction: Music, Sound and the Documentary Aesthetic”, in *Music and Sound in Documentary Film*, ed. Rogers (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1—19.

<sup>12</sup> Corner, “Sounds Real: Music and Documentary”, *Popular Music* 21:3 (2002): 362.

<sup>13</sup> Sexton, “Excavating Authenticity: Surveying the Indie Rock-Doc”, in *Music and Sound in Documentary Film*, 154—155.

<sup>14</sup> Oppenheimer, “Background”, at <http://theactofkilling.com/background/> (accessed 17 April 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Oppenheimer, “Background”.

<sup>16</sup> Carolyn Abbate, “Music—Drastic or Gnostic,” *Critical Enquiry* 30:3 (2004): 505—536.

<sup>17</sup> Andy Birtwistle analyses the work of these musician-directors in “Electroacoustic Composition and the British Documentary Tradition”, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design and Music in Screen Media: Integrated Soundtracks*, ed. Liz Greene and Danijela Kulezic-Wilson (London: Palgrave, 2016), 387—402.

<sup>18</sup> Baichwal quoted in *Capturing Reality*, 1’18”.

<sup>19</sup> Thom, “A Few Notes on Music in the Final Mix”, at <http://www.filmsound.org/randythom/finalmix.htm> (accessed 17 April 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Donnelly, “Extending Film Aesthetics: Audio Beyond Visuals”, in *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, ed. John Richardson, Claudia Gorbman and Carol Vernallis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 359, 365.

<sup>21</sup> Donnelly, “Extending Film Aesthetics”, 358.



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- <sup>22</sup> Whittington, “Lost in Sensation”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Sound in Digital Media*, ed. Carol Vernallis, Amy Herzog and John Richardson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 64.
- <sup>23</sup> Murch, “Stretching Sound to Help the Mind See”, in *New York Times* (1 October 2000), at <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/01/arts/01MURC.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed 17 April 2018).
- <sup>24</sup> Altman, “Moving Lips: Cinema as Ventriloquism”, *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 67.
- <sup>25</sup> Whittington, “Lost in Sensation”, 62.
- <sup>26</sup> Wierzbicki, “Sound Effects / Sound Affects: ‘Meaningful’ Noise in the Cinema”, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design and Music in Screen Media*, 156.
- <sup>27</sup> Wierzbicki, “Sound Effects / Sound Affects”, 157.
- <sup>28</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (1981, repr. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.
- <sup>29</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 69.
- <sup>30</sup> Ruoff, “Conventions of Sound in Documentary”, *Cinema Journal* 32:3 (1993): 27.
- <sup>31</sup> Patrik Sjöberg draws attention to this in “REC-PLAY / RE: PLAY: The Tape Recorder and The Pre-Recorded Voice as Figured in Documentary Media”, spoken paper at *Sound and Music in Documentary Film International Symposium*, 23—4 February 2017, University of Huddersfield.
- <sup>32</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 107, italics his.
- <sup>33</sup> Leonard and Strachan, “More Than Background: Ambience and Sound-Design in Contemporary Art Documentary Film”, in *Music and Sound in Documentary Film*, 166—179.

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- <sup>34</sup> Varèse “The Liberation of Sound”, in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), 20.
- <sup>35</sup> Hegarty, *Noise / Music: A History* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 3.
- <sup>36</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 205—6.
- <sup>37</sup> LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York and London: Continuum, 2006), 9.
- <sup>38</sup> Hegarty, *Noise / Music*, 4.
- <sup>39</sup> Horowitz, *The Universal Sense: How Hearing Shapes the Mind* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012).
- <sup>40</sup> Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 245.
- <sup>41</sup> Schaeffer, “What Can Be Heard”, in *Treatise on Musical Objects: An Essay across Disciplines*, trans. Christine North and John Dack (1966, repr. California: California University Press, 2017), 73—79.
- <sup>42</sup> Chion, “The Three Listening Modes”, in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), 49, 50.
- <sup>43</sup> Wierzbicki, “Sound Effects / Sound Affects”, 154.
- <sup>44</sup> Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London, Indiana: Indiana University Press/ BFI, 1987); Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- <sup>45</sup> Schaeffer quoted in Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.
- <sup>46</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 72, 73.
- <sup>47</sup> Kane, *Sound Unseen*, 148, 209.
- <sup>48</sup> Kane, *Sound Unseen*, 9.

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<sup>49</sup> Kane, *Sound Unseen*, 8.

<sup>50</sup> Kara and Thain, “Sonic Ethnographies: *Leviathan* and New Materialisms in Documentary”, in *Music and Sound in Documentary Film*, 180—192.