

The Schizophonic Imagination:
Audiovisual Ecology in the Cinema

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ABSTRACT

The Schizophonic Imagination: Audiovisual Ecology in the Cinema

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This dissertation examines a set of films that deal with narrative issues of ecology using innovative formal approaches to sound/image relationships. The guiding concept for these analyses is *schizophonia*: a term coined by R. Murray Schafer to refer to the split between sound and source by electroacoustical transmission, an aspect of modern soundscapes that Schafer ties to increasing alienation of the people that live within schizophonic environments. Although problematic in its implied anti-technological bias, I argue that the term *schizophonia* can be used as an analytical tool for addressing how sound in film can evoke ecological issues pertaining to alienation. I re-cast the “split” between sound and source to the technical division between sound and image inherent to sound cinema. This technical split, although conventionally obscured, informs the ideologies that govern approaches to synchronization. Thus I address sound/image relationships in film by way of acknowledging their separation, a strategy that I refer to as *audiovisual ecology*.

I argue that schizophonia is best understood as the subjective experience of mediation, and I develop the idea of environmental engagement as the awareness of mediation that allows for the synchronization between interior psychological experience and the external world. My chosen films present characters in various stages of achieving this environmental synchronization, developing themes of alienation and engagement through reflexive approaches to audiovisual synchronization that foreground the mediation at work between sound and image. The films under discussion are:

Jacques Tati's *Play Time* (1967); Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979); Peter Mettler's *Picture of Light* (1994); Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003) and *Last Days* (2005); and the films of Sogo Ishii (1976-2005). In my analyses I bring the field of soundscape research to bear on film sound theory, exposing productive points of intersection through which established terms in film studies are enriched through comparison with relevant concepts from acoustic ecology. I argue that these films eschew conventions of synchronicity in order to emphasize the schizophrenic nature of sound cinema, engendering a form of audience engagement that I call *reflective audioviewing* in which schizophrenic experience becomes a model for understanding sound/image relationships in the cinema anew.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The Schizophonic Imagination: Audiovisual Ecology in the Cinema.....1

Chapter One

Synchronization and its Discontents:
Reflexive Audiovisual Strategies and the Goal of Reflective Audioviewing.....42

Chapter Two

In a Glass Box: Modernist Architecture, Acoustic Design,
and Spatial Representation in Jacques Tati's *Play Time*.....94

Chapter Three

The Passion of the Zone: Ecological Shortsightedness and the Limits of Auditory
Extension in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*.....137

Chapter Four

The Movement of Thought:
Hearing the *Aurora Borealis* in Peter Mettler's *Picture of Light*.....188

Chapter Five

Reflective Listening and the Compilation Soundtrack:
Soundscape Composition in Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* and *Last Days*.....233

Chapter Six

Silence in the City: Urban (Dis)Engagement in the Films of Sogo Ishii.....289

Conclusion

Reflective Audioviewing.....345

Reference List.....351

Filmography.....361

Introduction

The Schizophonic Imagination: Audiovisual Ecology in the Cinema¹

It was once typical to begin academic inquiries into film sound with references to the neglected status of the domain. Yet as the research that informs this dissertation clearly illustrates, film sound theory is no longer the neglected domain that it once was. An impressive collection of scholarly materials has appeared over the last 30 years, with a veritable explosion of work on film sound, and sound studies in general, emerging in the first decade of the 21st Century. An important thrust of contemporary film sound theory has been to redress the vision-centric approach that has dominated film studies over the decades; but rather than swinging the pendulum all the way into the sound camp and reversing the critical hegemony, many sound theorists engage in a more holistic approach that recognizes sound film as an audiovisual totality in which the image cannot be discussed without reference to the soundtrack, and vice-versa. So when people say they are interested in “film sound,” more often than not they are interested in the role that sound plays within the audiovisual totality of the film. This is a positive acknowledgment of cinema’s audiovisual nature that has not been afforded by those interested in aspects of the image alone.

I include myself in the school of thought that treats film sound as one element of the cinema’s audiovisual system. Yet like the early sound theorists obsessed with asynchronization, I think it is important to remember that in a very real way, sound and image are fundamentally separate in the majority of the world’s cinema: they are recorded and played back by different technological means, a reality that informs the logic of audiovisual pairing in any given film. This dissertation addresses how film

sound theorists can deal with the audiovisual totality of film while accounting for the medium's divided nature, a strategy that I call *audiovisual ecology*. As I will discuss below, the term *ecology* is used to address the interconnection between distinct individuals and their environments, a general concept that I apply to the study of sound/image interactions in film by way of acknowledging their separation. In turn, I use the concept of audiovisual ecology to address a series of films in which narrative themes of ecology and environmental engagement can be traced through their formal organization of sound and image.

The guiding concept for these film analyses is *schizophonia*: a term coined by R. Murray Schafer to refer to the split between sound and source by electroacoustical transmission, an aspect of modern soundscapes that Schafer ties to increasing alienation of the people that live within schizophrenic environments. As I will discuss below, the negative implications of the term *schizophonia* expose a highly problematic way of thinking about sound reproduction that is tied to Schafer's self-acknowledged anti-technology bias. However, I argue that the term *schizophonia* can be used as an analytical tool for addressing how sound in film can evoke ecological issues pertaining to alienation. I argue that *schizophonia* is best understood as the subjective experience of mediation, and I develop the idea of environmental engagement as the awareness of mediation that allows for the synchronization between interior psychological experience and the external world. I re-cast the "split" between sound and source to the technical division between sound and image inherent to sound cinema. This technical split informs the ideologies that govern approaches to synchronization, although these ideologies often

strive to obscure the split through conventions of realism and naturalism that call attention away from the artificial nature of all sound/image pairing in the sound cinema.

The films under consideration are: Jacques Tati's *Play Time* (1967); Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979); Peter Mettler's *Picture of Light* (1994); Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003) and *Last Days* (2005); and the films of Sogo Ishii (1976-2005). As I will demonstrate, each of these films present characters in various stages of environmental synchronization, and the films develop themes of alienation and engagement through reflexive approaches to audiovisual synchronization that foreground the mediation at work between sound and image. I argue that these films eschew conventions of synchronicity in order to emphasize the divided nature of sound cinema, engendering a form of audience engagement that I call *reflective audioviewing* in which schizophrenic experience becomes a model for understanding sound/image relationships in the cinema anew.

In this introduction I will develop the concept of audiovisual ecology and situate my use of the term *schizophrenia* within the discourse of film sound theory, establishing the parameters of my use of these terms for the duration of this dissertation. In bringing the field of acoustic ecology to bear on film sound theory, I will expose productive points of intersection through which established terms in film studies are enriched through comparison with relevant concepts from acoustic ecology. In chapter one I will then go on to explore the ideologies and practices that have surrounded the concept of synchronization in sound cinema. There I will develop my concept of reflective audioviewing as a function of the schizophrenic paradigm developed here and the issues

raised by the concept of synchronization in chapter one. In turn, these discussions will form the foundation for the film analyses that make up the rest of the dissertation.

My aim for the dissertation as a whole is to illustrate what I call the schizophonic imagination: imaginary worlds where schizophonia can be explored regardless of the plausibility that its connotations may or may not have in the world outside the walls of the cinema. Indeed, as I will discuss in the following chapter, Schafer harbors a latent interest in cinema's potential, a not often discussed aspect of his writing that has nevertheless seeped into the consciousness of acoustic ecologists who have extended their interest in soundscape study to various modes of artistic practice. It is in the world of artistic expression that I find Schafer's evocative but problematic terminology has the most analytic potential; however much Schafer might decry forms of art that make use of schizophonic technologies, the goal of works of art designed to reflect upon human engagement with our environments is well in keeping with Schafer's desire to understand the world's soundscapes through the filter of the arts. Ultimately I argue that the films I address here develop their formal strategies of synchronization and narrative themes of ecology in order to engage the audience in a way that brings awareness of the act of listening to the fore, offering ways of thinking about environmental engagement as an awareness of the mediation that we all have to navigate between our internal experience and the external world.

A Technicality

To begin, let us think back to the birth of cinema through a version of the story that well suits my interest in thinking through the divided nature of the medium. Tom Gunning

tells us that Thomas Edison's stated goal for the Kinetoscope to "[do] for the eye what the phonograph does for the ear" is indicative of two concerns of the late 19th century: the separation of the senses popular for studies of perception, and "a desire to heal the breach" resulting from anxieties surrounding this separation (2001, 16). These technologies were born in an era in which science no longer regarded the human sensorium "as a single whole in which the various senses converged to produce a 'true' representation of the outside world, but as a bundle of processes, each subject to different physical conditions and processes of stimulation" (14). Technologies of sound and image reproduction broke the senses free of their grounding in the human body and isolated them within devices that focussed on a single sense at a time; the cinema offered the potential to re-unify the senses, albeit outside the body.

Gunning ties the "desire to heal the breach" to the myth of a total cinema that emerged shortly before these technologies were invented but which has yet to be realized, a situation that French film theorist André Bazin understood in 1946 when he suggested that with each new technological development in the cinema it returns closer to its origins (Gunning 2001, 13). In short, the cinema was born from an idea about the potential for technology to reproduce reality in all its dimensions, a goal which fell short in the silent era but gets nearer with each new addition to the medium (sound, colour, etc.). So the joining of sound and image was an important step towards the re-unification of the senses of seeing and hearing within their technological double. Yet as Gunning suggests, "this recaptured wholeness must also display in some way its artificial stopgap nature, its incomplete restoration of coherence" (23). As such, myths about the cinema's abilities to wholly reproduce reality acted as a "fetish-like response in the face of a new threat of a

loss of reality” under the “dissolving of the human sensorium” exemplified by these technologies (28). This is a situation that Gunning argues we have not firmly come to grips with, even to this day. Gunning’s account of the persistent problem of the cinema’s divided nature is a useful point of entry for the premise of this dissertation: thinking about sound/image relationships in film by way of the separation that informs the logic governing a film’s production, formal organization, exhibition and reception.

It will be useful here to elaborate on the technical grounds for what may seem like a limiting perspective concerning cinema’s divided nature. Look at a piece of 35mm motion picture optical sound stock and you will see two distinct sections: one for image, and one for sound – with a very real dividing line separating the two. The same line exists for magnetic sound stock, and can be applied to soundtracks played back separately from the film stock (whether Vitaphone discs of the late 1920s or their new digital counterparts). There can be no argument about whether or not sound and image are separate entities in the projection booth: they exist on separate channels of transmission, and are transmitted by different technological means.

This reality of transmission reflects the separation of sound and image at the level of production as well. When shooting on film, sound is generally recorded on a device separate from the camera. Even what the French call “direct sound,” recorded on set or location in synchronization with the camera, is captured separately and can be manipulated in the post-production process to create any number of different relationships to the image. As Britta Sjogren reminds us, the very idea of synchronized sound is somewhat arbitrary, “for one ‘synchs up’ ‘non-synch’ sounds with as much diligence as ‘synch’ sounds in film production practice” (2006, 6). And more often than

most filmgoers might think, sound is created absolutely separately from whatever happens on set or location, and is joined to the image based on conventions of synchronization in the post-production process.

Along with defining cinema as a divided medium I am outlining the parameters for what I will be calling “cinema” for the purposes of this dissertation: movies in which image and sound are recorded on separate devices and must therefore create their audiovisual totality as a necessary function of the post-production phase. True, video technology took a step towards dissolving the technical boundary between sound and image by recording both onto the same tape surface (though videotape machines have different heads for recording and reading sound and image). And yes, digital technologies can blur the lines of distinction between sound and image even further by rendering both subject to digitization: in digital formats, both the sound and image tracks are recorded and stored as a series of 1s and 0s. Yet these later technologies have not much changed the way that filmmakers approach the separation of sound and image during production or post-production. While a videomaker can simply record sound and image as a function of the same medium and not separate them in the editing process (if any), this approach remains the domain of (usually) amateur audiovisual media that will not be considered here. And while film negative can include a soundtrack so that sound and image are recorded simultaneously onto a single piece of filmstock during shooting, this is simply not the production reality on the majority of films. For the category of cinema I am outlining here, sound and image can be understood as separate from each other until the point of reception when the audience sees the image track and hears the sound track at the same time. And even at the point of reception, as I will discuss in the

chapters that follow, our senses keep sound and image divided until the sensory stimuli have been translated into the electrical impulses that allow our brains to process the information.

However, given that films are usually designed to be an audiovisual whole, and that ultimately our experience of sound and image is one of inseparable simultaneity, an important question arises: of what use is emphasizing the technical divide between sound and image when the reality of reception is that we experience these films as audiovisual totalities? As I will argue, the simultaneous reception of sound and image does not negate the separation at the heart of their technical production and formal organization. Rather, the audiovisual totality of the film is dependent upon the connection of sound and image by way of their separation, just as the mind makes connections between sensory stimuli that enter through distinct channels of reception. The paradox of understanding the audiovisual totality of a film by way of its divided nature is what exposes the medium's schizophrenic potential.

Separate, yet Inseparable

Filmmaker, composer and film theorist Michel Chion has drawn on the technical reality of cinema's dual nature as the basis for several decades of influential film sound theory. In his early work on the voice in cinema, Chion maintains that through the convention of lip-synchronization, "cinema seeks to reunify the body and voice that have been dissociated by their inscription onto separate surfaces (the celluloid image and the soundtrack)," and in so doing it presents the illusion of a stable body (1999, 126). For Chion, "it is an inherent consequence of the material organization of cinema that the

voice and body are at odds” (127). Yet as Chion himself also argues, to think of sound and image as separate does little good in understanding how sound and image work *together* in any given film. Because of synchronization, our experience of sound and image when “watching” a film is not separate. Further, conventions of realism emerged to suggest that sound and image often stem from the same source. For example, lip synchronization can be convincing enough that the voice and body do not seem to be at odds with one another. Film is an audiovisual art form, and the technical realities of production and exhibition are not evident to the layperson engrossed in a cinematic experience, especially when sound and image are brought together in such a way that the technical boundary between them seems to disappear. This is why Michel Chion, in his classic book *The Voice in Cinema*, proclaims that in the cinema, “there is no soundtrack” (1999, 3). To talk about a sound track is to talk about sound as it exists separately from the image track, and this negates any discussion of the reality of most sound film: that we hear sounds and see images at the same time. And so we have a paradox in which division and connection are to be understood as two sides of the same coin.

If we want to talk about film as an audiovisual medium, it makes little sense to talk about sound in film without reference to the image. Of course, the corollary argument is that we cannot talk about the image in film without reference to sound, a reality that, if globally recognized, would mean a massive re-appraisal of most of the work done in film studies since its very beginnings. But of course we *can* – and usually *do* - talk about the image alone. These discussions, however, are limited in their ability to grasp the inherent audiovisuality of the medium, negating the importance of the relationship between sound and image. I argue that discussing films without simultaneous awareness of sound and

image is not ecological: such discussions cannot account for the effect of sound on image and vice-versa, nor can it assess the points at which sound and image intersect.

Of course, one can make the argument for a more ecological approach on any number of different elements of cinema. What if we talk about framing without mentioning set-design? What if we talk about the musical score without reference to sound effects? True, there are useful ways of discussing any of the cinema's basic elements without the obligation to attend to every single detail of the film as a whole; as film scholars we choose our parameters and carry out our analyses accordingly. Yet there needs to be more recognition of how the simultaneity of sound and image affects our reading of any sound film, and this can only be done by acknowledging this simultaneity, what I will be calling the audiovisual ecology of the film. But as I will now discuss, an important quality of any given ecology is that it consists of interconnections between distinctly individual entities, requiring an approach acknowledging that holistic totality is the product of lines of division.

Audiovisual Ecology

Audiovisual synchronization is as much about the separate nature of sound and image as it is about their unification. This paradoxical understanding of film's audiovisuality informs a history of sound cinema that can be read as the evolution of how filmmakers deal with the dividing line between sound and image, and to what extent they want to keep this line apparent or to try and make it disappear. The technical divide between sound and image ensures that there is always mediation between the two, and filmmakers

must decide what conventions they will adhere to, or what ideologies they subscribe to, in order to arrive at a particular approach to the exposure or erasure of this mediation.

For the purposes of this dissertation I will be referring to issues raised by sound/image synchronization as issues in *audiovisual ecology*. There are two main reasons for this: first, the concept of ecology provides a useful analogy for the idea of sound/image interaction in film being based on ecological principles; second, adopting this analogy can point us to narrative themes of ecology at work in films that approach sound/image relationships in a very particular way. I will discuss the films in more detail at the end of this introduction. First, let me establish my use of the term *ecology* more substantially.

The term *ecology* is well suited for my description of sound cinema as a medium simultaneously divided and whole. The contemporary goal of the discipline of ecology is to study “the relationship between organisms and their environment” (Allaby 2005, iv). To understand the relationship between an organism and its environment is necessarily to understand their connection by way of their separation. The organism is an individual entity, and the purpose of ecology is to demonstrate how any given organism is inextricably linked to its environment. And because no environment is the sole domain of a single organism, any given environment can itself be understood as a collection of individual organisms working together. Ecology shows how these organisms work as a holistic entity within any given ecosystem; yet if we think of the ecosystem as a single entity then there would be no need for the discipline of ecology to study it. The work of ecology unfolds on precisely the point of inextricable relationships between definitively *individual* organisms. I propose that this basic template for ecology as a discipline works

well as an analogy for the study of sound/image relationships in the cinema. Think of any given sound film as an ecosystem, and the technical divide between sound and image becomes the basis for understanding their connection in the audiovisual totality of the film. This audiovisual totality is created through the process of sound/image synchronization, the audiovisual ecology of the film. There can be no such ecology unless we address this totality by way of the individual nature of its component parts. In other words, to understand how sound and image create the artistic whole that we call a film, we must understand the distinct individuality of the film's two main channels of transmission. And like the term *ecology* that refers both to an environment and the study of this environment, my term *audiovisual ecology* can refer to both the aesthetic practice at work in the films I analyze and the critical method of inquiry that I employ within these analyses.

Of course I am far from the first to use the concept of *ecology* within the context of audiovisual media studies. The term *media ecology* was introduced by Neil Postman in the late 1960s, formalizing an approach to the study of media as environment popularized by Marshall McLuhan. Media ecology studies the effects of human interaction with communications media, and “tries to find out what roles media force us to play, how media structure what we are seeing, why media make us feel and act as we do” (Postman 1970, 160). This approach adopts a bit of the “medium is the message” tenet so often attributed to McLuhan and his interest in how the specificity of certain media create modes of production, exhibition and reception that are unique to these media. My work here shares an interest in how the medium specificity of my chosen medium, cinema, engenders certain ways of handling its inherent division between sound and image,

creating strategies for both production and reception that either acknowledge this specificity or try to cover it over. However, as my focus is on the interpretation of specific film texts, my methodology here is not geared towards a study of the environment of cinema as a sociocultural phenomenon. The bulk of this dissertation aims to get us thinking differently about the themes within a set of films, rather than think through the way that the medium of film in general is situated within the media environment.

More recently, the discipline of film studies has also adopted the term *ecology* with aims geared more to the specificity of this particular form of media. A recent anthology, *Moving Image Theory: Ecological Considerations* (2005), attempts to bring film theory in line with the ecological approach to cognitive psychology. The anthology's editor, Joseph D. Anderson, explains that the ecological approach adopted by its contributors eschews the idea that human beings are separated from their environments through perceptual mediation, and adopts the idea that we are inextricably linked to the world through a direct line of unmediated experience (1). This, in turn, has led to an "ecological" branch of film theory seeking to understand the experience of film as a product of this unmediated connection to the world, rather than filtered through heavily mediated theoretical interventions. This "unmediated" approach is deemed ecological because it claims to forego the pretense of competing theories of cognition, instead assuming a measure of common experience that can be mapped and discussed. In his foreword to the anthology, David Bordwell states that such "ecological considerations" are tickets out of the main problem he sees with contemporary film theory: that any given theory is taken as dogma, and is applied to films that must then succumb to the tyranny of

that theory over any other which might challenge it (2005, xi). For Bordwell, the ecological approach is to position differing models for film analysis as equals in an environment in which they are all related, rather than contributing to the mastery of one theory over the landscape of a particular filmic text.

Again, my project shares some of the interests just described, while also differing significantly. The ecological strain of cognitive psychology described above suggests that there is an inextricable link between people and their environments for which theories of perceptual mediation cannot account. I will not engage in any of the discourse involved in the intersection of cognitive psychology and film studies. However, my dissertation is premised upon the idea that there is a line of connection that threads distinct individuals to the environments in which they live. Yet for my purposes, it is the mediation through which this line must pass which is of most interest. I will be examining how my chosen films explore the issues raised by the paradox of connection by way of separation. My film analyses explore how the mediation that occurs between sound and image works to establish a line of connection between the two, just as the characters that live in the worlds represented by these films seek to understand their own level of mediation between interior and exterior experience in order to engage more directly with their environments.

Like Bordwell, I am also interested in redressing imbalances in the relationship between theory and film, specifically in the case of how the mastery of image studies has dominated attention to sound in the cinema. In drawing on the field of acoustic ecology I do not wish to impose theories from soundscape study upon these films. Instead I aim to demonstrate how the films themselves evoke the issues that I read through my chosen

theoretical framework; I am as interested in what acoustic ecology can teach us about film sound as I am in what film sound can teach us about acoustic ecology. My analyses are thus premised upon an ecological approach to addressing the audiovisual strategies at work in these films. Here I point to Bordwell's discussion in "The Musical Analogy" wherein he describes "music" as being "a system of systems," a way of organizing a great number of elements that work in tandem with one another (1980, 142). In Western composition, this may mean that music is the governing body that regulates the systems of harmony, melody, rhythm, as well as all the various interactions between individual and groups of instruments. Bordwell concludes that this idea might be applied to film so that film itself is understood as a musical system that governs the interactions of the systems of both image and sound with all their intrinsic elements. The major implication of this idea of film as "music" is that, in such a governing system, no one element need dominate another. As we know, the image in film has dominated since the medium's birth. Within the soundtrack, dialogue has dominated. Within the form that image and sound take on, narrative has dominated. Bordwell suggests that filmmaking and film analysis alike would benefit from a more holistic understanding of the medium where all elements are treated with equal importance. My approach is similar, though I would substitute the word *ecology* for *music*; thinking of any given film as an *eco*-system allows us to consider its component parts as a function of this system. And for my purposes here, the prefix *eco* points towards the fact that considering the sound/image systems in these films leads to discussions of ecological issues raised within.

Also related to my project are the emerging narrative and historical analyses that focus on the representation of ecological issues within specific film texts, the two most

notable works being David Ingram's *Green Screen* (2000) and Pat Brereton's *Hollywood Utopia* (2005). Both of these books position narrative situations in Hollywood films in relation to the discourse of environmentalism. Their goal is to cast light on how popular media have reflected the environmental movement since its popularization in the 1960s, and the current issues raised by environmentalists today. While the authors do engage in formal textual analysis to support their arguments, these works are ultimately sociological in their aims. My project differs in that I forgo deep engagement with the philosophical issues behind different strains of environmentalist thinking in favour of a much deeper interest in the formal organization of specific films. My definition of ecology takes a step back from the nuances of environmentalist discourse to examine a more general concern: the simultaneous engagement and distancing between human beings and their environments that can be reflected by the simultaneous engagement between the fundamentally separate channels of sound and image. Also, my choice of films extends well beyond Hollywood to examine how films across a variety of cultures deal with similar issues of environmental engagement.

As is clear by now, the branch of ecology that I am most interested in adopting here is acoustic ecology. In her assessment of how sound studies disciplines might be of use to the film scholar, Michele Hilmes recognizes the potential relevance of acoustic ecology. In her words, acoustic ecology "could bring greater depth to that relatively untouched third dimension of the classic sound taxonomy: music, voice, and sound effects" (2008, 116). She equates the term *soundscape*, coined by R. Murray Schafer as the object of the acoustic ecologist's study, with the idea of ambient sound in film that falls under the rubric of "sound effects" within the industry's traditional division of

labour. So Hilmes is pointing towards one of the premises of my argument: that we can use ideas about studying the soundscapes of the world outside the cinema as the basis for studying the soundscapes of the environments in which the characters of narrative film live (a use of Schafer's term to which Schafer himself would likely not approve).

While acoustic ecology's interest in studying the soundscapes of the world would certainly provide excellent conceptual material for studying the sound environment in which the characters of a narrative film live, this approach alone fails to achieve a truly ecological study of film sound: one that addresses the interrelationships between ALL the elements of a film's soundtrack, the entire soundscape of the film. And, as I have suggested, the entirety of a film's soundscape cannot be considered on its own, for in the audiovisual context of the cinema we are (almost) always looking at something while we are listening. The approach that I am espousing here addresses any given film text in terms of its audiovisual ecology in which various aspects of image and sound are studied according to their interrelationships, not broken down into the classic taxonomy as so much film music analysis and work on the voice in cinema has done in the past. Finally, my interest in ecology is quite specific: trace how issues that arise in acoustic ecology can be mapped onto film studies by thinking of sound/image synchronization as an ecological principle, and the analogy that provides the basis for my concept of audiovisual ecology can reveal narrative themes of ecology at work in the films I will analyze. Let us now turn to a discussion of the specific concepts in acoustic ecology that I will be using in this dissertation and how they intersect with film sound theory.

*Schizophonia and the Discourse of Fidelity*²

My study of audiovisual ecology in film begins with Schafer's coined term *schizophonia*, defined as the separation of sound from source via electroacoustical transmission (1977, 90-91). The most obvious route for a dissertation titled "The Schizophonic Imagination" would be to address narrative films in which character alienation can be tied directly to their experience of electroacoustically transmitted sound within the world of the *diegesis* – the world in which they live. Indeed, parts of my Masters thesis take this route, examining the role of various sound technologies present on screen in the films of David Lynch (2003). But this is a limited perspective. I firmly believe that the term *schizophonia* has evocative potential beyond its strict definition, *without* losing the spirit in which it was coined. Its etymological roots are based on two essential concepts: "split" and "sound." At the same time, the term evokes the negative implications of *schizophrenia*, a mental condition characterized, in part, by the alienation of an individual from the environment as a result of mental disorientations concerning the experience of time and space. So in one term we get a reference to sound, its split from some kind of source, and an assessment of the effect of this split on the person who experiences the sound. Thus the value of the term, for me, is that it describes the subjective experience of external sound mediation. My goal is to demonstrate how the "split" that *schizophonia* describes can be thought of in different ways, and to illustrate how the subjective qualities of experiencing this split point to important issues in the domain of sound studies that will inform my approach to film sound theory in this dissertation.

By definition, every sound heard in a film is schizophrenic in nature because it is coming to our ears through technologies of electroacoustical transmission: in the space of the film theatre, the pro-filmic sources (if any) of the material recorded for a given film are replaced by the loudspeakers that transmit this material to the audience. By one way of thinking, the medium of cinema itself is simply part of the virtual world of reproduction technology that Schafer intends his term to deplore. However, there is another level upon which the idea of schizophrenia can be applied to sound in film: the cinema's divided nature ensures a schizophrenic relationship between sound and image as well as between a recorded sound and whatever source it may have had in the world. For the purposes of this dissertation, what interests me the most is not the fact that film sound is schizophrenically separated from its connection to real-world sources. Rather, I am interested in the idea that the cinema is an art form in which themes associated with the separation of sound from source often form the substance of the stories that films tell, and this separation of sound from source is most easily depicted through audiovisual pairings that emphasize the fundamental division between sound and image. The technological separation of sound from image that forms the cinema's schizophrenic nature thus provides a formal basis for exploring ideological issues associated with the issues that schizophrenia raises. In this section I will work through these issues in some detail.

The concept of schizophrenia is intended to address the power of sound technologies to disrupt the perception of both space and time within a given environment. In Schafer's thought, the fundamental fear underlying the experience of schizophrenia is that we will lose our grounding in the context of the here and now, with "machine-made substitutes" for "natural sounds ... providing the operative signals directing modern life" (91). The

problem is most severe when a reproduced soundscape replaces the soundscape of any given place. As Schafer describes, the logical conclusion of the presence of sound technology in the world is “the complete portability of acoustic space” in which “any sonic environment can now become any other sonic environment” (91). This is a nearly impossible situation that I have dubbed “space replacement” (2007b, 132). Schizophonic space replacement assumes a level of perfection in sound reproduction whereby an electroacoustically transmitted sound could be mistaken for the naturally occurring soundscape of a given environment. As Barry Truax has noted, the fear of schizophonia is essentially a fear of virtual reality (2000, 3). The virtuality in question is premised upon the goal of the “vanishing mediator” described by Jonathan Sterne as an impossible situation wherein “the medium produces a perfect symmetry between copy and original and, thereby, erases itself” (2003, 285). Within this construction, any technologies of recording/transmission should vanish from perception when listening to the final product. Of course the technological mediation between an original and its copy cannot vanish, and as I will discuss, the very notion of the original/copy dichotomy is problematic.

The idea of vanishing mediation is of obvious relevance to the cinema because the sound film is based on technologies of sound recording and transmission: the issue of fidelity can be applied to the relationship between the recorded sound that we hear in a film and its pro-filmic source. However, because film is an audiovisual medium, the idea of the vanishing mediator can be extended to the line between sound and image as well, where realist conventions dictate that the implied source for a sound is contained within the image on the screen. Realist conventions of synchronization, to be discussed at length in chapter one, work on two overlapping levels within the cinema: original/copy,

and sound/source. The break between a filmed representation of the world and the pro-filmic world itself is the given that ensures the split between original and copy. But realist conventions often try to draw attention away from this line by smoothing over the divide between the second dichotomy, sound and source, where any sense of mediation between the sound we hear and the image of its implied source vanishes, leaving behind the idea that the two are organically inseparable.

Significantly, Schafer's fear of space replacement through sound technology is perhaps closest to being realized within the space of the modern film theatre. Designed to be acoustically dry, these spaces add little spatial dimension of their own to the film's soundtrack, a situation that Chion actually dislikes (1994, 101). This is an example of the architectural schizophonia identified by Emily Thompson in *The Soundscape of Modernity* (2002), to be discussed at length in chapter two, wherein modern architecture is designed to be rid of reverberation and to isolate interior spaces from the world outside their walls (321). Add electroacoustically transmitted sound to such a dry environment, and the schizophrenic situation is complete. The modern cinema is a non-space waiting to be filled in and is thus one area that is specifically designed for the portability of space that the concept of schizophonia addresses.

The THX certification program for theatre spaces and equipment has been at the forefront of efforts to try and increase the portability of space through sound reproduction technology. Its aim is to reduce the differences between the controlled standards of the sound studio and less controlled conditions of exhibition through the modernization of exhibition spaces. The idea is to get all theatres standardized to THX specifications with as little differentiation as possible. In theory, if a THX certified film is played back on

THX certified equipment within a correspondingly designed space, there will be no difference between master and duplicate, original and copy (Johnson 1999, 104). This has extended into the realm of home theatre in recent years, with THX certifying home electronics and companies like DTS claiming that their process for encoding DVD soundtracks essentially clones the master tracks, offering the original without any process of reproduction getting in the way. And with the introduction of HD standards like Blu-Ray, claims for the “master” quality of the soundtracks have increased substantially.

One of the main problems with the THX ideal is that it not only requires equivalent equipment on both ends, but also equivalent spaces. What this means is that the only real way to guarantee that exhibition spaces will behave the same way as studio spaces is for the sounds of these spaces to be banished altogether. Theatre spaces become increasingly dead, with no architectural particularities that grant them a signature of their own. This is the space replacement model of schizophonia at its most tangible: the sound of a space is literally replaced by a dead zone designed to be filled in with a represented space from elsewhere. In this case it is not so much the represented space that is replacing a real-world space, but rather the theatre itself that has replaced any sense of a space grounded in the context of material reality. Space replacement has become the guiding principal for the construction of film theatres, and this is the main reason why the home theatre environment can only rarely live up to this principal: most people cannot afford to build a studio-level theatre space within their homes, and thus the listening experience, even on THX certified equipment, is always subject to the sound of the spaces in which people live.

Michel Chion has expressed dismay at the degree to which projects like THX have been extended. He laments the quest for sonic purification and banishment of coloration, and exhibits nostalgia for the sounds of the large acoustical spaces of older theatres (1994, 101). Chion argues that standardization models for film sound eschew notions of sonic fidelity in favour of homogenization (100-101). What is crucial here is that Chion's use of the term *fidelity* refers to privileging the sound of the space of exhibition over that contained on the film's soundtrack: being faithful to the space in which sound is reproduced, not to an idea of the original sound from whence the reproduction has come. This is a reversal of the way that the term *fidelity* has been used in the discourses responsible for the ideal of the vanishing mediator to which THX subscribes.

Chion's notion of fidelity is connected to Schafer's fear of space replacement in an important way: Chion wants the experience of film exhibition to remain faithful to the real-world context of the exhibition space. Modern architectural design seeks the opposite. I argue, however, that the ideology behind the THX certification program is the closest that we can come to the idea of the vanishing mediator in the cinema: instead of positing the idea of an "original" as something indefinable prior to the recording process, we can think of the master copy (print/tape/file) as the original, and exhibition prints as the copies, and try to keep the two as closely aligned as possible. This is really the only useful way of thinking about original/copy dichotomy in film sound theory that, as I will now discuss, is a problematic construction.

The original/copy dichotomy has been heavily critiqued in recent years. In his book *The Audible Past* (2003), Jonathan Sterne devotes his longest chapter to synthesizing the key threads in this discourse and excavating their social origins. The thrust of Sterne's

argument is that, “Copies would not exist without reproduction, but neither would their originals” (282). Sterne argues that the idea of sonic fidelity was invented along with the technologies that necessitated its use. There is no sense in using the term “original” without the idea of a “copy” in mind, and because of this the characteristics that are attributed to the idea of fidelity are characteristics born of the technology responsible for the idea of fidelity in the first place. Sterne identifies what he calls the “modernity thesis” within the discourse of fidelity: “First, it posits the moment of unmediated sonic reality prior to sound’s technological mediation. Then, it posits the ideal form of mediation as a vanishing mediator” (285). A hi-fi enthusiast might complain that a recording doesn’t sound like the original, yet this complaint is based on an understanding of an “original” that is inseparable from the act of reproduction itself. The mistake that the hi-fi enthusiast makes here is the failure to recognize that the idea of the original is created by the act of making the copy.

In film sound theory, the problem at the heart of Sterne’s modernity thesis has been addressed at length by what James Lastra describes as the “new wave” of film sound theorists that have emerged since the 1980s whose writing has been most substantially synthesized in the “Sound Theory” chapter of his book *Sound Technology and the American Cinema* (2000). Expanding on the work of Rick Altman and others who have challenged the idea that recording technology can effectively “reproduce” any given sound event, Lastra concludes that we should always think of sound recordings as “representation” rather than “reproduction” (153). In this way the problem of the vanishing mediator is removed, and all recorded sound is acknowledged as a product of mediation. This allows Lastra to move past expectations for a film soundtrack to

reproduce some “original” sound events “faithfully,” and focus instead on philosophies of representation that guide the choices that filmmakers make when designing their soundtracks.

Lastra demonstrates that sound recording for film has brought together two contradictory, though not necessarily incompatible, traditions of representation: those of the phonographic industry and those of the telephonic industry. For Lastra the question of fidelity comes down to two main perspectives on the subject: the phonographic model, which emphasizes what he calls *perceptual fidelity*, and the telephonic model, which emphasizes the intelligibility of speech (2000, 138-139). Perceptual fidelity refers to the idea that the sound in a film remains faithful to what might be heard if the listener were occupying the space represented on screen. Telephonic intelligibility, as one might guess, gives prominence to the treatment of the spoken word. Thus, the telephonic model of representation seeks to render the human voice as clearly as possible, most often at the expense of other sound that would ordinarily be heard in the space represented. Indeed, this removal of background noise and the enhancement of the human voice has long been the holy grail of telephone designers, hence the appropriateness of the term *telephonic*.

While the telephonic model is bound up with the supremacy of dialogue in most of the world’s cinema, Lastra’s category of *perceptual fidelity* is implicated within the more general hi-fi goal of the vanishing mediator, at least in terms of how well a soundtrack supports the environment depicted on the screen. The phonographic model thus ties the two spheres of fidelity discourse together: it seeks a faithful sound representation of what we see on screen, but also defines this faithfulness by appealing to what we know of real life spaces and how they sound. Where lip-synchronization seeks to erase the divide

between sound and image through a very precise approach to their simultaneity, the idea of perceptual fidelity reflects the desire to maintain realist consistency across sound, image, and the world outside the walls of the cinema. The ideal of perceptual fidelity adheres to the hi-fi goals of the vanishing mediator rather than simply the clear and direct rendering of speech, and this is perhaps where the cinema most clearly seeks to erase our understanding of the mediation between the pro-filmic event and its audiovisual representation. Because of this, filmmakers can engage with the concept of perceptual fidelity to explore relationships between characters and the environments in which they live, and expose the artificiality of spatial construction that is a necessary part of the cinema's technological division between sound and image.

The idea of perceptual fidelity is caught between two different conceptual frameworks: on the one hand, it refers to the way an environment would sound to an objective listener; on the other hand, the emphasis on *perceptual* recognizes that no such objective listener actually exists, and that every listener will hear a given soundscape in their own way – what Rick Altman refers to as the *Rashomon* phenomenon in reference to the Akira Kurosawa film (1950) and its play on the idea of subjective realities (1992a, 24). So how is a film supposed to represent a sound environment that remains faithful to what a listener would perceive in this environment? The tension between these two modes is embodied by the concept of the “cocktail party effect” in which the sound of a noisy environment will be lowered on the soundtrack when a conversation begins (29). Some argue that this is not a realistic representation of how sound operates in space; indeed, a recording device set up in a room will not differentiate between elements of a soundscape in this way. And yet the mind does filter sensory information, and we can

easily experience a perceptual version of the cocktail party effect when we shift our attention to the voice of someone speaking, effectively reducing the sound of the ambient noise around us. So the concept of perceptual fidelity bridges the goals of objective and subjective representation of space, just as the idea of the cocktail party effect can bridge perceptual fidelity with the telephonic mode. Perceptual fidelity is as much about human engagement with the sound environment as it is about “faithful” representation of the world. The term *perceptual fidelity* is useful for present purposes in the way that it calls attention to the relationship between perception and fidelity, two areas that come together in Schafer’s ideas about the relationships between people and the soundscapes in which they live.

Schafer’s concept of schizophonia implies the problems within the discourse of fidelity, a fact supported by Schafer’s own use of the term *fidelity* in his related concept of the “hi-fi” soundscape. In his words, “the quiet ambiance of the hi-fi soundscape allows the listener to hear farther into the distance just as the countryside exercises long-range viewing,” the opposite of the lo-fi soundscape that Schafer associates with urban settings in which “perspective is lost” when “individual acoustic signals are obscured in an overdense population of sounds” (1977, 43). Though he doesn’t make an explicit connection between schizophonia and the lo-fi soundscape, I argue that the two are closely related: the presence of electroacoustically transmitted sound creates an artificial sense of distance while in reality contributing to the density of sound that ultimately hinders long-range listening within the environment.

Schafer’s use of the term *fidelity* is an example of the problem that Jonathan Sterne describes within the modernity thesis: the term is born from the technology that gave rise

to the quest for fidelity in the first place. So it is intriguing that Schafer uses the designation “hi-fi” to refer to a soundscape that he associates most with the pre-industrial world prior to the invention of sound recording technology. In his concept of the hi-fi soundscape, Schafer borrows one of the key definitions of *fidelity* from hi-fi culture: that a good recording is one with a low signal to noise ratio, one of the main factors in striving for the vanishing mediator. Schafer is equating two varieties of noise: system noise, a marker of the recording apparatus, acting as a presence that inhibits our ability to hear through the technology to the recorded event; and urban noise, which similarly prevents us from hearing far into the distance. Interestingly, Schafer associates fidelity in the soundscape with what he calls the “human scale,” suggesting that “there are few sounds in nature that interfere with our ability to communicate vocally and almost none that in any way pose a threat to the hearing apparatus” (207). Though Schafer’s claim here is clearly human centric and can easily be argued against, what is important to understand is his equation of high fidelity with what Jonathan Sterne refers to as “the spatiality of the unamplified voice” (2002, 342), an idea of fidelity that is ironically more in line with Lastra’s concept of telephonic intelligibility than the objective mode of perceptual fidelity. Schafer treats the world as a place designed around unamplified human communication in which all the sounds of the natural world are bent around this basic premise just as filmmakers will adjust music and sound effects around dialogue. It is almost as though Schafer developed this idea after listening to one too many movies that privilege telephonic intelligibility over perceptual fidelity.

Yet in another way, the concept of schizophonia connects to the *perceptual* aspect of perceptual fidelity that I discussed above: the idea of “fidelity” as describing the line that

connects interior experience with the external world. The term *schizophonia*'s evocation of the mental condition called *schizophrenia* indicates that the negative implications of splitting sound and source are simply a product of the mind rather than a reality in the external world. In this way, the problems that Schafer uses the term *schizophonia* to describe can be understood as problems of a split not between sound and source, but between people and their environments when confronted with technological mediation. The issue underlying *schizophonia* is the level with which people feel cut off from the environments in which they live, and the role of media technologies in fostering this feeling of disconnection.

Like perceptual fidelity, the concept of *schizophonia* embodies the problem of an unbroken chain – the substance of fidelity – between interior experience and the external world. What is missing in Schafer's account of *schizophonia* is that it can be a productive incitement towards developing an awareness of technological mediation, thereby enhancing our engagement with modern sound environments rather than degrading it. As Barry Truax suggests, "The challenge of the *schizophonic* situation for the listener is to make sense out of the juxtaposition of two different contexts" (2001, 134), a situation made possible through electroacoustical transmission. Many artists have gravitated towards exploiting *schizophonic* media in search of what Andra McCartney calls an "electroacoustic ecology," a way of engaging with our environments that acknowledges the electroacoustic portion of the modern soundscape as just another element to be understood and engaged with (2002, 22). Such an electroacoustic ecology is a given in the environment of the sound cinema, and the premises of acoustic ecology can be well adapted for use in assessing film as a part of the environment in which we

live. Acknowledging electroacoustic ecology is the first step towards engaging with the mediation between sound and image at work in the cinema. When presented with the schizophrenic reality of a film's soundtrack, we are in a position to understand our distance from it, and use that position as the foundation for recognizing that sound and image are also distanced from each other by way of their technological separation. Here we can recognize that the film's audiovisual ecology is as much a product of distance between its two main channels of transmission as our own engagement with the film is dependent upon our distance from it.

At the heart of the concept of schizophonia is a paradox that exposes both the problems of Schafer's thinking and the evocative nature of the term: schizophonia posits a fundamental split between a sound-maker and the sound it makes through technologies of sound reproduction. And yet, the line that demarcates this split needs to vanish if it is to fulfill Schafer's nightmares, leaving the technological propagation of sound in place of the natural soundscape of a given place. The idea of a line that extends from original to copy is at the heart of hi-fi culture's notion of the unbroken chain offered by the indexicality of analog recordings, a theorization that film shares through its basis in the medium of photography. Yet this idea of an unbroken chain is also evocative of the theme of this dissertation: the line that connects separate individuals within an ecosystem, the line that runs across the technical division between sound and image to create their interconnections. Human engagement with the environment is based on understanding how a line can extend between our interior beings and the external world, across an undeniable divide – the contours of our bodies – that distinguish us from other discrete entities within the environment. Ecology studies these connections. Audiovisual ecology

casts these connections in the context of their cinematic exploration: stories that deal with how characters engage with their environments, supported by audiovisual relationships that emphasize the line that keeps sound and image separate while demonstrating their inextricable connections.

The goal of audiovisual ecology in the cinema is to recognize the presence of mediation as a fundamental part of the cinematic experience, rather than address film as a medium striving for virtual reality. With audiovisual ecology in mind, we can attend to the fundamentally schizophrenic separation between sound and image in film rather than buy into the illusionist premises of audiovisual synchronization that seek to erase the line of mediation between the two. The total cinema remains a myth that is best understood through an awareness of the limitations of the medium. In audiovisual ecology, these limitations are exposed along the line that divides sound from image. I will now discuss the key concepts at work in acoustic ecology that intersect with the established terms in film sound theory that I will be using in my analyses, and I will demonstrate how thinking through the intersection between these two disciplines by way of this terminology can help us understand the way that films present ecological issues through the audiovisual representation of space.

Terminological Intersections

Whether or not we agree with Schafer's ideas about how the signal-to-noise ratio of an environment affects those that live within it, the hi-fi/lo-fi distinction actually provides a very useful conceptual tool for analyzing the auditory construction of space in any given film. The most important of these concepts for my project is what Michel Chion terms

extension, referring to how far into the distance a film's soundtrack allows us to hear, the auditory equivalent of depth of field (1994, 87). Rick Altman's concept of *spatial signature* similarly refers to the distance between a sound source and point of audition by emphasizing the fact that sound will bear the markers of the space in which it is heard (1992a, 24). Both of these simple concepts address how filmmakers can construct hi or lo-fi soundscapes within the world of the diegesis by controlling our sense of space through evocations of the distance between source and listener. As such, these concepts can be read through the ideological underpinnings of Schafer's thought to reveal ecological issues at work in the audiovisual treatment of a film's narrative.

Chion's concept of *on-the-air sound* is also pertinent to Schafer's thought as it addresses sounds that are transmitted electroacoustically within the diegesis, such as music coming from a character's car radio or a voice from a public address system. Chion argues that such sounds "are not subject to 'natural' mechanical laws of sound propagation" and "enjoy the freedom of crossing boundaries of cinematic space" (1994, 76). Sounds that are on-the-air can take on different levels of spatial signature depending upon whether the filmmaker intends them to be grounded within the world of the diegesis, the realm of non-diegetic sound, or ambiguous spaces in between.

Interestingly, the use of a spatial signature attached to an on-the-air sound can work to either ground it within the space visible on screen or remove it from that space, thereby affecting our experience of auditory extension. As Chion observes, "a certain type of unrealistic reverberation, not commensurate with the place shown in the image, can also be coded as dematerializing and symbolizing" (1994, 116). As such, the on-the-air category of sound is charged with the implications of schizophonia but without

necessarily buying into Schafer's bias against the technologies that make it possible. On-the-air sound can be a celebration of schizophonic potential; its use depends upon fluctuating levels of extension and qualities of spatial signature, and as such it acts as a nexus point around which the idea of schizophonia in the cinema can be tied to descriptive tools for film sound analysis.

Consider a brief example from George Lucas' 1973 film *American Graffiti*, famous for sound designer Walter Murch's handling of the ubiquitous radio broadcasts of Wolfman Jack as the youth of 1950s Modesto, California cruise the streets with their car radios tuned into his frequency. Chion uses this film as an example for his discussion of how on-the-air sound can shift in register as the camera moves from car interiors to the spaces outside, running the gamut of possibility between the inside and outside of the diegesis (1994, 77). Murch achieved the variable spatial signatures through his "worldizing" process in which he re-recorded the sounds of the broadcasts in various different spatial environments (often artificially constructed) between which he could then fluctuate (Murch in Ondaatje 2002, 119). The very need for such a worldizing process is a marker of the highly contrived nature of audio post-production; even when striving for absolute realism, filmmakers use elaborate contrivances to achieve their effect. When inside the vehicles, the radio sound bears the signature of the kind of space depicted on the screen. Yet *American Graffiti* isn't afraid to expose the seam between sound and image: when the camera breaks free of the car interiors the sound of the radio takes on an enhanced signature with exaggerated reverberation, ultimately leaving the space depicted on screen altogether and occupying a completely non-diegetic register. This exaggeration simultaneously suggests a multitude of radios resonating through the

streets all over the town, and a kind of ethereal presence that defies the laws of sound propagation, an evocation of the supernatural powers with which the Wolfman is associated. In *American Graffiti*, then, control over auditory extension and spatial signature is used both to ground the soundscape within the world of the diegesis and to transcend that world to provide access to realms that exist only in cinematic representation.

The unnatural propagation of electroacoustically transmitted sound throughout the space of an entire town, replacing the “natural” soundscapes with an artificial one coming from another place, is precisely the kind of schizophrenic lo-fi situation that Schafer decries. On one level, this use of sound helps express the angst of teenagers unsure about their positions in the world, an angst that can be expressed by the schizophrenic quality of the Wolfman broadcasts. And yet, the broadcasts in this film tap into the community of youth around which the narrative revolves, bringing disparate people – often at ideological odds with one another – together through common interest. These broadcasts have a positive effect on the community, something that Schafer’s anti-technological bent would fail to account for. Further, these broadcasts reflect the varying degrees of empathetic relationships between these characters, providing a thread between their deepest hopes and fears as the sound of Wolfman’s voice and music fills the spaces in which they live. These spaces are physical, psychological, and social: Murch’s auditory treatments allow the sound of the broadcasts to cross the boundaries of the physical spaces of the automobiles that enclose these characters, just as the sound threads the spaces between their internal consciousness and the external world. As such, these auditory treatments present what Randy Thom calls the “acoustics of the soul,” referring

to what he feels is the moot distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic sound when we understand how these different registers can be embedded within one another (2007).

Attending to the role of Murch's handling of auditory spatial representation through the precepts of acoustic ecology enriches our understanding of how these characters navigate their engagement between physical, psychological and social space, revealing a powerful narrative theme of environmental engagement.

American Graffiti presents an ecosystem filled with distinct individuals who are nevertheless bound together within a social ecology defined by the electroacoustic ecology of Wolfman's broadcast, and the filmmakers explore these ecologies through the formal treatment of the film's audiovisual ecology. Acknowledging perceptual fidelity in this example requires shifting our attention between its objective and subjective modes, navigating the fluctuations in spatial signature and extension in order to flesh out what aspects of the sound refer to the physical space seen on the screen, and what aspects are tied to the social and psychological spaces that these characters occupy. So I recast the concept of fidelity as a way of thinking through the audiovisual ecology of the film to discover the intersections between these different registers of space.

The concept of auditory extension reaches through the terminological intersections described above and can act as a tool for guiding our attention to issues in audiovisual ecology. In each of my chosen films, the ecological issues begin with the engagement between human beings and the environments they inhabit. Levels of engagement can be traced by how individuals navigate the line that their bodies draw between the external world and their experience of this world through their internal consciousness. Fluctuations in extension are often used to shift between subjective and objective

auditory perspectives, and as such this formal strategy can denote levels of extension from internal experience through to the outside world.

The Films

The structure of this dissertation charts a return trip from the heart of urban modernity to the outskirts of civilization and back again. After a discussion of the ideologies of sound/image synchronization in chapter one, the film analyses begin in chapter two with the mid-20th Century Paris of Jacques Tati's *Play Time* (1967) where the glass walls of modernist architecture separate people through ideals of auditory containment while providing the illusion of community through their visual transparency. In chapter three we journey to the post-industrial nuclear wastelands of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) where three men discover that the line separating their deepest desires from the external world is best left intact, just as the walls of a nuclear power plant are best left in place lest a disastrous breach in containment wreak havoc in the environment. In chapter four we arrive at the edge of the untamed wilderness: the Churchill, Manitoba of Peter Mettler's *Picture of Light* (1994) in which the filmmaker questions the relationship between the northern lights and our experience of them as mediated by the technology of film. Chapter five begins our trip back to the city through the leafy suburbs of the Pacific Northwest in Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003) and *Last Days* (2005), both of which make use of the soundscape compositions of Hildegard Westerkamp to help present situations of youth in crisis as a direct result of their problems with engagement within the physical and social environment that surrounds them. Finally, chapter six lands us in the millennial metropolis of Tokyo, Japan as represented in the films of Sogo Ishii (1976 –

2005). Here we find characters who regularly struggle to find peace within the urban chaos as represented by a recurring motif of absolute silence that begins in Ishii's first film and continues through to his most recent. In following this trajectory, the dissertation moves in a roughly chronological order from the 1960s through to the present, but also follows a path that begins and ends in the heart of urban space by way of the suburban and wilderness areas that frame every city. The ecological issues raised along this journey will be informed by their relevance to different types of geographical space, and the different approaches to audiovisual ecology that go with them.

The divisions explored in each of these films are those that separate human beings from their environments and act as mediations between interior experience and the external world. As I will argue, understanding how these films explore this mediation of experience requires attention to the particular audiovisual ecology of each film. All of these films emphasize the technological divide between sound and image with their approaches to synchronization, and in so doing they all thematize the basic premise of ecology: understanding the connections between people and their environments by way of understanding the divisions that keep each person an individual entity. Each film, in its own way, exhibits the practice of what I call immersive audiovisual reflexivity: their disruption of realist conventions in sound/image synchronization is reflexive, and yet the goal of this reflexivity is not to distance the audience, but rather heighten our immersion within their worlds. Instead of immersion as a function of the illusionist premises of most narrative cinema, these films invite immersion within the divide that they expose between sound and image. In embracing this divide, we come to experience the worlds these films posit in a new way, a state of reflective audioviewing where our awareness of

the cinema's divided nature leads us to a more holistic understanding of their audiovisual totality. The concept of reflective audioviewing and its relationship to the ideologies of synchronization will be fleshed out in the following chapter.

Each of my chosen films deals with the cinematic representation of space as a function of sound/image synchronization. They all concern boundary lines that demarcate different spatial zones key to the narrative development of each film. In some cases these boundary lines are architectural, as in the glass walls of Tati's modern Paris. In other cases the boundary lines are metaphysical, as when the characters in Tarkovsky's *Zone* decide not to reveal their innermost desires to a mystical room which promises to make these desires manifest in the external world. In some cases the boundary lines are phenomenological, as in Peter Mettler's exploration of the relationship between the external world and its mediation by our senses, and by the technology of cinema, in *Picture of Light*. In all cases, lines are drawn so that the question of their erasure can be addressed. Each film presents characters in search of a way to transcend the boundaries that divide them from their proper environments, to step over the edge of their individuality into the zone next door. As made clear in the discourse of the vanishing mediator, to attempt to erase boundary lines by covering them over only serves to reinforce those lines. The transcendence that characters experience is articulated as a function of audiovisual ecologies, acknowledging the separate nature of sound and image. The films move towards an idea of cinema as an audiovisual totality rather than a divided medium, an idea that is only graspable by way of understanding the cinema's dual nature. Understanding audiovisual ecology, then, is to understand the productive

tension between cinema's two main channels of transmission, a mode of reception that these films foster through their reflexive approaches to sound/image synchronization.

Better to See with the Ear?

While ostensibly about sound, the issues raised by Schafer's concepts of schizophonia and the hi-fi soundscape are more generally about space, as are the film sound terms that I have associated with Schafer here. I propose that what acoustic ecology has most to offer film studies is not specifically an enhanced appreciation of environmental sound, or even of sound in general, but rather an attention towards the formal organization of space within any given film. The terminology discussed here is designed to address the auditory qualities of space and its relationship to those that live within it. These are the fundamental goals of acoustic ecology and of ecology in general. However, it is important to recognize that while certain qualities of extension and signature can be assessed with attention to sound alone, they require attention to the image in order to make that assessment complete. How can we assess the ideological implications of reverberation on the sound of a radio broadcast unless we also attend to its visual corollary? How do we know if a particular level of extension supports the film's visual perspective, or if it is intended to take the listener outside the world in which the characters live? It is on such points of intersection with the image track that the divide between sound and image often becomes apparent. As such, these tools for auditory analysis must extend into the realm of the image if we are to understand the audiovisual ecology of a film.

Schafer has quipped that it is “better to see with the ear” (2009), an anti-visual bias suggesting that he is at once willfully ignorant of the role of vision in our experience of the world, and strangely progressive in his implication that these two senses might be more linked than we think. The tension in this statement is the substance of audiovisual ecology. While attention to sound alone can help redress the imbalance of many decades of sight-centered film criticism, it is only the first step on the path to accepting the divided nature of the cinema as the necessary foundation for its audiovisuality. By embracing the myth of the total cinema as the product of technological division, we lose the need to use the myth to cover over anxieties about this division and can expose dimensions of formal organization that go far deeper than conventions of realism. The benefit of applying acoustic ecology to film studies is to recognize that understanding acoustic spatial organization in the cinema is essential. Yet this spatial organization also depends upon the image, and there is a profound division between these two spatial dimensions that always sets them at a distance from each other. Once this recognition is a staple of film spectatorship, then perhaps the cinema can cease its backward movement towards the original myth of its potential totality. Instead, we can embrace the cinema as a medium perfect in its divided nature, and accept that it is the gaps that hold it together in the end. Embracing the medium’s divided nature comes with understanding the ideologies and conventions that have historically governed sound/image synchronization in the cinema. In the next chapter I will address issues pertaining to the concept of synchronization as the marker of mediation that allows for audiovisual interaction in the cinema. In turn, I will argue that the idea of synchronization can be applied to discussions of the interaction between interior experience and the external world

represented in my chosen films, as well as to the relationships these films engender with their audiences.

Notes

¹ An abbreviated version of this introduction was published in *Cinephile* as: “Audiovisual Ecology in the Cinema” (2010).

² The arguments put forth in this section have been adapted from my essay: “Case Study: Film Sound, Acoustic Ecology, and Performance in Electroacoustic Music” (2007b).

Chapter One

Synchronization and its Discontents: Reflexive Audiovisual Strategies and the Goal of Reflective Audioviewing

The key questions posed in this dissertation are these: how do the films under consideration here navigate the divide between sound and image through their approaches to sound/image synchronization? And how do these approaches to synchronization work in conjunction with narrative themes of engagement between characters and the spatial environments in which they live? In the introduction I demonstrated how the concept of *schizophonia* can be used to bind these two questions together: the split between sound and image in film is a schizophrenic aspect of the medium that lends itself well to narrative explorations of schizophrenic experience. In the present chapter I will work through issues in audiovisual synchronization that will come to bear on the film analyses to follow.

I will begin by examining issues in synchronization within a variety of branches of film sound theory, with specific attention to the three most common terms used to describe the disjunction between sound and image: *asynchronous*, *offscreen*, and *acousmatic* sound. I will then examine alternative approaches to synchronization explored in the subgenre of experimental film known as “visual music” whose practitioners are interested in blurring the line that divides sound and image by exploring the power of the image to evoke sound, and vice-versa. Visual music practices lead to questions about the signifying power of either sound or image alone, an approach that further stresses the potential to understand audiovisual totality as a function of the sound/image divide. The concept of reflexivity will emerge as a key interest of

filmmakers who explore the line that divides sound and image in the cinema, and I will argue that reflexive approaches to synchronization provide the foundation for the idea of audiovisual ecology established in the introduction. I will then situate the issues raised in my discussions of synchronization within the discourse of environmental engagement found in acoustic ecology, focusing on how reflexive strategies in artistic practice are tied to environmental awareness that accounts for the mediated nature of experience. In particular I will discuss how the practice of soundscape composition - an artistic offshoot of acoustic ecology involving the use of field recordings as the basis for musical composition - shares much in common with the film sound design I will be analyzing in the subsequent chapters. Many soundscape composers embrace the schizophonic potential of their medium, making reflexive representations of auditory space that highlight the process of technological mediation. This is a compositional mode aimed at instilling what Katharine Norman calls *reflective listening*, a mode that I argue is at work on an audiovisual level in my chosen films. Ultimately I will argue that approaches to synchronization that emphasize the division between sound and image can yield an awareness of the mediation between these two channels of transmission, opening the audience up to a mode of reception that I call *reflective audioviewing*. Like the process of synchronizing the separate elements of sound and image to create the audiovisual totality of a film, the characters in these films attempt to “synchronize” their internal experience with the external world, a mode of engagement that requires full awareness of the mediation that exists on the point of division between inside and out. And this synchronization of interior experience with the external world, as expressed through

strategies of sound/image synchronization in the cinema, is what audiovisual ecology is all about.

Synchronization

With the coming of synchronized sound, a key question immediately emerged: what philosophies will govern the pairing of sound and image? The impetus behind the development of synch sound technology was to create “talkies”: films in which we see people speaking and hear the sounds of their voices simultaneously. Yet almost immediately, debates arose about whether or not the realist thrust of lip-synchronization was the best use of the new synch sound technologies. The popular antithesis to the talking picture were films governed by the use of *asynchronous sound*, an alternative strategy for the pairing of sound and image that became the hallmark of filmmakers who wanted sound cinema to explore areas outside the box of realist conventions. Yet the idea of asynchronous sound proves to be something of a conundrum: how can any sound in a synchronized sound film be asynchronous? Aren’t all sounds in a synch sound film, by definition, synchronous?

The term *synchronization* itself needs to be called into question when addressing philosophies of audiovisual pairing in the cinema, for it seems that when people talk about synchronous (and asynchronous) sound they are not always on the same page. The only truly stable meaning of the term *synchronization* in film is that which refers to the technology that allowed sound and image to be recorded and transmitted as fixed and simultaneous, and this is the result of two technological developments: one that allowed sound to be recorded in synchronization with a camera; and another that allows a sound

recording to be played back in synchronization with the image track. These are the two technical realities that gave rise to synchronized sound film. Yet discussions of synchronization between sound and image on film tend to be far more specific about what constitutes a sound synchronized to an image. Usually, we think about some particular sound occurring at the same time as something particular within the frame of any given shot: we see a door closing on the screen and we hear an appropriate sound at the same time. We forget that, in the most general sense of the term synchronization, *every* sound in any given sound film will occur in synchronization with exactly the same image every time the film is screened. The use of the term *asynchronous* illustrates my point perfectly. An asynchronous sound in a given film is, by definition, something we hear that is not synchronized with anything on the screen. Imagine the sound of a door closing at some point during a shot of a man walking along a rural road with no doors in sight; the tendency would be to suggest that the sound of the door closing is not synchronized with this image. And yet, every time we experience that moment in the film, we will hear that door close while watching that very same man in exactly the same position on the road. So in what sense is the sound of the door closing asynchronous? Only in the sense that uses the term *synchronization* to refer to certain *kinds* of sounds that are simultaneous with certain *kinds* of images, governed by very particular ideas about realism and naturalism.

Most discussions of synchronization between sound and image in film are about how certain specific types of sounds are matched with certain specific types of images, leaving the more general fact of technological synchronization as a given. Along this line of thought, there are three main ways in which synchronization between sound and image

can occur: the realist convention of having a sound occur at the same time as its implied source is visible on the screen; sound montage can be timed to image montage so that a cut on the soundtrack occurs at the same time as a cut to a different shot on the image track; finally, sounds and images can occur simultaneously in time such that, even if not connected by any convention of realism, there is a confluence of movement (rhythm or gesture) that suggests a relationship based on abstract formal qualities. And these areas can overlap, such as a sound event occurring in time with image montage, like the beat of a music cue occurring in time with cuts on the image track. Most films will contain some combination of all three, with realist conventions governing some kinds of sounds (i.e. sound effects) and abstract formal qualities governing others (i.e. the use of music cues). But perhaps the single most common convention in all the world's cinema, regardless of style, is that when we see someone speaking on the screen, we hear the sound of their voice simultaneously: the original goal of the talking picture. So it is no surprise to find that a dominant concern in theories of asynchronous sound is not with all varieties of synchronization, but rather only with those that follow conventions of realism and naturalist representation like lip-synchronization. This concern over realist convention is clearly demonstrated by the use of the term *asynchronous* by sound theorists looking for an alternative to the talkie within the domain of the synch sound film.

Asynchronous Sound

A quick survey of film sound theory makes it clear that many filmmakers have been concerned about the coming of sound. Over and over we hear calls for the asynchronous or non-synchronous use of sound as an alternative to the strict codes of lip-

synchronization. Yet these calls tend not to advocate a return to the days before the technology of synchronization allowed image and sound to be fixed for simultaneous playback. Instead, calls for asynchronous sound refer to a particular approach to the pairing of sound and image *within* a synchronous sound film. As I will make clear, the concept of asynchronous sound as an aesthetic ideal actually depends upon the technology of synchronized sound, an important fact when trying to sort through the aesthetic and ideological goals these filmmakers have had for the sound film.

Let us consider a few notable examples of how asynchronous sound has been theorized, starting with the famous case of the Soviet Montagists and their “statement” concerning the sound film, first published in 1928. Sergei Eisenstein and a few of his contemporaries wanted the cinema to continue developing along the lines of montage, and considered sound as another potential layer of meaning construction. Creating meaning through montage requires a measure of juxtaposition that, for these filmmakers, is impossible if sound is used naturalistically. So they called for a film sound practice based on “nonsynchronization with the visual images” as the key to developing the cinematic equivalent of “orchestral counterpoint” (84). As Pudovkin wrote shortly after, “The role which sound is to play in film is much more significant than a slavish imitation of naturalism” in which, for example, the sound of a car is added to the image of a car (1929, 86). As René Clair put it that same year, “We do not need to *hear* the sound of clapping if we can *see* the clapping hands,” (1929, 94), a sentiment later echoed by Robert Bresson in his famous “Notes on Sound” (1977): “What is for the eye must not duplicate what is for the ear” (149). For Bresson, “Image and sound must not support each other, but must work each in turn through *a sort of relay*,” (149), an idea that Clair

also expressed: “It is the *alternate*, not the simultaneous, use of the visual subject and of the sound produced by it that creates the best effects” (1929, 94). Alberto Cavalcanti suggests something similar when he explains that the whistled tune of the murderer in Fritz Lang’s *M* (1931) was most effective when it was heard without the murderer being seen: “In other words, when the tune was used ‘nonsync,’ as film people say” (1985, 108).

While there are nuances to the arguments put forth above, two different but related issues are at the fore: redundancy and naturalism, both of which should be avoided. In the minds of the thinkers mentioned here, sound and the image should not give us the same information simultaneously, and synchronization should not be used to further the realism of the film. While both couched in terms of synchronization and asynchronization, the issues of naturalism and redundancy are related but not identical. The sound of traffic noise simultaneous with an interior shot of an apartment with open windows is not redundant: the image tells us we’re in an apartment, and the sound tells us that the apartment is near a busy street. The sound and image track complement each other without duplicating information. However, this example is naturalistic because the sound is used to create a realistic sense of the environmental context of the apartment. So some of the above filmmakers, like Bresson, would be satisfied with this scenario. Indeed, Bresson is famous for his use of intensely present offscreen sound to provide information about the diegesis that isn’t given in the image. For the Eisenstein of the late 1920s, on the other hand, this scenario would be unacceptable for its lack of juxtaposition: the sound supports the image, thus no meaning can be created by a conflict between what we hear and what we see. For most theorists, the sound of the traffic noise

would be considered asynchronous because we do not see the implied source of the traffic noise on the screen. And yet, the fact that this sound occurs at the same time as this image is crucial to its realist premise, and this is necessarily a function of synchronization. So, whether striving for a realist aesthetic, or something else, the use of asynchronous sound must be thought of as a subset of the broader technological synchronization that allows the sound film to exist. Because of this, upon the arrival of synch sound technology, theorists immediately began to see the necessity for a greater level of specificity when describing their ideas about asynchronous sound.

For example, despite the Soviet montagists' emphasis on asynchronous use of sound, it is important to understand that the issue for them was more about eschewing naturalism than about any particular definition of asynchronous sound. Although Pudovkin later emphasized the connection between naturalism and certain approaches to sound/image synchronization, Eisenstein demonstrated that his problem wasn't with synchronization at all. It is for this reason that the Soviet montagists, notably Eisenstein and Pudovkin, argued for a different kind of musicality in the approach to sound/image synchronization: *counterpoint*. A term borrowed from Western music theory, counterpoint for the Soviet Montage school suggests that sound operates as another element of juxtaposition within the dialectic approach to montage so espoused by Eisenstein. This ideology resulted in a variety of approaches to the formal implementation of audiovisual counterpoint.

Kristin Thompson has conducted a detailed analysis of the various different ways that the Soviets attempted to use counterpoint, and the different meanings that it had for different filmmakers (1980). Interestingly, counterpoint for the Soviets was not necessarily a question of asynchronicity, but rather an approach to synchronization that

eschewed conventions of realism. Indeed, Eisenstein stated an affinity for Mickey Mouse cartoons because of the ways in which they substituted comical sounds in place of realistic sound effects, a strategy that came to be known as “Mickey Mousing” (118). This kind of forced connection through synchronization is what Michel Chion would later call *synchresis* (1994, 58). Chion has also elucidated the confusion surrounding the correct meaning of *counterpoint* since the days of Eisenstein, insisting that the use of this term to refer to jarring juxtaposition has not done justice to its musical origins. Chion notes that the term *dissonance* is much better suited to describe the kinds of audiovisual clashes that are often referred to as *counterpoint*. In music, the term *counterpoint* describes relationships between elements in sequence (horizontal) rather than simultaneous (vertical). Chion uses the term *free counterpoint* for instances where the sound and image tracks operate free of precise cause/effect relationships governed by vertical synchronization, but with a relationship of simultaneity that creates a new layer of meaning that wouldn’t exist if the sound and image tracks were presented separately (36-37). Counterpoint, then, treats the sound and image tracks of film as part of a coherent system that needn’t be governed by precise points of audiovisual synchronization. What *is* necessary for counterpoint is the simultaneous juxtaposition of sound and image that results in a new layer of meaning through their combination. We can easily imagine why this possibility would be of interest to Eisenstein, father of the idea of synthesis through montage.

Whether advocating synthesis through counterpoint, or simply hoping to avoid informational redundancy, calls for asynchronicity have one thing in common: the desire to keep the line between sound and image intact while acknowledging that sound and

image never operate alone in the cinema. The technology of the synchronized sound film ensures that sound and image will always be locked together, so eschewing naturalism and redundancy allows for this fixed simultaneity to be used to keep the audience aware that sound and image are separate entities, brought together for specific reasons. In other words, you can't spell *asynchronous* without *synchronous*; as a concept, the former is bound up within the latter. The term *counterpoint* operates the same way, building the idea of juxtaposition into the term itself. Counterpoint is one way of acknowledging the separate nature of sound and image, but this acknowledgment is only possible through the fact of audiovisual simultaneity. The task of those opposed to the premise of the talking picture was to think of ways to use synchronized sound that would keep the technical reality of the apparatus exposed: sound and image are separate first, and then brought together.

Offscreen Sound

Like the term *asynchronous*, the designation *offscreen* has a built-in reference to the image track, even when referring to sound that is somehow separate from what we see on the screen. The idea of offscreen sound is straightforward: if we don't see the implied source of what we hear on the screen, then the source must be somewhere off the screen, either in the diegetic space that lies outside the borders of the frame of any given shot, or somewhere outside the diegesis altogether. There are different registers of offscreen sound, with a notable division between sounds that are supposed to emanate from within the diegesis, and those that are positioned outside. The diegetic register suggests that the implied source of an offscreen sound has the potential to become visualized on the

screen, whereas non-diegetic sound generally operates in a sphere that lies outside the world in which the characters live and, according to mainstream conventions, is generally not visualized. The problem with distinguishing between diegetic and non-diegetic sound is that one can immediately point to the countless instances in which any given sound cannot be pinned down to either register, and many have suggested that the designation has become purely academic (see Buhler et al., 2003, 76). However, the line between the inside and the outside of the diegesis is relevant to this dissertation. Like the line that divides the soundtrack from the image track on a roll of film, the boundary that separates the inside and outside of the diegesis can be a key marker in the way a film handles its approach to audiovisual ecology. The concept of diegetic sound is tied to questions of visibility through the concepts of onscreen and offscreen sound. Throughout the film analyses to follow I will demonstrate how filmmakers regularly make use of this distinction between the inside and outside of the diegesis in order to chart their paths across the technical divide between sound and image.

Interestingly, some of the above-mentioned calls for asynchronous sound fall into the category of offscreen sound, while others do not. Offscreen sound can operate according to conventions of realism, it can behave as counterpoint, or it can be something more abstract. Offscreen sound can solve the problem of redundancy by suggesting its source without the need to picture this source on the screen. It can also eschew conventions of realism by providing sounds that don't support the space that we see on screen.

Chion discusses offscreen sound in terms of "passive" and "active" modes (1994, 33). The passive mode includes ambient sound, such as bird song and traffic noise, which doesn't invite the listener to question their sources. When we hear birds chirping

as part of the soundscape of an environment presented on screen, we don't ask where these sounds are coming from. Our reaction to them is passive. In the active mode, as you might imagine, questioning the source of an offscreen sound occurs in the audience and/or characters in the film. We hear an unidentified sound that makes us ask: what was that? Where did it come from? Such use of offscreen sound often drives narrative forward by engaging a character in the film to ask these same questions, and then to seek the answers.

In either the active or the passive mode, offscreen sound in the cinema is a perfect example of the medium's necessarily audiovisual nature. Take the image away and there can be no such thing as an offscreen sound. Without the image we can never know whether or not the traffic sounds we hear emanate from the space that would be represented on screen, and any question as to the source of the sound would no longer be based on the presence or absence of accompanying visuals. Precisely because of the built-in reference to the image track, the designation *offscreen* also suggests an absence of some kind, that the sound should have a visible corollary but we don't see it on the screen. This reference to the image built into the terminology contributes to a basic problem in addressing film sound: the importance of sound is couched in terms of the image, denying the potential to consider the sound in its own right. In the end, this is also a key problem with the idea of asynchronous sound: what is it that the sound is not synchronized to? The image. As film studies began lending more ears to its objects of analysis, film sound scholars regularly pointed to the fact that the image has historically been autonomous, able to be the subject of film analyses without considering its auditory counterpart. So why not sound? As Rick Altman asks, "Does sound have independent

ways of making meaning?” (1992b, 171). Neither the term asynchronous nor offscreen would seem to allow for such an autonomy for the soundtrack.

Recently, Britta Sjogren has taken up Altman’s question with vigor. In her book *Into the Vortex* (2006), Sjogren argues for a critical approach to film sound that recognizes the autonomy of sound and image and the potential for the body to be understood as an acoustic spatial entity rather than being defined by a voice’s attachment to something visible. Effectively, Sjogren calls for an amendment to the asynchronous sound manifesto of the Soviets: what happens if we consider sound to be a parallel but not necessarily related element of the audiovisual whole? What can sound in its own right offer us?

Britta Sjogren states the point as well as anyone when she says, “All sounds...are equally separate from the image track in that they are only ‘married’ in the final instance, brought together in the composite film print: prior to this, they are separate elements which can be ‘placed’ anywhere one wishes relative to the picture” (2006, 6). Yet when talking about the convention of lip-synchronization, there is a powerful logic behind the distinction between voices that are synchronized to the image of a speaking body, and those voices that are not. Sjogren assesses the history of terms that delineate various different levels of attachment between voice and body in film. She identifies Mary Ann Doane’s categories: voice-off, “where a character speaks from offscreen but is not seen”; interior monologue, “where we see the character and hear his or her asynchronous voice”; and disembodied voice-over, with “no visible character or designated diegetic figure – usually found in documentary” (7). Sjogren then charts how Kaja Silverman’s taxonomy in *The Acoustic Mirror* (1988) recasts these categories in terms of “embodiment”: synch

sound, the floating voice, and the disembodied voice (Sjogren 2006, 7). Again, this is a useful set of designations when addressing how a film connects a voice to a body. Sjogren's problem with these taxonomies is that they imply a hierarchy based on a voice's attachment to a visible body on the screen, and negate other ways of reading the voice. I will be elaborating on this below. For the moment, I will simply agree with Sjogren when she argues that these terms to designate degrees of realism in synchronization, or "onscreen-ness," are all useful only as far as they address realist conventions of synchronization themselves. The asynchronous voice is defined by its synchronized counterpart, but both are based on conventions of realism that define lip-synchronization to begin with. Ultimately Sjogren is interested in moving towards an idea of film sound that can be considered a parallel track defined separately from the image. I will now argue that her interest in breaking free of the conventions that define sound in relation to the image calls for an engagement with ideas pertinent to the concept of *acousmatic sound*.

*The Acousmatic*¹

Acousmatic sound is generally defined as sound that is heard in the absence of its source. Popularized by French composer Pierre Schaeffer in the 1950s who favored the use of loudspeakers rather than live musicians for the presentation of his sound compositions, Chion later adapted the term for use in film sound analysis. Acousmatic sound in the cinema evokes diegetic sounds designated as offscreen, but it can also refer to sounds with no possibility of a visible source on screen. The realm of the acousmatic is that realm of sounds existing on their own, a concept that comes from its use by Schaeffer in

the context of musical composition. Yet its use within film sound theory depends upon the medium's inherent audiovisuality. Although Michel Chion uses the term to describe certain modes of film sound, I will demonstrate how he ultimately fails to distinguish acousmatic sound from offscreen or asynchronous sound. I argue that understanding the term's usage in the context of musical composition can point towards a more productive way of thinking about acousmatic sound in the cinema, suggesting ways in which sound can signify independently of the image, even while simultaneously paired with a visual track on the screen.

In *The Voice in Cinema*, Michel Chion describes the origin of the term *acousmatic* in a story concerning Pythagoras from the 1751 *Encyclopedia* by Diderot and d'Alembert. Here the term *Acousmatiques* is used to refer to those "uninitiated disciples of Pythagoras who were obliged to spend five years in silence listening to their master speak behind the curtain, at the end of which they could look at him and were full members of the sect" (Chion 1999, 19). The reason for keeping the disciples in the dark may have been two-fold. In the context of his book on the voice, Chion uses this story to illustrate the idea that the voice without body is imbued with powers of omniscience and ubiquity associated with divinity. Chion uses the term *acousmêtre* to refer to cinematic characters presented as voices without bodies that, being kept hidden from view, are seemingly more powerful than the average human being. This sense of power through an emphasis on auditory presence would certainly befit a master wishing to assert his status. Yet Pythagoras' strategy might also have been an early expression of what has been distilled to the more familiar idea that the message is more important than the messenger. Not until the message is understood can the distraction of exposure to the messenger be

allowed, a point that Chion makes in *Guide des Objets Sonores* (1983, 19), his companion piece to Pierre Schaeffer's landmark *Traité des objets musicaux* (1977) in which the latter developed his ideas about acousmatic sound. For Pythagoras there was clearly some value to the idea of presenting sound in the absence of a visual source, and a sense of this value has remained intact through the 20th Century. Chion reminds us that in French the word *acousmate* has come to designate "invisible sounds," and it was writer Jérôme Peignot who "called this term to the attention of Pierre Schaeffer" (Chion 1999, 19). It is once Schaeffer began using the term that its relevance to musical performance became especially charged.

Chion makes a provocative connection between the screen of Pythagoras and the emergence of recording technology: in the emergence of *musique concrète* – based on the ability to record sound to a fixed medium – the tape recorder plays the role of the screen of Pythagoras (1983, 19). Like the screen that separates Pythagoras from his listeners, the tape recorder separates the recorded sound from the space in which the recording was made. Like the acousmatic voice of Pythagoras, recorded sound provides new conditions for observation. The screen, like the tape recorder, mediates between the sound source and the listener. The sound is abstracted from the context of its source, and can be heard differently as a result. Millennia after the screen of Pythagoras formalized the acousmatic listening situation, sound reproduction technology creates a rebirth of the acousmatic situation in modern times. Acousmatic sound offers the potential for sound to be attended to in its own right, without attention to its source, or the context in which this source is situated.

Pierre Schaeffer was interested in how musical composition might gear itself towards just such an understanding of sound in its own right. He pioneered the tradition of composition and performance referred to as *acousmatic music*, the basis of which is to present compositions recorded on a fixed medium and played back through loudspeakers. Yet it is important to understand that Schaeffer wanted to move beyond the physical detachment of sound from source offered by the loudspeaker, and into something more abstract. Schaeffer posited four main modes of sound reception: listening, perceiving, hearing, and comprehending, resulting in a complex system of possibilities in which the objective qualities of sound meet subjective experience (Schaeffer translated in Chion 2009b, 19). Michel Chion has distilled the thrust of Schaeffer's categorizations into three basic types of listening: causal (listening with an ear towards the cause of a sound); semantic (listening for the meaning contained within the sound); and reduced (listening to the qualities of the sound in its own right) (Chion 1994, 25-34). Schaeffer was most interested in reduced listening, and the ideal for composing music on acousmatic principles was to create sound works that fostered this kind of listening alone. The use of electroacoustical transmission is therefore a crucial aspect of Schaeffer's concept of acousmatic composition. For reduced listening to take place, sound must not only be detached from source, it must also be fixed on a recording medium so that the sounds can attain "the status of veritable objects" (30). No live sound is ever truly repeatable, so to properly analyze a given sound's particular qualities it must be made repeatable through technologies of recording and transmission. In this way the sound is made "concrete," and this is one of the principal tenets of the movement that came to be known as *musique concrète*.

So while acousmatic *sound* can apply to any sound presented in the absence of a visual source, acousmatic *music*, or composition, is geared towards creating pieces in which the audience members can detach themselves from the need to think about the sources of the sounds they hear and focus on the sounds as self-contained objects. To uphold the reduced listening ideal for acousmatic composition, the sound must be organized in a way that it does not evoke a sense of its own causes; it must achieve a level of abstraction that allows the audience to attend to its status as pure sound rather than sound which emanates from something recognizable in the world.

In his evocation of the term *acousmatic* for use in film sound theory, Michel Chion has led the way in bridging the gap between Schaeffer's world of acousmatic composition and the audiovisual art of the cinema. Needless to say, in a purely auditory medium, the idea of the *acousmatic* means something quite different from how Chion has adopted it for use in the cinema. The key question is this: can anything of Schaeffer's original intentions for the term *acousmatic* exist in an audiovisual context?

Chion engages with some of Schaeffer's thoughts on listening modes, and the benefits of practicing reduced listening on a film soundtrack in order to better understand how the soundtrack works in its own right. However, Chion's ultimate goal is to re-situate this new appreciation of the soundtrack within the context of its audiovisual whole. For Chion, the term *acousmatic* essentially becomes a stand-in for the term *offscreen*, and on this level I think he misses a great deal of the term's potential that is not shared by either the concepts of *offscreen* or *asynchronous* sound.

Chion's interest in a cinematic version of acousmatic sound is most prevalent in his aforementioned concept of the *acousmêtre*, developed most substantially in *The Voice in*

Cinema. For Chion, a character that fits the specifications of an *acousmêtre* is often possessed of supernatural powers because of its invisible presence within the diegesis, powers that disappear once a visible body is attached to the voice. Chion's theorization of the *acousmêtre* is an illustration of the tension that arises when sound becomes too separate from the image, and his examples describe narrative situations that are resolved when the voice of an *acousmêtre* is re-attached to its visible body. In the end, the *acousmêtre* only serves as a testimony to the lack of acousmatic sound in the Schaefferian sense, an independent soundtrack that owes no allegiance to the image.²

In the end, Chion doesn't treat what he calls *acousmatic* sound in film as an abstract object to be extracted from the context that comes with knowledge of its source, the ideal in Schaeffer's concept of acousmatic composition. The main difference between Pierre Schaeffer's original sense of acousmatic music and Chion's adoption of the term acousmatic for the cinema is that, for Schaeffer, the main purpose of presenting sound acousmatically is to deflect attention from source while keeping the sound itself the object of intense scrutiny. For all of Chion's expertise as a Schaeffer scholar, colleague, and friend, the only value he ascribes to reduced listening in film – the goal of acousmatic music - is as a way of training audiences to better hear in order to even the score with film history's academic emphasis on the image. In the end, I argue that this is the right approach if we are to come to terms with the cinema as an inherently audiovisual medium. However, it is precisely this preoccupation with sound/image relationships that Sjogren critiques when she calls for a way of understanding the value of sound as a parallel but independent track with its own level of signification independent of the image.

Sound Alone

In her book *Into the Vortex* Britta Sjogren takes issue with the historical tendency of theorizing the voice in cinema to think of the voice as necessarily dependent upon the presence (or absence) of a visible body. Here Sjogren challenges established positions in the field with a special emphasis on those laid out by Kaja Silverman in *The Acoustic Mirror*. Sjogren takes particular issue with Silverman's position that the body is negatively coded in classical Hollywood cinema, and calls for a way of understanding positive elements of corporeality by separating the body from questions of audiovisual synchronization. In so doing, Sjogren is pointing towards a variety of acousmatic sound in the cinema that is genuinely free of visual constraints, a situation that Chion's evocation of Schaeffer's term has not attempted to do.

Kaja Silverman's argument in *The Acoustic Mirror* is that the asynchronous voice in general holds a certain power that voices attached to a visible body do not, and that Classical Hollywood cinema has reserved this position of power for male characters (1988, 50). Although she draws examples from the section in *The Voice in Cinema* in which Chion delineates the particularities of the *acousmêtre*, Silverman is not specifically interested in how an *acousmêtre* is defined differently from other kinds of asynchronous voices. Rather, she is interested in the basic idea that the asynchronous voice in general holds a certain power that voices attached to a visible body do not (50). Attachment of voice to body is most complete in the context of lip-synchronization, and Silverman states that "to embody a voice is to feminize it" (50). She thus develops a methodology that uses Chion's writings as an example of the negative fantasy of female

corporealization, and suggests that this is the same fantasy used by classical Hollywood to contain women's voices within the inferior position of the body.

Britta Sjogren argues that a position of disembodiment is not necessarily a position of privilege, and that the corporeal body is not necessarily an inferior place from which to enunciate. Speaking of Silverman's map of the classical Hollywood approach to difference, Sjogren says, "the body can be nothing else in this system – always codified as the weighted signifier of lack" (2006, 45). Her way out? "Space, I shall argue, constitutes a way to figure, relative to the voice-off, a place of subjectivity not contingent on the body and its visual restrictions" (36). This idea of the body as a space that exists independent of visualization is the critical point at which she departs from her predecessors whose approach to film sound, she argues, has been too dependent upon reference to the visual. By shifting the idea of the body from the visual to the spatial, Sjogren wants to reclaim certain aspects of classical Hollywood for positive female subjectivity. She critiques Silverman for mapping Chion's postulations about negative feminine corporeality onto classical Hollywood cinema, and in so doing ends up leaving Chion by the wayside (44). For Sjogren, Chion's work does not share with classical Hollywood cinema an inherent positivity towards feminine subjectivity worth trying to excavate.

The crux of Sjogren's argument lies in her engagement with the work of Mary Ann Doane. In addressing what she finds most valuable in Doane's work on the voice, Sjogren focuses on the notion of how "voice-off" can work to "deepen" the diegesis beyond the visual realm (2006, 38). Sjogren draws this idea of a deepened diegesis from a seemingly innocuous observation by Doane: that a potentially embodied voice, heard

from a position within diegetic space but not pictured on the screen, serves to help demarcate space beyond fixation upon the visual. Sjogren acknowledges the original function of Doane's claim as an observation about one of the most common functions of offscreen sound, yet finds in it the potential for something more radical: recovering a space that is heterogeneous to the image, a "lost dimension" that, in fact, cannot be visualized (38-39). This is a "deepening" of the diegesis to create a space beyond the visual realm rather than simply extending the possibly visible through offscreen sound. Sjogren argues that the lost dimension is that of the body as space rather than as a visually corporeal object.

Sjogren's reading of Doane actually points to an agreement with Chion on one essential point: that the heterogeneity of sound and image on film necessitates that the two channels presented together always consists of an artificially constructed pairing. She calls attention to Doane's assertion that asynchronous sound, and the voice in particular, runs the risk of exposing the cinema's dual nature because of its lack of synchronization (2006, 61). This position is fundamentally connected to Chion's view of the duality of sound and image in the cinema that informs his early work on the voice. The "deepened" diegesis can open narrative cinema up to spaces understood differently from the norms established by conventions of synchronization.

I believe that Sjogren's main issue with her predecessors is not so much their overemphasis on the visual, but rather their treatment of the visual as necessarily attached to the auditory. If Sjogren's goal is for us to recognize the heterogeneity of sound and image, whereby the sound and image tracks can work in parallel without resorting to conventions of synchronization, then perhaps the image track can be just as effective in

opening the idea of the body into a space outside of the diegesis defined by these same conventions. For present purposes, what is most important to take from Sjogren's work is her argument that the code of lip-synchronization is artificial and contributes to the constant definition of sound by its relationship to the image. In Kaja Silverman's work, bodies are negatively coded according to their level of visualization. This negative coding is a trap that Sjogren seeks to disable by fostering an approach to sound and image that acknowledges their independent existence.

Sjogren's work is remarkable for her commitment to hearing beyond the conventions of naturalism to find expressions of positive female subjectivity in films that most would argue have none. These are not films designed to call attention to the division between sound and image, and are part of a canon of Classical Hollywood films in which patriarchal power inarguably rules the day. So what Sjogren's project shows is that any film can be understood differently if we take the cinema's dual nature as a given rather than something that needs to be ignored. This is an approach to reception that demands that the divide between sound and image become visible rather than remaining hidden under illusionist tactics. Sjogren finds new spaces opening up in the cinema through attention to the realities of audiovisual separation. It is a critique of the theories that cannot recognize these new spaces, not of the films themselves. She calls for a form of reception that hears through undeniable conventions designed to minimize audience awareness of the absent site of production, and instead take that absent site as an important part of the experience we get from these films.

One might say that Sjogren wants to keep the screen of Pythagoras intact within the audiovisual context of the cinema: a clear division between sound and visual source that

allows for sound to open up into new dimensions independent of the screen. She points the way towards an approach to film sound theory that acknowledges the artificiality of synchronization and allows for an understanding of how sound and image can work in parallel, the idea of the body being a function of auditory space rather than a function of synchronization. My critique of Sjogren is that the “deeper diegesis” she’s interested in should be equally possible for the image track as well and, therefore, be a product of audiovisuality rather than just audibility.

I argue that the term *acousmatic* might best suit Sjogren’s idea of the deeper diegesis and its soundtrack that signifies alone. Ironically, given her disdain for Chion’s work, her own theorization of film sound gets closer to Schaffer’s idea of the *acousmatic* than Chion’s own adoption of the term. Where Chion and Sjogren agree, however, is that the synchronized voice/body relationship is but an illusion, and if we learn to break that illusion on the level of reception we can read films differently. In his most recent book, *Un art sonore, le cinema* (2003), Chion argues that techniques of lip-synchronization - that have become quite advanced in the age of digital animation – point to the reality of all speaking bodies in the cinema: that the true source of the voice is an acoustic entity that hides behind the visible body whose lips we see moving on the screen. Why? “If the voice, even strictly synchronized with an image, *always* suggests someone speaking *behind* the visible source, it is because the human voice has no organ” (300, my translation). Drawing on the fact that human speech derives from a multitude of transferable body parts, he concludes that these parts are not the true source of the voice, a source that is ultimately not subject to visualization. Like puppets, lip-synchronization ultimately suggests one thing: that any visible body in the cinema is but a mask

concealing the true nature of the speaking body, one without visible organs - a space unto its own. For Chion, then, the image of a body is always a mask hiding the true and invisible speaking body, and it always has been. And it is towards this idea of the body as an independent acoustic entity that Sjogren points when she calls for a way of severing the tie between voice and visible body in search of deeper areas of the diegesis represented by sound alone.

I applaud Sjogren's interest in hearing past naturalist tendencies to reveal new ways of understanding films. My critique is that, in so doing, she neglects the potential for the image track to operate in a similar way, itself working as an independent track that might open into its own deeper areas of the diegesis, or suggest spatial bodies that are not tied to the soundtrack for their signification. Recognizing this potential in both the sound and image tracks is part of the work of audiovisual ecology. Finally, however, I am most interested in how we can understand these areas of sound and image in relation to each other. Once they have been removed from their grounding in naturalism, new connections between sound and image can emerge to help us understand spatial representation along different lines.

Visual Music

Another area in which sound/image relationships have been thought of differently is in the subgenre of experimental film known as *visual music*. This form of cinema has attempted to overcome the divided nature of the cinema that I have been describing to this point by suggesting a profound connection between sound and image that moves beyond naturalism or realist convention. Interestingly, some strains of visual music treat

the image track as an independent plane of signification to be understood as a form of “music” in its own right. As such, a discussion of visual music can help us understand how Sjogren’s interest in film sound alone has found a visual corollary in the work of visual music artists over the past century.

As Judith Zilczer explains, the idea of visual music began with painting: “No longer content simply to reproduce the visible world, painters instead sought to endow their canvases with the emotional intensity, structural integrity, and aesthetic purity that they attributed to music” (2005, 25). For painter Wassily Kandinsky, the goal was for painting to find the same access to the human soul that he attributed to music, a goal that was thought best achievable by moving in the direction of total abstraction (25). But is the concept of *music* really best defined by abstraction? The issue of representation in abstract art points to one of the key problems in Pierre Schaffer’s acousmatic ideal in which all sense of referentiality is supposed to be removed from the experience of sound. I will return to this issue below when we consider the place of soundscape composition as a kind of hybrid between acousmatic music and documentary sound making. For the moment, let us focus on another common goal of visual music: to evoke synaesthetic experience where “sensory perception of one kind may manifest itself as sensory experience of another” (Strick 2005, 15). For painters, this often means trying to provoke auditory experience through a purely visual art. For filmmakers, on the other hand, it means making decisions about whether or not to use a soundtrack and, if so, about what kind of relationship would be drawn between sound and image to achieve the goal of equivalency across the two modalities.

In the various different ways of conceptualizing visual music, filmmakers have explored key issues that arise in theorizing the relationship between sound and image on film. In the silent era, some filmmakers were interested in creating visual interpretations of existing music, such as Germaine Dulac's 1928 silent film *Disque 957* designed around Chopin's fifth and sixth preludes. However, to enable perfect repeatability of an image track designed for a particular sound recording, the technology of synchronized sound had to be in place. German animator Oskar Fischinger is among the best known filmmakers to attempt the creation of a visible equivalent to specific pieces of music. He often made films based on existing pieces where the images are designed to provide visualizations of the music, as in his 1933 film *Kreise* featuring abstract forms moving in tight synchronization to certain aspects of the musical composition. Others in the 1930s were also working in this vein, notably the team of Mary Ellen Bute and Ted Nemeth. Their 1934 collaboration with Melville Weber entitled *Rhythm in Light* is described in the introductory titles as, "A performance of the music from Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suite* with a pictorial accompaniment in abstract forms." In 1936, their second installment of the *Synchromy* series takes their concept a step further, moving beyond the idea of visual *accompaniment* to a piece of music, towards creating the visual *equivalent* of a piece of music. They open the film with the following note: "Music, in addition to pleasing the ear, brings something to the eye. The following film is designed by a modern artist to create moods through the eye as music creates moods through the ear. Do you see anything like this when seeing sound?" With this final question, the filmmakers are getting at the idea that when we listen to music our experience is not limited to what we hear. There is a visual equivalent of sound, and their goal is to approximate this.

While many works of visual music are graphic constructions set to existing music, these visual counterparts to specific pieces of music are often little more than accompaniments for, or at best visual approximations of, the sounds that inspired them. They are always artificial pairings, and their attempts to gloss over the divide between sound and image, however interesting or pleasurable to watch, ultimately fail because they attempt to make sound and image one and the same when in fact they are created separately. This is a non-realist version of the redundancy deplored by the Soviet montagists, and goes against their concept of musicality based on counterpoint. Rather than have the sound try to emulate the image, or vice-versa, counterpoint points towards thinking of the totality of a film as *music*. This is the “musical analogy” that David Bordwell talks about when discussing the idea that film, like conventionally defined music, is a “system of systems” whereby each element is treated as a section of a symphony orchestra would be: not necessarily doing the same thing, but working together to create a whole (1980, 142). Counterpoint becomes a way of freeing cinema from what many viewed as the tyranny of cause/effect synchronization - or abstract formal redundancy - so that it might explore other avenues of meaning construction, and hereby solve the problem of trying to make sound and image do the same thing. By thinking of film as a musical system in which sound and image are equal players we move a step closer to the idea that *music* can be understood separately from any attachment to the sense of hearing. If visuals can be part of a musical system, then the concept of music is freer than its standard definition.

The strategies of both audiovisual emulation and counterpoint described here involve the separate creation of sound and image followed by their pairing through the technical

process of synchronization. Other experimenters went the opposite route, seeking to solve the problem of forced relationships, or deliberate counterpoint, by attempting to create sound and image together by the same technical processes. Perhaps the most famous example is Norman McLaren's 1971 *Synchromy* in which he created a musical score by making visible marks on the optical soundtrack portion of a length of filmstock, and then used these marks as the basis for the visuals that would be seen as this soundtrack is heard. The result is that we are literally seeing what is responsible for the sound we hear with no possibility of separating the two. While sound and image are still confined to their separate portions of the filmstrip, they contain (more or less) the same information: the images we see ARE the sound events we hear. Computer technology has since allowed similar processes to be explored at more advanced levels. Early experiments in generating sound and image simultaneously through computer software were conducted by the Whitney brothers in the 1970s and 80s, and these kinds of films have become increasingly popular in the digital age with artists like Tetsu Inoue and the Skoltz Kogen duo experimenting with new tools for audiovisual generation afforded by today's software. These approaches offer intriguing ways of thinking about how sound and image can be understood as part and parcel of the same technical processes of generation.

However, whether using principles of counterpoint, or in exploring the potential of generating sound and image through the same processes, the general goal of presenting sound and image together takes us a step away from the goal of a purely *visual* music. The most literal approach to visual music comes with a renewed interest in making silent films since the coming of synchronized sound, a practice that often attempts to get at

those qualities of the image that can transcend the lines of division between sensory modalities, what Michel Chion terms *transsensoriality*. Chion describes transsensorial experience this way: “In the transsensorial model...there is no sensory given that is demarcated and isolated from the outset. Rather, the senses are channels, highways more than territories or domains” (1994, 137). He is careful to explain that transsensoriality is not the same as synaesthesia with the latter’s direct correspondences between the senses. Rather, he’s interested in how certain categories of perceptual phenomena are not specific to any one sense, similar to what filmmaker Paul Sharits refers to as “operational analogues...between ways of seeing and ways of hearing” (1978, 256). Chion gives rhythm as an example of an element found in cinema that is neither specifically auditory nor visual:

When a rhythmic phenomenon reaches us via a given sensory path, this path, eye or ear, is perhaps nothing more than the channel through which rhythm reaches us. Once it has entered the ear or eye, the phenomenon strikes us in some region of the brain connected to the motor functions, and it is solely at this level that it is decoded as rhythm. (1994, 136)

The upshot of this transsensorial model for understanding cinematic experience suggests that there are more fundamental levels of the cinema than simply sight and sound, levels which do not differentiate between the auditory and the visual but which cut through both to a deeper and more holistic understanding of experience.

Although Eisenstein’s interest in film sound is generally tied to the “statement,” he was also interested in the transsensorial potential of images alone. In *Nonindifferent Nature* (1987) he speaks of “plastic music,” that music which is contained and expressed by the visual aspects of cinema, particularly in the silent era. He says that the idea of expressing music visually fell mostly to images of landscape, “and a similar emotional

landscape, functioning as a musical component, is what I call ‘nonindifferent nature’” (216).

Interestingly, as David Bordwell has noted, Eisenstein moved away from the asynchronous sound manifesto as well as any interest in silent evocations of music to embrace musical score as a powerful element within his filmmaking. In later films like *Ivan the Terrible* (1944) the images are designed in correlation to the music, an “organic” approach rather than a “dialectical” one (1980, 147). Between his interest in “plastic music,” counterpoint, and a profound interest in using score to dictate his imagery, Eisenstein has run the gamut of possibility for the relationships between sound and image, and ended somewhat far from where he began.³ More recently, experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage made a career out of creating silent films in search of expressing what he called “moving visual thinking,” a strain of transsensorial filmmaking that I will be exploring in more detail in chapter four on Peter Mettler’s film *Picture of Light*.

Within the umbrella of visual music, then, we find a broad spectrum of interest in how sound/image relationships can be understood along musical lines. What these works of visual music all have in common is how they expose the line between sound and image in their attempts to overcome it. Now, designing abstract films around cognitive experiments in transsensoriality can certainly yield interesting results, but the reality is that the bulk of the world’s cinema is based, at least partially, in realist conventions of representation. This is where Britta Sjogren’s work becomes particularly interesting. Her interest in the signifying potential of sound alone seems clearly tied to how acousmatic sound can evoke spatiality without tying this spatiality to the image. I

suggest that she moves in the right direction by seeking to attend to sound in its own right, but needs to account for the image as well. The remarkable thing about Sjogren's work is that it isn't addressing works of experimental or abstract film: she finds the potential for acousmatic experience within films that operate largely according to realist conventions of sound/image synchronization designed around suture. Sjogren gives narrative representational film a life in which the experiments of acousmatic music and visual music can be found operating.

What the transsensorial qualities of purely visual music suggest is that there can be no such thing as the image alone, or sound alone, in our experience of images and/or sounds within the mind. Because of this, the anxieties about the separation of the senses into compartments outside the body discussed in the introduction need not result in the conventions of realism to smooth over the breach within the cinema; the breach is already healed upon our reception. What that leaves us with is a way of thinking about the cinema in which the divide between sound and image is plain to behold, regardless of what type of film we're experiencing. For the duration of this chapter I will discuss how I approach issues that arise from considerations of sound alone – as in acoustic ecology and the art of soundscape composition – in order to apply these issues to the audiovisual context of the cinema.

Sound Design and Acoustic Design

Though known for his disdain for the medium of film, R. Murray Schafer has actually shown an affinity for the medium's use of two sensory modalities – sound and image – and their potential for counterpoint and dissonance. In discussing the philosophy behind

his creative practice, what he calls the Theatre of Confluence (in *Patria: The Complete Cycle*, 2002), Schafer acknowledges the idea that disparate branches of the arts should come together to create more holistic approaches, somewhat akin to the Wagnerian dream of the *gesamtkunstwerk*. Importantly, however, Schafer's version of the confluence of the arts shares more in common with interest in counterpoint and dissonance espoused by transition-era Eisenstein. This is an approach that Bordwell sets in opposition to Eisenstein's later work that appeals to the Wagnerian model in which all elements of the *gesamtkunstwerk* are meant to work together without conflict (1980, 146). Like many early film sound theorists, Schafer's ideas about multi-modal confluence demonstrate a distaste for redundancy and realism. In fact, he uses Eisenstein as his example for what the cinema might have become if more filmmakers had adopted the idea of asynchronicity. Speaking of early interest in multimedia performance art such as opera, Schafer tells us,

It was thought that the total experience would be strengthened by having all the arts proceed in parallel motion; that is to say, whatever happened in one art had to be duplicated at the same instant in all the others. But this technique of synchronization results in an art form that crushes more than it exalts..." (2002, 28)

It is significant that he uses the term *synchronization* in a negative sense, and it is here that he points to Eisenstein's ideal of counterpoint in sound/image relationships as a model for thinking about other confluence of media in the arts (29). Schafer laments the fact that Eisenstein did not continue along his path of counterpoint, and dismisses the filmmaker's later work as part of the problem of the cinema's mainstream insistence on realist/redundant conventions of synchronization.

At first Schafer's interest in the contrapuntal artwork may seem contrary to his desire for the experience of spatiotemporal coherence in the soundscape. His problem with sound reproduction technologies is that they present soundscapes that stand in opposition to the natural soundscape of the environment. Indeed, in his own works of environmental theatre, detailed in his book *Patria: The Complete Cycle*, Schafer rarely makes use of electroacoustical transmission. He generally composes for purely acoustic instrumentation with the performance space in mind, allowing this space (often in the wilderness) to contribute as much to the composition as vice-versa. It is a context-based approach that supports his use of the term *schizophonia* as a negative, and illustrates his opinion that even within a space of performance, the decontextualized experience of electroacoustic transmission is not a good thing. Yet his interest in counterpoint and dissonance in the arts is actually in keeping with some of his ideas about what makes for an interesting soundscape in the world outside of these arts.

In *Voices of Tyranny, Temples of Silence* (1993), Schafer uses art examples to illustrate different categories of soundscape. In an analysis of Anton Chekov's references to sound in his novella *The Steppe* (1887), Schafer refers to the Ukrainian steppe as an "open soundscape." One of the features of this open soundscape is that it is "loose-jointed, the only synchronized sound [being] that of a row of mowers, their scythes moving together in unison" (58). Part of what Schafer idealizes about this environment is its lack of tight synchronization between what is heard and what is seen. Yet isn't this the kind of separation between sound and source that disturbs him in the context of electroacoustical transmission? Similarly, in his analysis of Pieter Brueghel's painting *The Battle Between Carnival and Lent* (1559), Schafer remarks upon the decidedly lo-fi

quality of the soundscape created by two competing street parades wherein “the entire picture is alive with sounds, and each of the leading players has his or her own identifying noisemaker” (51). Schafer admits that, “Nothing is hi-fi here. Every sound is heard in the presence of others” (51). And yet, “though there is conflict, there is no disorder . . . The essential vitality is in the dialectic of the sounds,” what he calls the “dialectical soundscape” in another clear reference to Eisenstein (51). So it would seem that Schafer isn’t averse to noisy environments, as long as there is an order to the noise in which new meaning can arise from the counterpoint between elements. Schafer’s appreciation of counterpoint and dialectical relationships in the arts seems to be based on a similar passion for these aspects in the natural world. He just doesn’t much like technology of recording and transmission, plain and simple. If we remove the fear of technology from Schafer’s ideals, we find some interest in soundscapes that are, in fact, quite noisy and disjunctive.

Schafer’s work on understanding the world’s soundscapes culminates in his call for acoustic design. His project of acoustic design, to be discussed at length in the following chapter, is essentially concerned with the design of the built environment with sound in mind, to make our soundscapes more habitable (1977, 237). It is here that his interest in the confluence of the arts is applied to his interest in the study of the world’s soundscapes, in which acoustic design is the product of collaboration between a variety of people from different disciplines. The first step in acoustic design is to learn to listen carefully to the environment, to be able to understand it first abstractly, as one would a musical composition with all its component elements, where “the noises of the world could be appreciated in context as a sort of percussion to an incredibly rich and subtle

orchestration of perpetual surprises,” where “noise pollution [can be] flipped into a subject of positive education” (1993, 105). This basic exercise is very much akin to Pierre Schaeffer’s notion of reduced listening. For the acoustic designer, attending to the soundscape in its own right is to treat it as acousmatic sound without attention to the rest of the sensory information that accompanies it. “The task then would be how to improve the orchestration” (105). To do this we need also recognize that we are part of the soundscape, at once its audience, its composers, and its performers (105). The exercise thus begins with attending to our own sensory experience of our environment, and then appreciating our position within it before setting to work on attempts to alter it. This involves a kind of shifting perspective that draws a line between interior mental space and the exterior world.

This kind of shifting perspective between modes of listening is what some argue Pierre Schaeffer had intended his concept of reduced listening to embody all along. As Rolf Inge Godøy argues, Schaeffer’s original development of the idea of reduced listening recognizes the fact that listeners would not be able to completely eradicate attention to context or signification, and that the act of shifting attention in and out of the mode of reduced listening was a necessary part of the experience (2006, 151). In essence, Godøy is arguing that Schaeffer’s concept of reduced listening recognizes the real-world nature of human perception, and that this kind of listening is more about an awareness of the different ways of listening than about adhering to one particular way for an extended period of time. Indeed, in Schaeffer’s own words, “Nothing can stop a listener from ... passing from one system to another or from a reduced listening to one that is not” (Schaeffer translated in Chion 2009b, 27). And it is towards this quality of

shifting attention that Chion puts the concept of reduced listening in *Audio-Vision*, where he advocates attention to sound in its own right only insofar as it can help us become more aware of how this soundtrack operates in conjunction with the image track. While the soundtrack may well offer forms of signification that exist in the world of sound alone, as Sjogren demonstrates, I believe the ecological approach is to understand how sound works with the image in creating its meaning, whether by way of realist conventions of synchronization, the counterpoint of the Soviet montage school, or other alternatives.

Significantly, Schafer's paranoid conceptualization of schizophonia stands in stark contrast to Pierre Schaeffer's quest for the acousmatic experience, as Jonty Harrison has suggested when he describes the perspectives of these two composers as occupying different streets on the map of compositional possibility (2000, par. 1). For both Schafer and Schaeffer, this line of thinking implies that the mediating technology can vanish, as discussed in the introduction. For Schaeffer, this vanishing is in favor of rendering sound as an abstract object to be attended to in its own right; for Schafer, this vanishing creates a kind of substitution where a recorded soundscape can erase and replace an existing, non-recorded one. If we adhere to Jonathan Sterne's conclusion that the possibility of the vanishing mediator is a myth (2003, 285), then both composers illustrate an unreasonable bias either for or against technologies of sound reproduction.

I argue that the process of shifting perspective between modes of listening amounts to a kind of "synchronization" of interior experience and the world outside, one in which apparent disorder can be rendered meaningful by one's attention to it, much like the cocktail party effect can pinpoint meaningful communication within a broader din. And

this process can be aided by forms of art designed to promote shifting attention that threads of interior experience with the external world. This is where the role of the arts comes into play. We have heard how important the fabricated world of artistic creation is to Schafer's ideals about how to shape the world outside, and that even Schafer has found some positive potential in the schizophrenic medium of the cinema through its dual nature. Now, let us conclude by considering the potential of understanding film sound design through the practice of soundscape composition, an artistic offshoot of Schafer's project of acoustic design in which the sound of recorded space is the object of compositional arrangement.

Reflective Audioviewing

The connection between various modes of sound art and film sound design is clear. Walter Ruttmann's sound piece *Weekend* (1930) is often cited as one of the first exercises in *musique concrète*, and the fact that he positioned it as a "film" without pictures laid a provocative precedent for drawing connections between sound for film and sound art in its own right. Later, Walter Murch stated his influence by the 1950s *musique concrète* of Pierre Henri and Pierre Schaeffer, driving him towards experimentation of his own that ultimately informed his work as a film sound designer (Murch in Chion 1994, xiii-xv). Indeed, Murch was not alone, and the broad influence of *musique concrète* on film sound design has been charted in detail by Philippe Langois in his doctoral dissertation on manifestations of electroacoustic music in the cinema of the 20th Century (2004). So it is inevitable that the emergence of soundscape composition - an offshoot of *musique concrète* inspired by the discipline of acoustic ecology - will come to be recognized as

another form of electroacoustic music that has important connections to the work of film sound design. Indeed, David Sonnenschein's guide to useful concepts for film sound designers (2001) already points in this direction, using terms like *hi-fi soundscape* and sets them alongside established terms in film sound theory in order to provide new ways for sound designers to conceptualize the spaces they build in their films along ecological lines (2001, 182). In so doing, Sonnenschein is one of the first to recognize the value of R. Murray Schafer's categorizations for the fabrication of soundscapes on film rather than as descriptive tools for the real world. And for present purposes, the crux of the intersection between acoustic ecology and film sound design lies in the art of soundscape composition.

Barry Truax has delineated the key difference between soundscape composition and other forms of electroacoustic music: where most electroacoustic music follows from Pierre Schaeffer's interest in the acousmatic ideal of abstracting recorded sounds from their context of origin, in the soundscape composition "it is precisely the *environmental context* that is preserved, enhanced, and exploited by the composer" (2001, 237). Soundscape composition deliberately plays on the listener's recognition of the recorded environments in order to call attention to how these environments have been altered by the composer. For Truax, "the successful soundscape composition has the effect of changing the listener's awareness and attitudes toward the soundscape, and thereby changing the listener's relationship to it. The aim of the composition is therefore social and political, as well as artistic" (237). Katharine Norman evocatively refers to such composition as "real-world music," an approach that relies on a balance between the realism of the recorded environments that make up the compositional building blocks,

and their mediation through technologies of electroacoustic recording and transmission. In her words, “real-world music leaves a door ajar on the reality in which we are situated” while seeking a “journey which takes us away from our preconceptions,” ultimately offering us a new appreciation of reality as a result (1996, 19). Soundscape composition, therefore, is premised upon a “dialectic . . . between the real and the imaginary, as well as between the referential and the abstract” (Truax 2001, 237).

Katharine Norman’s description of soundscape composition as real-world music suggests that total realism is impossible, even within a documentary approach to composition, for there is always mediation involved in the technological representation of reality. If this is true, then surely the opposite is true as well: total abstraction from context, as suggested by Schaeffer’s category of reduced listening, is also impossible. The reality is that the acousmatic ideal is no more achievable than the schizophonic space replacement discussed in the introduction. Rather, the reduced listening experience that acousmatic music induces is one of negotiation between listening modes. While seeking to appreciate the qualities of sound in its own right, the acousmatic ideal need not seek to separate this sound completely from its context in the world. Rather, attention to the qualities of sound in its own right helps the listener discover the sound’s context anew, to understand how the sounds we hear in a composition have been subjected to the hand of the composer. Norman refers to this awareness of compositional mediation as “reflective listening” (5).

Norman’s discussion of reflective listening fostered by the art of soundscape composition is intriguing in the context of the present chapter. She posits the practice of reflective listening against what she calls “referential listening” (1996, 5), the latter

clearly patterned on Schaeffer's categories of causal and semantic listening as distinct from the reduced listening mode (though she does not acknowledge any explicit connection to the French composer). Her conclusion is that the idea of reflective listening provides a way of understanding how we continually fluctuate between different modes of listening, and this is very much in keeping with recent work by Godøy and others who suggest that such fluctuations are inherent to Schaeffer's own reduced listening ideal to begin with. Norman argues that referential and reflective listening are not independent activities, that they "[work] together as a means of synthesizing our knowledge and our enjoyment of real-world sounds" (5). I suggest that we can think of the combination of referential and reflective listening as a schizophrenic practice where the awareness of a recorded sound's source in the world is balanced by an awareness of the mediation to which the soundscape composer has subjected it.

While Norman's use of the terms *referential* and *reflective* point towards Pierre Schaeffer's categories of listening, they also point towards other discourses of listening. David Sonnenschein, for example, uses the term *referential listening* within the cinema as "being aware of or affected by the context of the sound, linking not only to the source but principally to the emotional and dramatic meaning" (2001, 78). This is a similar form of listening to the combination of reflection and referentiality that Norman describes wherein the listener is aware of a sound's reference to the world outside the cinema yet also what the sound refers to within the context of the film in which it used, the meaning it takes on by virtue of compositional intent. Again, essential to Sonnenschein's discussion of referential listening is the simultaneous awareness of a sound's

representational quality and its mediation by the filmmaker for specific formal and narrative purposes.

In *Listening and Voice*, Don Ihde also develops a category of *reflective listening* that is pertinent here, referring to a kind of ecological awareness of the role of reflection and reverberation in creating the “voice” of space (1976, 57). For Ihde, the idea of reflection is quite literal as it refers to the spatial dimension of sound that comes to our ears by way of physical reflection: reverberation. In Ihde’s version of reflective listening one listens for spatial signature, a causal listening that provides information not just about source, but also about the space in which the sound is propagating. This is something like an acoustician’s version of Norman’s reflective listening in which the “voice” of a soundscape composition comes through in the way that representational sound recordings “reverberate” within the space of the composition. Thinking of Ihde’s version of reflective listening through the one posited by Norman raises an important point about sound mediation: architectural sound shaping is just as much a mediating agent as electroacoustical recording and transmission, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The term *reflection* can refer to the spatial signature of a place; it can be the way a recording reflects the sound that was recorded; it can be the way that representational recordings reflect within the space of a composition; and just as importantly, reflection can refer to the space of contemplation in which the listener makes sense of the composition they’re hearing, the way that a composition reflects within the listener’s mind. Norman’s discussion of soundscape composition as “real-world music” encompasses these dimensions of reflection, and I would like to bring this discussion in line with the experience of listening in the audiovisual context of the cinema.

Importantly, Norman's discussion of the simultaneity of different listening modes engendered by soundscape composition draws on a host of film references, particularly the writing of Eisenstein and Bazin. In essence, she uses Eisenstein and Bazin as emblematic of two different schools of thought on the ideal purpose of film: the montage school emphasizing the work of the filmmaker, and the realist school that emphasizes the pro-filmic event. She suggests that the montage approach is about reflexivity, where artists foreground the materials of their medium to generate a tension between any referentiality in the images and how they have been manipulated by the filmmaker. This tension, she says, prompts reflection, and she uses many examples of sound artists who exploit the tensions between abstraction and representation, and between document and artistic manipulation, to "engender a kind of internal 'listening montage'" (1996, 11). She further identifies with Eisenstein in that his interest in montage is necessarily tied to representation rather than abstraction. Eisenstein's dialectical approach to editing foregrounds his manipulation of the world through the montage of real-world materials, jolting viewers into navigating the line between representation and manipulation. Norman situates Eisenstein's grounding in representation within the context of the distinction between acousmatic and real-world music where the former seeks to move "beyond the point of real-world understanding" where the latter depends upon this understanding (32).

Ultimately Norman argues that because of the tensions between different listening modes engendered by soundscape composition, the listener is invited "to participate *subjectively* in the creation and transmission of transfigured meanings, to create *through* the confusion of our individual listening montage" (1996, 115). Her evocation of

Eisenstein is clearest in citing his desire to use montage as a way of getting the spectator to participate actively in the creation of meaning, where “the image is at one and the same time the creation of the author and spectator” (Eisenstein in Norman, 9). Finally, the montage strategy in real-world music “is impelled by a desire to invoke our internal ‘flight’ of imagination so that, through an imaginative listening to what is ‘immanent in the real,’ we might discover what is immanent in us” (26). In other words, to re-discover the world by navigating the line that separates internal experience from the external world just as soundscape composition presents imaginative re-interpretations of real-world material. Here Norman points backwards towards the goal for visual music expressed by Kandinsky wherein, “Musical sound acts directly on the soul and finds an echo there because ... music is innate in man” (1912, 53). The important difference here is that, unlike the goals of abstraction in visual music, and their auditory counterparts in the world of acousmatic composition, soundscape composition makes music by representing the external world so that this world can be discovered within us as well.

Intriguingly, Norman avoids talking about Eisenstein’s interest in sound altogether. Her application of film theory to questions raised by soundscape composition demonstrates a visual bias to cinema while focusing on a sound-alone aesthetic practice, missing the opportunity to explore the points of intersection between the art of soundscape composition and the cinema that interest me here. As I will now argue, Norman’s concept of reflective listening can be very useful to addressing films if adapted for the audiovisual context of the cinema.

I suggest that the term *reflective audioviewing* be used to describe a mode of film spectatorship in which shifting between modes of auditory awareness can be extended to

an awareness of the mediation at work between sound and image. Here I take the premise of Michel Chion's book *Audio-Vision* - that in the cinema we are always hearing and seeing at the same time - and add to this the concept of reflection as developed here. Like my use of the term *schizophonia*, the idea of reflective audioviewing focuses on how awareness of the mediation at work between sound and image can prompt a reflective state in the audience to become aware of the mediation between interior experience and the external world. Reflective audioviewing is the end result of addressing films with the paradigm of schizophonia in mind.

What I wish to draw from Norman's argument is the idea that the work of soundscape composers is very effective at navigating the tensions between the objective and subjective registers of perceptual fidelity as described in the introduction. In the film analyses to follow, I will demonstrate how film sound design shares with soundscape composition the potential to act as art that fosters an ecological awareness of our environments through reflexive approaches to representation. I will end this chapter by illustrating how the work of one soundscape composer, Hildegard Westerkamp, provides a model for the awareness of mediation inherent to reflective listening. The reflexive strategies at work in Westerkamp's compositions are prime examples of the form of reflective space that are expressed audiovisually in my chosen films. In chapter five the connection between Westerkamp's work and film sound design will become very specific as I discuss the use of her soundscape compositions within the films of Gus Van Sant. First, however, it will be useful to consider how her work is emblematic of Norman's concept of *reflective listening* as a general template for the issues that I will be discussing throughout the dissertation.

*Case Study: Hildegard Westerkamp's "Kits Beach Soundwalk"*⁴

Hildegard Westerkamp was one of the founding members of the World Soundscape Project with R. Murray Schafer in the late 1960s, and is a soundscape composer who works actively with principles of shifting attention embodied by the concept of reflective listening. Westerkamp's work is part of a tradition of soundscape composition in search of an approach to representation that highlights technological mediation as a function of the sensory mediation that we all experience between our internal consciousness and the external world. Her work is exemplary of the move from acoustic ecology as scientific study of the environment to creative practice that lies at the core of the project of acoustic design. And, I argue, her work provides a good model for understanding the relationships between soundscape composition and film sound design.

In her 1974 article "Soundwalking" Westerkamp lays out the foundations for beginning the process of soundscape awareness: "Start by listening to the sounds of your body while moving. They are closest to you and establish the first dialogue between you and the environment. If you can hear the quietest of these sounds you are moving through an environment that is scaled to human proportions. In other words, with your voice or your footsteps you are 'talking' to your environment, which in turn responds by giving your sounds a specific acoustic quality" (19). Although aligning herself with Schafer's problematic construction of "human scale," she calls attention to the importance of engaging with our environment through the "acoustic quality" that this environment gives the sounds we make. Such engagement with the sound environment is an essential idea when considering how sound is used to represent spatial environments in the cinema. In

making decisions about the use of spatial signatures and levels of extension, sound designers are, at a very basic level, engaged with acoustic ecology: constantly in search of the best ways to represent not only the fundamental sounds required in a film, but the relationship between those sounds and the space represented. And as I discussed in the introduction, these sounds often transcend the space represented on screen and enter the worlds of psychological and social space.

Westerkamp emphasizes the idea that we are in constant dialogue with our environments through the sounds that we put forth and take in. She suggests that, as children, “listening and soundmaking (input and output, impression and expression) were ongoing activities, like breathing, happening simultaneously, always in relation to each other, in a feedback process” (2001, 145). This simultaneity of listening and soundmaking is something Westerkamp would have us hold on to as adults. Her notion of the soundwalk includes the practice of decomposing the soundscape within our minds as we separate sounds that are often heard as one, and then sorting them into categories based on their pleasantness to our ears. The goal is to understand the soundscape as a composition so that we might compose better soundscapes in the future. This amounts to a psychological re-ordering of the heard environment that she emulates in her soundscape compositions. For Westerkamp, to listen is to compose, and she has placed this two-way relationship at the heart of her work as soundscape composer. In most of her work we get a sense of the mediation between interior and exterior space that is a fundamental part of human experience, perhaps most overtly explored in her 1989 piece “Kits Beach Soundwalk”⁵ in which she narrates a walk along Kitsilano Beach in Vancouver, BC, Canada while manipulating the soundscape to reflect shifts in listener attention.

“Kits Beach Soundwalk” is a documentary, of sorts. We hear Westerkamp’s voice as narrator describing the scene on the beach. She calls attention to different aspects of the soundscape, and makes a particular distinction between the din of the traffic noise in the background, and the sound of the waves on the beach in the foreground. She suggests that based on where we focus our attention, we can replace background with foreground. As her voice explains this trick of the mind, Westerkamp also explains how her sound technology can be used to emulate it. She manipulates the traffic noise on the recording to grow louder and quieter, eventually disappearing as she moves us in for a closer listen to the details of the beach. She highlights the tiny clicks and pops of the barnacles, and begins to relate associations she makes between these sounds and others she has experienced in her life. She comes to rest on her memory of a piece by pioneering electroacoustic composer Iannis Xenakis: *Concret PH II*. As she describes the piece it is brought in for us to hear, gradually replacing the soundscape of Kits Beach with that of Xenakis’ work, and by extension, that of Westerkamp’s memory. We have slipped from a document of an existing soundscape to a work of acousmatic music, by way of the technological manipulation of a recorded soundscape that emulates the powers of human perception to compose our auditory environments through the acts of listening and remembering.

David Kolber has analyzed Westerkamp’s piece in some detail, illustrating how, through the shifting of perspective, she offers us a way to experience our sonic environments anew. He situates her work within acoustic ecology’s mandate to offer ways of dealing with our increasingly noisy industrialized soundscapes, and suggests that through the act of listening as composition we can reclaim environments from which we

have become alienated, that those aspects of our environment that tend to dominate our awareness are “ultimately alterable by human desire and intent” (2002, 43). Perhaps most importantly, he recognizes how Westerkamp’s engagement with electroacoustic technologies is a fundamental part of this reclamation process through their ability to change our habits of listening.

By exposing the manipulation inherent in recording and playback Westerkamp calls attention to the mediated nature of the experience. And yet, as she does so, she makes a very clear point about how we all mediate our experience every second of every day of our lives, and how this mediation is related to our own personal histories. She narrates her own experience, connecting the sound of barnacles to the Xenakis piece, but she also leaves room for our own associations to develop. This is what happens in any piece of acousmatic music: we are always engaged in exploring associations within our minds and thus we can never experience sound on completely reduced terms.

The Xenakis portion of Westerkamp’s piece becomes the nexus point where abstraction and representation merge. This is precisely the point that Westerkamp makes when she explains that the barnacles remind her of *Concret PH II*: we are always at once grounded in the world and lost in our thoughts. This co-existence of the real and the imagined is at the heart of soundscape composition in which the act of listening is a dialogue between our thoughts and our external environments. The ultimate goal is that we become aware of our co-existing planes of attention and learn to focus on how and when we shift between them. This is reflective listening.

Westerkamp’s work suggests that the ideal hi-fi soundscape is one in which extension can be measured not only from the very close to very far, but also between

inside and outside, interior experience and the world outside. Just as importantly, “Kits Beach Soundwalk” is a virtual illustration of how the line of extension from interior to exterior is variable according to the perceptual shifts of the individual. Interior and exterior do not collapse into each other, but rather hang in a balance achieved by a level of awareness that allows the listener to be an engaged part of the soundscape, complete with its electroacoustical dimension. Her ideal is impossible, presenting a version of the cocktail party effect that would require the mental skill of an advanced yogi or Buddhist ascetic to realize in the world outside of artistic representation. But I argue that this is the point. “Kits Beach Soundwalk” is a reflexive piece that calls attention to the mediators that stand between the world and our experience of it, and in so doing the piece ensures that these mediators do not appear to vanish. Keeping aware of mediation is the goal of reflective listening defined by Katharine Norman. I argue that the reflexive model at work in “Kits Beach Soundwalk” provides a way of understanding similar strategies in the films I will be discussing in the chapters that follow. Within these films I will extend questions raised by reflective listening to include how approaches to sound design intersect with the image, how the films in question engender *reflective audioviewing* in the audience through reflexive strategies for sound/image synchronization that highlight the movement between interior experience and the external world.

Conclusion

Each of the films I address in this dissertation deal with engagement between individuals and their environments, and much of this engagement depends upon representations of interiority. These films explore characters that are at a crossroads in their level of

engagement with the environment, trying to navigate the line between interior experience and the external world, between what exists outside of their control and how they can reclaim this through their own life practice. These characters are negotiating the first stage of acoustic design: rendering the soundscape a function of their perception so that they can organize it within their minds. This is akin to a practice of reflective listening. In the context of audiovisual ecology, reflective listening must become reflective audioviewing, and I will demonstrate how the films under discussion here each work to promote such audioviewing through their approach to sound/image synchronization.

I argue that engagement with the environment can be thought of as a kind of synchronization between interior psychological space and the exterior world. These films explore this synchronization between human and environment through their approaches to the synchronization of sound and image. Perceptual fidelity here becomes a measure of extension between inside and out, and the value in keeping a line between. These narratives are enmeshed within formal approaches to sound/image relationships that emphasize the schizophonic nature of the medium, and the divide between sound and image. The goal of this dissertation is to learn to hear these films for their schizophonic qualities, and to reveal the potential for these films to engender the receptive strategy of reflective audioviewing.

Notes

¹ Parts of this section have been adapted from my essay: "Case Study: Film Sound, Acoustic Ecology, and Performance in Electroacoustic Music" (2007b).

² For a lengthy discussion of Chion's concept of the *acousmêtre* and its evolution over the course of Chion's career, see my article: "The Visible Acousmêtre: Voice, Body and Space across the Two Versions of *Donnie Darko*" (2009).

³ For a thorough examination of all the permutations of Eisenstein's interest in sound/image synchronization, see Robert Robertson's book: *Eisenstein on the Audiovisual* (2009).

⁴ For an expanded version of this analysis, see my essay: "Case Study: Film Sound, Acoustic Ecology, and Performance in Electroacoustic Music" (2007b).

⁵ "Kits Beach Soundwalk" is available on CD: Hildegard Westerkamp. *Transformations*. Montreal: empreintes DIGITALes (IMED 9631) 1996.

Chapter Two

In a Glass Box: Modernist Architecture, Acoustic Design, and Spatial Representation in Jacques Tati's *Play Time*

Jacques Tati's 1967 film *Play Time* opens with a compelling jazz drumbeat set against a frame full of white fluffy clouds hanging nearly motionless in the sky. As the music carries on the opening credits pop in and out of the thin air that forms their backdrop. The camera pans right. As the music changes from driving dance rhythms to laid back lounge jazz, the upper half of a glass-curtain skyscraper appears. The tower is framed against the sky, emphasizing the airiness of the design in a modernist break from the imposing buildings of the past. Its glass is both reflective and transparent: some panels reflect the clouds creating a continuum between sky and skyscraper; other panels allow for a view inside the building, the space of the sky opening into the space of the offices inside. The image is brief, but emphasizes the ideals of the International Style espoused by modernist architects like Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe: to free architecture from the cumbersome weight of stylistic excess and assume a form that follows its function, embodying the aesthetic beauty that such an alignment entails. Yet there lies a conundrum in the ability for glass to be both reflective and transparent, one that rests at the heart of Tati's film: glass has the ability to bring spaces together and to keep them separate – often at the same time. In purely visual terms, this duality is a function of the angle from which we view the glass along with the lighting differential between the spaces on either side. When considering the other senses, however, glass is much less variable in its mediation of space. A closed window allows for a view out into

the world, yet keeps sound and weather out along with their sensorial tactility. Yet what if the glass window's variable transparency were to encompass the other senses as well?

In *Play Time* Jacques Tati explores acoustic space and its variable mediation by glass, and this exploration begins with the film's initial moments. The opening shot of the skyscraper cuts to an exterior ground level shot of an airport terminal corridor lined with a modern floor-to-ceiling glass wall. The music fades out and unusually loud footsteps are heard as the camera peers into this space from outside. Two nuns emerge within the corridor, and a cut to an interior shot brings only a slight change to the treatment of the sound. For a brief moment, it is as though glass has an auditory transparency equal to its visual equivalent. This moment of auditory transparency foreshadows the film's conclusion in which, as we will discover, glass is presented as offering no barrier to either sound or sight. Yet this conclusion entails a major shift from how the film plays out during its first half. Once the music of the opening credits is gone, the film switches to an uncompromising approach to the distinction between interior and exterior space divided by glass barriers that is maintained for the first hour.

The film thus begins by emphasizing the use of glass as imbued with a paradox that exemplifies modern life: on the one hand, it separates individuals through its effectiveness as a physical barrier against the elements, a characteristic that the film explores with attention to its ability to impede auditory extension; while on the other hand, glass allows for a persistent illusion of community through its visual transparency. Ultimately this formal treatment gives way to a situation in which glass no longer acts as an acoustic barrier, thereby bringing the flow of sound and image into alignment with one

another. The physical properties of the architecture have not changed, but their formal treatment within the film has.

The decisive shift in the formal treatment of sound/image relationships in *Play Time* is traceable through the film's narrative trajectory which is structured upon three distinct acts: the first in which modern architecture is presented as an agent of separation between individuals and acts as an impediment to community; the second is a sequence in the Royal Garden restaurant and night club where the people of the city gather in a communal spirit, and the architecture begins to lose its divisive qualities; and the third section finds the partygoers now on the streets of Paris in the early morning where the same city, once divided, is transformed into a communal space. As such, the progression of the film presents a shifting perspective on the function of modernist architecture exemplified by glass barriers, a reclamation of divisive urban space through the spirit of community. As I will discuss at the end of the chapter, the film's representation of this shifting perspective on urban experience is not without its problems. For the moment, however, we need to understand how this shift is represented through Tati's approach to the audiovisual representation of space, and this will become clear by examining the role of architecture in mediating both auditory and visual extension.

In this chapter will trace the evolution of Tati's treatment of modernist architectural space across the film, contextualize his shifting perspective within discourses of the auditory and visual aesthetics of modernity (that have been kept relatively separate), and demonstrate how *Play Time* offers an excellent case in point for bridging critical interests in urban space, cinematic representation, and film sound. Key to my discussion will be three factors: spatial isolation and containment as a key goal of modernist architecture

that Emily Thompson describes as a type of architectural schizophonia; related debates in acoustic ecology about the value and effect of this containment on the people exposed to it; and the solutions to the problems identified within these debates suggested by the film's approach to the relationship between sound and image in his representation of architectural space.

My ultimate goal is to illustrate how we can engage with *Play Time* through the connections that can be drawn between scholarly work in the fields of film studies, urban studies, and acoustic ecology. In particular, I will draw on Emily Thompson's work in *The Soundscape of Modernity* (2002) to bring sound to questions of glass as modernist building material raised by Anne Friedberg in *The Virtual Window* (2006). And I will develop connections between these by way of R. Murray Schafer's own thoughts about the sounds of modern urban spaces, and by examining a little explored relationship between acoustic ecology and Situationist thought: the role that Schafer's discussion of acoustic design might play in establishing the popular reclamation of urban space called for in the principal of Unitary Urbanism. Here I will draw on the literature surrounding *Play Time* to explicate debates as to the substance of Tati's commentary on modernist architecture. I will demonstrate how *Play Time* speaks to the role of acoustic design in the creation of urban spaces better suited to human community, while also raising questions about how to evaluate the world presented in the film's final section. I argue that while *Play Time* is controversial in the utopia it offers at the end of the film, the most productive way to understand its meticulous audiovisual representations of modernist architectural space is by way of addressing the role of human perception in transcending the physical divisiveness of these spaces. In *Play Time*, the projects of reclaiming and

redesigning urban space starts with the power of shifting the perspective of the individual, a goal that is common to both Schafer's project of acoustic design and the project of Unitary Urbanism put forth by the Situationists, both of which will be discussed below. The physical barriers of glass are transcended to allow auditory extension on par with its visual equivalent. This transcendence is achieved, I argue, by crossing the barrier between subjective experience and the objective reality of the external world. The film's conclusion represents the result of characters opening their minds up to the world beyond their bodies, the physical and social spaces they inhabit. Glass becomes a metaphor for the barrier between subjective experience and the external world. Perceptual fidelity in this film can thus be traced by asking, how is mental experience reflected faithfully by the film's representation of the external space that the characters inhabit? The answer lies in recognizing how spatial representation shifts across the film to reflect a metaphorical shift in the consciousness of its characters.

Stylistic Considerations

Let us begin with a brief consideration of Tati's general style so that we can better situate the particularities of *Play Time*'s spatial representation within the filmmaker's oeuvre. One of the predominant characteristics of Tati's style is his long-take deep-space aesthetic in which the viewer is called upon to navigate a wealth of visual information within the *mise-en-scène*. This is true in most of his films, and in *Play Time* the *mise-en-scène* is so rich, with action often taking place on multiple planes, that it is impossible in one sitting to catch all the choreography that Tati has his characters play out. Because of this density, Noël Burch suggests that the film is the first true example of open form, a

film that necessitates multiple viewings, even from multiple distances to the screen (1973, 47). Although André Bazin didn't live to see *Play Time*, the critic was a great fan of the filmmaker's work, referring to *Les Vacances de M. Hulot* (1953) as "the most radical innovation in comic cinema since the Marx Brothers" (2009a, par. 34). We can certainly see how Tati's emphasis on the depth of mise-en-scène over analytical montage would suit Bazin's tastes. As Jonathan Rosenbaum notes, *Play Time* "can be regarded as an embodiment and extension of Bazin's most cherished ideas about deep focus, long takes, and the 'democratic' freedoms that these techniques offer to the spectator," even if it went too far, "overestim[ing] the capacities of several spectators" and preventing an immediate American release (1973, 36).

Indeed, Tati's films are notable for how they diminish the importance of conventional narratives and frustrate audience expectations for basic staples like character development and plot, and *Play Time* more than the rest. As Jonathan Rosenbaum observes, the film eschews the drive towards a "clearly defined separation between 'subject' and 'background'," instead creating an environment in which "every character has the status of an extra, every scene is filmed in long shot, and the surrounding décor is continually relevant to the action" (1973, 37). *Play Time* is a film in which hundreds of people pass through the frame without any particular one necessarily standing out. Although the film features Tati's recurring alter-ego Mr. Hulot, the bumbling gentleman from the suburbs of Paris does not fulfill the usual role of a main character in a narrative film. Rather, the film follows a spatial trajectory, spending time in the various elaborate reconstructions of modernist business environments that Tati created for the film, with Hulot just happening to pass through every now and again. We

can glean Hulot's mission to take a meeting with Mr. Giffard (Georges Montant), but the success or failure of this mission is inconsequential to the narrative drive of the film. Similarly, a group of American tourists featuring a young woman named Barbara (Barbara Dennek) also weaves in and out of the film, but we follow them no more than we follow Hulot. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, tracing how Hulot's path intersects with Barbara's reveals significant elements of the film's celebration and critique of modernist architecture. However, the paths of these two characters are meaningless without accounting for the space through which they pass. Because of this, space is the central character of this film, and the formal treatment of this space demands a very particular kind of audience engagement where our own shifts in attention dictate what we will get out of any one screening. In the end, I argue that this form of engagement by way of shifting perspective is, in fact, fundamental to the experience of the characters within the film as well, and how they enact the reclamation of urban space for the purposes of community.

Significantly, the film's demand for attentive viewing is matched by the soundtrack, something that is true Tati's previous work as well. Writing about *Les Vacances de M. Hulot*, Bazin observes,

It has sometimes been mistakenly said that the film's soundtrack is made up of a kind of magma of sound on which snatches of sentences float, some of whose words are distinct while just as many others are nonsensical. This is nothing more than the impression of an inattentive ear. In fact, the film's soundtrack is rarely indistinct ... On the contrary, all of Tati's artfulness consists in destroying clarity with clarity. The dialogues are not at all incomprehensible; rather, they are insignificant, and their insignificance is revealed by this very clarity. (Bazin 2009b, 42)

Here Bazin points to a major characteristic of the film's sound style, and Tati's sound style in general, that I will elaborate upon: an interest in rendering sounds with intense

clarity, an approach that yields a hyperrealistic effect in which everything we hear is both realistically plausible and overtly stylized.

On the most basic level, Tati's auditory treatments stand out as being highly artificial, seeming at times to float over the image rather than emanating from it, even during moments of tight cause/effect audiovisual synchronization. This is, in part, due to the fact that Tati's films are almost entirely post-synchronized. While this was the norm in some national cinemas during that period (i.e. Italy and the Soviet Union, to be discussed in the following chapter on Tarkovsky), the French cinema has had a long-standing tradition of direct sound recording. As Charles O'Brien has elucidated in *Cinema's Conversion to Sound* (2005), French filmmakers of the conversion era would privilege takes that better represented the spoken performance of the actors captured in direct sound, different from the American model that would give preference to visual characteristics of the shot and fix any audio problems in post (1-2). And this preference had a ripple effect that influenced some of the most notable French filmmakers of Tati's era including Jacques Rivette and Jean-Luc Godard who re-invigorated the use of direct sound after post-synchronization became more prevalent in the 1940s (162). Tati, however, had little interest in the use of direct sound, either for the aesthetic purposes that interested his New Wave contemporaries, or for its traditional association with the veracity of live performance that the French, even today, frequently deem more important than the technical polish of post-production sound work.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that the simple technical fact of post-production sound does not ensure artificiality to any extent. Many films achieve a high level of auditory naturalism through soundtracks that are created entirely in post-

production. Similarly, one could easily use location recording techniques that distort the auditory environment, so that direct sound doesn't necessarily ensure this naturalism either. But it is important that Tati chooses to eschew direct sound because of his aesthetic interest in exploring the artificiality of the built environment, particularly in *Play Time*. The film is dominated by the highly constructed spaces of International Style modernism. These spaces are achieved visually through the brilliant sets constructed in what has come to be known as Tativille, with an emphasis on the immateriality of glass as a dominant building material. So it only makes sense that the sound should follow suit. The film gives us the sense that while the sounds are often attached to the objects we see on the screen, they are also somehow lacking in material density, "as if Tati refuses to make us feel matter in its fullness and power" (Chion 1997, 125). "In a Tati film," Chion says, "matter has purposely been given the sound of emptiness" (125). This is an aesthetic strategy well suited to lightness of the design principles of the International Style.

Along with the sense of immateriality, Tati favours the consistent use of an approach that Chion describes as "hallucinatory ... 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" (2009a, 190). Most importantly, this immateriality and clarity is a function of Tati's "contained" approach to the relationship between sound and montage. Chion observes that Tati shows a tendency to include sounds that only emanate from within the frame while often keeping the source of the sound hard to pin down within the *mise-en-scène* (193). This strategy invites active reading of the image on the part of the viewer, as Chion points out, and also creates a sense of fixity in the sounds in which

precise sources are posited, what Chion calls a “technique of fingerpointing sound effects” (1997, 127) that contributes to the hallucinatory clarity of the soundtrack. In the following chapter on Tarkovsky’s film *Stalker* I will discuss how that film uses a similar technique of keeping sounds anchored to sources visible within the shot, a technique that helps to suggest the unstable spatial properties of “The Zone” where the existence of anything outside the visible frame is called into question within the narrative. Yet the goal in *Play Time* is very different. In fact, the film strives for a hyper stability supported by a camera that is frequently fixed to accommodate the unmoving nature of his sounds. This fixity and containment also reflects the film’s premise concerning the isolationist quality of modernist space, which *Play Time* pushes “all the way to insonorization. The glass pane cuts off all sound, stamping it out entirely” (Chion 1997, 129). As Iain Borden observes, interior soundscapes contain “little of the background, obfuscating rumble of the city,” a “low ambient level” that “renders a resolutely hi-fi rather than lo-fi quality, in which distinct sounds ... are identifiable” (2002, 222). This chapter will focus on these qualities of insonorization as I demonstrate how *Play Time* uses careful control over auditory extension to represent the containment of sonic flow between spaces divided by glass.

Because Tati’s filmmaking is structured around gags, both sight and sound, the most important moments are designed as points of comedy. Tati’s comedy is highly sophisticated in that it often depends upon elaborate choreography of character movement within dense mise-en-scène, and the comedy is often downplayed because a gag will take place in one small part of the frame while other events take place elsewhere. Again, this approach is a function of how the film eschews norms of character dominance

within the narrative, and so the comedy becomes literally part of the space that takes central position in the film. Therefore, my analysis of the film's exploration of extension within modernist architectural space will focus on those gags that are designed to illustrate the particularities – and peculiarities – of the International Style. Let us now consider a key scene from early in the film and then situate its representation of architectural space within recent discussions of modernist design principles.

Tataville: Modern Look, Modern Sound

Play Time begins with a very clear approach to the way that glass enclosures prevent the flow of sound between interior and exterior spaces. One of the first gags comes as Mr. Hulot approaches a modern building with walls of glass, positioned next to a street with a fair bit of noisy traffic. Before Hulot arrives at the door, we are given a preview of the delineation Tati will continuously draw between inside and outside in the first part of the film. The scene involves a concierge, positioned within the lobby area inside the building, and a construction worker on the street just outside. We are presented with an interior medium shot behind the concierge looking out onto the street, but framed in such a way that we do not see the edges of the windowpane. The effect is as though there is no division between the concierge's position inside the building and the street beyond, though the traffic noise diminishes dramatically when Tati cuts from the exterior shot to the interior. Tati then builds a sight gag around the effect created by the framing: the construction worker approaches the concierge from the street, asking for a light for his cigarette, not realizing that there is a pane of glass separating him from his fire. The concierge gestures towards the door, and the construction worker indicates that he now

sees the edges of the frame. As the two men move towards the door, the camera dollies leftwards to follow, revealing the edges of the windowpane. The worker opens the door as the concierge holds out a match, and a rush of environmental noise from the street becomes apparent on the soundtrack once again. We then cut to a shot from outside the building as Mr. Hulot approaches, and the level of the environmental noise remains the same. Here it becomes clear that glass acts as a powerful barrier to sound while remaining nearly invisible to the eye. At this point the film also makes it clear that doors will be positioned as powerful mediators to the flow of sound between interior and exterior spaces.

This is a classic example of Tati's use of comedy to explore certain key issues that come with modernist use of glass as architectural material. On the visual level, this particular gag calls attention to the relationship between the window and its frame, a relationship that is crucial to understanding modernist glass-box design. In *The Virtual Window*, Anne Friedberg traces the evolution of the window from architectural aperture to screen technology, emphasizing the shift from the window as a tool for ventilation to the window as a device for framing a view. A general argument that runs throughout the book is that this framing of views is not in service of making the viewer feel a part of the world pictured within the borders of the frame, but rather to keep the viewer at a distance from it. The frame becomes an agent of modernist isolation, and the window thus becomes a way of emphasizing the boundary between the spaces that it separates. The transparency of glass, then, offers a paradox in its ability to allow viewers to see what lies on its other side while also framing that view, thereby separating the viewer from the framed subject. As Friedberg also notes, "While the use of a structural membrane of

transparent glass in modern buildings performs a visual dematerialization, the material barriers of glass also isolate the other senses” (2006, 117). These effects are at their peak, Friedberg says, “in the paradigmatic modernist ‘glass box’” in which windows give way to transparent walls (117). Here the frame expands, diverting attention away from itself creating a greater sense of transparency, while keeping the containment of the other senses intact. Hence the paradox that R. Murray Schafer equates with what he calls the “glazed soundscape,” in which “Plate glass shattered the sensorium, replacing it with contradictory visual and aural impressions” (1993, 71).

The cigarette lighting gag reflects the paradox of glass very well. The window as framed view is a function of modernist isolation and containment, yet this gag is premised upon a citizen’s lack of awareness of the window’s frame; the *mise-en-scène* is framed in such a way that makes the audience complicit in this illusory community between separate spaces. However, the film does not present an auditory equivalent of the visual gag. Once we have cut to the interior shot, the isolationist properties of the building’s modernist soundscape take immediate effect, even before we realize that we are now positioned inside. The nature of the interior sound is contained and cut off from the world visible outside. This reflects another thrust in modernist ideals: the discrete management of isolated soundscapes.

The role of sound in modernist architecture is similar to the use of windows to frame a view while keeping the viewer separate from the environment visible through the glass. As Schafer has observed, “The glazed window was an invention of great importance for the soundscape, framing external events in an unnatural phantom-like ‘silence’” (1993, 71). In *The Soundscape of Modernity*, Emily Thompson charts modernist ideals that

sought to banish reverberation from interior spaces and create quiet and direct soundscapes that could be managed independently of the environment that surrounded them. As such, Thompson examines the auditory side of the quest for isolation and containment that Friedberg suggests is a key feature of the use of glass as modern building material. Indeed, the question of the sound of a modern building was an issue in the early part of the 20th Century, particularly where the use of vast quantities of glass was concerned. As Thompson notes, “Walls of expansive glass and hard, thin plaster partitions resulted in uncomfortably reverberant spaces that easily transmitted sound” (2002, 209). Le Corbusier, among the first to design such a space, was also among the first to try and regulate its sonic effects (209). Eventually, the visually appealing design of modernist glass enclosures was rendered sonically acceptable through acoustical treatments that were developed in the United States. These treatments were eventually refined to the point where reverberation could be effectively banished, leaving a quiet and direct sound to match the clean and airy designs of such spaces. Of course this matching was aesthetic only; the acoustical treatments divorced the real nature of the space from its modern sound. Contained spaces covered with textureless hard surfaces should be reverberant, something that humans recognize innately. Thus these spaces not only managed to contain sound and isolate it from the context of its surroundings, but also to seemingly break the laws of physics, one of the reasons that Schafer feels such spaces are unnatural and detrimental to the experience of the people that live within them.

In the coda to her book, Thompson reviews the history of an architectural trend towards the creation of a single, universal sound of space: the dead space created by the banishment of architectural reverberation. She refers to the success of such projects as

resulting in a severance of sound from context, a situation that she tellingly equates with Schafer's concept of schizophonia. "Fifty years after it was first accomplished," she says, "R. Murray Schafer dubbed this splitting 'schizophonia' to emphasize its pathological nature" (2002, 321). As discussed at length in the introduction to this dissertation, Schafer's original intention for the term schizophonia was in reference to the separation of sound from contextualization within the environment by electroacoustical means. Yet here Thompson shows how schizophonia can be understood as an architectural possibility as well: the separation of a contained soundscape from the context of the environment just beyond its walls.

Interestingly, Thompson goes on to describe how the use of electroacoustically transmitted sound within these contained environments went on to complete the modern soundscape, first erasing any spatial characteristics of the architecture and then filling it in with sounds from elsewhere. Indeed, Schafer himself has referred to this situation as another main feature of the glazed soundscape: "When the space within is totally insulated it craves reorchestration: this is the era of Muzak and of the radio" that he says were used as a kind of "interior decoration" intended to make these dry spaces "more sensorally complete" (1993, 73). The use of piped-in sound creates a contradiction between inside and outside: "The world seen through the window is like the world of a movie set with the radio as soundtrack" (73), a fitting analogy for the general theme of this dissertation and the specifics of Tati's approach to post-synchronized sound in this particular film.

The dry modern soundscape filled in with virtual material shares a measure of kinship with Friedberg's interest in the window providing the basis for visual virtuality, a

space of representation removed from that which is represented. We can understand the modern soundscape's propensity for creating artificial soundscapes as the auditory counterpart to the window's role in creating a virtual space for the eye. This is Schafer's fear of space replacement coming to fruition through the audiovisual ideals of modernist architecture, which serves to simultaneously disconnect people from their environments while providing illusions of community with the spaces beyond the glass walls in which they live.

Importantly, concerns over the isolationist qualities of modernist architecture are echoed in Situationist critique of modern society in general. As Guy Debord re-iterates in various different permutations throughout *The Society of the Spectacle*, "Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation" (1983, par. 1). This situation creates an experiential paradox: "The spectacle, like modern society, is at once unified and divided" (par. 54) ensuring "a constant reinforcement of the conditions of isolation of 'lonely crowds'" (par. 28). While Debord's prose is often intentionally cryptic, he is clear enough on the theme of modern society's thrust towards virtual realms of experience, creating illusions of unification between the people in what feels is a divided society. The planes of virtuality enabled by windows that frame views while reflecting other views are architectural embodiments of the illusion of community that Debord critiques. The same is true for the decontextualization of the modern interior soundscape and its replacement by virtual materials. These aspects of modernist architecture contribute to the Situationist critique of an emphasis on functionalism that results in the fabrication of "uninhabitable ambiances" despite its positive aesthetics (*Internationale Situationniste* 1959, par. 5). For Schafer, these "uninhabitable

ambiences” come in the form of isolationist soundscapes. As he says about the International Style that emerged from the Bauhaus, “Bellevue - mais mauvais son” (1977, 222).

The Situationists were writing around the same time that Tati’s career was flourishing and when Schafer’s ideas about acoustic ecology were percolating. All three figures have their similarities and differences that I will sort through later in this chapter. Whether one agrees with Schafer’s concerns, or those of the Situationists, it is important to recognize that containment, along with the illusion of openness, are key factors in the International Style, and there are debates about the psychogeographic effect of these factors on the people that dwell within these spaces. I argue that it is absolutely necessary to understand these debates if we are to properly gauge Tati’s treatment of modern architecture in *Play Time*. Let us now consider the film in greater detail before moving to a discussion of the issues that it raises.

Navigating Tativille

In this section I will provide a thorough examination of four key scenes in the film’s first half that illustrate a variety of approaches to the representation of the modernist architectural isolation discussed above. Let’s begin with the scene that follows the above described gag between the construction worker and the concierge. As the construction worker exits the frame, the concierge ushers Mr. Hulot inside. Hulot has come to meet with an important businessman, Mr. Giffard, and the concierge has Hulot take a seat while he calls for the man to come down. The events that follow are presented in a single static long take. Hulot is seated screen left next to the concierge who stands in front of a

floor-to-ceiling intercom apparatus, all of which occupies the left half of the frame. In the right half of the frame we see a long hallway in deep focus. After a frustrating time trying to figure out the intercom system, the concierge assures Hulot that Giffard is on his way down. Footsteps of hard-soled shoes on a hard floor emerge on the soundtrack, and then Giffard appears at the end of the long hallway. The intercom apparatus blocks Hulot's view of the hallway, so he depends upon his ears to judge the man's proximity. Here the film plays with the artificiality of the soundscape of this building by keeping Giffard's footsteps at relatively equal volume even as he draws closer and closer to Hulot. The volume fluctuates only twice, going briefly up and then back down again each time. Iain Borden suggests that the strange consistency of the footsteps, with minor and seemingly random fluctuations, is an example of how Tati explores the illogicality of modern architectural space (2002, 224). Borden is correct in identifying that the soundscape is skewed towards a presentness that denies the natural logic of distance and proximity. However, he misses an important part of the gag: the volume fluctuations, thought to be random, actually correspond with Hulot's subjective auditory perspective. Twice Hulot believes Giffard to be almost at the end of the hallway, each time rising to greet him only to be shooed back to his seat by the concierge. Each time Hulot rises, the volume of the footsteps rises with him, suggesting that these sounds represent Hulot's subjectivity. As Hulot sits back down, the volume of the footsteps returns to its previous level. Not until Giffard finally arrives in front of Hulot do his footsteps rise in an objective presentation of the man's proximity to the camera.

With the hallway gag Tati is doing two things. First, he is illustrating one of the effects of the dry direct sound of the modern interior: without reverberation, the sense of

distance becomes distorted. That Giffard's footsteps should sound as loud at the far end of the hallway as at the near end suggests a space in which it is hard to contextualize sound. Second, Tati illustrates Hulot's confusion when presented with this space. Without being able to see the hallway, and with no consistent gradual increase in the sound of the footsteps, Hulot must rely on his instincts as to how close Giffard might be. Twice Hulot believes Giffard should be almost in view, and twice he is wrong. These auditory fluctuations demonstrate the confusion of human perception within the artificiality of the modern soundscape. This is the first of three crucial gags that play on auditory perception which, I argue, are key to understanding the perceptual dimension of modernist space as it transforms over the course of the film. The other two gags come in the middle and end sections of the film and will be discussed later on.

Giffard then instructs Hulot to wait further, and the concierge leads him to a waiting area consisting of a street-level glass enclosure, a quintessential glass box. Here the transparent walls separate interior space from the street visible just outside. Their level of transparency ensures that we can see right through the enclosure, while remaining aware of its presence. As in the example with the construction worker asking for a light, this glass enclosure develops tension between the framing of views and our awareness of the frame. The broadening of the frame of the window so that it becomes a wall creates a heightened illusion of unmediated transition between interior and exterior space. Yet once again, sound within this enclosure is cut off from the street, an example of Schafer's idea of the glazed soundscape.

As Hulot waits within the glass box, he strolls about the enclosure poking the furniture, slipping on the buffed floor, and greeting another man who enters, sits down,

dramatically signs some papers while waiting for his own appointment, and then exits. As the scene progresses, the film again regularly cuts between interior and exterior shots. As we have heard previously, we find a marked distinction between the ambient sound of the exterior space and the lack of access to this sound on the inside. And again, there is very little distinction between the spaces on the level of the visual. What we also find is that sounds within this enclosure are enhanced: the space is dominated by the sound of electrical humming coming from the overhead lights. Within this highly artificial soundscape Tati delivers moments of punctuation as the cushions on the chairs squeak, hiss, and pop in an exaggerated manner, just as the second man's physical gestures while signing his papers also stand out amidst the relative quiet. We hear nothing of these sounds while watching Hulot from the exterior shots, and the dominating din of the city is reduced to a low rumble for the interior shots. With the modern soundscape rendering everything clear, direct, and isolated from its surrounding context, these sounds become prone to unusual exaggeration. It is as though the contained nature of these sounds, and their lack of freedom of flow, creates a hyperreality with a disconcerting nature that Tati uses for comic effect.

Were it not for a measure of reflectivity and the need for support structures, the glass box would be an invisible barrier between the waiting area and the street. This illustrates the modernist tendency to push the framing of views to the point of total visual immersion, where any virtuality offered by awareness of the frame as mediation between inside and outside disappears, leaving only the illusion of community between spaces that are actually kept separate. This is the architectural equivalent of the vanishing mediator discussed in my introduction. A while later, as Hulot continues to chase down his

appointment with Giffard, the film plays with the disconcerting effect that glass' reflectivity can create within a situation where the glass itself is meant to be invisible. Hulot approaches an exit to the office building with glass walls and door through which he can see a similar space directly across the street. The shot is framed from the interior of the first building looking in deep space through to the second. Hulot catches a glimpse of Giffard seemingly across the street, when he is actually standing directly behind Hulot; the glass wall of the adjacent building is catching Giffard's reflection. The upshot of this routine is that when glass is made to be invisible, its reflectivity poses disorienting problems of perspective. This is yet another way in which Tati demonstrates a keen awareness of the peculiarities of modern architecture's use of glass as building material. Because of the multiple perspectives offered by the multiple planes of glass and their levels of reflectivity, the nature of the space becomes confused. Again, the gag is based on the illusion of community between spaces, such that Hulot believes he sees Giffard in the adjacent space across the street, while in fact Giffard remains contained within the same space as Hulot.

This gag depends upon the simultaneous transparency and reflectivity of glass, a distinction that Friedberg discusses in terms of reflective mirror surfaces that create a virtual plane of representation, and transparent plate glass window surfaces creating "an unmediated (yet still framed) view of the world" (2006, 109). Friedberg cites Frederick Kiesler's observation that along with the use of glass walls came a kind of superimposition where for the first time glass "expresses surface and space at the same time," where the interior and exterior are visible simultaneously (119). Multiple glass surfaces visible together create not only a framed view from a single perspective, but also

a cubist view where multiple spatial planes are seen at once (119). Here Friedberg differentiates between two functions of transparency: “the window as a literal architectural aperture and as a phenomenal space of viewing” (122). The particularly modern qualities of the use of glass are thus two-fold. First, the framed view of the window as architectural aperture separates the viewer and the subject. Second, looking through multiple framed views at the same time creates the possibility for perspectival ruptures where space is broken up into differing planes. In the above gag, Hulot suffers from the disorienting effect of looking through a window without knowing what elements of the visual plane are virtual and which are real.

Friedberg makes another distinction between two modes of viewing enabled by plate-glass technology, what she calls a “two-way model of visibility: by framing a private view outward – the ‘picture’ window – and by framing a public view inward – the ‘display’ window” (2006, 113). This aspect of the modern window is on display in another important sequence later in the film. Here Hulot is out for an evening stroll and runs into an old army buddy. Hulot is invited into the man’s modern apartment, the street level corner flat in a long building featuring large bay windows that offer views into identical flats adjacent and above. Tati presents a series of relatively long takes, each one an exterior shot depicting two or more windows. And here another of Schafer’s comments on the effects of plate glass windows proves apt: “From the streets we are given views of interiors once private and mysterious” (1993, 70-71). Here Schafer might as well be describing this scene from *Play Time*, for with each shot comes a clear view of the events taking place within the flats, putting these private spaces on display in a reversal of the order that Friedberg describes. Sometimes the angle of the camera is such

that we don't see the wall dividing two adjacent flats, so the antics of Hulot and his friend in one flat appear to be on display to a seated family in the flat next door. There is an illusion of community between these spaces that results, in part, from the strategic framing of the shot.

Interestingly, Tati brings technologies of visual representation into the game here, with Hulot's friend trying to project a home movie for him on the dividing wall, while the family on the other side is revealed to be watching an in-wall screen on the other side of the division. Along with their living room windows turned into display cases for the public outside, their interior walls are turned into virtual spaces with screen technologies built in. So it appears that one family watches the other mediated by a virtual window, when in fact they are watching something entirely different. And again, we hear nothing of what goes on within the flats from the exterior shots, with only the ambience of the city streets audible. By now we can be assured that this urban ambience is absent from the inside of these apartments, even while visual access to the street is unrestricted. As Borden observes, seeing inside the apartments without hearing any corresponding sound simultaneously emphasizes the separation and connection between inside and outside, raising the question as to "what is inside and out, private and public" (2002, 223).

Each of these four examples illustrates the basic premise of the film's first hour: that modernist use of glass windows, doors and walls creates spaces that are contained and isolated from their surrounding context, while at the same time appearing open and transparent. Tati's various comedic strategies explore a range of different possibilities for the conflict between containment and community, each one exhibiting sensitivity to the audiovisual peculiarities of glass enclosures and related modernist architectural

spaces. With all its variety, the film's first hour is absolutely rigorous in the basic auditory distinction it draws between interior and exterior space while exploring the visual variability of glass. The effect of these spaces on Mr. Hulot is clear: however humorous his various confusions are to watch, he is consistently unable to take his meeting with Mr. Giffard. The spaces that Hulot has to navigate in his quest for Mr. Giffard are deceptively divisive, and this quality belies their visual beauty. Designed to be isolationist according to new modern ideals, it would seem that these modernist spaces prove ineffectual for the Hulot who seems to have arrived in modern Paris from the old-world suburbs of Tati's previous film *Mon Oncle* (1958).

Transformations

The rigorous approach to the auditory distinction between interior and exterior space, along with the paradoxes of glass as simultaneously transparent and reflective, are consistent throughout the first hour of *Play Time*. By the end of the film, however, we find a very different treatment of glass and its role in mediating the divide between interior and exterior space. In the film's final moments, there is a shot that works in parallel to that involving the concierge and the construction worker discussed earlier. After a series of shots that present exterior views onto the city streets transformed into a carnival environment, with appropriate street noise combined with suitable music, we then cut to an interior shot of a window cleaner working on a pane of glass at street level. The shot begins as a view out onto the street traffic with no indication that we are looking through a window (save for a bit of reflection towards the bottom left). The exterior sound from the previous shots remains constant as we cut to this one, suggesting that we

are still being presented with an exterior point-of-view. The camera then tracks backwards revealing the frame of the window and the fact that we are actually positioned in an interior space. The figure of the window cleaner then appears and opens the window, sets about wiping it down with a rag, and closes it again in the process. As the window opens and closes there is no change in the dynamics or spatial signature of the music or environmental sound. To punctuate this point, Tati cuts from interior to exterior as a car drives by with a loud motor, a match on action with a corresponding match on the soundtrack: there is no auditory distinction between these spaces that were once so divided.

Like the cigarette lighting gag, the window cleaner sequence uses a similar visual strategy whereby a shot of activity out on the street is revealed - through a moving camera - to have been filmed through a window. This time, however, the sound does not provide us with a clue that we are inside as it did in the example of the security guard and the construction worker: the bustle on the street is clearly audible during the interior shots, and the presence of music diminishes the possibility of delineating this interior space as being sonically confined. This situation continues as we then cut to shots of a tourist bus, alternating between interior and exterior perspectives. Here we find Barbara, a tourist with a group of Americans who has been crossing paths with Hulot throughout the film, who is seen here unwrapping a gift finally given to her by Hulot. It is a charming statuette of long-stemmed flowers that resembles the assemblage of street lamps visible just outside the bus window. This is a final visual pun on bridging the gap between inside and outside, and as this occurs on the image track we hear the voices of

the people along with the street noise and music on generally equal terms - regardless of where the camera is positioned.

So how does the film arrive at this final treatment of glass so diametrically opposed to that which we find at the beginning? The answer: through a good old- fashioned party. The film's centerpiece is the restaurant sequence at the Royal Garden that lasts over 45 minutes. Here people gather in a communal spirit that moves in a slow progression from civilized eating to frenzied dancing. Along with the progression in activity comes a gradual breakdown in the divisions between people and a return to communal behaviour that has been seemingly banished by the architectural tendencies of the modernist environment in which these people spend their days. Not surprisingly, the space of the restaurant is treated as a kind of intermediary between the two poles we find at the beginning and the end of the film.

As with the kinds of glass enclosures found early in the film, the restaurant features a glass door that, with the help of a doorman, controls the flow of both sound and human traffic between the street and the reception area. The interior space of the restaurant is dominated by a large open dining hall, but this space is also lined with glass around its edges creating an enclosed corridor between the exterior wall and the main dining area. This corridor is used by the waiting staff as a place to pause amidst their duties, and provides the opportunity for Tati to develop various gags over the course of the sequence. Interestingly, the glass that separates this corridor from the dining floor does not impede the flow of sound to any significant degree. As the action in the restaurant takes place, we regularly cut between shots from within the main dining hall and the corridor enclosure with no change in the sound of the restaurant environment populated by people

talking, dishes clinking, and a jazz band playing. The glass door to the corridor opens and closes, again with no appreciable change to the soundtrack. At one point, a trumpet player arrives on stage and begins a lively jazz number. Shot through the corridor glass, the force of the sound of the trumpet player blasts open a window set within the glass barrier, yet again there is no corresponding adjustment made on the soundtrack. Given that the restaurant's front door remains an effective sonic barrier while the glass doors and enclosures within the restaurant do not, the space of the restaurant is established as being governed by the communal nature of its intended function regardless of the architectural imperatives set forth in the beginning of the film.

As the party progresses, any lingering divisions between people, and between interior and exterior space, start to break down through the physical collapse of the restaurant. This begins, appropriately, with the front door shattering as Mr. Hulot wrestles with the doorman over his right to enter. This is a key event, as it is the unrestricted flow of people and sound between the inside and outside following the door's destruction that aids in the communal environment unfolding within the restaurant.

The doorman tries to maintain control by miming his duties with the use of the door handle, thus playing on the invisibility of glass to comic effect. Here Tati develops the second of three important audiovisual gags based on the role of perception in the relationship between sound, image, and space: in an exterior shot of customers arriving at the restaurant's entrance, the sound of the band playing within is raised on the soundtrack while the doorman mimes the opening of the door; the music is then lowered again as the doorman mimes the door closing once the people have passed through. The gag works because the film has developed glass as a transparent material that divides space

invisibly, and it indicates the importance of perception as a function of how Tati's characters operate within architectural space. This is a key moment in identifying the role of perception in the experience of architectural space: if people can be made to believe that a barrier exists where there is none, then the reverse might also be possible. This idea lies at the heart of how the film reverses the properties of glass as building material, and it is within the communal environment of the restaurant that perceptual shifts by the city's inhabitants begin to take effect.

Ultimately the doorman's attempts to control the flow of traffic after the collapse of the door are to no avail, and other aspects of the restaurant's physical construction start to come undone. As Hulot attempts to pull down an ornament from some baffling near the stage, he inadvertently pulls the baffling down with it, then causing part of the ceiling to cave in as well. The band stops for a moment, then carries on until a couple more of these incidents cause them to pack it in. It is at this point that Tati provides another pivotal moment in the film: bridging the divide between the performers on stage and the rest of the partygoers, finally breaking any pretense of formality to the evening and joining two spheres that have been hitherto kept separate. As the band leaves, a boisterous American customer takes it upon himself to ask if there is a piano player amidst the diners. The young American woman, Barbara, volunteers. She rises up onto the stage and begins to play, transforming herself from member of the audience to performer. This gesture of crossing the divide between the spaces of performance and spectatorship removes boundaries separating people from one another, and is symbolic of the physical destruction of the restaurant's front door. Finally, it is through this absent door that, in the early hours of the morning, the partying crowd will stumble out onto the

streets, bringing with them the feeling of community fostered by the events of the evening.

With this feeling of community still fresh in their beings they find the streets of Paris bathed in morning sunlight and transformed into a festive atmosphere, where music is in the air and something as mundane as traffic gridlock takes on the positive connotations of a carousel. This carnival atmosphere provides the environment in which the final shots of the window cleaner and the tourist bus play out, demonstrating that the permeability of glass found inside the restaurant has now become an architectural fact in the world outside, a world that was once governed by more divisive principles.

In these final moments we find the third important gag that revolves around perceived divisions between spaces represented in the film. At one point the carnival-style music now permeating the film stops dead, along with the circular motion of the traffic emulating a carousel. Then a man comes along and plugs a parking meter, and the music and traffic starts up again. This gag illustrates the artificiality of the distinctions commonly made between diegetic and non-diegetic music in film theory. Breaking down this distinction is yet another way in which Tati explores the idea that a communion of spaces is made possible by the flow of sound. This time, however, the gag plays upon the perception of the audience who, by exposure to convention, is likely to initially perceive this music as being non-diegetic. We then chuckle as the suggestion is made that, in fact, the music emanates from a citywide jukebox controlled by the parking meters.

The invisible divide between the inside and the outside of the diegesis is crossed, as was the divide between the stage and the audience in the restaurant, and the two sides of the glass pane in the window cleaner sequence. The boundary line across the inside and

the outside of the diegesis is the cinema's version of the tyranny of glass, an invisible barrier through which no sound should pass. Here music joins these spaces together, just as music joined people together in dance at the restaurant, music that also joined the spaces of performance and spectator together. So the film's final section is clearly geared towards a very different audiovisual representation of space than we find in the first hour. Yet the question remains: what should we make of the film's conclusion? Is it necessarily intended as a positive spin in answer to a critique of modernist architecture earlier in the film?

Is Modernism the Enemy?

In an essay entitled "Modernism as Enemy" (2000), Edwin Heathcote cites the films of Jacques Tati among several examples of films from the 1950s that cast modernist architecture in a negative light, and in so doing he adopts the prevailing view on Tati's interest in the cinematic representation of urban spaces. In "*Playtime: 'Tatville' and Paris*" (2002), Iain Borden agrees with the prevailing view in the literature that Tati's previous film *Mon Oncle* presents a decidedly favourable view of old-world urban settings, "a fast-disappearing France replete with market, mischievous boys, chattering residents, cafes and horse-drawn carts," as opposed to the new modern suburb and its enclosed private spaces (217). Yet Borden disagrees that *Play Time* offers a similar view transposed into the heart of the modern city. Borden cites an oft quoted interview in which Tati asserts that he does not find modern architecture itself to be a problem, but rather the consumerist society for which it is built (218). Indeed, Tati's love of certain strains of modernist architecture prompted him to make such spaces the central character

of the film, devoting much time and energy to the creation of the epic Tativille set. Borden argues that Tati's love for modernist aesthetics shines through the film, and that his comic routines involving the spatial disruptions within this architecture are "overtly positive attempts to reassert the poetic aspects of modern life that are latent within Modernist urbanism" (218).

Refreshingly, Borden spends a fair bit of time discussing the playful aspects of Tati's sound design as evidence for the filmmaker's appreciation of the comedic potential of these spaces. Many of Borden's individual observations are useful, as evidenced by my references to his essay during the scene descriptions found above. However, it is hard to agree with Borden's basic premise that the entire film should be understood as a celebration of modernist architecture without critique. Although it is funny to watch Mr. Hulot stumbling around modern buildings, struggling to take a meeting with a corporate mogul and getting increasingly disoriented by the compartmentalized space, I think there are very few people who would actually want to *be* in his position. The "poetics" of Hulot's misadventures would be the maddeningly frustrating realities of the average person.

More of a problem, however, is that Borden ignores the overall narrative progression of the film, treating gags in isolation and as equals across a film that, as I have demonstrated in detail, involves a dramatic shift over the course of its two hours. To suggest that one of the myriad set pieces in the film's first hour offers an equivalent message to one found in the film's final fifteen minutes misses the point of the film entirely. As Brian R. Jacobson puts it, "to negate or smooth over the critique [of modern architecture in the film] as Borden does here is, in a sense, to miss the joke by skipping

straight to the punchline” (2005, 32). The effect of Borden’s neglect is to gain only a generalized appreciation for Tati’s work, rather than understanding the guiding ideologies behind it.

In “Jacques Tati’s *Play Time* as New Babylon” (2001), Laurent Marie is clear about the need to chart the narrative progression of the film. He suggests that however comic Tati’s presentations of urban space might be, there is a definitive critique of the use of these spaces in the first half of the film that gives way to a more positive outlook in the film’s second half (260). Ultimately Marie agrees that the film posits the possibility for modern urban space to be a positive factor on human dwelling, but this comes as the result of a progression in the living of this space that can only be understood by addressing the narrative structure.

Both Borden and Marie connect the representation of space in *Play Time* to the writings of the Situationist movement that had arisen in the 1950s. As a critique of modern space, both social and architectural, the Situationists developed the program of Unitary Urbanism, a call to re-organize the way modern society functions. Central to Unitary Urbanism is the idea of free flow between the spaces of society. As Guy Debord writes, “Unitary Urbanism acknowledges no boundaries; it aims to form an integrated human milieu in which separations such as work/leisure or public/private will finally be dissolved” (1959, par. 5). Unitary Urbanism does have a goal of physical transformation of architecture “to accord with the whole development of society” (par. 4). However, the Situationists acknowledge that this physical transformation to dissolve all forms of boundaries can come only as the result of changing behaviour, “to extend the terrain of play to all desirable constructions” (par. 5). And before behaviour is changed, people

must change the way they *think* about behaving within the spaces they inhabit. This relationship between behaviour and its psychology is what the Situationists have dubbed *psychogeography*: "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals" (DeBord 1955, par. 2). So we can trace a tripartite approach to the re-organization of modern social life: psychogeography pays attention to the effects of the environment on the way people behave within it, and forms the basis for raising awareness about how they think and feel when making use of the environment in which they live; once this relationship is understood, people can begin to behave differently within existing spaces; finally, new spaces can be constructed based on the new forms of use developed out of the previous two stages. So it is not hard to imagine how readings of *Play Time* that emphasize the film's positive representation of the modern city can be tied to Situationist thought about how to re-claim the city for the people.

Borden connects *Mon Oncle* with Situationist concerns over the modernization of post-WWII France, yet he argues that *Play Time* as a whole exemplifies the Situationist goal of "reasserting the irrational, passionate, performed and contested elements of city life" (2002, 218). Like Borden, Marie argues that *Play Time* can be connected to Situationist critiques of modernist architecture and the need to reclaim urban space. Unlike Borden, Marie recognizes that this reclamation begins with critique, and that the positive goals of Unitary Urbanism are founded upon an understanding of the problems inherent in the space that the Situationists want to reclaim. What is most important for Marie's argument is that Situationist thought, particularly as it relates to the idea of Unitary Urbanism, proposes that industrialized society that has given way to privatization

and spectacle can also be used to bring art and technology together and create a truly communal space based on the mutual relationship between architecture and the people that inhabit it (2001, 259). Marie equates the film's conclusion with Constant's utopic New Babylon where people roam nomadically free through spaces that are made habitable by this social re-organization (262-263). Here Marie echoes Borden's emphasis on the fact that Tati was not against modern architecture or space, but rather how this space is used within the context of consumerist society.

Central to Marie's analysis is the destruction of the Royal Garden restaurant as the beginning of the new social order that spills out onto the streets of Paris in the morning. It is when the Royal Garden starts coming undone, he says, that the people's "behavior is no longer controlled by their environment, where they are no longer separated from it, but take hold of the place," embracing "their ability to act on the world, to transform it, to re-create it" (2001, 262). I argue, on the other hand, that close attention to the shifts in the audiovisual representation of the space indicates that the film is geared precisely towards the psychogeographical element of changing use through changing *thought* rather than physical transformation. The Paris of the film's end only *seems* more open and free because people have undergone a shift in their thinking.

Re-organizing the use of space is very different from re-shaping the space itself. While Borden's reading of Tati neglects the transformations that arise during the Royal Garden sequence, Marie reads this sequence as a call for physical destruction of built space in order to facilitate community. Yet as I have demonstrated, the Paris onto which the communing masses emerge after the party is not physically different from the city presented in the film's first hour. Although there is physical destruction of architectural

space within the Royal Garden, this destruction does not spill out onto the streets of Paris. So, there is a mixed message in the film that neither Borden nor Marie are able to sort out. While Borden's work is a step forward in bringing questions of sound to the cinematic representation of modernist architecture, it lacks the attention to narrative detail necessary to chart the shift across the film's three distinct sections. While Marie's analysis of *Play Time* is very specific in its attention to the shift, it pays no attention to sound. Based on my analysis of the interconnection between audiovisual form and narrative progression, I will now offer a way out of the problems posed by the positions represented by Borden and Marie. This is where I suggest that reading Unitary Urbanism through Schafer's project of acoustic design can lead to a more thorough understanding of the film's conclusion.

In *The Tuning of the World* (1977), R. Murray Schafer lays out his project of acoustic design that calls for architects and urban planners to collaborate with musicians, composers, and other people involved with the art of sound so that the spaces in which we live might be more sonically habitable (205). Schafer approaches architecture from the perspective of acoustic ecology, but his interest in multi-disciplinary collaboration on the design of living spaces stems, in part, from the Bauhaus school directed first by Walter Gropius and later by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Schafer praises the Bauhaus for its interest in ameliorating the visual aesthetics of industrial design; yet in a suggested acknowledgment of their lack of attention to sound, Schafer says that acoustic design must now offer a similar revolution for the auditory dimension (4). Schafer calls for a Bauhaus-inspired model for acoustic design, one that takes that school's interest in multi-disciplinary approach to the visual design of industry, and applies this to the sonic design

of the same. As discussed in the previous chapter, the beginnings of acoustic design come with increased awareness of the sonic environment fostered by the practice of soundwalking, the acoustic ecologist's version of psychogeography. As such, Schafer's notion of acoustic design has much to offer the goal of Unitary Urbanism through acoustic ecology's interest in the effect of the soundscape on the people that live within it.

The crucial point of connection between Schafer's project of acoustic design and the goals of Unitary Urbanism lies in the psychogeographical basis of each. I argue that thinking of the relationship between the sound of modernist space and its effects on those who use this space is Tati's project in *Play Time*. A difference between Schafer's thought and that of the Situationists lies in what to do about the isolationist qualities of modern architectural design. For Schafer, new designs must be implemented to correct problems of divisive space not conducive to community; making a place sound better could be achieved by designing space according to more communitarian principles of use. Within Unitary Urbanism, on the other hand, there lies hope for the fate of existing space through changing the way it is used *without* necessarily changing its design. As outlined in the third newsletter put out by *Internationale Situationniste*, Unitary Urbanism "is not ideally separated from the current terrain of cities. UU is developed out of the experience of this terrain and based on existing constructions" (1959, par. 8). So for the Situationists, "it is just as important that we exploit the existing decors" in attempts to reappropriate modernist urban space "as it is that we construct completely unknown ones" (par. 8). The Situationists call for reclamation; Schafer calls for reconstruction. Yet as the practice of soundwalking illustrates, there may be hope for the

idea of acoustic design along the lines of reclaiming urban unity. I suggest that the conclusion of *Play Time* is all about changing thought and use, not about changing the architecture itself. This is akin to the practice of the soundwalk as the first step towards acoustic design: through shifting attention, the soundwalker enacts a change in space through changed use that does not require a change in brick and mortar. I argue that, in the end, the film presents positive aspects of modernist architecture, but they are not based on either the homogenous play that Borden sees permeating the film, nor the destruction of this architectural space emphasized by Marie.

It is important to understand that the only way to fully account for the change in the treatment of sound in space at the end of the film is to acknowledge the role of the change in attitude experienced by the partygoers who find themselves on the street in the morning. The material properties of glass have not changed here: what has changed is the attitude of the people experiencing spaces dominated by glass. The shift in Tati's formal treatment of audiovisual relationships in the delineation of modern architecture removes the schizophrenic properties of glass; modern spaces, once distinguished by how their sound is managed separately from the context that surrounds them, revert to a state in which the flow of sound between interior and exterior space is free. This might seem like a very Schaferian solution to the problems of modernity: return to a pre-industrial society without the kinds of modern spaces that create schizophrenic experience. But this is not entirely what is happening at the end of Tati's film, where modern architectural space remains intact but with a different set of acoustical properties.

Play Time presents an architectural impossibility using the cinema's powers of illusion, but this impossibility is best understood as a metaphor for the

psychogeographical shift that allows for previously divisive spaces to become sites of communal activity despite their architectural intent. It is here that I suggest the film offers a way to draw a relationship between acoustic ecology's interest in acoustic design and Situationist interest in psychogeography: where we are interested in how architecture affects human psychology, we might also be interested in how psychology affects architectural space. To shift one's awareness of space is perhaps as powerful as shifting the space itself, and I believe this is the message of *Play Time*.

It is on the point of perceptual shifts that the three gags on perception described above are most important. First, the fluctuating volume of Giffard's footsteps in the long corridor reflects Hulot's confusion about his proximity as a function of the unnatural qualities of the modern space. Second, the volume of the music fluctuating as the doorman at the Royal Garden mimes the opening and closing of the shattered door reflects the expectations people have of modern architecture even after it has been physically destroyed. Finally, the sound of the music in the air transcending the divide between the inside and outside of the diegesis suggests the permeable boundary between different levels of the soundtrack as a reflection on audience expectations.

These gags get increasingly reflexive. As an audience, we are in on the first two gags, able to see what the characters experiencing the fluctuations in volume do not. The third gag, however, is on us. When the parking meter is revealed to double as a coin-operated jukebox, the film reveals that the division between sound and image is as much about the artifice of cinema as it is about the nature of modernist architecture. Just as the window cleaner sequence demonstrates that the flow of sound between compartmentalized spaces is a function of cinematic representation, so too does the

parking meter gag reveal the artifice of the divide between the inside and outside of the diegesis. The spatial qualities of the music haven't changed; only our understanding of its position within the diegesis. This drastically changes our understanding of the space, yet without changing the physical properties of the space represented visually. These gags at the end of the film demonstrate the power of shifting perceptual awareness to create a different understanding of the environment, and this is the lesson revealed by careful attention to the film's audiovisual treatment of space.

The Moral of the Story

Play Time can be critiqued for its engagement with the culture of spectacle: it is a large budget film shot on 70 mm to emphasize the magnificence of the artificial set constructed for the film. Yet as Marie suggests, the use of technology is not out of line with Situationist thought about the benefits of modernization (2001, 259). And as many have noted, the film's emphasis on long takes in deep space encourages the kind of participation that re-imagines the passive nature of film viewing to something more active and participatory. I argue that the narrative of the film itself suggests the power of changing modes of thought more than the power of destroying the physical markers of modern society. The film's invitation to audience engagement, combined with its reflexive shift in the audiovisual representation of architectural space, makes it an incitement towards changing the way we think about modern society, and about the medium of film, which is the first step towards new ways of interacting with both.

However, the film's proposed utopia has its problems. The presence of music in the air, a fixture of the diegesis, is one of Tati's trademark symbols of space that is able to

support human community. Like the old-world Paris in *Mon Oncle* in which there is always music in the air, the final moments of *Play Time* suggest that this modern urban center has been rendered a space where the free flow of music is emblematic of its reclamation by the people. Interestingly, this idea is inherent to R. Murray Schafer's project of acoustic design, the basis of which is to think of the world's soundscapes as a musical composition (1977, 5), thus ensuring that there is always music in the air.

The piped music of Tati's Paris serves as a marker of the dissolution of borders between spaces once kept separate. And yet this music in the air speaks to one of Emily Thompson's key points about the soundscape of modernity: that the new dry spaces of contained enclosures are completed by the addition of piped in ambience, the epitome of Schafer's schizophonic situation. Sound now moves freely across barriers and music is ever in the air, suggesting an atmosphere of freedom and community. Yet is the solution to contained spaces giving and virtual representation really to homogenize the entire city, essentially creating a single space washed in a single soundscape? To some, this may seem like taking the problem that was once limited to small contained environments and expanding it to encompass the city as a whole. Not to mention the fact that there are many benefits to contained spaces in modern society. Do we really need to be open to the world at all times and in all spaces? As we will see in the following chapter, the idea of free-flow between all spaces is not necessarily an ideal to be sought at all costs. The reclaiming of the streets for the purpose of play is a goal of Unitary Urbanism that seems to have found an accurate cinematic representation in these final moments of *Play Time*, but we all know that a society cannot function on play alone. Further, the very community sought by Schafer and the Situationists, and suggested by the free sonic flow

at the end of *Play Time*, does not acknowledge the role of separation when considering the relationships that make up any given ecosystem, just as commentators on Tati have not properly acknowledged the filmmaker's interest in exposing the divided nature of cinema through the shift in his audiovisual treatment of architectural space in this film.

In the end, the transformation in the formal treatment of architectural space is best understood as a cinematic metaphor for a different way of thinking about this space, leading in turn to a different way of using it. The real reclamation of the space illustrated by the film's final section is neither in the destruction of modernist architecture nor the magical transformation of its material properties. Rather, reclamation lies in a psychogeographical shift where the distance between individuals inherent in modern society is recognized as a necessary function of any community. This psychogeographical shift comes in the above mentioned sequence in which Mr. Hulot gives Barbara the flower statuette. This sequence closes the film by offering us the key to establishing a mindset of community: the gesture of giving.

Mr. Hulot spies the gift in a crowded shop, but finds himself caught at the check-out as he sees Barbara getting back onto her tour bus across the street. Just as the architecture of Paris has not physically changed the morning after the Royal Garden, so too is it still mired in the processes of consumer society – the main target of Tati's criticisms. Yet here Hulot finds a solution: he enlists the help of a stranger on the other side of the check-out who runs with the gift box over to Barbara and gives it to her on behalf of Hulot. This, I suggest, is the key marker of the film's engagement with Unitary Urbanism: the structures of consumer space can be reclaimed through altered use. With the creation of this relay, Hulot takes a consumerist principle – shopping – and turns it

into an act of profitless giving. To do this, he establishes a link of community between his position within the shop and Barbara's position on the bus by way of a stranger's help. Without destroying the infrastructure that has Hulot trapped, he charts a path of community within this infrastructure, adjusting its use from one of contained consumerist practice to free flowing communal giving.

Barbara accepts the gift happily, and as she rides the bus into the dusk, she opens the box and holds the flower in her hand with delight. As she looks at her gift, she finds a parallel between its shape and that of the street lamps just outside her window. As already noted, this moment takes place in an environment where glass barriers no longer impede the flow of sound, bringing this new architectural fact into alignment with the gesture of giving. Herein lies the film's most overt alignment with Unitary Urbanism. The Situationists argue that while the modern city is a "lamentable spectacle, a supplement to the museums for tourists driven around in glass-in busses, UU envisages the urban environment as the terrain of participatory games" (1959, par. 7). Hulot's gift to Barbara made possible by the relay between two elements of consumerist society, the shop and the bus, becomes a participatory game that is reflected by the new lack of auditory barrier posed by the glass that once would have kept the tourists on the bus separate from the environment that they came to see. This gift suggests the simple power of drawing associations between things that are usually thought to be separate, of breaking down the barrier between people in the symbol of passing an item from one person to another. Tati takes this gesture and uses it to create the film's final play on the dissolution of the divisive barriers to community that modern architecture posed in the first half of the film.

In the end, the film changes auditory extension from narrow to vast as a metaphor for people who open up the extension between their interior experience and the external world. Changing the way they think about the world leads to new ways of acting in the world, which results in a spatial transformation without re-design. In the chapters that follow, I will be discussing films in which the relationship between internal experience and the external world is the guiding ecological issue governing the approaches to audiovisual relationships. As such, we can keep the message of *Play Time* in mind as we read on.

Chapter Three

The Passion of the Zone: Ecological Shortsightedness and the Limits of Auditory Extension in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*

Let everything that has been planned come true. Let them believe. And let them have a laugh at their passions. Because what they call passion actually is not some emotional energy, but just the friction between their souls and the outside world. And most important, let them believe in themselves, let them be helpless like children, because weakness is a great thing, and strength is nothing.

- Stalker

In Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979), there is an instance of voice-over narration mid-way through the film that describes "passion" as the friction created between our deepest internal level - the soul - and the world external to the body that houses this soul. This concept of passion provides the basis for the film's fundamental narrative theme of ecology: the result of contact between the innermost desires of human beings and the reality of the world in which they live. Passion, as defined here, becomes an ecological issue, for it posits the point of connection between inside and outside as a space of tension that has to be negotiated. This negotiation is the issue that drives the narrative forward.

Three men, referred to simply as Stalker (Anatoli Solonitsyn), Writer (Aleksandr Kaidanovsky) and Professor (Nikolai Grinko), travel to a desolate post-apocalyptic area known as the "Zone," hoping to reach the mythical "Room" in which, it is said, one's deepest desires can be made manifest. The three men arrive at the threshold of the Room and there they suffer an existential crisis; none of them decides to enter, fearing that the true nature of their darkest souls will be revealed to the world with terrible consequences. Here the division between interior and exterior space is set up as the line between the

human soul and the objective reality of the external world. In this scenario, the men themselves act as mediators of their own relationship to the world. They must decide whether or not to engage their passions, to establish a free flow from their inner souls to the world in which they live. In so doing, they discover their own self-mediation, which plays out in the space we see on screen by their refusal to cross the threshold of the room. The architecture of the bunker that houses the Room provides the physical structure of spatial division between the men and their intended destination, but this structure is only a prompt that allows the men to come to terms with what is really at stake: the division between their inner selves and the world outside.

The film can be read as a metaphor for the benefits of ecological containment: a nuclear power plant must keep its contents contained, lest a breach create the kind of disaster seen at Chernobyl in 1986, an event eerily foreshadowed in Tarkovsky's film released seven years prior. The permanently contaminated site of the Chernobyl meltdown is now cordoned off and has been labeled "the zone of absolute exclusion." There is no specifically nuclear event presented in *Stalker's* narrative; instead, the Zone is vaguely positioned as the result of a possible extra-terrestrial visitation, but it can clearly be read as a cold-war commentary on the dangers of the nuclear age. The Zone consists of a constantly shifting geography, a supernatural space that requires an expert - a stalker - to navigate successfully. The visibility of a large power plant in Stalker's town, and the fact that his daughter suffers a genetic mutation, lends credence to the idea that the unstable properties of the nearby Zone are connected to heavy industrialization in some way, perhaps the result of a toxic breach of containment subsequently roped off and covered up by the government with fantastical stories of alien visitation.

Indeed, the profound weight of the film's allusions to the environmental dangers of nuclear waste played out quite tragically in the lives of Tarkovsky and his cast and crew, many of whom died of cancer in the years following the *Stalker* shoot that took place on locations drenched in contaminated water from a nearby factory (Martin 2005, 159). Watching these men slog through the foamy and visibly polluted waters of the Zone is to watch them contract the seeds of the cancer that would eventually kill them off, a documentary subtext that is detectable only upon paratextual hindsight. Though the facts of Tarkovsky's death and its relationship to the film's shooting locations are not part of the text of *Stalker* itself and will thus not figure into my reading of the film, these facts nevertheless weigh heavy on what the film does present us with: an existential investigation of the very concepts of ecological balance between people and their environments. The reality of toxic waste is that of a troubled relationship between the internal workings of a factory or power plant and the world that surrounds it outside. A nuclear meltdown is a breach of containment, but the film's climax on the threshold of the Room presents an ambiguous stance. Whether we're talking about nuclear waste or the darkness of men's souls, the question is this: is it better to keep dangerous elements contained within their housings, maintaining a clear separation between inside and outside that runs the risk of disastrous breach? Or, is it better to aim for a situation in which free flow between inside and outside is acknowledged as a reality, and create systems for being in the world in which such flow is not a danger to the environment or the organisms that live within it?

The three men opt for containment, recognizing that they are not living lives that are conducive to a free flow between their innermost desires and the world outside. *Stalker's*

daughter (Natasha Abramova), on the other hand, demonstrates a remarkable openness to the world through powers of telekinesis revealed in the film's final shot. Upon returning from the Zone, Stalker meets up with his wife (Alisa Frejndlikh) and daughter and they walk home, power plant looming large in the background. Stalker's daughter sits in the kitchen where she appears able to move three glasses across the table with the power of her directed visual attention. She has bridged the divide between interior and exterior space. Yet again, the film reserves judgment on this openness. Is she a mutant who threatens humanity? Or does she represent the next phase of human evolution wherein we become more at one with our environments through an openness that dissolves the boundary between self and the world?

Under Soviet rule, allegory and subtext were regular tools for artists wanting to address pertinent issues without directly implicating the government. Surely as the filmmakers slogged through waist-deep pools of toxic sludge they had issues of environmental containment on their minds. Yet Tarkovsky has famously resisted the idea that his films are in any way symbolic for things not depicted within them (Christie 1981, 161), and I generally respect this attitude. So my interpretation of the film will not be in search of nuclear holocaust as subtext for the film's direct address of the problems of human experience. I will deal with what Tarkovsky puts in front of us. In fact, as I will demonstrate, the idea of taking the world as it is directly observable is the operating principle of the Zone and its cinematic representation. Regardless of what the narrative tells us about the source of the Zone's unusual properties, the film makes clear that these properties do not work in accordance with the way that human beings usually experience their environments. Further, Stalker's exposure to this unusual environment has resulted

in the genetic mutation suffered by his daughter. Whether allegory for the environmental dangers of nuclear technology or not, the narrative gives us enough to warrant a reading of the film based on themes of ecology.

I will demonstrate that the film's narrative emphasis on the divide between the soul and the external world is conveyed by its approach to sound/image synchronization. The unstable spatial properties attributed to the Zone are created by three basic approaches to sound/image relationships: the use of ambiguous sound; an unstable approach to offscreen sound; and most importantly, a heavy emphasis on sounds that are attached to concrete sources within the diegesis only when these sources are made visible on the screen. These three elements create a space in which the only coherent cause/effect relationships between sound and image are grounded in direct connection between a sound and its implied visual source on the screen. All sounds that can be labeled asynchronous, offscreen, or acousmatic reflect the peculiar qualities of the Zone: an unstable environment in which anything out of view is constantly shifting and unreliable. These qualities of the Zone stand in stark contrast to the very deliberate stability of the world outside the Zone, where offscreen sounds are unambiguous and directly attributable to concrete sources that are connected to the world on screen. Thus the sound of an offscreen train early in the film is tied to vibrating objects in Stalker's bedroom; in the Zone, on the other hand, the sound of a nearby thundering waterfall becomes audible only when it is revealed on screen.¹

Tarkovsky's sonic treatments outside the Zone correspond with R. Murray Schafer's concept of the hi-fi soundscape: one in which we can hear far into the distance, and in which what we hear in the distance is always contextualized in terms of its source (1977,

43). This is an unbroken relationship between the near and the far that Schafer suggests is absent in the lo-fi environment he associates with the constant noise of the modern city. The space of the Zone disrupts this hi-fi soundscape, presenting a kind of lo-fi environment where people are cut-off from their surroundings by the audiovisual equivalent of shortsightedness. However, the Zone is not the kind of urban environment in which Schafer's notion of the lo-fi soundscape usually exists; it is a desolate rural area, one in which distant vistas are often present, as well as sounds that appear to stem from far away. It is the unstable qualities of these distant sounds that cut them off from the world that exists immediately around the characters who venture into the Zone, creating a variation on Schafer's schizophonia where sound behaves counter intuitively yet without the technologies of sound transmission that Schafer associates this kind of situation.

This paradox is what makes the space of the Zone so unnatural: it should be a hi-fi environment, but its soundscape exhibits schizophrenic qualities consistent with a lo-fi situation. The combination of the hypercontextualization of the very near and the instability of the very far creates a kind of inverse schizophonia in which disorientation emerges because sounds are too *closely* connected to their sources rather than too disconnected. I argue that the Zone can be understood as a cinematic metaphor for environmental shortsightedness, trusting only what is directly around one despite being able to see and hear very far into the distance. This is tied to the main theme of the film: the careful control of the relationship between the human soul and the world outside of the body. The film's approach to audiovisual ecology thus establishes its themes as a function of its sound design.

This chapter will extend my discussion of the issues raised by the concepts of asynchronous, offscreen, and acousmatic sound discussed in chapter one, for the film deliberately disrupts the usual functioning of these categories in its approach to sound/image relationships within the Zone. I will also build on the discussion of shifting perceptual awareness of space that informed my discussion of Tati's *Play Time* (1967) in the previous chapter. I will demonstrate how the approach to sound/image relationships in the Zone is ultimately a reflexive move that is tied to the film's approach to camera movement: the camera is frequently positioned as a diegetic presence in the film capable of bringing the world into being through the direction of its attention. I argue that this is a similar position to the one occupied by Stalker's daughter at the end of the film: a character that has learned to affect the world through directed attention. In so doing, she also bridges the gaps between sensory modalities; vision becomes touch, and her powers can be read as the development of transsensorial awareness that transcends the boundaries of the individual sense modalities. Thus the daughter also transcends the boundary between the soul and the external world, projecting her inner consciousness to the world outside, bringing it into motion. As in my discussion of *Play Time*, perceptual fidelity in *Stalker* can be traced according to the line that reaches through the boundary that keeps internal experience from opening up into the external world. In this case, I argue that the film keeps this boundary line intact, a less "faithful" relationship between the experience of its characters and the external world in which they live.

Where her father and his two clients failed to open themselves up to the world in the heart of the Zone, Stalker's daughter embodies such openness and, perhaps, the next phase of human evolution. The film withholds judgment about the daughter's position,

leaving the audience to decide whether she is the result of inhuman mutation or whether she points in the direction of progress for humankind. Either way, she embodies the main ecological theme of the film that can be tied to the way its audiovisual ecology plays out across the space of the *Zone* and the world outside its borders. The relationships between camera movement and sound that I will discuss are thus formal markers of the narrative weight embodied by Stalker's daughter at the end of the film.

Stylistic Considerations

Stalker uses a carefully strategized approach to the representation of audiovisual space as a reflexive approach designed to call attention to the relationship between sound and space. In my analysis of the film I will follow a similar methodology to that of the previous chapter on Jacques Tati's *Play Time*: I begin with a comparison/contrast between the beginning and ending of the film, and then suggest how we can understand the changes brought about in the film's final shot by paying close attention to what takes place between these two points. *Stalker* begins by positing a world with very precise connection between the world on screen and its extension into offscreen auditory space. By the end of the film, questions arise about this relationship, and this change is brought about by the heart of the film: the journey into the supernaturally unstable space of the *Zone*. As I did with *Play Time* I will argue that the characters in *Stalker* undergo a shift in their environmental awareness by way of the shifting space of the *Zone* and the architecture of its ruined buildings. The characters in *Play Time* move from the precisely ordered environment of modernist architecture, through the space of the disintegrating restaurant, and out into a new Paris where the architecture remains but its audiovisual

representation in the film has been magically altered to convey the new communal mindset of its inhabitants. Similarly, the characters in *Stalker* move from the stable space of their town to the unstable geography of the Zone, and emerge to a world in which the properties of the Zone have leaked back into the world outside through the figure of Stalker's daughter. However, as will become evident, the world of the Zone and its surrounding region is a very different one from that of Tati's modern Paris, and the characters are on a very different kind of journey: one that ends with their decision to remain closed off from the world around them rather than embrace a new communal way of being. Stalker's daughter thus remains an anomaly, an ambiguous figure whose powers set her apart from the other people in her world.

There are some stylistic similarities between Tati and Tarkovsky. Like Tati, one of the main things that authors note about Tarkovsky's general style is the use of long takes, often associated with a kind of Bazinian ideal in which the viewers are responsible for their own reading of the film with minimal guidance by way of directed attention. Yet where Tati's use of the long take is often static with an emphasis on the density of detail within the *mise-en-scène*, Tarkovsky's camera is almost always in motion. Vlada Petric talks about Tarkovsky's interest in "insistent, continuous camera movement through space instead of controlling the viewer's attention by cutting from one image to the other...directly opposed to the Eisensteinian collision produced by the juxtaposition of stationary shots" (1989/90, 121). When Tarkovsky does direct our attention, it happens almost imperceptibly. Tarkovsky's camera often moves so slowly that the motion is barely visible, allowing the time for viewers to "engage in their own reflection upon what they perceive on the screen" (122). It is often only through comparing the framing at the

beginning and ending of any given shot that we may realize just how much the camera has actually moved. This is a stylistic strategy that Donato Totaro links to processes of minimalist music in which the evolution of a piece is noticeable as a kind of afterthought, not during the experience of the evolution itself (2001, 251). And this feeling of slowness is aided by the fact that, unlike Tati, there is often very little figure movement within the *mise-en-scène* of any given shot, concentrating instead on a density of texture rather than multiple layers of action that require a long take in order for them to play out.

In Bazinian terms, the use of the long take with an emphasis on depth of field is admirable for its realist qualities, an antidote to the continuously directed attention of mainstream cinema's emphasis on coverage through montage (1971, 25). Yet Tarkovsky's work is not specifically realist in its aims, and his use of the long take often works against the development of a concrete and stable world. In fact, a particular quality of his work is the dreamlike aesthetic of many of his shots, established in part by the use of long takes with very slow movement that drift through spaces of minimal action.

Many commentators have also discussed the feeling of simultaneous co-existence of different planes of reality within the seemingly grounded paradigm of Tarkovsky's long take aesthetic. Midway through Tarkovsky's career, Ivor Montagu writes, "Stylistically he intermixes in his presentation the straight story – events in sequence – with events that happened in the past or may happen in the future, or can never happen, all represented on the same plane of actuality, without any of the fades or trick 'effects' that older techniques used to help guide the spectator to a distinction" (1973, 118). And Vlada Petric notes that, "An important feature of Tarkovsky's dream imagery is that his shots

are never distorted from their representational appearance, yet at the same time the projected image looks “estranged” (1989/90, 122). He continues, “Tarkovsky’s oneiric vision rests on an interaction between the representational and the surreal: the viewer feels that something is ‘wrong’ with the way things appear on the screen, but is incapable of detecting sufficient ‘proof’ to discredit presented events on the basis of everyday logic. As a result, the shot is ‘estranged’” (125). So Tarkovsky liberates the long take aesthetic from its frequent use by other filmmakers as a realist convention, and incorporates it into a style that seeks something of a more metaphysical nature.

For Donato Totaro, this metaphysical aspect can be found in what he calls “creation time” where “time is given the power of ‘creation,’ in the sense that something magical, unbelievable, or unexplainable (and often simple) occurs within the ‘reality’ (real time) of the continuous long take” (2001, 262). This is distinguished from what Totaro calls “drab time,” where the long take works more along the lines of realist ideals: revealing the concrete reality of three-dimensional space without any surprises to question the stability of this space (262). So while the use of the long take is consistent across the entire film, the function of the long take changes from the first section of the film to the second and third.

I agree with Totaro’s overall analysis of the film’s form: the world before they enter the Zone operates one way; the Zone operates another way: and then the Zone’s properties are brought back to the world outside in the film’s final section. However, my analysis of the audiovisual ecology of the film will necessitate a slightly different reading of many of the same shots that Totaro uses as his examples, for when we add sound to the equation new things are revealed which help us understand Tarkovsky’s long takes a little

differently. One very important distinction between my reading and that proposed by Totaro is that the world outside the Zone remains consistent in terms of how sound is handled in relation to the image, with no auditory changes apparent after their journey to the Zone. What has changed in the film's third section is the introduction of Stalker's daughter as a character with powers that I argue are born within the Zone, but which stand in stark contrast to the world outside the Zone in which she lives. The film's final long take does present the kind of revelation that is absent in the film's first section, but this is a revelation about how the daughter interacts with the world, not about the operational principles of the world itself. So while *Play Time* represents a world with a transformation in the formal treatment of space from the first section to the third, *Stalker* presents no such shift. Instead, Stalker's daughter embodies the potential for a new way of being that has not been adopted by her father and his clients.

The audiovisual consistency that is apparent in the world outside the Zone is best illustrated in comparison to the way sound relates to image inside the Zone. In her article "And Then There Was Sound" (1992), Andrea Truppin suggests many ways in which the use of ambiguous sound helps create the feeling of estrangement that so many commentators have discussed. Truppin suggests that "the use of ambiguous sound plunges the audience in to a never fully resolved struggle to believe in the diegesis, much as the films' characters struggle with their own ability to have faith" (235). When paired with a long take aesthetic in which the space visible on the screen appears stable, the sound can add an instability that imbues the image with a sense of estrangement. This works especially well when the image presents a long take aesthetic consistent with Totaro's drab time of the outside world: sound aids in imbuing drab time shots with a

feeling of the creation time that Totaro observes in the visual realm elsewhere. As I will discuss, this is one of the ways in which Tarkovsky establishes the unnatural qualities of the Zone.

In focusing on these qualities of simultaneous realism and estrangement, these authors are describing the aesthetic effects of what Jim Leach refers to as the “crisis of representation” in Tarkovsky’s work: something that brings us into the realm of the fantastic “where natural explanations seem insufficient but cannot be ruled out” (1990, 212). Leach grounds his discussion of Tarkovsky’s crisis of representation by focusing on the idea of cinema as a medium inherently unstable in its inability to represent unified space. He says that Tarkovsky’s last film, *The Sacrifice* (1986), has the power “to investigate problems of illusion and representation which are central to the relationship between art and life (and the film will never quite allow us to forget that this problematic includes the apparatus and, by extension, ourselves as spectators)” (207). It is precisely on this point of dealing with the crisis of representation in the cinema, and the relationship between the cinematic apparatus and the audience, that Tarkovsky develops the concept of the Zone in *Stalker*. In particular, I argue that the film deals with the cinema’s difficulties in representing unified space through an audiovisual strategy that emphasizes the artificiality of sound/image relationships within the Zone. The constantly shifting geography within the Zone suggests the inadequacies in representing spatial continuity that have led to conventions of realism through montage on the levels of both sound and image. The Zone limits access to the world outside the direct attention of those who pass through it, and this supports the fact that cinematic representation can only ever provide limited access to the larger whole of the world that it posits but never

fully reveals. The three men inside the Zone are positioned as though they are metaphors for cinemagoers confronted by the illusionist premises of realist convention that, through their active attention, comes apart at the seams. I argue that this positioning is a reflexive strategy designed to call attention to the artificiality of cinematic space, and the film constructs its audiovisual relationships to call attention to this artifice.

The style of sound in *Stalker* is quite particular in many ways, but also shares much in common with Tarkovsky's entire oeuvre. Part of the sense of auditory estrangement in Tarkovsky's work, particularly for North American audiences, is the generally artificial quality of the post-production sound work. Tarkovsky's approach to Foley effects and voice dubbing creates a kind of hyperrealism where certain sounds are exaggerated while others are entirely absent, and the voice is always foregrounded with little in the way of any naturalistic approach to spatial signature. However, I think it would be a mistake to put too much emphasis on the artificiality of the Foley and dubbing work in the film. In the case of Tati, he was working in contradiction to a tradition of direct sound in French film production, so his post-production sound techniques were a matter of choice. One can thus argue that the artificial quality of Tati's post-production sound work is entirely in keeping with the aesthetic goals of his films. I suggest that this sort of artificiality is less a matter of intention for Tarkovsky. The sound quality of his films shares much with his contemporaries on that level, with many of the particular qualities of the Foley and dubbing simply a matter of common studio practice in the Soviet Union at the time. My suggestion here is supported by the fact that the qualities of dubbing and sound effects in *Stalker* do not change much between the Zone and the world outside. What *does* change dramatically between these spaces is the sound editing and mixing, and the choices made

in synchronizing sound with the image. My analyses will thus be based principally on techniques relating to these aspects of the sound design.

Given that all the sounds in the film seem somewhat artificial, we need to address which ones are operating according to realist principles of sound/image synchronization, and which are intended as part of the cause/effect ambiguity that permeates Tarkovsky's work. As Truppin explores, Tarkovsky's use of ambiguous offscreen sound often serves to call into question that which is seen on the screen; in *Stalker*, the reverse is often true: by using non-ambiguous sounds attached to sources we see on the screen, he calls into question everything that lies outside of the frame. This is a very unusual approach, and I argue that it exposes the cinema's dual nature: instead of working to maintain the illusion of a stable diegesis, this hyper-contextualization of sound inside the Zone actually works to destabilize this peculiar geographical space.

Andrea Truppin suggests this kind of hypercontextualization of sound within the image is an exaggeration of the Hollywood convention "in which the microphone records only a narrow range of sound delineated by the camera's visual field and very little offscreen sound is picked up beyond this field" (1992, 240). "In this convention," says Truppin, "space does not exist until the camera creates it" (240). Interestingly, this observation contradicts Truppin's larger thesis of the use of ambiguous sound across Tarkovsky's work. The idea that the camera creates the space and brings its attendant sound into being is not a question of ambiguous sound. Rather, it is a situation in which sound is so unambiguous that it doesn't even exist in the offscreen world. The presence of this strategy within the Zone does not fit with her general thesis about the proliferation of ambiguous sound across Tarkovsky's work, a problem that she never fully resolves in

her article. However, I suggest that this problem need not be resolved. Truppin's thesis about Tarkovsky's interest in ambiguous sound is correct. It's just that the space of the Zone in *Stalker* needs to be recognized as quite unique in Tarkovsky's work. While the Zone does contain examples of the ambiguous sound that Truppin has identified in all of Tarkovsky's later films, it also features this hypercontextualization of sound that is designed for the particularities of the Zone, a space like no other space in Tarkovsky's oeuvre. This quality of the Zone stands in stark contrast to the world outside. Let us now consider this distinction between worlds in detail.

The World Before the Zone

To provide a sense of the differences between the inside and outside of the Zone, I will begin by establishing how sound/image interactions function in the world outside the Zone prior to the journey of the three men. This is the stable world of Stalker's home and town. The film begins with a single long take of the interior of a bar where Stalker will eventually meet up with his two clients, Writer and Professor. This shot is paired with the non-diegetic theme music by Edward Artemiev, an auditory situation that will recur several times throughout the film. In general, the recurrence of this theme at various points is one of the most conventional uses of sound within the film. It serves, as most film scores do, as tonal support for the mood of the film. More interesting aspects of the sound design lie in areas that are not so clearly identifiable as film score, yet which are orchestrated with just as much attention to detail as one would expect from a piece of music.

The opening shot at the bar is followed by a three shot sequence that sets up the space of Stalker's house. We begin with a track from outside Stalker's bedroom to the threshold, stopping at the doorway to peer in momentarily. Then there is a cut to a static close-up of their nightstand, eventually giving way to a lateral track across the bed showing first Stalker's wife asleep, then their daughter asleep, then Stalker awake, and then a track right back to the night table. Cut to the third shot, back to the wide angle of the bedroom where we see the Stalker get out of bed, put on some clothes, and move out of the room.

The very first thing we hear in this sequence is the sound of a distant train whistle, followed by the beginnings of the sound of the metal nightstand vibrating. The stand starts to vibrate more vigorously once we cut to the close-up, with a glass of water moving across its surface. As soon as the lateral track begins, we hear the sound of a train rushing by. A loud rendition of *La Marseillaise* fades in and out as though blasting from the passing train, and then the sound of the wheels on the tracks disappears once the camera track has stopped. After cutting back to the wide shot, we continue to hear sounds of the whistle in the distance, along with Stalker's footsteps on the creaky floorboards as he moves about the room.

This opening sequence establishes some very key points about the world in which the Stalker lives. First and foremost, there is a profound connection established between offscreen sound and the world that appears on the screen. Though our view is restricted to the confines of Stalker's house, its walls do not impede our ability to hear far into the distance; the soundscape is presented in vast extension. Just as the sound vibrations of the train's whistle can act on our eardrums, so do the vibrations of the train rolling by act

on the furniture in the room. This is a solid world of cause and effect. Yet at the same time, this sequence sets up one of the film's major operating principles: a tight relationship between camera movement and the sound of the space pictured on the screen. Timing the lateral tracking shot to the sound of the train's wheels binds this sound to the camera's movement through the space. Though we are not meant to understand that the train sounds are caused by the moving camera, their connection here foreshadows many instances in the Zone where similar tracking shots will bring the sound of the visualized space into being through the camera's movement. Sometimes sounds are even attached to objects whose movement on screen is a function of the camera rather than the movement of the object itself, thus inverting the relationship between sound and movement to expose the presence of the camera. This is the beginning of a reflexive strategy that is more prominent within the Zone where the sound of visualized space is less about the space itself and more about the camera that creates it, an increasingly visible presence as the film progresses.

The sound of the train in the opening section establishes a concrete spatial environment in which offscreen sound is connected to the pro-filmic world in a way that will disappear inside the Zone. Importantly, the sound of the train also works thematically: it is the sound of the world outside the home that continually draws Stalker away from his family, much to his wife's chagrin. After Stalker gets out of bed, she confronts him about leaving for the Zone again after he had promised not to, and asks him if he understands the effect of his absence on their daughter. He pays little attention, simply brushing his teeth before heading out the door, asking her to be quiet so as not wake up the little "monkey," again acknowledging the cause/effect relationship between

sound and the world pictured on screen. His wife then collapses in a fit of hysterical sobbing on the floor, and the sound of the train rushing by on the tracks emerges once again, rising in amplitude to match her rising despair. The sound of the train, eventually compounded with the sound of an airplane, is used as what Chion would call an empathetic sound device (1994, 8) to amplify the tension and drama of this scene, behaving the same way as a musical cue might in another film. But because of its referentiality, the sound of the train also foreshadows the train that will carry Stalker back into the Zone. Like associating the train with the vibrations of the nightstand, here the film ties it to the vibrations of the woman's body. In this world, offscreen sound sets the interior of the house trembling both literally and symbolically. Finally, the scene ends with the continuing sound of the train acting as a bridge over a visual cut to Stalker at a nearby train yard next to the bar where he meets up with Writer. Though we don't see the specific train that is supposed to be making the sound we hear, we do see other trains that establish the proximity of such sound makers to Stalker's home.

The whole of the film's first section is thus structured around Stalker and the train gradually coming together. Stalker's town is clearly an industrial environment with most of the offscreen sound consisting of machine noise, along with the schizophonicly presented music that emerges with the passing train. However, it is nevertheless a world in which there is a low signal to noise ratio with little difference between the inside and outside of Stalker's house. Sound from outside has a tangible connection with what lay within, setting Stalker's rural-style dwelling definitively apart from the kind of modernist containment we find in Tati's *Play Time*. And the connection between what we can hear in the distance and what we see on the screen is very tight, keeping a sense of perspective

that would be lost in a lo-fi situation. This hi-fi situation will change dramatically within the Zone.

Stalker continues to present a stable approach to auditory extension throughout the film's first section leading up to the arrival of the three men in the Zone. Having met up with his two clients at the bar, the three men have a chat while waiting to begin their journey into the Zone. Writer and Professor discuss their mutual interest in the Zone, despite their divisions along the lines of art and science. Both, it seems, are interested in seeking the "truth" in their own way, and hope that their experience in the Zone will prove enlightening. Stalker suddenly looks out the window next to their table and then interrupts their conversation: "Do you hear it? Our train." This is the film's first direct engagement of what Chion calls active offscreen sound: a character in the film hears something with a source outside the visual field of the frame, and responds to it within the narrative (1994, 85). This is the next logical step towards Stalker's movement away from his house to the train that will bring them into the Zone.

Offscreen sound continues to build a stable sense of the diegetic world as the three men drive their jeep through a military zone in order to meet their train. At one point they stop the car and listen. Hearing a motor, they duck down to hide from what they know is a police motorcycle patrolman, who then enters the frame thus concretizing the offscreen sound within the visual space on screen. This kind of visualization is profoundly absent in the film's second section. Inside the Zone, visualized sound sources will emerge on the image and sound tracks simultaneously; non-visualized sound sources will remain out of sight. Overwhelmingly, the Zone tends not to present an offscreen

sound and then reveal its implied source on the screen (though as with any rule there are important exceptions).

In the world outside the Zone, the film maintains a clear distinction between interior and exterior space through a stable approach to spatial signature, even while there is permeability between the inside and outside of the buildings we find here. For example, sounds inside the large industrial buildings through which the men travel on their way to meet the train are highly reverberant, while sounds in more open areas are not. There are hints at the sudden arrival of sound and source simultaneously that will become a trademark of the Zone: a train passes by the door of a building and we only hear its massive rumbling as soon as it is visible, even though it should have been audible before being seen on screen. Yet any examples of this that we can observe outside the Zone are not tied to issues of unstable geography within the narrative as they are within the Zone. Therefore, these examples work as kinds of foreshadowing, and to tie the presence of trains to the theme of travel into the heart of the Zone.

Ultimately, the function of the train is to act as a conduit between spaces, both literally and symbolically. Its distant sound binds the offscreen world to that which we see on the screen; it heralds Stalker's flight from home and the trouble he leaves behind; and finally, the men commandeer a railway inspection car and use it to travel the rest of the distance into the Zone. The train thus threads the two spaces, joining the first and second parts of the film together. This journey on the inspection car is marked by the famous slip from representational sounds of the wheels on the track into a piece of electroacoustic music by Edward Artemiev that contains a similar metallic timbre and repetitive rhythm, but whose sounds are abstract with little indication as to their source.

Through Edward Artemiev's scoring we find an example of how offscreen sound turns into sound that might better be described as classically acousmatic: abstracting from source to something that we pay attention to in its own right, a parallel track. Yet at the same time it offers a good example of Katharine Norman's idea of reflective listening as discussed in chapter one, because the sounds are positioned within the narrative context of the train ride, and stem from the referential sounds of the car on the tracks. After the first shot of the men setting off, we don't see the rail car at all until it has come to a halt. As the men ride, the camera remains focused on close-ups of their faces with the landscape passing in the background. This slip into spatial abstraction marks a journey into the highly ambiguous and unstable space of the Zone, an instability that is largely established by the sound design. The journey into the Zone is the last element establishing the theme of the train as an object that transcends spaces in the film: from outside to inside; from the town to the Zone; from the inside of the diegesis to the space outside; and as we'll discover in the film's final shot, between the internal experience of the characters in the film and the external world in which they live.

The World After the Zone

Once the men disembark from the railway inspection car in the Zone, Stalker sends it back down the rails from whence they came. After this we don't hear any sounds associated with trains until the final moments in the Zone: the camera is positioned inside the Room looking out past the threshold at the three men as they sit, unwilling to enter. Cut to a close-up of the water pooling in the room, and the sound of a train rolling on the tracks emerges and forms a sound bridge over an elliptical cut that spans an untold

amount of time, bringing us back to the bar in town where we find Stalker's wife and daughter waiting for him. Here again the sound of the train works as a conduit between spaces. With our return to Stalker's town we are back to the stable use of offscreen sound where what we hear in the distance once again finds grounding within the world, even when their sources are not visualized on the screen. Stalker and his family leave the bar and walk back towards their home, now accompanied by a black dog that Stalker has brought home with him from the Zone. The family is presented in a single long take that begins with a close-up on the daughter, then gradually shifts to a long shot revealing the daughter's position atop Stalker's shoulders, and then the whole family's position on the industrial landscape as they recede into the distance with a massive power station visible on the horizon. Once home, Stalker's wife delivers a monologue to her husband on the warnings her mother gave her about getting involved with someone like him, including concerns for the possibility of having a deformed child as a result of such a stalker's activities in the contaminated space of the Zone. The film's final shot then presents their daughter who, despite her physical impairment, has apparently developed powers of telekinesis.

Seated at the edge of a table upon which three glasses sit, the shot begins as a close-up on the daughter's face and gradually dollies back across the table as she reads a verse from a book of poetry, the words presented in voice-over as a representation of her internal monologue. Then, in a long shot across the table, we watch as she directs her gaze towards one of the glasses that begins to move in short spurts. She repeats this for the other two glasses, pausing only once after the offscreen sound of their new dog causes her to glance in its direction before returning her gaze to the table. As the glasses move

we hear the distant whistle of a train and the very faint sound of wheels on the tracks.

The third glass ends by falling off the table, at which point the sound of the table vibrating emerges, followed by the table shaking visibly as the sound of the train on the tracks rises dramatically, blaring music in a reprise of the very first instance of the train sound at the beginning of the film. Here the glasses start moving again, only this time prompted by the instability of the table.

The order of events on both the sound and image tracks are crucial to keep in mind. In the bedroom scene at the beginning of the film, the order of events proceeds like this: 1) we hear the sound of the distant train whistle; 2) the sound of the vibrating nightstand emerges; 3) we see the glass vibrating on the nightstand before moving across it; 4) the sound of the train wheels on the tracks becomes apparent. In the film's final shot, things progress differently: we hear the sound of the whistle, but then the first glass begins to move *without* the table shaking and without the liquid vibrating. We don't hear or see the table vibrating until after the three glasses have moved across the table. Once the sound of the table vibrating emerges, we see the liquid in the glasses vibrating after which the sound of the train on its tracks becomes very loud.

The final shot clearly distinguishes between the movement of the glasses caused by the table vibrating, and movement caused by something else: apparently by the daughter's gaze. However, as Donato Totaro suggests, the film maintains a measure of ambiguity about the cause of the first set of glass movements; perhaps it is possible that the distant train is vibrating the table imperceptibly resulting in the movement of the glasses (2001, 274). Indeed, to keep things interesting, the film does bring in the very faint sound of the train on the tracks as the first glass moves across the table, a connection

that is absent when the glass starts vibrating on the nightstand during the bedroom scene. Yet the order of events in this final shot clearly subverts the way things operate in the bedroom scene, offering the possibility of interpreting the daughter's gaze as being responsible for the movement of the glasses independent of the passing train.

So in this final shot we have another example of the stability of the offscreen world in relation to what we see on screen: by the end of the shot there is a clear connection between the vibrations of the table and the sound of the passing train, akin to what took place in the bedroom scene at the beginning of the film. At the same time, however, the final shot does something dramatically different: the daughter's apparent power of telekinesis actually inverts the relationship between offscreen sound and onscreen movement. In fact, at one point offscreen sound - the dog's whimper - actually disrupts the movement of the glass as the daughter takes her eyes off of the glass for a moment to glance in the dog's direction. When her gaze returns to the glass, the movement begins again. In presenting the world of Stalker's home as a stable hi-fi environment, the film highlights the unusual nature of the daughter's powers.

By initiating the movement of the glasses before the table begins to vibrate, she takes the place of the train sound as the logical cause of this movement. In so doing, she also removes the auditory cause of this movement and replaces it with a visual cause: the power of her gaze. So she connects the power of sound to the power of vision, and embodies the train's thematic function of threading together the space of the Zone and the world beyond its borders. Essentially she is demonstrating the relationships between three different orders of perceptual awareness: subsonic vibration, sound, and vision. The nightstand at the beginning of the film and the table at the end both shake as the

result of vibrations whose cause is revealed audibly afterwards. In this way, sound is revealed to be an extension of touch. Stalker's daughter then brings this connection into the realm of vision, suggesting that the realm of the visual is also connected to touch. This is a transsensorial move, one that I suggest is born inside the space of the Zone. Just as she demonstrates how vision, hearing, and touch are all connected, she also illustrates how internal experience is connected to the outside. She creates a hi-fi environment between inside and outside, something the three men were afraid to open up within the Room. As such, Stalker's daughter becomes an embodiment of the Room itself, destabilizing the divisions between the sense modalities as she demonstrates her internal connection to the outside world. Finally, I suggest that Stalker's daughter also takes on the particular qualities of Tarkovsky's camera as it functions within the Zone: an agent that brings the world into motion through its directed gaze. As I will now illustrate, this quality of the camera's presence within the Zone is tied to the audiovisual ecology of this space, an ecology that differs in many ways from the spaces of Stalker's home and town.

The World Inside the Zone

The Zone's particularities have to do with this essential fact: the world comes into being through attention directed to one's immediate surroundings, limiting the importance of the world that is perceivable in the distance. The space of the Zone thus presents a variation on Schafer's idea of the lo-fi environment: though the Zone doesn't cut people off from the extended environment because of the constant presence of noise, it still emphasizes awareness of a very limited range at the expense of that which lies in the distance. This foreshortened space is tied to the film's main reflexive strategies: the

artificiality of sound/image relationships within the Zone, and the use of the camera as a presence that, despite its languid pace, often calls attention to itself as being the agent responsible for bringing the world into being. Therefore, there is a complex relationship between camera perspective and the perspective of the three characters that make their way through the Zone.

Donato Totaro offers several examples of shots that he suggests are associated with different levels of subjectivity. He divides these into two main categories: internalized subjectivity, in which the images we see might reflect a character's dream; and externalized subjectivity, in which a shot can't be clearly connected to a character's physical perspective but which nevertheless reflects a character's experience of the space (2001, 255). To these I would like to add a third category consisting of those instances in which the camera takes on a diegetic presence, no longer conveying an internal or external subjectivity but moving towards the idea that it is an autonomous entity in its own right. As I will illustrate, certain shots can be read as transferring from the subjectivity of an identifiable character to an unidentifiable presence, sometimes within the space of a single long take. Short of suggesting that the camera itself displays moments of its own subjectivity, I argue that these reflexive shots call attention to the camera's role in bringing the cinematic world into being, just as the three men bring the space of the Zone into being through their own directed attention. Through this reflexivity the film thus binds the audience to the characters through a shifting process of identification, similar to the shifting spatial geography of the Zone that is articulated through the film's approach to sound/image relationships. Importantly, tracing the camera's ability to bring the world into being necessitates attention to the peculiarities of

sound/image relationships inside the Zone, and the following section is devoted to a detailed analysis of how this relationship works.

For my analysis of the world inside the Zone, I will break my discussion into examples of the three particularities of sound: the use of ambiguous sound; the shifting quality of offscreen sound; and the simultaneous revelation of sound and implied visual source that suggests the camera's power to bring the space into auditory being. Many of these audiovisual peculiarities are present in the first two shots following the halting of the inspection car and the end of the Artemiev's abstract sound treatments that accompanied their ride. I will use these two shots as an introduction to the kinds of audiovisual relationships I'll be discussing throughout this section.

The camera pans the landscape marked by long grass with distant hills dropping down into a valley of mist. For a moment there is a total absence of recorded sound on the soundtrack, a silence broken with a cut to a wide shot of the men sitting on the rail car where Stalker stretches his arms and exclaims the Zone's beauty. "It's so quiet here," he says. "This is the quietest place in the world. You'll see for yourselves." This is the beginning of a single shot lasting over four minutes in which the three men slowly disembark from the car and move a few feet down the tracks. As Stalker starts to speak, the ambient soundscape of the Zone emerges, starting with light wind and an almost imperceptible electronic drone. At one point Stalker mentions a nearby river, and as the camera continues to track left this river gradually comes into view, previously blocked by the distant hills and the mist hanging about their peaks. Although the camera only moves a few feet closer to the distant river over the course of its track, the sound of running water emerges once it is visible on the screen. Realism would dictate that the sound of

the water should be audible from the very outset of the shot, so the approach taken here indicates an alternative logic at work in establishing audiovisual space. Stalker then disappears down the hill for a moment, leaving Writer and Professor to sit and talk. As they discuss what they've heard about the Zone, we hear the sound of a dog howling in the distance. The dog is a rare example of an offscreen sound in the Zone whose implied source will eventually be visible on the screen, though when the dog finally appears midway through their journey in the Zone we never see it in the act of any vocalizations. Its voice is kept to the status of offscreen sound for the whole film, right up until the final shot when this sound distracts the daughter from her telekinetic gaze. The dog is also the only thing the men will bring back with them from the Zone to the town, and as such its offscreen howl is tied thematically to the train sounds described earlier, both of which thread the two spaces together.

These two opening shots inside the Zone present all of the significant auditory anomalies that make the Zone what it is. First, the extreme quietude at the beginning sets up the idea that the Zone is an unstable space that comes alive as a result of being observed, a kind of geographical embodiment of the Heisenberg principal. As Stalker tells his companions a little while later, "I don't know what's going on here in the absence of people, but the moment someone shows up, everything comes into motion ... Everything that happens in the Zone depends on us." It is as though there is no sound in the Zone unless there is someone there to hear it, a play on the old question concerning trees falling in the forest. The Zone begins as quiet as Stalker's bedroom, but in an environment that should be filled with ambient sounds. Instead, such environmental sounds emerge as though from nowhere a short while after their rail journey stops,

perhaps a reflection of the ear's need for an adjustment period to hear quiet sounds after extended exposure to louder sounds, but also suggesting the Zone's unstable properties.

The idea of attention bringing the auditory world into being is furthered by the emergence of the distant water sounds only when the water is clearly revealed by the camera. In this world, offscreen sound may exist to suggest the world outside one's direct attention, but it can't be trusted. Very often, as in this example, the sound of things that can be pinpointed within the frame will only exist when they enter this frame.

Finally, once the absolute silence in the first shot has been lifted, there emerges a light acousmatic tonality reminiscent of the resonant decay within a piano after the strings have been strummed by hand with the sustain pedal in effect. This sound will recur frequently throughout the Zone, along with processed choral sounds, and is one example among several of a soundscape that may or may not be audible to the characters. The source of these acousmatic tonalities is never revealed, and they provide the primary examples of ambiguous sound that keeps the Zone from being entirely grounded within conventional ideas of the diegesis. This kind of ambiguous sound causes what Truppin suggests is the audience's inability to fully accept the diegesis, resulting in a level of identification with the characters suffering the same problem.

Zonal Trajectory. The rest of my discussion of the Zone will be non-linear, grouped around types of audiovisual relationships. So, I will briefly lay out the trajectory of the men through this space based on key events and their associated geographical landmarks. After disembarking from the inspection car, Stalker sends it back down the tracks from whence they came. The official start of their journey into the heart of the Zone begins

near an abandoned car containing the skeletal remains of previous travelers. The *modus operandi* for their journey through the Zone is then revealed: they proceed in short lengths defined by the distance they can throw a metal nut tied to a length of cloth bandage. The implication of this method is straightforward: you can only trust that which is within very short range, on a path predetermined by one's directed attention, and in finite trajectories that do not necessarily follow each other in a linear fashion.

A short while into their zig-zagging path they near the bunker that houses the Room. Though only 200 feet away, Stalker refuses to move directly towards it. Writer grows impatient with this method and decides to go towards the bunker on his own. He is stopped in his tracks by an unexplainable experience, and returns to the other two to follow Stalker.

Later it is Professor's turn to defy Stalker's method. Having left his backpack on the ground near what is called the "dry tunnel," Professor insists that he goes back to get it. Stalker refuses, and he and Writer continue on through the tunnel leaving Professor behind. When they emerge from the tunnel, however, they discover Professor seated at the exit – which turns out to be the point from which they started. The Zone has played a geographical trick on them, and all three men are now convinced of its instability. Here they take a rest.

Then they continue through a long length of drainage tubing until they reach the "meat mincer," a room filled with sand dunes in the middle of which lies "the pipe," a tube leading down beneath the ground. Writer enters this room by accident and suffers an existential crisis about the inability of his writing to effect any tangible change within the world, a realization that drives him nearly to break down. Stalker manages to talk

him out of the meat mincer, and finally they arrive at the threshold of the Room itself.

Adjacent to the Room is a smaller room containing a telephone where Professor calls his university colleagues to inform them that he has beat them to the Room and intends to destroy it with a bomb concealed in his knapsack. Stalker talks him out of it, and all three of them decide not to enter the Room for fear of revealing their true natures to the world.

Invisible Instability. I will now describe several instances of the unstable approach to offscreen sound that permeates the space of the Zone. These are sounds that are recognizable as plausible elements of the environment pictured onscreen, but whose treatment in the sound mix tends to defy the laws of physics, and certainly steps outside the conventions of cinematic realism. Examples of legible offscreen sound that come and go unnaturally are too numerous to list, but they consist mostly of ambient sounds one would expect from the environment (i.e. birds, wind) which are one minute there and the next minute gone, even while the environment on screen remains constant. While experience with the real world teaches us that such sounds are often intermittent in nature, the quality of their emergence and disappearance within the Zone suggests a logic that defies our expectations for a natural environment. A key example comes as we watch Writer and Professor, left alone by the Stalker in the first minutes of their arrival in the Zone, discussing the possible origins of the Zone. Wind sounds fluctuate in both intensity and realism, at some points taking on a more abstract quality that suggests an unnatural presence. When Stalker returns, these sounds cease altogether, as though they

were tied to the perceptual peculiarities of the uninitiated men while in the absence of the stabilizing presence of their experienced guide.

Similar situations emerge as they move forward throughout the space. After delivering a speech to his clients about the dangers of wandering off on their own without following the path of the nut, Stalker throws the next one, and the bird calls start up again, as though the sound of the nut hitting the ground wakes them up, but also symbolic of the space of the Zone coming to life in the presence of directed attention. A similar situation arises in the bunker that houses the Room, a ruined space with many portals to the outside, but with a soundscape that fluctuates from permeable to dead quiet, sometimes with birds audible, other times with nothing. Here the fluctuating soundscape is positioned in direct relation to the crisis the men undergo as they decide whether or not to enter the Room and open themselves up to the world outside: the ambient soundscape suggests varying levels of permeability between inside and out while the men wrestle with their desire to open themselves up. Significantly, once they resign themselves to remaining on the outside, a moment of dead silence emerges on the soundtrack, an instance of null extension that reflects the closed nature of the men themselves.

Particularly important is the unstable quality that the spatial signature often takes on within the Zone. Spatial signature is an interesting element of sound design because it has the power to thread the world of offscreen sound with what we see on screen in special ways. Ambient soundscapes, like birds and wind, provide a sense of the expanded world of the diegesis beyond the frame, but they don't contain specific sounds that begin within the frame and move outwards. Reverberation on someone's voice, on the other hand, can do just that: we see someone speak on the screen, and the sound of

their voice is treated with reverberation to suggest the spatial qualities of the space they are in, only some of which is visible on the screen. The film plays with this quality of spatial signature as well, and there are two instances of particular note. Before entering the long tube leading to the meat mincer, Writer stands facing the entryway where he argues with Stalker about the fairness of him being chosen to enter first. Strangely, when he speaks into the tube there is less reverberation on his voice than when he turns his head to address Stalker standing behind him, even though their previous conversation in the area just outside the tube had no such reverberation. Within the tube itself, the sounds of footsteps fluctuate constantly between varying levels of reverberation. It is plausible that the dynamics of the space change from one section to the next as Writer moves down its length, but the fluctuations here take place on a step by step basis, more frequent than one would expect, suggesting a volatile space. When Professor makes a call to his colleagues in the telephone room, his only movement is that of his fingers on the rotary dial. Yet as he dials, the level of reverb on the sound of the rotary fluctuates as though he is moving from one space to another. The direct sound of the dialing remains constant, something we can see on the screen. Yet the behaviour of this sound in the surrounding space is not visually accountable, and here the Zone makes that clear by suggesting the shifting geography around them by the behaviour of the reverberation within this space.

There are also moments when the spatial signature extends beyond the above-mentioned kinds of instability and moves into a wholly abstract realm, tying the shifting quality of offscreen sound to the realm of ambiguous sound. The most prominent example comes as the men near the dry tunnel. We see Writer and Professor sitting down as Stalker calls them over. Then there is the sudden sound of an offscreen splash just

before a cut to an image of water at the bottom of a metallic well, glistening like mercury. Along with the splash comes the sound of processed choral voices, continuing after the splash has subsided as though they are the resonance of the well, the spatial signature of the splash. Here we also slip into the film's first instance of voice-over narration, the internal thoughts of Stalker that recount the words presented in this chapter's epigraph. Here the idea of the tension between the soul and the external world is perfectly encapsulated by the sounds we hear: the internal thoughts of Stalker are diegetic, but not externalized; the splash is clearly attached to an event within the diegesis; and the sound of the processed voices extends from this splash through to an ambiguous realm that could move outside of diegetic space. This moment illustrates the connection that the spatial signature can have to both the concrete reality of a film's proposed diegesis and the world outside that diegesis.

Using the choral sounds as the reverberant signature attached to the sound of the rock falling into the well reflects Randy Thom's notion of the "acoustics of the soul": sounds that defy the academic jargon encapsulated by the concept of the "diegesis" by occupying multiple registers at once (2007, 2). In situations like these, spatial signature works equally well as a marker of both internal subjectivity and of the space visible on the screen, the resonance we hear suggesting the "acoustics" of a listener's "soul" while grounding the sound with the space in which the listening takes place. This rather far out analogy happens to be particularly apt in this moment from *Stalker* when the idea of friction between the soul and the outside world is first spoken. Sounds have an internal resonance for their perceivers as well as an external resonance within the space, and

spatial signature can reflect both simultaneously, acting as the Room that can open internal experience to the outside world.

Later in the film it is revealed that this shot of the well is a close-up of the interior of the pipe that sits inside the meat mincer room into which Writer drops a rock before he has his existential meltdown. The shot of the water inside the well foreshadows Writer's crisis of connecting to the world, and it uses this ambiguous spatial signature as part of the foreshadowing effect: the acoustics of Writer's soul resonate inside the well, the auditory manifestation of the bridge between inside and outside that Writer could not effect in his own work. The shot of the well thus also marks the film's first break from temporal linearity, an example of the narrative reaching into its own future, extending into space that hasn't been revealed yet, just as spatial signature reveals offscreen space to the viewer.

The spatiotemporal anomalies in the scene described above become more pronounced as Stalker and Writer make their way through the dry tunnel. The ambiguous choral resonance continues along with the loud rushing water. All of a sudden there is a dramatic cut to a close-up of burning embers. The rushing water sound from the previous shot continues but immediately becomes unstable now that it has assumed offscreen status. The sound of the rushing water diminishes, the sound of the squeaking lamps returns, and the sound of choral resonance becomes more pronounced. As the camera tracks left from the embers over a pool of water, the sound of the rushing water diminishes further until it is suddenly gone, while the sounds of Writer and Stalker talking move quickly between reverberant and non-reverberant treatments. Finally, we cut back to a shot of Writer and Stalker emerging from the tunnel to find Professor seated

eating his lunch, the sound now stabilized once again to reflect what is visible on the screen: non-reverberant voices with light sounds of dripping water. The camera tracks back to reveal a fire in the foreground, its crackling sounds emerging once it is visible on the screen. Here they realize that the Professor hasn't moved from their initial position, meaning that Stalker and Writer have gone full circle when they thought they were advancing forward: evidence of the unstable spatial geography of the Zone as conveyed by the film's approach to offscreen sound. And now, as though indicating their heightened sense of the Zone's instability, the sound of their footsteps as they walk out of frame are reverberant while their voices are not.

The sound across this entire sequence, beginning with the water splash and ending with the sound of the three men talking by the fire, functions as a kind of soundscape composition employing many of the sound motifs that have been present throughout the Zone, yet mixing them together in ways that disrupt their previous presentations. It's as though the space is collapsing in on itself, something that the men believe has taken place when they discover the circularity of their movements. As I discussed in chapter one, such spatial disorientation is often a feature of soundscape composition, and the use of sound effects as a kind of soundscape composition here reflects composer Edward Artemiev's contribution - as consultant on the sound design - to the compositional nature of many of the film's auditory treatments.

In the end, we can think of the relationship between a sound and its spatial signature as one that moves from null to vast extension: the original sound event extends outwards, activating the surrounding space. In the Zone, the realm of vast extension is unstable, demonstrating the shifting possibilities of the space outside of view. The ambiguous

treatment of spatial signature in the film reflects an approach to camera movement that emphasizes the importance of what is on screen at the expense of anything that lies outside the frame. I will now turn to a discussion of how camera movement in the Zone aids in establishing this nearsightedness through a strategy by which shots that might be labeled as a subjective representation of character experience take on a life of their own and become markers of the camera's own presence as an entity in the Zone.

Visible Creation. The volatility of the Zone is not only tied to the movement of the men throughout the space, but also the movement of the camera that follows them, often bringing the space into audible being as it goes. The film's strongest articulation of this principle comes at the dry tunnel when Stalker and Writer leave Professor behind to find his knapsack only to discover him waiting at the other end of the tunnel. Before leaving Professor, the three men find themselves inside a tunnel, their voices reverberating in the space as they argue over the missing knapsack. Stalker and Writer then carry on without him, and as they emerge from the interior space the reverberation on their voices stops, consistent with the distinction between the two spaces. However, sounds that are not attributable to things pictured within the frame float in and out of the sound mix, from reverberant drips to the sound of running water. When the camera then pulls back and tilts down, a distant waterfall is revealed, and the sound of rumbling water emerges louder than any heard previously. Logically, the sound of the waterfall should have been audible a few seconds before when the camera was positioned just a few feet away. But the Zone keeps any suggestions of nearby water ambiguous through their shifting quality in the mix until the camera reveals the water on screen.

This sense of the camera bringing the space into being as it moves is augmented further as we watch Writer move out of frame screen right, followed shortly by a track in the same direction. As the camera tracks, we hear a distinctive squeaking noise timed to the appearance of hanging lamps on metal chains within the frame, as well as the emergence of very loud rushing water sounds just as another tumbling waterfall appears on screen. The two men continue in what they think is a forward direction through the so-called dry tunnel, yet when they emerge on the other end they're back where they started and find Professor seated there next to his backpack. This scene demonstrates the key principle of the Zone: that all you can trust is what is directly in front of you, and any sense you have of the bigger picture of the space is not reliable.

What is most interesting about the tracking shot past the hanging lamps and waterfall is the precise connection between the sound of objects and their appearance on screen. The waterfall provides an example of how unstable the offscreen world is: its absence from the soundscape prior to visual revelation suggests that it didn't exist at all until it became visible to the camera. The case of the hanging lamps is even more intriguing. The metal squeaking sound emerges with their appearance on screen and stops when they move out of frame. The sound suggests the movement of the lamps. Yet, in fact, the lamps are not moving. Their apparent movement is created by the movement of the camera, an early incarnation of a now popular aesthetic device whereby sound effects are used to punctuate camera movement. In fact, the end of this shot suggests that the squeaking sound does not come from the lamps at all, as the shot is choreographed so that Writer's re-emergence screen right to correspond with the hanging lamp exiting the frame screen left, thus making it seem as though this squeaking sound is now associated with

him rather than the lamp itself. This sound is associated with onscreen movement rather than with any one specifically moving object. Attaching sound to apparent motion reveals the artificiality of cinematic representation, creating sound that is purely a function of the camera's view on the subject rather than emanating from the subject itself. This is a reflexive move that calls attention to the presence of the camera as responsible for the movement we see on the screen.

The Reflexive Camera. The close connection between camera movement and the emergence of sound is one aspect of a reflexive approach to cinematography that is at its apex in a few particular shots that begin by suggesting character perspective only to reveal that this perspective ultimately does not belong to any of the three men. As noted, this process of transferring subjectivity from characters to the camera itself is an extension of Donato Totaro's observations about internally and externally subjective shots. In revealing the camera as a presence within the diegesis, these shots also qualify as variations on Totaro's notion of creation time in which something that betrays the logic of real-time exists within the context of the long take aesthetic.

After the men disembark from the railway inspection car, Stalker leaves Writer and Professor for a few moments. As Stalker disappears from the frame, we cut to a shot of the landscape down the hill, tracking forward and tilting up as we hear footsteps in the grass at close range. Here the film's theme music emerges for the first time since the opening shot in the bar, and we cut to a shot of Stalker kneeling down in the grass, then lying flat out on his stomach, soaking up the Zone that he has missed so much. The status of the tracking/tilting shot is unclear; are the close-miked footsteps supposed to

indicate a P.O.V. shot? Or is nearby Stalker following a similar trajectory? This is an example of what Totaro would call externalized subjectivity, related to what Pier Paolo Passolini refers to as a “free indirect subjective” position in which the camera can embody a character’s subjectivity without presenting that character’s literal point-of-view (1988, 183). As Gilles Deleuze puts it, in the free indirect subjective camera, “the distinction between what the character saw subjectively and what the camera saw objectively vanishe[s]” by allowing the camera to assume “a subjective presence, ... acquir[ing] an internal vision, which enter[s] into a relation of *simulation* (‘mimesis’) with the character’s way of seeing” (1989, 148).

This ambiguous strategy is taken to a greater extreme a short while later when Stalker returns to the top of the hill and instructs Professor to be the first to officially begin their journey into the Zone. Professor starts down the hill towards an abandoned car. Immediately following this shot of Professor we cut to a medium shot of the car as the camera moves forward. With none of the men visible in the frame, the camera moves forward in what appears to be another P.O.V. shot: it glides with slight unsteadiness towards the abandoned car, footsteps audible in close proximity. Footfalls are even visible as the grass at the bottom of the frame is depressed with each step. It’s easy to assume, at this point, that we are getting Professor’s perspective. The camera then enters the vehicle through the missing door, and human skeletons are visible in the back seat. The camera stops at the threshold of the window on the car’s other side, and one by one the three men enter the frame from screen left, the sounds of their footsteps quieter than those heard while the camera was moving forward. Professor looks directly into the window, and therefore the lens of the camera, in a moment of direct address. Writer does

the same, acknowledging the bodies in the car as those of two people he remembers from the town, packing for their journey into the Zone. And so we are left to wonder: did this shot start out as Professor's P.O.V. and shift to another status midway through? Or is this a representation of some other presence in the Zone? It is as though Professor's gaze upon moving in the direction of the abandoned car leaves his body and continues in that direction while he turns to go around the car and emerge on the other side and meet the camera's gaze, a circular shift in perspective within the confines of a single long take.

In this example, the process of situating the camera as a diegetic presence goes beyond Passolini's category of the "free indirect subjective" and moves into different territory; here the camera's dissociation from P.O.V. within a single long take shifts it away from any simulation of character subjectivity to a vision of its own. But this vision is not that of the objective camera that we're all accustomed to. Instead, it is a different category altogether, a diegetic presence in its own right that is acknowledged by the other characters. Deleuze goes on to note that Passolini's interest in the free indirect subjective is to make the camera "felt," a break from the camera that we're meant to ignore in more classical forms of narrative filmmaking (1989, 307). In the above example, the camera is not only felt, but also literally seen – by the characters in the film and, by extension, the audience who meets the gaze of these characters through their direct address.

In Totaro's discussion of this shot, he describes the moment of "creation" as that when the three men subsequently disappear below the frame line, revealing a dramatic dip in the landscape that was not visible through the framing of the landscape alone (2001, 262). For me, the big revelation comes when the shot shifts from such a clear suggestion of individual character perspective to another presence that is directly

acknowledged by the characters themselves through direct address. This kind of shot, suggesting the diegetic presence of the camera, is ultimately tied to the film's final shot of Stalker's daughter as she demonstrates her own ability to send her gaze outward through space and act on objects external to her body.

The next significant moment of direct address comes in the meat mincer scene where Writer presents a monologue about the perceived futility of his art. He wanted to effect change in the world, but has failed. We see him lying on the ground, with a reverse shot of Stalker and Professor looking at him from a point just a few feet from the entrance. We cut back to Writer, and a single long take moves slowly from a wide shot to a medium close-up as he gets up, sits down on the edge of the pipe, and delivers his monologue. At one point he makes direct eye contact with the lens as though it is the P.O.V. of one of the other two characters who has perhaps approached him as he talked. However, we then cut to a long shot of Professor and Stalker still positioned at the other side of the room, revealing that the previous shot was not specifically attached to one of their perspectives after all. Again, it is almost as though the long take that tracks towards Writer represents a kind of remote viewing on the part of Stalker or Professor, directing their gaze through space without actually moving their bodies. Or, as I have been arguing, a transference from character P.O.V. through the free indirect subjective and on into a reflexive acknowledgment of the camera's own gaze as a diegetic entity.

Finally, when sitting on the threshold of the Room, the three men look out into its heart, right where the camera is positioned, as though the presence that has been hovering around their journey has come from within this very space. Given the power of the Room to reach deep into the souls of anyone who enters, there is a certain logic in

understanding the previous examples of camera movement as suggesting the process of moving from internal subjectivity to something entirely removed from any of the characters, just as the Room offers the potential to pull their deepest desires out in the world and make them manifest as separate entities. Significantly, after all this turbulent sound and spatial instability, we return to the silence with which their time in the Zone began. As the camera tracks back from within the Room, all sounds disappear for the film's final moment of absolute silence. Then Stalker says: "It's so quiet. Can you feel it?"

In the end, only the camera enters the Room, and only we the audience are granted a perspective on the Zone from within this magical space. With no acoustics audible, our own souls are left to fill the void. Nothing in the space resonates. It is a blank slate for us to fill. Then, at long last, environmental sound is brought back in as it starts to rain inside the Room, blurring the line between interior and exterior space, again supporting the idea that the room's power is to reveal the inside to the outside, and vice-versa. This position is finally transferred to Stalker's daughter in the film's final shot as the task of creating motion through visual attention is then given over to her as she applies her telekinetic skills to the glasses on the kitchen table.

Touching the World

The notion of creation as a function of the Zone is essential when connecting its peculiarities to Stalker's daughter at the end of the film. Totaro and Truppin both cite the idea of the camera as a tool of bringing the world into being as an important aspect of how the film represents the space of the Zone. My analysis of the audiovisual ecology of

the Zone supports the idea of creation: the shifting and often ambiguous quality of offscreen sound suggests a world in the process of coming into being but not yet stabilized, a stability only offered when the camera reveals space on the screen to which concrete sounds can be attached. Yet the camera also reveals the world coming into being, the visual equivalent of the shifting quality of the sounds that I have described. In the moments of shifting subjectivity described above, the world changes before our very eyes. Usually, the use of the long take suggests that the self-contained shot will, if nothing else, keep the world stable by avoiding the fragmentary and often illusionary nature of montage. Yet as I have shown, there are certain times when a shot will begin according to one logic, and end on another, suggesting that as it has moved through space, it has also changed the very nature of that space. The shifting subjectivity presented by the moving camera acts as a visual corollary to the shifting nature of the Zone's offscreen sound: both are markers of how the space of the Zone is in constant flux, crystallized only through directed attention. This changing space for the audience is brought about by the camera's movement, just as the space changes for the three men as they navigate the Zone through their own movements. What the camera's powers of shifting subjectivity ultimately do is to thread character subjectivity to our own, inviting the audience to participate in the creation of the space revealed on the screen through active attention. Finally, creating the world through directed visual attention is the power that can be attributed to Stalker's daughter at the end of the film as she literally creates movement in the world by looking at it.

The film's final shot, suggesting the daughter's telekinetic powers, illustrates a path across areas of human perception often kept separate: the connection between vision and

hearing, and the relationship of both to touch. As a product of the Zone, her mutation is situated as a function of the kind of transsensorial awareness that I discussed in chapter one: she brings her powers of vision in line with the power of touch, moving objects with her gaze as though she is touching them with her hands. In fact, there is a way in which all five human senses can be thought of as varieties of touch: light must enter our eyes and touch the retina to create our sense of seeing; sound must enter our ears and set the tympanic membrane vibrating for us to have the sensation of hearing; odors must enter the nose for us to smell; matter must touch the tongue for us to taste. Our bodies stand as entities separate from the world around us, but are filled with pathways to our insides that bring the outside world into our bodies for us to experience it. In a very real way, the notion of the distant observer is a physical impossibility, for we can experience nothing without being literally touched by that which we see, and touching it back in return. The question is this: does the daughter's transsensorial awareness represent an evolutionary step forward for humanity? Is the dissolution of her boundary between the soul and the external world the way that all humans should go? Or is there some value in remaining closed to the world that surrounds us, as the three men realize on the threshold of the Room?

For many, the key to unlocking the mysteries of the universe lies in unlocking the mysteries of the self, breaking down the boundaries we draw between ourselves as individuals and the world in which we live, for this world also lives inside us. One place to begin this project is by adopting transsensorial awareness, where the lines between the sensory modalities are shown to be highly permeable. As I discussed in chapter one, there are certain concepts (i.e. rhythm and gesture) that are transsensorial in their scope.

We can add the concept of vibration to this list for everything in the known universe consists of vibrating particles, some of which are detectable by sight, some by hearing, some by touch, and others beyond our senses altogether. Yet learning to understand vibrations we cannot directly perceive might begin by better understanding those vibrations that we can perceive. There is an ancient Hindu saying: “Nada Brahma, the world is sound,” the title of and guiding concept for Joachim-Ernst Berendt’s investigation of a “musical” understanding of the universe across the world’s varied cultures (1987). The premise is simple: vibrations bring the world into being. The universe is created by motion. There is no known stillness in the world, only a matter of perceived stillness. Musical principles, consisting of mathematical relationships between different vibrational frequencies, offer a way of understanding the workings of the universe outside our perception by way of an art form that is universal throughout the world. Therefore, Nada Brahma is an expression of the connection between our middle world and that which lies beyond, and suggests a way of knowing that which we cannot perceive by way of that which we can: sound.

Though it is appealing to equate the concept of vibration with music, and thus think of the entire universe as operating according to musical principles, there is also a basic problem to be considered. The word “sound” is used to refer to that which we can literally hear, a function of the distinct sense modality perceivable by the ear. Vibrations above a certain frequency turn into light that we can see, and below a certain point they become something that we can feel but cannot hear. While it is important to understand the connection between these levels of perception, that they are all generated by vibration, it is also useful for us to understand their different levels according to the

divisions of our senses. If we have to transcend these divisions in order to make the next step and be able to experience vibrations beyond these senses, then we might ask whether or not this is a good thing. To bring the conversation back to the subject of this dissertation: perhaps maintaining cinema's dual nature, the distinctiveness of sound and image, is necessary to keep cinema as a medium born of the passion that results from audiovisual friction, just as *Stalker* suggests that passion results from the friction between the human soul and the world. If transsensorial experiments do finally yield a medium where sound and image are collapsed into the same plane of experience, then perhaps this is no longer cinema. Certainly, a genuinely transsensorial medium would no longer be the sound cinema capable of exploring ecological issues by way of audiovisual ecology.

By moving the glasses with her powers of vision, *Stalker's* daughter stands in for the sound that was previously connected with this same kind of movement. In so doing, she connects the vibrational frequencies of light to those of both sound and touch. This is a transsensorial move, but one about which the film withholds judgment. I suggest that *Stalker's* conclusion thus presents a conflicted stance on the relationship between human beings and our environments, a conflict that embodies the very fundamental premise of ecology: organisms are simultaneously connected to, and distinct from, their environments. Everything in the universe is made from the same stuff, thus there is a profound connection between the smallest particles of our interior being and the largest processes of the cosmos. On that level, there is no division. Yet on another level, we are bound to know our world through our senses, between which there are physical dividers, and which we embody through our sense of individuation from other organisms and the

environment that surrounds us. The powers of Stalker's daughter are ambiguous in their implications.

Donato Totaro concludes that the spread of "creation time" into the world after the Zone, as epitomized by the final shot, is indicative of the powerful transformation that the three men experience in the Zone: they have come to a new level of self-awareness, their relationship to the world has changed (2001, 283). Yet the result of their heightened self-awareness is that they should keep themselves separate from the world, that what they have discovered deep within their souls is not commensurate to the world that exists outside. If our insides are made of the same stuff as that which lies outside, then there should be no problem in allowing the Room to bridge the gap between the two. The recognition of the three men on the threshold of the Room is that there is value in maintaining the distinction between inside and outside. Yet the more we keep things to ourselves - the more we keep separate from the environment - the more potential exists for disaster upon breach of containment. In environmentalist terms, this is the problem with toxic waste. So what is the solution? Develop surefire methods to prevent breach of containment? Or develop ways of being that allow for free flow without disastrous consequence?

The same questions can be posed for the relationships between sound and image in film. If one were to dissolve into the other, we would lose the productive tension that can develop around them, and lose our sense of the distinctiveness of our senses. The premise of ecology – the interaction between distinct individuals – suggests that we keep to a middle ground between free flow and total containment, maintaining our awareness of the distinction while concentrating on the interaction between them. The ecological

perspective is that of a mid-fi system in which the benefits of the extension characteristic of a hi-fi environment are tempered by a recognition of the value in the limited extension of the lo-fi situation. Transsensoriality leads in the direction of dissolved boundaries between the senses, but it can be balanced with a continued appreciation of the value in the distinctiveness of each sense modality in its own right.

Finally, the power of the Zone is in its reflexive approach to exposing the illusionistic premise of spatial representation in the cinema, and the artificiality of sound/image relationships therein. By positioning the camera as a reflexive entity within the diegesis, and tying this reflexivity to an approach to audiovisual relationships that emphasizes the artificiality of spatial representation in the cinema, the film allows the audience a space of reflection upon the processes by which the diegesis is brought into being. In the next chapter I will discuss how documentary filmmaker Peter Mettler handles many of these same issues through an even more reflexive approach, questioning the relationship between our internal experience, the world outside, and the mediation of the two by way of cinematic representation. As I will argue, Mettler positions these questions directly in terms of transsensorial awareness and its relationship to the cinema's divided nature, extending some of the key themes found in *Stalker* even further.

Note

¹ My analyses are grounded in several screenings of the film on 35mm that I've been lucky enough to attend, but I also rely heavily on home video releases of the film for the close reading I give the film here. Some controversy arose a few years back when the Russian Cinema Council (RusCiCo) released the film on DVD with a re-mixed 5.1 channel soundtrack that included a host of newly created material that never appeared in the original. It is no exaggeration to say that every single point I make about the sound in *Stalker* is disrupted by this new sound mix. For example, it is impossible to gauge the subtleties of the film's use of environmental sound when an entirely new ambience full of continual wind, birds, water, and the like obscures Tarkovsky's original treatments. What is more, the timing of certain sound effects has been adjusted so that the relationship between sound and camera movement is now different from the original. Even Edward Artemiev's score has been "enhanced" with new instrumentation! Thankfully,

RusCiCo later released a new edition of the film with the original soundtrack intact, keeping the re-mixed version as an alternate option. It is crucial to emphasize that I am working from DVD releases that use the original soundtrack, and readers should be aware of the need to check what version they have in case they choose to re-visit the film on DVD.

Chapter Four

The Movement of Thought: Hearing the *Aurora Borealis* in Peter Mettler's *Picture of Light*

Mettler lets people living under the skies of the Aurora Borealis tell their story about them by simply letting their hands speak. They seem to be conducting mysterious music. We learn that whoever observes the Aurora Borealis for a long time loses the sense of distance – suddenly one has this feeling that the play of lights is happening in one's own head. Like thoughts.

- Peter Weber

In *Picture of Light* Peter Mettler and his crew travel to Churchill, Manitoba, and attempt to capture the *aurora borealis* on film. On the surface, the subject matter of the film consists of the problems inherent in translating the *aurora borealis* into cinematic visual representation. But Mettler frames this quest with broader questions about the role of media technologies in mediating our experience of the world, and about the relationship between civilization, the wilderness, and the modern human subject. The film explores these questions through a highly reflexive strategy that emphasizes not only the filmmaker's presence in the process of constructing the film, but also the fundamental division between the cinema's two main channels of transmission: sound and image.

As such, *Picture of Light* is as much about what we hear as it is about what we see, and the film's ecological theme of human engagement with nature by way of modern technology is positioned within this reflexive approach to audiovisual ecology. Yet I argue that in *Picture of Light*, these techniques are not used solely to foreground the distance between subject, film, and audience, as is the standard for the reflexive documentary film. Rather, the film suggests the possibility of providing the audience with an authentic experience of the *aurora borealis* based on points of intersection

between the external manifestation of the lights and our internal experience of them as mediated by the technology of film.

In this chapter I will demonstrate how *Picture of Light* can be read as an attempt to move past critiques of documentary veracity towards a transcendence of the boundary between subject, film, and audience by evoking the concept of *haptic* space. Defined differently by various theorists, a fundamental theme in discussions of haptic space is the negation of the distance between the external world and our experience of it. David B. Clarke has illustrated how transcending this distance is often articulated as the transsensorial relationship between vision and touch (1997, 8). Giuliana Bruno has also theorized the haptic around the experience of motion that is shared by internal consciousness and physical movement through exterior space (2002, 7). Mettler addresses the haptic potential of cinema by suggesting that the *aurora borealis* move “like thoughts,” an external manifestation of an internal experience. And this comment is tied to a later question about whether or not the northern lights can be heard, the answer to which inevitably comes by way of the power of the lights to evoke transsensorial awareness of sound in the absence of anything tangibly audible. This connection between the “movement” of thought and the transsensorial potential of the *aurora* is what Peter Weber describes in this chapter’s epigraph: when he describes the gestures of interviewees describing the movement of the *aurora borealis* as “conducting mysterious music,” Weber calls attention to the transsensorial potential of the northern lights as a function of gestural movement, negating the distance between the *aurora* as external phenomenon and one’s internal experience of them. This connection between haptic experience and transsensoriality is the basis for reading *Picture of Light* as an attempt to

transcend the second-order nature of the cinema, an attempt to provide the audience with a more direct experience of the *aurora* than the simple presentation of their filmed representation can offer on its own.

I will situate *Picture of Light* within the discourse of reflexive documentary practice, tying the film's mode of address to the concept of the "performative" documentary theorized (slightly differently) by Bill Nichols and Stella Bruzzi, and to Catherine Russell's related theorization of experimental ethnography. Though Mettler's film shares much in common with these approaches to the documentary film, I argue that the film's reflexivity is not premised upon the irrefutable skepticism about the connection between film and the pro-filmic world that often informs performativity in documentary film. Instead, *Picture of Light* demonstrates how calling attention to cinematic mediation of reality is a way of finding something within this mediation that can instill an experience equivalent to seeing the *aurora borealis* in person. I argue that this "something" lies in the haptic potential of cinema. I will draw on Giuliana Bruno's extension of the idea of the *haptic* as based fundamentally on our experience of space by way of movement, connecting spatial orientation to the "motion" of emotion (2002, 7). Movement also lies at the heart of Michel Chion's concept of transsensoriality, as discussed in chapter one, where concepts like rhythm and gesture transcend individual sense modalities through their connection to our experience of movement in space, a quality Chion also refers to as haptic (1998, 57). Finally, I argue that Mettler's equation of the movement of the *aurora borealis* with the "movement" of thought is most productively read through experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage's quest to create the cinematic equivalent of "moving visual thinking," silent films that explore the "musical" qualities of visual movement as a way

of illustrating the transsensoriality at the base of all experience. While *Picture of Light* doesn't look like one of Brakhage's works of visual music, Mettler's film is geared towards very similar ideas about the potential for cinema to challenge the line that separates the film from its audience.

The overt ecological theme in *Picture of Light* is the role of technology in mediating humankind's relationship to nature, and I argue that this theme is tied to Mettler's approach to the audiovisual ecology of the film. Mettler exposes the artificial nature of sound/image relationships in the cinema in order to call our attention to the fact that ecological unity is a function of mediation. The experience of the northern lights in this film, while at an aesthetic remove from the real thing, can trigger the mind in a way that is no different from being there in person. This, I argue, is an attempt to transcend the negative qualities of schizophonia and reveal the positive potential in the subjective experience of external mediation.

Stylistic Considerations

Picture of Light makes use of dramatic shifts in approaches to documentary representation, creating a profound connection between the film's immersive power and its reflexive interests. There are times when the boundaries between sound and image are ill-defined, creating a wash where abstract electroacoustic music by Jim O'Rourke blends seamlessly with location sound and images that are at once fantastical and grounded in realism. This mixture allows us to question where one element of the soundtrack stops and the other begins, and where the image and soundtrack touch through conventions of realism, free counterpoint, or transsensoriality. Other times the distinction between these

various elements is very well defined indeed, creating abrupt moments of disjunction, or shifts between modes of audiovisual synchronization, that provide a more direct example of reflexivity.

An early example of how the film shifts between different strategies of reflexivity comes as a series of traveling shots follow a snowmobile convoy through the tundra in the black of night, lit only by the headlights of the vehicles. As we watch the snow passing quickly by in a P.O.V. shot from on board one of the vehicles, Mettler's voice-over explains the nuances that local Native languages have for describing snow. As is usually the case, the narration is mixed with Jim O'Rourke's music, creating a surreal quality to the sequence that suits the hypnotic quality of the images. Jerry White finds the lyrical quality of this sequence to be a mark of reflexivity in and of itself (2006, 26). Yet Mettler ups the ante significantly as this sequence ends abruptly with a cut to a sound recordist next to a stand of trees with microphone in hand. He taps the microphone, and as soon as the hand makes contact we hear the corresponding thump and are dramatically torn out of the ambient drones that permeated the snowmobile ride. In this way the film cuts from dreamlike ethereality to the crisp reality of direct sound. We then watch from a fixed vantage point as crew-member Gerald Packer marches through ever deepening snow, and Mettler tells him from behind the camera that the rest of the crew cannot follow. The sounds of the crunching snow are so prominent as to seem exaggerated, the direct sound recording yielding a stark contrast of "reality" to the preceding sequence's soundscape treatments. Though the sequence ends with a powerful example of synchronization through direct sound, the transition between the snowmobile ride and the deep snow walking reminds us that even realism through synchronization is only a

convention that can start and stop at any given moment. With this transition between modes Mettler is contrasting an observational approach with a more reflexive one, illustrating two extremes that often involve heavily defended philosophies about what constitutes an ethical approach to documentary filmmaking.

Picture of Light is first and foremost a meditation on the relationship between the world, its experience by human beings, and the role of technologies of audiovisual representation in mediating this experience. The film is overtly reflexive, a strategy geared towards exploring philosophical problems of documentary filmmaking as they relate to the particularities of Mettler's journey to film the northern lights. Every step of the way Mettler inserts himself and his team into the film, so that it is as much about the making of the film as it is about its stated goal: to capture moving images of the *aurora*. Yet as with all of Mettler's work, the film's style is lyrical, poetic, and dreamlike, prompting Bruce McDonald, Martin Schaub and Tom McSorely to compare him to Tarkovsky in that respect (in Pitschen and Schönholzer 1995, 18,52,104). The film's simultaneous lyricism and reflexivity works against the usual role that performativity plays in contemporary documentary theory: in *Picture of Light*, the self-conscious disruption of cinematic illusionism takes nothing away from its powers of immersion. The film points towards the permeable boundaries between immersion and reflexivity, creating what I call an "immersive reflexivity" that is the fundamental driving force behind the film. And this immersive reflexivity is structured around the film's approach to sound/image synchronization: conventions of sonic realism are contrasted with moments of lyricism and counterpoint that keep us aware of the artificiality of

audiovisual relationships while pointing towards their inextricable links within the totality of the film.

As Catherine Russell describes of Mettler's subsequent film *Gambling, Gods and LSD* (2002), Mettler "probes and prods with his camera while suturing and soothing with his soundtrack," a disjunction that she associates with Mettler's desire to keep a measure of distance between the film and its subject matter and explore "a way of being in the world that is specific to the cinema" (2006, par. 2). As we've heard, similar approaches to sound and image are often present in *Picture of Light* as well, featuring abstract soundscapes as part of the fabric of the sound design that often accompanies images with a starkly realist aesthetic. Yet such moments are also strangely immersive, inviting the audience to become enraptured with the film. Russell maintains that this kind of cinematic rapture is not the same as those experienced by the trance-induced subjects of *Gambling, Gods and LSD*, and the same could be said of the awe-inspired sky-gazers of *Picture of Light*. For Russell, Mettler's approach creates a situation of cinephilia in which the spectacle of watching people having an experience stands in for the nature of the experience these people are having (par. 13). Yet I argue that *Picture of Light* uses techniques of distanciation in order to bring the audience closer to its pro-filmic subject while acknowledging the impossibility of the cinema to stand in for reality, a paradox that fuels Mettler's style.

The idea that Mettler's work is founded upon paradoxical relationships is pervasive throughout the literature on the filmmaker. Many commentators position Mettler between various established poles: between his Swiss and Canadian nationalities; between his interest in fiction and documentary filmmaking; and between narrative and

experimental modes of address. Tom McSorely argues that Mettler's status as a dual-citizen caught between nations well suits Arthur Kroker's idea of Canada itself as an "in-between" nation whose two strongest cinematic traditions, documentary and avant-garde, provide the basis for Mettler's oeuvre (1995, 90-92). Jerry White extends Mettler's engagement with Canadian cinema by linking him to the Toronto New Wave of the eighties, which added a strong narrative fiction tradition to Canada's previous grounding in documentary and experimental film (2006, 1). At the same time, White positions Mettler within Canada's second generation of avant-garde filmmakers alongside Mike Hoolboom and Guy Maddin, among others. And Catherine Russell has described Mettler's work in *Gambling Gods and LSD* as an example of experimental ethnography, another facet of documentary/avant-garde hybrids that is evident throughout Mettler's oeuvre (2006, par. 2).

So it is clear that a dominant strain in the literature on Mettler is his interest in hybrid approaches that explore intersections between narrative, documentary, and experimental work. As White says, "Mettler exists between the conventional and the experimental, never entirely at home in either and yet fully engaged with each" (2006, 2). Fittingly, White also positions *Picture of Light* "as a kind of intersection point for his work" (24), combining the various filmmaking camps from which Mettler emerged to create a hybrid film that well suits its subject: fluidity between borders that occur at "a meeting place of edges," the phrase that Mettler uses to describe Churchill, Manitoba, but which also describes the meeting point between interior experience and the external world.

Mettler's interest in blending documentary and experimental modes of address is tied to his interest in providing his audience with access to the world that exists in front of his

camera and microphones, while simultaneously emphasizing that the audience's experience of this world is necessarily a product of cinematic mediation. McSorley stresses that Mettler's films constitute "a cinema which constantly investigates its own images, its own ways of representing what it sees" (1995, 90) in which "the conflict between the 'way you see and what you see' is exposed and explored" (94). In McSorley's description, the "what" that we see is connected to documentary and the "way" that we see to the avant-garde, thereby suggesting that the essence of Mettler's hybrid style lies in the investigation of the world itself and its mediation by both our senses as well as the technology of cinema. McSorley positions this duality within the ideological duality that he finds at the heart of Canadian film. Speaking of the tradition of Canadian documentary associated with John Grierson's NFB, McSorley cites the premise that "all knowledge derives from external sensory experience. The documentary film therefore purports to be a mirror of the known world, not an artificial cinematic construction" (94). This stands in stark contrast to the Canadian tradition of experimental film that "detonates conventional documentary practice by foregrounding and investigating the artificial nature of images" (94). Borrowing a metaphor from Spanish author Carlos Fuentes, McSorley describes Mettler's fluidity between these traditions as "a cinematic pilgrimage ... 'from the security of the enclosed place to the risks of the shelterless outdoors' to search for a sense of identity and to investigate the processes of perception" (98). The relationship between interior experience and the external world is a dominant concern in all of Mettler's films, but is most directly investigated as a function of cinematic representation in *Picture of Light*.

Jerry White describes *Picture of Light* as sharing an interest in Mettler's previous work in "the way that interior or mental complexity can echo the complexities of the physical world," while also suggesting that the film treads more tentatively than his earlier work (2006, 24). He ties Mettler to a brand of Modernism shared with Borges and Kafka which is "self-conscious about formal conventions without abandoning them altogether, and skeptical about the possibility of using art to create clear meaning without entirely giving up on that possibility" (25). White describes this as "the kind of love-hate relationship with limitations that defines much of Modernist art" (27). As Russell describes of *Gambling, Gods and LSD*, "its attempts to translate the diversity of experience continually fall back on the limits of cinematic representation" (2006, par. 5), a characteristic that White argues is present throughout Mettler's work as he is "constantly coming face to face with what technology cannot do," and yet embracing these limitations all the while (White 2006, 27). So Mettler's desire to explore the relationships between internal experience and the external world is tied to his keen awareness of the technology of mediation.

For Russell, "The failure of realism to present evidence of the real is the radical possibility of experimental ethnography" (1999, 25), a quality that she attributes to Mettler in her later discussion of *Gambling, Gods and LSD*. Russell praises Mettler's work for its recognition that the cinema necessarily entails a second-degree form of access to reality, offering "valuable clues to the potential of cinematic practice in a fallen world" (2006, par. 17). Russell argues that a film like *Gambling, Gods and LSD*, which is his closest work to *Picture of Light*, is about "a quest for an experience that is ultimately incommunicable," a state of being "somewhere the camera cannot follow"

(par. 4,12). Just as the camera cannot follow through to the subjective experience of trance states in *Gambling*, it cannot follow to the experience of the *aurora borealis* in *Picture of Light*. Russell emphasizes Mettler's interest in maintaining a distance from the subject matter in order to call attention to the limitations of the technology, limitations that she ties to the "fall from experience" inherent in Walter Benjamin's account of the cinema whose "illusory nature is that of the second-degree" (1968, 233), a way of being in the world "which is first and foremost, a mode of being among images, in the second nature of the cinema" (Russell 2006, par.13,17).

Indeed, the pre-occupations of Mettler's voice-over in *Picture of Light* corroborates Russell's account to a large extent, musing as he does over the nature of experience as mediated by the photographic image while we watch he and his crew fiddling with their equipment. I argue, however, that Mettler's reflexive approach is not solely interested in acknowledging the "second nature of the cinema" as a way to break from traditions of documentary grounded in photography's indexical potential. Rather, the film tries to move past the idea of the world of reproduction as "fallen" and get at something deeper. Here, the camera as extension of the body has different implications – not the surrogate "pleasure machine" that Russell describes as the object of cinephelia (2006, par. 13), but neither the analog for consciousness, the "metaphor for vision" that Russell identifies in the work of experimental filmmakers like Stan Brakhage (1999, 15). Rather, I argue that there is profound desire in Mettler's films to create a cinema that offers a true experiential equivalent to the world that existed before his camera. I will argue below that this equivalency is best understood in terms of the *haptic* potential of cinema in which what we see and hear in a film are translated into feelings that also occur when

experiencing the world outside the walls of the cinema. For Mettler, the cinematic equivalent of the pro-filmic world does not lie in realist notions of documentary's indexical relationship to the world, or in trying to simulate internal experience through cinematic special effects. Rather, Mettler is interested in how calling attention to cinema's mediation of the world can help call attention to the way ALL of our experience is mediated by the senses, thereby creating a cinema that invites the audience to become immersed by way of reflexive strategies.

Much of Mettler's experimental approach to documentary filmmaking fits well within Stella Bruzzi's description of the "performative" documentary as one that "uses performance within a non-fiction context to draw attention to the impossibilities of authentic documentary representation," a feature which is "an alienating, distancing device, not one which actively promotes identification and a straightforward response to a film's content" (2006, 185-86). She contrasts this definition with that of the "performative mode" identified by Bill Nichols as consisting of films that "stress subjective aspects of a classically objective discourse" (Nichols 1994, 95). For Bruzzi, the idea of performance, "Whether built around the intrusive presence of the filmmaker or self-conscious performances by its subjects – is the enactment of the notion that a documentary only comes into being as it is performed" (2006, 186). In essence Bruzzi is discussing reflexivity in a positive light as it breaks with the canonical association between documentary filmmaking and the idea of the "real."

Importantly, Bruzzi discusses performativity not only in terms of overt reflexivity, as when filmmakers are present as subjects of the film, but also in terms of stylistic qualities associated with *auteurism*. She discusses the films of major figures like Errol Morris in

which “the slipperiness and indeterminacy of ‘the truth’ is principally signaled by how this overwrought visual style becomes linked to a skepticism concerning the capability of the documentary to represent such a truth” (2006, 195). She refutes claims that the idea of the *auteur* has no place in documentary, “for one of the corollaries of accepting that documentary cannot but perform the interaction between reality and its representation is the acknowledgement that documentary, like fiction, is authored” (197).

Bruzzi doesn’t discuss Mettler’s work, but much of what she might identify as performative in these films would be tied to his highly idiosyncratic personal audiovisual style that allows for comparisons to other acknowledged *auteurs* like Tarkovsky. Though Jerry White agrees with the connection made between some aspects of Mettler’s style and European art-cinema, he wants to move Mettler past this narrow definition and towards a more global perspective, recognizing that his films are “engaged in a truly global search for the particulars (lights, dance, rhythm) that provide us with a sense of wonder” (2006, 34). I argue that this sense of “wonder” is the slippery nexus point around which Mettler equates technological mediation with that of the human sensorium. At the heart of White’s assessment is the idea that Mettler’s “pursuit of wonder” is grounded in skepticism about the medium of film’s role in this pursuit, but that he achieves the goal of sharing wonder with the audience in spite of technology’s limitations. So White finds it appropriate that “the sequence where the *aurora borealis* are finally put front and centre is also the most detailed about the technology of the camera,” suggesting that “one can only capture the purity of vision through an intense, highly-prepared manipulation” (30). In McSorley’s words, “The trick of physics and the ‘lies’ of the camera that have made the images possible create wonder and awe: the paradox is complete, and the conflict

between the way we see and what we see is revealed in all its rich possibility” (1995, 112,118). And it is within this apparent conflict that Mettler finds the most productive way to transcend the barrier between audience and subject: “This is how technology can help us get closer to understanding the truth of our world – so long as we acknowledge the limits of our senses and those of technology itself” (White 2006, 31). The technology of the cinema and the “technology” of our senses both have limits, revealing the fact that all our experience is mediated.

Though Mettler’s style in general might seem the pitch-perfect embodiment of the performative documentary style that Bruzzi describes, I argue that the performative reflexivity in *Picture of Light* is not about skepticism and distrust of the medium. Instead I would describe Mettler’s reflexivity as post-skeptical, seeking to move past a filmmaking strategy that emphasizes the distance between subject, film and audience, and move towards an approach that uses performative strategies to expose the profound connection that our experience of a film can have to our experience to the world outside the walls of the cinema. By cuing the audience into the processes of cinematic mediation, Mettler wants us also to understand how the experience of the *aurora* themselves is mediated by our subjectivity, a mediation that can be transcended by the haptic space opened up by transsensorial experience. I will elaborate upon the connections between the concepts of haptic and transsensorial experience below, and tie this connection to the tradition of visual music and the work of Stan Brakhage. But first, let us establish the key themes and aesthetic traits found within the audiovisual ecology of *Picture of Light*.

Mettler's Voice

A key aspect of the auditory aesthetic of *Picture of Light* is set forth right from the film's opening moments: a stark contrast between direct location sound, often in adverse environmental conditions, and highly nuanced post-production work balancing voice-over narration with soundscape treatments by Jim O'Rourke and other sound design elements created by Mettler. The first shot we see is a long take of Mettler's crew in a meat locker testing their equipment in cold conditions. From behind the camera Mettler asks the film's producer Andreas Züst to explain what they're doing, and Züst answers loudly, competing with the harsh ambience of the refrigeration system. After almost two minutes with the relentless sound, the film cuts to absolute silence as we watch a series of panning shots over macro-photographed images of ice crystals that resemble aerial shots of the barren tundra. An ambient drone emerges, and the film's titles appear. Then we cut to the film's first shots of the night sky with a glimmer of movement resembling clouds glowing with the last of the setting sun, moving in time lapse and echoing the images of the *aurora* we see later on. Here Mettler's voice-over narration begins, telling us of the origins of the journey:

In the ether one swims and meets complements. I met a man at a dinner who loves to watch the sky. He'd spent as much time watching the sky as I had trying to point cameras and microphones out into the world. It seemed that both of us were trying to find an answer to a question we didn't yet know. As the night closed we agreed to share a path we had in common: the pursuit of wonder.

With this opening volley of narration Mettler suggests one of the key issues raised by the film: the common experience that can arise from nature – looking at the sky – and its technological mediation – pointing cameras and microphones out into the world. For Mettler, both of these activities are in search of an answer to a common question, a path

of common pursuit: wonder. This opening narration comes amidst an ethereal soundscape created by Jim O'Rourke that has been sharply contrasted with the film's opening sequence of direct sound in the meat locker. As the film progresses it becomes evident that it will alternate regularly between the brash qualities of direct sound, usually associated with the appearance of the filmmakers on camera, and the lyrical passages that mingle O'Rourke's work with Mettler's sound design, often accompanying shots of the northern landscape and the *aurora borealis*. Both strategies are reflexive, either by calling attention to the filmmaking process or by highlighting Mettler's lyrically personal audiovisual style. Importantly, Mettler's voice-over narration is invariably set within the context of the latter strategy, situating his questioning voice as part of the most direct assertions of the idiosyncratic style he developed in his earlier and more experimental works.

As the voice-over narration is a major part of the film's soundtrack, let us consider its implications for the argument I am making about Mettler's desire for the film to use reflexivity as a strategy for bringing the audience closer to its subject. From the opening lines of narration quoted above Mettler demonstrates his interest in blurring the lines between poetry, prose, and the basic delivery of information. The content of Mettler's narration, along with his tone of delivery, are far from the conventional voice of authority associated with what Bill Nichols calls the "expository mode" (1991, 32). Rather than providing a steady stream of objective information, though there is certainly some of that, Mettler is more interested in posing questions about the nature of experience and its relationship to the medium of cinema. He speaks in a gentle, hypnotic manner that, with the help of Jim O'Rourke's sound compositions, creates a dreamlike quality rather than

an atmosphere of objective mastery over the film's subject matter. Overtly reflexive in content, the voice also envelops the listeners, hoping to draw us in and keep us immersed. The voice-over, then, is one of the principle ways that Mettler achieves immersive reflexivity.

Jerry White identifies Mettler's use of voice-over narration as a key component of his reflexive style: "Mettler lays his cards on the table through his deeply subjective voice-over; by doing this he makes it clear that he is not hiding an attempt to master the landscape behind faux-neutral observation" (2006, 30). This style of voice-over is part of what White and others argue is Mettler's skepticism about film's ability to connect with reality; Mettler's voice-over eschews the direct connection between the voice of authority that asserts control over the image, opting instead for a looser connection, a voice that hovers in the ether, an equal player with the other elements of a highly nuanced soundtrack that frequently slips free of any realist connection to the image. With this style, Mettler demonstrates his stated belief that all elements of a film's soundtrack should work together as a musical composition (1992, 41). This respect for the equality of the different components of the soundtrack is something that composer Fred Frith says Mettler has more than any other filmmaker he has collaborated with (Frith in Pitschen and Schönholzer 1995, 42). Indeed, Mettler's approach to voice-over narration can be read as a direct response to criticisms of other forms of narration that seek to dominate both the sound and image tracks.

Interestingly, in Stella Bruzzi's chapter on voice-over narration in documentary, she situates debates about its use within more general debates about sound/image synchronization in film. Bruzzi tells us that, "The negative portrayal of voice-over is

largely the result of the development of a theoretical orthodoxy that condemns it for being inevitably and inherently didactic” (2006, 47). Bruzzi critiques the way that histories of documentary have created the voice-over as what she calls an “unnecessary evil” in their constant emphasis on documentary films as “an endless pursuit of the most effective way of representing the ‘purity’ of the real,” a purity of visual representation that is displaced, and therefore threatened, by the “voice-of-God” style authority of the voice-over that dominates our understanding of the image (47-48).

Bruzzi situates the negative connotations of documentary voice-over in the context of general concerns over the coming of sound that I have discussed at length in chapter one. In particular was the concern over this idea of the “purity” of the image being somehow damaged by sound. Here she cites Nichols’ assertion that synchronized sound aids in establishing the realism of the image – the very fear of the Soviet montagists – whereas voice-over narration “is an intrusion which interferes with this automatic prioritization of the image” (2006, 49). Bruzzi also notes how later sound theorists like Kaja Silverman have contributed to the negative connotations of voice-over by tying it to hegemonic practices of Classical Hollywood cinema (58).

These critiques of voice-over are all premised upon the problem of voice-over dominating other sound design elements, just as many commentators feared that through voice-over narration sound could dominate the image in an unwelcome reversal of the primacy of the image established prior to the coming of synchronized sound. Because of these critiques, Bruzzi notes the increasing popularity of the ironic voice-over in performative documentaries used as the narration equivalent of asynchronous sound that deliberately sets itself apart from the image. Many documentary filmmakers have also

opted to eschew the use of voice-over altogether. Yet this approach, too, has been criticized. Addressing Mary Ann Doane's argument that the "silencing" of the voice of authority "promotes ... an illusion that reality speaks and is not spoken, that the film is not a constructed discourse," Britta Sjogren laments that, "One can only feel somewhat sympathetic towards documentarists, who apparently just cannot win, one way or the other" (2006, 222). *Picture of Light* presents neither the voice of authority nor its silencing. Nor is Mettler's voice-over adopting an ironic tone. Rather, it is a voice that speaks to the problems of narration by emphasizing its own position in meditating the content of the film while forming an equal partnership with the other elements within the audiovisual totality of the film. As I will demonstrate now, Mettler's use of voice-over is profoundly connected to what I argue is the film's goal of using reflexivity to transcend the acknowledged limitations of film and bring the audience closer to the "reality" of the *aurora borealis* than most skeptics would think possible.

A Surrogate for Real Experience?

Following the film's opening title, we watch and listen as Mettler and his crew make the journey north by train. As the train pulls out of the station we get a shot from the back of the caboose, watching the terminal recede into a night filled with thick steam and mist. The sound of the train is front and center, and at one point we see the sound recordist with his microphone hanging out the window. As the sequence continues, O'Rourke's ambient soundscapes rise in the mix, and the sound of the train becomes part of a more fantastical sound environment, not unlike the famous ride into the Zone in Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. Here Mettler's voice-over continues, establishing the philosophical tension that

exists between the wilderness he's interested in capturing on film, and the technology that will allow this capturing to take place, a process of commodification he describes as the extraction of "business and numbers out of life force and wonder." As these words are being spoken, a view of the passing landscape from the moving train zooms jerkily back to reveal the window that frames the view, emphasizing the window's mediating role in the experience, one layer of glass among many in the process of making a film. There is a cut to a shot of the cameraman in the bathroom mirror shooting himself, a reflective pane of representation that also emphasizes the mediated nature of this enterprise. The narration continues:

Maybe this wacky process of harnessing money and technology is just an extension of thinking, of trying to understand. These images and sounds are articulations of experience. We look at them, and try to decipher the reality that gave birth to them. It may well be that the northern lights cannot be filmed, that nature cannot be filmed, that film or media is in conflict with nature. Is it just a surrogate for the real thing? Is film a surrogate for real experience?

Here Mettler positions cinematic mediation of the pro-filmic world as an "extension of thinking," then questions the extent to which film allows access to that which it represents. As these final words are spoken, we are presented with a shot through the window in shallow focus. Andreas Züst is revealed screen right looking out the window through his glasses, and what we see through these glasses is in sharper focus than the window itself. Here Mettler places further emphasis on how the framing of views and the lenses we put between the world outside and the world inside are examples of the mediating agents that we experience on a daily basis. But to what extent do these mediators impede the flow across the division between internal consciousness and the external world?

This question can be answered, in part, by the way that Mettler chooses to describe his own previous experiences of the *aurora borealis*. “I’d seen the lights before a few times in my life, and I remember mostly how they move: like thoughts.” In equating the movement of the *aurora borealis* with the movement of thoughts Mettler is associating the phenomena of the lights outside in the world and his experience of them inside his mind. It is telling that he situates this equation within his musings on the relationship between the pro-filmic event and its representation. Later in the film, as we see the filmmakers examining some footage by hand, Mettler connects these ideas more concretely:

We live in a time where things do not seem to exist if they are not contained as an image. But if you look into this darkness you may see the lights of your own retina. Not unlike the northern lights, not unlike the movements of thought. Like a shapeless accumulation of everything we have ever seen. Before science explained, the lights were interpreted as visions, prophecies, spirits, a trigger for the imagination. Images provided by nature, framed by no less than the universe itself.

With the final sentence in this narration Mettler suggests an equivalency between experiencing images on film, framed by the dictates of the lens and screen, and experiencing images in the sky, framed by the peripheries of our vision and the boundaries of the sky itself. Experience of the world is always mediated by framing of some kind, whether imposed by technologies of representation or by the limitations of vision and our perspectival position with respect to what we’re looking at. Even more importantly, Mettler is suggesting a kinship between the way the *aurora borealis* look, and the way we experience the process of our own thoughts. Mettler is moving towards the idea that there is a profound kinship possible between his experience of the lights in Churchill and our experience of the lights on film. Towards the end of the film, Mettler

puts this articulation into a single sentence: “And we tell ourselves that seeing it on TV just isn’t the same as being there,” as though this were an idea that humans came up with to keep the boundary between reality and representation perfectly clear. But the boundary is not clear, and it never has been. We may tell ourselves that there is a difference between the external world and its mediation by way of media technologies, but Mettler is suggesting otherwise.

The idea of the lights being a trigger for the imagination is key to my interests here, because it speaks directly to Mettler’s questions about whether or not film is a surrogate for experience, or if there is a deeper connection between the two. At one point in the film, as we watch the camera gently moving across barren frozen landscapes, Mettler recounts the legend of the Lumières brothers screening *Train Arriving at a Station* for a public audience in which people were said to have run screaming for the exits for fear of being run over by the train. Mettler then asks: “Are you cold yet?” Though he presents these events as though a matter of fact, his question could be construed as a cynical jab at a story that most contemporary historians interpret differently. Even audiences of the late 19th Century were media-savvy enough to understand the difference between reality and representation in film but modern scholars need a primitive antithesis to mystify the experiential transparency of film (see Vaughan 1999, 1).

Mettler claims that: “I was simply addressing that power, a power so profound that a representation of reality evoked the same feelings as the perception of that reality” (Mettler in Rall 1995, 64). While he indeed seems earnest in his belief in the facts of this legendary story, I argue that Mettler’s take on the story is not based on the idea of an audience duped into mistaking an image for the real thing. Rather, Mettler is trying to get

at the commonality that images have with reality through the way they make us feel in their presence. In the interview with Rall and Kelemen, Mettler goes on to discuss a “possible audience” for *Picture of Light* mistaking the “cinematic wonder” they feel at watching images of the *aurora* on film with the “natural wonder” experienced by Mettler and his crew when seeing them in person (66). However, the “possible audience” to which he ascribes this possible mistake is one that ignores the film’s reflexivity and attempts to see through it to the world beyond, missing the point entirely.

In Mettler’s version of the Lumières story, the fear of being run over did not stem from believing the train was real, but rather from *feeling* the same in the face of the representation as one would in the face of reality. If we were to feel cold while watching images of a frozen landscape, it is not because film steps in as surrogate for reality, but rather that it triggers the imagination, sets our thoughts moving in a particular direction that yields genuine experience of the cold based on whatever past experiences we’ve had with it. When Mettler refers to the northern lights as images provided by nature and framed by the universe, he’s drawing a connection between the kinds of mental triggering that film can effect upon us, and the lights themselves that are no less images that we watch within a kind of frame. Each situation is mediated, and each has the capacity to set our minds moving in the same way. Thus the lights can transcend any thought of experiential surrogacy and speak to us directly, even through their mediation by way of film.

Mettler is using his very particular brand of voice-over narration, hovering between authoritative mastery and its absence, to frame his questions about how the northern lights hover between the space of the night sky and the internal consciousness of those

who look at them. The presence of his voice acts as a conduit through which the other sounds and images in the film can be understood, a line of mediation that calls attention to the very act of mediation itself. I argue that the best way to understand what Mettler is trying to get at by evoking the idea of the movement of thoughts is through two related concepts: haptic space and transsensoriality.

Haptic Space and the Movement of Thought

In a discussion about how film studies has typically dealt with the relationship between film and the world it is meant to represent, David B. Clarke points to the problems surrounding the premise that one of film's greatest features is its indexical relationship to the pro-filmic event (1997, 7). Emphasis on indexicality suggests that representation is the dominant mode of cinematic expression, a position that inevitably leads to a view of cinema in which the world depicted on film is always at a remove from the world being filmed. Clarke outlines the emerging rebuttal for arguments founded on notions of cinema's indexical relationship to reality in the concept of *haptic* space, a virtual condition of "sensorial immediacy" whereby film can inspire modes of thought in the same way that the world can, thereby placing the cinema alongside the world rather than at a secondary remove from it (8).

Clarke argues that the world on film need not be thought of as a fragmented portrait of the real world requiring that the resulting disorientation be contained by means of narrative form (as psychoanalytical film studies has suggested) (1997, 8). Rather, film offers access to a virtual understanding of the world that the real world also offers. Clarke refers to the cinema's potential to tap into our virtual experience of the world as

“reproduction” rather than “representation” (9), a choice of terms that poses a problem for the debates in the discourse of fidelity outlined in the introduction to this dissertation. As discussed, James Lastra argues that debates around the distance of a copy from its original based on indexicality are outmoded, and the term “reproduction” should be replaced by “representation” so that there is no claim to authenticity in recordings of reality (2000, 152). In Clarke’s discussion of haptic space, however, the “reproduction” at issue is not that of an attempt at authentic reproduction of reality, but rather a reproduction of the virtual experience of reality (1997, 9). He maintains that film’s indexical connection to reality remains important, but that it needs to be refigured to consider filmed reality as a haptic space understood (after Fleisch) as “proximity without presence,” a notion of the contact the viewer makes with the world through a virtual connection to that world experienced both in and out of the cinema (9).

Clarke examines the history of the term *haptic* in film studies, centering upon Walter Benjamin’s influential essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in which Benjamin refers to cinema as a tactile art form with the potential to “hit the spectator like a bullet” (Benjamin 1968, 238). Clarke notes how Benjamin’s evocation of the tactile potential of cinema links the medium’s visual qualities to the sensation of touch (1997, 9). Interestingly, Benjamin’s reference to the cinema’s tactile potential is couched within his critique of the medium’s distracting qualities, a symptom of “the desire of contemporary masses to bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly” which has given way to “overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction” (1968, 223). Yet at the same time, the idea of the cinema as a tactile medium has

provided fertile ground for thinking through the possibility that film might just be able to touch us in a way that belies the surface qualities of its second-degree nature.

Giuliana Bruno elaborates on Benjamin's description of the cinema as a tactile form, clarifying that his association of vision with touch reverses common uses of the term *haptic* in film studies as a reference to the depthless two-dimensional surface of the cinematic image (2002, 250). Bruno reminds us of the Greek origin of the word as meaning "able to come into contact with," referring to the "reciprocal *contact* between us and the environment" that comes with a tactile experience of the world (6). She then expands the notion of tactility to encompass "the ability of our bodies to sense their own movement in space," thereby bringing physical movement into the sphere of haptic experience (6). Finally, Bruno ties bodily movement in external space to the "movement" of emotions in our internal space, suggesting that the core of haptic space is that which extends from interior to exterior (7). Bruno then applies the connection between motion and emotion to a concept of haptic space in film as a "habitable" quality that relates to the awareness of one's bodily movement through space, an aspect of experience which renders the cinema "as habitable as the house we live in" (251). For Bruno, "Film provides the modern subject with a new *tactics* for orienting herself in space and for making 'sense' of this motion, which includes the motion of emotions" (251). Through this motion of emotion, we can occupy the space of a film with as much experiential tangibility as the world outside. Films can set our subjective experience in motion, bringing us into the motion of the film so that we can experience it directly.

Significantly, Michel Chion connects the idea of the *haptic* to the concept of transsensoriality that I discussed in chapter one. In *Le Son* (1998), he evokes the concept

of the *haptic* to describe the idea that vision is the equivalent of touch at a distance, emphasizing the idea that space is itself transsensorial, our ability to conceptualize space as depending upon vision, hearing, and the touch we experience as we move through it (57). At the core of conceptions of *haptic* space, then, are transsensorial connections that recognize those aspects of experience that are not defined by any single sense modality. The idea of movement here is critical, as the transsensorial quality of haptic experience denotes a movement between the senses that also articulates a movement through physical space; this is also a movement between internal experience and external space defined by the commonality between our internal experience of movement as we navigate the external world by way of our own physical movement. So for Bruno, the sensation of “motion” can connect emotional experience to our experience of spatial orientation; this is a highly evocative idea well suited to my present consideration of Peter Mettler’s evocation of the “movement of thoughts” and their connection to the movement of external phenomena such as the *aurora borealis* by way of the medium of film.

Gesture is another key concept that transcends specific sensory demarcations, tying the general category of movement to qualities of both images and sounds that are embedded within each other. Rolfe Inge Godøy has recently suggested that works of abstract sound composition, like the acousmatic music of Pierre Schaeffer discussed in chapter one, cannot be experienced as entirely removed from the realm of imagery. Godøy describes this relationship between acousmatic sound and visuality as being linked to “*embodied cognition*, meaning that virtually all domains of human perception and thinking, even seemingly abstract domains, are related to images of movement” (2006, 150).

Godøy's conclusions here extend from a field of inquiry into the idea of "musical imagery." Music theorists have long been interested in how the idea of the "image" plays into the creation and reception of music. As Rosemary Mountain illustrates in her discussion of musical imagery in the compositional process, the concept of "image" has various connotations in this field. Of particular interest here are kinaesthetic images – our visual understanding of motion – that our minds often turn to when hearing sound alone. Mountain's survey of the concept of musical imagery demonstrates that composers often create music with a visual intent, the desire to create "effective illusions of imaginary sonic objects moving through time" (2001, 286). Denis Smalley, in turn, refers to musical interest in evocations of gestural movement and imagery as having a *haptic* quality (2007, 39).

Significantly, Mettler's interest in the movement of the *aurora borealis* and its kinship to the movement of thoughts is positioned within a discussion of the transsensorial potential of the lights. Towards the end of *Picture of Light*, Mettler considers the possibility of hearing the lights:

Ed says you can hear them, but Bill says all you could theoretically hear is static discharge as though your head being the highest point around this flat terrain acted like some kind of conductor to the currents of the night sky. Or maybe it's our breath freezing into tiny ice crystals and falling upon our nylon parkas.

The sequence ends with O'Rourke's ambient treatments fading out as the visuals fade to white. The sound of breathing emerges, floating for a moment over the blank screen until we cut to a shot of Inuk elder Joseph Natakok. He speaks without translation as the camera cuts from him to panning shots of the frozen tundra. Mettler delays offering translation for a minute and a half, finally stating that, "The old Inuk said that most of all

he likes to hunt,” just as we watch local motel owner Steve Bosnjak setting up his video camera on the land during a heavy wind. “Perhaps we are modern day hunters,” Mettler continues. Perhaps what they hear while filming the lights is the sound of their own breath in the act of hunting the lights down, the material result of their attempts to use film as a way of accessing the connection between the lights and the movement of thoughts.

With his attempts to film the lights comes the question of what is heard while so doing. Can the lights themselves be heard? Or only the environment in which the viewing takes place? Perhaps the sound one might hear is just the minutiae of the environment. Perhaps the lights are a trigger for the imagination, putting one in tune with the smallest details of the surroundings, just as Mettler’s cameras and microphones do. If Mettler was interested only in the possibility that attention to the lights calls similar attention to the nuances of the environment in which they are viewed, then one could imagine an approach to sound design that emphasizes direct location recording above all else, providing us with access to the auditory minutia of Churchill, Manitoba. Yet as is clear by now, Mettler is far from approaching sound design with strict realist or observational principles in mind. Mettler’s sound design is geared much more towards the idea of the lights as trigger for the imagination, of setting the mind moving.

*Visual Music, Stan Brakhage, and Moving Visual Thinking*¹

Picture of Light is a sound film, but its primary subject is an abstract visual one. In asking if it’s possible to hear the lights, which appear to Mettler as the movement of thought, he is pointing towards the potential for abstract images to create an auditory

experience through their connection to the mind's way of processing these images. This is a transsensorial connection that I argue is best read through the discourse of visual music that I introduced in chapter one. For present purposes I will focus on the work of experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage who has expressed his own interest in exploring the cinematic equivalent of the movement of thought through the "musical" quality of moving images alone. Jerry White connects Mettler's interest in exposing the materiality of film with a similar interest shown by Brakhage. White suggests that sequences like those that present the lights in time-lapse photography "recall the rough, turbulent work of Stan Brakhage" who "thought carefully" about "the lengths to which you had to take the image, the kinds of abuse you had to inflict on the celluloid in order to make it speak" (2006, 32). Yet what interests me here goes beyond the mutual concern Brakhage and Mettler show for rendering the surface of celluloid apparent to the audience. Even more important are the ideological underpinnings of their shared desire to find a way to get at the haptic potential of the cinema through the transsensorial qualities of moving images. The idea of the haptic is a way of exploring the way that film can thread representation with reality through our common experience of both, using moving images to suggest the moving qualities of sound, and by extension the "movement" of interior experience. While certain aspects of Mettler's visual style may resemble certain aspects of Brakhage's aesthetic, the two filmmakers are more substantially linked through their interest in getting at the haptic qualities of film through its transsensorial potential.

In chapter one I gave a brief introduction to the concept of visual music, defined largely by experiments in creating moving images that have "musical" qualities, often designed to provide the visual equivalent of the music presented on their soundtracks, the

inverse of musicians who want to evoke imagery through their sound compositions. Of course the most literal approach to visual music comes with a break from such audiovisual experimentation and a renewed interest in making films that are absolutely silent. As many have noted, the coming of synchronized sound allowed the purposeful use of silence, and a small group of experimental filmmakers have engaged in making what Fred Camper calls the “true silent film,” often interested in allowing visuals to create a sense of musical experience without the need for sound (1985, 372-373).

Nowhere is this desire more evident than in Oskar Fischinger’s 1945 film *Radio Dynamics: A Color Music Composition*, beginning with a title card reading: “Please! No music. Experiment in colour rhythm.” In making silent films designed to use imagery to evoke qualities associated with music, like rhythm, filmmakers like Fischinger pointed backwards to painters like Kandinsky who set the stage for the motion version of visual music to come. For present purposes, what is most important about this kind of work is the interest in hearing without the ear, and the relationship between the dissolution of sensory boundaries and the idea of the movement of thought as the basis for experience.

Though he isn’t usually discussed as a visual music filmmaker, Stan Brakhage has explored the realm perhaps more fully than any. His 1990s hand-painted films like *Stellar* (1993) and *Black Ice* (1994) often end with a credit stating that they are to be understood as pieces of visual music wherein Brakhage is the “composer” and the person operating the optical printer is the “visual musician.” But he has a long history preceding this overt reference to visual music suggesting a powerful interest in exploring hearing without the ear, and indeed seeing without the eye, through the notion of the movement

of thought. For Brakhage, getting at the movement of thought involved some very particular ideas about sound/image synchronization in the cinema.

During his 2001 retrospective at the Cinémathèque Québécoise in Montreal, Brakhage exclaimed, “you sync something and it is sunk, as far as I’m concerned!” (2003, par. 5). He was referring to the banality of treating sound/image relations in mainstream film as elements to be unified through representational cause/effect synchronization, and in so doing aligns himself, at least a little, with the Soviet montagists. In a letter to Ronna Page on the subject of music, he speaks of his intense dissatisfaction with “conventional uses of music for ‘mood’ and so-called ‘realistic sounds’ as mere referendums to image in movies” (1978, 134). So, he studied with John Cage and Edgar Varèse, “at first with the idea of searching out a new relationship between image and sound and of, thus, creating a new dimension for the sound track” (134). He continues:

The more informed I became with aesthetics of sound, the less I began to feel any need for an audio accompaniment to the visuals I was making... The more silently-oriented my creative philosophies have become, the more inspired-by-music have my photographic aesthetics and my actual editing orders become, both engendering a coming-into-being of the physiological relationship between seeing and hearing in the making of a work of art in film. (135)

Here, as Fred Camper notes, Brakhage is interested in appealing to what he calls the “sound sense,” sounds that can be evoked by movement and editing patterns (1985, 373) without the need for an actual soundtrack. With this kind of approach, Brakhage was moving in the direction of exploring the highly soluble boundaries between our demarcations of sound and image to show that a work which we perceive with the eyes does not mean that we experience it solely as visual information. To this end, Brakhage

says he wanted to “get deeper into my concept of music as sound equivalent of the mind’s moving” (1978, 135). Here Brakhage associates music with sound, but by tying it to the idea of the “mind’s moving,” what he calls “moving visual thinking,” music can transcend the strict delineation of auditory perception and become a marker of the totality of thought.

With this line of thinking, Brakhage connects himself to another aspect of Sergei Eisenstein’s interest in film sound. As noted in chapter one, Eisenstein speaks of “plastic music” in *Nonindifferent Nature* (1987), “music” which is contained and expressed by the visual aspects of cinema, particularly in the silent era. He says that the idea of expressing music visually fell mostly to images of landscape, “and a similar emotional landscape, functioning as a musical component, is what I call ‘nonindifferent nature’” (1987, 216). For Eisenstein:

The musical course of a scene in those days was decided by the structure and montage of representation. The greatest share in ‘making sound’ fell to landscape. For landscape is the freest element of film, the least burdened with servile, narrative tasks, and the most flexible in conveying moods, emotional states, and spiritual experiences. In a word, *all that*, in its exhaustive total, is accessible only to music, with its hazily perceptible, flowing imagery. (217)

Brakhage’s films are also concerned with landscape, both outer and inner, and this exploration of landscape goes hand in hand with his interest in exploring the musical qualities of the visual as a key to unlocking the totality of thought. Eisenstein’s idea of music as being comprised of “hazily perceptible, flowing imagery” makes me think of Brakhage’s idea of “moving visual thinking”: the landscape of human consciousness in full motion at the intersection of the five sense organs, occupying a space where perception is only the beginning of experience, not the definer of it.

Brakhage himself makes connections with music and landscape. In his letter to Ronna Page, he says:

I recall first hearing shifting chords of sound that corresponded in meaningful interplay with what I was seeing when I was a child in a Kansas cornfield at midnight. That was the first time I was in an environment *silent* enough to permit me to hear “the music of the spheres,” as it’s called, and visually specific enough for me to be aware of the eye’s pulse of receiving image. (1978, 136-37)

So on some level Brakhage is interested in the synaesthesia that preoccupies many artists working in the area of visual music. He says that he “seek[s] to hear colour just as Messiaen seeks to see sounds” (1978, 136), the classic goal of the synesthesia enthusiast.

When Brakhage refers to music as the “sound equivalent of the mind’s moving” he suggests that the way the mind processes the world is best understood as the movement of thought rather than as a collection of specific sensory phenomena. This movement is not confined to isolated channels of hearing or seeing, but can be represented and expressed by both sight and sound equally well (not to mention the rest of our senses). This is exemplified by the idea that Brakhage’s films need no soundtrack for their musical qualities to come through: the brain understands the music even if the ears do not hear it. The transsensorial qualities of experience reflect what Brakhage calls the “totality of thought” (Wees 1992, 77), the post-sensory experience of the world that pays no heed to whether sensory information comes in through the eyes or the ears. It is simply the totality of experience which cannot be broken down the way our technologies of representation make us believe they can. And this idea of the totality of thought exists as a kind of movement that Brakhage attempts to get at through his cinematic explorations of moving visual thinking.

Picture of Light, and Mettler's work in general, is aligned with the goals of visual music and the work of Stan Brakhage on several levels. Mettler has stated his personal commitment to the idea that film is a form of music. In his essay "Music in Film: Film as Music," he says,

Film has the same potential immediacy as music. What I mean by this is that film has many aspects in common with music, especially in its ability to tap into an unconscious or subconscious mode of experience, and in its ability to create meaning through rhythms and emotional colours and tones. (1992, 35)

With this description of film Mettler points towards the haptic potential of the cinema to create an immediacy of experience in the audience that he equates with the idea of music. His description also evokes the transsensorial potential of the cinema in establishing rhythm as a grounding element, a point he emphasizes further when he suggests that, "like music, it could be that the essential element of a film is its rhythm" (36). Here Mettler engages with a long history of filmmaking concerned with the cinematic exploration of rhythm. As I have discussed, rhythm is part of the larger category of movement that lies at the heart of transsensorial and haptic experience alike.

In *Picture of Light*, arriving at the *haptic* comes by way of Mettler's question about whether or not the *aurora borealis* can be heard, a question about the transsensorial quality of the lights that might bind their external manifestation to our internal experience of them through an equivalency of movement. Of course, *Picture of Light* is not a silent film, so Mettler's interest in the lights as a manifestation of what Brakhage would call moving visual thinking is not explored through the same strategies as Brakhage's silent hand-painted abstractions. Rather, *Picture of Light* emphasizes the audiovisual nature of sound cinema by exploring the line that separates sound and image in order to arrive at

unconventional ways of establishing connections between these two modes of transmission. By emphasizing the technical separation of sound and image as part of the film's reflexive strategy, Mettler also emphasizes the distance between his audience and the lights that he filmed in Churchill. Yet by asking whether or not we might be able to hear the lights, he is suggesting their transsensorial potential, just as he suggests the film's haptic potential to enable a common level of experience of the lights between the audience and the filmmakers. So it is essential that we understand Mettler's reflexive approach not as one borne of total skepticism, but rather an optimism for the potential of cinema not only to teach us about life amidst images – a second-order reality – but the cinema as a conduit for experience that extends from the screen through physical space to our interior consciousness. The remaining analyses will focus on the film's deliberate disruption of conventions of audiovisual synchronization in order to demonstrate how these disruptions function as agents of the haptic potential of the *aurora borealis* and their cinematic representation.

Conducting Mysterious Music

In an interview segment Brian Ladoon, a local dog-team trainer, explains the concept of “blood bathing” wherein a hunter becomes unscrupulous about what prey to shoot and indulges blood lust to an extreme degree. As we listen to him speak, the film shows us images of other dog handlers feeding a team outside in a blustery wind, axing chunks of meat off of large frozen blocks and throwing it to the animals. The sound remains grounded within the interior space of the interview with just a little bit of external ambient sound leaking through: axe thuds, wind blowing, and dogs barking in the

distance to underscore the dog trainer's commentary. The interview continues as we watch one of Mettler's crew setting up a camera in the deep snow. Again, direct sound from the exterior space is layered with the sound of the interview as the dog trainer contemplates the responsibility of the hunter to respect the value of all life. The image track, however, never returns to the dog trainer. Once the interview ends, an offscreen Mettler begins a conversation with the onscreen cameraperson. They discuss the settings for the time-lapse electronics being used to try and capture the lights on film. Once the equipment is set we hear the sound of the camera going off once every few seconds, along with the steady breathing of the cameraperson, providing a rhythmic base to an emerging soundscape featuring O'Rourke's music once again. Mettler's narration begins once more, explaining that after much time spent waiting out bad weather, the skies are finally clear and they can turn the camera upward. As we watch the film's first significant sequence of the *aurora* in time-lapse, the location sound of the camera and breathing fade out while the sounds of barking dogs fades in, the ambient drone continuing all the while.

This time-lapse sequence of the lights illustrates Mettler's signature approach to auditory accompaniment to the visual phenomena. The lights are a visual phenomenon, and the technique of time-lapse is a particularly silent form of filmmaking. Time-lapse sequences are rarely accompanied by their auditory equivalent: the sound of the pro-filmic environment sped up dramatically. Instead of such a literal approach to the sound of the time-lapse environment, Mettler emphasizes the sound of the mechanism responsible for creating the time-lapse imagery. The sound of the camera and breathing, presented in real-time, are incongruous with the temporal compression visible on the

screen, yet their connection has been made clear. This is an example of how an overtly reflexive disruption in conventions of realist synchronization can nevertheless create a profound connection between sound and image.

Then, when the camera sound is replaced by the sound of barking dogs, the dog trainer's story about the relationship between hunter and prey is evoked. We have already heard Mettler explain that the lights are often interpreted as spirits by the aboriginal population; here the sounds of the dogs, earlier associated with the spirit of the hunted animals coming out in their last breath, are now associated with the lights as visual representation of the spirit world. Mettler thus takes direct sound recording from one sequence of the film and uses it to create a rich and meaningful moment of free counterpoint for another sequence. The abstract visual phenomena of the lights are thus contextualized within a reflexive strategy laced with an ecological message. The genius of Mettler's style lies, in part, with his ability to balance all these elements to create a reflexive meditation on the act of filming the lights while engaging deeply with the cultural environment in which this filming takes place.

Relationships of audiovisual counterpoint are at their peak during a series of interviews with local residents about their experience of the northern lights. As people talk, they are first presented using the convention of lip-synchronization, the standard for the interview format. Then, however, images begin to slip away from the talking heads whose voices we hear, and instead we are presented with images of *other* interviewees in the process of talking. While it is common for documentaries to insert related imagery while listening to interviewees talk on the soundtrack - as in the images of the dogs over the dog trainer's bathing story - it is almost unheard of to layer the sound of one person

talking over the image of another speaker whose voice is absent. This strategy serves as a definitive break from the norms of the talking head documentary, and indeed of talking cinema in general. Yet as we are disrupted from the lack of lip synchronization, new synchronizations emerge. As we watch people talk they gesture with their hands, and these gestures are presented as reflections of the descriptions of the *aurora* being spoken in voice-over. These are the images of citizens “conducting mysterious music” that Peter Weber describes in this chapter’s epigraph, and his analogy could not be more apt for this discussion of how the film’s reflexive approach to sound/image relationships ties into the theme of film as visual music.

The nexus point of the whole film comes at the end of this sequence when we see Andreas Züst gesturing while we hear the dog trainer describing seasonal differences in the lights that are detectable through the levels of definition around their edges. Züst makes an inverted V shape with his hands just as we hear the dog trainer mention “defined edges.” However, at this point in the film, viewers realize that this shot of Züst is from an earlier interview in which he describes not the lights, but the artificially defined edges of a snowdrift that he shaped in his hotel room as an experiment inspired by the boredom inherent in waiting out the weather in Churchill.

While confined to their motel rooms, the crew and some local residents decide to pass the time by shooting a hole in the wall of the hotel room to allow a stream of snow to enter and, hopefully, create a natural drift across the room. This is one of many moments in the film where the boundary between nature and human-made artificiality is brought up. The results of the experiment leave something to be desired, prompting Züst to shape a nicer looking drift than the one created by the experiment itself. His

disappointment about the lack of grandeur of the interior drift stems partly from their lack of attention to the other side of the wall, their failure to see how the weather was behaving in relation to the hole they punched to let the outside in. This is one of the constant references in the film to a permeable boundary between inside and outside while questioning what differences there are, if any, between interior and exterior manifestations of the same thing. In this case it's a snow drift, but this applies also to Mettler's question about media as surrogate for real experience, and his equation of the interior machinations of consciousness with the exterior manifestation of the lights.

The snowdrift sequence ends with a close-up of the drift partially covering the room's television set, making a direct connection once again between the natural and the artificial, the artificial snow drift playing at natural forms while it partially obscures the television's attempt at the same. And this connection is brought home when we see Züst gesturing about the edges of a snowdrift while we hear the dog trainer describe the levels of definition visible on the edges of the lights at different times of the year. Here we find a convergence of the landscape of the Earth - the snowdrift - and the form of the *aurora*, both of which have been subject to mediation by human hands. We have heard Mettler describe the *aurora* as moving like thoughts, evoking a connection between the lights in the sky and the "lights" of consciousness. We have read about Brakhage and Eisenstein's interest in visual representations of landscape as "musical" in nature, something Brakhage also equates with the moving mind. With this simple juxtaposition between Züst's hand gesture and the dog-trainer's description of the lights, the film zeros in on the triangular relationship between interior space, exterior space, and their connection by way of cinema.

In this interview sequence Mettler uses images from one interviewee as harmonic counterpoint to the sound from another. It is important that the disjunction in this interview sequence takes place on the point of hand gestures. Like rhythm, gesture transcends sensory modalities – physical movement which can be experienced in the absence of both sound and image. The idea of gesture as being tied to moving visual thinking is connected to what Rolf Inge Godoy refers to as embodied cognition, images of movement within the mind, that tie all processing of even the most abstract sound into gestural sensibilities within the brain. The break in lip-synch disrupts the convention of sound/image relationships, yet the gesturing brings these images back into alignment with the sound offering new potentials for making meaning. Here the film ties one of the most basic ideas we have about gesture – hand movements acting as a visual aid while speaking – to the disruption of conventional approaches to sound/image synchronization in order to demonstrate other modes of connecting sound with image. Gesture is the concept that threads these sound/image disjunctions together, just as the gesturing motion of the *aurora borealis* threads representation with reality, interior consciousness with exterior space. The “mysterious music” being conducted in these shots of gestural hand movements is the “music” of the silent *aurora*, a transsensorial gesture by Mettler to suggest the haptic potential of cinema to engender a common experience of the northern lights with the people we see and hear on the screen.

In the end it’s not that Mettler wants us to feel as though we’re actually standing with him in Churchill beneath the northern lights. Rather, the film demonstrates that through exposing the audience to the filmmaking process, while drawing explicit relationships between this process and the machinations of our individual consciousnesses, we can get

closer to the experience of the *aurora* than many would think when mediated through the technology of film. “And we tell ourselves that seeing it on TV just isn’t the same as being there...”

Manufacturing the Pill

The greatest strength of *Picture of Light* is its quality of immersive reflexivity, to expose the processes of its own construction while engaging the audience. The result of this immersion is not that the film becomes a realist window out into the world, bringing the audience to Churchill. Rather, it is an immersion in the processes by which the *aurora* are captured and brought to the audience, emphasizing the distance between subject and audience as mediated by film. Yet I argue that awareness of this distance brings the audience *closer* to the subject, creating an environment in which what is ultimately represented in the footage of the northern lights is the experience of movement that we all carry within us, whether we describe this movement as embodied cognition, moving visual thinking, or the motion of emotion.

The issue of what is represented in the film is key. Just as the film does not try to represent pro-filmic reality according to realist convention, neither does it try to represent experience itself through the creation of an analog of consciousness. Rather, the film is interested in how our experience of the world, whether on film or not, is constructed by way of mediating agents. Mettler’s film is about the process of representation, the difficulties in achieving the technical aspects of filming something in the world under adverse conditions, and questioning the relationship between the world and its representation. *Picture of Light* suggests that the medium of film allows for a

transcendence of its own mediation to draw the spheres of interior consciousness and exterior space together. Mettler might be said to take a cue from Alejandro Jodorowsky who once proclaimed:

I ask of film what most North Americans ask of psychedelic drugs. The difference being that when one creates a psychedelic film, he need not create a film that shows the visions of a person who has taken a pill; rather he needs to manufacture the pill. (Jodorowsky in Samuels 1983, 33)

The key to Mettler's film is that it seeks to dissolve the boundary between audience and subject, not through conventions of realism that allow us to forget that we are watching a film, but through reflexive strategies that allow the audience to ponder the dissolution of boundaries. It embodies the paradox of allowing the mediator to vanish by foregrounding the process of mediation. Though film provides second-order access onto the world, the connection of the northern lights with the movement of thought has the power to dissolve this second order, to make the mediator vanish. But as mediation can never vanish, the film positions its own mediation of reality front and center so that we can be made aware of the fact that ALL experience is mediated in one form or another. When we realize that, we can move past the problems of indexicality, or "reproduction," and focus on those aspects of experience that are common between our experience of film and our experience of the world outside of film.

The idea of vanishing mediation in *Picture of Light* is brought home during the above described interview segment where local residents describe their experience of the lights. The local priest, Kees Verspeek, talks about the difficulties in assessing distance when viewing the lights. Mettler talks about the possibility of hearing the lights. These two issues are raised again in the film when Native resident Alex Ouskun describes his own experience with the lights. As a child he was told by his grandfather not to look at

the lights or else he would hear a wind and the lights would swoop down on him. His experience of the lights is that when turning attention towards them they seem to come closer, and to create a sound. Again Peter Weber's comments are apt in their equation of the negation of distance between the lights and their viewer to be tied to something audible. To look at the lights is to bring them close, so close that we experience them as internal sound, as the movement of our own thoughts, the motion of our emotion. And this, in the end, is an experience that can transcend cinematic mediation – not through strict representation, but through the immersive reflexivity that Mettler builds through his approach to the formal treatment of sound/image relationships.

In the end, *Picture of Light* offers a way of thinking about the separation of human beings and the natural world through technologies of mediation, the core issues that gave rise to Schafer's concept of schizophonia. Mettler's film illustrates how technological mediation need not be an agent of separation between human beings and their environment. If handled a certain way – as in Mettler's immersive reflexivity – we can situate mediated experience as an important part of the ecological balance between human beings and nature in the modern world. By creating awareness of the split between sound and image, Mettler demonstrates how a line can extend across this split to create new relationships between these separate entities. Similarly, the film's subject matter extends through to the audience, allowing for a connection between the two that does not stand at a remove because of its technological mediation. Mettler gives us the positive potential of schizophonia: to engender a subjective experience of the split between sound and image that allows us to experience the world anew. Mettler's style allows us simultaneous access to the wonders of its subject and the means through which

this subject is turned into the film itself. Mettler shows us that reflexivity does not have to jolt the audience out of rapture. Science does not have to negate magic. They are each part of the other, as inseparable as the multiple levels upon which the film explores its themes of the haptic transcendence of the line between interior experience and exterior space. When the lights trigger our minds moving in the film's environment of immersive reflexivity, we can hear them loud and clear – even though their sound does not reach our ears.

Note

¹ Parts of this section have been adapted from my essay, "Brakhage's Silent Legacy for Sound Cinema" (2001) in which I conduct a longer discussion of Brakhage's interest in the "musical" quality of images alone.

Chapter Five

Reflective Listening and the Compilation Soundtrack: Soundscape Composition in Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* and *Last Days*

Early in Gus Van Sant's film *Elephant* (2003), based loosely on the Columbine High School shootings in Colorado, U.S.A, student Alex (Alex Frost) is seen mapping out the space of the cafeteria in preparation for the shooting spree that he'll soon embark upon with his friend Eric (Eric Deulen). In the final shot of this sequence, he pauses for a moment and glances around the room in distress as the amplitude and reverberation of the noisy lunchtime crowd rise to higher levels on the soundtrack. The shot ends as he winces and raises his hands to his head as though in pain. The next time we see Alex in this space it has been emptied of all life, and the chaos of the mid-day bustle has been replaced with the sounds of a forest environment underscored by electronic tonalities, his own footsteps now reverberating through the vacant space. For a moment he can sit in peace, having banished the sounds he apparently found so disturbing the previous day. Yet the peace is unnatural, a forced emptying of interior space into its surrounding exterior reflected by the bizarre co-existence of electronics, birds and wind rustled branches within the boundaries of an institutional enclosure.

The sounds we hear at this moment are a combination of the work of sound designer Leslie Shatz made for the film, and Frances White's pre-existing piece "Walk Through Resonant Landscape #2" (1992) which provides the climax to the film's recurring use of soundscape compositions. The power of this moment lies beyond the tension found in its combination of realist representation and suggestive dissonance. I argue, rather, that a great deal of what makes this approach to auditory representation so poignant is the

interplay between pre-existing soundscape composition and the sound elements created for the film, an overlap between two modes of sound production that are similar in their interest in the tension between representation and creative license. Although White's piece is central to the film's closing moments, this sole excerpt of her work is but one example of the frequent presence of soundscape composition in *Elephant* that relies much more heavily on the pieces "Türen der Wahrnehmung (Doors of Perception)" (1989) and "Beneath the Forest Floor" (1992) by Hildegard Westerkamp. And the use of Westerkamp's work figures even more prominently in Van Sant's next film, *Last Days* (2005), inspired by the last days of grunge music superstar Kurt Cobain. In this chapter I will trace the use of Westerkamp's soundscape compositions within the sound design for *Elephant* and *Last Days* and examine their position within the audiovisual ecology of the films. I argue that the origin of these pieces outside of the filmic text and subsequent incorporation into these films is the formal expression of a strong narrative theme of youth alienation, an ecological issue regarding the position of young people in relation to their environments. Further, I argue that the spirit that informs the practice of soundscape composition, drawn from its origins in acoustic ecology, infuses the themes of environmental disengagement explored in these films and provides a formal support for their narrative expression.

As I discussed in chapter one, soundscape composers like White and Westerkamp draw on a long history of interest in soundscape research and the emerging tradition of using field recordings as the basic elements of sound composition. One of the founding members of the World Soundscape Project with R. Murray Schafer, Westerkamp often uses her work to explore the changing nature of the world's sonic environments, how

they engage with their inhabitants, and how people engage with them in return (if at all). As we know by now, acoustic ecology is concerned with the problem of how we contextualize ourselves within the environments we inhabit, with Schafer's notion of *schizophonia* as a high concept expression of environmental alienation resultant from technological mediation. Westerkamp's work is directly engaged with issues in the relationship between internal experience and external environments, often highlighting technological processes of mediation as a reflexive strategy in her work. As such her compositions are ideally suited for helping to flesh out Van Sant's portraits of young people adrift in worlds from which they are seemingly detached. These films thus provide a new angle from which to examine the role of de-contextualization as both a practical component of, and thematic element within Westerkamp's soundscape compositions. In turn, the presence of her work in these films offers a valuable entryway to the examination of Van Sant's aesthetic and thematic concerns.

Westerkamp's inclusion in the soundtracks to *Elephant* and *Last Days* relates to the category of the compilation soundtrack: the adoption of pre-existing music for use in a film. The concept of the compilation soundtrack poses a fundamental question of ecology: how does removing a piece of music from its original context and re-situating it within the environment of a film affect the music itself, its point of origin, and the new cinematic world in which it comes to rest? There are some powerful examples to be found in the history of cinema: Tarantino's use of Dick Dale's vintage surf-rock track "Miserlou" (1962) for the opening credits of *Pulp Fiction* (1994) is a high watermark for the fusion of song and film to the point that to think of them separately becomes almost unfathomable. And yet, the track remains separate from the film, with its own storied

history, always something that Tarantino has re-purposed rather than created. This is a fundamentally schizophrenic situation in which the re-contextualization of a sonic environment (in this case, as song) leads to disorientation about both its origins and its relationship to the new environment.

The difference in Van Sant's films, compared with the use of pop songs as part of a film's compilation soundtrack, is that Westerkamp's soundscape compositions are not pieces of "music" in the conventional sense. Within *Elephant* and *Last Days* they operate more on the level of "sound effects" than of "music" or "score." One could easily go through the entirety of these two films and believe that the sounds of Westerkamp's work were actually elements created by sound designer Leslie Shatz, or perhaps even recorded on location. "Miserlou" will never be thusly mistaken. And yet there is a prevailing sense that when we hear Westerkamp's work in these films, we are hearing something decidedly unsettling in its appropriate-but-not-quite-perfect bond with the audiovisual elements that surround them. In other words, her pieces point to their origin from outside the film even while they may not be recognized as having been created independently. And so the position of these soundscape compositions embodies Schafer's concept of schizophonia even more fully than an example like "Miserlou"; the ties that Westerkamp's work have to the world outside the film are threatened with being erased altogether, the mediation between the text of the film and the text of these compositions all but vanishing while leaving a strange gap in its place. Like the vanishing mediator upon which the space replacement model of schizophonia relies, the spaces represented in the film are often filled in with Westerkamp's creations as though erasing the mediation inherent to their extra-textual origin. And yet mediation cannot vanish, and

Westerkamp's work leaves gaps between the world in which the characters live, the world of the film as a whole, and the world outside the film altogether. It is in these gaps that the productive tension between Westerkamp's work and the films of Gus Van Sant plays out.

The use of soundscape composition as part of a film's sound design, and the particular compositional strategies specific to Westerkamp's work, make *Elephant* and *Last Days* highly unusual in their exploration of the complex physical and emotional spaces opened up by their difficult subject matters. Understanding the unique intersection between soundscape composition and film sound design, along with the intersection of the artistic goals of Westerkamp and Van Sant, makes for a richer experience of these films and allows for new ways of understanding how they handle their narrative material. I will illustrate how the incorporation of soundscape composition within the sound design of these films blurs established boundaries between film music and sound effects, both on the level of production and critical reception. I suggest that understanding the role that these compositions play in these films requires a hybrid analytical model that extends the study of soundscape composition into the realm of film sound design, one that can approach the formal strategies employed by Van Sant through a framework established by the study of Westerkamp's own creative practice. Ultimately I argue that Van Sant's use of Westerkamp's work is a reflexive strategy designed to call attention to the artificiality of the worlds in which his characters live. This artificiality contributes to the feelings of alienation that come with a consistent awareness that each character remains a separate and autonomous individual despite their social settings, unsure of how to engage with the world around them.

Stylistic Considerations

The narratives of both *Elephant* and *Last Days* deal with youth culture in crisis, and both revolve around gun violence. At the heart of these two films, as in most of Van Sant's oeuvre, is the theme of friendship. *Elephant* reveals the closeness of the two shooters, their alienation from the rest of the school's population posited as possible motivation for their actions. *Last Days* investigates the effects of superstardom on a single individual, the paradox of being known by everyone while knowing very few in return. The two films differ slightly in their approach to character development: *Elephant* is an ensemble piece in which a handful of students pass through the narrative in stories that intersect but which are never fully developed; *Last Days*, while also featuring a handful of characters, focuses on Blake (Michael Pitt), loosely based on Kurt Cobain, and explores his general disconnection from the people around him. Like Alex and Eric in *Elephant*, Blake is surrounded by people. Unlike the two shooters, who seem to have no friends, the people in Blake's entourage consider themselves to be close to him, yet the film portrays their relationships as fundamentally one-sided. Neither the shooters nor Blake seem either able or willing to communicate effectively with any of the people around them; the shooters express their alienation through mass murder, while Blake retreats further into himself until he is finally found dead under mysterious circumstances. Both of these films explore a basic tenet of ecology: the relationship between individuals and their environments. These films position friendship as an ecological issue by illustrating the basic problem of empathy in human relationships: access to the emotional and psychological space of another person is always mediated by the distance in between.

As many critics have noted, the films tend to eschew elaborate character

development for an approach to narrative that emphasizes dead time, most notably through sequences dominated by a long take aesthetic in which characters are filmed from behind as they walk between spaces, usually separated by doorways, repeated at different points in the film from different perspectives in a non-linear approach to narrative progression. Critics commonly compare this dead time, the tracking shots of people walking, and the non-linear structure to Hungarian filmmaker Béla Tarr. Van Sant has corroborated the connection by publicly acknowledging Tarr's influence on his work (2003, 3). And in the case of *Elephant*, Van Sant has also acknowledged his debt to Alan Clarke's earlier film of the same name (1989).

In Clarke's film, the problem of IRA gun violence in Ireland is explored through a series of brutally spare steadicam shots following gunmen as they walk for extended periods, punctuating the end of each sequence with a killing. With no explanations given, little in the way of dialogue, and many characters shot from the back so that their faces aren't even visible to offer a hint of psychology, the film is a statement on the senselessness and systematic brutality of gang killing. The film emphasizes the traversal of space as the killers walk through the environments in which their killings will be carried out, each spatial environment becoming increasingly charged with tension as we follow each killer for extended periods, never knowing when their target will be reached. Van Sant's *Elephant* is clearly drawing on Clarke's film in so far as it is, in part, an aesthetic meditation on the process of killing, and the spaces in which this killing takes place, rather than an investigation of the motivations for the killing. Yet Van Sant's *Elephant* goes much further with its characters than Clarke's film, and presents an affectionate view of the shooters and their victims that results in the potential for some

audience identification, even if the film ultimately does not privilege character psychology the way that mainstream narrative film tends to do.

In comparing the two versions of *Elephant*, Amy Taubin argues that Van Sant's version "is as radiant and tender as the original is dour and brutal. Yet the impact of both films is a result not just of their subject matter but of a dialectic between documentary-style immediacy and formalist distance" (2005, 18). The "documentary-style immediacy" comes, in part, from a highly realist approach to visual representation combined with an unusual emphasis on location sound recording, the latter going against the grain of most contemporary American filmmaking. A key element of the "formalist distance" that most critics latch onto is the non-linear narrative found in both *Elephant* and *Last Days*. Taubin ties this non-linearity to the way the films position themselves in relation to the real world events upon which they are based:

The effect is to transform what seems like 'real' time into recorded time and the time of memory, which is the mode in which the 'reality' of Columbine now exists. The reversals also suggest a longing to stop time, to prevent the inevitable tragedy from ever taking place. (2005, 18)

In describing *Last Days* Taubin suggests that this feeling of looping time is also tied to the drug-addled subjectivity of Blake who appears to be a heroin addict on relapse.

The approach to camera movement and montage in both films is often connected to the theme of social and environmental alienation. S.F. Said observes that, "*Elephant* presents a startlingly fragmented vision of a social world, its people forever crossing paths but never connecting" (2004, 17-18). Said describes a particular dialogue interchange between characters John (John McFarland) and Acadia (Alicia Miles) in which the former can't articulate to the latter why he is crying: "This is as close a human interaction as we get: two people failing to make a meaningful connection and then going

their separate ways” (18). While the ensemble nature of *Elephant* helps to explore the general space of alienation amidst the high school, *Last Days* withdraws to an emphasis on a single character, Blake. As such, Stephen Dalton finds that in *Last Days*, “the background characters serve a less clear dramatic purpose, except that the rambling non-plot might simply implode without them” (2005, 66). Yet the theme of social disconnection is the same as in *Elephant*, and continues to be supported by a similar non-linear structure and formalist aesthetic. Referring to *Last Days*, Taubin argues that, “The disconnections in the narrative, such as it is, reinforce the feeling of emotional disconnection among the characters” (2005, 19).

Elephant and *Last Days* have been criticized for their eschewal of character development for an apparent emphasis on structural elements. Kent Jones refers to Van Sant as “the prince of calculated disaffection,” and says of *Elephant*, “The problem... is that the absences – of motivation, surface emotions, connective tissue – are much more compelling and provocative than the stabs at explanation” (2003, 28). Indeed, when dealing with issues as socially provocative as high-school shootings and suicide, the question people want answered is “why?” The epidemic of shootings in educational institutions continues to worsen since Columbine, and Kurt Cobain has joined a long list of celebrities who have killed themselves (or died under mysterious circumstances as some conspiracy theorists believe is the case here). So when a film is released which deals directly with these subjects, many view them as a chance to explore questions of motivation, and perhaps even to get some answers.

Van Sant’s films, on the other hand, seem rather arty explorations inspired by the events of Columbine and Kurt Cobain’s death without going deep into the cause or

offering any solutions. There are hints at psychological motivation: in *Elephant*, for example, the shooters are shown being picked on by other kids, perhaps because of issues of sexual identity. They also play first person shooter video games and have easy access to the purchase of firearms online. In *Last Days*, Blake is presented as a recluse who has succumbed to the intense pressure of being a superstar, babbling a drug-induced stream of incoherent speech, unable to engage with the people around him and apparently becoming increasingly psychotic in his behaviour. But these suggestions are superficial at best, and do not really allow for much in the way of audience identification with the high school shooters or the rock star.

Yet for their seemingly surface treatment of such sensitive issues, these films are not devoid of engagement with the deadly seriousness of the issues raised by their depicted events. They are not simply formal exercises in narrative structure. Rather, the films chart a different path through the processes of identification in how they explore the spaces in which the characters spend their time. Importantly, their explorations of the institutional space of the high school environment, or the grounds of Blake's estate, are inaccessible without considering sound as equal partner to the image. The soundscape compositions of Hildegard Westerkamp as part of the sound design of these films offers an intriguing model for audiovisual relationships; thinking through this model allows us to consider the level of engagement that the film has with its subject matter, as well as the processes of engagement that the films engender with their audience. I argue that the very particular ways in which these films deal with space is, in part, the result of how the filmmakers incorporate existing pieces of music into the sound design of the films. Because of the nature of soundscape composition in general, and the specifics of

Westerkamp's compositional strategies, I will demonstrate that these films are very unusual in their approach to the relationship between spatial representation and character psychology through their use of sound.

Critics have noticed certain particularities in the use of sound in *Elephant* and *Last Days*. In describing the sparseness of dialogue in *Elephant* as an example of the film's emphasis on dead time, S.F. Said describes a scene that follows Nathan walking through the school: "Five and a half minutes pass in which someone simply walks in silence before a mere 30 seconds of dialogue kick in" (2004, 18). Thinking of the film without attention to aspects of the sound design other than dialogue, you might come to the same conclusion as Said: "It's all surface, and not once are we taken inside the character's heads. The cumulative effect is of distance and dispassion, of almost affectless observation" (18). The scenes in which characters do not speak, however, are far from silent. The example of Nathan's walk through the school will be discussed at length below, as it is one of the key moments in which the work of Hildegard Westerkamp is heard. And whether or not they acknowledge Westerkamp's presence, many critics mention the auditory dimension, and it is here that some find a measure of access to character psychology that is absent on the image track.

Speaking of *Last Days*, Amy Taubin goes so far as to say that, "Leslie Shatz' sound design is at least an equal partner to [cinematographer Harry] Savides' haunting images. It's primarily the sound design that conveys Blake's blurring of inside and out – of the sound in his head with the sound around him" (2005, 19). And of course, a good portion of the sound design makes use of Westerkamp's work, which Stephen Dalton describes as adding "a subtle air of dislocation to the rustic wandering of Pitt's hero, Blake" (2005,

65), acknowledging how the soundtrack can help us understand the character's feelings of alienation. Similarly, Danijela Kulezic-Wilson addresses the use of Frances White's work in *Elephant* and *Paranoid Park* (2007) where she finds significance in the fact that scenes were designed with this pre-existing soundscape composition in mind, again tying the suggestive qualities of the sound to psychological space (2008, 129).

Of course critics tend not to go too far into the significance of the practice of soundscape composition for the themes of these films. Chris Chang is an exception to this, and identifies the importance of the underlying principles behind Westerkamp's compositions for understanding the thread that runs through Van Sant's recent work. He quotes the "Soundwalking" article in which Westerkamp lays the foundations for beginning the process of soundscape awareness:

Start by listening to the sounds of your body while moving. They are closest to you and establish the first dialogue between you and the environment. If you can hear the quietest of these sounds you are moving through an environment that is scaled to human proportions. In other words, with your voice or your footsteps you are 'talking' to your environment, which in turn responds by giving your sounds a specific acoustic quality. (Westerkamp in Chang 2005, 16)

As discussed in chapter one, Westerkamp is interested in the relationship between distinct individuals and their environments, and understands environmental engagement as a reciprocal process defined by the relationship between a sound's origin and its propagation through space. Chang suggests that "the idea of a symbiotic play between personal noise and the contextual ambience of location is a type of interaction—I would argue it is the defining component—experienced in Van Sant's trilogy" (16).¹ And that is essentially where he leaves us.

I agree with Chang that the interaction between the self and the environment is the defining component of these films, and this distinction between self and environment is analogous to various other interactions that Westerkamp's compositions bring to these films, most notably the interaction between pre-existing music and the sound elements created for the films. However, despite his attention to the spirit of Westerkamp's work, Chang still ultimately relegates it to the realm of the psychological. He suggests that the presence of Westerkamp's work is "a visceral enhancement to uneasy states of mind," and describes the kinds of odd and out of place sounds heard in the film as "aspects of a constantly invasive sound environment" that Blake is trying to escape from (2005, 16). While I agree that Westerkamp's work does help to provide some access to subjective experience in these films, I will argue that it is essential to understand the importance of the work's detachment from the world created for the film as well.

Westerkamp herself is very interested in the relationships between the noise of the outside world and that of the mental interior. Her prescription for soundwalking begins, as we've heard, with an attention to the sounds around us, and how our own sounds fit into this environment. But her idea for the art of the soundwalk is more than just an exercise in attentive listening: as discussed in chapter one, she puts forth the idea that we can, in fact, be the composers of our own environments through shifting our listening attention and understanding relationships between what we hear and the experiences we bring to that hearing. And as discussed, these relationships form the thematic content of her piece "Kits Beach Soundwalk" (1989). In an interview I conducted with Westerkamp about the use of her work in Van Sant's films, she extends her thoughts on soundwalking

to explain varying degrees of engagement that one can have with the surrounding environment:

There is the type of walking that opens the environment up to us and connects us to our inner selves. That ideally is what a soundwalk is. But a soundwalk does not necessarily mean that we connect directly/socially to the environment through which we walk, as the emphasis is on listening and not on speaking. We may recognize and get to know it better, but we are not responding. However, there is no trace of alienation in this. It is the opposite: it is an openness to the place in which we are letting it in, acknowledging a relationship, but feeling no obligation to respond. And then there is the type of walking through a space that comes from a place of inner desolation/isolation (through empty institutional corridors and wide open suburban spaces in *Elephant*) or disconnect (through natural environments or even into the town/social environment in *Last Days*), where there is no connection to the environment other than perhaps a few not very meaningful meetings with people. In this walking situation the senses are not open to the place in which one walks. The place has no power to enter one's inner world; there is no relationship, no dialogue. (Westerkamp in Jordan 2007a, 9)

Westerkamp's discussion here of the various different levels of engagement between an individual and the environment in which she lives proves pertinent to my discussions here, for it is in the level of openness between interior and exterior spaces that the characters in Van Sant's films are given depth. The appearance of Westerkamp's compositions in *Elephant* and *Last Days* can be heard as sitting upon the surface of Van Sant's worlds, hovering somewhere in the ether; or it can be heard as material which reaches through this ether and touches the earth, healing the breach between engagement and alienation by demonstrating how something as simple as a shift in our attention can position us deep within the ecology of these films. So it is for Van Sant's characters as well.

In the analyses that follow I will consider the implications for the idea of "personal noise" as it relates to the position of these soundscape compositions within the overall sound design of these films. The notion of personal noise can be thought of literally: the

ability to hear the noise that an individual makes in his or her environment; or it can reflect the idea of internal noise, of subjective experience. Indeed, the presentation of subjective experience is one of the most common uses of sound design in film. But even more important for these films is the *connection* between the inner “noise” of psychological/emotional space, the world outside, and how the use of soundscape composition can act as a reflexive strategy that draws this thread from the inner recesses of the diegesis through to the audience watching the film. We bring our own “personal noise” to the film, and I will argue that the processes of identification the audience has with the work of Westerkamp in these films creates a state of reception that can help us access the theme of social alienation at work in their narratives.

What interests me most is not simply how Westerkamp’s work, or the overall sound design for these films, might provide access to character consciousness where the image does not. Rather, I am interested in how the position of soundscape composition within the sound design reflects the position of the characters in relation to their environments. I will demonstrate how the dissociative sounds that stem from Westerkamp’s work are not simply about expressing the aesthetics of institutional paranoia or drug induced hallucination, but go much deeper in their own expression of the processes of ecological engagement. The idea of “personal noise” will govern my reading of the theoretical intersections that inform my interpretation of these films.

I will concentrate on a key stylistic similarity between the structure of Van Sant’s films and the work of Hildegard Westerkamp: the use of doors as mediating agents between spaces, calling attention to how people move between separate spaces, drawing them together, as the formal equivalent of drawing the line between interior mental space

and the exterior world. As with all the films discussed in this dissertation, *Elephant* and *Last Days* explore the relationship between people and space through an interest in points of mediation: *Play Time* is about potentially communal spaces divided by invisible walls of glass; *Stalker* concerns the boundary between internal experience and external space, and the consequences of opening one up to the other; *Picture of Light* questions the role of media technology in mediating the relationship between inner experience and the external world; and *Elephant* and *Last Days* use the concept of the door as a metaphor for the principle of empathy in relationships of friendship. As I will demonstrate, both of these films are set in environments that force their inhabitants to move between spaces mediated by doorways. Significantly, Westerkamp's piece "*Doors of Perception*" is the principal soundscape composition used in these films, and is patterned around the use of door sounds to mediate transitions between spaces that would not ordinarily co-exist. Tracing how this composition is mapped onto these films can tell us much about how space is used to express the fundamental issues of their narratives: the processes of empathy in human friendship.

I will argue shortly that we can best understand the issue of empathy in Van Sant's films by relating the personal noise of the characters to the position of soundscape composition within the audiovisual ecology of the film. To flesh these ideas out I will draw on theories of audience identification with compilation film soundtracks as discussed by Anahid Kassabian, and tie these to Katharine Norman's concept of reflective listening by way of Mikhail Bakhtin's thoughts on the process of empathy in human relationships. But first, I will use a close textual analysis of *Elephant* in order to illustrate how Westerkamp's compositions are incorporated into the film's sound design.

Soundscape Composition in Elephant

Early in *Elephant*, a segment of Westerkamp's piece "Doors of Perception" is used in a sequence that follows character Nathan (Nathan Tyson) as he walks from the football field into a wing of the school's interior, out into a courtyard, back into the hallways and finally down to the office to meet his girlfriend.² The original piece is structured around door sounds as mediators between the soundscapes of different environments. We hear the sounds of doors opening and closing to bring spaces together that would ordinarily be incompatible, creating as much of a mental journey through impossibly overlapping spaces as a representational journey through the spaces recorded for the project. Van Sant then appropriates this structure as Nathan moves between different sound environments mediated by the doors we see on screen, effectively mapping the imagined spatial movements created by Westerkamp onto Nathan's movements through the school complex.

"Doors of Perception" is absent for the first part of the sequence as Nathan begins his walk on the football field towards the school, during which we hear appropriate environmental sounds along with the solo piano of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" (1801). The environmental sounds are clearly distinguished from the Beethoven piece through their spatial signatures, the latter presented in a clean studio recording that bears no suggestion that it might be emanating from any source within the diegesis. As Nathan enters the building, a visual cut from outside to inside is accompanied by an abrupt change in the soundscape while keeping "Moonlight Sonata" a constant. We move from subtle environmental sounds to the sudden sound of a choir singing which marks the

beginning of the use of Westerkamp's piece for this scene. The cut from outside to inside treats Westerkamp's piece as though it is the soundscape of the interior of the building rather than operating as non-diegetic music conventionally does, as in "Moonlight Sonata" carrying over changes in location without being affected. Yet as Nathan walks we notice that his footsteps are not audible. In fact, there is little sense of any personal noise coming from him as he moves throughout the space, though we hear many such personal sounds from people who are not seen on the screen. So there is a tension between the plausibility of "Doors of Perception" as diegetic soundscape and the strange distance that its use here places between Nathan and his environment.

When comparing the sound in this sequence with Westerkamp's original piece, we find that "Doors of Perception" provides almost the entire soundtrack (aside from the Beethoven piece) until, slowly, other sounds emerge just before he reaches the set of doors leading to the courtyard. These new sounds, mostly of voices and room tone, take over for Westerkamp's piece in the few seconds of silence that appears mid-way through the excerpt before it returns with the sound of squeaking hinges just as Nathan passes through a set of doorways into the courtyard outside. Once outside, Westerkamp's piece again takes over as the primary soundscape, now presenting the much larger and open sounding space of a train station, a shift in spatial signature that corresponds exactly with Nathan's shift from interior to exterior space. Yet there is also a clear disjunction between sound and image here. Things we should hear – like a group of break-dancers – are virtually inaudible. While the sounds that we do hear, like the voice of a PA system, are semi-compatible but also strangely out of place. Then, as Nathan approaches the next set of doors leading back into the school, the sound of one of Westerkamp's doors closing

is in perfect synch with a door we see closing in front of Nathan, offering a concrete point of synchronization grounded in conventions of realism. So Westerkamp's piece is acting largely as a stand-in for diegetic sound, but it also offers a distance from the diegesis. We are simultaneously grounded within a plausible soundscape while being distanced from it through the lack of personal noise corresponding to the person in the foreground. This lack of personal noise is borne out in the absence of substantial character development for Nathan and all the other subjects of the film.

The position of the Beethoven piece during Nathan's walk is a key factor. In retrospect, the inclusion of "Moonlight Sonata" is heavily loaded, for the middle-point of the film shows us Alex at home practicing another Beethoven piece on the piano, "Für Elise" (1810), as Eric comes over to play first-person shooter video games. This scene is dominated by location recording, such that if you listen carefully you can even hear the camera running offscreen. As Alex's play progresses, he becomes increasingly frustrated at the limitations of his skill level, and ends by banging on the keyboard so loudly that distortion is audible on the recording, obviously having pushed the pre-set levels on the location recording device well into the red. It is important that the rawness of this scene remains intact rather than being "corrected" in post-production, for the sound of Alex's playing stands in stark contrast to the highly polished, steadily perfect quality of the studio performance of Beethoven heard earlier in the film. This professional studio recording is the unattainable goal of Alex's frustrated musicianship filling the non-diegetic register. While "Moonlight Sonata" in and of itself is subdued and melancholic, it also acts as a marker of the violence that will turn the space of the high school inside out.

Just after the shooting begins, another of Westerkamp's pieces is used to particularly powerful effect. In "Beneath the Forest Floor," Westerkamp takes sounds recorded in the forest and uses various manipulations to create an environment that plays with the relationship between the real and the imaginary. There are two key formal strategies at work in this piece. Firstly, field recordings of forest sounds are layered with non-representational ambiences. These ambiences are the very same forest sounds we recognize elsewhere in the piece - mainly those of birds and water - electronically pitched down to render them unrecognizable as such. These are the ambient drones and pulsating low frequencies that provide the foundation for the work. The second strategy is the use of dramatic stereo panning to create a disorienting sense of space. As we will hear, however, the mapping of "Beneath the Forest Floor" onto the space of *Elephant* continues to follow a logic governed by the movement of characters through spaces mediated by doors (and in this particular case, a window too).

With the school in flames and desperate kids running every which way to try and escape from the two gunmen on the loose within the building, we see a single shot of Benny (Bennie Dixon) slowly wandering the hallways. He comes upon a group of students hiding in a classroom, exiting from an open window one by one. One young lady is too stunned to move, and Benny enters the room and gently helps her up on the windowsill and out to freedom. He then turns back and continues his journey through the halls.³

At this point the film builds significant tension around the distinction between inside and outside emphasized by the theme of escape. Throughout the scene we see people running all over, many racing by doors clearly leading to the outside but without going

through them. This creates a bizarre de-spatialization where the sense of inside/outside is increasingly lost and people are scrambling about in the resulting confusion. The sounds presented during this shot support the conflation of interior and exterior space: along with diegetic sounds of fire and running footsteps we hear an eerie low pitched pulse that underscores abstract drones of a higher register, punctuated by sudden bird calls and rushes of running water that are recognizable but also electronically distorted.

As in the previous example from “Doors of Perception,” this excerpt from “Beneath the Forest Floor” is timed to actions on the screen in interesting ways. Significantly, as Benny approaches the doorway to the classroom with the open window, a rapid right to left pan on the sound of rippling water is heard. This pan is used to introduce a new auditory space in which the abstract tonalities cease and the sound of a forest environment opens up with light wind through trees and more consistent birdcalls. These are sounds that are more clearly associated with the world outside than the more abstract treatments heard just prior. Though the shift in the soundscape is timed to the shift in spatial environment pictured on the screen, the sounds we hear are far from perfectly representational of this environment and are thus not specifically positioned as emanating from within the diegesis. Rather, the change from abstract processed material to a more representational soundscape acts as a metaphorical reflection of the bizarre situation unfolding within the school and the promise of a return to normalcy held by the open window. Additionally, the shot ends with the conjunction of another rapid right to left pan on a water sound that is timed precisely to Benny turning his head in the direction of screen left.

These two points of synchronization operate more abstractly than the door sounds in Nathan's walk, and yet they still serve as anchors that illustrate the connection between sound and image at this moment in the film. This example also differs from the previous one in that other diegetic sounds are heard that are not part of Westerkamp's original piece, such as the sounds of fire and kids rushing about in panic. Yet Benny himself remains quiet, without any audible footsteps of his own, continuing the theme of alienation that runs throughout the film. It is significant that Benny – who is helping students rather than killing them – is losing his own auditory presence to the panicked sounds of everyone around him. It is a world that is turning itself inside out, a fact that is underscored by the eerie synchronicity between Westerkamp's piece and the events being portrayed on screen. Westerkamp's creation of abstract auditory space through the manipulation of representational recordings finds an analogue in the increasingly abstract space of the high school in the chaos of the shooting spree. The school is still recognizable as such, but a level of familiarity is replaced with the disorienting images of lost students and burning smoke-ridden hallways, just as the recognizable sounds in "Beneath the Forest Floor" take on a new dimension through their distortion.

Without differentiating between different soundscape treatments in different scenes, Kent Jones describes a general impression of the alternative use of sound in *Elephant*: "birdsong, scrambled voices, odd notes, wind, snatches of music. Sounds uttered and whispered, echoing down those long, linoleum-floored corridors under fluorescent lights..." (2003, 28). Jones relates the alienating quality of these kinds of soundscape treatments to the general qualities of alienation experienced by high school youth: "You walk these uninviting spaces as if your life depended on it, hyperaware of every echo,

each one a possible insult and a challenge to your identity. High school” (2003, 28). Jones does not mention that much of the soundscape he describes comes from Westerkamp’s pre-existing work. On one level, these sounds can be understood as part of the soundscape designed specifically for the film to engender this kind of response. But I argue that the origin of Westerkamp’s work from outside the world made for the film adds a layer to this estrangement that is best examined by way of thinking about the idea of the compilation soundtrack in film, and its implications on the use of Westerkamp’s work by Van Sant. The theme of blurring distinctions between inside and outside carries through to the use of pre-existing music as part of a film’s sound design: such music literally comes from elsewhere, with the potential for the audience to recognize it as such, creating a form of engagement that differs from a film which presents a more closed system of relationships.

A Different Model for the Compilation Soundtrack

The kinds of synchronization points that I’ve discussed above are markers of the points at which Westerkamp’s soundscape compositions intersect with more conventional applications of sound effects and music. Of course there is nothing unusual about sound effects being tweaked and timed to screen events, just as a composer would time music cues when writing a film’s score. The difference here is that these elements were not recorded and mixed for the film itself. Rather, Westerkamp’s work occupies the position of a compilation soundtrack: pre-existing music mapped onto the film. Yet Westerkamp’s pieces don’t sound like compilation soundtrack materials that would ordinarily provoke audience recognition of their origin outside the film. Even knowing

her work as well as I do, I still have trouble sorting out what comes from the original works and what has been created for the film, and I rely on the kind of close formal analysis I engage in here to help sort all that out. For this reason, soundscape composition poses some interesting problems when thinking through issues pertaining to the use of compilation materials within film sound design.

The way that these soundscape compositions are incorporated into the sound design ensures that they always hover between modes within the filmic text, and by extension they create an ambiguous positioning for the audience. This ambiguous positioning opens a space of concurrent distance and engagement between the film and its audience which, finally, creates a third category for the concept of personal noise: that of the audience member whose subjective experience of the film isn't necessarily tied to a recognition of the soundscapes as compilation source material yet who do, perhaps subconsciously, recognize the genesis of this material from a world outside the film. Recognizing that the soundscape compositions might have an origin outside the film text is the recognition of what Michael Riffatère would call an ungrammaticality: "Intertextual connection takes place when the reader's attention is triggered by...intertextual anomalies...which are traces left by the absent intertext, signs of an incompleteness to be completed elsewhere" (1980, 627). The kinds of sounds we hear in Westerkamp's work suggest an incompatibility with the film that act as a trace of the complete work that can only be found outside the film. I argue that awareness of such an ungrammaticality, without the concrete recognition of source that comes with a well-known piece of pre-existing music, engenders a kind of reflective listening in which we navigate between thinking about the origins of what we hear outside the text and how it is

used within the text. Let us consider what this kind of reflective listening means in more detail.

At the most basic level, the use of soundscape composition in these films makes for an interesting play on audiovisual synchronization that speaks to a long history of adding music to films by way of both scoring and compiling. In the so-called “silent era,” films were accompanied by sounds that varied according to the venue of exhibition. The conditions might change from a large symphony in a grand urban movie palace, perhaps playing music commissioned by the film’s director, to a lone pianist improvising while viewing the film for the very first time. There were also the beginnings of the compilation soundtrack: the use of recordings of existing music to play along with the films being screened. Amidst these variances there were also different approaches to handling audiovisual synchronization. A commissioned score might include key points of synchronization and perhaps even the emulation of sound effects to reflect events happening on the screen. Whereas a compilation film soundtrack might contain little in the way of concrete points of synchronization, offering more of a general mood to accompany what is seen on the image track. Some filmmakers, like Germaine Dulac, began designing films to work with existing pieces of music, a practice that continues to this day.

While it is quite rare for an entire film to be designed around an existing musical work, the use of existing music on a film’s soundtrack is ubiquitous. When treated with a mind towards audiovisual integration, a compilation soundtrack has the power to make the existing pieces of music seem as though they were made specifically for the film. Yet as Anahid Kassabian explores in her book *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in*

Contemporary Hollywood Film Music (2001), audience members who recognize an existing piece of music in a film can't help but bring very specific identifications to it, regardless of how integrated the music becomes. She suggests that this process of identification with a film's soundtrack is different from what we experience with a commissioned score that an audience hears for the first time in conjunction with the movie.

Kassabian identifies two kinds of identifications that film music can engender with an audience: *assimilative identifications* and *affiliative identifications*. The assimilation model is generally at work in films with a score of original music composed for the film (2001, 2). With no prior experience with the film's music, the film is free to create a set of identifications with the audience from scratch. The affiliation model is the domain of the compilation soundtrack containing pieces of music that spectators may recognize from contexts other than their situation within the film (3). Here identifications are developed, in part, by the intertextual relationships between the music's role in the film and its position outside of the film. A film can help create new identifications for a pre-existing piece of music, but it cannot undo whatever experience audience members might bring to the film when they hear music that they recognize.

For Kassabian, what is most important is that the filmmaker's intention for a piece of music is the realm of assimilation, which takes on another dimension when affiliation comes into play. With this distinction Kassabian is expressing the tension inherent in intertextual relationships, where a given film text cannot function as a closed system because it points outwards to the existence of other texts. Recognition of pre-existing music is usually simplified by the fact that the music falls into a very general category of

noise-making that involves a conventional understanding of what music is: whether Western classical music, colloquial pop, or avant-garde experimentation, the creation of music through the use of *instruments* creates a broad paradigm for understanding the difference between “music” and the broader category of “sound.” This begs the question: what happens when a film makes use of existing music that uses field recordings rather than instruments as the basis for composition, thereby resembling the traditional category of “sound effects” more closely than “music”? In other words, how does the distinction between assimilative identifications and affiliative identifications work in the realm of sound effects?

Take the example of any given door sound from Westerkamp’s “Doors of Perception”: it is instantly recognizable as a door sound, something we recognize from our experience outside the world of the film, and we bring affiliations to that sound based on that experience. This is a kind of affiliation that is central to all representational work, and is one facet of Katharine Norman’s concept of reflective listening as discussed in chapter one: we recognize a sound as having a source in the world, while also recognizing how it has been organized within the form of the composition (1996, 5). And yet, if we recognize that particular door sound as coming from Westerkamp’s piece, the kind of affiliation that Kassabian describes also comes into effect. This dual-affiliation makes the process of identification with sound effects more complex than with pieces of pre-existing music. The use of soundscape composition as part of a film’s sound design, then, adds layers of dimension to Kassabian’s models of identification.

One of the problems in adapting Kassabian’s model for a discussion of soundscape composition, or sound effects more generally, is that she doesn’t deal with auditory

representation of space as denoted by concepts like spatial signature and auditory extension. Kassabian's models are geared towards considering pre-existing music according to generic conventions associated with the score of the western classical art piece, or a particular recording of a pop song. This is a limitation, particularly in her discussion of the problems with differentiating between the inside and the outside of the diegesis. She mentions the classic example of *American Graffiti* several times (2001, 43, 57, 77, 92), not once paying any attention to the famous treatments of spatial signature that I discussed in the introduction to this dissertation. Instead, she talks about how the use of period rock music in the film helps establish the setting, fostering identifications based on period associations the audience brings to the film. Similarly, in a discussion of implied source music in the bar scene from *Star Wars* (1977), Kassabian mentions that the implication of source comes from assessing whether or not it's plausible that this *kind* of music would be played in this kind of bar (44). She doesn't address whether or not the music *sounds* like it's coming from inside the bar or not, and does not address any difference in the music's sonic qualities that suggest a difference between live musicians or a recorded source such as a jukebox.

For Kassabian, the status of music as either coming from an implied source in the story world or from somewhere outside has to do with increases in volume and a temporal continuity over cuts that indicate a temporal ellipsis on the image track. This model works well when addressing an example like "Für Elise" during Nathan's walk in *Elephant*: this is a well-known piece of music that is understood as non-diegetic because its volume level remains stable regardless of camera position, and because it carries over a cut that moves the visual perspective from outside to inside. Similarly, we assign it the

category of non-diegetic sound because it is not the *kind* of music we would expect to hear in the high-school environment (band practice notwithstanding), and certainly not out on the football field. Let us now consider what happens if we use this same logic to address the presence of “Doors of Perception” in this same scene.

I noted above how the visual cut from outside to inside coincides with a cut on the soundtrack that introduces Westerkamp’s piece only once inside the building. This offers the possibility to read the sound as diegetic. Yet when we point to the kinds of sounds we hear, it becomes clear that not everything fits with the space presented on screen. The situation is most interesting when we think of how the spatial signatures on the sounds from Westerkamp’s piece often match what we would expect from the high-school environment, while the sounds of trains, bells, and other elements pose a problem. The figure and camera movements are timed so that Nathan moves between areas of the building as “Doors of Perception” moves from one auditory space to another, again suggesting a diegetic origin for these sounds. But when noting the absence of sounds produced by Nathan himself, and those that surround him, the distance between the diegesis and Westerkamp’s work is revealed.

So what happens when the kinds of sounds we hear do not seem to fit the world in which the characters live, but their spatial signature does? If a listener does not recognize “Doors of Perception” as a pre-existing piece of music, Kassabian’s model comes up short in offering an account of how it is functioning within the film. By attending to both the *kind* of sounds heard and the *way* that they sound we can point to ungrammaticalities that indicate the presence of Westerkamp’s work as a point of intertextual intersection between the film and the pre-existing music. This attention to different dimensions of

sound opens up the potential to engender affiliations on the part of the audience rather than simply asking them to buy into the film's processes of assimilation.

I argue that the affiliative mode of listening can be extended through situations like Westerkamp's work in Van Sant's films by reading this mode through Katharine Norman's concept of reflective listening. As discussed at length in chapter one, Norman refers the kinds of soundscape composition at issue here as "real-world music": compositions that blend a documentary approach in their use of field recordings with the compositional sense found in more traditional models for music. In her words, "real-world music leaves a door ajar on the reality in which we are situated" while seeking a "journey which takes us away from our preconceptions," ultimately offering us a new appreciation of reality as a result (1996, 19). Reflective listening is a mode of identification in which understanding the source of a sound (i.e. a door, bird or running water) is positioned in the context of the use of this sound within the piece (i.e. the conflation of incompatible spaces in "Doors of Perception," or the dramatic panning or pitch manipulations evident in "Beneath the Forest Floor"). This negotiation on the part of the listener creates a constant interplay between reality and its creative manipulation. This negotiation is the substance of the reflective space opened up by real-world music, and the incorporation of this kind of music into a cinematic context adds further levels of negotiation which create an even greater potential for reflection. I contend that Norman's discussion of real-world music establishes a category for potential compilation soundtrack material that requires new ways of thinking about the relationship between film sound and musical composition, extending Kassabian's definition of the affiliative mode into new areas.

Spaces of Empathy

Kassabian is interested in the distinction between assimilation and affiliation because it separates the uses to which a filmmaker puts a piece of music, and the “uses” that an audience member brings to the music. As part of her critique of the way that film sound theorists address issues of music, she finds the labels *diegetic* and *non-diegetic* sound to be too simplistic when trying to account for the way that film music is always implicated within the narrative. She talks about the problematic assumption that “the more identifiably within the narrative the music is produced, the less liable it is to take its cues from the events of the narrative” (2001, 49). The basic point here is that if sound is thought to be diegetic, it is less likely to act as support for the narrative than if the music is understood to have been added by the filmmaker for just such purposes.

The assumption that diegetic sound is somehow less contrived than non-diegetic sound is the premise for Chion’s categories of *empathetic* and *anempathetic* sound as well: empathetic sound “can directly express its participation in the feeling of the scene, by taking on the scene’s rhythm, tone, and phrasing” (1994, 8); anempathetic sound exhibits a “conspicuous indifference to the situation, by progressing in a steady, undaunted, and ineluctable manner” (8). Chion notes that anempathetic sound is much more likely to be diegetic, just as sounds in the real world don’t usually follow the pacing or emotional tone of any given individual on the street. Indeed, the music I hear coming from someone’s car on the street isn’t likely to be in emotional synchronization with whatever is happening in my life at that moment, and as such it generally acts in an anempathetic manner. On the other hand, if I choose to put a specific piece of music on

to match my current mood, then I am manipulating my own soundscape to behave in an empathetic manner. Because sound outside the cinema tends to work in the way these examples illustrate, I map this real-world expectation onto film. But this isn't the way that film works, and Kassabian wants to call attention to the fact that *all* sound in a film is put there by the filmmaker and can be used to flesh out the narrative. I suggest that the problems of the diegetic/non-diegetic dichotomy are easily overcome if we simply adopt the attitude that anything we hear in a film is put there for a reason, plain and simple, regardless of how we theorists categorize it. Sounds that are meant to emanate from within the world in which the characters live are just as likely to be evocative as non-diegetic sound; the empathetic or anempathetic function of sound is no less the decision of the filmmakers for being positioned inside or outside the world in which the characters live.

These discussions from Chion and Kassabian provide a way of thinking through one of the paradoxes that cinematic representation makes possible: the connection between subjective character experience and the world outside the diegesis. Using diegetic sound to evoke subjective experience seems contrived within conventions of realism in a way that the addition of music or other non-diegetic sound to “empathize” with a character’s psychological state is not. Yet all sound in film is contrived. I contend that the soundscape compositions of Hildegard Westerkamp connect interior subjectivity to a plane outside the diegesis, and ultimately outside the filmic text itself. This is a highly reflexive strategy that does not conform to conventions that work to keep the representation of subjective experience grounded within the closed system of the film and compatible with realist ideals. Labeling the odd sounds of Westerkamp’s work as strictly

psychological or subjective limits our understanding of how this work functions in these films. I argue, rather, that while we can acknowledge the subjective dimension of Westerkamp's work, the reflexive strategies apparent in that work can be found at work in the films as well: the characters move towards the awareness of the constructed world in which they live, exposing the dual nature of the cinema and its relationship to the world outside.

Compilation soundtrack material can be understood as embodying one of the tenets of this dissertation: it is both separate from the film into which it has been incorporated, while also being inextricable from it. This is very much in line with a way that we can think about the process of empathy in human relationships. In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993), Mikhail Bakhtin addresses the concept of empathy, and the impossibility of a "pure empathy" in which one person's subjectivity is subsumed by another. He says: "After looking at ourselves through the eyes of another, we always return – in life – into ourselves again" (17). This return into ourselves is at the heart of what makes empathy possible, for we must be within ourselves in order to experience something as ourselves. If we were to lose ourselves completely into our experience of the other, then there would be no room left for the empathetic act of understanding someone else through our own experience – we would simply be the experience of the other. This is one aspect of his concept of *dialogic* relationships where the life of a society lies in the interactions between individuals, acknowledging that these interactions are only possible because they exist between separate entities.⁴

We can think through issues in the use of soundscape composition as compilation soundtrack material by thinking of its relationship as a process of empathy that can be

addressed by way of the various threads I am tying together here: Kassabian's concept of affiliative identifications for the audience; Chion's concept of empathetic relationships for the way the sound sits in relation to the image and narrative situation; Norman's concept of reflective listening; and by way of the idea of empathy in human relationships. A good metaphor for all these situations is that of the door that allows some transference between spaces while keeping them distinctly separate. The conflation of spaces made possible by an open door is analogous to the empathetic relationships between people, and the ecological relationship between a person and the environment: connected by way of separation. Indeed, *Last Days*, even more than *Elephant*, uses Westerkamp's work as a guide around separate spaces mediated by doorways, the setting in which the film explores the processes of empathy, and lack thereof, between Blake and his entourage.

Soundscadpe Composition in Last Days

From the opening moments of *Last Days* the film sets up the importance of environmental sound and its relationship to personal noise. We find Blake stumbling through a wooded area, mumbling a mostly incomprehensible babble blending with the sounds of birds, wind, and his footfalls. He arrives at a lake below a thundering waterfall and takes a dip, the sound of the rushing water drowning out most everything else. Cut to a nighttime campfire where he sings "Home on the Range," his voice audibly bouncing off the trees establishing a measure of engagement with the place. Cut to morning where he is on his way home. The setting is still rural, but Blake's proximity to civilization is revealed as we see a train rush by in the distance. Its sound is similar in character and volume level to the rushing water of the waterfall heard previously, a conflation of the

urban and the rural where elements of either can create a lo-fi environment that hinders personal noise. And so the film begins by positing fluctuating levels of engagement between Blake's personal noise and the spaces through which he moves, mediated by the sounds of the environment that surrounds him.

After the train passes, the first strains of Westerkamp's "Doors of Perception" are heard: mechanical sounds and motor sounds that could be plausible elements of an environment in which we know that loud markers of industry exist. More importantly, we hear the first sounds of doors opening and closing as he approaches his mansion, a space in which Blake's environmental disconnection will be formally explored through his movement through its various rooms. The door sounds here do not act as stand-ins for Foley or sound effects, but as foreshadows of the importance that doors will play in the development of the film. These sounds also raise initial questions about whether or not oddly placed sounds are meant to represent Blake's psychological interior, or if they are like non-diegetic music cues meant to act empathetically.

Though Westerkamp's work appears exclusively in conjunction with scenes involving Blake, I propose that we think of the use of Westerkamp's work as a reflexive strategy designed to call attention to the film as an artificial construction rather than simply providing markers of Blake's interior psychology. The sounds that come from Westerkamp's work can be understood as part of the system of the film that have come from outside that system, and I read the film's ending as an illustration of Blake becoming aware of levels of cinematic representation that move outside the diegesis, and outside the film altogether. This is an impossible situation if we buy into the narrative fiction without question, but not if we acknowledge the film's reflexive approach to

audiovisual ecology that revolves around the presence of Westerkamp's work. So it is important to address Westerkamp's work as part of the film's use of pre-existing music while also acknowledging how it engages with narrative themes and their formal exploration. I suggest that Blake's move is not towards an increasing interiorization leading to suicide, but rather an increasing awareness of the artificiality of the construction within which he is caught, both in narrative terms - his life situation as an over-represented public figure - and in reflexive terms that acknowledge his position within the fabrication of the film itself.

One of the reasons why the use of Westerkamp's work has been associated with Blake's subjective experience is because of certain moments in which "Doors of Perception" functions brilliantly well as a marker of interiority. The most obvious example of such a moment comes just after Blake (apparently) digs up a box in the back yard containing heroin and prepares himself a fix. I say "apparently" because the film skirts around the particulars, showing us simply a montage that reverses the usual function of such a sequence. Instead of showing us all the "action," the sequence shows us the in-between moments: we see Blake with a shovel but not digging; we see him walking into the kitchen with a box wrapped in a plastic bag, but not opening the box to reveal its contents; we hear Blake talking to himself about the need for a spoon, but this could just as easily be for the breakfast cereal he is preparing as for cooking up a shot. After this montage, however, sound steps in to suggest Blake's drug-addled mind: as he climbs the stairs to his bedroom we hear the sounds of a chiming clock offscreen.⁵ This could easily be a standard diegetic sound, for this kind of clock would certainly fit within this environment, and it bears the spatial signature of a location recording in a mildly

reverberant space rather than the dry quality of a studio fabrication. For these reasons the sound of the clock is not likely to be perceived as an ungrammaticality pointing to its origin in “Doors of Perception.” However, as Blake slows his gate and falls backwards onto the bed, the sounds of the clock begin to distort, multiplying in different pitches and displaying other obvious technological manipulations that give it a hallucinatory quality. These manipulations are at once signs of Westerkamp’s interest in exposing the technological mediation through which her compositional process is filtered, while also working perfectly to add a psychological dimension to the observational quality of the images.

The sounds of doors from Westerkamp’s piece are used here and there to punctuate images of Blake moving through doorways in the house, as when he bursts into a spare bedroom in a state of paranoia, shotgun in hand, where Asia (Asia Argento) and Scott (Scott Green) are sleeping. Here the sound of the door from Westerkamp’s piece behaves as a stand-in for sound effects, but it also creates an affiliation between the kinds of door sounds used in Westerkamp’s piece and the sounds of the mansion. This conflation becomes crucial when we begin to consider how the space of the mansion is represented through the film’s prolific use of compilation soundtrack materials played as on-the-air sound at various points throughout the film.

The film’s three most pronounced structural loops revolve around the presence of songs being played in the house: first is “On Bended Knee” (1994) by Boyz II Men, presented as a music video on a TV in the den; second is “Venus in Furs” (1967) by The Velvet Underground, presented as an LP played on the turntable in the living room; and the third is “Death to Birth” (2005) written by Michael Pitt and performed by him as

Blake on solo guitar and voice in the studio corner of the living room. Each of these songs is presented twice as the scenes in which they first appear are revisited from a different perspective as the film progresses. And each song bears a different relationship to the use of “Doors of Perception” throughout the film. I’ll address each of these instances in turn.

The first comes a short while after Blake’s collapse on the bed upstairs. He awakes and moves downstairs where he deals with two intrusions from the outside: first a phone call from his bandmates to see if he will make their upcoming tour, to which he responds simply by hanging up; then, a discussion with a representative from the Yellow Pages who mistakes Blake for the proprietor of a locomotive parts shop, a mistaken identity with which Blake plays along, emphasizing that his interactions with others tend to be based on who they want him to be rather than who he really is inside. Each of these sequences is marked by location recording in which the reverberant nature of the hardwood mansion is evident, an auditory strategy that continues as he then moves into the den and closes the door.

We cut to a shot of Asia walking down the stairs and stopping in the hallway as we hear the first strains of “On Bended Knee,” quiet as though coming from the other room. Asia walks over to the den and opens the door. Blake is passed out on the other side, and falls over as the door opens, blocking the entryway. The volume of “On Bended Knee” is raised in conjunction with the door opening, suggesting its source from inside the room. We cut to Asia walking back upstairs, only to be interrupted by another doorbell. She calls Scott down to go and answer it, and he finds the Friberg twins (Adam and Andy Friberg) here to provide information about the Church of Jesus Christ and the Latter Day

Saints. Scott invites them in, and their proceeding discussion is intercut with shots of Blake in the den, shots that are soon revealed to be from a prior point in the narrative when Blake passes out against the door where Asia later finds him.

In these shots of Blake in the den, he turns on the TV and finds a Boys II Men video of “On Bended Knee.”⁶ We cut to the Fribergs discussing their ability to communicate directly with God, and then cut back to Blake. Along with this cut back to Blake comes the sudden emergence of an excerpt from “Doors of Perception” consisting of a steady drone of processed bell and choir recordings punctuated with the sounds of doors and woody thumping with a similar timbral quality to the location sounds we’ve heard throughout the house. The refrain re-iterates, “Can’t somebody tell me how to get things back the way they used to be,” a clear comment on the sadness of Blake’s current situation. While we hear these lyrics, Blake stoops forward and drops to his knees in a protracted moment of self-imposed slow-motion, the Boys II Men song fading out and leaving only the ethereal qualities of Westerkamp’s piece along with some light ambience from location recording. Eventually Blake ends up on all fours, his fist hitting the floor with a sound that could easily have come from “Doors of Perception,” and crawls towards the door. As Blake crawls, the Boys II Men track returns, while the sounds of doors and creaking wood from Westerkamp’s piece continue to emphasize the sound of the door against which he finally passes out.

We are then made aware that this sequence is being presented out of chronological order as Asia suddenly opens the door and finds Blake in front of it, an event that was first presented prior to the arrival of the Fribergs. The sound of the door opening is timed with a major shift in the tone of Westerkamp’s piece featuring a lower register drone

punctuated by distant fog horns and processed bird calls, closer to the aesthetic of “Beneath the Forest Floor” than anything else heard in “Doors of Perception.” Here Van Sant and Leslie Shatz adopt Westerkamp’s own strategy: the sound of a door opening recorded for the film provides a formal opening for a new soundscape to emerge, just as Westerkamp’s own shifts in soundscape are mediated by the sounds of doors opening and closing. Timing this shift in “Doors of Perception” to the sound of a door from the film suggests that the new soundscape of foghorns and birds is meant to reflect a vaster level of extension, the open door moving the soundtrack beyond the space of the den. However, the kinds of sounds we hear are not commensurate with the space we see on screen, and a cut to the reverse angle from outside the den reveals no corresponding cut on the soundtrack to suggest its grounding in the diegesis. The open door has opened us up to a register of the soundtrack that simultaneously suggests Blake’s altered state of consciousness and the artificiality of the film’s constructed diegesis. Asia then steps over Blake to enter the room, props him up against the wall, and exits, closing the door behind her. Cutting back into the room, the excerpt from “Doors of Perception” is gone and the camera lingers on the TV as the rest of the Boys II Men song plays out.

Like the Beethoven piece accompanying Nathan’s walk in *Elephant*, the sound of the Boys II Men song is presented in its ideal state as a studio recording, not bearing what Chion would call the “materializing sound indices” that ground it within the space represented on screen (1994, 114), in this case the markers of its supposed emanation from the small speakers of the TV set or the spatial signature of the room in which it is being played. And like the Nathan’s walk sequence, “Doors of Perception” provides the bulk of the “environmental” sound heard in conjunction with the music track, with one

important difference: we can hear Blake's personal noise throughout as he shuffles across the floor and leans up against the wall, a marker of a level of engagement with place that belies his semi-conscious state.

In fact, the excerpt from Westerkamp's piece used here overlaps with the excerpt used in the sequence of Nathan's walk in *Elephant*, creating the possibility for those that don't know Westerkamp's work to nevertheless recognize it from the previous film. And the plausibility of the sounds of choir and bells in this environment is greatly reduced compared with their plausibility in the high school environment of *Elephant*, while the sounds of the doors and woody reverberations are more in keeping with Blake's mansion than with anything at the school. Because it is heard with "On Bended Knee," our tendency would be to think of Westerkamp's piece as "sound effects" rather than "music," again a rare instance of two pieces of pre-existing music being heard at the same time in a film. And this opens up a similar tension to that embodied by the presence of "Doors of Perception": sounds that seem like they could be part of the environment are revealed not to be, where the music from the TV sounds like it comes from outside the diegesis while being grounded within by way of the visible source of the sound.

This is a complex sequence. The "interaction" between Blake and Asia is a classic example of how people relate to Blake in the film: the doors of communication are blocked, making empathy almost impossible. The non-linear cross-cutting, combined with the structural loop, serves the distancing and disjunctive experience of time associated with Blake's subjectivity, while also emphasizing the distance between characters. But the non-linear strategies also build important thematic associations between different elements of the sequence. We hear Boys II Men singing about praying

“on bended knee” for a way back to the past, intercut with the Fribergs relating a story about how the founder of their religion came to find Christ, and the impact this event has on their present practice of prayer. Both threads deal with spiritual issues and questions of faith, supported by the sounds of bells and choir in “Doors of Perception” that, as I will discuss later, come back in the final shot of Blake alive. Significantly, “On Bended Knee” was a number one hit in the US in 1994, the year that Kurt Cobain died. As such the song also foreshadows Blake’s death when read as an intertextual marker of Cobain’s real-life story, adding another layer of complexity to the identifications this song engenders for the audience of the film. And the studio quality presentation of the song here, abstracted from the spatial signature of the den, highlights how different this style of pop music is from the “dirtier” sounds of the grunge that Cobain popularized and which Blake is associated with in the film. This song literally comes from a different world of popular representation than Cobain’s grunge scene, and yet Cobain was reluctantly but inevitably moving towards this glossy world with his increasing popularity, another factor in the disillusionment we can attribute to both Cobain and Blake.

The interaction between location recording, the Boys II Men song and the Westerkamp piece reflect the complex processes of distance and connection that Blake experiences in his surroundings. He’s there, but he’s not there. While the use of Westerkamp’s piece helps blur the boundaries between the external diegetic world and the subjective experience of those who live within it, I think these auditory treatments are also part of a reflexive strategy designed to emphasize the cinema’s dual nature. The presence of “Doors of Perception” not only opens us up to Blake’s perception, but also

suggests Blake opening up his own perception to become aware of the cinematic representation of space in which he lives. The idea of speaking to God who, according to Christian doctrine, is an entity outside the world in which we live, is equated with Blake's emerging engagement with planes of the soundscape that are neither part of his external world nor his subjective experience of it. This is why it is important that we continue to hear the sound of Blake's physical presence interacting with the space, drawing textural relationships with the sounds we hear from Westerkamp's piece. This connection grounds Blake in the physical space while pointing to a plane not only outside the diegesis, but outside the film text itself. The presentation of "On Bended Knee" serves a similar function as its visible grounding within the space is belied by the polished sound indicating a source from beyond. It is as though the representation of the televised music here reflects the ability of recording technology to bring us to another plane of experience, a schizophonic potential that threatens to disrupt the here and now for the then and there.

The complex relationships between "Doors of Perception," "On Bended Knee," and the space we see on screen stands in stark contrast to another of the film's song-based set-pieces, this time revolving around a party scene in which Asia, Luke, Nicole and Scott stumble intoxicated into the house one evening and cue up a Velvet Underground record to "Venus in Furs" on the living room stereo. Westerkamp's piece is not present here, and there is no ambiguity about the sources of the sounds we hear: the entire scene is presented in direct sound, the song partially garbled by the spatial signature of the living room, and by Scott singing along with the recorded voice of Lou Reed. In the middle of the song, Scott gets up and walks out of the room into the kitchen through the open

hallway that separates the two, the camera panning to follow but remaining fixed within the boundaries of the living room walls. We see Scott from the back talking to someone in the kitchen who we later learn is Blake. Then Scott returns to his spot in the living room and resumes singing along. The scene ends just after the lyric “on bended knee,” drawing a parallel between this song and the Boys II Men track heard earlier.

Later in the film we find Blake making macaroni in the kitchen. “Venus in Furs” begins to play offscreen, bearing the spatial signature one would expect from a song played on the stereo in another room, indicating that we have looped back to a previous point in the narrative. This time we stay in the kitchen with Blake until Scott enters, and here we learn that their conversation consisted of Scott’s attempt to borrow some cash for apples, a jet heater, and a ticket to Utah. When the conversation ends we cut to a shot from the living room as Scott re-enters, the sound of the music cutting to a much louder perspective in conjunction, emphasizing the distance between the living room and the kitchen.

The simple treatment of the sound in these sequences works well to establish the spatial qualities of the living room and kitchen, as well as emphasizing their separation from each other. Hearing “Venus in Furs” from the kitchen is an example of how two spaces can meld while remaining distant, a function of an open doorway rather than a closed one. While highly realist in convention, this is also a metaphorical use of sound to underscore the communication between Blake and Scott: each has only partial access to the other, an ultimately superficial relationship where Scott is positioned essentially as a mooch and not a real friend with whom a greater degree of spatial conflation – empathy –

would be possible. Blake is essentially alone in the house, even as he is surrounded by people he knows.

Aside from the spatial qualities of the song's presentation, the choice of "Venus in Furs" also involves complex affiliations both within the narrative and by audience members listening to the film. The Velvet Underground, of course, is iconic of a particular scene in the late '60s wrapped up in the emergence of new forms of rock music and social rebellion, as well as the hype surrounding Andy Warhol's factory, notorious for being simultaneously subversive and superficial. As such the band acted as a major influence on the grunge scene in the 90s for which Kurt Cobain stood as reluctant representative. Scott's identification with the song by singing along indicates both an engagement with the music while illustrating the impossibility of really being part of a scene long gone. The connection between Lou Reed singing "on bended knee" and the Boys II Men song of that name can be read through the idea of longing for the past, of getting things "back the way they used to be." But that's an impossibility, and Blake's distance from this schizophrenic engagement with the past is telling: he is too young to have been part of the original scene, nor is he a part of its attempted recapture by Scott and his posse. And so hearing this song as a record played within a listening space becomes loaded in emphasizing its status as recorded object as opposed to the studio perfection of the Boys II Men track with its absence of materializing sound indices. Blake might live on through the recordings he has made throughout his career, but the interactions this engenders with his audience run the risk of being as empty as the one we witness here between Scott and The Velvet Underground.

Blake's distance from the people around him is made most clear immediately following the first iteration of the "Venus in Furs" scene. Just after we hear the lyric "on bended knee," we cut to a shot of Blake seated at a drum kit listening to Luke discuss a song he is working on. Luke says he's having trouble with the bridge, and would like Blake's creative input. Scott enters and interrupts, whispering in Luke's ear: "Why don't you leave him the fuck alone and come upstairs with me?" Luke complies, apologizing to Blake for talking his ear off. We cut to a shot of Scott and Luke on the stairwell as the former tries to convince the latter that Blake doesn't really want to have anything to do with them. As this conversation takes place, we hear Blake begin to sing and play guitar offscreen, performing "Death to Birth," again presented in a realist fashion that emphasizes the sound of the space that separates the music room from the stairwell. We follow Luke and Scott as they go up to the bedroom and remove their clothes, Luke stating that he doesn't believe Scott's claim that Blake isn't really their friend. And so we find a desire on Luke's part to engage meaningfully with Blake, while Scott's selfish sexual interests in Luke stand in the way. All the while Blake is heard singing alone downstairs, prevented from the one kind of communication he might actually enjoy: a discussion about music to which he is clearly still committed.

The second iteration of "Death to Birth" comes just after the second iteration of "Venus in Furs." This time we enter the conversation between Luke and Blake earlier, and learn that the song Luke wants help with was inspired by a contradictory situation in which the best sex Luke ever had was with a girl he didn't want to follow up with afterwards. In giving us this back-story, Luke is demonstrating his own problems of communication in the world, problems that lead him to try and express the feeling of

isolation through song, ultimately seeking to communicate meaningfully with Blake in the process. After Scott enters and takes Luke out of the room, this time we stay with Blake as he picks up his guitar and performs “Death to Birth” in its entirety, the refrain “It’s a long, lonely journey from death to birth” emphasizing his position in the world while foreshadowing his death. Again presented in direct sound with its attendant spatial signature, the song projects out into the space where we know from the earlier iteration that Luke and Scott can hear it as they go upstairs. Again, the treatment of sound here emphasizes the fact that Blake is there, in the house, his music interacting concretely with the space, while those who share the house with him choose not to interact with him. It is significant that Scott would rather interact with a recording of a band long gone than with Blake performing live right in front of him, and this could be interpreted as one of the dangers of schizophrenic experience in Schafer’s original sense of the term: technologies of recording and transmission disrupt our sense of engagement with the here and now, and Blake suffers from this as a recording artist whose representation has become separate from his real identity.

In these scenes Blake is grounded within the space of the house, underscored by the spatial signatures on his personal noise, but is alienated from those who share this space, preventing any moment of communicative lucidity he might have between his spells of incoherence underscored by Westerkamp’s piece. This alienation fuels an increasing awareness of the world that lies outside this space, ultimately pointing him towards the surface of the film’s artificial construction by way of Westerkamp’s piece.

“Doors of Perception” returns near the end of the film during a sequence in which Blake is shown wandering along the driveway of his estate, approaching and then

entering the greenhouse in which he will be found dead the next morning. In addition to the sound of his own footsteps and unintelligible mumbling, for the duration of this sequence we also hear an unaltered section of “Doors of Perception” involving trickling water, chimes, doors banging, orchestral music playing, someone whistling, and reverberant footfalls on a hard interior surface.⁷ Most of what is heard here seems incongruous with the image of Blake walking in the environment pictured on screen, and thus the bulk of these sounds appear to be coming from somewhere else. Yet just before entering the greenhouse he suddenly turns to look over his shoulder as though reacting to something heard from behind. This is a moment where the sounds of Westerkamp’s piece might be said to enter the realm of Blake’s awareness for the first time, indicating a point of connection between his individuality and the larger context of the environment in which he is moving. So we can understand this moment as a shift between the closed and open models of environmental engagement that Westerkamp identifies above. In choosing to read Blake’s reactions this way, we can come closer to accessing the significance of his death shortly thereafter.

It is of great importance that Blake’s first reaction occurs just after we hear an orchestra begin a phrase that is completed by a lone whistler. In fact, he turns to look behind him just after the first note of the whistler’s phrase has sounded, as though it were this whistler that has caught his attention amidst a sea of floating noises. The shift from orchestra to lone whistler is a move from macrocosm to microcosm, a call to shift from the ether to the earth. Like the whistler’s engagement with the orchestra, Blake has adjusted his attention to become aware of his own larger environment. This adjustment reflects an essential aesthetic and thematic model upon which these films are based, and

which is also inherent to Westerkamp's work: the constant negotiation between the very small and the very large, between the personal and the larger context in which the individual exists.

After his reaction to something that ultimately remains unseen, the shot continues with a series of actions that gain significance when considered in relation to the sounds we hear from Westerkamp's piece: Blake approaches the greenhouse, reaches for the doorknob, turns the handle, opens the door, and enters the room. Then we cut to a shot of Blake sitting down, and then looking around until suddenly locking onto something we don't see, finally holding that position until the shot ends.

As he turns the handle, opens the door, and moves into the greenhouse, we hear an equivalent series of sounds appropriately synchronized: a door latch being turned, some related creaking and banging, and a subsequent shift in ambient sound that reflects a move from one space to the next. In fact, most of the sounds we hear as Blake moves from outside to inside are taken from "Doors of Perception" (with just a couple of additions provided by Leslie Shatz). The precise point of synchronization between the image of Blake opening the door and the equivalent sounds from Westerkamp's piece suggests without a doubt that this soundscape excerpt has been positioned in such a way that Blake's move into the greenhouse becomes the point at which Westerkamp's piece makes contact with the physical plane of Blake's environment. His prior reaction to the unseen whistler can therefore be understood as a harbinger of the inevitable concretization of "Doors of Perception" within the physical environment that surrounds him. The sound of the door becomes a symbol of Blake's own shift in perception.

Finally he sits down, staring into a void while appearing to be listening intently to the chorus of church bells that are now audible in Westerkamp's piece. Again it is no coincidence that he becomes transfixed at precisely the moment that the bells appear on the soundtrack, indicating once again that his actions throughout this shot have been synchronized to the excerpt from "Doors of Perception." The bells seem at once distant and impossibly close, suggesting a merge between different planes of experience, allowing Blake to make contact with an environment that has remained otherwise elusive. At long last he now seems engaged with an impossible soundscape that is, nevertheless, the one in which he has been living: that of the film itself rather than its constructed diegesis. This soundscape has been partly grounded within his diegetic world, partly hovering somewhere outside the diegesis, and partly outside the film altogether. His engagement with this soundscape thus places him in a tenuous relationship to the world, neither quite here nor there. After we cut away from this shot he will leave the diegetic world by violent means, never having managed to exist in full engagement within it. The death by shotgun could have been by his own hand, or the result of foul play - a conspiracy theory that the film nods towards in a shot that shows a mysterious person in red with Blake in the greenhouse as his friends abandon the premises just before his death. Either way, Blake's death can be read as the result of his inability to connect with those around him, an ecological failure to engage with his social environment.

A short while later Blake is shown one last time. In the film's climactic shot - significantly the only superimposition found in either *Elephant* or *Last Days* - his transparent naked body is seen rising from his corpse. The shot involves a complex mise-en-scène in which the camera peers through the glass door at the front of the greenhouse,

across Blake's dead body, with another French door at the back. In the foreground the groundskeeper stands just outside the door, blocking a portion of the front door's window grid and leaving the shape of a cross in what remains. The grid of the windowpanes on the back door provides the illusion of a ladder rising from the floor to a point beyond the top of the frame. As Blake rises from his corpse, he latches onto the ladder-like grid and proceeds to climb up it and out of the frame, viewed across the shape of the cross in the foreground. The religious symbolism is not subtle, but not at all forced given the film's recurring themes of spirituality discussed throughout my analysis here.

In this shot Blake is at once transcendent and grounded, a fact reflected by his existence on two planes of the film's surface being presented as one, their separation distinguishable only due to his ghostly translucence while rising from the body on the floor. Interestingly, the ghostliness of this translucence is offset by the reflective surface of the window through which we are seeing him; his transparency could just as easily be the result of the play of reflections off the glass as it could be an indicator of the supernatural. The presence of a door once again acts as a mediator between spaces, this time between the world of the living and the world of the dead, perhaps the world of the diegesis and the world that lies outside. Blake's translucence mediated by the reflective door suggests Westerkamp's auditory equivalent: sounds that merge with Van Sant's environments, at once seeming a part of these worlds while remaining quite distinct. It is as though Westerkamp's sounds are housed within the spaces we see on screen, while continually offering a ladder out of the frame to lands that lie beyond. This final shot of Blake thus presents a visual analogy for what I have described as the concretization of Westerkamp's work within this environment: two distinct planes have been positioned in

the same space forging a connection between two worlds that seem simultaneously incongruous and at peace with one another. Our experience of the journey to this moment is, among other things, a soundwalk through shifting planes of attention guided by Hildegard Westerkamp. Her soundscape compositions help us enact the changing awareness necessary to enabling an engagement with these films, a process of engagement that has been well respected by Van Sant and Shatz in their appropriation of her work here.

Finally, we know that Blake's presence will live on through his music, the projection of his voice out into space that will resonate schizophonicly through the lives of those that listen to his recordings. In death he shifts to that plane occupied by the compilation soundtrack in film: a ghostly presence from another time and space which finds its way into the world of the film, operating according to principles of empathy where it connects with the world while remaining autonomous. I read Blake's possible engagement with Westerkamp's work not as a diegetic presence, but as Blake's awareness of the artificiality of the construction in which he has been living: the world of self-representation through celebrity, and the world of the cinematic representation embodied by the totality of the film itself. This is not to suggest that he suddenly becomes aware of Van Sant behind the camera, but rather that his consciousness opens up to what lies outside the world that surrounds him, a metaphor for a state of film reception in which the audience is aware of the mediated nature of the world they experience on screen rather than continually engaging in a state of suspended disbelief. This awareness is the goal of reflective listening in soundscape composition, and here it becomes a function of

reflective audioviewing when we consider how soundscape composition functions within the audiovisual ecology of these films.

Conclusion

Both *Elephant* and *Last Days* end in tragedy, the alienation of the characters never fully resolved within the environments they inhabit. It is the space of this uneasy relationship between person and place that these films explore, and Westerkamp's soundscape compositions are a major part of how this space is developed. These soundscape compositions sit uneasily within their new contexts, at once seemingly at home while remaining strange. Part of this strangeness comes from the categories and qualities of the sounds themselves; on this level, these sounds could have been designed by Leslie Shatz specifically for the film, and nobody would hear the difference. Yet another part of the uneasy relationship between these pieces and their new homes within these films is a direct result of Westerkamp's compositional strategies; these pieces deliberately invoke the shifting relationships that people have with respect to the soundscapes in which they live and are designed as explorations of the various levels of mediation through which the interaction of person and place takes shape. Like the songs from Boys II Men and The Velvet Underground whose lyrics about being "on bended knee" are pertinent to the narrative, something of Westerkamp's message shines through these films by way of the use of "Doors of Perception." The difference between Westerkamp's work and a pertinent pop song is that people are not likely to recognize the presence of her work as having compositional form designed outside the context of the film. Yet this form is there, and so it comes through subliminally. As such, her compositions engender a kind

of identification process that cannot be so easily traced as those belonging to more concretely identifiable compilation soundtrack material.

The position of Westerkamp's work within these films is a formal reflection of the position in which the characters exist with respect to their diegetic environments. The pieces chart a process of emerging interaction between person and place, between personal noise and its spatial signature. The narrative lines of these films do the same, their characters caught in a relationship to their environment that fluctuates between alienation and engagement, never becoming fully resolved. The presence of Westerkamp's soundscape compositions, mapped by Van Sant and Shatz onto the spaces that the film represents, is a unique approach to the merging of form and content, and throws the doors wide open for future filmmakers to explore the particularities of soundscape composition as film sound design to even greater effect.

It may well be that my treatment of Westerkamp's work in the films of Gus Van Sant is indicative of my own deep engagement with these compositions, an example of the affiliative process of identification posited by Anahid Kassabian that I have tried to build upon here. It may be that without knowing Westerkamp's work, response to its use in the films might not carry the weight of her connection to acoustic ecology, interpreting her sounds as interesting sound design elements that help flesh out the themes of alienation in these films. However, my hope for this chapter is that by offering some of the historical context and artistic intentions behind Westerkamp's work, and of soundscape composition in general, people can respond to these films differently, to think of them in terms of environmental engagement and the process of reflective listening. At the very least, thinking about how Westerkamp's use of field recordings intersects with questions

about cinematic representation of auditory space can yield a higher attention to film sound design where questions about the significance of things like spatial signature can be understood as having profound narrative importance.

In the end, these are films about friendship: *Elephant* is about the alienating conditions of high school and the relationships it engenders; *Last Days* is about Blake's alienation from the "friends" that surround him and who may have had a hand in his death. The use of doorways as mediators in Westerkamp's "Doors of Perception," and its mapping onto the spaces of Van Sant's films, can act as a useful metaphor for the myriad other ways in which these films address the idea of overlapping spaces mediated by the instrument of their separation. Tracking identifications in *Elephant* and *Last Days* involves a process of soundwalking through each film, gaining access to the emotional and psychological spaces it explores through attention to the way that the sound engages with, while remaining distanced from, the spaces presented on screen. Finally, the use of soundscape composition as part of the sound design of these films creates the opportunity for the audience to negotiate the spaces between their points of audiovisual synchronization and engage with each film in a way that would be otherwise impossible. It is this opportunity that allows for access to the deeper levels of each film's engagement with its subject matter without recourse to complex character psychology or overt cause/effect narrative structure. It is the audiovisual space of these films that ultimately positions the audience in the same ambiguous position as the characters within their world, a position from which I suggest a different form of identification between film and audience can be born.

Notes

¹ The “trilogy” refers to *Gerry*, *Elephant*, and *Last Days*. Chang was writing before the release of *Paranoid Park*, which some believe now constitutes the final entry in a quadrilogy. Yet I have also seen the word “trilogy” used to describe *Elephant*, *Last Days*, and *Paranoid Park*, leaving *Gerry* out of the equation. There are important relationships between all four of these films, but my discussion focuses on *Elephant* and *Last Days* because only these two feature the work of Hildegard Westerkamp.

² The shot beginning with the interior of the school begins at 11:12 on the R1 DVD release, and ends with the “Nathan and Carrie” title card at 14:05. The excerpt of “Türen der Wahrnehmung (Doors of Perception)” that runs for the duration of this shot begins at approximately 15:40 on its original CD release: *Radius #4: Transmissions From Broadcast Artists*. Canada: What Next (WN 0019) 1995. This version was also re-issued on the soundtrack album for *Last Days: Last Days Soundtrack: A Tribute to Mr. K*, Japan: Avex Records (AVCF-22746) 2006.

³ This shot begins at 1:08:44 and ends with the “Benny” title card at 1:10:03. The excerpt of “Beneath the Forest Floor” heard here begins at 7:51 on its CD release: Hildegard Westerkamp. *Transformations*. Montreal: empreintes DIGITALes (IMED 9631) 1996.

⁴ The concept of *dialogism* is developed extensively in the essays that comprise Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) and *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics* (1984).

⁵ This shot begins at 13:52 in the R1 DVD release of the film. The excerpt from “Doors of Perception” that begins here starts at 5:50 in its CD release.

⁶ This sequence begins with Scott answering the door at 27:46 on the R1 DVD release. Blake turns on the TV at 29:31, followed by a cut to the Friberg twins, and then back to Blake at 30:30 at which point the sound of “Doors of Perception” cuts in with the location sound and the Boys II Men track. The excerpt from “Doors of Perception” heard here begins at 14:10 in the CD release. As Blake begins his crawl towards the door at 31:25 in the film, a lengthy cross-fade to another section of “Doors of Perception” begins, bringing in an excerpt that begins at 19:00 in the CD release layered with the previous excerpt. As Asia opens the door at 32:16 in the film, the first segment of “Doors of Perception” ends and the second continues until Asia leaves the room and closes the door.

⁷ This excerpt from “Doors of Perception” begins at 9:06 on the CD release.

Chapter Six

Silence in the City: Urban (Dis)Engagement in the Films of Sogo Ishii

The divide between sound and image in the cinema is nowhere clearer than when the sound film makes use of absolute silence through the absence of recorded sound. Silence was commonplace in the early days of synchronized sound when filmmakers were still deciding what kinds of sounds they would pair with images, and why. But since the use of environmental ambience became commonplace after WWII, it is now very rare to hear a complete dropout on the soundtrack. This rarity is due, in part, to the fact that there is no such thing as absolute silence in the real world. As John Cage famously reported, even when confined to one of the quietest possible environments on earth – an anechoic chamber – one becomes aware of the sounds of one’s own body, internal noise that not even the deaf can escape (1991). Conventions of realism thus dictate that a complete absence of recorded sound on a film’s soundtrack is a disruption that exposes the artifice of the medium. Because of this, however, moments of silence can be used to powerful effect, as in the films of Japanese filmmaker Sogo Ishii.

This chapter will trace Sogo Ishii’s use of dramatic fluctuations in auditory extension, epitomized by moments of absolute silence, as an aesthetic device that is consistently tied to themes of urban anxiety and alienation. The stylistic use of silence is a product of the synchronized sound film, and as such it embodies one of the key tensions upon which this dissertation is founded: the distinct nature of the sound and image tracks that often belies their powerful connection. Silence can act as powerful punctuation, but it is also highly reflexive in pointing to the blank space that is filled in by the filmmakers,

like a blank set waiting to be decorated. In the context of Japanese cinema, the aesthetic use of silence also has a connection to the Buddhist concept of *mu*: an empty space that nevertheless suggests endless possibility, significant only in relation to the form that surrounds it. The idea of *mu* as an aesthetic principle will aid my discussion of how silence operates in Ishii's work in which themes of urban alienation speak to universal issues raised by modern cities throughout the Western world, as well as the specifics of Japanese culture in the decades following World War II.

The line between sound and image exposed by Ishii's use of silence often serves to reveal the divide between tradition and modernity in Japanese culture, a subject that Ishii's films regularly explore. Ishii's use of silence also exposes the line between interior experience and the external world that his characters must acknowledge if they are to engage more fully with the worlds in which they live. Like the other films I have discussed in this dissertation, the films of Sogo Ishii use strategies of audiovisual reflexivity in order to call attention to the mediated nature of the worlds they represent, and in so doing they present characters who are also becoming aware of the mediation between their internal experience and the external world. Ultimately I argue that silence in the films of Sogo Ishii has evolved from a marker of schizophonic rupture to a sign of deep interiority that can heighten one's engagement within urban space. As such, these films are models of a reflexive approach to audiovisual synchronization that highlights the positive potential of urban experience.

To guide my analysis I will draw on the discourse of the cinematic city and its intersection with acoustic ecology, with a particular emphasis on theories of engagement between pedestrians and the built environment. I argue that we can understand Sogo

Ishii's characters as evolving across the filmmaker's career, demonstrating increasing levels of engagement with urban space through the navigation of the line that separates interior experience and external reality. This chapter ends where we began: with a consideration of issues in modern urban space, re-cast here for the chaos of the city streets rather than their modernist interiors. I will be extending key concepts that have arisen in previous chapters: the psychogeography of urban space that framed my discussion of Tati's *Play Time*; unnatural plays on auditory extension that defined the space of the Zone in Tarkovsky's *Stalker*; questions about the technologically mediated relationship between humans and the wilderness that informed my analysis of Mettler's *Picture of Light*; and issues pertaining to the concept of soundwalking that were important to my discussion of the work of Hildegard Westerkamp in the films of Gus Van Sant. All of these issues come into play in the work of Sogo Ishii, and they all revolve around his use of silence. In the discussions that follow I will tie the key threads in the discourse of the cinematic city together, and examine how these play out in Ishii's work with a particular emphasis on the films *Isolation of I in 880,000* (1977), *Angel Dust* (1994), *Electric Dragon 80,000 V* (2000), and *Mirrored Mind* (2005).

Stylistic Considerations

Writing for the online journal *Midnight Eye*, Japanese film specialist Tom Mes suggests that Sogo Ishii has been “the most important Japanese filmmaker of the last three decades” (2007, par. 1). However, Ishii's work remains underappreciated both at home and abroad with very little critical writing available in any language. One of the key members of the 1970s post-new wave generation of Japanese filmmakers, Ishii was a

pioneering university-based 8mm filmmaker, and the one most closely connected to the punk music scene in Japan. He is arguably the most significant film director to document musical performers and performances in Japan (i.e. *1/2 Mensch*, 1986, on the German “noise band” Einstürzende Neubauten) and one of the foremost punk film aestheticians in the world (i.e. *Panic in High School*, 1976; *Burst City*, 1982). He was also a pioneering director of 1980s action (*Shuffle*, 1981) and comedy (*Crazy Family*, 1984). Following a 10 year hiatus from feature filmmaking (during which time he produced a handful of short films alongside commercial work and music videos), he returned in the mid-1990s with a series of films that marked a significant aesthetic and thematic shift away from the visceral chaos of his punk sensibility to a more measured, contemplative, and metaphysical approach. In his three 1990s feature-films, *Angel Dust* (1994), *August in the Water* (1995) and *Labyrinth of Dreams* (1997), he also turned away from his previous male-centered narratives to stories driven by central female characters. And in the last ten years his films *Electric Dragon 80,000 V* (2000), *Gojoe* (2001), *Dead End Run* (2003), and *Mirrored Mind* (2005) have demonstrated a remarkable blend of the various styles he has employed in the past, pushing these genres into increasingly new territories.

Tom Mes describes Ishii’s career as “an ongoing evolution rather than a clearly delineated body of work,” yet one that has nevertheless resulted in “an oeuvre of great cohesion” (2007, par. 2). To some, his marked stylistic shifts might suggest an uneven aesthetic sensibility. His earliest work in the 1970s bears the amateur markers of the 8mm film movement in Japan, full of shaky hand-held cinematography, in-camera editing complete with technical anomalies, and rough location sound recording. This early style developed into a well-formed punk aesthetic that found its apex in *Burst City*.

This film features incredible volleys of visceral camera movement and frenetic montage that turn a post-apocalyptic landscape into an abstract world of light, the thick grain of the 16mm blow-up to 35 as much a political statement as the distortion on the instruments of the punk bands that populate its diegesis. Peter Rist argues that the kind of visceral camera movement that permeates Ishii's early work, tied to a recurring chase motif, has had a major influence on the current trend of chase films in Hollywood (2010, 35). While moments reminiscent of the early Ishii recur in his later films, 21st Century films like *Gojoe* are as technically polished as any big budget studio films produced in Japan. And his latest film, *Mirrored Mind*, is comprised of predominantly static long-take digital photography of spaces often silent or gently accompanied by sparse Gamelan music. Indeed, even the most attuned critic would have trouble identifying films from his early period with his more recent work. Yet in the midst of Ishii's ongoing evolution there has been a remarkable thematic consistency across his work, the vast majority of which revolves around struggles to find coherence within the increasingly urban space of modern Japan. And there has been at least one stylistic consistency that recurs throughout the films: the exploration of pockets of silence within the dense and noisy metropolis. The remainder of this chapter will flesh out the stylistic specifics of Sogo Ishii's use of silence across his varied career, tying them to narrative themes of alienation that are at once universal to the discourse of urban space and particular to the position of Tokyo as a post-WWII metropolis.

The Ancient and the Modern: Electric Dragon 80,000 V

Sogo Ishii's film *Electric Dragon 80,000 V* is the clearest amalgam of all of his stylistic tendencies over the years, making for an extremely dense and sometimes erratic formal re-visitation of his earlier work. It is also arguably the clearest expression of the main theme that I am going to locate in his work: that of a character's struggle to find balance within the metropolis of Tokyo, itself a dense and often erratic terrain. Made several years after a marked stylistic shift from his high-energy gangster/punk films to the contemplative psychological thrillers of the 1990s, *Electric Dragon* is in many ways a return to the anarchy celebrated in films like *Burst City* and *Crazy Thunder Road*. And yet it also bears the mark of a highly refined audiovisual stylist, with ultra-crisp cinematography and an elegance of montage that was decidedly absent from his early work. Alexander Zahlten has focused on these qualities to suggest that the film is only a superficial return to the punk aesthetic, amounting to something of an empty formal exercise without the true anarchic spirit that made his early films so iconic for the Japanese punk movement (2009).

Value judgments aside, *Electric Dragon* is the first in a series of 21st Century films that demonstrate a major refinement of the director's technical skills while remaining true to a thematic path concerning urban engagement, along with a particularly Japanese interest in the co-existence of the ancient and the modern within contemporary Tokyo. The film also contains poignant examples of Ishii's recurring interest in representing urban experience through fluctuations in auditory extension and moments of absolute silence. As I will demonstrate, Ishii's approach to sound design is tied to themes of urban anxiety and the search for coherence within the chaos of the city.

The film's narrative concerns a young boy who suffers a severe electrical shock awakening the reptilian area his brain. He grows into a man with uncanny abilities to harness electrical current and communicate with reptiles. He takes the name Dragon-Eye Morrison (Tadanobu Asano), an embodiment of the co-existence of the ancient and the modern, and appropriately earns his living finding lost pet lizards within the city while playing electric guitar on the side. Much of the film is spent following Dragon-Eye as he roams the city in search of lizards. Meanwhile he is being stalked by a mysterious stranger known as Thunderbolt Buddha (Masatoshi Nagase), wearing a metallic Buddha mask over one side of his face and sporting high-tech audio surveillance gear.

While Dragon-Eye is a definitive pedestrian, Thunderbolt spends much time on the rooftops of the city, scanning cell-phone conversations and surveying the targets of his unexplained vigilante exploits. The film evolves as a kind of dance choreographed around the movements of these two characters as they come closer and closer. Finally, Thunderbolt pays a visit to Dragon-Eye's home while the latter is out, viciously slaughters his lizard collection and chops his guitar into hundreds of little pieces. Enraged upon his return home, Dragon-Eye explodes in an electrical fury, running through the streets of Tokyo as electrical boxes overload and explode all around him. He finds Thunderbolt Buddha on a high-rise rooftop where they battle it out to the end. It is a contest between the ancient and the modern: we are told that Thunderbolt's powers emerged from a lightning strike, while Dragon-Eye's came from technologically harnessed electricity, a fact that Thunderbolt uses as supposed evidence of the superiority of nature over technology. Yet in practice, Thunderbolt is far more technologically engaged than Dragon-Eye, the latter spending most of his time getting in tune with the ancient part of

his brain as way of navigating the modern city. And in the end, Dragon-Eye is the last one standing after a battle sequence as viscerally charged as anything Ishii has filmed before or since (although Thunderbolt Buddha doesn't so much "die" as "dissipate" amidst the lighting clouds that gathered over the city as they fought, his energy returning to its point of origin).

Although the two men are positioned as opposites who clash, the two men also fight battles within themselves. Thunderbolt is positioned as a figure literally divided, half Buddha half-man. At one point he even attacks himself in a slapstick-sequence where one hand tries to force a taser into his own face while the other hand struggles to keep it at bay. Dragon-Eye, on the other hand, is not so much divided as he is mixed, a man whose reptilian ancestry expresses itself through the flow of modern electrical current. He doesn't fight with himself, but sometimes his primal urges require expression through the modern technology of the electric guitar. As such, the two men stand as differing expressions of the idea of the ancient and the modern co-existing: one as a mixture where the old fuels the new and vice-versa, the other as competing elements where points of intersection between the old and new create tensions. The two men are symbolic of different takes on urban experience, and in turn they act as metaphors for audiovisual ecology in the cinema: a medium divided along the lines of sound and image yet whose audiovisual totality is a function of the inextricable links between its two component parts.

The theme of tradition and modernity co-existing in Japanese culture is embodied by these two men. This theme is formally supported by the film's interest in plays on auditory extension - how far into the distance we can hear - as a way of representing the

urban soundscape. In one of the most iconic scenes in all of Ishii's work, the camera follows Dragon-Eye down narrow alleyways as he searches for a lost lizard. A moment of silence precedes a fade to black, and then some non-diegetic music emerges as we fade-in on a wooded environment. Then we cut to two shots of Dragon-Eye moving through the woods and finding the lizard he sought, with a simultaneous cut on the soundtrack to the sounds of leaves crunching under his feet and birds chirping from the trees. The space becomes, for a moment, distinctly rural. Finally we cut to a wide shot revealing that this rural setting is actually a tiny plot of vegetation within the busy city. There is a simultaneous cut on the soundtrack and traffic noise now dominates the soundscape. With this last audiovisual cut we discover that the previous shot's soundscape consisted of an artificially limited auditory extension to match the narrow view of the space on the image track. This strategy creates the sense that the forested environment is a space distinct from the city that surrounds it, when in fact it is a part of this surrounding space. Dragon-Eye is able to find ancient spaces within the metropolis, signified by the limiting of urban noise within his soundscape. As such, *Electric Dragon* suggests a path where the main character embraces his conflicted nature, making productive use of his primitive leanings within his modern environment.

Thunderbolt Buddha also has the capacity to play with auditory extension, yet for him it is the result of modern sound technologies. At one point in the film, Thunderbolt is scanning cell phone frequencies in an attempt to hone in on the conversation of a gangster he is stalking. Having found the frequency, he listens in on the conversation while keeping the gangster in view on the balcony of a nearby building. Midway through the sequence the gangster is presented in a long shot, while the sound of his voice is

given in auditory close-up as heard through Thunderbolt's headset. The effect is disconcerting, a level of extension afforded by schizophonic technology. Where Dragon-Eye is able to narrow his extension to focus on his immediate environment, Thunderbolt seeks to artificially extend his hearing in order to focus on things that are far away.

Each of these examples demonstrates the creation of a hi-fi soundscape that transcends the masking qualities of urban noise, and each example approaches the representation of this soundscape in a different way. In the first example, *mise-en-scène* is closely connected to the sound design; when we see only the wooded environment, we hear only sounds that seem appropriate to that environment. As soon as urban features of the *mise-en-scène* are revealed through an adjustment in the framing, the sound changes to suit. In the second example, Ishii takes the opposite approach. A long shot of the gangster on the phone is married to the close-miked sound of his voice, the soundtrack thereby defying the distance implied on the image track. Both methods reveal the cinema's power to defy spatial realism through the divided nature of sound and image.

Later in the film, the strategy of limiting auditory extension is taken to a much further extreme as Dragon-Eye again wanders the city. In the midst of the chaos of the dense metropolis, complemented with urban noise and heavy electrified non-diegetic music, he pauses for a few seconds with his hand on a power pole. All sound drops out in a moment of absolute silence. He taps into his primitive past through the technological present, communing with a power pole to reach deep into his reptilian brain and become one with the city's grid. Like the previous example in the wooded area, the sound of the surrounding environment is limited according to Dragon-Eye's intense concentration on the task at hand. But while the previous example transformed urban space into a forested

area, now the limited extension becomes completely null. He turns absolutely inward to throw his awareness outwards, marking a key point about silence: it can be a sign of absolute inwardness while also providing the ideal conditions for the vast extension associated with the hi-fi soundscape. Silence has a duality that reflects Dragon-Eye's own dual-nature, the ancient and the modern within the same space at the same time, just as his interior experience is mapped onto the external reality of the city.

Electric Dragon is the story of two ways of being within modern-day Tokyo, a place that carries with it centuries of tradition through to its ultra-modern present: one way of being in which the old and the new are divided and at odds with one another, and the other in which the two share a reciprocal relationship that feeds each other. These different modes play out in many of the characters in Ishii's films across his career, and they reflect a mode of urban representation that explores the space of Tokyo as a space in which lived experience results in various forms of crisis and resolution. The theme of the old and the new co-existing is also an ongoing theme in the discourse around Tokyo's representation on film. The issues raised by this discourse point, in turn, to many of the issues pertinent to the more general discourse of urban representation on film. My task for the duration of this chapter will be to illustrate major themes in the discourse of the cinematic city, and to representations of Tokyo in particular, and tie these to issues in film sound and acoustic ecology. The films of Sogo Ishii will then provide a series of ideal case studies to illustrate how these intersections play out with respect to the filmmaker's recurring interest in the soundscape of urban space. I will begin by laying out key issues in film and urban studies particular to the city of Tokyo in which so many of Ishii's films are set.

Tokyo and the Cinematic City

Electric Dragon deals with the theme of the tradition/modernity divide in the Japanese cultural imagination through two characters that suggest opposite poles of this situation: Thunderbolt Buddha is divided, and often self-destructive in being so. Dragon-Eye Morrison, while appearing unstable in his inability to control his electrical outbursts, is nevertheless harmonious in the balance between his pre-historic side and his modern technological side. In many ways, Dragon-Eye is the more emblematic of a Japanese society that, as Noël Burch suggests, “may be identified as belonging simultaneously to several apparently incompatible types and stages of historical development,” in part due to the fact that Japan “is the *only* major non-Western country to have escaped the colonial yoke” (1979, 27). Even following the adoption of capitalism and “a thirty-year inoculation of American individualist ideology,” the Japan of the 1970s that Burch is commenting upon “still bears the unmistakable stamp of three centuries of standardization” (26). Where Thunderbolt Buddha might reflect the seeming incompatibility of these various co-existing stages of historical development, Dragon-Eye Morrison exemplifies how they can be embodied within a single individual, here standing in for the nation of Japan.

These two characters also illustrate different levels of engagement with the city: Dragon-Eye is comfortable on the streets, navigating the labyrinth of the city, able to attune his senses to focus on his objects without the benefit of the synoptic overview; Thunderbolt Buddha, on the other hand, surveys the streets from the rooftops, using technology to transcend the din of the urban noise and isolate individuals within the city. In a sense, these two characters embody the poles of technological mastery and

pedestrian engagement, major themes within the discourse of the cinematic city, nowhere more prevalent than in cinematic representations of Tokyo. As a city, Tokyo embodies a massive and rapid urbanization within a country still steeped in the traditions of centuries past. As such, the city raises some key issues in how the co-existence of tradition and modernity play out within this urban space and those who live within it. Many of these issues also reflect more general anxieties about urban transformation in Western countries all over the world following WWII. These will be key issues in my study of representations of urban experience in the films of Sogo Ishii, so let us now consider them in some detail.

In her article “Tokyo, The Movie” (2002), Catherine Russell discusses how Tokyo is a site that is particularly hard to access as a totality. In the transformation of the old city of Edo into Tokyo, long range views were lost (i.e. Mount Fuji and Tokyo Bay). And in their place has emerged a Tokyo filled with giant video screens replacing real views with representations of views that are, of course, always changing (213). This dissolution of perspective is a function of the discursive nature of Tokyo in which, Russell argues, the built environment and proliferation of large-scale video screens have hindered visual perspective and positioned a virtual perspective in its place. In response to these transformations, Russell notes that “an imaginary Tokyo has come to stand in for a metropolis that has few distinctive landmarks and no familiar skyline. And this imaginary city plays a central role in the narrativization of the great social shifts of twentieth-century Japan” (212).

Yet Russell argues that Tokyo’s discursive nature stems back well beyond modernity to Old Edo, itself a city of self-representation and constant transformation. Russell notes

that the frequent fires that raged through Old Edo came to be known as the “flowers of Edo,” indicative of a desire to express this constant transformation as an aesthetic practice (2002, 213). Yet at the same time, Old Edo is regularly imagined as a stable fixed historical point that posits modern Tokyo as its opposite. Edo is something to move towards as an escape from modernity: “Edo-memory sometimes eliminated the tradition-modernity divide altogether. Edo became tomorrow” (213).

Russell charts cinematic representations of Old Edo in Japanese films of the classical period, often framed symmetrically using composition to complement the architectural forms which aid in rendering the city as “a kind of interior space” (2002, 216). This interiorization of exterior space is related to growing angst over increasing urbanization and the sense of the “violence implicit in the modernizing process” (218). She notes that Tokyo films of the 30s, 40s and 50s often dealt with family, and treated urbanity as a threat to domestic peace. Many films sought to position a family enclosure within the sprawl of the urban sphere, creating the city as “modular extension of the home” by which family drama can become social drama (i.e. the park in Akira Kurosawa’s *Ikiru* as shelter from urban space) (217). The 50s and 60s saw Tokyo transformed into a sea of skyscrapers where even distinguished modern buildings disappeared. This ushered in a new era of cinematic representation where Tokyo is not only positioned against the village, but new Tokyo is pitted against an older version of itself that is imagined to have been more stable.

Russell notes that critical discourse on cities often emphasizes layers of meaning built up in architecture, as in the case of a city like Berlin. But in Tokyo the process has been so “swift” and “violent” that “there is little by way of ruins, little evidence of

historical process” (2002, 220), creating even more need to latch onto an imagined stability of the past in the face of bewildering change. Yet, Russell warns, it is a mistake to think of all this constant transformation as suggesting an un-centered Japanese subject, for to do so would be to forget that these are spaces “where people actually live” (222). And herein lies Russell’s most poignant argument: that the idea of a totalizing view, of a city graspable as a whole, is not the answer to understanding the reality of lived experience within such a discursive space as Tokyo. As we will see, life in the absence of totalizing spatial coherence is a guiding theme in the discourse of the cinematic city, and is crucial to understanding the work of Sogo Ishii.

Many of the issues Russell raises in relation to Tokyo are common to the discourse of urban studies in general. The distinction between the coherence sought through synoptic overview and the fragmentary nature of lived experience of pedestrians on the street is particularly important, especially how this distinction relates to the idea of “interiorizing” exterior space. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) Michel de Certeau relates the aerial view/street view dichotomy to differences in consumptive practice. Referring to his experience of viewing New York City from the top of the World Trade Center, he says, “Having taken such a voluptuous pleasure in it, I wonder what is the source of this pleasure of ‘seeing the whole,’ of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts” (92). This position of “voyeur-god,” he says, entails a separation from the lived practice of the people down below (93). “They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, Wandersmanner, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it” (93). What is most important for de Certeau, and many urban theorists to

follow, is that the lived experience of the pedestrian is a productive form of urban engagement despite the lack of totalizing coherence one can gain from this vantage point.

As Tasha G. Oren argues, the emergence of large urban centers in recent decades suggests that it is time for a move from Marshall McLuhan's concept of the global village, with its evocation of a quaint, unified world, to an idea of the global metropolis which is "inherently messy, multivariant, and decidedly serpentine" (2003, 64). As different from the village, she says, the global metropolis "is never fully known to any singular resident and is only decipherable from a bird's-eye view, gaining coherence as it loses detail" (64). She likens this to de Certeau's distinction between observing a city from above and living down within it, the difference between actively writing a narrative and simply reading one. The "instant total field of awareness" is opposed to the lived experience of city dwellers (64), and thus exposes the details of daily practice as the life of the global metropolis. The key point here is that this lived experience doesn't depend on totalizing knowledge to make sense of its world, an idea that will become very important in the literature discussed from here on.

Walter Benjamin understood that the fragmentary nature of urban experience does not necessarily prevent one from gaining a productive understanding of the world. In the *Arcades Project* Benjamin sought to gain access to the lived experience of the era of the Parisian *flâneur* through the material artifacts of the culture that produced this figure. Through fragments of actual historical documents, Benjamin presents an array of historical materials which, as Susan Buck-Morss notes, "made visible the philosophical ideas" at work in the culture that produced them (1989, 55). "In them," she says, "history cut through the core of truth without providing a totalizing frame. Benjamin understood

these ideas as ‘discontinuous,’” and notes that “the images themselves cannot be strung together into a coherent, non-contradictory picture of the whole” (55). And yet through this material we can gain a profound understanding of the culture from which it came, an understanding that is closer to the experience of the people who made up that culture than one can get from traditional modes of detached historiography.

Benjamin collects a variety of materials in which the figure of the flâneur is characterized. For present purposes, I would like to focus on Benjamin’s description of the flâneur as one for whom “the city splits . . . into its dialectical poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closed around him as a room” (1999, 417). For the flâneur, the streets are experienced as interior spaces that can be *inhabited* in a way that emphasizes the lived nature of the social and cultural landscape rather than the alienating detachment so often attributed to urban living (421).

Critics like Anne Friedberg (1993), Anke Gleber (1997), and Tom Gunning (1997) have argued for different ways of thinking about flânerie and its offshoots when accounting for female subjectivities and the changing nature of modernity since the 19th Century origins of the term. Friedberg in particular has pointed to the emergence of the *flâneuse* in the cinemas and shopping malls of the early 1900s, allowing for a form of mobile spectatorship through the experience of screens and shop windows that operate on a virtual register. I will return to this figure of the flâneuse in my discussion of *Mirrored Mind* below.

Invariably, however, flânerie is theorized through attention to vision alone. I argue that thinking of forms of pedestrian urban engagement through sound can add another corrective layer to this discourse. In particular, I think it is valuable to consider the

concept of interiorizing exterior space by way of the soundwalker described by Hildegard Westerkamp. As discussed at length in chapters one and five, Westerkamp's prescription for soundwalking posits a way of practicing urban space that likens the act of engaged listening to an act of composition, recalling de Certeau's conflation of the divide between reading and writing, consumption and production. The soundwalker does not physically alter the environment through her listening strategies, but she does come to understand it and to find the possibility for making peace with it. Most importantly, this engagement is a function of mobility, but not a mobility that is necessarily marked by physical movement through space. Just as important is a psychic mobility, a movement through space by way of perceptual exercises in varying the extension of one's listening, and by recognizing the inextricable relationship between interior experience and the external world. The soundwalker can travel through space while standing still, shifting perspective within the soundscape and mapping that space by way of her own memory.

Key to my interests in the films of Sogo Ishii is how the relationship between interior and exterior space relates to the engagement a person has with their environment, of gaining a measure of productivity in the absence of totalizing spatial coherence. I argue that the use of silence in the films of Sogo Ishii marks a deep interiority that opens the characters up to their external environments, offering the potential for a profound level of engagement, an example of how the increasing urbanization of Tokyo does not necessarily result in a corollary urban alienation.

Edo Memory, Silence, and the Aesthetics of Emptiness

In Russell's account of Tokyo's transformation from Edo into contemporary metropolis, Old Edo embodies a kind of duality with respect to Tokyo. On the one hand, Edo itself was a discursive entity, constantly under transformation and subject to self-representation, making for the perfect environment from which modern Tokyo might rise. On the other hand, within the post-WWII environment, Edo stands as a stable representation of the village of the past, in stark contrast to the ever changing and indefinable complexity of modern Tokyo. In the popular imagination, Edo acts as an imaginary past that residents of the metropolis might try to evoke through the maintenance of traditional architecture, furnishings, and dress within the context of the modern city. And filmmakers have certainly latched onto this ideal as a way of selling the idea of tradition to the modern urban public, a point that Russell drives home when she argues that the "traditional" domestic architecture of the post-war films of Ozu and Naruse are the product of simulated tradition marketed to mass culture in an era of rapid urban expansion (2003, 93).

In simulating a tradition based on the past, Edo memory positions the city against an earlier version of itself, while also defining itself in relation to the countryside. This can be seen in two main features of Tokyo's transformation: the disappearance of long-range views that connect the city to Mt. Fuji and the ocean, and a replacement of these views with virtual ones. The imagined stability of old Edo is, in part, a function of the long-range views of Mt. Fuji, popularized in the Japanese imagination by works like Hokusai's Edo-era print series *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji* (see Bouquillard 2007). Many of these prints represent views of the sacred mountain from positions within the old city of Edo

that still exist in modern Tokyo but from which these views of the mountain have been banished. So, the stability of the city comes, in part, through its contextualized relationship to the countryside, another familiar tension in the discourse of urban studies, and one that is certainly rife within Japanese cinema that so frequently positions Tokyo against the rural village.

These transformations are perfectly in line with R. Murray Schafer's thoughts about the problems posed by modern urban space. With respect to sound, we have already encountered Schafer's bias towards a pre-industrial soundscape, one that emphasizes the hi-fi soundscape with its long range listening and an absence of the schizophonia induced by technologies of representation. Schafer would argue that along with the disappearance of views of Mt. Fuji from within the city, long range listening has also been banished. And artificial views have stepped in to take their place, along with the schizophrenic soundscapes created by the proliferation of sound transmission technologies within the city. As I will discuss below, the relationship between Mt. Fuji and modern Tokyo is a crucial component of Ishii's *Angel Dust*, while issues raised by Tokyo's signature proliferation of virtual views is at the heart of his most recent film *Mirrored Mind*. And as I will demonstrate, these issues are bound up with the idea of silence as it relates to different forms of engagement in the city.

Silence is a necessary precondition for the hi-fi listening situation. This silence is lost on the city streets, marked by continual din. Or else it is artificially constructed, so that interior spaces offer quietude without the potential for one's hearing to extend beyond architectural boundaries. Silence as a Holy Grail for acoustic ecology is nowhere clearer than in Gordon Hempton's recent book *One Square Inch of Silence* (2009) in

which the author goes in search of the lowest possible sound level readings within the United States of America. Yet it is important to understand that what acoustic ecologists usually mean by “silence” is actually better defined as “quietude,” for the silence they seek is in aid of hearing certain *kinds* of sounds rather than hearing nothing at all. This situation is well illustrated by Hildegard Westerkamp’s journey to the Zone of Silence in the heart of Mexico. This is a space within the open desert so quiet that Westerkamp was compelled to make her own sounds, and these stood out very well for recording because of the silence that surrounded them (McCartney 2000, chap. 7, p. 2).

Acoustic ecology’s quest for silence can thus be understood as an interest in quietude shaped by the sounds that surround it or, conversely, sounds that are shaped by the quietude that surrounds them. Both variations on silence can be read through the Zen Buddhist concept of *mu*. On a very basic level, *mu* translates as “nothingness,” the basis for the enlightenment sought by Zen practitioners. While its monastic connotations are perhaps less important in late 20th century Tokyo than in times past, *mu* has been adopted as an aesthetic principle that still permeates modern Japanese culture. As Paul Schrader describes it, “Emptiness, silence, and stillness are positive elements in Zen art, and represent presence rather than the absence of something” (1972, 27). He draws on several noted Western authors on Zen Buddhism who explain that the emptiness of *mu* is a function of that which shapes it: the empty spaces in a flower arrangement are only recognized as formal nothingness because they exist within the form of the flowers. In Will Peterson’s words, “the sound gives form to the silence” (Peterson in Schrader, 27). Without the sound, the silence is not recognized as a formal quality. A blank sheet of

paper is only paper until it bears markings, and then the space between these markings will be recognized as formal emptiness (27).

As an aesthetic principal, then, *mu* offers a way of understanding silence in the sound film as well. As discussed in chapter one, silence only became an aesthetic option once the synchronized film soundtrack came into being. Yet because of the conventions of constant ambient sound that increasingly became the norm as the decades progressed, audiences from the 1970s onwards no longer expect to hear a complete absence of recorded sound, what Chion calls the “zero-degree” of the soundtrack (1994, 57). As Chion has observed, “You can’t just interrupt the auditory flow and stick in a few inches of blank leader” for fear of the audience believing that such silence is the result of a “technical break” rather than an aesthetic choice (57). This is why most filmmakers opt for “synonyms of silence: faraway animal calls, clocks in an adjoining room, rustlings, and all the intimate noises of immediate space” (58). These synonyms of silence are all tied to Schafer’s notion of the hi-fi soundscape that allows hearing far into the distance, or of the very quiet in one’s close surroundings, because of an absence of other sounds that would obscure these finer details. Silence by these standards is an example of *mu*: absence that is understood as presence because of that which shapes it.

It is essential that *mu* is understood as a formal quality shaped by its opposite, for this gives hope that silence can be found in the city, that where there is form there is also emptiness. It is a given that the built environment provides little in the way of aesthetic *mu*: the density of Tokyo as a modern metropolis does not offer much in the way of the equivalent of the spaces between branches in a traditional flower arrangement. As Werner Herzog told Wim Wenders from the observation deck on Tokyo Tower in the

latter's film *Tokyo-ga* (1985), "From here you can see that everything is extremely built up. There are few images to be found. One has to dig for them like an archaeologist. One has to search through this ravaged landscape to find anything at all." Wenders counters by suggesting that he is in search of the Tokyo of the streets, the Tokyo that Ozu's characters occupied in his films. Whether or not Ozu's Tokyo can still be found, or if it ever even existed, is Wenders' question to answer. The Tokyo of today, on the other hand, is Sogo Ishii's Tokyo, a place where the density of the city is a challenge to his characters to experience *mu*, to understand the emptiness that is inextricable from the form that surrounds it.

Thinking about spaces of silence as a function of noise is to recognize its presence within the modern city rather than in some distant and imagined past. The idea of silence is marked by a certain paradoxical nature that I argue is rather similar to the concept of Edo memory. What if the noise of the city provides access to pockets of silence, just as silence in the country provides access to pockets of sound? Perhaps the city can be thought of as a "presence" between the structuring emptiness of the country that surrounds it, just as ideas about the country might be structured by the city. This is a circular notion of the relationship between town and country that suits the circularity of much Buddhist thought as embodied by that most well known of symbols, the yin and yang. This can be understood as a circularity in governing relationships to the past, as well as to the imagination. Imagined space is structured by the reality of the space that surrounds us, just as our idea of the past is accessible only in how it is made manifest in the present. These are the circularities that lie at the heart of Sogo Ishii's characters in their quest to come to terms with the urbanization of post-war Japan, and the dichotomies

of silence are a way for Ishii to aesthetically invoke these dichotomies within his films. As I will illustrate, Ishii's films revolve around questions of engagement between characters and the urban spaces they occupy. This engagement is marked by relationships between the interiority of the mind and the external world, between town and country, between noise and silence.

Sogo Ishii's use of silence is also a reflexive strategy, particularly when it involves sudden ruptures in the soundtrack that reveal moments where there is no recorded sound. He often uses sudden moments of silence to dramatically contrast between spaces, and sometimes to simply drop the sound out of a given space altogether. Both of these strategies serve to call attention to the artificiality of the sound's grounding within the image, disrupting both our sense of the space pictured on screen as well as our sense of the realist conventions of synchronization. And, as I will demonstrate, Ishii ties these ruptures in the soundtrack to themes of urban anxiety, more often than not set within the dizzying labyrinth of Tokyo. These ruptures can be read differently from one film to the next as characters respond differently to their environments, but are always tied to the dual nature of silence: as intensely introspective and expansive at the same time. As such, they reflect the idea of Edo memory evoked by Russell as a staple of representations of Tokyo in Japanese cinema, an imagined stable presence that is itself open to discursive transformation. Silence as an aspect of *mu* is a way to understand silence in the city by way of its connection to that which surrounds it, a kind of totalizing perspective that is available even from within the heart of its obscuring density.

I argue that many of the characters in the films of Sogo Ishii struggle with attempts to embody the model of urban engagement proposed by Westerkamp's concept of the

soundwalker, and that silence in these films is a marker of deep interiority as well as a profound connection with urban space. As I will suggest, this interest in urban experience is tied to themes of the divide between tradition and modernity in these films, and is particularly emblematic of Russell's account of Edo memory in films that represent Tokyo following WWII. *Mu*, then, becomes a marker of an extreme shift in extension to bring the world to absolute silence from which the soundwalker can then begin to compose the soundscape according to listening practices that seek out relationships between her interior experience and that which exists outside. Silence becomes an expression of *mu*, a way of engaging with vast extension by way of the very narrow, connecting interiority to exteriority, giving pedestrians a way of extending beyond their limited position on the street without the distancing effect of the synoptic overview.

Civilization Sickness: The Early Years of Sogo Ishii

In his 1984 comedy *Crazy Family*, salaryman Katsuya Kobayashi (Katsuhiko Kobayashi) feels that his family suffers from what he calls the "civilization sickness," and moves them out of their cramped Tokyo apartment to a house in the suburbs. The style of *Crazy Family* acts as an interlude that separates Ishii's punk years from his newer work, and is interesting in the way that it engages with the new urban reality of the suburb and its place in the individualist model of American capitalism that emerged in Japan following the war. The suburb is neither the traditional country village nor the dense metropolis epitomized by Tokyo. Similarly, it is neither the place for multiple generations of families to co-exist within a single room, nor the compartmentalized isolation of

individuals fostered by the city. It is an in-between space designed for single-family dwellings that concentrate on the nuclear family, a new mode of living that emerged simultaneously in the U.S.A. Indeed, the emphasis on the nuclear family as a break from Japanese tradition is made when Katsuya's father pushes to move into the new house with his son's family, but only after having worn out his welcome at the homes of his other children. Ultimately, however, he is just an annoyance, and in this respect the film nods towards Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1953) and its message about the perils of the increasing emphasis on individualist culture within post-WWII Japan.

Crazy Family begins with a silent aerial shot of the suburban grid as Katsuya drives his family to their new home. The silence here suggests his quest for a peaceful oasis amidst the chaos of urban life, hoping that the orderly environment of the suburbs will help ease his family's distress. This shot also clearly associates silence with the aerial perspective, a physical remove from the streets accompanied by a remove from the din. The film's silent opening suggests the middle space of suburbia, replete with its own paradoxical isolationism and promise of community.

At a pivotal moment later in the film, this absolute silence is brought to the world below. Katsuya is distressed when he discovers that his new house is infested with white ants, and tries to banish them with chemicals. One day at the office in Tokyo, he has a seemingly metaphysical realization that the ants are still present despite his efforts at extermination. The moment is marked by the bustle of the office soundscape cutting to zero-degree silence as Katsuya lifts his head from his work. Here the camera performs a simultaneous dolly/zoom that keeps his face at the same framing distance while the background compresses behind him. The bizarre effect that this "*Vertigo* shot" has on

the visual space is amplified by the unnatural quality of the absolute silence. Within this moment of auditory null extension his mind reaches across space and seems to connect with his home, a spatial anomaly further suggested by the disorienting effect of the cinematography. Katsuya packs up his bag and runs out of the office, beginning a brilliantly realized sequence that follows him running madly through the city streets, then from car to car on the subway, and finally stealing a child's bicycle to finish the trip through suburbia to his home. Here Ishii draws on the visceral hand-held camera style that was his staple during the 70s, fashioning a portrait of one of the most maddening features of suburban living: the commute between work and home, a common theme in Japanese film. More importantly, this sequence gives us a sense of the distance between these two points, a length of space that is collapsed in the moment of silence when Katsuya's mind reaches across it to realize what is happening at home. Once at home he jumps into a deep hole he has dug in the dining room and begins attacking the ants with a motorized digging tool. Later in the film he'll use this same tool to attempt the murder of his entire family as he realizes that there is no hope of relief from their urban anxiety. The moment where his mind reaches across space in absolute silence points the way towards later characters in Ishii's films who use this conflation of interior and exterior as a form of engagement within the city that provides a measure of grounding and personal agency. For Katsuya, however, there can be no balance between the wild and the structured, between the natural world and modern space, and it drives him mad. This is the "civilization sickness" that so many of Ishii's characters seem to exhibit in their battles against the realities of their modern environments.

The separation between different kinds of space within the built environment of the modern city is a recurring interest for Ishii. Across his entire career he explores different variations on the collapse between these spaces as a function of the ways in which his characters choose to engage with, or remain at the mercy of, urbanization. From Ishii's very first film we see his interest in the tension that arises between the structure of modern society on the collective level and the chaos lurking within the hearts of individuals.

In *Panic in High School*, a 15 minute 8mm short from 1976, a frustrated student has taken over the school at gunpoint. Forced to the breaking point by the extreme social importance of exit exams within Japanese society, this student revolts, holding his classmates hostage inside while the police lay siege just outside. The film is structured around alternating views of the interior and exterior of the school between which Ishii distinguishes by cutting sound and image simultaneously, shifting from outside to inside with abrupt shifts from non-diegetic music and the diegetic soundscape of the interior. When the gunman is finally cornered by the police and tackled to the ground, Ishii abolishes the distinction between exterior and interior space altogether by introducing the sound of a passing airplane and carrying it over to the scene of the take-down happening inside the school. The roaring airplane creates a suitably aggressive mood for the gunman's capture, while also motivating a swooping camera movement mimicking the flight of the plane. Most importantly, the limited extension of the school's interior is thrown open to the vastness of the world outside school, threading the spaces of the police and the gunman together at the moment where they coincide on the narrative.

In addition to the beginnings of Ishii's play with the auditory distinction of spatial environments, the scene of the gunman's capture also features his first use of null extension: the moment of complete silence following the end of the airplane sound effect and before the sound of the interior space cuts back in. This isn't quite a zero-degree silence marked by the physical absence of a soundtrack, but is rather a moment where the recording of the airplane has subsided leaving only the noise of the tape material itself in its place. The extension here is rendered completely null at the apex of the film's narrative trajectory, just as the drive of the gunman to break from the norms of society is put down by the authorities of the established order. Such plays on extension to reflect the balance of chaos and order are a staple of Ishii's style, and become increasingly well defined with his later films.

Two years later, Ishii made the 43 minute film *Isolation of One in 880,000*. Here he takes the concept of silence as a marker of interiority, as well as a symbol for the conflation of separate spaces, and makes these central narrative themes. Also shot on 8mm film, and very crudely fashioned, this film is the portrait of a lonely man who tries to communicate with those around him but generally fails to forge meaningful relationships. He is socially awkward, trying to flirt with the clerk at the grocery store, bumping into people on the street and spilling his groceries, etc. Most of his time is spent roaming around town between classes at school, looking in pornography shops, attending Pink films, and buying a set of binoculars to better spy on his attractive female neighbour across the street.

Exterior scenes are often completely devoid of diegetic sound, with well-known pieces of classical music providing the soundscape, clearly detached from the

environment as is the man himself.¹ In fact, when diegetic sound is heard during the exterior sequences, it is generally only when there will be some form of communication attempt between the man and the people he meets, and each instance of interaction serves to emphasize his difficulties in forging interpersonal relationships. For example, he meets an old acquaintance on the train, and the interaction appears so stressful that the man vomits, and shortly after fantasizes about committing suicide by jumping in front of an oncoming train. Later he sees a friend who he is genuinely interested in talking to, but the two are separated by the gulf between opposite platforms at a train station. He yells to get the friend's attention, and then tries to run over to the other platform through throngs of people. He can't get there fast enough, and the friend is already gone on the next train. The urban environment for this man forces unwanted contact while hindering meaningful communication.

These variations in auditory extension, and moments of complete silence, support the film's theme of urban alienation. The first moment of absolute silence comes as the man is sitting in his room, leafing through the porno magazine he just purchased. With location sound marked by an audible camera running in the background, all of a sudden an insert shot of his attractive female neighbour appears, and all sound drops out. She is speaking, but we hear nothing, suggesting a silent memory that carries over for a moment in the next shot of the man sitting looking into the air, enraptured by his fantasy. The rapture is then rudely interrupted by a knock on the door as the ambient sound of the room cuts back in. Silence here marks the man's ideal, a transcendence of the space in which he exists, the state in which his imagination might be made real.

Later he is sitting in his room trying to read, visibly agitated by the noise of his neighbours talking loudly, playing guitar, and singing. He throws a book at the wall, and then turns on his radio as a masking agent. It doesn't help. Then he catches sight of his fantasy woman in the apartment across the street, and begins to spy on her from behind his curtain. He is adopting the position of the voyeur, detached from any real engagement with her but without any agency or control of his own. This lack of control is emphasized when she closes her curtains and moves out of view, at which point he is out of luck. This scene illustrates key problems in modern urban living: the quest for increasing privacy in a situation where people live very close together, and a simultaneous desire to engage with one's neighbour who is separated by her own desire for privacy. The man has no control over either situation, unable to remain detached from his surroundings, and simultaneously unable to engage.

The case of the noisy neighbours illustrates how the modern city does not afford the ideals of containment to all of its citizens equally. It is easy to build walls that divide these spaces visually, but controlling the flow of sound is much more difficult. The art of modernist architecture on display in Tati's *Play Time* has achieved a high level of sound insulation, but such achievements are not built into low-income apartment blocks that are often found just around the corner in urban centers. So here we find the reverse of the architectural situation found in the beginning of Tati's film: instead of transparent walls that impede the flow of sound, these are opaque walls that let the sound through. The film uses an approach to auditory extension that emphasizes the simultaneous isolation and communion that urban living so often entails. The man seeks an island of silence within the chaos of the urban soundscape, and the soundscape of his private apartment

extends beyond his walls into the public sphere. He keeps his streets as interiors, but he does not want his interior to become the street. His detachment is not a form of mastery but rather a sign of his lack of control over his surroundings, and he ultimately goes insane.

His noisy neighbours respond to his complaint in a threatening and confrontational manner. Driven to madness over his desire for some control, he poisons a bottle of Coke and leaves it for his neighbour, who is then shown coughing and finally dying the next morning in his bed. As soon as he takes his last gasp, all sound cuts out and absolute silence accompanies a series of shots of the man now packing his bag and setting out for the day. He has stooped to a bit of militant acoustic ecology, banishing the noise of his neighbours through murder and aiding his quest for the silence in which his fantasies - the only form of engagement that he knows - can play out. Ultimately, however, he is doomed to succumb to his madness, and the film ends as he erupts in a violent outrage in the middle of a crowded train car. The build up to his eruption is underscored by a rapid and repetitive montage of train crossing signals and shots the train rushing by on the tracks with their attendant sounds that grow in intensity until he explodes. His quest for silence has failed.

This film exemplifies many of the recurrent issues in the discourse of urban experience. Pornography acts as the central point, a marker of the desire for human engagement but with no potential for this to be realized; it is fantasy engagement, often leading to frustration. The urban setting provides ample opportunity to see other people, but these connections are fleeting. The city often stands in the way of forging deeper relationships, and fosters the kind of alienation and anxiety apparent in this character.

His engagement with the city is voyeuristic and decidedly detached. His quest for silence is part of his detachment rather than deep engagement with urban space. His desire for peace and quiet to fuel his mental fantasies is a step in the right direction, but the goal does not lead to heightened engagement. And so the city finally gets to him, his meltdown signaled (literally) by urban noise pollution. As with the student in *Panic in High School*, the man is frustrated by the modern system of living imposed upon him, and he acts out in a futile attempt at engagement. He is unable to map the silence within the interior of his mind onto the space of the world that surrounds him. Yet the ability to conflate interior and exterior space is something that many of Ishii's later characters develop.

Town and Country in Angel Dust

Catherine Russell suggests that much Japanese *anime* seems to be enacting Nagisa Oshima's edict to "banish green" from the cinema, "along with its connotations of nature-worship and nationalist sentiment" (Russell 2002, 221), and this could just as easily be said of Sogo Ishii's films of the 70s and 80s. Indeed, Ishii's early punk characters thrive or find self-destruction within the glass, concrete and steel of the modern metropolis. Yet Russell also notes that in such films, "the demonology of traditional Japanese folktales and fairy tales is alive and well in the urban jungle" even while nature has been suppressed (222). Here we can certainly point to *Electric Dragon 80,000 V* as a modern folk tale of the urban jungle, borrowing heavily from the cyberpunk aesthetic that Ishii himself helped inspire through his early punk films. Yet one of the most remarkable aesthetic shifts upon Ishii's return to feature filmmaking in 1994 is a return of the green,

a consistent pre-occupation with the natural world, its connection to the city, and the psychological dimension of this connection. And with this turn comes a new interest in narratives driven by female characters almost entirely absent from his punk work (generally included only as objects of male desire and abuse). His three feature films of the 90s all revolve around female characters, as does his most recent work, *Mirrored Mind*. In this section I will focus on *Angel Dust* as exemplary of Ishii's 90s films, and in which we can trace what is perhaps the most systematic use of silence in all of his work.

Angel Dust is a detective story featuring a narrative that revolves around Mt. Fuji, tying the central symbol of Japan's cultural awareness of the natural world to a story centered within a Tokyo where views of the mountain have been obliterated. The film also boasts the most prolific uses of silence in all of Ishii's work. As I will demonstrate, these moments of silence propel the narrative forward and are thematically linked with the heart of Mt. Fuji, the interior depths of which provide the key to unlocking the mystery at the heart of the story.

Setsuko Suma (Kaho Minami) is a female psychologist working within the male-dominated Tokyo police department in search of a serial killer who mysteriously strikes a woman dead on the Yamanote line of the Japan Rail system at 6 pm each Monday night. Suma traces the first murdered woman to a treatment center for victims of cult brainwashing. The center is headed by Suma's colleague and former lover, Dr. Rei Aku (Takeshi Wakamatsu). As the first murder victim once sued the establishment following her treatment, Aku is initially suspected to be behind the murders. However, it is later revealed that the real killer is another of Aku's patients, Yuki Takei (Ryoko Takizawa), suffering extreme emotional distress as a result of the doctor's radical treatments. A

confrontation between Suma, Aku, and the killer takes place at the doctor's "Re-Freezing Psychorium," a lab in the shadow of Mt. Fuji outside the city where Aku attempts to de-program his patients. The killer ends up turning her weapon upon herself, and Suma makes peace with Aku.

The film is structured around alternating scenes between the police tracking the murderer within the city, and Suma's journeys to the Psychorium, connecting the rural region surrounding Mt. Fuji to what is taking place within the heart of Tokyo. This narrative structure is tied to deep thematic issues that connect the central position of Mt. Fuji in Japan's national consciousness to the desire for order in the city. This quest for order is, in turn, associated with Suma's quest to stop the serial killer. Silence lies at the heart of Mt. Fuji, and it systematically accompanies Suma's revelations about the case.

The film opens with overhead shots of the city, beginning at the vantage point of Tokyo Tower and gradually bringing us closer to street level until we are positioned inside a crowded subway car. While views of Mt. Fuji are now notoriously absent from within the densely built city, the observation deck on Tokyo Tower remains one place where the mountain is still visible (though the city's smog often prevents views even from here). Significantly, the film keeps the sacred mountain invisible even in aerial shots by ensuring that the upper edge of the frame cuts off at the horizon. From the very beginning, then, these aerial shots do not help contextualize the city in relation to Fuji, and thus do not contribute to a feeling of synoptic mastery over the urban space.

Exterior shots in the opening sequence are presented with either non-diegetic music or diegetic sound effects, but when inside the subway the sounds are strictly diegetic. However, it is here that dramatic alterations of extension are tied to the presence of the

killer. As we see extreme close-ups of people's ears, eyes, and lips, the loud din of the subway is reduced, with auditory close-ups of someone's breath, music from headphones, the turning of a newspaper page etc. Most importantly, we also hear an eerie whistling that we soon learn will precede each murder, an overt nod to Fritz Lang's *M* (1931). In these close-ups accompanied by their auditory equivalent, Ishii takes the visualization of auditory extension that began in *Isolation* (and developed further in the *Street Noise* short from his 1993 compilation film *Tokyo Blood*) and uses this as a narrative strategy tied to the pattern of murders under investigation. Immediately after the whistling, a woman drops to the ground. All subsequent murders will be announced by similar variations on auditory extension and the presence of this whistling. Importantly, when Suma is present at the murder scene the plays on extension give way to moments of absolute silence. Silence is thus associated with Suma's presence as well as her interiority as she tries to solve the case.

Importantly, silence is also associated with Mt. Fuji. The image of the first victim collapsing on the subway platform is followed by a direct cut to the exterior of a cave entrance that we later learn is an entrance to Mt. Fuji itself. The first few seconds of this shot are presented in absolute silence, thereby connecting this silence with both the murders and the interior of Mt. Fuji. Following the shot of the cave entrance, we cut to a sequence in which Suma and her husband Tomoo (Etsushi Toyokawa) are shown spelunking. The marked quietude of the cave is emphasized by the reverberation on their voices as they speak, and the presence of an unsettling sound in the distance that they cannot identify. Investigating the sound leads them to a dead body, and this revelation is followed by a series of hallucinatory flashes of imagery featuring glimpses of a man we

later learn is Dr. Aku. All of a sudden we cut to the interior of a sensory deprivation tank where we see Suma sit bolt upright in a startled awakening from a dream. The cave sequence turns out to have been a dream while in the tank, a dream that proves significant when she returns to Mt. Fuji as her quest leads her to Dr. Aku.

Suma's interest in sensory deprivation is a mark of urban society's quest for peace within the metropolis. The sensory deprivation approach is premised upon detachment from the city rather than engagement, a quest that Sogo Ishii has condemned in earlier films like *Panic in High School* and *Isolation of 1 in 880,000*. However, in *Angel Dust* the flotation tank sets up Suma's interest in looking for emptiness as a function of her aptitude for detective work. This detective work is premised upon her ability to get inside the minds of her subjects, breaking down the barrier between interior and exterior experience. As one of her colleagues explains to her partner in the case: "She analyzes the evidence, and slips her mind into the evidence to assimilate the thoughts and emotions of the perpetrator." As the film progresses, she will find moments of silence in the heart of the city as she grows nearer to the source of the murders in the Psychorium near Mt. Fuji.

The first time we see Mt. Fuji as a recognizable landmark, it is through a decontextualized shot that presents the mountain rising up from the bottom of the frame but without evidence as to where the shot was taken. The significance of this shot is made clear shortly thereafter as Suma arrives at a psychiatric hospital outside the city where she receives directions to meet Dr. Aku in the woods on the side of the mountain. This meeting establishes the connection between Aku and Mt. Fuji. Shortly thereafter, Suma gets a follow-up call from Aku suggesting that she get in tune with that part of the

killer's mind that already exists inside her. Right after this phone call, Fuji becomes visible from the city for the first time. Cut to a shot overlooking Tokyo near dusk with Mt. Fuji prominent in the background, and then on to the next murder.

Later we see the mountain from the window of Aku's office inside his Psychorium. The window frame mirrors the mountain's conical shape and flattened peak. This window and its view establishes Aku as something of a Fuji fetishist, suggesting that he has constructed his Psychorium as a Fuji of his own, its interior laboratory a space where he can get inside the minds of his patients just as the interior of the real Mt. Fuji is associated with Suma's own psychic abilities. So it is no surprise that Suma also has a private Mt. Fuji of her own: a pyramid-shaped steam-room surrounded by lush greenery in the back of her apartment, a bit of nature in the big city where she goes to clear her mind. Finally, after the climactic showdown inside the Psychorium, the police arrive and Suma embraces Aku, now sure of his innocence, while leaning up against a car in a shot that frames them against the mountain. So the film clearly positions Mt. Fuji, and the presence of silence, as markers of interiority that represent the connections that Suma will make between town and country on her quest to find the killer.

Angel Dust thus establishes clear connections between the murders, silence, Suma, and Mt. Fuji, which are fleshed out as the narrative progresses. Suma is obsessed with mapping the trajectory of the murders within the physical geography of Tokyo as well as within its psychic space, essentially employing a psychogeographic approach to hunting down the killer. In the film's climax, Suma returns to the Psychorium to have it out with Aku where Yuki then attempts to kill them both, revealing that Aku was not responsible in the end. In this final confrontation there are, as expected, key moments of silence. As

Suma attempts to attack Aku, Yuki enters and reveals herself as the killer. Rather than the subject of Aku's mind control, as Suma once suspected, we learn that her homicidal mania was an unintended byproduct of Aku's attempted reprogramming. He was trying to relieve Yuki of her fixation with death, but in the end he only made it worse. Yuki tries to attack, but the doctor wrestles her to the ground. Here, in the film's most dramatic use of silence, they pause as he has her pinned to the ground, and then begins to speak, his lips moving but with nothing audible. This is a reflection of Yuki's retreat into interiority as she is confronted by her own psychosis. The sound of a child's voice emerges in synchronization with Aku's moving lips, a schizophonic replacement reflecting the implanted childhood memories of the patient. Silence is what allows her interior experience to be reflected in the image of Aku's moving lips. Ultimately Yuki kills herself, and the police arrive at the Psychorium to close the case. The film ends with a shot of the police cars framed against Mt. Fuji in silence, followed by a brief resolution between Suma and Aku.

While Suma was unable to finally master the situation, her psychic connection to the case resulted in its resolution. This connection can be tracked through the recurring use of silence that draws consistent relationships between four main physical or psychic locations: the interior of Mt. Fuji, Suma's psychic interiority, the interior of the Psychorium (patterned after Mt. Fuji), and finally the psychic interiority of the killer Yuki. The interior of Mt. Fuji is immediately established as a quiet place that is connected to Suma's psychic space through the dream that opens the film. Silence is then associated with the killer by way of the narrowing of extension that accompanies each murder. Silence also connects Suma to the killer by punctuating key moments of her

investigation with silence, moments where Suma gets closer to the truth by getting closer to the killer's own mind. And finally, the silence of Aku's Psychorium, literally patterned on Mt. Fuji, is the space where the killer's mind was first emptied, and where her own silence is thus connected to Suma in the final confrontation.

While Tom Mes considers the film's conclusion to spoil the mystery through too much resolution (2001, par. 5), this conclusion plays an important role: it is essential that the killer's mind is opened up through silence in the presence of Suma within Aku's Psychorium, for this event brings all the connections described here together for the first time. The narrative strength of these associations demonstrates how Ishii uses variations of auditory extension and silence as formal support for the story of criminal investigation. At the same time, by associating silence at the heart of Tokyo with both the interiority of an individual's mind and the interior of Mt. Fuji – a powerful symbol of Japan's collective mind – the film connects town and country to reveal key themes about the relationship between the individual and urban space that have been staples of Sogo Ishii's work.

The Tokyo of *Angel Dust* doesn't aim to recapture an idea of Old Edo in which there were spots were for excellent Fuji viewing as made forever famous in Hokusai's series of views rendered in the Edo period. Nor does the film seek to construct an imaginary stability in Tokyo as in the immediate post-war films that Russell discusses. Rather, it suggests the possibility of maintaining a connection with what is still there – Mt. Fuji – even if its views have been obscured from within the city. Tokyo remains the dense and untotalizable metropolis that it is renowned for. Yet some order is possible within as a function of the psychological experience of its inhabitants. An idea of stability lies in the

heart of Mt. Fuji's dark and silent depths, equated here with psychological interiority, a psychic thread between town and country rather than one based on visibility. In *Angel Dust*, the long-range listening of Schafer's hi-fi soundscape is a function of the silence of interior experience, allowing for a connection to Mt. Fuji from the city despite its lack of visibility and the density of the urban soundscape.

The experience of the silence of interiority becomes a tool for the urban dwellers to reclaim some personal space within the dense population of the city, as well as extend outwards towards the countryside that defines the city's limits. The city in *Angel Dust* is the embodiment of the Zen principle of *mu*, a space that is defined by its surroundings. Tokyo's sprawl is not without limits, even if the limits are invisible from the ground. Silence helps connect the individual to the city's limits through the natural world beyond its borders. Sogo Ishii continues to develop these themes of connection between town and country, and between individual and city, in the films that follow *Angel Dust*, culminating in his most profound portrait of Tokyo to date: *Kyoshin* (Mirrored Mind).

Mirrored Mind: *Window Shopping and Mobile Spectatorship in the Urban Jungle*

Like *Isolation of 1 in 880,000*, Ishii's latest film *Mirrored Mind* features a character suffering from urban anxiety. Like *Angel Dust*, the film represents the search for grounding within the modern metropolis, a grounding that is equated with silence. An unnamed actress (Miwako Ichikawa) is distressed with her life in Tokyo, enough so that she attempts suicide via an overdose of sleeping pills. She winds up in a coma, and when she awakens she has undergone a psychological transformation and is now able to cope with the urban world that surrounds her. The centerpiece of the film is a journey to the

tropical paradise of Bali where the woman finds some peace and quiet amidst the palm trees and the ocean breeze. The film remains ambiguous as to whether or not she actually took the trip to Bali, suggesting that it was perhaps a dream while unconscious in the hospital. Either way, the journey has affected her deeply, and her newfound peace within the city is positioned in direct relation to her experience in the wilderness.

The events presented in the film revolve around five settings: the streets of Tokyo, the woman's apartment, the film set where she works, the tropical setting of Bali, and the hospital where she is admitted after her overdose. In addition to scenes in these settings, the film also has psychedelic interludes consisting of nature imagery abstracted through a mirrored split-screen effect that recalls a view through a kaleidoscope. The first recognizable images visible in the film are of the streets of Tokyo, followed by a sequence within the woman's apartment. Without revealing her face, the film follows her hands as she sets up a video camera to shoot in the living room area. A close-up of the camera's lens cuts directly to a close-up of a TV screen: here we see images of the ocean, followed by images of the woman in her kitchen mixing an alcoholic drink in the blender. In the middle of the drink-making process we cut from these images presented on the TV screen to a direct shot of the woman in the kitchen. The sequence ends as we see reflections of the televised water bouncing off the liquor bottles, followed by images of the floor of her shower as the water runs.

Over the rest of the film we see her walking the city streets, playing a scene at work, and spending some time in Bali. Yet the film returns to the living room scene at various points, each time providing us with non-linear access to key details that the opening sequence leaves out. Most notable among these details are the message that she

videotapes in her living room, and the fact that she includes a handful of sleeping pills in her blended drink recipe. This last detail is given only after she has woken up in the hospital, an event that is positioned after her trip to Bali. So it is only in retrospect, after viewing the film and sorting its events into linear order, that we realize her trip to Bali might have been a coma dream. Therefore, part of the film's ambiguity about the line between fantasy and reality is achieved by its non-linear structure.

Another key to the film's blurred boundaries between fantasy and reality is the mediating technology of video. As an actress, the woman's identity crisis is, in part, a function of her own self-representation. It is essential that her trip to Bali, whether real or imagined, is initially presented on her TV screen at home, and then shortly after as a representation on a video screen in a shop window on the streets of Tokyo. While her crisis is positioned at the center of the tension between reality and screen representation, it is important that this crisis is equally a function of tensions between urban space and the wilderness. The film's conclusion rests upon the dissolution of these boundary lines so that she manages to bring some of her fantasy into reality, to make real what she has seen on the video screen, to bring some of the wilderness into the city. To illustrate how the film presents the theme of overcoming urban anxiety, I will compare an early sequence to the film's conclusion and then demonstrate how this conclusion is a function of the film's representation of the wilderness.

Following the opening apartment sequence, we first see the woman in full as she crosses the famous multi-directional pedestrian walkway in the Shibuya district of Tokyo, complete with its attendant noisy soundscape. Here she becomes disoriented amidst the flow of people from every direction and has to pause for a moment in the middle of the

street. From here we cut directly to a close-up of a textured glass surface with a mass of water visible beyond, matched with a cut on the soundtrack to complete silence. Air bubbles embedded within the glass look as though they could be droplets of water following a rainfall. The surface of the glass adds an abstract texture to the water visible in the distance, and it is not immediately clear that we are, in fact, inside a modern building in the middle of Tokyo. Two shots later the actress is revealed in front of the window, followed by a wide shot that reveals the frame of the window itself. At this point it becomes clear that the water visible beyond the window is part of a fountain in an urban courtyard, with traffic now also visible in the distance. Along with this revelation comes the emergence of the light din of traffic noise, the absolute null extension of the interior's first shot opening up to the vastness that corresponds with its visual equivalent. Finally, it is revealed that the actress is in the middle of playing a scene, the film crew revealed at the other end of the large open room.

Silence in this sequence is married to abstraction, a lack of sense of place that has the potential to become anything, like a scene waiting to be played. Silence here is also related to the natural world, for the first we see of this interior are suggestions of the wilderness that stand in stark contrast to the images and sounds of Shibuya presented just prior. The textures of water from the fountain and the windowpane itself are pockets of the natural world embedded within urban space, and the silence of this interior space is thereby equated with these pockets. But it is an artificial silence created by architectural design. As I will suggest, the actress wants to find her way out of this artificiality and come to experience nature within the city as a function of her very being, rather than one

dictated by the design of the built environment. Reflections of the natural world in the city must give way to the real thing, and this is the suggestion made at the end of the film.

Mirrored Mind closes with a sequence that mirrors the woman's street crossing at the beginning, only this time the cut to silence does not come with a visual cut to an interior space. Rather, the silence exists with her outside on the busy street. Standing at a busy intersection similar to the one where she became disoriented at the beginning of the film, here she takes a moment and stretches her arms outwards in a gesture that recalls her time on the Bali beach. A cut to absolute silence on the soundtrack comes as she performs this gesture. A young man also waiting at the crosswalk sees her gesture and does the same thing himself. Then, as the rushing sound of the city traffic returns, she crosses the street with a smile and a confident gait that stands in stark contrast to her demeanor at the beginning of the film. As we watch her cross, the film cuts to what is perhaps the most iconic shot in the film: a simple view of light clouds in the blue sky, framed by buildings on either side. This shot is a visual literalization of the principle of *mu*, the emptiness of the sky emphasized by the buildings that frame it. It is the visual equivalent of the film's characteristic moments of rupturing silence, given significance because of the sound that frames these moments – in this case, the roar of the city.

So what precipitated this shift between her initial disorientation and subsequent peace within the city? The middle of the film presents a transcendent journey to Bali that begins with images of the tropical paradise that the woman sees on a television screen in a shop window. As she stops in front of the window we hear Gamelan music and the slightly distanced din of traffic. The two-dimensional nature of the window and screen are emphasized by their glossy surfaces as we see reflections of street lights, cars and

people passing by. At the same time, these reflections suggest the inseparability of these surfaces from the environment that surrounds them, the connection forged by the reflections themselves. What follows is a rich formal exploration of the relationships between what we see on the screen and the environment that surrounds it, established largely through connections made between the soundscapes of the city and the natural sounds of the Bali seaside.

A light wash of white noise emerges as we see the images on the video screen, suggesting the sound of wind emanating from the *mise-en-scène* presented therein. Yet this sound, even if it were part of the video being screened, would not be audible through the glass of the window. Instead, the sound functions as a marker of the transcendence from representation to reality that is about to occur. From here we cut to a direct shot of a sunset, now with none of the materializing evidence of the window or screen. The traffic noise continues in conjunction with the white noise, but in this new context the two begin to merge, suggesting a transformation from din to wind. Then we cut to a shot of waves lapping gently on the beach, and sounds emerge that are more recognizable as those associated with water. Then we cut back to a shot of the woman's face looking at the screen, and immediately the ocean and wind sounds drop out, leaving only the din of traffic. This is a sudden separation of wind from traffic just as they were beginning to merge beyond distinct recognition. And so we have moved from the city street through to the environment represented on the TV screen and back again.

Cut to a shot of the woman's feet reflecting in the chrome panel at the bottom of the window, and all sound drops out for a moment of absolute silence. Another pair of legs enters the frame next to hers, but no new feet reflect in the chrome. Cut to a direct shot

of the ocean, now presented in a mirrored split-screen effect. The light sound of white noise emerges again, and as we cut back to a frontal view of the woman's face we see another woman standing behind her, the sounds of the traffic din now re-emerging on the soundtrack. Cut to a shot of a tree blowing in the wind, and the sound of a car passing in the previous shot seems to morph into the sound of wind in the leaves. Cut back to a profile shot of the woman, and as she turns to look behind her the sound of the wind fades out and leaves us with another moment of silence.

Cut to another shot of the ocean, and the white noise emerges once again. Cut back to the woman looking behind her, now in medium close-up so that we can see the other woman standing behind her. The sound of the white noise yields to the traffic din, the two now easily transitioning into each other. Cut back to a shot of the ocean, and the specifics of the traffic noise fade out, leaving only a distant din once again. Cut back to the women looking at the screen with the sound of wind and water continuing, but now these sounds do not appear out of place on the city street until we see cars in the background whose individual sounds are now absent. Cut back to a sunset over the water, and then back to the women looking, the sound of the wind and water continuing until the traffic noise re-emerges. Then comes a third fade-out to complete silence after which we cut to a long shot from behind, the two women still looking at the screen. Gamelan music now gently fills the silence, just as it will again in her journey to the places she has just seen on the screen.

This sequence is an exploration of the remarkable similarities and differences between an urban soundscape and one positioned at a rural seaside. It also explores the tensions inherent in the representation of these landscapes by way of the screen.

Throughout this sequence, the image track keeps us precisely oriented, never leaving any question about whether or not we are seeing a shot of the wilderness on a screen in the city, or a direct shot of the wilderness itself. The soundtrack, however, is more elusive. The shifts between sounds that are clearly identifiable as either urban or rural roughly follow similar changes in montage, yet only once does a direct cut on the image track come with a similar direct cut on the soundtrack. The rest of the time, the sounds of the ocean overlap with shots of the city street, while the sound of passing traffic carries over to a shot of wind in the trees until it seems to dissipate upon that very wind.

The approach to sound design in this sequence illustrates how easily an urban soundscape can transition into that of an ocean side setting. This ease of transition is, I argue, the main theme of the film. The three moments of absolute silence each occur just after the two soundscapes have blended into each other, almost as if to suggest that their similarities cancel each other out, leaving an empty space at the point of their most complete intersection. This silence at the heart of the connection between town and country is the silence that the woman finds at the end of the film, a representation of the overlap between the two, the ability to find nature within the city.

The overlapping soundscapes in this sequence raise a number of the key issues that have run throughout this dissertation. The blending of the urban soundscape into that of the wilderness can be thought of as an extreme form of auditory extension. The images on the video screen offer a similar extension, though one that is the product of technologies of representation, the kind of virtuality that R. Murray Schafer has deemed negative. Yet these images of the video screen give way to direct shots of the location itself, and these are accompanied by soundscapes that appear unmediated by any

technologies within the diegesis. Instead, these images and sounds of Bali suggest the woman's imagination while she watches, while also foreshadowing later shots in which we will see the woman within these same locations and hearing these same sounds.

Schafer's bias for the pre-industrial landscape fails to recognize that the sounds of the city can so easily blend into the sounds of the country. However, later acoustic ecologists, like Gordon Hempton, have recognized similarities between certain kinds of urban and rural soundscapes as an important indicator of how the wilderness and the city can find points of experiential intersection (2009). So the fact that a recent report states that Japan is thinking of adding the sound of running water to their silent electric cars isn't as ironic as it might first appear (Ryall 2010). This point of intersection between the sound of traffic and of water is used here to mark a point of mobility between reality and representation for the actress, and where the two meet in the space of her psyche. This type of mental overlapping is exactly what Westerkamp represents in her composition "Kits Beach Soundwalk" which, as discussed at length in chapter one, posits a form of engagement with urban space that finds pockets of the wilderness through a connection between the imagination and the external world. This form of engagement is the premise of the soundwalk.

The interchangeability between urban and rural soundscapes in this sequence is also an interesting example of what Chion calls "added value" in sound/image relationships (1994, 5). You can change how a sound is interpreted by pairing it with different images. And in fact, as Chion discusses, people's response to the same sound can change depending on what they are told about that sound. Because urban noise pollution has a built-in negative connotation in the age of the highly contained ideals of modern

architecture, when people hear what they think is the din of traffic they will respond negatively. However, if they believe the same sound is that of the ocean in the distance, a sound with much more positive connotations, they will respond positively. This is one reason that water fountains are so effective at masking traffic noise and are used as such in many urban parks (Hempton 2009, 75). Westerkamp's trick is to use the power of the mind to alter the personal significance of sound through its interiorization, and I argue that this is what the woman in *Mirrored Mind* is doing as she watches the video screens.

As a screen spectator within urban space, the woman also embodies many of the key issues about urban experience and screen culture that have been at the forefront of the discourse of the cinematic city. Anne Friedberg argues that the emergence of a female flaner through spectatorship in the cinema and the shopping mall has helped give way to theories of mobility in the face of virtual representation (1993, 120). These issues have been taken up by Giuliana Bruno in her equation of motion with emotion as discussed in chapter four (Bruno 2002, 7). In the window scene from *Mirrored Mind*, the frame of the shop window bears the historical marker of the emergence of female flaner. The window frame gives way to the frame of the video screen, itself another marker of the emergence of female flaner. And then both frames disappear as we are presented with a virtual view of the actress's interiority. In addition to the connection between town and country by way of the silence of interiority, this film posits an example of the virtual mobility that Friedberg ties to screen culture as an extension of the evolving flâneuse. The woman here is literally a spectator, combining the art of window shopping with screen spectatorship, something that Tokyo offers perhaps more than any other city in the world through its excess of screens that have stepped in to replace long-range

views of the surrounding countryside. Further, this scene extends the concept of mobile spectatorship to considerations of sound through the formal treatment of audiovisual synchronization I have described here. She is soundwalking while standing still, threading interior and exterior space aided by technologies of representation.

The Tokyo of *Mirrored Mind* is not the unsafe environment of *Angel Dust* in which women are stalked by a serial killer. Rather, this is the Tokyo that is renowned as the safest big city in the world, with the lowest rates of violent crime. This is the perfect environment for the safety required for female flanerierie - once associated with the shopping mall and the cinema - to spill out onto the streets of the city. And here, in her rapture over the screen in the store window, her psychological journey to the world pictured on the screen can be positioned in relation to the key questions that Friedberg poses about the experience of screen culture. This is what Friedberg identifies as the “tension between the material and immaterial,” addressed by two questions: “*Where*” and/or “*When* are we when we watch film or television or sit at the computer?” (2006, 178).

Friedberg takes us through the various answers to these questions posited by different strains of film studies. In the psychoanalytic approach, “we would say we are in the ‘imaginary,’ a place of psychic regression produced by cinema’s apparatical effect” (2006, 178). The phenomenological approach remains “stubbornly concrete, immanent, and pre-reflective: it is devoid of depth and interiority” (178). In the approach taken by those of the *Kulturkritik* school, we might emphasize the tension between film’s two-dimensionality and the three-dimensional space in which the screen is being viewed

(179). Friedberg concludes that no matter what size or type of screen being viewed, “the space of the screen is a virtual space, an elsewhere that occupies a new dimension” (179).

In *Mirrored Mind*, all of these questions are brought to the fore when thinking of the principal character as a screen spectator. Interestingly, these questions take on a new significance when sound is added to the equation. In the shop window sequence, we find a kind of literalization of the psychoanalytical approach, where the woman’s experience of the screen takes her into a psychic space, and the film then presents this as a reality in the tradition of the fantasy or dream sequence. The film does this by playing on the tension between the screen’s two-dimensionality and the three-dimensionality of the world around the screen: the flat depthless surfaces, emphasized by the frame of the screen and the store window, dissolve as the film transcends both and takes us into the three-dimensional world pictured on the screen. The space of Bali is then brought back to the city streets through the soundtrack, allowing for an overlap of the two. While the screen in the window remains a flat surface in shots of the Tokyo street, the sound of the Bali soundscape combined with urban noise keeps the three-dimensionality of the wilderness alive even when its image is put back in its depthless place on the TV.

Yet there is more going in the sequence than simply attempting to represent the woman’s psychological experience of the images she sees on the screen. Rather, this sequence illustrates Friedberg’s idea of screen space as a new dimension of its own that gives birth to a form of virtual mobility that has emerged along with screen culture. The woman here is taking her first step on a virtual journey that will then inform her experience of the city as a pedestrian, even in the absence of any such screens. The film’s positive conclusion, the woman’s experience of silence in the city, is the result of

combining the “imaginary” interior space prompted by the images on the screen with the screen’s depthless materiality. The interchangeability of the soundscapes is a metaphor for the interchangeability of the real and the virtual, of the flat surface of the screen and the three-dimensional world, of interior experience and external reality. The film posits a character who makes productive use of all these paradoxes and tensions, each of which is embodied by silence, at once a marker of depthlessness and interiority and the potential for great depth and exteriority.

The reflections on the window and video screen that keep us grounded within the city are a key theme throughout the film which continually exposes reflections of the wilderness within the city. The film is full of minute visual details that bring nature into the city, through textured glass that resembles water or images of the ocean on a TV screen that reflect on the wall just as real water would. As Tom Mes suggests in his review of the film:

Beauty is not the exclusive domain of utopian travel destinations. The man-made environment contains just as much of it, but we need to be willing to open our eyes, minds and hearts to it. The same sun that sets into a tropical sea also reflects off steel. The same rain falls on leaves and on asphalt. The same clouds pass over forests and cities. The same human beings dwell among both. Indeed, humanity is the key, the knot that ties both ends together. If man is a product of nature, then what is man-made must inevitably contain something natural inside it. (2007, par. 4)

Mes points out that the film presents a city that reflects the natural world, and that many of these spaces are conflated. Yet this film is not an illustration of a character that loses herself to the city. Instead, she retains her autonomy, making her peace within the city by way of an interior journey that allows her to reflect upon the relationship between what lies within her mind and that which lies outside. Her ability to bring silence into the space of the city is a result of her psychological experience, to move inward in order to

open outwards. A trip to the wilderness becomes a trip to the depths of her interiority, like Suma's journeys to Mt. Fuji in *Angel Dust*. As in *Angel Dust*, this interiority is marked by silence. But *Mirrored Mind* also suggests that this interiority is the key to affecting positive change on our experience of the urban. It is this recognition of the "natural" within the built environment that the film seeks out, and that is explored by the relationships between urban and rural soundscapes in the window-shopping sequence.

The conclusion of *Mirrored Mind* takes us back to Tati's *Play Time*. Tati's film begins by emphasizing the contained nature of modernist architecture, just as this film does in its initial transition from the noise of the street to the silence of the interior space enclosed in glass; *Play Time* concludes with the suggestion that the divisive nature of glass is transcended because of a perceptual shift in the city dwellers, allowing for a free flow of sound between spaces of modernist containment. *Mirrored Mind* brings this same principle into the realm of virtual mobility. Not only does the glass of the shop window and video screen give way to the spaces represented on that screen, they do so by way of the woman's psychological experience. While the store window provides a frame, and the TV screen another frame, her experience of these is transcended to the plane of the virtual, represented here by the impossible soundscape that emanates from these images on the screen and replaces the soundscape of the city street. This is a marker of the kind of space replacement model of schizophonia that Schafer fears in the face of virtuality. But *Mirrored Mind* suggests that this virtuality is a positive thing.

Like in *Play Time*, this dissolution of architectural mediation is the product of a perceptual shift rather than a change in the built environment. In other words, it is through psychogeographical engagement that our experience of the urban world can be

transformed. The individual is an engaged member of the urban community with some autonomous agency, without retreating to the distanced aerial view associated with synoptic mastery. In turn, this experiential shift of urban space can yield new forms of practice within this space that can effect concrete change on the built environment, just as the woman in *Mirrored Mind* starts to add greenery to her apartment. The woman's experience of silence in the city is her first step towards mapping her own experience onto the space that she inhabits.

Conclusion

The moments of silence in each of the examples I have discussed from across Sogo Ishii's career all share one thing in common: they are important because they stand in stark contrast to whatever is visible on the screen, and whatever sound came before and returned afterwards. Silence is *mu*, framed by the sounds on either side of the pockets of silence, and also by the images of space on the screen. As such, these examples of silence are all reflexive strategies that call attention to the artificial pairing of sound and image, emphasizing the missing soundtrack that lies at the heart of all sound film. These are reflexive moments that threaten to disrupt our engagement with the illusion of the film's diegesis, and yet they also serve to heighten audience engagement by highlighting the dual nature of cinema, the gap between which we must make our own meaning. Just as Ishii's characters must recognize silence as a presence rather than an absence, so too does Ishii's audience need to understand his reflexive use of silence as a way of engaging them in the process of the film's construction, an awareness of mediation that is a necessary part of urban living. To navigate the urban environment we must make peace

with its architectural peculiarities, to gain a sense of grounding by recognizing how our own experience can be mapped onto the city.

It is essential that silence is so regularly equated with interior experience in the films of Sogo Ishii, an interiority that allows the characters who experience this silence to connect with the world outside. Some fail, others succeed. But the quest to thread these separate spaces is consistent across Sogo Ishii's career with its many stylistic shifts. Recently, the filmmaker announced that he has changed his screen name to Gakuryu Ishii and will no longer use the given name Sogo. So it seems the era of Sogo Ishii has come to an end, while the era of Gakuryu Ishii is just beginning. Given the thematic consistency across the films of Sogo Ishii, it will be interesting to discover if the break in this cycle will distance Gakuryu from the work of his previous identity. Only time will tell.

Note

¹ This detached effect is emphasized by the fact that the music cues on the DVD release in the *Punk Years* box set released by Transformer have been positioned in the film separately from the sound on the print source. I don't know if these same cues were used in the original film or not, but my analysis will be based on the DVD version of the film.

Conclusion

Reflective Audioviewing

As I have shown throughout this dissertation, the work of theorists like Michel Chion and Rick Altman has provided us with a solid vocabulary that can be used for various avenues of inquiry into film sound. With the help of this vocabulary, attention to film sound is becoming a more regular aspect of film studies in general. Yet very often, broad inquiries into film sound neglect the specifics of individual films, and there remains a gap between theorizing film sound in general and listening to specific films very carefully. Even Chion's own books dedicated to specific filmmakers like David Lynch (1995), Jacques Tati (1997), and Stanley Kubrick (2001) make only passing references to sound, belying the author's own call at the end of *Audio-Vision* for scholars to take up the task of analyzing films with a sound-based methodology. Steps towards taking up Chion's call have been made in recent years, with books like Britta Sjogren's *Into the Vortex* (2006) and William Whittington's *Sound Design and Science Fiction* (2007) that include case studies of individual films. But we need more. And as sound studies comes into its own as an area of research specialization across a variety of disciplines in the fine arts and humanities, interdisciplinary concerns rush to the fore.

This dissertation reflects my commitment to contribute to the expansion of sound-based film analyses. And my approach to film sound analysis is based on the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of sound studies research, with a particular interest in the intersections between film sound theory and acoustic ecology as a way of accessing ecological themes at work in my chosen films. My goals for this dissertation have thus

been three-fold: to expand the horizons of film sound theory by demonstrating how it can intersect productively with the discipline of acoustic ecology; to offer in-depth textual analyses of sound/image relationships in a set of films that have not been treated with as much attention in the existing literature; and to demonstrate how reading these films through my interdisciplinary methodology points towards new ways of thinking about acoustic ecology as a useful field within the fine arts as well as for the “real” world.

In drawing on acoustic ecology I have focused on the writings of R. Murray Schafer as a general representative of the field. He has laid the groundwork for all the work in acoustic ecology to follow, and I believe that if we better understand Schafer’s thought - problems and all - we can better understand acoustic ecology in general. Of course there is a lot more to acoustic ecology than Schafer, and there are many possible directions that thinking about film sound through acoustic ecology can take. Indeed, one could carve out a lifetime of scholarly activity following the path of the World Soundscape Project. The project is concerned with studying the soundscapes of specific geographical locales. The film scholar could apply similar interest to the regional representation of local soundscapes on film, thereby revealing the rich cultural and historical implications of how a specific region has been represented through sound. One could also apply acoustic ecology to the study of exhibition practices in the history of cinema, following more directly from the work of Emily Thompson in delineating the auditory evolution of the modern film theatre (2002), and of Rick Altman’s excavation of sound practices in the silent era (2004). Though my work here has been grounded in textual analysis, the key intersections between acoustic ecology and film sound theory that I have charted provide

an important foundation for other research interests to follow. The field is wide open, so let the work begin.

My decision to use the term *schizophonia* as a guiding concept for my film analyses is based on the value I find in its reference to the internal experience of external mediation. Schafer's original definition of the term is quite narrow in its emphasis on the split between sound and source by way of electroacoustical transmission. Yet I have explored various possible permutations of the concept that extend beyond the basic meaning that Schafer ascribed to it. By keeping the concept of *schizophonia* a constant throughout the dissertation, I have been able to explore ways in which it can be read through different areas of critical inquiry: ideologies of sound/image synchronization in chapter one; discourses surrounding modern architecture in chapter two; issues of ecological containment in chapter three; the role of technology in mediating our experience of the natural world in chapter four; the connection between soundscape composition and film sound design in chapter five; and the discourse of urban engagement in chapter six. The "split" that *schizophonia* describes can be thought of in different ways, and the subjective qualities of experiencing this split need not necessarily have negative implications. Thinking of film as a medium in which sound and image are split leads to new ways of thinking about reflexive strategies that the filmmakers discussed here tie to the theme of the subjective experience of mediation.

The bulk of the work in this dissertation is grounded in textual analyses and its associated interpretive practice. I am a firm believer in the value of formal analysis for gaining insight into a film's aesthetic system. In part, this dissertation offers analyses that elucidate aspects of film form that have not been fully recognized in my chosen

films: the glass barriers of modernist architecture explored in *Play Time* that suddenly allow sound to pass through in the film's final moments; sound effects that are timed to camera movements instead of figure movements in *Stalker*; the use of soundscape composition in *Elephant* and *Last Days* that maps Hildegard Westerkamp's compositional practices onto the spaces represented in these films. By attending to these aspects of film form we can get at the reflexive aspects of these films that open up the possibilities for new interpretation, allowing us to think about sound/image relationships in the cinema in new ways. If readers come away with nothing more than a few revelations about what is actually happening in these films, then my work here will have been of some service.

Of course, many of the interpretations I develop from my observations are certainly arguable. Not everyone will find it useful to equate *Stalker*'s daughter with a film camera; nor will everyone agree that Blake looking over his shoulder at the end of *Last Days* indicates a sudden awareness of the cinematic apparatus that is responsible for the world in which he lives. Such interpretations are the end result of my desire to get the reader thinking about the way that these films use sound/image relationships to call attention to the artificiality of the worlds they construct. If we come to different conclusions about how to interpret these reflexive strategies, my hope is that this disagreement results from the reader examining the films more closely than she has before. My interpretations are thus intended, in part, as provocations towards new ways of thinking about the use of form in these films, and about sound film in general.

In concentrating on formal analyses I have willfully treated the spectator only tangentially (most significantly in addressing Mettler's questions about the level of

access an audience has to the world represented on film, and by questioning what audience identifications a listener might bring to Westerkamp's work in the films of Van Sant). But make no mistake: I have conducted these analyses with the audience in mind. Chion describes film spectatorship as audio-vision, emphasizing the fact that we experience sound and image simultaneously in the cinema. And yet, as I have argued, sound and image remain separate from each other, their interconnections traceable only by acknowledging their separation. These interconnections by way of separation form the substance of audiovisual ecology in the cinema. I adapt the concept of audio-vision by tying it to Katharine Norman's concept of reflective listening: a way of addressing works of art by acknowledging their reflexive qualities. Reflective audioviewing is thus prompted by reflexive strategies that expose the artificiality of sound/image relationships in the cinema, which is why I have continually emphasized the cinema's divided nature. So reflective audioviewing is a result of schizophrenic experience; the positive potential of the term *schizophonia* lies in its acknowledgment of how people experience mediation. Schizophonia thus begins as an evocative way of discussing aspects of a film text, but it ends by suggesting that schizophrenic experience in the audience is an awareness of the mediation to which they have been exposed. In this respect, schizophrenic experience engenders the practice of reflective audioviewing.

Each of my chosen films explores perceptual shifts in the people that live within the worlds represented, and these shifts are tied to reflexive approaches to sound/image synchronization. I argue that in recognizing these perceptual shifts as a function of reflexive strategies, the audience can experience a perceptual shift of their own that they can carry with them to the world outside the walls of the cinema. The characters who

experience the world differently at the end of *Play Time* reveal a dramatic formal shift that exposes the artificiality of their world's cinematic representation; the use of silence in the films of Sogo Ishii is a reflexive strategy tied to the subjective experience of characters who move from profound and violent forms of urban alienation to an experience of peace within the heart of the city. The films offer the potential to open audiences up to a state of reflective audioviewing, and by extension to make moves of their own towards the positive experience of mediation in the world beyond the cinema. And learning to perceive the world differently, through attention to sound, is the goal of acoustic ecology.

Schafer's life-long project, regardless of his biases, is to get people to learn to listen to the world more carefully. Chion applies this same goal to film spectatorship in his own work on film sound. Real-world listening skills can help us hear films better; and from films we can learn to listen to the world differently as well. Learning to hear the world better is my most prescient wish for the readers of this dissertation. Finally, my interest in film sound comes not from a disciplinary lack, though I am happy to fill in a few gaps. More importantly, however, I believe in the fundamental tenets of acoustic ecology, and I believe in the power of art to change the way people experience the world. Studying the art of cinema through the methodology of audiovisual ecology can lead to a greater level of audience engagement with these films, as well as a greater level of engagement with the environments in which these audiences live.

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Filmography

Disque 957, 1928, Germaine Dulac, France.

Weekend, 1930, Walter Ruttmann, Germany.

M, 1931, Fritz Lang, Germany.

Kreise, 1933, Oskar Fischinger, Germany.

Rhythm in Light, 1934, Mary Ellen Bute + Ted Nemeth + Melville Weber, U.S.A.

Synchromy #2, 1936, Mary Ellen Bute + Ted Nemeth, U.S.A.

Ivan the Terrible (Part One), 1944, Sergei Eisenstein, U.S.S.R.

Radio Dynamics: A Color Music Composition, 1945, Oskar Fischinger, Germany.

Rashomon, 1950, Akira Kurosawa, Japan.

Les Vacances de M. Hulot, 1953, Jacques Tati, France.

Tokyo Story, 1953, Yasujiro Ozu, Japan.

Mon Oncle, 1958, Jacques Tati, France.

Play Time, 1967, Jacques Tati, France .

Synchromy, 1971, Norman McLaren, Canada.

American Graffiti, 1973, George Lucas, U.S.A.

Panic in High School (Koko dai panikku), 1976, Sogo Ishii, Japan.

Star Wars, 1977, George Lucas, U.S.A.

Isolation of 1/880,000 (Hachijyu-Hachi-Man Bun no Ichi no Kodoku), 1978, Sogo Ishii, Japan.

Stalker, 1979, Andrei Tarkovksy, U.S.S.R.

Crazy Thunder Road (Kuruizaki sanda rodo), 1980, Sogo Ishii, Japan.

Shuffle, 1981, Sogo Ishii, Japan.

Burst City (Bakuretsu toshi), 1982, Sogo Ishii, Japan.

Crazy Family (Gyakufunsha kazoku), 1984, Sogo Ishii, Japan.

Tokyo-ga, 1985, Wim Wenders, U.S.A./West Germany.

The Sacrifice, 1986, Andrei Tarkovsky, Sweden.

Elephant, 1989, Alan Clarke, U.K.

Stellar, 1993, Stan Brakhage, U.S.A.

Angel Dust (Enjeru dasuto), 1994, Sogo Ishii, Japan.

Black Ice, 1994, Stan Brakhage, U.S.A.

Picture of Light, 1994, Peter Mettler, Canada/Switzerland .

Pulp Fiction, 1994, Quentin Tarantino, U.S.A.

August in the Water (Mizu no naka no hachigatsu), 1995, Sogo Ishii, Japan.

Labyrinth of Dreams (Yume no ginga), 1997, Sogo Ishii, Japan.

Electric Dragon 80,000 V, 2001, Sogo Ishii, Japan.

Gerry, 2001, Gus Van Sant, U.S.A.

Gojoe, 2001, Sogo Ishii, Japan.

Gambling, Gods and LSD, 2002, Peter Mettler, Canada/Switzerland.

Elephant, 2003, Gus Van Sant, U.S.A.

Last Days, 2005, Gus Van Sant, U.S.A.

Dead End Run, 2003, Sogo Ishii, Japan.

Mirrored Mind (Kyoshin), 2005, Sogo Ishii, Japan.

Paranoid Park, 2007, Gus Van Sant, U.S.A.