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**A Neoformalist Analysis of the Intersections of Cinematic  
Technique and Musical Performance**

By

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A full dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
of the Master of Arts Degree in Audiovisual Communication

at the University of Johannesburg

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

## 1.1 Introduction

This study aims to explore and analyse the cognitive and emotional effects on viewer-listeners when engaging with a set of specific audiovisual artworks, as well as the meaning-making processes involved in these experiences. The scope of research and analysis aims at the intersection of two fields of art-making: striking live musical performances, which are captured through innovative uses of cinematic technique. The resulting audiovisual artworks are interesting because they are not perceived and enjoyed only as musical performances, nor musical performances captured in predictable or formulaic ways by cameras in an expected performance space, but they become something closer to what may be called “cinematic”, and therefore seem to constitute a new category of artwork. What the filmmakers are doing in the act of creation is as important as what the musicians and performers are doing in terms of the artistic impact of the final audiovisual text. A third artistic tradition might even be included in this synthesis, namely lyricism, or linguistics, but for the sake of an uncomplicated introductory paragraph, this study will include the analysis of lyrics (where applicable) in the broader category of “musical performances”. Levinson (1984:6) defines a hybrid art form as “arising from the actual combination or interpenetration of earlier art forms”. What this study is analysing, therefore, is essentially a hybrid art form, arising from combinations of the rich artistic traditions of music, linguistics, performance and, importantly, filmmaking.

Essentially, the fusion of image and sound in the audiovisual text means that “we do not *see* and *hear* a film, we *hear/see* it” (Murch in Chion, 1994:xxi). Because this study is placing nearly equal emphasis on the audio and the visual elements of the texts being analysed, I will refer to “viewer-listeners” (instead of viewers and/or listeners) wherever it is appropriate, and wherever it is clear that the texts being referenced would not have shied away from including either the auditory or visual experience of the person engaging with the audiovisual text. According to Plantinga (2009:86), viewer-listeners’ affective experiences (emotions and cognitions), as well as the processes of meaning-making and interpretation, are all firmly intertwined. To really understand the nature of the affective experience of the various combinations



of music, performance, and cinematic technique on the viewer-listener, an analyst therefore needs to consider emotions, cognition, meaning and interpretation simultaneously.

The combination of music, lyric and performance, all recorded on camera and then edited and viewed as moving images with a soundtrack, creates dense layers of possible meaning and emotional responses for viewer-listeners. Vernallis (2008:405) argues that in many music videos the music, image and lyrics “function synergistically: all are transformed, as they become part of a new entity”. This study focuses on a particular set of such ‘new entities’, hybrid texts which I am calling ‘sublime-oceanic musical performances captured in moving images’. Perhaps the most important (and interesting) feature of all of these artworks, is that they problematise their own categorisation as texts: they are not merely musical performances captured on camera, and they are not exactly pieces of ‘cinema’ because of the primacy of the musical performance in each sequence. The artworks (listed in the table below, arranged by year of release) are grouped together by a number of shared characteristics, which are briefly expanded on below.

**1.1.1 Common Characteristic of Sublime-Oceanic Musical Performances Captured in Moving Images:**

<b>Film Title</b>	<b>Song Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Filmmakers</b>	<b>Musicians / Performers</b>
<i>The Juniper Tree</i>	<i>untitled</i>	1990	Nietzchka Keene	Björk
<i>Searching For The Wrong-Eyed Jesus</i>	<i>Amazing Grace</i>	2003	Andrew Douglas	Melissa Swingle
<i>La Blogothèque – The Take Away Shows (series)</i>	<i>Neon Bible</i>	2007	Vincent Moon	Arcade Fire
<i>An Island</i>	<i>Alike</i>	2010	Vincent Moon	Efterklang

<i>The Big Easy Express</i>	<i>medley</i>	2012	Emmett Malloy	Edward Sharpe & the Magnetic Zeros, Old Crow Medicine Show, Mumford & Sons
<i>Music at the House (series)</i>	<i>Ukulele Anthem</i>	2014	Jim Batt (director) Brett Harrison (cinematographer)	Amanda Palmer
<i>Black America Again</i>	<i>Black America Again</i> ft. Stevie Wonder	2016	Bradford Young	Common & Jabari Exum
<i>The Odyssey</i>	<i>How Big How Blue How Beautiful</i>	2016	Vincent Haycock	Florence Welch (of Florence and the Machine)

### 1.1.1.1 Liveness

The first common characteristic is that in each of the audiovisual artworks listed above, the musical performance itself is clearly a *live* performance. There are many small imperfections or other cues in each performance which make it clear that the music is being made in the present moment, as the camera is recording the performances. Examples of this include being able to hear wind and breath on microphones, lapel microphones being touched, audible footsteps, vocal and instrumental inflections, rhythmic or tonal inconsistencies, and the changing sonic perspective dependent on the position of the camera. Much has been written about the fact that whether a piece of music is heard (and/or seen) as part of a live performance or listened to as a recording dramatically changes the dynamics of viewer-listener engagement and experience (Auslander 1999:61-111, Nasta 1991:77, Thom 1993:205, Uidhir 2007:298-303, Wurtzler 1992:89). These eight artworks listed above exist in an interesting liminal space which problematises the clear distinction (or blurs the line) between a viewer-listener's perception of the artwork as a live performance as opposed to a recording. In each case the audiovisual sequence being engaged with is clearly a recording, but the immediacy

and “rawness” of each performance, as captured and edited by the filmmakers, seems to create an experience that is much nearer to witnessing such a performance live in the physical world.

### **1.1.1.2 *These are not exactly ‘music videos’***

Secondly, the live audio recording also positions these eight artworks in a different category to what is commonly understood as ‘music videos’, because music videos are typically constructed by shooting images which are lip-synced by performers, and then edited over pre-recorded and pre-mixed audio. In most conventionally edited music videos, none of the final audio used in the music video is recorded on the set of the music video shoot itself. There are many exceptions to this rule, in which music video makers insert brief narrative segments or Brechtian moments of “breaking the illusion” of the music video world, but in general it is true to say that most of the actual music used in music videos is not recorded on the set of the music video shoot. The artworks that this study is concerned with might fall under a very broad category of ‘music videos’ (given that they are indeed hybrids of music and video), but this study aims to show that they constitute a unique subset of audiovisual experiences, which are ontologically and experientially very different from the mainstream understanding of ‘music videos’.

### **1.1.1.3 *Filmmaking as a fundamental element***

Thirdly, each of the eight artworks is filmed in an innovative manner. In each case there is careful consideration of formal elements such as camera movement, the timing of certain musical moments in relation to the camera, the positioning of the performers, their interactions and/or lack of interaction with the camera in the act of performance (which further complicates the line between ‘performance’ and ‘cinema’ in interesting ways), the setting of the performance, and the performers’ interactions with the spaces and objects around them. Most of the performances are captured in one continuous take (with a small amount of intercutting in the segment from Florence and the Machine’s *Odyssey* and Melissa Swingle’s performance in *Searching for the Wrong-Eyes Jesus*), and in each case the movement, pace, framing and angles created by the cinematographers and editors of each film create

very specific effects, which position these viewing-listening experiences ever nearer to (or perhaps within) the “cinematic” experience.

#### **1.1.1.4 Filmic context**

A fourth common characteristic is that seven of the eight musical performances are embedded as segments inside longer audiovisual texts, flowing in and out of other parts of films (narrative, documentary, experimental, multi-genre etc.), providing wider contextual platforms for meaning-making in each performance. If the meaning of any moment in a film is dependent on the context of the rest of the film, as many film analysts seem to agree is the case, then these musical performances are not to be engaged with as standalone moments, but rather as segments of a larger whole.

#### **1.1.1.5 The sublime-oceanic audiovisual experience**

Most genre-based narrative films base their plots on the seven basic emotional systems, namely play, fear, seeking, panic, care, rage and lust (Panksepp, 2017:149-151). These systems are evolutionarily hard-wired into humans' perception of the world, and they also come into play when we are watching films. They serve as the motors of narrative interest in the developing narration of every film we engage with, “because storytelling in films...is primarily about acting on goals defined by emotions” (Grodal, 2012:130). Each narrative is driven by characters who engage in the various patterns of play, fear, seeking, panic, care, rage and lust, and usually a film is “satisfying” to the viewer because it sets up a narrative which fulfils the goals of the main characters in each of these emotional systems, leading to an emotional release for the viewer. The plot sets up tension, but also usually allows it to be resolved. It is not only the characters who are engaging in these systems, but the viewers themselves are also consistently engaging in the emotional system of “seeking” as they discover new information and make predictions about the action in the film's plot (Badt, 2015:69). Consider a conventional rom-com which begins with two characters who struggle to make their relationship work in a series of dramatic (and often humorous) events - such a film may often end with a happy wedding scene, in which the tensions and conflicts of the plot are resolved. This would be an example of the play, lust, care and seeking emotional systems interacting to create a

satisfying emotional climax (and therefore release of emotion) for the viewer. Another common example would be a revenge plot in an action film, in which a character takes steps to enact revenge on the antagonists who have perhaps hurt his/her family (examples include *The Punisher*, *Kill Bill*, *John Wick*, *Taken*). In these cases, the emotional satisfaction is usually released in the final fight scene in which the protagonist defeats the antagonist in an extended violent scuffle. An interplay of the emotional systems of panic, fear, care, rage and seeking are used by the filmmakers to set up and resolve the tension in these narratives. Almost any conventional subset of genre movies can be understood in this way, and usually the combinations of the emotional motors of narrative interest are easy to identify in the patterns of the plots, also making it easier to identify the conventions and formulas being used by the filmmakers of each genre.

However, not all films operate so predictably along the somewhat formulaic emotional motors of genre movies. Neuroscientist and film theorist Torben Grodal (2009:11,12) explains that when a film presents a non-narrative experience which might possibly produce higher levels of meaning, there is “no prescribed way to release the saturated emotions”, and the feelings of deeper meaning therefore “remain permanent” and “persist in the viewer’s mind once the film experience is over”. The eight artworks that will be the focus of this study can all be argued to produce this specific emotional and cognitive effect in viewers, which Grodal has described as “sublime-oceanic feelings” (2006:5). Grodal (2006:5) argues that these types of films can result in “saturated” emotional experiences, which “may produce an experience of perceptual, cognitive, and emotional plenitude and deep meaning because of the complexity and emotional charge of the mental associations involved”. Grodal (2006:5) lists “art films” and “music videos” as examples of films which consistently produce sublime-oceanic viewing experiences, and interestingly the eight films that this study is looking at can be understood as particular amalgamations or hybrids of ‘art film’ and ‘music video’.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

On 25 August 2018, 94 of the 100 most-viewed videos on Youtube (the world’s most-viewed online platform for audiovisual moving images) were music videos,

making this one of the most prevalent and powerful forms of mass media currently being consumed in the world. There are hundreds of creative decisions made in the construction of each music video, which all have the potential to produce specific effects in viewers. As specified above, this study is mostly concerned with a specific subset of 'sublime-oceanic live musical performances captured as moving images', but these could probably be categorised in the larger grouping of "music videos".

Much has been written on the meaning-making processes of viewers and listeners engaging with cinema, with music, and with live musical performances, but there is still a significant gap in research relating to the intersection of these three specific artforms. Cohen (2015:17) states: "Studies of the psychology of film music and the role of music in multimedia have been relatively few, in part because of technical challenges associated with controlling complex audio and video simultaneously". This study suggests that there exists a relatively under-theorised hybrid artform which is worthy of further research. Levinson (1984:6) states: "An art form is a hybrid one in virtue of its development and origin, in virtue of its emergence out of a field of previously existing artistic activities and concerns, two or more of which it in some sense combines." By combining the production techniques and critical analytical tools of music, lyrics, performance and cinema, this study aims to provide some building blocks for further research into a specific type of audiovisual text, which can indeed be considered a hybrid art form.

In describing the work of the analyst of artworks, Storr (1993:180) states that "making sense out of anything depends upon relating one thing with another, upon discovering or imposing order". Levinson (1984:6) further argues that hybrid arts "must be understood in terms of and in light of their components." The research problem that this study aims to solve is to construct a conceptual and technical framework within which to consider the intersections of live musical performance and cinematic technique. To do this, various elements of cinematic and musical and performance technique are identified, categorised, and then analysed in the way that they work together to create specific audiovisual experiences for viewer-listeners. To this end, a neoformalist theoretical and analytical approach is most useful, because the neoformalist theoretical project is largely driven by identifying elements of a text, considering their individual functions, and then considering the way that they

contribute to the overall form a text, creating a unified artwork out of many parts. In other words, neoformalism is essentially a theoretical framework as well as an analytical method.

### **1.3 Aims & Objectives**

This study aims to identify and analyse the following elements in the selected audiovisual texts:

- The *formal elements* of the artworks (the parts of the whole) that become carriers of emotion and meaning - how they function individually and how they work together.
- The meaning-making elements that emerge specifically in the innovative *intersections* of cinematic technique and musical performances.
- The specific *effects* on the viewer-listener enabled by the creative choices of the filmmakers and the musicians, to be outlined in the context of textual case studies and not through audience research or reception studies.
- To identify the elements of an audiovisual experience which might qualify a text to yield eudaimonic or sublime-oceanic experiences to a viewer-listener.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

- How is meaning and emotion captured in the creation (encoding of the formal elements) of audiovisual sequences which record and edit musical performances?
- In the context of eight specific textual case studies, how can meaning and emotion be decoded by the listener-viewer engaging with these recorded performances?

### **1.5. Research Design and Methodology**

#### ***1.5.1. Research Design***

Music theorist and philosopher Christopher Small (1998:17) posits that there are probably no final answers to be found for life's important questions, only useful and useless answers, and that useful answers should "lead to enrichment of experience". The key insight for Small is that the framing of questions is the most important part of theory, and as he used to say to his own students "I don't care whether or not you agree with my answers, as long as you see that there are questions to be asked" (1998:17). Bordwell and Carroll (1996:69) describe "sharply focused 'piecemeal' theory" as a process of theorising "driven by questions and problems", designing a conceptual framework to address particular problems, as opposed to applying a doctrine-driven "Grand Theory" to a case study. Essentially, piecemeal theorising is "probing midrange concepts in depth" as opposed to trying to create a "sweeping account of all cinema and its effects" (Bordwell, 2009:361). In the field of studying the relationship between music and film, which is the precise aim of this study, Heldt (2013:245) asserts that the development of theory and its application should happen simultaneously, and will prove most successful if "the theory provides ideas of what to look (and listen) for, and how to describe and understand it, and the study of films and their creative musical solutions provides the theory with problems that need solving". This study upholds Bordwell, Carroll, Heldt and Small's views, and begins with a set of questions derived specifically from identifying a set of unique viewing-listening experiences, with the aim of building a theoretical framework which can help provide insight, and hopefully even some tentative answers to those questions.

This study employs qualitative research methods, in its focus on human experience and interpretation. This study is non-empirical, and functions mostly as a conceptual analysis as it is concerned with "clarification and elaboration of the different dimensions of meaning" (Mouton, 2009:175). The range of conceptual frameworks and specific formal and evaluative elements are used as analytical tools in a series of case studies of specific audiovisual sequences demonstrating intersections of cinematic technique and live musical performance. Neoformalism, as a broad theoretical framework built in constantly evolving analysis, thus functions simultaneously as a theory and a method. In identifying and defining key elements of each audiovisual sequence to be analysed in this research report, neoformalism as a methodology also maps very well onto a 'piecemeal' theory framework, in which concepts and elements and principles are assimilated from music theory, film theory,



linguistic theory, cognitive theory, bioculturalism, neuroscience, neurophenomenology and performance theory.

### **1.5.2. Collecting and analysing the data**

The data used in this research consists chiefly of films, songs and lyrics, which are sourced from online viewing platforms as well as from the researcher’s personal collection of films. The subsequent analyses are not based on collecting data from subjective interviews from different viewers, but rather considers five categorised groupings of audiovisual texts, and makes analytical cases for their similarities and differences in terms of form and style, and then develops arguments for effect and meaning. The focus of the study is on the first group of eight artworks listed above.

For further context, this study also develops brief analyses of the intersections of musical performance and cinematic technique in four other specific types of films, namely filmed musical concerts, narrative film and television, documentary films and music videos. These four types are briefly analysed (with specific case studies listed below) in order to contextualise the fifth and most interesting type already briefly described above: sublime-oceanic musical performances captured in moving images. These films have all been selected because they underscore certain meaningful elements contained in the eight primary artworks, such as setting, bodily performance, narrative context, non-traditional cinematographic choices, blurring the lines between recording and performance, and various other elements which will be discussed in later chapters.

#### **Type A: Musical Performances Filmed at Concerts**

<b>Film Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Filmmaker</b>	<b>Musicians / Performers</b>
<i>Stop Making Sense</i>	1984	Jonathan Demme	Talking Heads
<i>Tripping with Nils Frahm</i>	2020	Benoit Toulemonde	Nils Frahm

#### **Type B: Musical Performances in Narrative Film and Television**

<b>Film/TV show Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Filmmaker</b>	<b>Musicians / Performers</b>
---------------------------	-------------	------------------	-------------------------------

<i>Faces</i>	1968	John Cassavetes	Band in club scene
<i>O Lucky Man!</i>	1973	Lindsay Anderson	Alan Price
<i>Nashville</i>	1975	Robert Altman	Various Artists

### Type C: Musical Performances in Documentaries

Film Title	Year	Filmmakers	Musicians / Performers
<i>Karoo Kitaar Blues</i>	2002	Liza Key	David Kramer & Various Artists
<i>Heima</i>	2007	Dean DeBlois	Sigur Ros

### Type D: Musical Performances in Music Videos

Film Title	Year	Filmmakers	Musicians / Performers
<i>Don't Look Back</i> (specifically <i>Subterranean Homesick Blues</i> )	1967	D.A. Pennebaker	Bob Dylan
<i>Anima</i>	2019	Paul Thomas Anderson	Thom Yorke

## 1.6. Delimitations

This study briefly covers the subset of artworks commonly understood in the mainstream media as 'music videos' (Type D above), but exerts most of its efforts in the pursuit of discovering innovative fields of intersection between these artforms ('music' and 'video'), such as the work of filmmaker Vincent Moon, whose impressive body of audiovisual work has been described as "a niche somewhere between the narrative of a documentary and the art of a feature film" (Traynor, 2008:56). Thus, this is not a study of 'music videos'.

## 1.7. Ethical Considerations

This study will not use any human subjects and therefore there are no ethical implications to be considered.

## **1.8. Chapter Outline**

Chapter 1 introduces the idea of sublime-oceanic audiovisual experiences, and frames the research question around a subset of audiovisual texts which fall in the larger category of 'music videos', but have a distinct set of characteristics that make them worthy of further study.

Chapter 2 contains the literature review and conceptual framework that grounds this study in the theoretical territory of neoformalism. The nature of eudaimonic viewing experiences is expanded on, and various concepts and principles are identified from a range of applicable fields to create a "toolkit" which can be used for textual analysis. Formal elements of cinema, music and performance are identified and explained, and the chapter concludes with a description of the sublime-oceanic audiovisual experience which may result from various combinations of the filmmakers and musicians' creative choices.

Chapter 3 contains the case studies towards which this study has been aiming. Eight specific audiovisual sequences are analysed, using most of the elements, concepts and principles identified and explained in chapter 2. Some other examples of different types of intersections of musical performance and cinematic technique are discussed more briefly, to add context and depth to the eight primary case studies, which constitute their own group.

Chapter 4 contains a conclusion to the study and recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter will outline some of the key principles and tools that can be used in neoformalist analysis, and will then proceed to outline some of the formal elements of cinema and music, as well as providing an overview of some of the relevant historical and current theoretical discourse surrounding these artforms, before concluding with a discussion of “the sublime-oceanic audiovisual experience”.

### **2.2. Neoformalism: A Toolkit for Analysis**

This study uses a chiefly neoformalist analytical approach. The neoformalist approach favours neither evaluation nor interpretation as the central departure point of analysis (Rushton & Bettinson 2010:133), but rather provides a set of conceptual tools by which to engage in both of these branches of making meaning. One of neoformalism’s overarching analytical projects is to break artworks into their separate parts or elements, to consider how each of these parts functions on its own, and then to consider how all the elements work together in a coherent (or incoherent) audiovisual artwork to create specific (possible) effects and layers of meaning for the viewer-listener.

One of the key features of neoformalist analysis and interpretation is an emphasis on effects, i.e. cognitive and emotional effects on the viewer (Rushton & Bettinson, 2010:141-143). The different ways in which filmmakers and musicians weave the worlds of musical performance and cinema together can lead to very different possible effects, and thus cue a wide range of affective experiences for the viewer-listener. Here is an insightful augmentation to the view that individual formal elements might not hold any meaning in isolation, but that there is value in considering how they work together to create the whole:

No recipe can guarantee that the filmmaker will achieve a specific emotional response. It is all a matter of context – that is, of each artwork’s overall form. All we can say for certain is that the emotion felt by the spectator will emerge

from formal patterns that she or he perceives in the work. This is one reason why we should try to notice as many formal relations as possible in a film. The richer our perception, the deeper and more complex our response may become (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:57).

Storr (1993:182) adds an illuminating perspective on humans' desire to identify and categorise patterns in texts in terms of the responses these patterns can generate: "Aesthetic appreciation of this kind is not simply a cold, cerebral, intellectual exercise; it touches human feelings. We delight in perceiving coherence where there was none before; we take pleasure in contemplating perfect form".

Two of the current leading neoformalists in global film theory are David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, who published the first edition of their seminal neoformalist work *Film Art* in 1979, with the 12th edition of that book being published in 2018, a testament to the powerful analytical frameworks contained within. This study will make use of many of Bordwell and Thompson's neoformalist principles and criteria regarding cinema and meaning-making, and combine them with elemental ideas and frameworks more specifically from the theoretical fields of musical performance, live performance and cognitive theory to sample categories and criteria from which to analyse a number of different types of intersections of cinematic technique and musical performance.

### **2.2.1. A Note on Illusions: Revealing Tricks Can Increase the Depth of the Magic**

Russian master of cinema Andrei Tarkovsky (2005:114) claims: "No one component of a film can have any meaning in isolation: *it is the film that is the work of art*. And we can only talk about its components rather arbitrarily, dividing it up artificially for the sake of theoretical discussion". In an interview with Terrence Rafferty (2006:48), master filmmaker David Lynch says forcefully: "Do not demystify. When you know too much, you can never see the film the same way again...all the magic leaks out." When "considering awe and wonder as phenomena worth understanding in their own right", there is a nagging sense of doubt in many theorists about whether the statement would prove true that "studying something fundamentally compromises it", especially with something as mysterious as the concept of awe and wonder itself

(Gallagher, Reinerman-Jones, Janz, Bockelman & Trempler, 2015:3). As I begin this literature review and the construction of a conceptual framework for textual case studies, I am aware of the warnings in these points of view. The transcendental magic of an audiovisual experience seems to originate from a nearly mystical ability to create a sense of unity or wholeness between the various elements which have been synthesised together by the artist, and to hide the inner workings of the illusion from the viewer-listener. Chion (1994:5,97) refers to this perceptual union in the relationship between sound and image as an “audiovisual illusion”, which he further suggests should prompt philosophical and ontological questioning about the nature of human unity and the idea of unity itself. Perhaps the illusion of unity in the filmic text reassures us about the illusion of coherence in our perceptions of the rest of reality. Storr (1994:174) makes the same philosophical parallel between music and our cognitive experience of reality: “Our perception of a melody as something continuous is an illusion; but so is the stream of consciousness of which music is said to be an analogue”.

Should these mysterious, magical, illusory, ‘falsely unified’ works of art rather be better left untouched by the theorist who seeks to pry them apart? Perhaps, but Tarkovsky does concede that the consideration of a film’s individual components might be useful for “theoretical discussion”, and I would add that the focus of most neoformalist analysis is indeed to gain a better (and thus more rewarding) understanding of the whole, or of the entire finished film as a work of art. Dutton (2010:52) explains that “enjoyment of artistic beauty often derives from multi-layered yet distinguishable pleasures that are experienced either simultaneously or in close proximity to each other...the so-called organic unity of artworks”.

Chion (1994:47) describes “unification” as one of the principal functions of sound in the audiovisual artwork, a unity which is often created by establishing atmosphere and creating “a framework that seems to contain the image, a “heard space” in which the “seen” bathes.” This is a beautiful metaphor which underscores the power of the audio in the audiovisual experience, and challenges the notion that sound is somehow a less important element of the filmic experience, an increasingly outdated inclination “to think of sound simply as an accompaniment to the real basis of cinema, the moving images” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:267). Cohen (2000:367)

explains that pieces of music contain structural (formal) components, as well as affective (emotional) components, and when they are added to images they make “a new meaningful whole, a whole much closer to our sense of reality than the visual image alone.” In describing our innate ability and drive to find patterns and connections and create new aesthetic wholes from disparate textual elements (essentially the neoformalist project), Storr (1994:177) puts it quite poetically: “Anything which lessens our distress at being surrounded by chaos, or promotes our shaky sense of control and mastery, gives us pleasure. Even the most abstract intellectual patterns engage our feelings”. I am confident that a more precise theoretical explanation, or a ‘revealing of the workings of the magic trick’ might indeed increase the levels of emotional affect and layers of possible meaning-making when engaging with the audiovisual artworks in the following chapter, and Bordwell and Thompson’s (2013:57) statement bears repeating here: “The richer our perception, the deeper and more complex our response may become”.

Human brains have the capacity to engage in different levels of meaning-making simultaneously. In the realm of music appreciation, Patel (2008:3) asserts that “humans are unparalleled in their ability to make sense out of sound”. Levitin (2007:103) describes the different simultaneous levels in the cognitive experience of a person listening to music: “The brain extracts basic, low-level features from the music, using specialized neural networks that decompose the signal into information about pitch, timbre, spatial location, loudness, reverberant environment, tone durations, and the onset times for different notes (and for different components of tones).” These are some of the formal elements of music which neoformalists could differentiate from each other, and analyse individually in terms of their function and patterning. But this low-level engagement with music alone would probably not be enough to generate significant experiences of emotion or meaning. Levitin (2007:105) continues: “At the same time as features are being analyzed individually, parts of the brain that are higher up – that is, that are more phylogenetically advanced, and that receive connections from lower brain regions – are working to integrate these features into a perceptual whole.” The word ‘phylogenetical’ refers to the evolution of humans’ cognitive processes and abilities, as distinguished from other animal groups, and is thus what Patel is referring to as humans’ ‘unparalleled ability’ for making sense out of sound. The ‘perceptual whole’ that Levitin refers to

here is the experience of a finished and mysteriously unified audiovisual work of art, the same one that Tarkovsky and Lynch have advised us to be careful with in our process of analysis.

The perspective of this study remains that a deeper analysis of these 'low-level' formal elements would increase the possible depth of engagement in higher levels of cognitive and emotional experience. "High-level processing is where it all comes together, where our minds come to an understanding of form and content" (Levitin 2007:104). 'Form' and 'content' are two key concepts in artistic analysis, and are often used in the traditional theoretical discourses surrounding most artforms, from painting to poetry. This study will not waste any time making a distinction between form and content, but will rather lean on Bordwell and Thompson's view that every element of what might traditionally have been referred to as the film's 'content' functions as part of a pattern that engages the viewer, and thus that 'content' is essentially "governed by the film's formal context" (2013:52-54).

### **2.2.2. Evaluation and Interpretation**

As noted above, neoformalism places equal emphasis on the processes of evaluating and interpreting audiovisual artworks. In terms of evaluation, Bordwell and Thompson (2013:60-62) have proposed four key evaluative criteria as foundational ways to access and build a case for the quality of an artwork: complexity, coherence, originality and intensity of effect

#### **2.2.2.1 Complexity**

Complexity considers the interconnected layers of meaning-making to be found in a text. Bordwell and Thompson (2013:61) state that "a complex film engages our interest on many levels, creates a multiplicity of relations among many separate formal elements, and tends to create intriguing patterns of feelings and meanings". Dutton (2010:57) discusses the pleasure gained by the person who engages with the complexities of artworks in response to the "intellectual challenge" that many artworks pose. "Works of art tend to be designed to utilize the combined variety of



human perceptual and intellectual capacities to the full extent; indeed, the best works stretch them beyond ordinary limits” (Dutton, 2010:57).

#### **2.2.2.2. Coherence**

Coherence considers the unity of the elements of a text, similar to the components of the magic trick referred to earlier in this chapter, the organic unity of an artwork. It is vital for the analyst to remember that unity is always “a matter of degree”, in the sense that no artwork has perfect unity between all elements. The degree of disunity or incoherence in a text can also be harnessed by the artist to produce specific effects (which is arguably most often done in cinema). Leaving unresolved plot elements at the ending of a film, or using any distancing devices or narrational deviations from the norm can create jarring, surprising and even sublime-oceanic responses in viewer-listeners.

#### **2.2.2.3. Originality**

Originality measures the intrinsic norms of the text’s formal elements against the extrinsic norms of other related texts. In other words, what is this text doing, within the genre or category that it exists within, in relation to other similar texts, that makes it original. This has to do with artists using established conventions in fresh ways, to give viewers a new experience (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:61). In discussing originality and novelty as one of the criteria that defines something as “art”, Dutton (2010:54) explains: “the unpredictability of creative art, its newness, plays against the predictability of conventional style or formal type”.

#### **2.2.2.4. Intensity of effect**

Intensity of effect considers the affective impact of the text on the viewer-listener, especially considering whether the experience is “vivid, striking and emotionally engaging” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:61). These four conceptual tools taken together provide a strong basis from which to evaluate artworks, or to make a case for their quality, and will serve as key determinants in the case studies contained in the following chapter of this study.

### **2.2.2.5. Bordwell and Thompson's four levels of meaning**

In terms of interpretation, Bordwell and Thompson (2013:57-60) have written extensively on the “four levels of meaning” that can be used to make meaning in films. The levels of meaning each build upon the previous level, and here it is important to note the distinction between “finding” meaning in an artwork, as if it is magically discovered inside a text by a viewer-listener, as opposed to “making” meaning, which implies a more thorough process of the application of conceptual tools by which to *construct* layers of meaning. The neoformalist approach definitely favours the latter view, that meaning is made, specifically by building up through the four levels of meaning: referential meaning, explicit meaning, implicit meaning and symptomatic meaning. “Sometimes the filmmaker guides us toward certain meanings; sometimes we find meanings the filmmaker didn’t intend” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:60).

#### **2.2.2.5.1. Referential meaning**

Referential meaning is literally being able to understand what the text is referring to, on a primary visual level – the viewer needs to have existing background knowledge about the properties of water and buoyancy to understand an image of a ship floating on an ocean. As Grodal (1999:76) puts it: “A face or a tree is immediately recognizable by means of innate perceptual mechanisms plus fundamental human experience, even for people without any previous experience of film or television”. The captured-and-projected images on a screen refer to real things in the world, and referential meaning considers this first-level presentation of the images without moving into the realm of *representation*, or symbolism, or semiotics, or interpretation of those images.

#### **2.2.2.5.2. Explicit meaning**

The second level of meaning is explicit meaning, or the central “point” of the film’s narrative, or what is sometimes colloquially referred to as “the moral of the story”. Bordwell and Thompson (2013:58) refer to this as “openly asserted” explicit meaning, which can be decoded into a sentence or two by the analyst by identifying

some key meaningful moments in the film, often found in lines of dialogue or sometimes even in the title of the film. But the aim of the analyst isn't necessarily to find only one specific meaning, as if there is only one valid explicit meaning, but rather to remember that "the film's total system is larger than any one explicit meaning we can find in it. Instead of asking, "What is this film's meaning?" we can ask, "How do the various meanings relate to one another?" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:58).

#### **2.2.2.5.3. *Implicit meaning***

The third layer of meaning is implicit meaning, which moves deeper into the realm of interpretation, and allows for many various streams of interpretation, as long as they are all rooted in examples taken from the form of the film. As Bordwell and Thompson (2013:59) put it, "One of the appeals of artworks is that they ask us to interpret them in several ways at once." Mercado (2013:3) claims that many filmmakers manage to convey their perspectives, values, idiosyncracies and values purely through the framing of shots, an idea which introduces Bordwell and Thompson's fourth level of meaning rather effectively.

#### **2.2.2.5.4. *Symptomatic meaning***

The fourth level of meaning is symptomatic meaning, which can only be reached by working through and building up from the previous three levels of meaning. Symptomatic meaning points out flaws in the film or in the filmmaker's worldview, thus functioning as an illuminator of "symptoms" or problems in the film's moral or philosophical construction. The set of values that are revealed by an analysis that employs symptomatic meaning are therefore essentially working on a social-ideological level (Bordwell & Thompson 2013:60). Neoformalist analysis does not only consider the narrative of each film to be a carrier of meaning, but also closely considers the technical elements of each film, or the four elements of film style.

### **2.3. Making Movies: A Neoformalist Approach to Cinematic Technique**

Cinematic technique can be separated into four stylistic techniques, namely editing, cinematography, mise-en-scene and sound, each of which will be discussed in more detail below. The neoformalist approach considers the creative choices made by filmmakers within the craft of each of these elements, and then analyses the unity or disunity achieved in their combination (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:308-326). For example, in the sequences that I am analysing, the camera's tracking has often been planned and mapped out, or in other cases occurs apparently spontaneously, which creates specific effects in each case, especially in relation to the other three elements of style. In a related theoretical example, Mercado (2013:21-22) explains how many filmmakers work with an "image system" which imbues the sequences of a film with additional layers of explicit and implicit meaning. The image system is created by a combination of filmmaker's decisions about lighting, lenses, shot composition, editing and art direction. The effects (intended or unintended) in any film or piece of music cannot produce affect, however, without the active participation of the viewer-listener. As Grodal (1999:210-211) puts it: "Film and television screens can be described as focusses of visual attention emitting cues...the viewer cannot actively control the signals from the screen, only decide whether he wants to provide attention and to reconstruct the emitted". Neoformalism places strong emphasis on the role of the active viewer, or an "active information seeker" who frames expectations about upcoming events, fits filmic action into larger frameworks, and applies schemas derived from world knowledge and cinematic traditions (Bordwell, 2009:360-261). As Eidsvik (1978:4) puts it: "We cannot understand films unless we understand that film viewing is not something that happens to us, but something we *do*, actively and with all our mental equipment".

### **2.3.1. Eudaimonic Viewing Experiences**

Cinema is one of the most emotionally affecting artforms. Viewers often watch films or TV series with an end-goal of immersive entertainment, colloquially understood as a type of escapism. The satisfaction produced by engaging with the basic emotional systems which act as motors of narrative interest can be addictive, as evidenced by cult followings of many different genres of films, and the repetitive viewing habits of billions of viewers who find comfort and assurance in the ritualistic viewing of genre movies. Grodal (1999:222) explains that genre schemata in films often provide "a

limited set of expectations”, and this “small set of possible outcomes will be the target of the concentrated expectations, and will, given proper motivation, activate strong ‘obsessive’ emotions.” Repetitive watching of genre films also serves as a ritual which can be compared to the observance of religious holidays in certain societies “because they reaffirm cultural values in a predictable way” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:338). There is also a school of theoretical thought that suggests the varying popularity of certain genres over time reflects society’s anxieties and fears during certain historical moments (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:338). There is little doubt that genre movies will remain popular, and will continue to be a fertile playground for filmmakers who are keen to learn (and deviate from) the formulas that are designed to straddle the line between convention and innovation with the aim of maximum immersive entertainment.

But many viewers also actively pursue viewing experiences which can produce moments of meaningfulness, cognitive challenges and even personal growth. Bartsch and Hartmann (2017:30) make the helpful distinction between ‘hedonic’ and ‘eudaimonic’ viewing motivations: hedonic motivations are about having fun, but eudaimonic motivations drive viewers to seek viewing experiences “that challenge my way of seeing the world”. Grodal (1999:209) offers another distinction: “the critical viewer wants to have cognitive and voluntary control, whereas the accepting viewer prefers to abandon himself while watching a film”. Badt (2015:77) asserts that the evolutionary mechanism of “seeking” (as defined by Panksepp) is a unique driver of emotion and pleasure in the viewer-listener engaging with a film, because cinema “provokes an intensified experience of what we naturally do every second of our lives: seek our environments, through sight and sound, for new information”. In a sense, the activity of viewing a film can mirror a thought journey, or a philosophical exercise. The ensuing sense of gratification experienced by viewers who seek out this eudaimonic category of viewing experiences is related to a sense of gaining deeper insight about themselves and the world (Bartsch & Hartmann, 2017:31). Similar points have been made about music’s ability to remove listeners from their everyday emotions or worldviews and to change the psychological space of the listener (Patel, 2008:324). Indeed, there is a growing body of research that positions the act of listening to sad music as a eudaimonic experience, leading to reflection on the meaningfulness of life (Eerola et al, 2017:111).

Grodal (2005:19) also asserts that “many viewers of art films may watch such a film in order to get an insight in a director’s special and personal vision of the world”. This is evidenced by the fact that many cinephiles seek to watch the rest of a director’s oeuvre if they enjoyed one film, and often a new film by an established auteur would be described as “the new Yorgos Lanthimos film” or “the new Lars Von Trier film” before the name of the movie is even mentioned.

Cinema, properly understood in this sense as a meaning-making activity, “offers us moving images through which we may reconfigure the reality around us and our own position within it”, and becomes “a point of mediation between us and reality, and between us and others” (Casetti, 2012:7,11). This power to “reconfigure reality” exists partly because we use the same brain circuits to experience filmic events and real events, and “much like the dreams and visions of ancient times, mediated visual images are cognitively processed by the same unconscious pathways and memory systems as nonmediated visual information” (Williams 2005:195). Badt (2015:71) describes this unique sense-based audiovisual experience: “we are responding to sight and sound, to a two-dimensional artificially created universe on a screen that we process as the real world”. Grodal (2010:31) explains that “whether the source is the world or the source is a film”, viewer-listeners’ visual neurons activate their emotional systems in the same way. “Higher up and more frontally in our brain there are mechanisms that try to evaluate the reality status of what we see, but the primitive basic perceptual system works on the principle that “seeing is believing and feeling”” (Grodal, 2010:31). This ability of cinema to problematise the parameters of our audiovisual perceptions of reality is surely part of what philosopher Alain Badiou was referring to when he said “cinema is the only art today which is cut to the measure of the world” (in Ling, 2009:35).

Gombrich (1983:154) states that: “The message from the visible world must be coded by the artist”. Dutton (2010:53) explains that style in any art form is governed by rules of form, composition or expression, and that the notion of style itself “provides a stable, predictable, “normal” background against which artists may create elements of novelty and expressive surprise”. Most films which contain some of the aforementioned properties which could induce possible moments of ‘higher meaning’ in the viewer-listener are technically innovative, and the filmmakers often

experiment with the uses of cinematic techniques such as cinematography, editing and sound design, as well as the construction (or deconstruction) of narrative. The resultant deviations from the formulaic or predictable patterns are what make the experiences interesting, pleasurable and possibly even meaningful.

### **2.3.2. A brief overview of the formal elements of filmmaking**

The form of any film can, broadly speaking, be broken up into two branches: narrative and stylistics. The style of any film (or sometimes distinctive stylistic choices of a filmmaker across many films) can quite effectively be broken up into four categories: cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing and sound.

#### **2.3.2.1. Cinematography**

One of the most complex questions to answer while watching any film, is “who is holding the camera”? Does the filmmaker want us to be aware that there is a holder-of-the-camera, a sentient mind selecting the frame, the composition, the angle, the lens, the focus, the length and the movement of each shot? Or is the intention that the viewer would accept the camera’s presence as an absence, as a perfectly neutral and perfectly objective observer of the film’s events, never to be noticed or thought about, similar to the “fourth wall” that Brecht described in the playhouse, which keeps the illusion of theatre intact? This question has prompted many great thinkers to develop theories about “Point Of View”, or camera movement and subjectivity. The answers become tricky to articulate because the parameters of the question also seem to change in different contexts, as Branigan (2006:39) explains: “is point of view primarily a matter of sense perception (as in the point-of-view shot), or is it more a matter of belief, ideology, tone, mood, self-consciousness, emotion, psychology and/or identification?” To reframe (pun intended) the question: when the camera moves, who is moving it, and perhaps even more intriguingly, *what* is moving? Branigan (2006:153) shows that viewers could be imagining the movement or presence of a character, a narrator, an author/screenwriter, an invisible observer, a camera operator, or perhaps only a camera. Grodal (2009:23) points to a simple but useful distinction: “art films are often seen as authored, whereas mainstream narratives are often perceived as anonymous”. In defining different modes of

documentary filmmaking, Nichols (2017:139) explains that the “observational” mode gives viewers a sense of “what it is like to be in a given situation, but without a sense of what it is like for the filmmaker to be there too”, while the “participatory” mode gives viewers a “sense of what it is like for the filmmaker to be in a given situation and how that situation alters as a result”. The intentionality and immediacy of the viewing-listening experience in all eight of the audiovisual texts to be analysed in the following chapter create interesting layers of meaning when thinking about the subjectivity/objectivity of the camera and the person filming the musical performance in each sequence.

Mercado (2013:2) argues that “the placement, size, and visibility of anything in the frame” will be “interpreted by an audience as being there for a specific purpose” in their interpretation of the film. This echoes Bordwell and Thompson’s neoformalist principle of *function*, being able to ask of any element at any time in the film – “what is it *doing* there?” Although it can prove useful to do analyses of the composition of various still frames in films, an important thing for the analyst to remember is that a film usually consists of 24 still frames per second, and that complex meaning in films is created by the *relationship* between *all* the shots, or as Mercado (2013:3) puts it: “The composition of a shot conveys meaning not only through the arrangement of visual elements in a frame, but also by the context in which it is presented”. Eidsvik (1978:51) also frames it (again, pun intended) well: “Each image “works” in terms given by the images that preceded it”. In other words, the meanings of individual frames or compositions or even shot selections should be grounded in the contextual whole, or at least in sequential context. Mercado (2013:3) also explains “because so much of the meaning of a shot is derived by the context in which it is presented, it is possible to subvert the commonly associated connotations of certain shots”. This is partly because “our eye also enjoys the formal play presented by unusual angles on familiar objects” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:193). Similarly to the way that filmmakers can experiment with genre conventions, filmmakers can also be creative in the way that they re-frame cinematographic conventions to straddle the line between expectation and innovation.

Through careful choices in lensing and composition, cinematographers can either create what Bordwell and Thompson call “selective focus”, which effectively “steers



our attention to a single important part of the shot”, or even achieve the rarely used “deep focus”, which makes several areas of the frame visible, thus creating “another set of options for guiding our eye” (2013:175). The “active follow shot” is defined by Branigan (2006:55) in the following way: the camera moves in order to follow alongside an object (usually a character) that is moving in the foreground so as to hold it steady against a changing background. The Steadicam shot has been part of the cinematographer’s arsenal since 1976, when a lightweight rig was invented to move the camera and minimise shakiness, and created almost unlimited range of movement while maintaining a smooth shot in the hands of a skilled operator. Mercado (2013:161) states: “the freedom of movement that (Steadicam) shots allow are also used to give the viewer a feeling that they are there, amongst the action and activity in the scene”. Combining long takes with variants of the active follow shot (usually achieved with a Steadicam rig) with selective focus or with deep focus seems to be one of the key syntheses of cinematographic techniques that steer the eight artworks to be analysed in the following chapter into that liminal space between music, performance and cinema.

### **2.3.2.2. *Mise-en-scene***

Bordwell and Thompson (2013:112) state that “of all film techniques, mise-en-scene is the one that viewers notice most”. It basically refers to “the director’s control over what appears in the film frame”, including setting, lighting, costume, makeup, staging and even the acting or performance itself (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:113). Van Nierop (1998:33) explains the craft of mise-en-scene by comparing a painter’s process to the director’s ability to “balance the objects in the frames to convey a specific atmosphere or relationship between them”. Mise-en-scene is often associated with the production design team in the filmmaking crew, including the art department and all those responsible for creating the world in which the plot of the film may unfold.

#### **2.3.2.2.1 *Lighting***

Even though lighting is a vital skill for any cinematographer, and most cinematographers are also very good at setting up and understanding lighting on a

film set, it is still classified formally as an element of mise-en-scene, because lighting is one of the most important visual elements in the filmed world. There are four major aspects of lighting which can be manipulated by the filmmaker to guide the viewer's experience: quality (hard vs. soft lighting), direction, source (natural vs. artificial light) and colour (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:125-131; Van Nierop, 1998:58-65).

American filmmaker Jet Kaiser, who filmed a series of musical performances inspired by the work of Vincent Moon, affirms this idea specifically in the context of this study: "Color can greatly embellish the emotion of the performance" (in Merfeld, 2010:43). A final notable idea about lighting and its effect on the viewer is Bordwell and Thompson's (2013:125) observation that "lighting joins with setting in controlling our sense of a scene's space".

### **2.3.2.2.2. Setting**

Setting, in a cinematic context, is often more than a mere container of the narrative events, and can play a dynamic and active role in the viewer-listener's experience and interpretation of the audiovisual artwork (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:115). Van Nierop (1998:128) argues that setting can acquire symbolic meaning, and can even function as an ideological microcosm of larger themes and ideas, placing individual characters in a specific space to represent larger groups of people or ideologies. A specific setting for a filmed musical performance can cue the viewer to place a song within a genre, such as "the street" and "the ghetto" being related to hip-hop (Vernallis, 2008:412; Dyson, 2007:13), which relates directly to the case study of rapper Common's *Black America Again*, which features him performing in the street with percussive accompaniment. Dyer (2012:26) argues that many songs and specific styles of music are 'geographically anchored' even when they cross borders and are mass consumed globally. All of the sequences this study analyses involve more than just the capturing of a musical performance in an aesthetically interesting environment, in each case the space and/or landscape is contextually important to the meaning of the performance. In terms of cinematography (and editing), a moving camera can be very effective in defining the geography of a space, especially through the use of a long take. MacDougall (1992:42) explains:

The long take may be crucial to defining the geographical context within which a character exists or an action takes place. It is also obviously important in delineating actual matters of time, such as how long it takes someone to perform a particular task – something which is normally masked by the condensation of edited sequences.

### **2.3.2.3. Editing**

One aspect of the art of editing consists of being able to manipulate variables in order to create various sorts of perceived continuities and discontinuities in the motion that is being pictured, no matter what the actual continuities and discontinuities were during filming (Branigan 2006:164). What is referred to as “continuity editing” in any good film school, is essentially the art of cutting the various shots and sequences of the film together so as to make the viewer forget that there is any cutting or editing even happening. When a filmmaker decides to shoot a long take (as opposed to cutting between shorter shots), the decision is often done so that “the spectator has more opportunity to scan the shot for particular points of interest” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:214). A common strategy for filmmakers is to combine longer takes with sharp sequences of cutting, with the effect of placing emphasis for the viewer on certain parts of a film. Just as the mise-en-scene can guide viewers’ focus within a frame or a sequence, an “unedited” long take (which is technically both an editing choice, as well as being a cinematographic choice) can create a gradually unfolding scene which also shifts viewer’s attention from one piece of revealed information to the next (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:213-216). This study’s emphasis on “the long take” as an important synthesis of cinematography and editing is because all of the eight artworks being analysed consist (at least in significant part) of long takes, and the long take is perhaps one of the most prominent formal elements that pushes these sequences into the ‘cinematic’ experiential space. French filmmaker and pioneer of cinema vérité, Jean Rouch, explains that in certain instances of the moving camera engaged in a long take, the bodily improvisations of the cinematographer actually result in “editing while shooting”, with choices about editing as well as cinematography happening simultaneously, a “synthesis at the exact moment of observation” (1973:39).

Another aspect of editing that is relevant to many of the sequences being analysed, is the use of L-cuts and J-cuts. In film editing, there are two types of cuts, or transitions between scenes which use the audio track to either precede the visuals (the J-cut), or to keep playing even after the visuals have changed (the L-cut). Careful use of this transitional device can create very specific effects as one scene blends into another and asks the viewer-listener to make specific connections or form expectations, and becomes what Bordwell and Thompson call a “sound bridge” (2013:298). Both types of cut are named because of the shape of the letters themselves. The letter “J” has a tail that stretches to the bottom left, and the letter “L” has a tail that stretches to the bottom right. In a pictogrammic sense, this matches what the edit would look like on the editor’s timeline. The editor’s audio track is usually below the video track, thus the tail of the “J” or the “L” is referring specifically to what the audio is doing, stretching out either to the left or to the right.

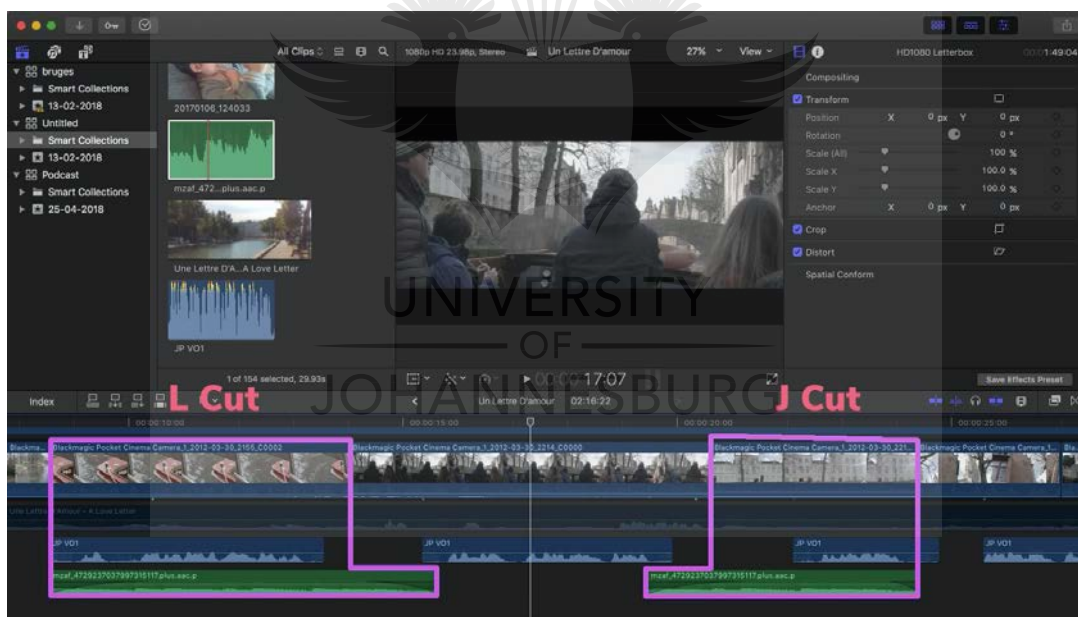


Figure 1: the L-cut and the J-cut function as “sound bridges” between shots.

In Figure 1, the audio track is green, and the visual tracks are dark blue. The shape of the L and the J are clearly illustrated. With the use of the L-cut, the audio from one scene bleeds into the next, while the visuals have already changed. In the J-cut, the audio from the next scene has already begun before the visuals have shifted to the new scene. These transitional devices are commonly used in film editing. They are very effective world-building techniques, or “sound bridges”, and they illustrate once

more the powerful ability of sound design to shape the viewer-listener's cognitive and emotive experiences.

#### **2.3.2.4. Sound**

“Sound bristles with as many creative possibilities as editing” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:268). Obviously, the nature of the artworks being analysed positions sound as a fundamental technical element of each audiovisual experience, but because the emphasis in each sequence is on the *liveness* of the musical performance, there is not much layering of sound, or mixing or adding of sound effects. As stated in the introductory chapter of this study, the fact that the soundtrack of some of the sequences include little “mistakes” (like the sound of the wind on a microphone, or a hand hitting a lapel microphone and creating a muffled booming sound) are precisely what makes the sequences so powerful and so immediate. The treatment of the sound, from a filmmaking perspective, often succeeds in creating a feeling of genuine proximity to the musicians and performers, with the audio levels matching the position of the moving camera. The most important element of sound in these sequences, is, of course, music, to which an entire section of this chapter is devoted.

#### **2.3.2.5. Narrative**

At least four of the eight sequences analysed in more depth in the following chapter of this study can quite easily be framed as existing in a narrative, even though the approaches are quite unconventional. The remaining sequences also form part of more experimental narrative structures, even Arcade Fire's performance of *Neon Bible* in a crowded elevator happens immediately before bursting into an arena in Paris, thus setting up a causal link, and Amanda Palmer's song *Ukulele Anthem* has distinctly narrative-driven lyrics, and the film itself also has a clear beginning, development, climax and euphoric ending. One of the central concepts of narrative in cinema is that “films must withhold information as well as give it in order to retain interest” (Eidsvik, 1978:52). As usual, Bordwell and Thompson have excellent terms by which to describe this phenomenon, which they refer to as “range of knowledge” (2013:88), or “who knows what when?” – a question which applies to both characters and viewers as the “oscillation between restricted and unrestricted narration” is

determined by the director and editor's choices about how much information to reveal, and when. A compelling sense of mystery can be evoked by the process of hiding and revealing strategic bits of information at certain points in a film. In each of the eight musical performance films, narrative is not a central experiential driving force as much as the other formal elements of filmmaking, and of course, the music and the performances.

#### **2.4. Making Music: The Emotive Power of Live Performances**

Music is another of the most emotionally affecting artforms (perhaps even more powerful than cinema, but that's a debate for a different study). The philosopher Schopenhauer was so convinced of the parallels between music's ability to bypass representation and reveal the "true nature of all things", that he claimed we "could just as well call the world embodied music" (in Storr, 1993:141). Patel (2008:401) states that music has universal appeal and power "because it transforms our lives in ways we value deeply", including the areas of "emotional and aesthetic experience and identity formation". In many ways, music is a global and ancient socio-cultural factor that helps us define who we are, and music can even bring about subtle or radical changes in a person or a group's sense of identity, in single experiences or over a period of time. Storr (1993:4) asserts that music "can temporarily transform our whole existence". According to Levitin (2007:211) every human is inherently an expert listener with a musical brain, even if a person lacks training in music theory or performance, and Storr (1993:78) concurs that "appreciating musical form and structure is not a technical matter which only the trained musician is equipped to undertake". Obviously, there are differing levels of musical appreciation, and according to Overy and Molnar-Szakacs (2009:493) a listener will "reconstruct various elements of a piece of music in their own mind (bringing together auditory, motion, and emotion information), and the richness of that reconstruction depends on the individual's musical experience", ranging from someone appreciating the basic beat of a song to an accomplished performer appreciating (and imagining) the technical intricacies of a specific performance. Warrenburg (2020:1) also points out that listeners can both "*perceive* emotion in the music and *experience* emotion from the music". Eerola et al (2017:101) agree: "Emotions expressed by music may be different from the emotions the same music induces". In other words, the various

studies of the connection between music and emotion should be careful to differentiate between the emotion contained in the music itself as opposed to actual emotions experienced by the listener. A listener could identify a piece of music as being 'sad' because it is composed in a minor key, for example, but might experience emotions of deep happiness or pleasure while listening to this inherently 'sad' composition being performed.

The effect of music on the listener is in many ways more direct and immediate than many of the other arts (Storr 1993:149). In describing the emotional effects of music specifically on film viewers, Plantinga (2008:94) explains that music resonates with and even impacts us physiologically, affecting our heartbeats and brainwaves through rhythm, dynamics, tempo and pitch. Such physically-driven emotional responses can be one of the key features of making meaning, or of the deeper cognitive experience that a listener can have when listening to music. Meaning-making through music occurs when either the listener's emotions or intellect are aroused, and therefore "music that is neither interesting nor affective is not meaningful" (Meyer in Budd 1985:165). According to Kapilow (2008:230), a piece of music's meaning is never fixed, it is perpetually changing, created in ongoing collaboration with performers and listeners, one performance at a time. Small (1998:2,8-9) makes a thorough argument that music should not be thought of as a thing, or a noun, but rather as a verb ("musicking"), an activity that people engage in which creates layers of individual and social meaning-making. Overy and Molnar-Szakacs (2009:494,499) agree that "the core of musical experience" may be "not the nature of the acoustic signal per se, or the ability to perform complex motor skills, but the sense of human interaction" which is a most "extraordinary case of *being together in time*".

According to Quinto and Thompson (2013:139), listeners "are sensitive to the expressive actions of performers and interpret them as emotional signals that can be decoded." Levitin (2007:193,204) asserts that the essence of musical performance is "being able to convey emotion", and occasionally a performer may record a piece of music that contains "impossibly detailed and subtle nuances" which somehow manage to express emotions "that go beyond description". Dyer (2012:2) points out that the almost magical association many people have with music can be traced

through the etymology of music-related words used to describe magic, words such as *enchantment* and *encantation*. Thus, music, and specifically musical performance, is a potent carrier of meaning and emotion, and possibly the most powerful of all the artforms in this sense. Langer (in Budd, 1985:110) contends that “because the forms of human feeling are much more congruent with musical forms than with the forms of language, music can *reveal* the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach”. Levitin (2007:267) agrees that music is a better tool than language for arousing feelings and emotions, and it has also been argued that music’s “immediacy in communicating emotion has been envied by visual artists” (Bergstrom & Lotto, 2016:398). Storr (1993:26) states that “there is a closer relation between *hearing* and emotional arousal than there is between *seeing* and emotional arousal.” In analysing the emotional effects of the eight artworks that this study is focusing on, the music in each sequence therefore deserves close analysis.

#### **2.4.1. A selection of the formal elements of music**

Neoformalism, as a conceptual framework, includes the principle of ‘function’ as one of the five primary principles of film form. In terms of function, the neoformalist analyst may try to answer the following question about any element at any moment in a film: “what is it doing here?” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:62). In addition to considering such questions about the visual elements of each artwork, this study will also identify and analyse the music in each film’s formal elements of pitch, rhythm, tempo, contour, timbre, loudness and reverberation, as well as the higher order elements of meter, key, melody and harmony (Levitin, 2007:14-18) in the process of making meaning. In terms of making meaning from music, Patel (2008:301-303) argues that “sonic logic” and a “brilliant play of form” can result in meaning for a listener which is not necessarily connected to a salient emotive experience (thus emotion and meaning can be viewed as separate elements of analysis), and he further provides an extensive list of eleven types of meaning in music (2008:305-351), most notably “intramusical meaning” which considers the structural interconnection of musical elements within a piece of music, and the way that listeners either predict the following pieces of music or recall previous pieces of music in order to make meaning from what they are currently hearing. This is



essentially a formalist approach, building meaning purely by considering the form of the piece of music. An “extramusical” formalist approach suggests that music is capable of expressing everyday human emotions by virtue of its form (Patel, 2008:309). As stated in the opening chapter of this study, Plantinga (2008:96) makes the case that viewer-listeners’ affective experiences are simultaneously cognitive and emotive, and thus meaning-making is often directly linked to emotion. Juslin and Slobada (2013:598) show that there are various complex interrelationships between the formal elements of music which need to be picked up as “cues” by the listener in an additive process, and “listeners have to combine several cues for successful emotion recognition to occur”.

#### **2.4.1.1. Timbre**

In basic terms, timbre is the quality of tone that is produced by a voice or other musical instrument. Timbre is “one of the primary perceptual vehicles for the recognition, identification, and tracking over time of a sound source and thus is involved in the absolute categorization of a sounding object” (McAdams, 2013:35). Timbre also plays a key role in “perceiving musical patterns and forms and shaping musical performance expressively” (McAdams, 2013:35). In a beautiful comparison, Levitin (2007:92) asserts that composers of music use “subtle shadings of timbre...to convey the many different emotional shadings of human experience”. In many listening experiments, listeners tend to associate harder and harsher timbres with emotions like anger, and brighter timbres with happiness (Patel, 2008:313-314). Timbre is used by composers or sound editors to merge sounds together, or to place a specific focus on certain sounds. As Bordwell and Thompson (2013:272) put it: “Filmmakers manipulate timbre continually”.

According to McAdams (2013:49), there are three types of timbral blend when instruments play together: timbral heterogeneity in which instruments are perceptually distinct, timbral augmentation in which one instrument embellishes another one that perceptually dominates the combination, and timbral emergence in which a new sound results that is identified as none of its constituents. As a particularly horrifying example of the latter type of timbral blending from the world of filmmaking: “the noises emitted by the demonically possessed girl in *The Exorcist*

blended screams, animal thrashings and English spoken backwards” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:273).

#### **2.4.1.2. *Tonality***

Tonality, loosely, refers to the key of a piece of music. For the purpose of this study, the main focus will be on whether the music in a sequence is in a major or minor key, which are conventionally understood as “happy” and “sad” progressions of notes, respectively. An interesting phenomenon to note is the “paradoxical pleasure produced by sad music”, and the fact that “listening to sad music elicits more self-reflection and meta-awareness than listening to happy music” (Eerola et al, 2017:100,101). Most of the eight films’ music do indeed create spaces for reflection, even if stripped from the visuals.

#### **2.4.1.3. *Rhythm and groove***

In order to make music together, musicians need to hear a regular pulse in music, which allows players or performers to synchronise with the music (Honing, 2013:381). This is enabled by various mechanisms in various musical contexts, for example by the conductor of an orchestra indicating the rhythm of the performance using a baton, or by the “click track” that recording artists listen to over headphones when recording separate parts of a song in a music studio, enabling the mixing engineer to fit the various separate recordings on a tempo-bound grid. This ability to play together to a rhythm is a fundamental species-specific cognitive skill, to which humans are quite possibly genetically predisposed (Honing, 2013:382). A specific element of rhythm that makes a powerful emotional impact on the listener, is this rhythmic connection between the performers, which can be called ‘groove’. Levitin (2007:170) writes: “In order to be moved by music (physically and emotionally) it helps a great deal to have readily predictable beat. When a song has a good groove, it invites us into a sonic world that we don’t want to leave. Groove has to do with a particular performer or particular performance, not with what is written on paper. Groove can be a subtle aspect of performance that comes and goes from one day to another, even with the same group of musicians”.

In a book-form series of conversations between novelist Haruki Murakami and conductor Seiji Ozawa, Ozawa makes the observation that small groups of musicians who play together have their ears “open in all directions” (2017:317). Ozawa points out that a group of four musicians who rehearse together over a period of time achieve much greater levels of interaction than in a larger orchestra, because of the “intimate communication” that happens between the performing instrumentalists, resulting in the music clearly “getting better and deeper” (2017:317-318). Musicians and listeners seem to agree that groove “works best it is not strictly metronomic – when it is not perfectly machinelike” (Levitin 2007:171). Levitin (2007:172) further asserts that “the gold standard of groove is usually a drummer who changes the tempo slightly according to aesthetic and emotional nuances of the music; we say then that the rhythm track, that the drums, “breathe””. This beautiful observation relates directly to four of the eight artworks analysed in the following chapter.

#### **2.4.1.4 The voice**

In most of the artworks being studied, there is at least one vocalist singing or rapping. The human voice itself also becomes a formal element of musical analysis, with various “emotional-semantic and affective dimensions”, among which Dyer (2012:7) lists the formal elements of tone and delivery, as well as markers of gender, class, ethnic, regional, geographic and other socio-cultural differences, while “affect is carried in vocal timbre – smooth, rasping, bright, warm, husky, raw”. Human listeners are good at decoding basic emotions from the sound of human voices, even when the words themselves are emotionally neutral or unintelligible (Patel, 2008:345). Sundberg (2013:100) asserts that “our decoding of the emotional information in singing” is probably founded on our acquaintance with human emotional behaviour, and particularly of speech. Another noteworthy aspect of decoding song, is that the lyrics and the music are merged into one acoustic signal, but remain as two salient dimensions (Gordon, Racette & Schön, 2006:224), and thus from a neoformalist perspective, two separate meaning-making elements to consider. Six of the eight artworks have very distinct (and thus meaningful) vocal and lyrical performances.

#### 2.4.1.5 Lyrics

“Storr (1993:14) states that the Greek word *melos* (from which we get the English word ‘melody’) referred both to music as well as to the lyric poetry which it was set to. Poetry and music were inseparable in this early tradition of musical performance, and the poet/lyricist was also often the composer of the music, leading to a “musically determined verse, or music and poetry in one” in which “the musical-rhythmic structure was completely determined by the language” (Storr 1993:15). This seems an apt description of hip-hop music, which is most commonly understood to be a fusion of beats and a vocalist rapping (although there are many variations and forms of instrumental hip-hop music, as well as acapella or spoken word vocals-only forms of rap and hip-hop performance). A related idea which might form interesting connections in this context, is the “physical participation” of the reader or listener engaging purposefully with the rhythm of a lyrical text - according to Brooks and Warren (1976:49) “your whole body shares in the experience”. Skilful use of rhythm in lyrics also “establishes the form” of a text, “in bringing its materials into a sharp focus of attention” (Brooks & Warren, 1976:495). Skilfully written (and performed) rap lyrics might be considered “euphonious verse” (or well-sounding verse), which is created by “the repetition of sounds - in rhyme, alliteration, assonance and consonance”, and “may give a pattern beyond a metrical pattern, and such repetitions may also work to emphasize sounds basic to the “music” of a passage” (Brooks & Warren, 1976:543). Only one of the eight songs analysed in the following chapter consists of rap lyrics, but the rhythmic musicality and patterning that is commonly found in rap lyrics can also be traced in a few of the other performances. Lexical cohesion is the study of connections across a text, and functions in a similar fashion to the neoformalist project, searching for patterns across a text and evaluating their coherence, development and effects. Poetry (and lyrics) are often “densely patterned”, effectively using cohesion as a literary strategy (Carter & Goddard, 2016:117). Lexical cohesion is often created by repetition or the patterned use of synonyms “threading through the text” (Cutting, 2015:9). This patterned repetition is also a common strategy in lyric writing, where extended metaphors often unify the lyrics of a song around a theme or concept.

One of the most useful analytical tools for interpreting lyrics is the concept of connotation, or association. The basic idea is that certain words and phrases can set up a connection to another image or memory or emotion in the mind of the reader or listener. “Connotations operate at a number of levels. They can have wide-ranging social and ideological associations because they encode the practices and values of a society”, and they can also “operate at a much more local and personal level” (Carter & Goddard, 2016:104). The connotative meaning of words can be found in “overtones, personal or emotional associations aroused by words” (Zindela et al, 2013:65). Carter and Godard (2016:201) provide an insightful description of the interpretive process when engaging with lyrics, which seems to be true of both musical and filmic interpretation as well:

Reading and interpreting any text is a dynamic process. It is not simply a question of decoding what has been put there, as if it were a formula. People bring their own experiences to bear in interpreting a text, and this means that no two individuals will have exactly the same response. At the same time, there are aspects of texts that can be identified as part of a set of communicative strategies. In the end, interpretation is a process of negotiation between what is in the text and what people bring to it.

Cutting (2015:2) explains that meaning-making in the interpretation of lyrical texts hinges on the fact that “interactors communicate more information than the words they use. The speaker’s meaning is dependent on assumptions of knowledge that are shared by both speaker and hearer: the speaker constructs the linguistic message and intends or implies a meaning, and the hearer interprets the message and infers the meaning”. Cutting’s description outlines a very similar process to Bordwell and Thompson’s four levels of meaning, starting with the referential meaning (assumptions of shared knowledge), moving to explicit meaning (the speaker’s intended meaning), and finally building towards implicit and symptomatic meaning (the hearer interpreting and inferring meaning). The parallel established between the role of the “active reader” and neoformalist film theory’s “active viewer” is made clear in both Carter and Goddard and Cutting’s descriptions of the meaning-making and interpretive processes of the reader-hearer of linguistic texts.

“Tone” in lyrics refers to the speaker, singer or writer’s attitude towards the subject, toward the audience, and sometimes toward him or herself, and the interesting thing about the word “tone” in this context is that it is a “metaphor drawn from the tone of voice in speech or song” (Brooks & Warren, 1976:112). Tone is an indication of attitude, and needs to be picked up by the reader or listener to be understood in the context of the lyrics. A good example is the use of sarcasm - if the sarcastic tone is not decoded by the reader or listener, the words of the text might literally mean the opposite of what the speaker or writer intended. Our ability to have differing affective reactions to lyrics tends to change with age. As Trainor & Hannon (2013:446) point out: “When lyrics conflict with musical cues to emotion (such as mode, tempo, and other expressive cues), 5- to 10-year-old children tend to focus on the semantic content of the lyrics (e.g. “I lost all my money on the way to the store”) and ignore the expressive cues in the sung performance, while adults do the opposite”. In other words, adults are more adept at perceiving the emotive tone of the performer, and find this to be a stronger cue for their own emotional reactions than the actual referential meaning of the words.

The writer may also employ different strategies in considering the “audience” of a lyrical text, or who the text might be addressed to. In an interview with Melt Myburg (2012), South African poet Loftus Marais describes his writing process as “a complicated version of mumbling to myself”, or engaging with a “vague imagined reader” as he writes his verse. Sometimes the reader or listener is the specific audience, when the lyrics directly address the listener as “you” (Brooks & Warren, 1976:114). This strategy of directly addressing a listener can produce strong emotional effects if used sparsely, similar to the filmic Brechtian device of “breaking the fourth wall”, in which an actor might suddenly look directly into the camera and address the viewer. Five of the eight texts in the following chapter make use of this strategy, employing “you” to address the listener at poignant moments in the songs.

In relation to narrative films, songs may be commentary or reflection on the action, or expressive of character (Dyer, 2012:9). In the narrative context the performance of a song can also act as a powerful thematic unifier, uniting characters with their destinies or individual character arcs with collective human experience (Chion, 2009:430). This concept is relevant to five of the eight artworks to be analysed,

which are encased inside larger narrative structures. All of these elements can be used as neoformalist tools by which to analyse sequences in films.

#### **2.4.2. Live Musical Performances**

Small (1998:13) proposes the following fundamental insight:

The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance.

This study holds the view that the musical performances in the eight artworks are essentially done “for a camera”, and the camera is there to allow the viewer into the space of the performance. This is an extended “set of relationships”, which, to follow Small’s definition, means that the viewer becomes one of “the people taking part in the performance” even though they are sitting in front of a screen. Overy and Molnar-Szakacs (2009:492) have developed a model which they call “shared affective motion experience (SAME)” to provide a framework for understanding the relationship between agent and listener, or performer and perceiver of music, in which “the expressive dynamics of heard sound gestures can be interpreted in terms of the expressive dynamics of personal vocal and physical gestures”. There is a powerful link between the human body and the music being performed, as well as perceived.

Prior to certain types of electronic music production, it was true to say that “all musical sounds are created by movements of the human body” (Overy & Molnar-Szakacs, 2009:489). In discussing the widespread preference for being at a concert rather than listening to an audio recording of the performance, Storr (1993:31-32) explains that many viewer/listeners gain more pleasure from seeing and hearing a live performance of music than from only hearing it, because of the “physicality of musical performance”. Thom (1993:181) asserts that because the performers are

present in the performance, to a certain extent they therefore *are* the performance. Levitin (2007:211) describes a “personal magnetism, or charisma” that many performers seem to exude which is independent from any musical talents they may or may not have. This is definitely an applicable element of analysis in all eight artworks with which this study is concerned, the physical aspect of performance is strikingly communicative in all eight audiovisual sequences. In the art of live performance, emotion can be expressed through the human body in facial expression, posture, gesture, movement, words and vocal sounds (Budd, 1985:126). Body movements are often more powerful carriers of emotive expression than words or facial movements (Ekman in Kivy, 2007:80), and this study therefore considers the bodily performances and gestures of performing musicians as elements of analysis. Even a choice to not move, or move in a restricted manner, may be expressive of particular emotion or affect (Dyer, 2012:27). This is very similar to the craft of acting, in which the actor’s performance consists of appearance, gestures, facial expression and voice (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:131). In essence, the musicians who do their performances “for” the cameras become something akin to actors, they make decisions about whether to acknowledge the presence of the camera or not, and in this embodiment they also succeed in pushing these eight audiovisual sequences ever nearer to the “cinematic” experience. Vernallis (2008:420) makes a wonderful observation here about the musician-performer’s shapeshifting functions in the diegesis of music video worlds: “Music videos’ characters inhabit a strange world, one which bears some resemblance to reality, but which possesses a different phenomenology: a world where sound structures events. The performer is transformed in this environment...The pleasure of music video, therefore, derives in part from the ways that the performer can negotiate two worlds – one like ours, and the other a parallel musical universe in which the performer becomes a musician who moves through a musical landscape”. These statements are made about performers in conventional music video worlds, in which the audio is pre-recorded, but I would argue that it is even more true in the worlds of the eight sublime-oceanic sequences. The measurable acoustic utterances made by the musician-performers within the diegesis of these scenes make them even more directly connected to the enworlded space of each film, and each vocal or physical gesture becomes a carrier of meaning, precisely like an actor playing a character.



Levitin (2007:210) asserts that many non-musical viewers (as in people who do not play musical instruments) of a live musical performance “detect a great deal of the expressive intentions of the musician” from the physical gestures that the musicians make during performance of the music, even with the sound of a recorded audiovisual performance turned off. “Add in the sound, and an emergent quality appears – an understanding of the musician’s expressive intentions that goes beyond what is available in the sound or the visual image alone” (Levitin, 2007:210). This description is precisely the type of neoformalist decoding of separate elements which produces the sublime “emergent quality” that this study is interested in.

## **2.5. Taken Together: The Sublime-Oceanic Audiovisual Experience**

Vernallis (2008:424) argues: “As we build a field of study for music video, we might do well to draw on the best parts of author-centered work on film and music – a respectful attentiveness to the work, an interest in style and socio-political context, a curiosity about the possibilities and limits of a medium”. Elements of “style” have been considered in the preceding parts of this chapter (and will be considered again in the following chapter), and perhaps the overarching “socio-political context” that this study is interested in, is the ontology of the ‘sublime’ viewing-listening experiences produced in the eight specific sequences to be analysed in the following chapter. The fact that technological apparatus, namely the camera and the screen, are at the heart of each of these experiences, also suggests that the notion of ‘sublime’ may have evolved since the Romantic thinkers found it in nature.

Philosopher Alain De Botton (2010:165) describes this transitional moment in our collective understanding: “We were now deep in the era of the technological sublime, when awe could most powerfully be evoked not by forests or icebergs, but by supercomputers, rockets and particle accelerators. We were now almost exclusively amazed by ourselves.” The amount of time currently spent in front of screens by viewer-listeners is completely unprecedented in human history, and continues to rise exponentially. The question of whether we can still have sublime, transcendent, meaningful or eudaimonic experiences through our screens is therefore an increasingly important topic to consider. This entire study is building on a tentative answer of “yes”, specifically because of the potential for sublime-oceanic audiovisual experiences identified in the eight artworks analysed in the following chapter.

Gallagher *et al* (2015:6) define 'awe' as "a direct and initial experience or feeling when faced with something amazing, incomprehensible or sublime", and they define 'wonder' as "a reflective experience motivated when one is unable to put things into a familiar conceptual framework – leading to open questions rather than conclusions". In this useful definitional framework, it then makes sense that "awe hits you more immediately at the first-order level of experience; wonder is more reflective or second-order. One can think that perhaps an immediate experience of awe motivates a more reflective experience of wonder" (Gallagher *et al*, 2015:6). Perhaps these 'sublime-oceanic musical performances captured in moving images' have the potential to produce experiences of awe and wonder precisely because they initially seem nearly "incomprehensible", in the sense that they leave the viewer-listener "unable to put things into a familiar conceptual framework". This also adds weight to Grodal's notion of "saturated emotions" not finding release through the form of the unconventional audiovisual text, leading to the potential for sublime-oceanic experience. As stated in the opening chapter of this study, these eight artworks seem to problematise, or 'blur the line' between two well-known artforms, and the hybrid resultant texts seem to exist in an intriguing ontological position between 'cinema' and 'musical performance'. Described in another way, the artwork being made by the musician/s is just as influential as the artwork being made by the filmmaker in the viewer-listener's affective and cognitive experience of the sequence. There is thus an intended double meaning in the subheading of this section: firstly, all of the formal and conceptual tools discussed earlier in the chapter are "taken together" to create a theoretical toolkit for analysis of what may be considered a sublime-oceanic audiovisual experience. Secondly, in both musical and cinematic terminology, a "take" refers to a specific recording. If one of the performers or technicians, in either context, is unhappy with a certain recording, or sees possibility for improvement, it is common to hear the phrase "let's do another take". Thus "taken together" also refers to the equally significant roles of the musician and the filmmaker in the creative processes and subsequent emotive power of these sequences.

"Music is a heterogenous medium in which many things happen simultaneously. The director's choice of focus reflects a personal way of experiencing the song" (Vernallis, 2008:417). This insightful statement was made about the traditional craft

of making music videos, which usually consists of creating the images after the music has already been recorded and mixed, essentially using the recorded song to inspire and build a visual world for the music video. The eight artworks in the following chapter are not constructed in that same manner, but in each case the chances are very good that the filmmakers had heard a recorded or rehearsed version of the song before they filmed the live performance of it, and therefore the planning of the cinematography, editing and mise-en-scene of each sequence was possibly influenced by listening to an earlier recorded version of the song. Vernallis' statement therefore holds true even in this context, and is perhaps even more poignant than originally intended in these sublime-oceanic audiovisual sequences because of the distinct role that the cinematographer plays in the creation of each experience.

### ***2.5.1 The filmmaking of Vincent Moon: “reinventing the music video”***

In an interview with Cian Traynor (2008:57), filmmaker Vincent Moon (who filmed two of the eight artworks to be analysed) shares some thoughts on his own process:

I think at some point the real question is whether I am just documenting and reporting or whether I am able to become part of the action. I have to decide what is more important: the movie, which is the final result, or the experience of that moment. I don't want to lie with the images by editing reality. I need the final cut to represent how emotive and intense that moment originally was in real life.

In 2006, Vincent Moon (real name Mathieu Saura) co-founded the “Take-Away Shows” series of online video podcasts as part of La Blogothèque. His co-founder was Christophe “Chryde” Abric, Abric wrote much of the text for the blogposts on their website, and Moon did most of the filming. In four years, they filmed more than 200 videos for the Take Away Shows, which are all still freely available to view online. Moon's fresh organic style of guerrilla filmmaking led to the proclamation (five years later in the New York Times) that Moon had “reinvented the music video” (Goodman, 2011), echoed by Traynor's (2008:56) view that the Take-Away Shows “single-handedly revolutionized the music video”. The intimacy and immediacy of the

viewing experience that Moon was able to create by filming well-known indie artists (including Grizzly Bear, Sufjan Stevens, The National, R.E.M., Sigur Ros, Beirut amongst hundreds of others) doing mostly unrehearsed and acoustic performances in unconventional settings led to an impressive oeuvre in which “Moon proved it’s possible to reinvent an old, tired format (the music video) using the very thing (the Internet) that supposedly killed it” (Goodman, 2011). Most of these films were shot in one continuous take, with the cinematographer moving in and around the musical performers, often intuitively and spontaneously. Again, Moon’s own reflection on his process is illuminating:

I try to find a good balance between distance and intimacy without being in the middle...I’m fascinated by those two things. Most of my work is about how to be close to people. In that way, I’ve utilized new technology – like smaller cameras – to approach human bodies and create something intimate and emotional with them. It’s very simple: I am there as the little eye on a little moment in a little dark room (in Traynor, 2008:58).

Moon’s observations about his own approach, as an embodied camera-eye that is in constant movement to capture specific moments, echo the views of another French filmmaker and pioneer of cinema verité, Jean Rouch, who wrote the following three decades earlier:

For me then, the only way to film is to walk with the camera, taking it where it is most effective and improvising another type of ballet with it, trying to make it as alive as the people it is filming. I consider this dynamic improvisation to be a first synthesis of Vertov’s cine-eye and Flaherty’s participating camera...nothing is known in advance....instead of using the zoom, the cameraman-director can really get into the subject. Leading or following a dancer, a priest, or craftsman, he is no longer himself, but a mechanical eye accompanied by an electronic ear. It is this strange state of transformation that takes place in the filmmaker that I have called, analogously to possession phenomena, “ciné-trance.” (1973:39).

“In art, the perceptual process is a purpose in itself, and art prolongs the perception of an object and makes the process difficult in order to trigger attention. Art is the liberation of perception from automatism by which the object is not perceived as a part of space, but acquires a maximum of intensity and duration” (Grodal, 1999:214). What Grodal is referring to here is art’s ability to defamiliarise the familiar, to elicit heightened attention and draw the interpretive faculties of the perceiver into the experience. Dutton (2010:55) lists “special focus” as one of the key criteria that defines anything as an artwork, and argues that “works of art and artistic performances tend to be bracketed off from ordinary life, made a separate and dramatic focus of experience. In every known culture, arts involves...”making special”. Moon’s camerawork seems to possess an ability to heighten the appreciation of the musical performance, to “prolong the perception of an object”, and his own contribution as cinematographer positions him as a creative collaborator, co-creating an audiovisual artwork in the act of filming. As Traynor (2008:56) puts it: “Under the gaze of Moon’s loosely held camera, magic has a way of appearing even when the artists themselves least expect it”. Moon (in Traynor, 2008:57) remains humble and reflective about the praise his filmmaking has been attracting: “With the Take Away shows, people have been telling me that I am doing something new but I always insist what I do is just the basics – that’s what I think real cinema is. At some point even that word is inadequate for what I’m interested in. The most simple, beautiful idea of cinema is just one camera filming what’s happening around”. Moon (in Traynor, 2008:59) does have a teleological purpose to his filmmaking though, and his own description sounds rather similar to Grodal’s notion of ‘saturated emotions’ leading to sublime-oceanic perceptual experiences: “what I am doing is aiming to change how people consider cinema. If I can create an emotion that you can’t really define in words then I know I have been successful.”

In an interview with Liz Merfeld (2010:42-44), American filmmakers Bill Grant and Jet Kaiser of Caveat Films recount the story of how they began making a series of films directly inspired by Vincent Moon’s cinematographical work in La Blogothèque’s Take Away series. Grant recalls being “instantly struck by the power and the immediacy of the performances” that Moon was capturing in his films (Merfeld, 2010:42). Grant and Kaiser set up four rules for their own films (which became an online series called “boneshow”), based on what they observed from Moon’s films: 1.

No pre-recorded overdubs (all the audio is recorded authentically at the same time as the shot); 2. No cuts (only continuous long takes of the performance); 3. One camera; 4. Either the camera or the performer is completely portable. Within the creative restraints of these filmmaking parameters, Kaiser observed that “the camera becomes a part of me and almost acts as a curious spectator” (in Merfeld, 2010:43), immediately calling to mind the idea of subjectivity in/through the camera (as discussed earlier in this chapter). Merfeld (2010:43) describes the phenomenon of the ‘happy accident’ which helps to create the “power and the immediacy” of these sequences: “one-take videos owe much of their magic to happenstance. Ambient noises and imperfect lighting only add to the appeal, and editing after the shoot is minimal and precise”. Vincent Moon (in Traynor, 2008:56) echoes this sentiment himself, and embellishes the idea: “it’s more interesting with an element of danger’ ...You don’t know what’s going to happen in the next five minutes or how people in the street will react. What unfolds from that moment on is a mystery: you know there’ll be a band, a camera and some form of alluring chaos. All those little moments are the bits that make the videos. It’s something you just can’t predict”.

Even though Moon only filmed two of the eight analysed pieces in the following chapter, it was his cinematographic work that first caught my eye and drew me into this study. The descriptions of his technical and conceptual process, his aims and his style also map very well onto most of the other six sequences. Two final observations from Cian Traynor, which this study would argue pertain by extension to the filmmakers of all eight sequences in the next chapter: “Moon wants to continue raising questions, to re-examine the avant-garde through the belief that what is bare is beautiful” (Traynor, 2008:59). “A purist at heart, the Frenchman consistently speaks of the aesthetics of integrity and the art of ‘sublimation’ – to relay the energy of a moment to a wider canvas without losing its natural splendour” (Traynor, 2008:56). The overarching project of the eight main sequences in the following chapter seems to involve a desire to capture raw, “real” musical performances in a manner that makes the techniques of cinema just as important as the music.

## CHAPTER 3: MAKING MEANING: WHEN MOVIES AND MUSICAL PERFORMANCES INTERSECT

### 3.1 Various intersections of musical performances and cinematic technique

This chapter briefly categorises a range of different types of intersection between musical performance and filmmaking. Four basic categories are briefly discussed: musical performances filmed at concerts, as part of narrative filmmaking, as part of documentary filmmaking, and in music videos. A few examples in each category will be analysed briefly, to provide context for the eight main case studies at the end of the chapter. This study aims to loosely define a certain set of elements, almost serving as “criteria”, which need to be present in the audiovisual text in order for it to be considered a hybrid of music, live performance and cinema that this study is interested in.

#### 3.1.1 Type A: Musical Performances Filmed at Concerts

##### 3.1.1.1 *Stop Making Sense: Talking Heads & Jonathan Demme (1984)*

Filmmaker Jonathan Demme, who died in 2017, is most well-known for directing *The Silence of the Lambs*, which won him the Academy Award for Best Director in 1991. In 1983, he worked with a band called Talking Heads to make a concert video that is still widely considered as one of the greatest concert films ever made. The film, *Stop Making Sense*, was released in 1984. The filmmaking crew shot four separate concerts at the same venue to create the final edited film (which feels like one continuous concert). On each night they would focus on getting different camera angles, sometimes wider shots, and sometimes placing more cameras on stage for tighter shots. The fact that the performance is done in front of a (very appreciative and energetic) crowd means that most of the musicians’ performative energies are directed towards the presence of the crowd before the stage, but every now and then, throughout the film, a number of elements combine to make a moment feel “cinematic”. The best example is the opening of the film. The opening image is a beige texture that fills the screen, and the titles of the film begin to appear. It is a beautiful handwritten typeface, and it immediately reminded me of the striking title

designs of Stanley Kubrick's iconic 1964 film *Dr. Strangelove*. I was so convinced of the similarity that I made two screengrabs of the two films' titles, and the resemblance was so striking that I decided to find out who the title designers of both films were, if the one was maybe inspired directly by the other. My intuition proved to be on the money: the title designer for both films, made 20 years apart, was a filmmaker and designer called Pablo Ferro. Ferro's title design work for *Dr. Strangelove* was his first effort into that specific craft, prompted by Stanley Kubrick himself, and kickstarted a long career of designing titles. It is most likely that Jonathan Demme and David Byrne (the vocalist of Talking Heads, and the artist who gets credit for the "concept" of this film) asked Ferro to do the titles in the same style as *Strangelove* to spark a thematic connection from the outset of the film. The function of these titles is also to place this film in a slightly different category than "regular" filmed concerts, there is definitely a cinematic sensibility that pulses throughout the entire audiovisual experience.



**Figure 2: Pablo Ferro's titles for *Stop Making Sense* (1984) on the left, and *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) on the right.**

As the credits continue to be displayed on the screen, fading in and out, the camera moves slowly backwards, revealing that the beige light is the reflection on the floor of



an open door. Thus far, the soundtrack has been silent. Suddenly a shadow, recognisable as the shape of a guitar, enters the frame, and two feet dressed in white sneakers and beige pants begin to walk towards the camera. The camera moves backwards, keeping the feet at a fixed distance, a variation of what Branigan (2006:55) calls the “active follow shot”. It is an intriguing angle, keeping the identity of the walker hidden. As the feet approach the base of a mic stand, the sound of a cheering audience gradually increases in the audio track, and a male voice is heard saying “Hi!”, ostensibly on the microphone. The voice then says “I got a tape I wanna play”, and a hand reaches down and places a tape cassette player on the stage next to the sneakered feet, and presses play. The sound of a drum machine’s beat enters the mix, and the sneakered foot in the frame immediately begins to tap on the beat (see Figure 3). This sequence has clearly been conceived as much for the camera as for the live audience in front the stage, it is a wonderful blend of live performance and cinematic technique. The camera’s gaze moves slowly up along the man’s body, revealing that it is in fact David Byrne, strumming his guitar and dancing in his peculiar idiosyncratic manner before he begins to sing the opening song of the concert into the microphone.



**Figure 3: David Byrne’s foot taps in a performative opening clearly conceived to be a cinematic moment.**

From this point on, the film mostly “feels” like a wondrous musical performance which is skilfully filmed and edited to capture the performance in front of an adoring crowd, but there are only rare moments when the mise-en-scene (specifically lighting and production design elements – see Figure 4) combine with cinematographic framing to create brief shots which seem like they might be existing outside of the concert stage in a cinematic world. *Stop Making Sense* is undoubtedly one of the great music-concert-films, but apart from a few short sequences where the cinematic technique is of equal importance to the musical performance in the audiovisual experience, the text does not do enough in terms of the “cinematic” to qualify for the specific category of sublime-oceanic hybrids that this study is focused on.



**Figure 4: one of the rare shots in which framing and production design combine to create a brief near-cinematic moment.**

### **3.1.1.2 *Tripping with Nils Frahm (2020)***

Despite having a few interesting subsidiary credentials in place, such as a global launch on renowned art cinema streaming platform Mubi, a length of 90 minutes, and having Hollywood A-list actor Brad Pitt listed as executive director, Benoit Toulemonde’s 2020 film *Tripping with Nils Frahm* does not quite succeed in

hybridising a truly cinematic experience with the experience of a live musical performance. There are moments, indeed, which very nearly produce the oceanic-sublime intersection that this study is interested in: considered hand-held cinematography and in-house lighting effects which match the rhythms of the musical performance, as well as delicate intercutting between the long shots and closeup shots which highlight the intensity of the solo musician's performance and the electrifying connection with his audience at appropriate times during the performance. But in the end this audiovisual artwork only serves as an enjoyable documentation of a great musician performing in a beautifully lit and controlled space (the Funkhaus in Berlin) in front of an appreciative audience, and at no point genuinely unlocks the possibility that the experience could be anything more than that.

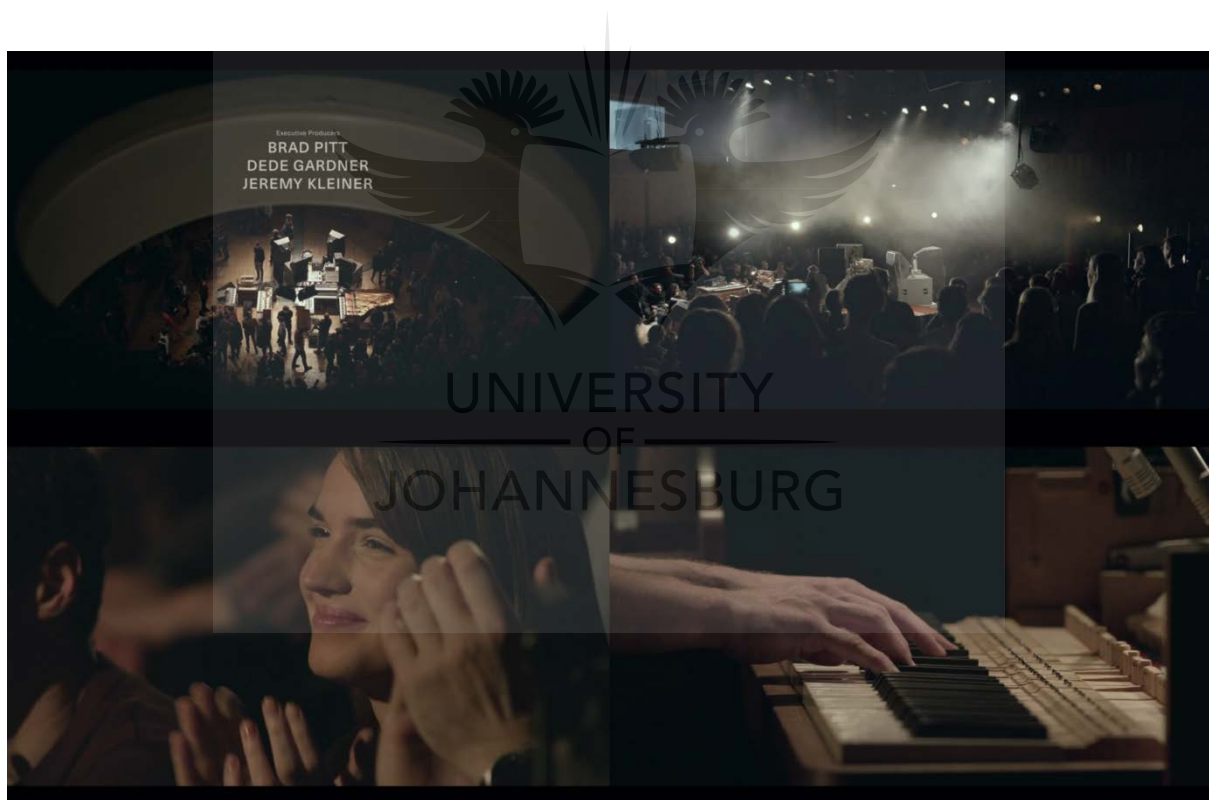


Figure 5: a few beautiful moments from *Tripping with Nils Frahm* (2020).

### 3.1.2 Type B: Musical Performances in Narrative Films

#### 3.1.2.1 *John Cassavetes' Faces* (1968)

John Cassavetes is a legend of American independent cinema, an actor, writer, director and editor. One of his most prestigious acting roles was in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), and in the same year he released an independently financed movie called *Faces*, which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay. Cassavetes wrote, directed and edited the film, which is a slow-burning depiction of a marriage falling apart. The filmmaking style is decidedly experimental, shot in black and white, with long dialogue scenes, a tremendous amount of close-ups (conceptually linked to the film's title, of course) and an almost cinema-verité approach to cinematography. The film forms part of a ground-breaking group of movies (along with iconic films *Easy Rider* (1969), *The Graduate* (1967), *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), *The Last Picture Show* (1971) and many others) that would steer American independent filmmaking in exciting innovative directions, especially in terms of breaking away from traditional Hollywood narrative and editing structures in the 1970s. About a third of the way into the film's plot, a scene takes place in a nightclub. The opening shot shows a hand on a percussion instrument, and as a song starts playing the hand begins to hit the drum. The camera, which is on the stage amongst the musicians, pans to the left, then to the right, revealing the different members of the band on the stage, most prominently a drummer and a pianist. As the camera pans around to the audience, two singers, a man and a woman, can be seen silhouetted against the lights on the club's ceiling. They are singing a duet about love. The camera circles around them, to end, predictably, on a close-up of their faces as they sing the chorus of the song.

The audio is clearly live, possibly being picked up by the camera's audio recording function, creating a sense of changing audio perspective as the camera moves around. The shot is 50 seconds long, and makes for compelling viewing. There is a distinct blend of live musical performance and cinematic technique, and the only reason that this scene does not fully qualify for the 'sublime-oceanic' experience that this study is interested in, is that the musical performance itself is a little lacklustre, and the quality of the audio signal and mix is shaky. From the credits of the film, it is possible that the venue is called "Loser's Club", and somehow that seems a fitting description of the musical mood, which is quite clearly intentional, and not meant to be a critique of the performance or the film, but the short scene doesn't quite succeed in stirring sublime-oceanic feelings. It is an example of an intersection

where the “cinematic” elements are stronger than the musical performance, not quite succeeding in creating the powerful hybrid that this study is looking out for.

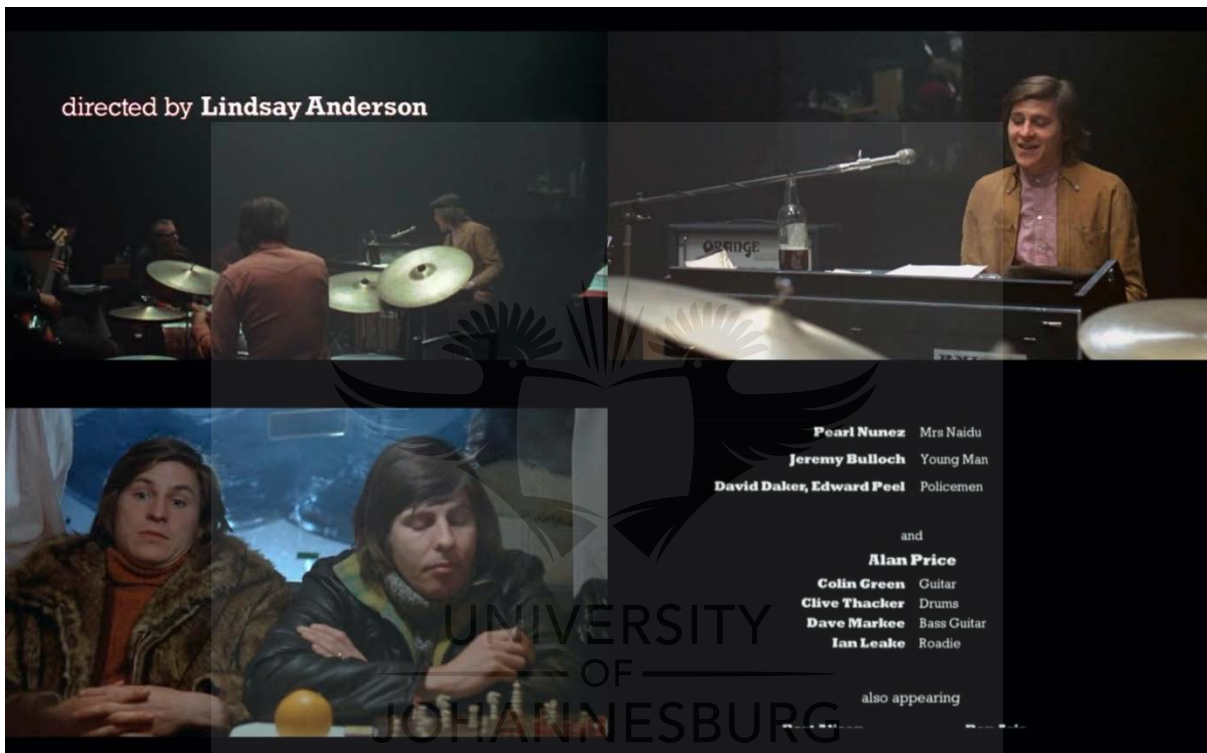


**Figure 6: the short musical performance in Cassavetes’ *Faces* (1968) is more effective cinematically than musically.**

### **3.1.2.2 Lindsay Anderson’s *O Lucky Man!* (1973)**

*O Lucky Man!* stars a 30-year-old Malcolm McDowell (two years after his iconic role in *A Clockwork Orange*) and 28-year-old Helen Mirren. What makes the film significant to this study is the casting and prominent role of a musician, Alan Price. Price wrote the soundtrack to the film, including the title song, and throughout the film Price and his band do performances of some of the songs, with thematic links between the plot’s action and the songs’ lyrics. To blend the diegetic with the non-diegetic even further, director Lindsay Anderson gives Price and his band a small narrative role in the film as well, pretty much playing themselves, on tour in a small van. The musical performances themselves are rousing and energetic, but in each instance they happen in a studio setting, and the camera and editing unfortunately ends up feeling like a relatively standard recording of some musicians performing in a studio. The sound is also immaculately mixed, and the somewhat over-polished

nature of the audiovisual experience in these performances does not create the sense of immediacy or presence that is necessary for a sublime-oceanic hybridisation. My point is that if these filmed performances are removed from the longer narrative film, they would not really feel “cinematic”, which is surprising and disappointing (in the context of this study), given that they are in fact embedded inside a feature length narrative film, which is quite experimental in its structure and approach overall.



**Figure 7: Alan Price and his band play important roles in *O Lucky Man!* (1973), but in the end are credited only as musicians, having never fully crossed the line into a “cinematic” experience.**

### **3.1.2.3 Robert Altman’s *Nashville* (1975)**

In the opening of *Nashville*, two musical performances are happening simultaneously, and the film cuts between them to create a satirical emotive contrast. In one music studio, an older male singer dressed in a white jacket with shiny sequins on it is busy doing a recording of a very slow-paced, “patriotic” American song called “200 years”, and the chorus repeats the line “we must be doing something right to last 200 years”. The actor is Henry Gibson, playing the fictitious

role of country star Haven Hamilton, with long grey sideburns and a surly attitude (interestingly, Gibson is credited as writing the lyrics of the song). In a separate booth in the background, which is visible in many frames, four backing vocalists sing droney echoes of Hamilton's drippingly sentimental lyrics. The film cuts to show a few people seated in a listening area, and introduces some of the characters, who then make their way to another recording studio nearby, in which a large group of gospel singers dressed in green cloaks is preparing to do a recording. The song they record, titled "Yes I do" is a fast-paced, upbeat gospel song, and the performers dance as they sing, increasingly wilder body movements, especially from the lead female vocalist (actress Lily Tomlin, who is credited as co-writing the lyrics). The film then begins to cross-cut between the two live musical performances, creating a humorous contrast between the serious, formal, propagandistic tone of the patriotic country song and the wild joyous frenzy of the gospel song.



**Figure 8: Gibson's slow-paced performance is intercut with Tomlin's fast-paced performance to create a satirical contrast in the opening of Altman's *Nashville* (1975).**

The sequence becomes a strong example of the blending of cinematic technique (specifically framing, lighting and editing) and live musical performance, and is working on many meaning-making levels by setting up strong explicit meaning-making levels from which to infer more implicit and symptomatic meaning. The fact that a white performer (Tomlin's character Linnea Reese) is leading the African-American gospel choir's song is commented on by a British journalist observing the recordings, and immediately a complex multi-layered socio-political system of commentary has been set in place by director Robert Altman, using heavy-handed musical, lyrical and cultural stereotypes. The only reason why this superbly crafted nine minute scene does not quite qualify for the category of 'sublime-oceanic musical

performances', is that the two songs being performed are clearly designed to be very particular stereotypes. The fact that both song's lyrics are co-written by the actors themselves, clearly suggests that the songs were written with a specific narrative function in the context of the film. They become functional elements, heightened (and therefore somewhat emotionally flat) examples of ideological ideas to be exploited further by the film's editor. They are very effective in their function, but because the music itself is so clearly not an authentic expression of a musician working within the parameters of freedom of creative choice, the music of both songs becomes more like an element of "sonic mise-en-scene", elements in the director's control, and not "real" songs outside of the world of the film. The effect could even be argued to be eudaimonic, prodding the viewer towards deeper self-reflection, but the sense of authenticity from the music is missing. To put it plainly: these are lyrics written by actors.

### **3.1.3 Type C: Musical Performances in Documentaries**

#### **3.1.3.1 *Sigur Ros (Heima, 2007) and Dawid Kramer (Karoo Kitaar Blues, 2002)***

*Heima* and *Karoo Kitaar Blues* are two of my favourite music documentaries. What they both achieve, as well as the reasons why they do not quite qualify in the category this study is aiming for, is very similar, so I will discuss them simultaneously. *Heima* (which means 'Home') follows Icelandic band Sigur Ros on a tour through their home country after several years of touring and gaining massive international recognition and fame as one of the world's best live bands. They move from town to town, visiting several interesting locations (all of them aesthetically breath-taking), and playing musical performances of various kinds in various settings. At some of the locations places they invite the people from the local towns to come to their performances. It is clear that not all of the people attending the performances are necessarily aware that the performers are world renowned rock stars. At other locations, the band sets up and plays music with no audience in attendance, thus "for the camera". A memorable composition is performed on a stone marimba in a cave, with all four band members playing the instrument together. The jaw-droppingly beautiful landscape, the warmth of the people, the



incredible music by one of the planet's greatest bands all make for a deeply enjoyable and moving film.

Similarly, the beautiful Karoo landscape forms a wonderful backdrop for Dawid Kramer's quest to find undiscovered and innovative musical talent in the small communities scattered across that part of South Africa. The film actually has two parts: in part one, Kramer scouts the Karoo for musicians, and part two is a concert that Kramer produces and hosts to showcase the musicians he has discovered in part one. The most famous musician to emerge from this project is Hannes Coetzee, who plays the slide guitar by holding a spoon in his mouth and sliding it on the neck of a guitar while he plays the guitar with both hands. Kramer and Coetzee played many more shows together after this project. Throughout the *Karoo Kitaar Blues* film, a variety of musicians do very idiosyncratic performances in authentic Karoo spaces, often in their dwellings. Once again the beauty of the landscape, the warmth of the people and the interesting musical performances make for a moving viewing experience.

There are brief scenes or moments in both films in which it seems as if the musical performance is about to blend with the cinematic experience to produce a hybrid text. Mostly, however, the experience is of interesting music being filmed in wondrous aesthetic locations, and does not manage to transcend into the "cinematic" for long enough to merge experiential worlds, or to make what the filmmakers are doing equally as important as what the musicians are doing in the audiovisual experience. In the category of 'sublime-oceanic' sequences, I am including three scenes from music-documentaries, namely *Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus*, *An Island* and *The Big Easy Express*, with the intention to describe clearly why these sequences are ontologically and experientially different from the musical scenes in the two documentary films described here.



**Figure 9: *Heima* and *Karoo Kitaar Blues* both capture beautiful music in beautiful landscapes, but don't hybridise with 'cinema'.**

### **3.1.4 Type D: Musical Performances in Music Videos**

Music videos, by nature of their construction, do not qualify for the 'sublime-oceanic' category that this study focuses on. The key problem is that the actual musical performance is (usually) not live, but instead a miming "performed" over an already recorded piece of music, and the visuals and pre-recorded music are then synchronised together in the edit, often combining various different takes of footage. There are a number of music videos that challenge their own ontological parameters in interesting ways. This study will briefly look at two such examples from opposite ends of the historic spectrum of music videos: one which is considered the birth of the music video in 1967, and the other released exclusively on Netflix in 2019.

#### **3.1.4.1 Bob Dylan and D.A. Pennebaker: *Don't Look Back* (1967)**

In 1965, filmmaker D.A. Pennebaker followed Bob Dylan around on his tour of England, and made a film called *Don't Look Back*, which was released in 1967. The back of the 2006 edition DVD cover describes the resultant project: "With unobtrusive camera equipment and rare access to Dylan, legendary filmmaker D.A. Pennebaker achieved an unprecedented, fly-on-the-wall glimpse of one of music's most influential figures – and redefined filmmaking along the way". The first chapter of the film is called "Subterranean Homesick Blues", and is regarded by many as the first music video. It was created as a "publicity film" to promote the album, the song, and the film itself. Dylan himself had the idea for its construction: a whole bunch of

large cue cards were drawn, containing the lyrics of the song (or sometimes puns about the lyrics). An interesting bit of trivia is that beat poet Allen Ginsberg helped to make the cue cards, and that Ginsberg is one of the two men framed in the background of the final video. In the video, Dylan stands boldly, defiantly, casually, embodying the “coolness” of a Rockstar, and drops the cue cards one by one as the rambling lyrics of the song unfold. Obviously, he was listening to a recording of the song being played back, and timing the dropping of the cue cards to sync with the timing of the song. This leads to one or two lovely moments of pause between the song’s verses. This is also, obviously, one of the world’s first (and still one of the most innovative) “lyric videos”, a form which has become very widespread and popular on the internet. The camera begins with a closeup of an alley in London, zooms out during the instrumental introduction of the song to reveal Dylan standing with a large cue card that says “BASEMENT” in his hands. As the lyrics roll (the song is only slightly longer than 2 minutes long, but there are plenty of lyrics), Dylan drops the cue cards on the floor, sometimes looking into the camera, mostly not. And when it is done, he walks away. The world’s first music video had been made. It is lovely to think that the world’s first (and only) musician to win the Nobel Prize for Literature is also responsible for co-creating the world’s first music video.



**Figure 10: Bob Dylan in London, 1965, making the world’s first music video, with Allen Ginsberg in the background.**

Even though the music is pre-recorded, this audiovisual experience does have a sense of “liveness” in the way that Dylan is handling the cue cards in reaction to the music. The viewer might almost imagine that they are there, in the alley with Dylan, listening to the recording playing through a speaker of some kind. Many of the other characteristics of a sublime-oceanic hybrid are in place: the dense, rambling lyrics create many eudaimonic moments (very similar to a well written rap song), the action is shot in one take, the setting and framing provides contextual meaning, and if it wasn't for the fact that the music wasn't live, this seminal film would have been included in the final section of this chapter.

#### **3.1.4.2 Paul Thomas Anderson and Thom Yorke: *Anima* (2019)**

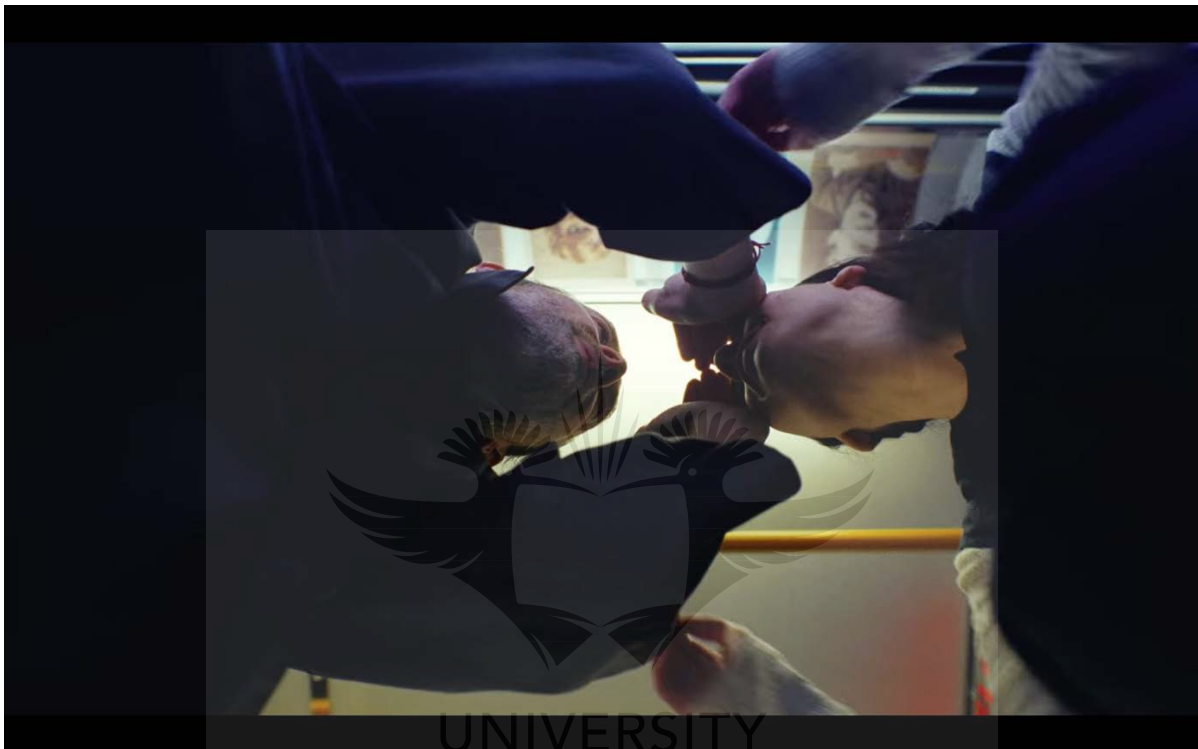
In June 2019, Radiohead's vocalist and songwriter Thom Yorke released his third solo album, *Anima*. On the day that the album was released, a 15 minute short film of the same name also premiered on Netflix. Yorke made the film in collaboration with filmmaker Paul Thomas Anderson (known for directing *There Will be Blood*, *Magnolia*, *Punch-Drunk Love*, *Boogie Nights* and *Inherent Vice* amongst others). As of 2020, Anderson is the only person to have won the Best Directing Awards at all three of the “Big Three” film festivals, namely Cannes, Venice and Berlin. The short film *Anima* was nominated for Best Music Film at the 2020 Grammy Awards. The film uses three songs from the *Anima* album, namely “Not the News”, “Traffic”, and “Dawn Chorus”, in that order, as the soundtrack to create a visual, narrative world to. Again, the fact that the musical performance is not live discredits this audiovisual text from belonging to the specific group of ‘sublime-oceanic’ filmed performances. However, the artistry in this hybrid between music, performance (not musical performance, but an interesting fusion of dance and acting) and cinematic technique produce many beautiful moments which are worthy of analysis, with the aim of creating further context for the eight sequences to follow. The film begins on a train, with Yorke seated amongst dozens of other passengers, all wearing similar dark grey and dark blue wardrobe, ostensibly a workforce of some kind, heading to work. There are immediate visual parallels with Fritz Lang's great German Expressionist masterpiece, *Metropolis* (1927), which are affirmed as *Anima* continues (see Figure 11).



**Figure 11: *Anima*'s workforce on the left, *Metropolis*' on the right.**

The narrative structure is relatively simple: Yorke makes eye contact with a beautiful woman on the train (his real-world girlfriend at the time), she forgets a bag in the train, he grabs it and tries to return it to her, but gets caught up in a surrealistic Kafkaesque world with physics-defying characteristics. They eventually find each other, dance around a bit, board another train together, but Yorke ends up alone again at the end of the film. It is a visceral audiovisual study in loneliness and togetherness, melancholy and love. The most striking thing about the world is the way that the characters inhabit it, through expressive gestural choreography, which is also a German Expressionist characteristic. The mise-en-scene is stupendous throughout the film, a sci-fi dream-like atmosphere pervading every scene. Yorke himself partakes in the strange ways of moving and navigating the film world's spaces, and in this way is fully integrated as a character in the diegesis. His acting is strikingly good, as Ehrlich (2019) puts it: "Yorke is also a natural actor with a silent film star's grasp of movement and comic timing". This is affirmed by Anderson himself, who compares Yorke's performance in this film to the great silent actor Buster Keaton in an interview with Chris Willman (2019) for *Variety*: "Well, he has that similar thing, doesn't he? Like, physically. He's amazing with his body —very, very physical. I just kept saying, "More Buster Keaton, more Buster Keaton!" It

seemed to fit.” Yorke only “sings along” as the voice of the music in the final minute of the entire film, for the rest of it he is purely embodying a character in the film world. There is no sense of “liveness” in this film, but it is a beautiful intersection of cinema and music, and it is wonderful to see a renowned musician pull off a great acting performance.



**Figure 12: Yorke in the moment that he starts singing along with the music.**

### **3.2 Eight sublime-oceanic musical performances captured in moving images**

The common characteristics of these sequences, as discussed in the opening chapter of this study, include the fact that they all present a very tangible sense of the liveness of the performances, they are not to be understood as conventional ‘music videos’, the craft of filmmaking is just as important as the craft of musicianship in the creating of each text, and most of these sequences are nested within larger filmic contexts. Lastly, all eight of these sequences form a unique hybrid category of texts in the nature of their intersections between gripping musical performances and innovative filmmaking techniques, leading to the high probability of “saturated emotional” responses for the engaged viewer, and even possibly sublime-oceanic viewing-listening experiences.

I will be doing the eight analytical case studies in sequential order of the years that they were released in. In each case study, I am listing the musical artist as well as the primary filmmakers in the subheading, to once again place emphasis on the equal roles that performers and filmmakers have in creating these sublime-oceanic sequences. I have also made a supercut video of the eight scenes that I will be analysing, in the order that they appear in this study, which can be accessed at the following Google Drive link by any reader of this study (I will have to grant access to the folder, but please do click through and request access):

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1sZVywA-891Wy7BdoFvAVH5oopSXypDCJ>

### **3.2.1 Björk & Nietzchka Keene: *The Juniper Tree* (1990)**

This film stands out a little from the other seven films, in three noteworthy ways. Firstly, it's the only film I hadn't seen at the time that I started doing the research. In other words, it's the only sequence I "discovered" during the writing of this study, and as such it's the last addition to the group. When I watched and then re-watched a specific scene in the film, I realised it was meeting most, if not all of the criteria for the sublime-oceanic experience I had been describing in my research, and on further reflection I was practically obliged to include it. Secondly, the musical performance itself has no instrumentation, and also no lyrics. One of the eight other performances has no instruments, and another has no vocals, but this is the only one in the group which consists purely of one voice singing a melody with no words. Thirdly, it's the only feature length fictional narrative film in the group (partly positioning it as an example of Type B above), albeit a distinctly arthouse viewing experience - a dark retelling of a Grimm brothers fairy tale set in the wild and lonely landscape of Iceland. The nature of the narrative fictional film means that the performer is fully embodying a character in a fictional space as she is doing the musical performance. One could, and probably should argue that because the actress doing the singing is in fact global pop/avant-garde superstar-musician Björk, most viewers of the film would probably be aware of her status as an incredible vocalist and musician in the real world, and possibly even recognise her very particular singing voice, so that when she bursts into song as a character in the film, there is probably a measurable

blurring of the lines between the world of the movie and the real world. What I mean is that when she starts singing, I am confident that many viewers of the film would be thinking something along the lines of “Björk is singing, I’m so glad she’s doing a bit of music in this film along with all the acting”, and not “this witch-like character called Margit is now singing and it makes perfect sense in the diegesis that she would be doing that”. Of course, the viewing-listening experience of each viewer would probably happen on a spectrum between these two extremes, but I dare say that most people who watch (and have watched) this film are watching it *because* it stars a then-21-year-old Björk in one of the lead roles. To illustrate my point, upon the film’s re-release (as a restored version) in 2019, one reviewer wrote: “the movie’s only lasting contribution to the general public is it being an answer to the trivia question “In what movie did Björk make her acting debut?”. It’s a shame because both *The Juniper Tree* and its source material deserve to be more widely known and appreciated; hopefully, the film’s re-release will help accomplish this goal” (Estes, 2019). Film analyst David Ehrlich (2019) agrees that “*The Juniper Tree* deserves to be seen outside of her [Björk’s] shadow”. A collateral point I’m making is that in each of the other seven sequences, the musician/s doing the musical performances are performing “as themselves”, or as their artist-selves. Here it should be noted that “one’s very life can be a work of art”, and that authenticity might consist in “relating one’s life to a creative activity” (Dyson, 2007:13). Even though the rules of the film worlds might be bending a little bit away from “reality” through various performative or cinematic devices in each of the following seven films, none of the other performers are fully rooted into a larger narrative as characters in an entirely fictional plot, as is the case with Björk’s performance.

The narrative context of the specific scene in which Björk sings is important to the meaning of the sequence. However, I would argue that a viewer-listener who watched only this 60-second sequence, extracted from the rest of the narrative, could also be moved to the point of a sublime-oceanic experience purely through the combined effects of the music, the performance, the mise-en-scene, the editing and the cinematography. I will therefore begin by analysing the sequence as a self-standing experience, and gradually I will give more narrative context to suggest further layers of possible meaning.



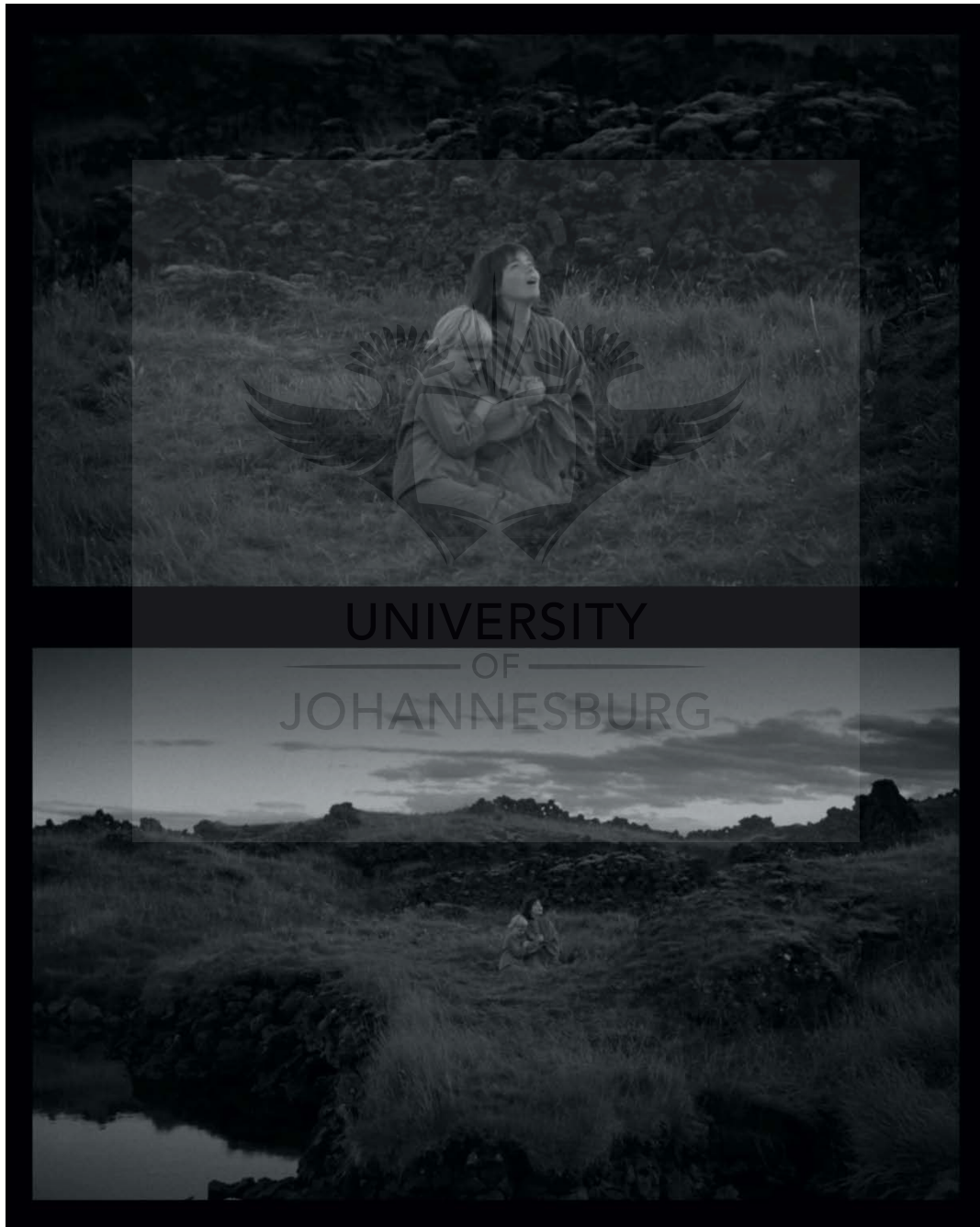
The scene begins with a J-cut, which means that the sound is audible before the visuals are seen (an editing device explained in chapter 2.3.2.3.). The sound of birds chirping cues a natural setting, over a fully white screen. Björk's voice begins to sing at the exact moment that the images of the scene start to become visible. The images become visible through an editing device called "dip from white", which means that the screen begins as a fully white screen, and then the opacity of the filmed image gradually increases until it is clear. A "dip to black" or "dip from black" transitional device is much more common in film editing, thus the choice of a white screen by director Nietzchka Keene is notable here, it immediately draws attention to itself as a considered editing element, a specific creative decision. The white suggests a supernatural state, or a pure world of light, from which the rest of the scene emerges. The fact that Björk's voice is the audio element which cues the transition from white screen to visible image suggests a kind of shamanic power, a cue that viewer-listeners might pick up (albeit subconsciously) even without any narrative context. The implicit meaning is that Björk's character has the agency (represented by her voice) to move or manifest things from a mystical space into the space of the real world. With more narrative context, given a little later, this seems a very plausible interpretation of the "dip from white" device, but I think this idea could be perceived even without narrative context. The sound of birds chirping continues throughout the scene, and creates an undercurrent of serenity. A growing body of scientific evidence is showing that the sounds of birds chirping or singing "are reassuring to humans because over thousands of years of evolution we've learned that the sweet melody of birds merrily singing is an indication that our environment is safe" (Reisinger, 2017). The overarching sonic mood gradually becomes more melancholy as the birdsong blends with Björk's emotive, raw vocals, and the two sounds eventually effectively function as a "timbral augmentation" (McAdams, 2013:49), in which two sounds work together but one dominates the other. The fact that the filmmaker chooses to let viewer-listeners hear the stark birdsong on its own before Björk starts singing, and then lets the birdsong continue to the end of the scene, suggests that the intended audio experience is indeed a blending of the two sounds.

Björk's voice is raw, textured, breathy, and characteristically skips effortlessly between rough and smooth notes, simultaneously comforting and warning the boy at

her side, as well as the listener. Through the positioning of her body and her face, the intended audience of the song in the world of the narrative seems to be more than the boy alone, she seems to be singing towards the heavens, and loud enough that Nature itself should hear. The “liveness” of the performance (which is a fundamental characteristic of the sublime-oceanic sequences being analysed here) is evident in the deep breaths she takes between phrases of notes, in which her body can be seen drawing air. The resultant effect of the combination of all these audio elements for the viewer-listener is an ambiguous, unsettling sense that safety and reassurance is being challenged by the foreshadowing of a deep sadness, which is further enhanced by the creative decisions about the images in the scene. By starting the scene with audio, Nietzchka Keene effectively follows Chion’s principle of using sound to create atmosphere, a “framework that seems to contain the image, a “heard space” in which the “seen” bathes” (1994:47).

The first image that becomes visible out of the white screen is of Björk holding a little white-haired boy, rocking back and forth gently as they both kneel in a grassland. Björk is looking up at the sky and singing, the boy is clasping her arm firmly and looking down at the ground. It is a long shot, with both characters’ bodies fully framed. The cinematographic choice of a long shot has many interpretive implications for the viewer. According to Mercado (2013:59), “the composition of long shots can be made to...emphasize the space over the character, or to establish a special connection between a character and the space around them. The wide field of view of long shots also makes them ideal for the emblematic shots (shots that convey complex, associative ideas by the arrangement of visual elements in the frame)”. Slowly, over the period of 60 seconds, the camera performs a slow zoom outwards, eventually ending the scene in an extreme long shot. Mercado (2013:65) points out that extreme long shots are often kept on screen for longer than other shots because of the amount of visual information that viewers have to process, and the composition of an extreme long shot often emphasises the difference in scale between the characters and their surroundings. The zoom shot usually “doesn’t alter the aspects or positions of the objects we see. Our vantage point is the same at the end of the shot as at the beginning” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:199). This combination of a slow outward zoom which begins in a long shot and ends in an extreme long shot has a very distinct effect on the viewer, especially in combination

with the audio. The overall effect is that the vastness of the landscape steadily gains an ominous nature, amplified by the boy's anxious body language, the raw, husky timbre of Björk's voice, the melancholy tonality of the melody, the liminal time of day (dusk) and the beautiful composition of the two figures positioned between earth, water and sky. The sequence ends with a "dip to black", another ominous cue as the black screen bookends the scene which began with a white screen.



**Figure 13: The opening and closing frames of a sublime-oceanic 60-second shot from *The Juniper Tree* (1990).**

As shown above, the sequence on its own already contains much potential for meaning-making, but the other 77 minutes of the film obviously lend more contextual substance from which to build further layers of meaning. The entire narrative film itself is shot and edited in black and white, a style choice which is indicative of the good-and-evil moral spectrum which is at the heart of all fairytales (especially the Grimm brothers' stories). In the story, Björk's character, Margit, is a mystical witch-like figure who can see visions that other people cannot see. She interacts with characters who have died earlier in the narrative, including the little boy's deceased mother. The boy's name is Jonas, and later in the film he is killed (accidentally, it should be argued) by Margit's sister Katla, who is the new woman in Jonas' father's life (after the death of Jonas' mother). Katla has succeeded in winning Jonas' father's heart by doing a spell, and throughout the narrative both Margit and Katla do several witch-like incantations and spells, culminating in a gruesome scene near the end of the film where Jonas' severed finger is stirred into the broth that Katla, Margit and Jonas' father are eating for supper. Throughout the story, Björk's character Margit is soft-spoken, gentle, empathetic and not sinister. She also does spells, but usually to try and make things better, seemingly without selfish intent. Margit struggles to navigate the rising tension between her sister Katla and the boy Jonas, who feels that Katla is manipulating his father, and trying to replace his mother.

This scene in which Margit attempts to comfort Jonas takes place in the middle of the narrative, where the point of conflict between the boy and the new mother has been established, and a dark ending begins to seem inevitable. The body of water that is gradually revealed in the bottom left corner of the frame also holds narrative significance, as Katla later disperses of Jonas' body in the river after he has died by falling off a cliff. The water is thus an ominous foreshadowing, a motif that runs throughout the plot. The fact that Margit is a mystical figure able to navigate between worlds also gives more weight to the interpretation that her singing is a spiritual or a magical act, a melodic incantation to try and appease the dark forces that are seeking to take Jonas' life. The fact that her plea ultimately goes unheard in the eventuality of Jonas' death, and that her attempt to give comfort is not sustainable for more than this moment, is a haunting melancholic reminder of the unpredictability and transience of every human life.

This scene, experienced on its own or as part of the longer film, definitely has the potential to produce saturated emotions which could lead to sublime-oceanic feelings. It generates a sense of awe, which may lead to wonder upon further reflection, and as such becomes a eudaimonic experience.

### **3.2.2 Melissa Swingle & Andrew Douglas: *Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus* (2003)**

*Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus* is a memorable and innovative film. It problematises the parameters of documentary filmmaking in interesting ways. Its narrative form is basically constructed as a stream-of-consciousness journey through parts of the South of the USA, an experience loosely held together by the unconventional narrator Jim White, who is a musician and street philosopher. White makes for an unforgettable guide to the world that the film is exploring. Film reviewer Nick Schager (2005) gives this beautiful summation of the film's scope: "In the film's clear-eyed portrait, the South is revealed as a place in which Christ, mysticism, superstition, and the yin-yang forces of the sacred and the profane combine, creating a delicate blend of the real and the unreal, the known and the unknown." Critics of the film have pointed out that it needs to have more thorough cultural and historical context to be considered a proper factual documentary, and that it skirts over many issues of history and demographic to produce a kind of one-sided view of poor white Southerners. In my view, the film is something between a magic realist musical folktale and a travel documentary, and is not necessarily seeking to provide specific answers to specific socio-historical questions as much as it is allowing the viewer to enter into the dark heart of a gritty, off-the-beaten-track world that is not often seen in mainstream cinema.

What makes this film particularly relevant to this study is the central role that music, especially live musical performance, plays in the form of the film. Jim White is an alt-country songwriter, and he does quite a few performances of his own throughout the film, in interesting locations where filmmaker Andrew Douglas frames White as part of the world that he is singing about. Throughout *Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus* Douglas films a whole series of different musicians doing performances (mostly alt-country style) in a range of authentic locations, from gas stations to

forests to barber shops, and most of these performances match most of the criteria that this study has set up to qualify as being sublime-oceanic audiovisual experiences. For this analysis, I have picked one specific scene to represent the entire body of work, but any interested reader is encouraged to watch the whole film and enjoy the many different live musical performances captured through innovative cinematic technique. Schager's (2005) beautiful description of Andrew Douglas' filmmaking in this film immediately calls to mind much of what has been written about Vincent Moon's filmmaking in the previous chapter: "Douglas's detached camera (functioning as a fascinated, bemused spectator) presents a world straddling a fine line between reverence for heaven and fondness for hell."

This audiovisual sequence is also different from the other seven in two ways. Firstly, it is the only musical performance in the group of eight which does not feature a human voice. The music is performed by alt-country musician Melissa Swingle, who plays a beautiful rendition of *Amazing Grace* on the musical saw, whilst seated in the boot (Americans would say 'trunk') of her car. Secondly, it is also the only musical performance which gets "interrupted", or joined by a narrator's voice, in this case Melissa Swingle herself, recounting a dark but somewhat comical episode that happened at a funeral that she had attended, while the music keeps playing.

The scene begins with a J-cut. The screen shows an image of a bridge with memorial flowers on it, as the strange timbre of the musical saw can be heard playing the first notes of a song in the sonic background. Stuckenbruck (2016:4) makes an apt description: "the saw produces a unique singing tone that is difficult to describe. It has a beautiful pure and clean timbre but with an eerie quality to it". The image of the bridge cuts to a shot of brown leafless trees, with a strong lens flare from the sun just behind the trees, while the first few notes of *Amazing Grace* become recognisable. The camera is immediately moving, from left to right, smoothly and slowly, revealing a blue 20<sup>th</sup> century American car parked in the dry grass near the trees, parallel to the angle of movement of the camera. The smoothness of the camera's movement suggests that it is a Steadicam shot. The sun through the trees continues to create beautiful lens flare effects as the camera moves smoothly from left to right. A person is sitting behind the steering wheel of the car, perhaps a child. The seated person does not acknowledge the presence of the camera, and just

stares ahead as the camera continues to reveal the body of the car, moving towards the back of the car. At the same moment that the viewer realises the boot-door of the car is open, two figures walking behind the car (in relation to the camera) also become visible through the glass of the back window. The camera continues to slide smoothly to the right, and a seated figure wearing a brimmed hat is shown sitting on the edge of the car's back end. Her arms and hands are moving, and within moments it is clear that the eerie but beautiful musical sound is being produced by this seated figure, who is playing a saw with a bow held in her right hand, and bending the bow with her left hand to create the different notes of the classic gospel melody. The two male figures who were approaching the car from between the trees, and who initially appeared quite threatening (at least while their intentions were unknown as they approached the parked vehicle) have now also stopped at the edge of the treeline near the car, and appear to be standing and listening to the song being performed on the saw. It is an unexpected sacred moment, a roadside liturgy led by one of the most well-known spiritual tunes in the English-speaking world being played on an instrument whose unique timbre has been described as the sound of "singing from heaven" (Stuckenbruck, 2016:4).

The camera continues to move to the right, and eventually swivels around the back of the car, framing musician Melissa Swingle from a front-on angle. Melissa does not acknowledge the presence of the camera either, but continues to bow the saw, looking down at the instrument, her face towards the two figures who are standing and watching, but are not in the frame anymore. The contents of her car's boot are displayed, there is a blanket and a few containers of various kinds, suggestive of a semi-nomadic gypsyesque life perhaps. Every now and then her right leg shakes up and down in small movements, which seems to have a direct effect on the pitch of the sound that the saw is making. The pitch seems to "wobble" a little bit in sync with the shaking leg, creating a musical effect called vibrato. Stuckenbruck (2016:32-33) explains this phenomenon: "Vibrating the left or right foot is one way to obtain vibrato if one is sitting with the saw between the knees. The foot that has the blade tucked under its thigh is the preferable foot to vibrate since vibrating the other leg, underneath the blade, may cause the blade to slip. In order to make one's foot vibrate the heel must be lifted and as a reflex response the foot, along with it the whole leg, will begin to shake. With practice a player will be able to control this

response and with it vary the speed of the vibrato". The camera finally comes to a halt and spends a second or two in more or less the same position, facing the saw-player.

Exactly 70 seconds into the musical performance, a female narrator's voice is heard, saying the words: "She just started laughing. She couldn't help it." At this point, the camera is just starting to make the 90 degree swivel around the back of the car, diverging from its straight line of movement alongside the car for the first time. This is another J-cut, again bringing the sound from the following image into the mix before the images are shown, blending the worlds of one shot with another, and acting as a "sound bridge" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:296). While the sounds of the music and the images of the saw-player continue, the narrator's voice carries on with the story: "She couldn't help herself. Even though it was at granddaddy's funeral...uhm...and I don't know what got into Amy and Kimberley and Christie either, my little sisters. They all started laughing too, it was contagious. It was quite horrifying though..." At this moment, during the phrase "was quite horrifying", the shot cuts to a medium close up shot of Melissa, sitting in the back seat of (ostensibly) the same car from the previous shot, and now her mouth is moving in sync to the storytelling, making it clear that she is the narrator. This shot is quite unconventional, framed through the open back window, with the storyteller facing roughly 70 degrees away from the camera, shadows on her face. The camera is not perfectly still, but makes small intuitive movements as the story is being told, suggesting that it is a handheld shot, possibly still on the Steadicam rig. Although Melissa is not wearing the brimmed hat anymore, and her face was not clearly shown in the previous long shot while playing the saw, it is easily conceivable for the viewer that the saw-player and the woman telling the story are the same person, both dressed in black and seated in the same car, and also because the music of the saw can still be heard underneath the narrator's voice.

Melissa continues with the story, never looking at the camera: "You would think a missionary woman would be more sombre at a funeral, but she couldn't help it, because, there granddaddy was, lying in the casket, and grandmother, who had had a stroke, and lost her short-term memory, kept saying: "Sut! Wake up! Wake him up! Everybody's here, wake up, Sut, wake up!" and for some reason, that just hit her as



funny, I guess it was either laugh about it or cry about it, but boy, she laughed so hard, and I think Kimberley even snorted, but uhm, I was not amused. But, anyway, that's the way it goes sometimes at funerals, you never know how people are gonna act." As Melissa is saying the phrase "sombre at a funeral", the final notes of *Amazing Grace* are played behind her voice, and the music stops as the story being told continues. The sound of birds chirping can also be heard in the ambient background, making it clear that the car is most probably parked in the same spot as it was when she was playing the saw, near the leafless trees. It is a delicate piece of editing that transitions from the musical scene in the forest to the storytelling shot in the back of the car with a lovely, natural fluidity, creating a beautiful coherence between the two shots. There is a third and final shot that completes this beautiful little scene in the film, which happens right as Melissa says "you never know how people are gonna act". An L-cut suddenly shows a much tighter close-up of her face as she blinks and looks out of the window, past the camera, her unsmiling mouth not moving, as the final few words of her story are heard in the audio track. Swingle's story and her own apparently unsympathetic reaction to the situation described, combined with the eerie, melancholy performance of one of the most recognisable gospel melodies of all time, creates a reflective space for the viewer to be able to reflect on ideas about mortality, religion, humour and societal conventions about behaviour and etiquette. It is a valid philosophically-prompting piece because the form of the sequence does not point explicitly at any specific idea about life and death and life after death as the "correct one", but explores these ideas anecdotally and leaves the viewer plenty of room for their own threads of implicit and symptomatic meaning-making to take shape.

Melissa Swingle, as performer and storyteller, has not once directly acknowledged the presence of the camera throughout the three shots, and has retained an almost mystical distance from the viewer, even while the nearness of the cinematographer's Steadicam shots has allowed the viewer to feel like they were right there, "amongst the action and activity in the scene" (Mercado, 2013:161). There is a distinct Southern Gothic atmosphere about Swingle's performance and her enigmatic persona in this intriguing short roadside vignette. In musical terms, the "Southern Gothic" genre refers to a blend of acoustic folk, blues, country, gospel and rock traditions fused with dark lyrical subject matter. Both Melissa Swingle and Björk's

performances are reminiscent of Vernallis' (2008:420) observation that performers seem to become transformed in music video worlds, able to "negotiate two worlds – one like ours, and the other a parallel musical universe in which the performer becomes a musician who moves through a musical landscape". There is a mysterious, dark, nearly witch-like similarity between these first two performers, but that is largely a coincidental similarity and only pertains to most of the other performances in the sense that all the performers become almost "magical" (and definitely very powerful) in the performative spaces they occupy in each film world, something akin to shapeshifters or tricksters, aware of their role as illusionists.



**Figure 14: Melissa Swingle performing *Amazing Grace* on a musical saw while seated in the boot of her car and then narrating a story from a family funeral she attended, in *Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus* (2003).**

If Iceland's dark mythological heart is revealed in *The Juniper Tree*, the same can be said about this film, in fact Schager's (2005) wondrous description could almost work for Keene's film if only a handful of words were changed: "somewhere deep within the very fabric of the film's gnarly tapestry of anecdotal stories of death and heartbreak, lyrical landscape cinematography and plaintive homegrown songs, *Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus* truly captures the bewitching, somewhat

unsettling spirit of the South.” Swingle’s scene is a poignant vignette of what the whole film feels like. Again, the formal elements of musical performance, cinematography, editing, storytelling and what should even be described as a strong acting performance have combined to create a compelling audiovisual sequence which blurs ontological lines and becomes a eudaimonic experience.

### **3.2.3 Arcade Fire & Vincent Moon: Take Away Shows (2007)**

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2007, Canadian band Arcade Fire were in Paris. They played a show at an iconic venue called L’Olympia, in support of their newly released album *Neon Bible*. Cinematographer Vincent Moon and his La Blogothèque partner Christophe Abric were there, and an arrangement was made that Moon would film the band for one of La Blogothèque’s Take Away Shows. Apparently, the logistics were tricky to figure out, and a decision was made to perform two songs which would form the Take Away Show, firstly the title track of the new album, followed by a song called “Wake Up”. The resultant video is nearly 14 minutes long, filmed as one continuous take, as Moon follows the band into an elevator, where they perform “Neon Bible” in cramped quarters, whereupon they open the lift doors, tune their instruments again, and stride out into a crowd of thousands of people who have come to see their show at L’Olympia. They don’t stride onto the stage, they literally stride right into the crowd, from the back of the concert hall, and then vocalist and band leader Win Butler begins to sing on an acoustic megaphone, strumming his guitar, with the rest of the band near him, in an ocean of Arcade Fire fans who sing and clap along as the band plays a completely acoustic (as in none of the instruments are plugged in) version of “Wake Up”. Moon’s camera has not stopped filming since before the band got into the elevator, it is one, long, riveting take, in which the camera is sometimes very deliberate and intuitive, and at other times is clearly trying to keep up with the pace and limitations of the large band’s movement between quite confined spaces. The performance of “Wake Up” is truly extraordinary, and characteristic of a band who seeks to build meaningful connections with their audiences. It becomes something similar to a religious experience, in the way that Arcade Fire succeeds in destroying the edifices of conventional rock performances in European concert halls. Moon himself describes the occasion: “when I was on-stage with Arcade Fire, it was just insane! When you

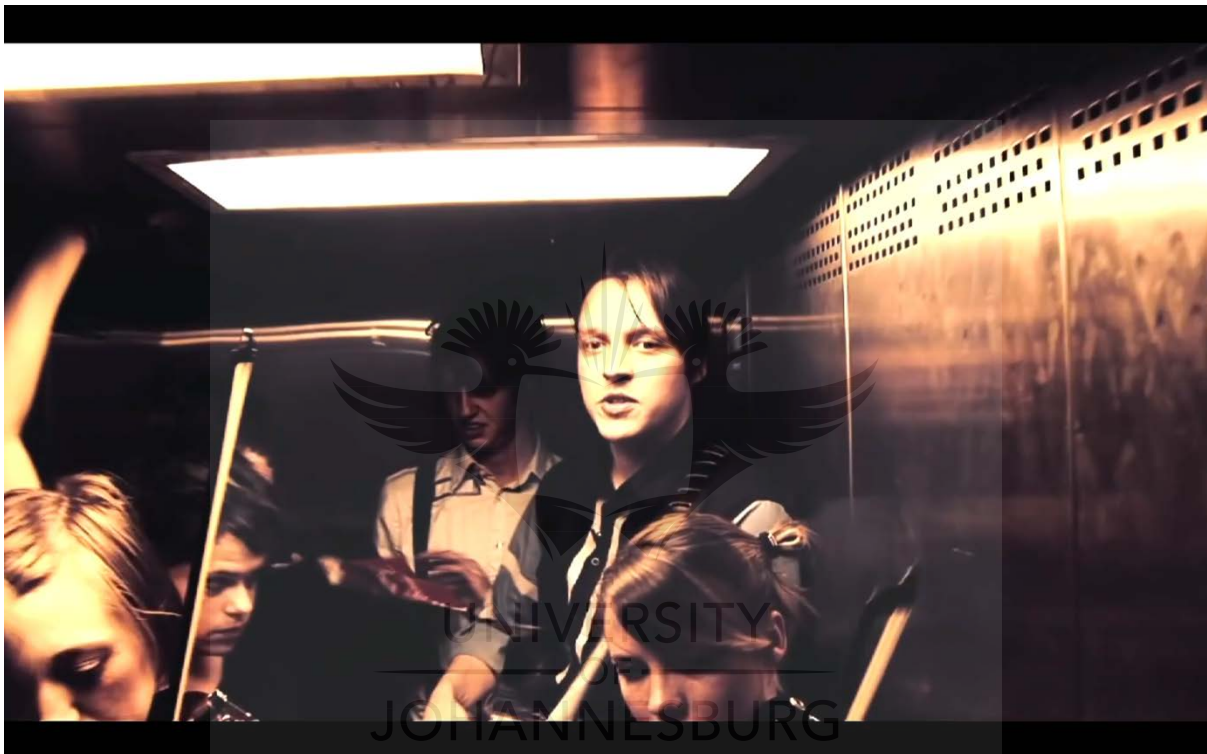
look out at the crowd, you realize that guy is God, in a way. So that's always a beautiful thing" (in Traynor, 2008:58). The stripped down but terrifically powerful version of "Wake Up" is an audiovisual delight, and Moon's camera does some interesting things in the darkness of the concert hall, surrounded by a mass of rhythmically moving bodies, but the overall viewing experience is still positioned somewhere near to the Nils Frahm film discussed earlier in this chapter – musicians playing live music for an appreciative audience. The sense of the filmed performance of that song being a "cinematic" experience gradually decreases, even though it is a very unique and moving experience, and Moon's cinema-verite approach can definitely not be described as conventional or boring.

This study finds more value in the first of the two songs in Moon's Take Away Show collaboration with Arcade Fire. At first glance, it may seem the stranger option to focus on. The construct for the performance is almost painfully obvious – the band will all squash into an elevator and play an acoustic version of "Neon Bible" together, with the lift door open so that Moon can film them. The way that Win Butler asks an extra person inside the elevator to get out of the elevator just before they begin seems a little forced, a little pre-meditated, and there is a moment in which the viewer-listener might doubt the spontaneity of the setup. It's almost as if the organic, authentic energy that might have been part of the experience is slightly reduced as they all try to squash into the narrow confines of the elevator with their instruments. The question for the viewer might be "why?", as in "why are they all squashing into the elevator, do they practically need to go up or down, or is it just to try and look cool?" Before the band walks towards the elevator, at the very start of the shot, band members can be heard saying "let's destroy this song in the elevator". Without the knowledge that the band would be playing a bigger show directly after this performance in the elevator, the viewer might find this entire construct and the effort it is taking to set it up rather puzzling. This version of the song's performance can be found in various places online, but the scene often doesn't include the walk towards the elevator, the rather awkward piling into the elevator, or what happens after the song. It takes exactly two and a half minutes (which is relatively long in continuous-take time) for the band to move from one location in the corridors of L'Olympia to the elevator, and be ready to play the song. All of that aside, whether one is watching this performance with or without the context of what happens before or after, the

performance of “Neon Bible” in the Parisian elevator (perhaps somewhat unexpectedly) becomes a seminal moment in the filming of live musical performances. Goodman (2011) explains that even after having made dozens of similar films for the Take Away Shows, “it was the clip of Arcade Fire, 10 of them, strings, horns, xylophone, guitar – packed into an elevator and singing, with the rip of magazine pages for percussion, that came to represent Moon’s innovative new oeuvre”.

Win Butler is one of the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s great musical frontmen. In performance mode, he has an inescapable presence, an illustrative case of the “personal magnetism, or charisma” that Levitin (2007:211) described as exuding from certain performers. It is Butler’s voice that says “OK, let’s do this” when the band and its entourage is milling about backstage, and everyone’s immediate reaction is to start walking together, towards the elevator. In the chaos of the ten bodies jostling for semi-comfortable playing positions once they are in the elevator, 180 seconds later, it is once again Butler’s voice which says, quite calmly but with an intriguing sense of authority “let’s do it”, and immediately everyone involved in the project comes to rest, aligns themselves, and is ready to play their part. None of them really look at him, his voice is enough, and the world is quite literally transformed. The moment is reminiscent of many traditional creation myths in which the voice of a god speaks order into the chaos, aligning disparate energies and establishing order. At first I wondered if I was making too much of this moment, but the more I watched the scene, the clearer it became that this is indeed a significant transitional moment, when the preceding chaos (that led to a somewhat frustrating viewing experience, as described above) is harnessed, and the magical musical world with its new rules is put in place (see Figure 15). Abric, the co-founder of the Take Away Shows, writes the following in the official blog post which accompanies the iconic video (2007): “Arcade Fire is a unique group. Everyone’s split up during the day, managing and wandering through his/her own affairs in the dressing rooms and corridors. No one seems to move about as much as Win, who manages everything, knows everything, watches everything, and hears everything.” The implicit metaphor I had picked up of a variety of wandering energies being called into line by an omniscient voice was perhaps not so far-fetched after all. Abric (2007) writes that himself and Vincent Moon, as the Take Away Show filmmakers, had a premonition that the show with Arcade Fire

would be “different” from any of the others, and he describes their experience in working with the band: “We had been playing the role of outsider the entire day, like a foreign body that latches onto the daily grind of these magnificent musicians. We had to adapt, through astonishment and wonder, as the band took up their tools and started to play. But Arcade Fire didn’t take us as outsiders. It seemed to unfold naturally: we entered into their logic, as they awaited us and eventually swallowed us up. It was now Win Butler’s Take Away Show, and we followed.”



**Figure 15: The moment that Win Butler says “let’s do it” and the world transforms.**

Moon senses the magical moment intuitively, and slowly zooms in on Butler’s face directly after he says “let’s do it”. The perfectly centered framing and the striking lighting on his face, in the midst of a relatively fluid and chaotic sequence of events (including what the camera has been doing) is further testimony to Moon’s artistry. Butler waits for a brief moment, then counts the rest of the band in: “1, 2, 3, 4...”, and the musical performance begins. The only other musician currently visible in this shot is directly behind Butler’s head, it is multi-instrumentalist Richard Reed Parry. His right arm is lifted up, and he is hitting the actual roof of the metallic elevator to create a rhythmic surrogate for a bass drum, on the pulse of the song. Nobody reacts to this, which suggests it is a pre-meditated decision about the timbre of the acoustic

percussion, and has perhaps even been rehearsed, or at least discussed. This would accord with legendary music producer Bob Johnson's description of his time with the band when they were writing and recording the *Neon Bible* album: "Man, they played and played. They'll play the same song over 100 times 'til they get it right" (in Harris, 2017). Most performing musicians know that the sweet spot of a magical performance lies somewhere between being over-prepared through disciplined rehearsal and giving in to the wild expressive intuition of the performative moment, in which anything can happen. Arcade Fire's live performances have consistently exemplified a powerful balance between these two ideas. Thom (1993:181) argues that because musical performers are present in the performance, to a certain extent they therefore *are* the performance. In this case, the physical integration of the elevator means that the setting itself also becomes a constituent part of the performance, and not only in a visual or atmospheric way. There is also an interesting formal link here between this industrial freight elevator with electric lighting, and the lyrics of the song, which definitely contain the theme of city living. The conceptual-physical fusion doesn't seem entirely accidental. Again, Abric's (2007) backstory about the choice of location for this performance is insightful: "Then, suddenly, we had a plan. Win asked if there was a freight elevator. We found it, Win smiled, and the Take Away Show was no longer in our hands".

Moon zooms out slowly as Butler sings the opening four lines in a gentle, low pitched tone, that is almost a speaking voice: "A vial of hope and a vial of pain / In the light they both looked the same / Poured them out on into the world / On every boy and every girl". The musical accompaniment for this opening quatrain is just the guitar and the percussive hitting of the elevator, it is beautifully sparse. At the singing of the first chorus, Butler's wife and co-founder of the band Regine Chassagne is now also in frame, as well as two female string players. All three are singing backing vocals as Butler sings the chorus: "It's in the neon Bible, the neon Bible / Not much chance for survival / If the neon Bible is right". More notable than the additional vocalists at this point, is the fact that Richard Reed Parry is holding up a magazine in the centre of the frame, and is tearing pages from the magazine in a rhythmic pattern to create the sound of a snare drum on the pulse of every second downbeat. It is a daring, innovative and superbly original piece of music-making, captured by the cinematographer's sound recording equipment, and amplified in the small space of

the elevator. The timbre of a ripped magazine page, torn at the right speed, definitely resembles a snare drum being played with a brush. The brush snare is a technique commonly used by drummers in acoustic performances. Not only is the page-ripping an effective sonic device, it is also a mesmerising visual moment. Parry is at the back of the elevator, slightly in shadow, but his hands are right in the middle of the frame, making the biggest gestures of any of the musicians at this point in the song, so the actions (and the accompanying sound) immediately capture the viewer-listener's attention. As the camera continues to zoom slowly outward, the frame reveals that Chassagne is still keeping the roof-bass-drum going with her right arm. At the end of the final phrase of the chorus, a xylophone joins with a short, catchy, characteristic Arcade Fire melody to close out the fourth musical bar, which is lyricless.



**Figure 16: Richard Reed Parry rips a magazine for a snare drum, while Regine Chassagne bangs the elevator's roof as a bass drum.**

When Butler begins the second verse, the two string players join in on their instruments, the magazine-ripper takes a break, and a beautiful timbral blend starts to happen inside the open mouth of the elevator. Butler sings: "Take the poison of your age / Don't lick your fingers when you turn the page / What I know is what you



know is right / In the city it's the only light". As the camera zooms out further, a saxophone player and a horn player are also revealed near the open door of the crammed elevator. They are producing lower frequency droning sounds which are blending with the strings to create what McAdams (2013:49) refers to as "timbral emergence", in which a new sound results that is identified as none of its constituents. The skilfully played sustained notes means that neither the strings nor the brass instruments are distinctly louder than the other, and the pleasing resultant sound is a fusion of both instrument families. These long notes which are held throughout a song are referred to as a "pedal point" in music theoretical terms, and in this case they are sustained in the key of B major.

Moon moves his camera's gaze slowly around the group, eventually revealing that there are 10 musicians inside the elevator, including the seated xylophone player whose only visible body part is his hands. Butler's restrained idiosyncratic voice sings the rest of the lyrics, sometimes alone and often joined by more voices: "It's the neon Bible, the neon Bible / Not much chance for survival / If the Neon Bible is right / Oh God! well look at you now! / Oh, you lost it but you don't know how / In the light of a golden calf / Oh God, I had to laugh / Take the poison of your age / Don't lick your fingers when you turn the page / It was wrong but you said it was right / In the future I will read at night / In the neon Bible, the neon Bible / Not much chance for survival / If the Neon Bible is true." The music ebbs and flows, the chord pattern changes for what could probably be referred to as a bridge section, or maybe a variation of the verse over the continuing pedal point, the chorus is repeated another two times, and suddenly the song is over. The musicians stand in silence, lowering their instruments, one or two glancing at each other or at Win. It is a sacred moment, the immediate afterglow of an unrepeatable performance. The silence lasts for six wondrous seconds before a man's voice shouts "open the door!" in a thick French accent, and the Arcade Fire members disassemble and start walking towards the concert hall, where the electrifying performance of "Wake Up", as described earlier in this section, will take place within a few short minutes of the elevator performance. Moon's ever-present camera remains in attendance throughout, with his "signature of flowing ideas, instinctive timing and astute positioning" (Traynor, 2008:56). For the attentive viewer-listener, time has seemingly stood still, even though the entire performance of "Neon Bible" was 1 minute and 46 seconds long (less time than it

took to walk to the elevator from the backstage area!). The combination of the camerawork, the musicianship, the setting and the simple beauty of the song's repetitive structure (the technical term here is an 'ostinato', referring to a repeated phrase of music) have resulted in a sublime-oceanic audiovisual experience that is possibly still unmatched in terms of its intensity of effect and memorable innovation.



Figure 17: Ten musicians merge with an elevator in Paris.

### 3.2.4 Efterklang & Vincent Moon: *An Island* (2010)

Three years (and hundreds of projects) after the Take Away Show with Arcade Fire, Vincent Moon made a unique music-documentary with Danish band Efterklang. On Efterklang's official website, [efterklang.net](http://efterklang.net), their own description of *An Island* is as follows: "*An Island* is an unconventional music performance film and an abstract documentary about a band and an island. In August 2010, French filmmaker Vincent Moon and Efterklang's 8-piece live band met up on an island off the Danish coast. The objective was to shoot a film...full of performances, experiments and collaborations. Over an intense period of 4 days Efterklang collaborated with more than 200 local musicians, kids and their own parents, creating new performances and interpretations of songs from their album *Magic Chairs* (2010). It was all filmed

by Vincent Moon who [at the] same time conducted several filmic and musical experiments with Efterklang as his dedicated playmates.” The island itself is named Als, and is where the founding members of the band grew up, and where some of their families still reside. *An Island* makes for an intriguing viewing, which Goodman (2011) refers to as “a sonic biography” which “will most likely remain the sole example of the beguiling genre it inhabits”. Throughout the 48-minute film (the strange length was partly pre-meditated as an attempt to be roughly as long as a musical album), Efterklang play different songs from the *Magic Chairs* album in a variety of different settings and with an array of collaborators, including a choir of children from the local school. There are a number of performances in this film which match all the criteria for a sublime-oceanic hybridisation of musical performance and cinema, but the one that has always affected me most deeply and left a lasting impression is the band’s performance of a song called “Alike”, during which the band’s parents join them in the playing of the song.

The scene begins with a J-cut, in which the sounds of the first few notes of the song can be heard, over a black screen. The first image is of two windows and two doors, recognisable in the darkness by the orange light that is coming from inside. It is clearly night-time. This image of the windows and doors matches beautifully with the last thing that was seen before the black screen, which was the shape of the same house, filmed from inside a car that is approaching it. Moon’s camera begins to move slowly towards the house in the darkness, as the introductory chords and rhythms of the song continue. Sustained chords on a synthesizer can be heard, over a side-stick driven drum beat. This intro is in the key of F minor, and sets an enigmatic mood, especially in combination with the strange visuals. The moving camera starts to swivel a little towards the right, seemingly aiming for the open doorway on the right of the screen. As it approaches the doorway, a number of figures are revealed, standing inside the lit room. One man is moving his head and arms quite enthusiastically to the pulse of the music. Next to him is an elderly lady, with white hair, her arms clasped behind her back, also swaying rhythmically to the music. Behind them, a little deeper into the room, some seated figures can be seen as the camera’s approaching arc continues to reveal more figures inside the room. Just as Casper Clausen, the band’s vocalist, sings the first note of the lyrics, Moon has framed him in the middle of the shot, standing underneath an old basketball hoop in

a room that seems to resemble a barn (see Figure 18). With an open walkway towards this primary subject now before him, like an aisle in a church, Moon's camera begins to move slowly forward in a straight line.



**Figure 18: When Casper Clausen sings the first note, Moon has him in his sights.**

Clausen begins with the lyrics of the second verse just as the camera passes the first row of people standing near the doorway. The frame that Moon has before his camera's lens now, is again reminiscent of a religious gathering of some kind, with a standing figure in the middle of a seated circle (see Figure 19). The lyrics of the song, sparse and poetic, contain quite a few phrases and images which might also be associated with a religious (or at least 'spiritual') theme, such as "calming voice", "it is true", "the flood is gone", "the path was wrong", "it gave us hope", "the more we found, the more we grew, upon the truth". Here is the full text of Efterklang's song "Alike":

The time is right, when the mission fails  
The calming voice that kept me safe  
It may be stupid, but it is true

The flood is gone and the trouble stays  
The car was slow, but it took us far away  
It may be stupid, but it is true

Ooooooh  
And it made us feel alike

The days are gone and the game was fun  
The path was wrong, but it gave us hope  
The more we found, the more we grew  
Upon the truth, upon the truth

Ooooooh  
And it made us feel alike



**Figure 19: An establishing *Last Supper*-ish composition strengthens the spiritual undertone of Efterklang’s performance of “Alike” in *An Island* (2010).**

Moon’s camera continues to approach Clausen. The drummer, seated, bottom left, and the player of the yellow synthesizer seem to be the only musicians actively

creating the layers of sound underneath the vocals at this point. Just as Clausen begins to sing the first “Ooooooh” of the chorus, the flute and the violin join into the music-making, and again Moon has timed his approach almost perfectly, framing the violinist and the flautist to the sides of Clausen just as they begin to play their instruments. The longer the scene continues, and the more times it is watched, the clearer it becomes that quite a bit of “blocking” (or planning of camera-path and placement of characters in the world) was done before the shoot. Moon gets close enough to Clausen so that he is now the only figure in the frame, but seems to have no boundaries, pushing ever nearer until it is an extreme close-up shot of Clausen’s neck and face, singing the chorus with smooth, clear falsetto notes, and shaking his head from side to side in emotive gesture. The peculiar low angle and the intense nearness to the subject creates a highly charged emotive aesthetic moment, and is evidence of the enjoyment that viewers find in “the formal play presented by unusual angles on familiar objects” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013:193). Clausen doesn’t ever look into the camera, even when it is unsettlingly near him, and thereby retains an enigmatic aura as a performer-in-a-world, and as a leader of the group in the room. This leadership role is clearly established in the following moments when Moon begins to move slowly backwards again, and Clausen looks directly at someone not seen by the camera, ostensibly in the circle, widens his eyes, smiles encouragingly, and begins to shake a percussive shaker in his right hand.

When the camera moves backwards, a new composition is revealed: a white-haired lady is to Clausen’s right (left on screen), and to his left is a smiling elderly gentleman. Both elderly people are playing small electronic synthesizers which are held on their laps. The female flautist is standing behind the elderly lady, and the trombone player who was seated in the earlier composition is also standing and playing. A rich, layered texture of sound is taking shape as the group of musicians enters into the third and final verse of the song. Moon is now in the middle of the circle of people, and begins to pan his camera to the left, in a circular shape, revealing more and more people standing in the circle and participating in the sonic layering. The drummer is playing on a drum, accompanied by an older man (possibly his father), and behind them three elderly ladies are shaking small percussive hand-instruments in time with Clausen’s own shaker (see Figure 20). It becomes clear that they were the ones Clausen was looking at when he brought the shaker into the mix.

The only line of lyrics of the chorus “and it made us feel alike”, do not seem amiss or accidental in the form of the film here. Implicit and explicit strands of meaning are merging to create a moving in-the-moment portrait of family, togetherness, lineage, generational inheritance, and mortality, with music as experiential glue. This audiovisual scene is a recorded (and yet so incredibly “live”) embodiment of Small’s (1998:2,8-9) view that the shared activity of “musicking” creates layers of individual and social meaning-making, as well as Overy and Molnar-Szakacs’ (2009:494,499) beautiful insight that “the core of musical experience” is “not the nature of the acoustic signal per se, or the ability to perform complex motor skills, but the sense of human interaction” which is a most “extraordinary case of *being together in time*”. Levitin (2007:244) provides another poetic summation: “The power of art is that it connects us to one another, and to larger truths about what it means to be alive and what it means to be human.”



**Figure 20: *An Island* is a beautiful representation of musicking’s key transcendental super-power: “being together in time”.**

The camera keeps turning in the centre of the circle, revealing that the violinist is now standing in a completely different spot, roughly 180 degrees away from where he previously was. He is holding his instrument and singing passionately along with

Clausen, eyes closed and body swaying. The enthusiastic mover who was seen near the doorway at the opening of the scene, turns out to be a guy with a broom. He is now sweeping the floor to the rhythm of the song, creating a swooshing diegetic percussive element reminiscent of Arcade Fire's magazine-ripper: it is a sonically and visually interesting performative gesture, contributing equally in each category to the viewer-listener's experience. Next to the guy with the broom is a hand holding about five balloons of different colours, which is unexpected and seems at first to be merely a production design element to flavour the world of the performance. Next to the balloon-holder, a woman's face is shown, singing along with Clausen. The camera has now gone past the doorway in its circular spin, and is approaching Clausen himself again. An old man is shown playing guitar alongside a younger man (again the implication of father-son is increasingly probable), and the camera reaches Clausen again just as he sings the final lines of the third verse, "upon the truth". He gives a meaningful look to the group, and shakes his shaker right on the first downbeat of the following bar of music, which kickstarts an instrumental section of the song, and sends Moon's camera into a considerably faster spin around the room.

When the camera reaches the balloons this time round, the holder reveals a pin in his right hand, and bursts a balloon perfectly on the downbeat of the song, creating, effectively, a snare drum. Once more, the image and the sound are equally interesting for the viewer-listener. The fact that this is the third significant crossover of unconventional percussion sounds created by ordinary household objects which are interesting to look at makes one wonder whether Moon is involved in generating these ideas, or whether his style of filmmaking prods musicians towards making these kinds of creative decisions in the musical worlds he is filming. It turns out there are two balloon-poppers next to each other, and Moon's camera slows down just a fraction in order to catch the second one popping a balloon on a specific beat just before she leaves the frame. This slight slowing down of the spin in order to catch a specific visual "beat" is comparable to Levitin's (2007:170-172) description of a drummer's human "groove", which is not mechanical or perfect, but can adjust organically to the emotional rhythm of a specific performance, especially in collaboration. Moon's camera, essentially, is "grooving" in collaboration with the



musicians, and a sublime-oceanic audiovisual experience is in full swing. It is a mixture of planning and improvisation, and it is gripping.

At the end of this second spin, when Moon's camera reaches Clausen again, Moon begins to retreat slowly out of the room, along the same line on which he entered, but now in reverse. At this point there are roughly 20 people actively making music together (it's tricky to do a precise count because of the shuffling and the framing). Clausen is still playing the role of a conductor, indicating key musical moments to the other people in the circle. He also dances into the middle of the circle, where Moon's camera was, as Moon backs away, backwards towards the doorway. The camera leaves the room, which is in euphoric musical mode, layers of strings and brass and synthesizers and percussion all jamming together. The first balloon holder has grabbed a white balloon, and stands towards the centre of the room again, in anticipation. The music builds to a crescendo, and the white balloon is popped emphatically (sonically and visually) on the final beat of the song, a fragment of it flying up into the air. The last note is still hanging in the air as Moon's camera pans to the right and sees only the solid black of the night. Moon, "with Efterklang as his dedicated playmates", has created another audiovisual eudaimonic masterpiece.



**Figure 21: Clear evidence of planning merges with rhythmic spontaneity in Moon's camerawork to create cinematographic "groove".**

### **3.2.5 *Mumford & Sons, Edward Sharpe & the Magnetic Zeros, Old Crow Medicine Show & Emmett Malloy: The Big Easy Express (2012)***

There are plenty of wonderfully performed and beautifully filmed pieces of music throughout this music-documentary film (which incidentally won a Grammy in 2013 for “best long-form music video”), but the scene that most stands out in terms of the criteria established in this study as a hybridisation of cinema and musical performance, happens at the opening of the film. The first few (relatively quick) establishing shots show a train moving through landscape, with the camera on board, and a few film credits superimposed over the images. The grainy texture of the footage suggests it has been shot on celluloid film, and indeed the credits show that much of the movie was shot on 16mm film. An immediate sense of nostalgia is created, the opening images could easily have been from an American indie narrative film of the 1970s, perhaps followed by a young Jack Nicholas striding into view wearing a construction helmet. What I am intending to illustrate by this fictitious comparison is that the experience feels “cinematic” from the first moment. Director Emmet Malloy’s film then cuts to the interior of the train, for a very impressive single shot that is nearly four minutes long. This is the scene that this study focuses on as an example of a sublime-oceanic audiovisual experience.

The first image in the shot is of a corridor inside the train, creamy reflective walls, a window on the left showing the passing landscape through it, and a door to the right. The door opens, and a young woman enters the frame and glances smilingly out of the window. Her brown hair is tied in a pony-tail, she is wearing a dress and a backpack. She begins to walk down the train’s corridor, and the camera follows her. She snakes through a few different small spaces in the train’s interior, and the non-diegetic word “FEATURING” appears on the screen in small white letters just before she enters a room full of seated figures, and a large diegetic postbox with the words “Mumford & Sons” is seen at the entrance to the room. The linguistic link between “featuring” and “Mumford & Sons” is nearly impossible to miss. To make sure though, the filmmakers superimpose the words “MUMFORD & SONS” again in stylised white lettering over the images of the musicians seated in a carriage together. The moment that the woman walks into the room, a banjo starts strumming, and now that she is in the middle of the group, nine musicians

(ostensibly a band called “Mumford & Sons”, if the textual cues are to be trusted) start playing together. Trumpets, a trombone, some guitars and some banjos create a rousing folksy timbral bed of instrumentation, upon which vocalist Marcus Mumford delivers a rousing few phrases of lyrics, eventually accompanied in harmony by one or two more voices. The camera has also moved into the middle of the group, and proceeds to spin slowly in a circle, showing all the participants of the musical performance. The woman has taken a seat next to the vocalist-guitarist, and is nodding her head emphatically along to the music. As the band breaks into a hearty instrumental section, led by the brass section, the woman gets up again, and skips energetically to the back of the room. The camera follows her once more (with slightly less skipping in the cinematographer’s gait).

She enters another corridor, and can be seen pulling at the shades on one of the windows. It seems that she might be stalling, in a sense, waiting for the camera to catch up to her. In this corridor, two more credits are superimposed over the images, in the same white typography. Matt Murphy is credited as the editor, and Giles Dunning as Director Of Photography. The way that the non-diegetic credits interact with the images retains the “look and feel” of a cinematic experience. The girl moves around a few corners and crosses through a doorway between carriages, and then enters a bar-car, where the word “FEATURING” appears on screen again. A rustic wooden container bears the words “OLD CROW MEDICINE SHOW” in large white letters, and is framed right underneath the word “featuring”, so again it is an unmissable connection between non-diegetic and diegetic text (see Figure 22). Fast-paced, violin driven music can already be heard coming from the back of the bar carriage, and as the camera passes by the bartender pouring drinks on the left of screen, the woman skips ahead to join a group of musicians jamming at the back of the carriage (after high-fiving the barman). She immediately begins to dance, hopping up and down on the lively beat of the music. Once again, the non-diegetic words “OLD CROW MEDICINE SHOW” appear over the images. A group of six musicians is standing and playing together. There is a double-bass, a violin, two guitars, two banjos, and pretty much everybody is singing, creating layers of harmonies. As the camera gets nearer, the viewer can see that the woman’s hair is no longer tied up, and she is now bobbing her head energetically along to the music. The camera proceeds to get very close to the performers, almost in the middle of the

circle, as the girl veers off to the left of the group, and moves towards the back of the room. Once more the camera follows her as she moves through various spaces, now highly energised and doing even more skipping and high-fiving as she passes a few people seated in the next carriage. She also opens the door for the cameraman, and glances back to see that he has in fact managed to catch the door before it closes. The interplay between this playful guide into the film’s world and the camera is increasingly joyous, and infectious. The effect of this long continuous shot is that the viewer is enthusiastically invited into the musical world of the train, and is now, quite literally, taken along for the ride.



**Figure 22: the mixture of diegetic and non-diegetic titles create a distinct cinematic mood in the opening scene of *The Big Easy Express* (2012).**

The non-diegetic word “FEATURING” appears for a third time as the camera quickly glances left to reveal a man preparing food in a small kitchen space, then pans to the right again and moves towards the back of the corridor, where a man in a white brimmed hat and white jacket is standing. The guide has already moved past this man, and he now also walks to the left, revealing a painted sign in the corner of the room that says “Edward Sharpe & the Magnetic Zeros”. To complete the pattern, a non-diegetic title also appears, proclaiming the name of the third group of musical

performers in this opening scene. As the camera rounds the corner, a female voice can be heard singing, which is revealed to be the woman that has led the camera through the train. She is seated in the group, and is singing along to the song they are playing, clearly a member of this band. The guide is in fact Jade Castrinos, co-vocalist of ES&TMZ at the time. There are ten people in this group of musicians, seemingly led in performance by the man in the white suit, who is Alex Ebert, the lead-singer and founder of ES&TMZ. The camera lowers its position a little and gets into the middle of the group, who are seated and arranged at various heights in a tight circle. A woman with red hair is playing an accordion, a Wurlitzer organ is being played, there is also a djembe and a trumpet in the circle. They're playing a slightly slower song than the previous two bands, but with much soul and unmistakable groove. The lyrical verse reaches a conclusion as the words "A film by Emmett Malloy" are displayed over the images of the musicians.

After a brief pause, the music enters a jamming instrumental section, and Alex Ebert begins to dance, waving his arms and snapping his fingers. He gradually moves to the front of the room, in the direction from which the camera has entered, to reveal a short set of stairs to the right, and he climbs them as the camera follows him, away from the group. The camera angles down slightly, revealing his bare feet on the stairs, a hippy-esque contrast with his suit and hat. Ebert walks into an upper room which has many windows, ostensibly a viewing room, and sits at a table (see Figure 23). He closes his eyes for a few seconds, and eventually looks up and stares out of the window at the passing landscape. At the moment that he turns his head to look out the window, the film cuts to a shot of the passing landscape, and the riveting long take is ended. The final formal element that is worth mentioning is the narrator's voice, which begins as Alex Ebert climbs the stairs. It doesn't seem to be a reach for the viewer to conclude that the voice is indeed Alex's. He is not seen to be speaking in the images, so the voice is clearly mixed over the images in post-production, and succeeds in ending the immediacy and "liveness" of the previous four minutes of footage in a considered edit. The music continues to play underneath the voice, adding a layer to this "sound bridge" that transitions out of the opening and into the rest of the film. Ebert says "160-odd people on a train to New Orleans. And we're gonna play music. And if anyone asks, we'll just say, uh, yeah, no big deal, just playing music on a train through the country, but secretly, not even to ourselves, I

think we're gonna say, yeah, we're playing music on a train *with* the country, *across* the country, to see it the way they saw it more than a hundred years ago." The timing of the word "ago" is synced to the moment that Ebert moves his head to look out of the window, and to the cut. It is a skilfully crafted transition to exit a spellbinding opening scene.



**Figure 23: the moment that Alex Ebert turns his head to look out of the train's window, and the magical scene ends.**

### ***3.2.6 Amanda Palmer, Jim Batt & Brett Harrison: Music at the House (2014)***

This is the only scene in the group of eight that does not form part of a longer film. It is, as far as I can tell, a standalone filmed performance of nearly 6 minutes in length, branded as being created "For Music At The House", which is a reference to the Sydney Opera House, where it was performed and filmed. It is not clear whether this video is part of a series of such filmed performances, or whether the hashtag #musicatthehouse (with which this video closes) merely refers to any musical performances which happen at the actual Sydney Opera House (probably usually inside the Opera House, but in this case, significantly, not). In 2014, punk-cabaret musician Amanda Palmer was on tour in Australia, when an opportunity to do a

filmed performance for a “live music video” at the Sydney Opera House was presented to her. Amanda Palmer is well-known for her strong, consistent, open and emotional connection to her fans and supporters, with her iconic TED talk “The art of asking” amassing nearly 6 million views on Youtube. In characteristic fashion, she took to her Facebook page, and wrote the following to her fans (also asking them which song they thought she should play): “I have a single day, a camera crew, a budget from the Sydney opera house, and TOTAL ACCESS TO THE OPERA HOUSE TO MAKE A LIVE MUSIC VIDEO. Can be any song I want – old, new, cover, whatever. I don’t have the band, so...piano or ukulele. Can probably get a string section. The opera house has amazing insides but even more amazing outsides. WHAT DO I FUCKING DO???” In the end, her song “Ukulele Anthem” was selected, and what a profound choice it turned out to be. On a windy, cloud-covered day early in 2014, Palmer stood outside the famed architectural shape of the Sydney Opera House, pretty much amongst the iconic sail-shapes, and, in more ways than one, she set sail. I am going to include the full lyrics of the song at the outset of this analysis, firstly because the lyrical experience on its own is a rewarding journey, and secondly because in the following paragraphs I will be making reference to various lines in the song which coincide with other stylistic choices. Having understood the patterning of the text as a first step for the reader of this study might hopefully lead to a more thorough grip on some of the following observations about the audiovisual sequence. Here, in all their glory, are the lyrics for Amanda Palmer’s *Ukulele Anthem*:

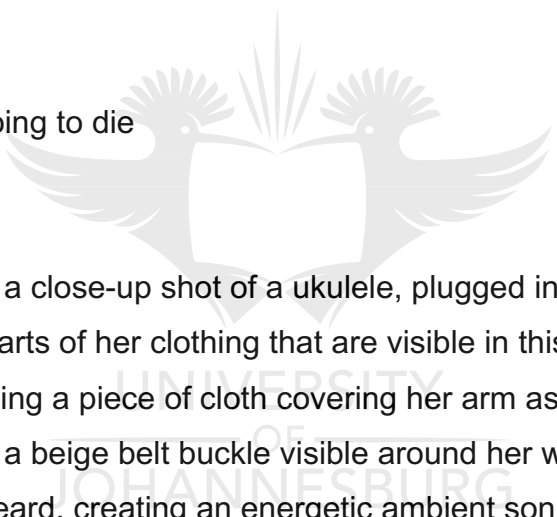
Sid Vicious played a four-string Fender bass guitar and couldn't sing  
And everybody hated him except the ones who loved him  
A ukulele has four strings, but Sid did not play ukulele  
He did smack and probably killed his girlfriend Nancy Spungen  
If only Sid had had a ukulele, maybe he could have been happy  
Maybe he would not have suffered such a sad end  
He maybe would have not done all that heroin instead  
He maybe would've sat around just singing nice songs to his girlfriend  
So play your favorite cover song, especially if the words are wrong  
'Cos even if your grades are bad, it doesn't mean you're failing  
Do your homework with a fork

And eat your fruit loops in the dark  
And bring your etch-a-sketch to work  
And play your ukulele  
Ukulele small and forceful  
Brave and peaceful  
You can play the ukulele too it is painfully simple  
Play your ukulele badly, play your ukulele loudly  
Ukulele banish evil  
Ukulele save the people  
Ukulele gleaming golden on the top of every steeple  
Lizzie Borden took an axe, and gave her father thirty whacks  
Then gave her mother thirty-one, and left a tragic puzzle  
If only they had given her an instrument, those puritans  
Had lost the plot completely  
See what happens when you muzzle  
A person's creativity  
And do not let them sing and scream  
And nowadays it's worse 'cause kids have automatic handguns  
It takes about an hour to learn how to play the ukulele  
About same to teach someone to build a standard pipe bomb  
You do the math  
So play your favorite cover song, especially if the words are wrong  
'Cos even if your grades are bad, it doesn't mean you're failing  
Do your homework with a fork  
And eat your fruit loops in the dark  
And bring your flask of Jack to work  
And play your ukulele  
Ukulele, thing of wonder  
Ukulele, wand of thunder  
You can play the ukulele, too  
In London and down under  
Play Joan Jett, and play Jacques Brel  
And Eminem and Neutral Milk Hotel  
The children crush the hatred



Play your ukulele naked  
And if anybody tries to steal your ukulele, let them take it  
Imagine there's no music, imagine there are no songs  
Imagine that John Lennon wasn't shot in front of his apartment  
Imagine if John Lennon had composed "Imagine" on the ukulele  
Maybe folks would have more clearly got the message  
You may think my approach is simple-minded and naïve  
Like if you want to save the world then why not quit and feed the hungry  
But people for millennia have needed music to survive  
And that's why I've promised John that I will not feel guilty  
So play your favorite Beatles' song  
And make the subway fall in love  
They're only \$19.95, that's not a lot of money  
Play until the sun comes up  
And play until your fingers suffer  
Play LCD Soundsystem songs on your ukulele  
Quit the bitching on your blog  
And stop pretending art is hard  
Just limit yourself to three chords  
And do not practice daily  
You'll minimize some stranger's sadness  
With a piece of wood and plastic  
Holy fuck it's so fantastic, playing ukulele  
Eat your homework with a fork  
And do your fruit loops in the dark  
Bring your etch-a-sketch to work  
Your flask of Jack  
Your vibrator  
Your fear of heights  
Your Nikon lens  
Your mom and dad  
Your disco stick  
Your soundtrack from "Karate Kid"  
Your ginsu knives

Your rosary  
Your new Rebecca Black CD  
Your favorite room  
Your bowie knife  
Your stuffed giraffe  
Your new glass eye  
Your sousaphone  
Your breakfast tea  
Your Nick Drake tapes  
Your giving tree  
Your ice cream truck  
Your missing wife  
Your will to live  
Your urge to cry  
Remember we're all going to die  
So play your ukulele



The scene begins with a close-up shot of a ukulele, plugged in with a cable, held in Palmer's hands. The parts of her clothing that are visible in this first frame are all shades of white, including a piece of cloth covering her arm as an unconventional garment. There is also a beige belt buckle visible around her waist. The sound of wind blowing can be heard, creating an energetic ambient sonic space for the performance. The raging wind remains audible for the full performance, underneath the music. Almost immediately, Palmer's right hand begins to strum the four ukulele strings quite aggressively, pounding out the rhythmic four-chord progression of the instrumental introduction of the song, over the sound of the wind. This is one of the few moments of the song that are not driven by lyrics (as the reader could see above, there are quite a few lyrics to get through in six minutes). A microphone stand is also visible at the right edge of the frame. As soon as Palmer's voice sings the first line of lyrics, "Sid Vicious played a four-string Fender bass guitar and couldn't sing", the camera moves up along her torso and ends on her face, still in a close-up shot. Palmer is singing into a black microphone on a black mic stand, and behind her head there are several long white streamers blowing in the wind. A streamer covers her neck as well, creating an immediate visual link between her body and the

background. The basic curved shape of the outline of a building is also visible. Palmer's stylised red hair blows in the wind as the camera moves rhythmically from left to right and back again, staying near her face, as she sings the rest of the opening four lines of the song: "Sid Vicious played a four-string Fender bass guitar and couldn't sing / And everybody hated him except the ones who loved him / A ukulele has four strings, but Sid did not play ukulele / He did smack and probably killed his girlfriend Nancy Spungen". Palmer's iconic makeup creates a striking visage as she alternates her focus between looking directly into the camera and staring mischievously from side to side, a wicked smile near the edge of her mouth, her dark eyeliner and mascara reminiscent of the twisted larger-than-life characters in German Expressionist films from nearly a century before. The dark, playful lyrics about seminal punk band The Sex Pistols' notorious vocalist-bassist Sid Vicious (who died of a heroin overdose at age 21, and before that had been accused of stabbing his girlfriend Nancy Spungen) create a parallel between the four-stringed bass guitar and the four-stringed ukulele, which the lyrics will explore further as an extended metaphor about the positive power of playing the ukulele.

On the next line of lyrics, the camera begins to move backwards to a medium close-up shot, revealing more of Palmer's wardrobe, which resembles something from a sci-fi film (see Figure 26 for a light-hearted reference). Palmer sings "If only Sid had had a ukulele, maybe he could have been happy / Maybe he would not have suffered such a sad end" as the camera ends in a medium long shot which frames Palmer just above her knees. It is revealed that the streamers are attached around her legs, and the beige buckles around her waist and thighs seem to be tying or anchoring her to something, possibly the architectural structure or a podium of some kind near the building. Given the apparent strength of the wind raging around her, the viewer might feel reassured that Palmer is anchored somehow. By now, the recognisable sail-shapes of the Sydney Opera House should have become part of the referential meaning-making level of any viewer who might possess that piece of background knowledge. As Palmer sings the next line, "He maybe would have not done all that heroin instead / He maybe would've sat around just singing nice songs to his girlfriend", the camera begins to move to the left in a semi-circular path, always facing Palmer. On the phrase "nice songs to his girlfriend", the cinematographer Brett Harris achieves a spectacular frame: Palmer in the bottom left corner of the

image, with one of the Opera House sails sticking out behind her like the helm of a spaceship, which she seems to be steering forward.



**Figure 24: Amanda Palmer at the helm of a spaceship.**

The composition is so pleasing that the camera-wielder stays in that spot for a few seconds, before moving back to the right, and then moving in another semi-circular orbit until the camera is nearly behind Palmer, from a low angle, and then the camera moves to the front again. The effect is spellbinding, as the camera intuitively weaves back and forth and nearer and farther from the performer, the sails of the Opera House are revealed behind Palmer and her streamers in majestic compositions. Nearly every frame is aesthetically delightful and visually balanced. Mise-en-scene is definitely one of the most striking formal elements of this piece, and again the emphasis on wardrobe and make-up, as well as framing the performer inside a dream-like architectural wonderland, are stylistic choices that seem to be drawing roots from the German Expressionist filmmakers. Bordwell and Thompson (2013:471) explain that for the German Expressionist filmmakers of 1920-1927, “all of the elements of the mise-en-scene interact graphically to create an overall composition...Characters do not simply exist within a setting but rather form visual elements that *merge with* the setting”. The cloudy day adds to this unified

composition, because the sky, which is almost constantly in shot, is also grayish-white, just like the buildings and the wardrobe, creating a visual coherence to the world's mise-en-scene that almost seems like it was in the director's control.



**Figure 25: Amanda Palmer forms a visual element that seems to merge with the setting in an array of beautiful, fluid compositions captured by the moving camera.**

When Palmer reaches the line “you do the math”, after an intense few lines of close-up performance mostly staring into the camera, the cinematographer moves rapidly backward as she sings “so play your favorite cover song”, and the lyrics begin to resemble a kind of manifesto or call to action, or indeed an anthem. As she sings “it doesn’t mean you’re failing”, the camera begins to move to the left very quickly, and for the first time completes a mesmerising full circle around the performer on the podium, and then another, ducking underneath the streamers and painting a full panoramic scope of Palmer’s surroundings for the viewer, almost like a 360 degree interactive video. The camera comes to a halt just as Palmer sings “if anybody tries to steal your ukulele, let them take it!” as she raises her arm to the sky triumphantly at the counterintuitive revolutionary declaration. When she begins the section about John Lennon’s “*Imagine*”, the camera moves closer to her face, and remains hovering near her face for the next 20 lines of lyrics. The effect is intense, the

nearness of the camera to this pulsating energetic performer is intimate, raw and even slightly unsettling. The spit in her mouth can be seen, she is not holding back, she is clearly giving everything. She has already referred in the lyrics to the ukulele as a “thing of wonder” and a “wand of thunder”, and both through the honesty of the lyrics and the intensity of her performance it is hard to doubt the sincerity of her belief in the power of music, and especially musical performance, to affect actual change in the world around her. This positions her alongside all the other performers in these eight sequences who seem to embody magical powers in their respective audiovisual worlds.

For the conclusion of the song, Palmer rattles off a list of manifesto-like instructions that seem to coincide with the positive but subversive worldview apparently engendered by the magical playing of the ukulele. The repetition in the phrasing and the lyrics creates a rhythmic pulse that mirrors a chanting crowd, stirring itself up to action. The camera begins to move slowly backwards, framing Palmer standing on a white round podium between two of the House’s sails. The camera reaches the furthest point away from the performer that it has been for the entire sequence when she sings the penultimate lines of “your will to live, your urge to cry, remember we’re all gonna die”. Palmer’s raw voice holds the note of “die” for longer than most of the notes of the whole song, creating an emotional climax at the exact moment that she reminds everyone listening to think about their own mortality. When she ends with “so play your ukulele”, she raises her right arm to the sky, and the camera tilts upwards, following her arm, between the two sails and up into the bright sky, which is also the final image of the piece – a perfectly white screen. The formal elements of lyrical repetition and development, the musical crescendo, the performative gesture and the cinematography combine to create a memorable emotive ending. I would argue that the eudaimonic experience doesn’t lie in the climax of the ending, but rather in the overall experience of a magical performer urging us to reconsider the philosophical framing of our lives, using a simple musical instrument as a key to unlock that sensibility, captured intuitively by a roaming camera in a single dynamic shot. Palmer’s heavily stylised character who interacts with the camera playfully also produces a self-reflexive awareness of filmic mise-en-scene that seems to transcend more ordinary examples of “musical performances being filmed”. The metaphor of a ship cruising forward in the wind is unavoidable, it is present in the visuals and the

audio, and Amanda Palmer, cinematographer Brett Harris and director Jim Batt have succeeded in taking us on an audiovisual journey we are unlikely to forget.



**Figure 26: No odd one out here - Amanda Palmer's delightful outfit is reminiscent of a mashup of wardrobe from sci-fi films *Waterworld* (1995) and *The Gentlemen Broncos* (2009).**

### **3.2.7 Common, Jabari Exum & Bradford Young: *Black America Again* (2016)**

“Conscious” rappers don’t tend to get as much limelight as “commercial” rappers. For those readers with any contextual knowledge about this generalised distinction, this seems a relatively obvious statement. The argument could however be made that “commercial rappers” is a term meant to designate an end of a spectrum, created by hip-hop artists who need a reason (apart from lack of skill) for their lack of success, if they happen to measure success by fame or popularity. There are also several notable exceptions to this rule, recent examples including Kendrick Lamar and Childish Gambino as rappers who gain immense followings while still creating primarily “conscious” or at least thought-provoking artistic material. Run The Jewels’s recent run of success and rising popularity could be another example. But, in general, the public seems to be more aware of A\$AP Rocky than Aesop Rock, even

though Aesop is arguably one of the most skilled writers and spitters of hip-hop rhymes alive on the planet. This pattern of the general public preferring easily accessible entertainment over slightly more challenging eudaimonic artwork repeats in every field of monetised creativity, from painting to filmmaking to novel-writing. It is not a new lament, and there are many understandable reasons for this occurrence. Engaging with conceptually driven art can often feel like hard work, and most ordinary people turn to “the arts” as a form of entertainment or recreation or relaxation after a day of hard work. The less cognitively challenging and more easily emotionally rewarding the experience can be, the better.

The concept of “selling out” is often used as tool of critique by artists who might be jealous of another artist’s rise to fame or fortune, but the term is also often an accurate description: many artists do “sell out” by following popular formulas or trends, or producing work that is more likely to be financially rewarding, and abandon more experimental or personal idiosyncratic explorations of their craft. On the other side of the spectrum, many musicians proudly announce that they are “independent” or “unsigned”, wearing the idea as a badge of honour that suggests that they are free to make their own creative choices, and therefore more artistically credible. But chances are good that a sweet enough deal from a label or production company just hasn’t been offered to them yet. It is a complex concept to navigate as an artist – how do you make work that is authentic and true to your artistic vision, but make sure it is accessible enough and enjoyable for a large enough group of people to sustain your art-making further? In researching Arcade Fire’s *Neon Bible* album, I stumbled again on the story of American writer John Kennedy Toole, who wrote a novel called *The Neon Bible* in 1954, when he was 16. Toole wrote one more book, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, which was published posthumously and was awarded the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1981. Toole had committed suicide in 1969, at age 31, before the book was published or the award given, suffering from paranoia and depression which were understood to be consequences of his many failed attempts to get *Confederacy* published. This is not a unique story by any means, but a strong case in point. A friend of mine, writer and musician Hunter Kennedy (who plays in South African bands Fokofpolisiekar and Die Heuwels Fantasties), has made the argument in conversation that the concept of “selling out” is redundant, surely an artist would *want* to “sell out” the tickets to their show, or “sell out” all the



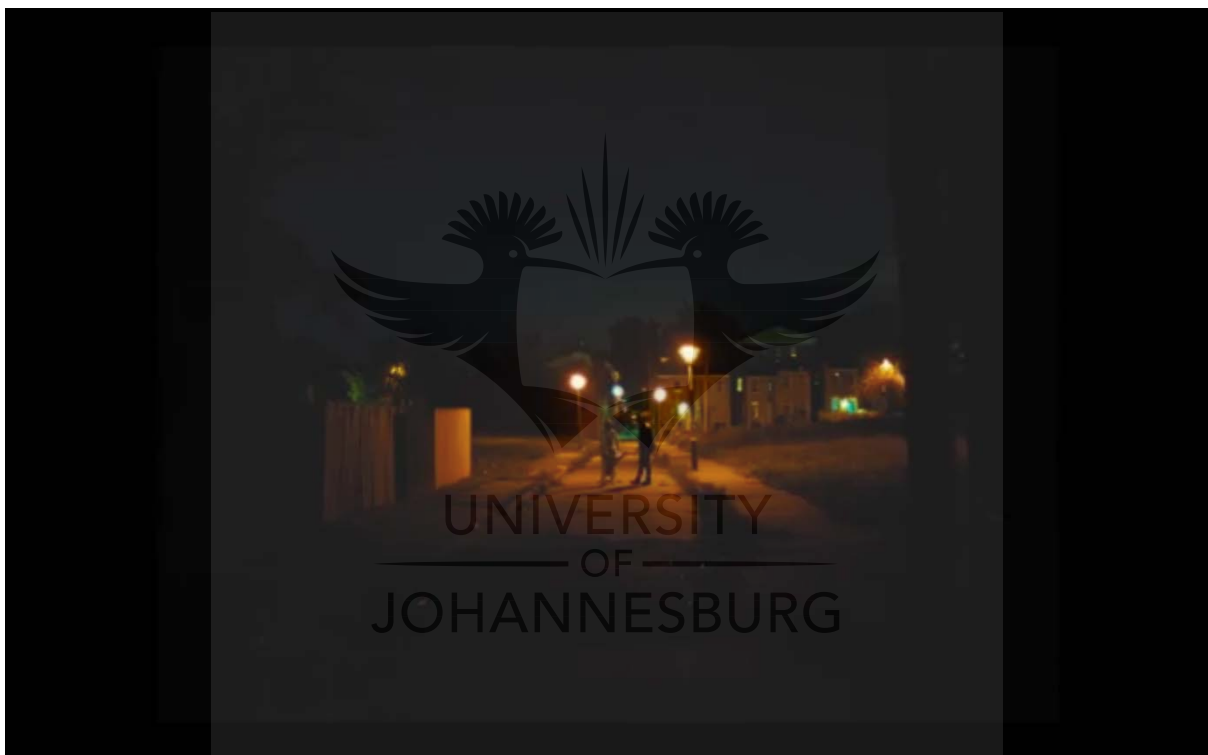
merchandise at the merch table, or “sell out” all the albums in a music store? It remains an important discussion, especially during a time when the entertainment industry (which includes so many of the arts) is experiencing the biggest economic challenge in many decades, and hundreds of thousands of artists all over the globe are abandoning or de-prioritising their art-making in order to find other means of survival as the infrastructure collapses around them. With this idea of “conscious” and “successful” being established as two seemingly opposite poles, this study will now turn to the rapper named Common.

Common released his first rap album in 1992, and maintained the reputation of being an “underground” rapper (albeit a comparatively successful one) for a decade. He joined the legendary New York-based “Soulquarians” collective around 1998 and made significant contributions to a number of the albums produced by the group, also leading to more commercial and critical success from his own album *Like Water for Chocolate*, released in the year 2000 (with much collaboration from the Soulquarians crew). In 2003, Common won a Grammy, he won a second Grammy in 2007, and in 2015 he won the Golden Globe Award as well as the Academy Award for “Best Original Song”. Common is also an accomplished actor, whose filmography includes roles in *John Wick 2*, *Terminator Salvation*, *Wanted* and *Date Night* amongst many others. Common has maintained a successful career from making art for three decades, without ever really changing his overall focus on hard-hitting social commentary and promoting positive values. Browsing through the dozens of video uploads on his personal Youtube channel reveals a diverse catalogue ranging from high production value music videos that garner millions of views, to workshops and interviews and short opinion pieces that often don’t reach 10,000 views. The fact that there is a prolific, ceaseless stream of creativity emanating from Common is beyond debate. Considered from a slightly different perspective, Common also has a modelling career, and has appeared in many branded advertisements, leading to many rap fans feeling that he is “soft”, and “not real”, in the authentic hip-hop sense of “keeping it real”. Michael Eric Dyson (2007:6-7) explains that the hip-hop community, in its obsession with authenticity (which has many different root causes), has always been invested in “specifying what’s real and what’s not...These fights over authenticity take place along a couple of divides. There’s the rift between underground hip hop and commercial rap. The underground claims to be an

authentic expression of a kind of hip hop that has not been emptied of its moral or aesthetic meaning by commercial dictates". What is clear is that over a career spanning thirty years and producing many artworks in different mediums, Common has quite successfully straddled the complex line between "mainstream" and "underground", or "conscious" and "commercial", that his poetic-political voice is still relevant, and that he still cares deeply about issues involving his community and humanity at large. In 2016, an election year in the USA, Common released his 11<sup>th</sup> studio album called *Black America Again*. The album received generally positive reviews and ratings in the media. The title track also served as the backbone of a 21-minute experimental art film made in collaboration with filmmaker Bradford Young, known for his work on *Selma* and *Arrival*, amongst others. This unique film is the focus of this case study, specifically the three moments in the film in which Common is filmed rapping, accompanied by percussionist Jabari Exum.

The first of the three performance segments happens more than 5 minutes into the film, and the shot is only 30 seconds long. The opening scenes of the film have consisted of a compelling mixture of portraits, follow shots and sound design, and a very specific almost "magic realist" mood has already been set in place by director Bradford Young. There is a feeling of expectation, in the streets of the ghetto, and just after an exquisite shot of a magical figure in extravagant costume dancing violently, in slow motion, in the dim blue light of a streetlight, the camera pans from a shot of some shop-fronts to a long shot of a concrete walkway, in the night. The only visible thing in the mostly black frame is two figures, quite a distance away, illuminated by three streetlights. One of the figures is rapping, the other is playing a hand-held drum in accompaniment. The audio perspective is relatively far away, the lyrics are not audible at first, but as the ghostly camera glides nearer the lyrics become a little clearer. The shot is in colour, with strong yellows and oranges creating a warm glow around the two musicians standing in the street. Even at the end of the shot, when the camera is at its nearest, the two figures cannot be identified yet, and the alluring sense of mystery is only intensified, not resolved (see Figure 27). Underneath the consistent ambient sounds of cars driving past (which almost sound like the ocean at certain moments), Common's recognisable voice has rapped the following lines from the first verse of "Black America Again" in this 30 second shot: "Who stole the soul from black folk? / Same man that stole the land from Chief Black Smoke / And made

the whip crackle on our back slow / And made us go through the back door / And raffle black bodies on the slave blocks / Now we slave to the blocks, on 'em we spray shots / Leaving our own to lay in a box / Black mothers' stomachs stay in a knot / We kill each other, it's part of the plot / I wish the hating will stop (war!) and the battle with us / I know that Black Lives Matter, and they matter to us / These are the things we gotta discuss / The new plantation, mass incarceration". On the phrasing of "mass incarceration", the film cuts abruptly to a striking shot of two young black men standing in front of a wall, looking directly at the camera, as the camera moves closer to them.



**Figure 27: the camera at its nearest to the performers at the end of the opening performance scene, keeping the mysterious atmosphere intact.**

The next performance scene happens seven minutes into the film. It begins with a J-cut, in which Common's voice can be heard saying: "Here we go, here, here we go again" over a black screen. The image joins the audio on the second line. This time, Common and Exum are standing in the middle of a street, in the daytime, and the shot is presented in black and white. The rapper and the percussionist make constant eye contact, they are in sync with each other's performative energies in a mesmerising way as the camera moves intuitively around them. The percussionist's

skill is evident from the get-go, weaving intricate but incredibly solid beats and rhythms into the rhythm of Common's delivery, and even doing a few vocal double-ups throughout the verse. This time, in a 71 second shot, Common raps the entire first verse of "Black America Again", which reads as follows:

Here we go, here, here we go again  
Trayvon'll never get to be an older man  
Black children, they childhood stole from them  
Robbed of our names and our language, stole again  
Who stole the soul from black folk?  
Same man that stole the land from Chief Black Smoke  
And made the whip crackle on our back slow  
And made us go through the back door  
And raffle black bodies on the slave blocks  
Now we slave to the blocks, on 'em we spray shots  
Leaving our own to lay in a box  
Black mothers' stomachs stay in a knot  
We kill each other, it's part of the plot  
I wish the hating will stop (war!) and the battle with us  
I know that Black Lives Matter, and they matter to us  
These are the things we gotta discuss  
The new plantation, mass incarceration  
Instead of educate, they'd rather convict the kids  
As dirty as the water in Flint, the system is  
Is it a felony or a misdemeanor?  
Maria Sharapova making more than Serena  
It took Viola Davis to say this  
The roles of the help and the gangstas is really all they gave us  
We need Avas, Ta-Nehisis, and Cory Bookers  
The salt of the Earth to get us off of sugar  
And greasy foods; I don't believe the news  
Or radio, stereotypes we refuse  
Brainwashed in the cycle to spin  
We write our own story, black America again

It is hard-hitting social commentary, intertextually dense with real-world references and delivered with authority by a master of the craft of lyrical rhetoric. The aim of this study is not to dissect the political content of the text, but it is hard not to be moved by the controlled intensity of Common's voice, the persuasive structure of his lyrical argumentation, and the sincerity of the performance itself, as the two performers lock eyes and energies into a precise focus. It becomes an embodied protest piece, brought to life and pushed to maximum intensity of effect by the sensitive camerawork. The camera is never completely static, but there are no sudden movements, and the sense of an intuitive, subtle cinematographic response to the musical performance is tangible throughout. The scene begins as Common raps "Trayvon'll never get to be an older man", making it clear that the off-screen opening "here we go, here here we go again" wasn't only a playful rhythmic introduction to a rap verse, as is found in many other rap songs, but in fact has lyrical function because it is referring to the devastating repetitive occurrences of young black men being shot in America (the shooting of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in 2012 was one of the catalysts for the start of the Black Lives Matter movement). This implicit meaning is confirmed by Common himself, in a conversation-interview with Bradford Young in front of an audience at the Carnegie Museum of Art in 2017 (where this film was screened), Common states that the word "Again" in "Black America Again" refers to the repetitive cycles of dehumanisation that black Americans are subjected to, but he also intends that the word "Again" should trigger the thought in the listener of "how do we write a new story?"

The opening image is a medium long shot, in which Common and Exum's full bodies are framed. Common is dressed all in black, and Exum all in white, with his drum strapped around his back and hanging from his waist. In such a highly stylised film, in which each image and choice seems carefully considered, the black and white colour choices are clearly not accidental. Behind the two performers is a city block, ostensibly in an American ghetto, with small narrow apartment blocks on the left of screen, and a small vacant lot, perhaps a parking lot, on the right. Dyson (2009:11,13) writes: "the metaphysical root of hip hop is connected to the ghetto", and "within hip hop the elevation of the ghetto is often a metaphysical complaint against society's failure to recognize the humanity of those who come from the ghetto". A street runs down the middle of the frame, into the background. The city is

actually Baltimore, which is important contextually to the rest of the film, but in these scenes the generic image of a street somewhere in America is already a powerful setting, both in terms of implicit and symptomatic meaning-making. Common paces up and down, and uses his hands and arms in expressive gestures to embellish the meaning of his lyrics, constantly looking directly at Exum (see Figure 29). Both of them nod their heads in sync to the rhythm of the performance. Exum is beatboxing with his mouth, adding hi-hat like breathing sounds to the rhythms that his hands are producing on the drum. It is breathtakingly effective, a powerful reminder that all *Homo Sapiens* share a deep evolutionary appreciation for the basic storytelling mechanism of the-voice-and-the-drum. When Common raps the line “and they matter to us”, he hits the palm of his right hand against his chest, and the resultant distorted thuds in the audio track reveal that he has a lapel microphone attached underneath his shirt. It is a quick, probably unintentional Brechtian distancing moment, in which the immersive spell of an illusionistic experience might be broken momentarily for some viewers, but in my view it only accentuates the “liveness” and immediacy of the moment, and in fact makes it more compelling. The moment is real, it is raw, it (perhaps counterintuitively) makes me feel even more like I am right there. Even though the recording device is “revealed”, the fact that it is *not hidden* makes the experience even more authentic.



**Figure 28: Common hits his chest and reveals the presence of a “hidden” microphone.**

The third and final performance scene begins 16 minutes into the film, in which Common performs the second verse of the song. Again, the performance is 71 seconds long, testament to the skill and control of the two musicians who manage to perform two 16-bar lyrical verses in exactly the same amount of time, without any electronic tempo guidance. In both verses they stick impressively closely to a tempo of 94 bpm (beats per minute). These are the lyrics of the second verse:

Hot damn, black America again  
Think of Sandra Bland as I'm staring in the wind  
The color of my skin, they comparing it to sin  
The darker it gets, the less fairer it has been  
The hate the hate made, I inherited from them  
But I ain't gon' point the finger  
We got anointed singers, like Nina, Marvin, Billie, Stevie  
Need to hear them songs sometimes to believe me  
Who freed me: Lincoln or Cadillac?  
Drinkin' or battle raps? Or is it Godspeed that we travel at?  
Endangered in our own habitat  
Them guns and dope, man, y'all can have it back  
As a matter of fact, we them lab rats  
You build the projects for, now you want your hood back  
I guess if you could rap, you would express it too  
That PTSD, we need professionals  
You know what pressure do, it make the pipes bust  
From schools to prison, y'all, they tryna pipe us  
Tell your political parties invite us  
Instead of making voting laws to spite us  
You know, you know we from a family of fighters  
Fought in your wars and our wars  
You put a nigga in Star Wars, maybe you need two  
And then, maybe then we'll believe you  
See black people in the future  
We wasn't shipped here to rob and shoot ya

We hold these truths to be self-evident  
All men and women are created equal  
Including black Americans

Dyson (2007:66) states that “contemporary conscious rappers are lauded as much for what they *don't* say as for what they spit on record. They don't brag about exorbitant jewelry, excessive women, or expensive automobiles. Conscious rappers *do* talk about racial injustice, police brutality, over-incarceration, political prisoners, rampant poverty, radical educational quality and more”. If Dyson's criteria were a checklist, the content of Common's verses would score very highly, and again a case must be made for the authenticity of Common's lyrical intentions at this point, which is nearly 25 years after he dropped his first rap album. This third and final performance scene begins pretty much where the previous one ended, in the exact same location, so chances are good that the original performance of both verses happened directly after each other in one take, and Young chose to separate them in the editing of the film. It is an effective creative choice, as the interludes before, after and between the two verses create a multi-layered meaning-making foundation in which these rap verses are embedded. Each lyric seems to hit harder and stir more thoughts and feelings because of the subconscious formal platform in which Bradford Young has set them up in this experimental non-narrative short film. In their 2017 conversation at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Young and Common discuss their shared intention with this film to “challenge and change the structure of reality”. As a good indication of what I mean by Common's simultaneous hyper-fame and “undergroundness”, the video on Youtube has only amassed a total of 630,000 views, four years after its release. The film itself deserves a full viewing, and perhaps a separate analytical paper, but the three performance segments contained within are exceptional pieces of audiovisual art-making even on their own, unquestionably capable of producing sublime-oceanic viewing-listening experiences.





**Figure 29: Common and Jabari Exum exchange and fuse intense energies to produce a powerful emotive performance in Young's *Black America Again* (2016).**

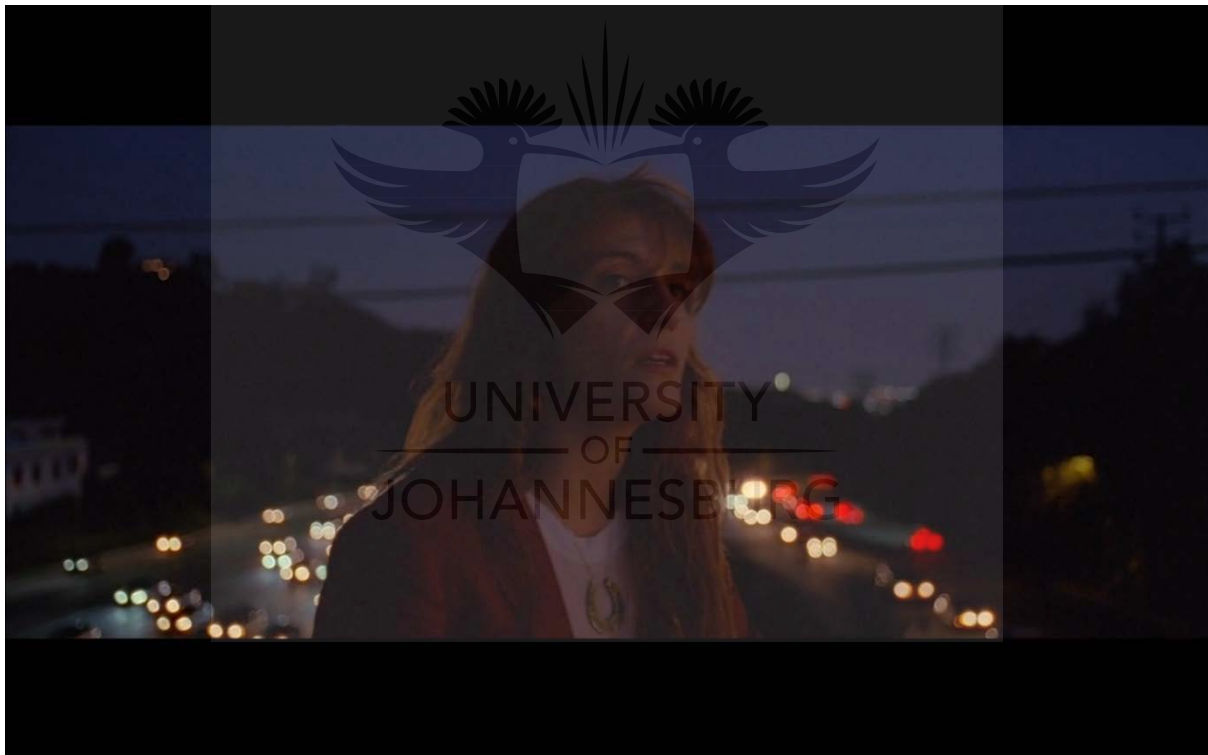
### **3.2.8 Florence Welch & Vincent Haycock: *Odyssey* (2016)**

In 2015, Florence and the Machine (F+TM) released their third studio album called *How Big, How Blue, How Beautiful*. The album was a departure from F+TM's earlier work, in the capturing of a revealing "rawness" in the music and lyrics. Florence Welch, the vocalist and songwriter, had taken a year's hiatus from the music scene prior to this release, and had undergone some deep introspection and a re-evaluation of her life. During 2015, a series of music videos of some of the album's songs was released, all made by Welch's friend and collaborator Vincent Haycock, and in April 2016 a 48-minute film titled *The Odyssey* was released, which featured all the previous music videos, tied together by newly shot connecting scenes and a new ending. The film was nominated for Breakthrough Long Form Video at the 2016 MTV Music Video Awards, and consists of nine chapters, which are centred around nine of the songs from the album. Viewed together, there is a narrative connection and progression in the overall form of the film. Haycock describes the context of the project from his perspective: "*The Odyssey*, like the epic poem by Homer, is a journey. It's Florence's personal journey to find herself again after the emotional

storm of a heartbreak. Like the layers of Dante's purgatory, each song or chapter represents a battle that Florence traversed and physical landscape that embodied each song or story. It's a metaphorical journey about escaping your demons, confronting yourself and returning to the original Florence, the dancer, the performer, the lover" (in Minsker, 2016). Eight of the nine chapters are mostly constituted of conventional music videos, in the sense that the images are constructed after the song has been recorded and mixed, and the "performance" of the singer is thus lip-synced in the edit to match with the original audio recording. The reader should hopefully be aware that this type of audiovisual merging is not the focus of this study. One of the chapters of *The Odyssey*, however, is precisely what this study is interested in: for the second chapter of the film, Florence Welch sings a remarkable acapella version of the album's title track, "How Big How Blue How Beautiful".

The scene is 4 minutes and 20 seconds long, and opens with a shot of a small hill in the dusk, next to a road, with a cityscape in the far background, and some electric wires stretching from the one side of the screen to the other, across the purple sky. Some white barricades are in the front of the image, and a lamp post is on the left of the screen. The ambient sounds of cars can be heard. Suddenly, a red-haired figure appears on the right of the screen, seemingly having walked from behind the camera. She adjusts her long hair as she walks, and the camera begins to follow her. The background objects begin to blur as the cinematographer pulls focus on the woman, effectively achieving what Bordwell and Thompson (2013:175) call "selective focus", which "steers our attention to a single important part of the shot". The background remains interesting, red and white lights of cars moving in opposite directions blurrily dot the spaces behind the woman, and the hill becomes larger and darker as she walks to the right, and the camera pans and then begins to follow her, in a variation of what Branigan (2006:55) refers to as the "active follow shot". She is wearing a red jacket, and is approaching a bridge which seems to be over a busy road, possibly a freeway. The woman has revealed her profile a few times in the walk towards the bridge, glancing from side to side, and many viewers might have recognised her as Florence Welch by now, even if they hadn't seen the preceding eight minutes of the film. The natural lighting provided by the streetlights along the way, and the grainy look of the footage in the dusk are creating a distinctly "cinematic" look in combination with the long take. Before she starts singing, this

woman in this space could easily have been a character in an art film from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Figure 30). There is a sense of anticipation, the mood is electric. The streetlights create lovely lens flares and flickers on the edges of the frame, reminiscent of a far-off thunderstorm. As Florence begins to walk across the bridge, she begins to sing, with her back to the camera. The ambient sounds of the road below her provide a soothing static bed of sound. She sings the opening lines of the song in a controlled vibrato as the camera moves around her: “Between a crucifix and the Hollywood sign, we decided to get hurt / Now there's a few things we have to burn / Set our hearts ablaze, and every city was a gift / And every skyline was like a kiss upon the lips / And I was making you a wish / In every skyline / How big, how blue, how beautiful / How big, how blue, how beautiful”.



**Figure 30: selective focus and natural lighting creating beautiful filmic compositions in *The Odyssey* (2016).**

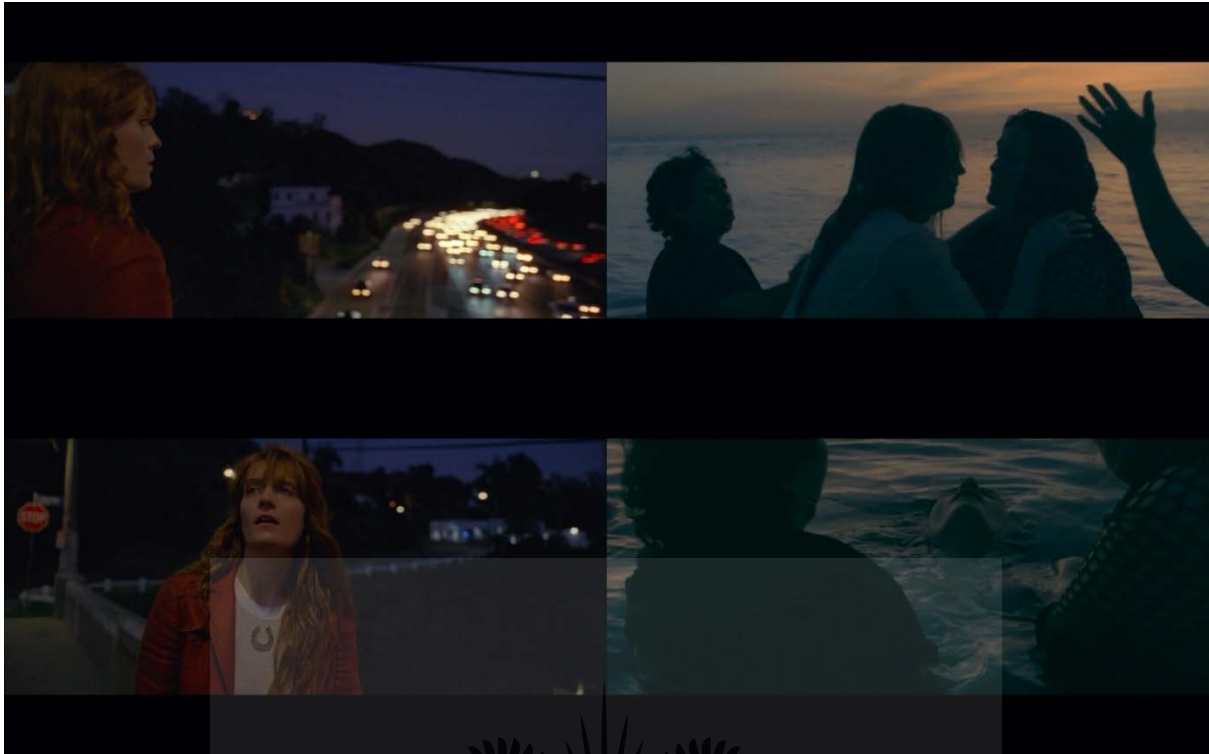
On the second repetition of the chorus, the film cuts to a long shot of a still ocean, also at dusk, with dramatic hues of blue and soft orange. Four female figures are walking into the water, three of them dressed in black, one with her arms raised to the sky, the other two seemingly carrying a fourth figure who is dressed in white, and seems to be injured or unable to walk on her own. Florence’s acapella singing, with

the gentle hum of traffic, continues to be heard underneath this new scene's images. The four women wade slowly into the water, as Florence's voice sings: "And meanwhile a man was falling from space / And every day I wore your face". On the next line of lyrics, the images cut back to Florence on the bridge, a close-up shot of her profile, with a stream of bokeh white and red car lights behind her. She moves her hand across her mouth as she sings "Like an atmosphere around me", and stretches the same hand to the horizon as she sings "The satellite beside me". For the next four lines of lyrics, which are a repeat of the previous four lines, the film cuts again to the ocean scene. Now a tighter shot reveals that the woman struggling to carry her own weight is Florence, and the three women in black are setting her up for some kind of ritual in the water, presumably a baptism. Their hands move over her mouth, her hair, they seem to be praying or chanting, evoking ancient powers. Florence stretches her arms out and lets her head fall backwards as her voice from the other world sings: "What are we gonna do?" The film rejoins Florence on the bridge as she sings: "We've opened the door, now it's all coming through / Tell me you see it too / We opened our eyes and it's changing the view". On the line "tell me you see it too", she stretches her hand out to the horizon again, pointing at the unnamed thing that the viewer-listener should also be seeing. As she sings "Oh, what are we gonna do?" in a raised emotive tone, the film cuts back to the ocean scene, where Florence has apparently already been submerged and lifted out of the water, as her clothes and hair are already wet. A very soft sound of the three women's chanting voices enters the mix, barely audible below the hum of the cars and Florence's vocals which increase in intensity as she sings a higher melodic variation of "We opened the door now, it's all coming through / How big, how blue, how beautiful". Her head goes under the water a few more times, and suddenly the film cuts back to the bridge scene, just for one line of the chorus as Florence continues to walk across the bridge, before returning to an extreme long shot of the ocean, with the four figures in the bottom right third of the frame, as Florence's body submerges once more and one of the women in attendance raises her arms to the sky again.

The film cuts back to the bridge world as Florence sings: "So much time on the other side / Waiting for you to wake up / So much time on the other side / Waiting for you to wake up / Maybe I'll see you in another life", and on the next lines "If this one

wasn't enough / So much time on the other side”, the images are back at the ocean, a closeup of Florence’s face from the side, her mouth open as she floats on the water. The final cut happens when Florence sings the last chorus, and the camera is now directly behind her, just like at the beginning of her walk across the bridge: “How big, how blue, how beautiful / How big, how blue, how...” Florence raises her arms outwards as she holds the last note, and the camera stops moving, letting her walk the last few paces of the bridge alone. As Florence reaches the other end, the camera pans slowly left, back across the lights of the freeway, and moves up into the sky to reveal a small glowing white orb which is presumably a nearly full moon in a dark navy sky. The sound of birds chirping can suddenly be heard underneath the cars, and a J-cut introduces the world of the next shot, which is also a shot of the sky, but seemingly in morning light. The scene is over.

This scene stands out from the other seven because it is the only one which intercuts two different worlds during the performance of the music. There is no reason to believe that the musical performance was not all done in one take, although it would have been a relatively easy editing job (as long as Florence managed to stay in the same key with her acapella vocals across different takes). However, it definitely looks and sounds and feels like one continuous take, and therefore falls in the same category as the other seven performances. Welch’s onscreen presence is gripping, and the unfamiliar rawness of her unaccompanied and unedited acapella vocals create a beautiful aural experience as the camera (and the viewer) crosses the bridge with her. The overarching shared metaphor of the baptism and the bridge-crossing should not be missed, this scene’s explicit meaning is surely intended to represent the crossing of a threshold in Welch’s personal mythology, a concept at the heart of an odyssey (see Figure 31). Ships are not meant to stay in the harbour, as the saying goes, and this rite of passage near the beginning of the film is clearly a narrative decision, the first tentative (but bold) steps of a new journey of self-discovery.



**Figure 31: the intercutting of Florence crossing a bridge and being baptised create a cohesive metaphor of a threshold being crossed in *The Odyssey* (2016).**

These eight audiovisual scenes, taken together, seem to constitute a “new” hybrid of musical performance and cinema. In the following chapter, I will outline some concluding insights about their shared characteristics, and make some recommendations for further research in this exciting and constantly expanding field of intersections between, arguably, the two most powerful artforms.

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

### 4.1 Conclusion

To achieve a synthesis of music-making and filmmaking that results in the specific eudaimonic audiovisual experience that this study focuses on, seems to require a delicate balance of the following key elements:

1. In the musical performance, the music itself needs to be good, or at least formally interesting or innovative.
2. The musical performance must be live. There should be consistent audio (and/or visual) cues as evidence of this liveness, a very effective example is ambient sound from the world in which the musicians are performing.
3. A continuous take is the most effective way to capture the liveness, both in terms of audio capturing, but also in terms of cinematography. Editing or intercutting during the musical performance does not necessarily disqualify the sequence from achieving the effect (as is seen in the scenes from *Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus*, *The Big Easy Express* and *The Odyssey*), but should not be overbearing.
4. A handheld, one-take Steadicam shot seems to create the cinema-verité-like sense of immediacy and nearness to the performer most effectively.
5. **Importantly, what the cinematographer is doing during the musical performance should be just as significant as what the musicians are doing in terms of the viewer-listener's overall audiovisual experience.** Sticking a camera on a tripod produces a clean shot, but doesn't quite make the viewer aware that there is a "teller of the tale", as the French New Wave filmmakers used to say. Various filmmakers who have shot musical performances with the above criteria in place, seem to have similar observations about the camera's function in that magical space of co-creation: "The most simple, beautiful idea of cinema is just one camera filming what's happening around" (Moon in Traynor, 2008:57); "the camera becomes a part of me and almost acts as a curious spectator" (Kaiser in Merfeld, 2010:43); "Douglas's detached camera [functions] as a fascinated, bemused spectator"

(Schager, 2005). All of these observations are reminiscent of Rouch's description of the "ciné-trance" (1973:39).

6. In seven of the eight performances, the performers do not directly acknowledge the presence of the camera. They remain "in-character" as performers in a musical world, with seemingly different rules to the real world. The exception in this group is Amanda Palmer, but her heavily stylised performer-persona seems to only add to the cinematic experience when she stares mischievously into the camera's lens.
7. Seven of the eight musical performances are embedded within larger filmic texts. This is not necessarily a prerequisite (as Amanda Palmer's video showed), but having additional narrative or conceptual context does seem to create deeper possible layers of cognitive and emotive responses.

These criteria are drawn from the audiovisual texts analysed in the final section of the previous chapter. Their presence is still not a *guarantee* of any deep eudaimonic or sublime-oceanic experiences for the viewer-listener though, because, as already stated earlier in this study:

Reading and interpreting any text is a dynamic process. It is not simply a question of decoding what has been put there, as if it were a formula. People bring their own experiences to bear in interpreting a text, and this means that no two individuals will have exactly the same response. At the same time, there are aspects of texts that can be identified as part of a set of communicative strategies. In the end, interpretation is a process of negotiation between what is in the text and what people bring to it (Carter & Godard, 2016:201).

In the context of the eight audiovisual sequences analysed in this study, the notion of fandom should also be mentioned here – having a predisposed appreciation for a genre or style of music, or for a specific artist, will also probably heighten the likelihood of intensely emotional or possibly sublime experiences for a viewer-listener, and having an aversion to a style of music or type of performance would also diminish the likelihood of being moved.



Filmmaker and theorist David MacDougall (1992:39) describes the interpretation of film images as follows:

How we interpret it [the film image] depends upon who we are and what assumptions we bring to it. This is a fertile process, the text of the film interacting with the texts of personality, culture and society that define us. Despite that, there are habits of film-viewing which will hold broadly true for audiences with a shared set of cultural expectations.

Essentially, all this study has done is sketch an outline of “aspects of texts that can be identified as a set of communicative strategies”. The elements I have listed above should not be understood as a formula, or a recipe. Bordwell and Thompson’s (2013:57) insights on this idea are powerful enough to warrant a third repetition in this study:

No recipe can guarantee that the filmmaker will achieve a specific emotional response. It is all a matter of context – that is, of each artwork’s overall form. All we can say for certain is that the emotion felt by the spectator will emerge from formal patterns that she or he perceives in the work. This is one reason why we should try to notice as many formal relations as possible in a film. The richer our perception, the deeper and more complex our response may become.

I hope this study has equipped any reader who engages with it to have richer perceptions, leading to deeper and more complex responses whenever they engage with hybrid forms of music-making and moving-image-making.

## **4.2 Recommendations for further research**

Making and/or listening to music is one of the most emotive and pleasurable human experiences. Music and musical performance intersects with the world of moving-image-making in a wide variety of ways, especially with the emergence of new media. The range of intersections overlaps from artefacts such as 360 degree interactive music videos, to video games (immensely popular game *Guitar Hero* as

an example), to the incredibly entertaining Old Spice advertisement of 2012, which was an interactive viral video in which viewer/players could trigger Terry Crews' muscles to play various instruments, and even record their "muscle-compositions".



**Figure 32: Terry Crews' muscles become the viewer-player's instruments in this 2012 Old Spice interactive video.**

I have identified a few more intriguing examples from the intersections of moving-image-making and musical performances, and I suspect that there will be many more notable examples emerging from the world of television specifically, as the moving image industry and viewers' focus seems to be shifting towards the production and consumption of TV series above feature films. Researchers inspired by the work of this study might begin with analyses or categorisation of some of these examples (I suspect Oscar Isaac's performance might match nearly all the criteria for a sublime-oceanic hybrid, even though it is not shot in one take):

Film Title	Year	Filmmakers	Musicians / Performers
<i>Mulholland Drive</i>	2001	David Lynch	Rebekah Del Rio

<i>Walk The Line</i>	2005	James Mangold	Jaoquin Phoenix (as Johnny Cash)
<i>Inside Llewyn Davis</i>	2013	Joel & Ethan Coen	Oscar Isaac
<i>M.a.a.d.</i>	2014	Kahlil Joseph	Kendrick Lamar
<i>True Detective</i> (Season 2)	2015	Nic Pizzolatto	Lera Lynn
<i>Johnny is Nie Dood Nie</i> (trailer)	2016	Christiaan Olwagen	Illana Cilliers
<i>Lemonade</i>	2016	Beyoncé, Kahlil Joseph and others	Beyoncé
<i>Money + Love</i>	2017	David Wilson	Arcade Fire
<i>Félicité</i>	2017	Alain Gomis	Kasai Allstars
<i>Kanarie</i>	2018	Christiaan Olwagen	Germandt Geldenhuys (as Ludolf Otterman)

This study has showed the value of applying a neoformalist approach to the analysis of artworks, and much work that is currently being done in the more experiment-based fields of neuroscience and evolutionary bioculturalism will continue to equip theorists studying the arts with more insights about how viewers make meaning and experience emotion. If music and moving images remain two of the most prevalent and powerful forms of communication in an age characterised by emotional and cognitive influence and manipulation through the relentless flood of mass media we all engage with daily, perhaps it is valuable to keep reframing and enriching our knowledge about our own viewing and listening processes.

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