

‘On How Queer Cinema Might Feel’

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Drums beat onwards, a snapping and crackling trickle of beats. These sounds are archaic, visceral and elemental. Projected on to two screens are images of water cascading and falling; on the left side we see drops of melting ice falling through the fingers of a brown skinned hand, fingers cupping the droplets; the second image is that of water gushing forth, volcanic, sculptural bursts of foam and columns of mist. The beating drums, the sound of water flowing endlessly through chasms of rock and ice, transport us to an arctic environment of magnitude, beauty and mysticism.

Images unfold slowly and unsteadily in Isaac Julien’s digital video installation *True North* (2007). Subtle, elemental sounds crystallise such images, crafting edges, sculpting glittering textures and sharp, elliptical rhythms which mirror the arctic landscape and its microcosms depicted within the filmic diegesis. *True North*, a film about the post-colonial re-appropriation of the North Pole (notably, from a black female perspective) and its alternative narratives is visually arresting, but it is the ambient, rhythmic sound of its filmed spaces of ice and snow, trickling, drifting and smooth, which haunts the viewer long after the images fade and drift.

True North is ostensibly a very sensuous audio-visual project, but the evocative vocabulary pertinent to phenomenological film theory serves to assert its visual rather than sonic attributes. Phenomenological theory provides an appropriate theoretical framework through which to further discover and flesh out the meaning of Julien’s rich mapping of the North Pole but, crucially, its subject matter cannot be easily reconciled with embodied film theory since its questioning of sexual difference and subversion of post-colonial histories tends to scramble, as it were, the co-ordinates of corporeal subjectivity. Films like *True North*

and, as we shall see, Derek Jarman's seminal *Blue* (1993), attune viewers to different ways of hearing and sensing cinema, and they mediate different ethical responses to film sound in the context of haptic criticism. This paper posits the thought that such alternative, embodied responses to *Blue* or *True North*, haptic or otherwise, might increasingly demarcate a new territory for queer film experience and this, above all, leads me to question the extent to which haptic criticism can account for such complex, enigmatic, viewing relations.

The most embodied responses to the films I wish to discuss are prompted by their audio-visual rendering of human existence as sonic and visual phenomena. Jarman's *Blue* opens up the viewer to a dimension of film that is both receptive to the material aspects of the medium and the materiality of the body in the diegesis (the director's body, dying of AIDS). On the other hand, Julien's *True North* diegetically experiments with diegetic sound, space and light in order to transform the geographical location and, most strikingly, historical specificity of the film's subject matter (the discovery of the North Pole). Both films use colour in way that appeals to an embodied response. Indeed, according to Trond Lundemo, blue and white are the most haptic colours, the most inviting to the senses but, as we shall see, it is not only the colour of these films which calls upon a tactile appreciation of film. The contrasting viewing contexts of *True North* and *Blue* (cinematic versus the gallery projection, multiple channels of sound versus one soundtrack) also raise fascinating questions about their soundscapes, offering greater insight into the queer specificities of moving image media.

(Listening to) Queer Sounds

Before examining the role of sound in *True North* and *Blue*, it is vital to clarify the methodology which will illuminate my subject matter. As the title of this paper implies, my main concern is with haptic criticism and its concordances with queer spectatorship. Indeed,

introducing notions of queer audio-visual experience to haptic theory presents an awkward challenge. For critical theory, ‘queer’ invariably calls to mind non-normative forms of identity or, in slightly more politicised terms, it defines a ‘resistance to regimes of the norm’ (Warner 1993: xxvi). However, in order to relate such ‘resistance’ to the ideological projects associated with sensuous theory, it is important to acknowledge the implications of gender and sexual difference in existing haptic discourse. If queer theory exposes, and is constituted by, the instabilities of hetero-normative identity categories, then closer attention must be drawn to those categories which might already be implicated in haptic theory.

In her book *Touch*, the sensuous theorist Laura U. Marks cites the philosophical thought of Luce Irigaray in order to mark out her differences from existing discourses on cinema and the senses. Marks draws attention to Irigaray’s view that ‘women take pleasure more from touching than from looking’, underlining her intention to employ haptic criticism as a feminist visual strategy (2002: 19). However, while Marks acknowledges the ‘feminine qualities’ (ibid.) of haptic perception, the erotic relations that are called into play through her concept of *haptic visibility* increasingly correspond with a drive towards ‘basic bisexuality’ in which identification is masculine *and* feminine (if read in psychoanalytic terms). While Marks’s interest in haptics leads her to pose the question: ‘how might cinema feel?’, the queer dimensions of haptic enquiry require further investigation, especially the involvement of sound in the configuration of such ‘queer haptics’.¹

The aim of this paper is not to rethink haptic theory through the adoption of ‘queer’ thought, nor to graft the one discipline onto the other. Indeed, this paper is also less concerned by the notion of ‘queer cinema-as-haptic-experience’. This paper intends to shore up the queer implications of haptic enquiry that are set in motion through Marks’s

¹ I am very grateful to Lucy Bolton for inviting me to present an earlier draft of this paper as part of a panel at the annual *Film-Philosophy* conference, held at Warwick University, 2010. It also useful to note Bolton’s accomplished study of Irigarayan philosophy and, in particular, phenomenological film (Bolton 2011). See also, Liz Watkins’ striking Irigarayan analysis of colour cinema (Watkins 2002).

engagement with Irigaray's discourse, opening up a new dialogue between Marks and Irigaray in the light of developments in Irigaray's on-going project on sexual difference which was the sole focus of her 1993 publication *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. This paper will argue that Irigaray's thoughts on the breathing body in her recent text '*le temps du souffle*' ('The Age of the Breath', 2004a) complicate the erotic relations which characterise Marks's haptic criticism of film, calling attention to a 'queer' visual strategy which emerges through my discussion of Jarman's *Blue* and Julien's *True North*. My treatment of Jarman's and Julien's films will be informed by their specificity as examples of experimental film, and the questions they raise about viewing responses to film sound.

Haptic discourse: Laura U. Marks

In her ground-breaking book *The Skin of the Film* (2000), Marks demonstrates how exilic filmmakers such as Atom Egoyan and Trần Anh Hùng mediate the trauma of cultural displacement through the manipulation of film's material properties, intensifying a 'haptic' rather than linguistic mode of communication. Such a haptic mode of perception, for Marks, offers a model of viewing pleasure alternative to the power relations engendered through vision and historically aligned with sexual difference. Drawing on the philosophical writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gilles Deleuze, Henri Bergson, and the work of Victorian art historian Alois Riegl, Marks suggests a 'logic' of film viewing which conceives of film as a sensuous terrain, continuously traversed by the body of the viewer (2000, xi). However, Marks rarely addresses the issue of film sound and, as we shall see, my analyses of *Blue* and *True North* propose ways in which to rethink haptics as an acoustic phenomena.

The legacy of Marks's thought is evident: Marks's exploration of touch and film's tactile epistemology has prompted several emergent discourses in the field of embodied film theory. In particular, the work of Laura McMahon has sought to question the ethics which

shape Marks's model of filmic contact and mimetic exchange, positing a new model of touch based on the rupturing of intimacy and the figuring of withdrawal that is privileged in the philosophy of Jean Luc Nancy (See, McMahon 2009). While McMahon's work offers an alternative to Marks's immediate and proximal terms which characterise her work on touch, the recent work of Jennifer Barker in her book *The Tactile Eye* engages with Vivian Sobchack's concept of the 'film's body' (Sobchack 1992: 207), marking out new territory for the haptic and totally immersive qualities of skin, musculature and viscera, likening processes of human physiology to the structuring of film experience: 'I hope to show that touch is a "style of being" shared by both film and viewer, and that particular structures of human touch correspond to particular structures of the cinematic experience' (Barker 2009: 2). Both McMahon and Barker engage with Marks's haptic theory in order to stage their own encounters with film's sensuous qualities, but I want to draw closer attention to the queer politics which underpin Marks's thinking and re-evaluate such sensuous scholarship when viewed through the lens of queer cinema. Such queer politics are not only implied through Marks's discussion of the 'bisexual' orientation of haptic perception and her dialogue with Irigaray, but are also implied through the fundamental logic of her project which questions the very meaning of haptic enquiry. Marks's work might not only foster a radically different approach to notions of queerness and the queer gaze in film, but also enable new insight into queer phenomenology. However, this is not to say that queer theory is entirely resonant with haptic discourse, as we shall see, but my study of film sound is best viewed as an experiment which probes the unthinkable and undisclosed nature of aurality and, especially our orientation towards such sounds.

The question of orientation is central to the Marksian concept of haptic visuality. Marks's haptic film theory rethinks the significance of viewing pleasure while negating the binary oppositions of passive/active, subject/object elaborated on by Laura Mulvey in her

essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975); haptic visuality is the orientation of viewers towards an oscillation between passivity-activity, subjectivity-objectivity.

Commenting on her interest in haptics, Marks writes: 'I was looking for an alternative to the dominant theory of the Gaze, derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis. I wanted to understand how looking could be something other than the exercise of power, and how to explain the pleasure of looking as not gendered, not perverse' (Marks, 2004). Thus haptic visuality is a form of film viewing which, as Marks puts it, 'invites the eyes to function as an organ of touch' (ibid.). Or, rather, the eyes are oriented towards the sensory rationale of skin, fingertips, to the pleasure of intimacy and the salvation of contact. If skin is the most important organ of touch, film viewing, then, is mediated through an interface of skin and screen. This non-hierarchical interplay of the sense of touch and sight is for Marks, invariably charged with a cultural, but not necessarily sexual or gendered, specificity. Importantly, for Marks, diasporic cinema is most notable for its haptic imagery since it tends to recover 'sense memories' that are lost or displaced through the trauma of exile; for example, the filming of tiny fibres drifting away from a vivid red sari in *Seeing is Believing* (Shauna Beharry, 1991), or images of freshly cut papaya as seen in *The Scent of Green Papaya* (Trần, 1993) connect viewers to culturally specific places and anchor them in bodily experience. Thus, the skin of the film and the skin of the viewer come into contact with each other through haptic visuality, but less attention is paid to the questions surrounding the sexual orientation or gender of the viewers engaging in such sense memories. Of course, to treat such bodies as sexed would be to adopt a psychoanalytic perspective that Marks largely avoids, but if this line of enquiry was to be pursued it is certainly Marks's interest in Irigarayan thought which presents an apt point of contact between phenomenology and psychoanalysis. If we revisit Marks's theoretical engagement with Irigaray, we can begin to flesh out the potential of a queer kind

of haptic thought and its further resonances within the context of Irigaray's writings in her text 'The Age of the Breath'.

Marks and Irigaray

Marks's consideration of Irigaray's philosophical concept of the 'caress' enables her to introduce the sense of touch to the field of vision that film has long been theorized in relation to. For Marks, Irigaray's concept of the caress offers a useful critique of the phenomenological thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, establishing a 'tangible intimacy' in which touch is a feminine form of contact that is felt without reference to the visible world (see Marks 2000: 149). Haptic visuality adopts a strategy that may be loosely understood as a continuation of Irigaray's mimetic structures (of looking and perceiving) and is informed by a similar eroticism that Irigaray's concept of the caress implies, or what Marks describes, in filmic terms, as a proximity to the image which calls to mind: 'an intensified relation with an other that cannot be possessed' (2004: 19). However, it is this intensified, yet fleeting and elusive relation with an other which also resonates with queer thinking. While Marks builds on the ethics of Irigaray's thought, her engagement with the notion of the caress remind us of the queer politics which might potentially be involved in haptic visuality. If haptic visuality is reconsidered in line with queer phenomenology and, importantly, the further developments in Irigaray's corpus of work, then it might be possible to elaborate on how 'queer' cinema might feel.

The ethics of haptic visuality correspond with a kind of looking which yields to a body that cannot be possessed, motivated by a searching gaze which fails to rest on a single entity or body. This wandering spectatorship, or 'grazing' (Marks 2000: 162), is key to haptic visuality – the viewer becomes disoriented by the image, shaken by its lack of co-ordinates resulting from extreme close ups, highly mobile camera work or other formal devices which

de-stabilize perception. While the concept of ‘grazing’ raises questions about cinematic aurality and hearing as a kind of ambling of the ear which will be central to my readings of *Blue* and *True North*, the role of disorientation in producing haptic effects bears comparison with a fundamental aspect of queer phenomenology which provides a basis for my theoretical experimentation with haptics. Crucially, as Sara Ahmed argues in her book *Queer Phenomenology, Orientations, Objects, Others*, phenomenology is ‘full of queer moments, as moments of *disorientation* (...) A queer phenomenology might find what is queer within phenomenology and use that queerness to make some rather different points’ (Ahmed 2006: 4; emphasis mine). Thinking through disorder and disorientation is vital to queer phenomenology, but while Ahmed employs the example of a chair and table in order demonstrate the queer orientation of writing, beginning with the direction of the chair and table rather than the pen and ink, it is important to return to the thought of Irigaray if such queering of phenomenology is to be further explored in relation to haptic visuality and the disorienting, and orienting, qualities of silence, air and breath.²

Haptic Sound and its Queer Implications

Irigaray’s concept of the caress enables Marks to formulate a mode of haptic perception that is guided by the presence of an unknowable other. This unknown presence that is involved in haptic perception is indicated by visual and formal attributes of the image, but Irigaray’s wider corpus of work, especially her current work on the philosophical treatment of breathing and air prompts consideration of the aural possibilities of haptics and it is this facet of Irigaray’s thought which resonates most clearly with Ahmed’s queer phenomenology. While Marks develops a haptics that functions according to the viewer’s

² I explore the locus of breath in film spectatorship with Irigarayan philosophy in my book *The Place of Breath in Cinema* (2012). I return here to Irigaray in order to relocate the role of breath in the context of queer film experience, an issue which was beyond the scope of the book’s project.

proximity and closeness to the image, breath reconfigures these issues in a way that, as Irigaray suggests, ‘weaves a proximity’, an invisible passage between the subject and the exterior world, between viewer and film (2004b: 150). Although Marks tends to privilege vision over sound, her thoughts on film hearing suggest a tantalising engagement with breathing that is brief, but highly suggestive. She writes: ‘the aural boundaries between body and world may feel indistinct: the rustle of trees may mingle with the sound of my breathing, or conversely the booming music may inhabit my chest and move my body from the inside’ (2000: 183). In this sense, proximity is characterized by discretion, a small movement that attends to the rustling of trees, as Marks describes, a less reactive and more tentative sound that does not overcome the ‘body’ of the other³. On the aural spaces between speech and the breaths that fill those silences, Irigaray writes: ‘breathing and speaking use breath in almost inverse proportion, at least in our tradition, at least for most of us. [...] This *touching upon* needs attentiveness to the sensible qualities of speech, to voice tone, to the modulation and rhythm of discourse, to the semantic and phonic choice of words’ (1996, 121, 125; emphasis original). From a haptic perspective, Irigaray’s thought might amount to a theorization of ‘touching’ with the ears rather than the eyes as Marks has suggested through her concept of *haptic visuality*. Irigaray’s philosophy offers a way towards thinking about our aural perception of breath as new form of hearing the materiality of the body.

Breath and its silences, for Irigaray, offers a valuable way in which to theorize both a ‘tangible invisible’ space and ‘caress’ that, as Catherine Vasseleu remarks, is ‘not so much a touch than a gesture of touch’ (1998: 114). Indeed, several of Irigaray’s texts directly relate breathing to a kind of caress, a ‘touching upon in words’, in speech, that presents many new possibilities for the discussion of sound and image and the weaving of breath as an ‘aural

³ I have offered a more detailed elaboration of this argument in Quinlivan 2009.

texture' in the cinema. While breathing is not the same as touching, it is involved in embodied sensation and holds the potential to create embodied sound.

If, as Ahmed suggests, disorientation is key to queer phenomenology, then the audio-visual evocation of breathing in film might also be queer since it is unsettling, it creates 'queer moments' and disturbs our perception of bodies. Investigating the locus of breathing in film might offer a different kind haptics which also emphasizes the queer dimensions of Marks's logic. Two films which tend to operate within this schema of queer hapticity are Derek Jarman's feature-length *Blue* and Isaac Julien's digital video *True North*. These films, from the outset, challenge conventional and normative modes of thinking and being, they present to their viewers unknown and unknowable bodies, yet invite intimacy through their haptic imagery, but it is their suggestion of air, breathing and silence which is most appropriately analysed through a queer kind of haptic theory.

A *Blue* Kind of Hearing

Derek Jarman's *Blue*, released in 1992, just a few months before the director's death, is an experimental film consisting entirely of a blue screen accompanied by an elliptical and poetic soundtrack which largely consists of Jarman's voice as he describes his experience of living with the advancing and debilitating effects of the AIDS virus. The sound of Jarman's voice is both strange and familiar, ancient and as honeyed and inviting as a relative whispering just behind your shoulder. Unlike the silent figure in Julien's film, Jarman exists as both voice and noise, two separate entities which cross over each other, gravelly sounds, coughing, singing, humming, sniffing, breaths sometimes indistinguishable from the wind which also fills the soundtrack. Known for his anarchic, playful art cinema, Jarman made *Blue* as his final political act, but it is also intensely personal; it carries his bodily being,

inscribed within the film, the only kind of signature he could be faithful to when his fingers became too weak to write (he describes this in detail in his memoir *Smiling in Slow Motion*).

The phenomenological implications of *Blue*, in particular, have been the subject of Vivian Sobchack's recent work, (2012), but I am interested in how the queer specificity of such a film can be accounted for through phenomenological enquiry. Existing criticism of *Blue*'s soundtrack has directly engaged with its queer meaning and questions of audiovisuality in *Blue* have been usefully addressed by Jacques Khalip in his article 'The Archaeology of Sound: Derek Jarman's *Blue* and Queer Audiovisuality in the Time of AIDS'. Khalip explores notions of queer belonging and the plurality of listening which are also important to my treatment of the film, but I want to emphasize the 'objects' of such aurality and their especially their Irigarayan resonances. Of course, one of the foremost theorists of film sound, Michel Chion frequently observes the textural qualities of film sound in his writings on the experience of speech and its ambient effects (1999), but the thought of Irigaray illuminates a different kind of haptic relationship with *Blue* predicated on our notion of vocality.

Jarman's films are well known for their ethereal and demonstrative soundtracks, dense with breaths, whispers, poetry read aloud, and words neatly dropped into chasms of silence such as in the layered acoustics of *The Angelic Conversation* (1985) or the dislocated voices of *War Requiem* (1989). Steven Dillon, one of Jarman's foremost commentators puts forth the case that sound is a vital component of Jarman's 'lyric films' in which it does not substantiate a three-dimensional real world but leads the viewer into unsubstantial, imaginary spaces (2004: 115). On *Blue*, Dillon likens its style to a 'species of radio' indebted to Samuel Beckett but, as we shall see, it is also the breaths and silences of this film's drama which engage the mind and body of the viewer (ibid.: 227).

For Dillon, the title *Blue*, and indeed its formal use of colour, also pays homage to the modern art of Yves Klein and his work on the *Blue Epoch* which became the inspiration for Jarman's experiments with a blue screen. While Jarman's debt to Klein certainly explains the origins of his conceptualisation of *Blue*, existing criticism of this film has yet to further probe the question of what it might mean to encounter a 'blue' kind of hearing, especially in the light of Sobchack's phenomenological enquiry.

The most important human body featured in the content of the film is Jarman's body itself - the implicit subject of the film. While Jarman exploits the monotonous visual register of his film (its blue screen), like Klein, to remind us of the experiential qualities of colour, the lack of real, literal images contained in the film also prefigures the progressive blindness Jarman endured towards the end of his life and it is Jarman's experimental approach to the film experience and its provocations to existing modes of vision which stimulate ways in which to think afresh the applicability of haptic theory.

Jarman's blue screen does not dramatically change when it is projected in an auditorium, but it does flicker and shudder, reminding us of the apparatus which also stands for, the 'film's body' (Sobchack 1992: 207). The cinematic image is thus projected in its purest form, made visible through colour—no sign of painterly three-dimensional, renaissance space, sets or objects in the frame except for the image of celluloid itself. Yet, changes in the modulation of Jarman's voice, coupled with rich ambient sounds and varying degrees of pitch and volume create a kind of depth perception, a virtual three-dimensionality, and viewers become oriented to the impressions of life evoked by *Blue*. *Blue* offers an alternative haptics through its blue tones which dazzle and hypnotise viewers; it has hallucinogenic qualities, and in this sense it produces a 'queer' disorientation in which the viewer adjusts to a different kind of sight. After twenty or so minutes small changes in light occur as our eyes adjust to starting at a blue screen, it casts a blue shadow over viewers in the

chiaroscuro light of the auditorium and darkness becomes deep azure, midnight blue. Such queer feelings are juxtaposed with the subject matter of the film; viewers grasp the material qualities of the blue screen and its sensuous aural world, but most importantly, it is my view that an Irigarayan notion of air and breath circulates throughout this film.

For Irigaray, air is the most fundamental inter-subjective space, it exists between everything including inside of our bodies and between the visible objects of the material world. On a literal level, we hear the sound of Jarman's breathing and the wind, waves lapping against a shore and Buddhist prayer chimes resound and vibrate in the air between silences. Contextually, Jarman's breath reminds us of the deep breath Tilda Swinton takes in a pastoral setting in *The Garden* (1990), both announcing new beginnings and, to a certain extent, the 'first breaths' of selfhood before we acquire language. While the content of the film evokes air and breath, air is also suggested through the film experience. Most notably, the blue screen displaces space as patterns and lights, vision adjusting to the density of colour projected in the air, especially when the film is viewed in the enclosed space of an auditorium. Air becomes tinted in hues of azure, it mingles with dust and light and the sound of silence. In *Blue*, it is not sound which is privileged over the image. Rather, sound makes present the on-screen absence of Jarman's body: the filmmaker's breathing, enunciated body 'ghosts' the space between film and viewer, screen and auditorium.

In sum, the airy, sonic qualities of *Blue* do not correspond with the Marksian model of haptic visuality, they are haptic but also queer objects which, like Ahmed's analogy of the table and chair, remind us of the orienting of ourselves and the strangeness of being embodied.

One particular moment from *Blue* which elicits a response to the airy, spectral qualities of the intermingling of sound and image takes place at the end of

the film. The final moments in *Blue* are extremely potent specifically owing to the length of time the viewer has invested in staring at the blue screen and listening to the film's soundtrack; at this point in the film the viewer is more likely to be fully immersed in the experiential nature of the film and its subtle rendering of a corporeal world in which the materiality of film resurrects Jarman's breathing body. For Marks, The haptic visuality of *Blue* involves not an orientation towards objects in the diegesis, but towards the screen as fragments of light, a material light which 'touches' the air and is made audible through heard silences and diegetic, aural motifs which foreground notions of breath.

An Atlas of Air: Rhythms of Breath

While the airy and breathy sound/images contained in Jarman's *Blue* conjure an elemental and ethereal world entwined with the earthbound grittiness of street corners, traffic and echoing hospital corridors, it is the silence of air which is summoned by Julien in his 14-minute short film *True North*. *True North* re-imagines the discovery of the North Pole, inspired by the story of Matthew Henson, the black explorer who accompanied Robert Peary and was one of the first black people to reach the North Pole in 1909. Julien not only imagines what might have happened if Henson had made it to the North Pole before Peary, but also envisages the story from a black female perspective, played by Vanessa Myrie. The logic of exploration and its twinning with patriarchal notions of ownership and capitalism is rejected by Julien, reason is replaced with irrational meanderings and multiple images of the seeping inertia of ice and glistening arctic vistas traversed by Myrie. Julien uses the medium of digital video in order to play with notions of temporality, noise and stillness, projecting triptychs of geometric patterns, doubly framing images of blocks of ice and foamy, iridescent water.

Rather tantalisingly, Marks comments on the queer, material qualities of video in her chapter 'Video's Body, Analog and Digital'. She writes, 'if digital video can be thought to have a body, it is a strikingly queer body, in the sense that queer theory uncouples the living body from any essence of gender, sexuality, or other way to be grounded in the ontology of sexual difference' (2002: 152). According to Marks's logic, digital media is always already in possession of a 'queer' body. While, strictly speaking, *True North* was filmed on 16mm, it is always projected as a DVD transfer of the original footage and thus it might be seen to relate to Marks's thinking. However, despite the material qualities of the film, the formal content and narrative specificity of *True North* also embeds other kinds of queer meanings and these are best understood through the soundtrack of the film.

While Ahmed emphasizes the important of the orientation of queer bodies, *True North* makes apparent a literal re-writing of orientation through his re-imagining of one of the most historical discoveries in the history of the Western world. In *True North*, viewers must orient themselves towards the experience of strangeness and must encounter an alien world; this kind of film viewing particularly involves responding and identifying with the queer presence, and silence, of Myrie in the diegesis.

Hearing *True North* attunes the viewer's ears to a sensuousness not only resulting from the material sounds of ice breaking, water flowing and wind howling, but to the spaces between such sounds – to air and rhythms of silence. In one particular sequence, a kaleidoscopic split screen image contains what appears to be a cross-section of a tunnel of ice, while the central image consists of an eroded, fissuring glacier. Such kaleidoscopic effects can be seen frequently in Julien's work, especially his carnivalesque inhabitation of the John Soanes museum in *Vagabondia* (2000), but the soundtrack disrupts the fluid movement of the images. We hear crumbling, cracking sounds, tiny, yet fantastically rich and organic.

Through the soundtrack, the images of ice obtain a kind of heartbeat, a breathy rhythm, as if the body of Myrie, silent and calm, has been aurally displaced. This displacement is further emphasized through the filming of the arctic as if it were a body, lovingly explored in close-up detail by an invisible admirer. We do not hear Myrie's breaths, but we hear wind shuttling through corridors of ice, rumbling breezes and whistling icy crevices of igloos. Julien not only offers Myrie the role of explorer, she claims the space as her own, literally.

For Irigaray, air is 'place' itself and therefore the soundtrack of *True North* resists familiar images of exploration, proposing a different location that is neither entirely on or off-screen, heard or unheard. While the embodied experience of Jarman's *Blue* encourages responses to the 'airiness' of the auditorium and the inter-subjective conditions of the cinema, *True North* sculpts a corporeal experience of elemental spaces, breaking free from patriarchal, hetero-normative conceptions of imperialism and its objectifying gaze.

Conclusion

In her chapter, 'Loving a Disappearing Image', Marks reflects on the ways in which haptic visuality prompts a kind of response to film as an incoherent body. Marks draws attention to the work of Mike Hoolboom's *Letters from Home* (1996), a film about a man whose dreams of bodily fragmentation (he imagines grains of spilled crystals as parts of his incomplete self) end with a doctor informing him of his HIV-positive status. Drawing on Hoolboom's images, Marks writes: 'to have an aging body, raises the question of why we are compelled to identify with images of wholeness' (2002: 92). For Marks, haptic visuality is defined by its relationship to wholeness, a unity that is ever searched for, desired, but forever stalled. While sound is often theorised to be supplementary to the image, the work of Julien and Jarman disrupts such logic – sound is employed to enhance the elliptical and

contemplative imagery of *True North* and *Blue* without undermining their own ‘bodily’ fragmentation. *Blue*, obviously, seems to resonate with Hoolboom’s notion of incompleteness and physical instability, owing to its Kleinian void of colour and its ontological transparency. Yet, the films I have discussed are not examples of a queer haptics or queer phenomenology. Rather, I have shown how sound operates in both films in order to reinforce their queer aesthetic, experimenting with the hearing body of the viewer and positing them in the realm of the unknown and ever-shifting. This space of the unknown, suggested through my Irigarayan engagement with notions of air and breath may be most applicable to the theorisation of the queer haptic viewer.

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