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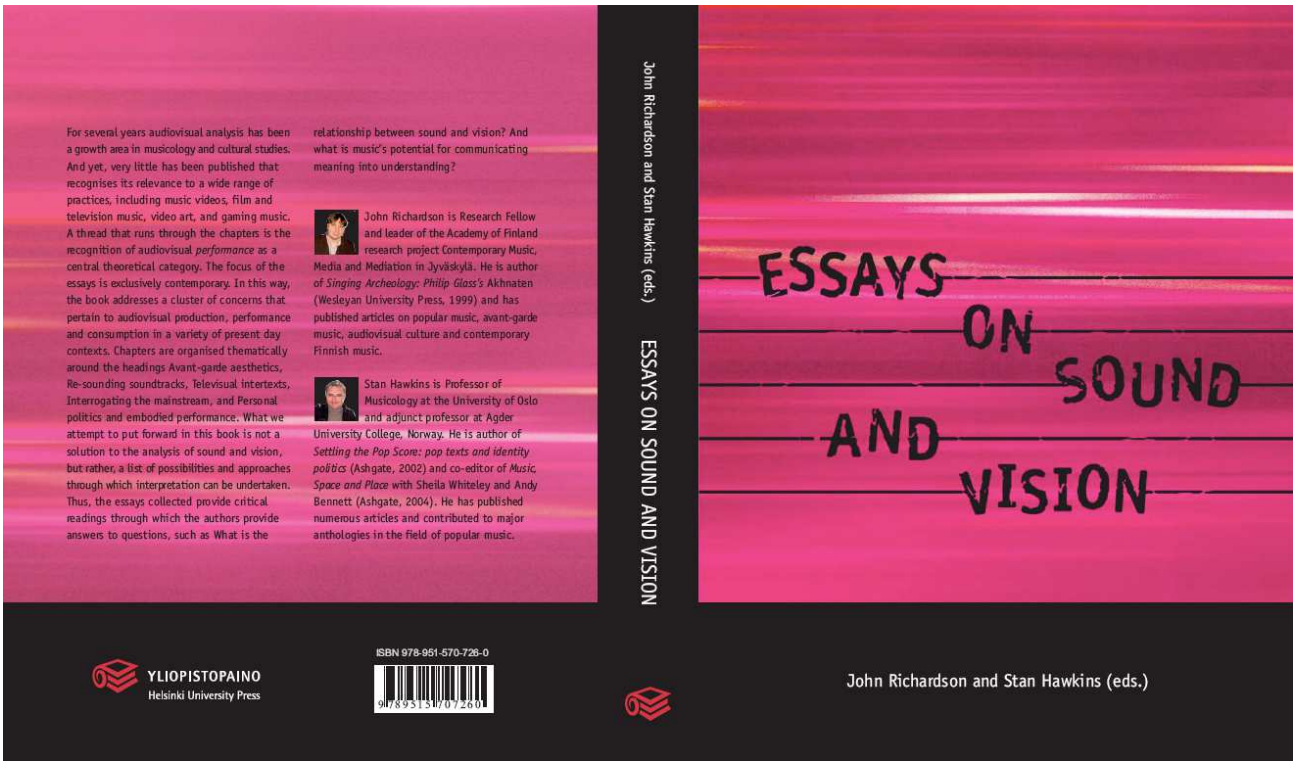

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For several years audiovisual analysis has been a growth area in musicology and cultural studies. And yet, very little has been published that recognises its relevance to a wide range of practices, including music videos, film and television music, video art, and gaming music. A thread that runs through the chapters is the recognition of audiovisual performance as a central theoretical category. The focus of the essays is exclusively contemporary. In this way, the book addresses a cluster of concerns that pertain to audiovisual production, performance and consumption in a variety of present day contexts. Chapters are organised thematically around the headings Avant-garde aesthetics, Re-sounding soundtracks, Televisual intertexts, Interrogating the mainstream, and Personal politics and embodied performance. What we attempt to put forward in this book is not a solution to the analysis of sound and vision, but rather, a list of possibilities and approaches through which interpretation can be undertaken. Thus, the essays collected provide critical readings through which the authors provide answers to questions, such as what is the relationship between sound and vision? And what is music's potential for communicating meaning into understanding?

Chapter 3

Going with the flow: compositional and analytical perspectives on soundtracks for experimental films[1]

Petri Kuljuntausta and John Richardson

The two essays in this chapter explore the creative background and artistic end-results of composer Petri Kuljuntausta's collaborative work with the director Sami van Ingen, which includes moving images, experimental film, video art, and audiovisual installations. Although these artists are based in Finland, their films are well known on the international experimental and short film circuit. Their work together spans a period of just over a decade, from 1995 to the present day, and includes the following films and videos: *Texas Scramble* (1996), *The Blow* (1997), *Days* (2000) and *Tomato One/Navigator* (2005-06), as well as the audiovisual installations *Free Zone* (an ultrasound-installation, 1998), *Sekoitin* (Engl. mixer, 2002), and *Wave Motion* (2005). Individually, Kuljuntausta is one of the more visible (and, of course, *audible*) musicians working with electronic media in Finland. He was recently awarded a prestigious State Prize for the Arts, is the author of two books on electronic and experimental styles, and hosts a Finnish Broadcasting Corporation (YLE) radio programme. Stylistically his music incorporates influences as diverse as electro-acoustic music,

[1] This article is an elaboration of Kuljuntausta's text "Kokeellisen elokuvan musiikista" published in the book *Äänen eXtreme* (Engl. eXtreme Sound) and Richardson's sleeve notes, "Kuljuntausta and van Ingen's audiovisual dreams", published in the booklet of the DVD *Three Films* (Richardson 2006a). Kuljuntausta's essay was translated by Richardson.

electronic dance music (including drum'n'bass and jungle), free jazz, minimalism, and *musique concrète*, all of which can be heard in his music for visual media.

In the first essay, Kuljuntausta discusses his compositional praxis as it bears on multimedia issues. Informal in tone, this contribution documents the composer's observations and impressions concerning his teamwork with van Ingen with a view to illuminating the poetic and pragmatic sides of the subject. In the second essay, Richardson opens up a dialogue with the filmmakers in writing that draws on music research, media studies, and cultural theory. After an initial review of relevant theory, he goes on to develop a model of how to approach the soundtracks to experimental films that is exemplified in discussions of three films. The three films analysed in this essay can be found on the *Three Films* DVD (2006), packaged with the initial pressing of this publication. It is hoped that the inclusion of the films will exemplify—better than picture stills might—some of the points made in the analysis, at the same time providing teaching material on a genre that is underrepresented in commercial publications and academic scholarship alike.

1. On composing for experimental films

Petri Kuljuntausta

My experience in combining sound with moving images is limited to the domain of experimental art. The films and video art I have composed music for are non-narrative: they have no dialogue or plot and written texts are used only sparingly. The main impetus for work of this kind is in the visual sphere: the director/camera operator pursues suitable subjects with a hand-held camera and captures images in a manner resembling the aesthetic of *cinéma vérité*. Various elements work against this impression, however, such as the conspicuous use of postproduction techniques and the presence of a non-diegetic soundtrack. While some planning is done by the

filmmaker in advance, which to some extent shapes the film in terms of its general aims, this does not determine the outcome of the shoot. Vital to the character of the film is what *happens* that is not scripted and how the camera operator succeeds in capturing these unique moments on film. Conditions are constantly changing and the circumstances of the shot give rise to surprises. The unique appeal of this approach inheres in the ability of the filmmaker to capture the unstaged flow of everyday life. The camera operator directs while filming, in the here and now. Events lead to others and at the same time the camera operator perceptibly scans the surroundings in search of the next subject. It is essential to track what is going on when filming rather than slavishly follow a script or storyboard drawn up in advance.

Sami van Ingen's recent films are a type of documentary, but knowing this is not essential to the sense audiences will make of the films. Background knowledge of the films can enhance the experience, but identifying so called extra-cinematic features is not foremost for many spectators. Instead, the sensual materiality of the visual aspect is central. Ideally the viewer should become almost literally immersed in the experience of the moving image—colours melding on the screen and slow motion sequences stretching to the limits of perception.

In this respect, the films resemble those films of the 1960s and 70s that have been called Structural (e.g., those of Tony Conrad, Hollis Frampton, Peter Kubelka, Andy Warhol, and Michael Snow), a movement that parallels and in the case of some directors intersects with the formative stages of musical minimalism (see Sitney 1979; Peterson 1996, 108-109). Structural films share with minimalism an interest in simplified forms, which tends to direct attention, on the one hand, towards the viewer/listener's perceptual processes, and on the other, to the contextual nature of the filmic experience. Structural films would often employ predetermined

processes that once initiated by the filmmaker unfold of their own accord; an extreme example is Andy Warhol's *Empire* (1964), an eight-hour study of New York's Empire State building in which the only remarkable features are changes in light, the weather, and a few occasions when Warhol himself passes in front of the camera. Sami van Ingen's films share with Structural films an interest in perceptual processes and an approach to form and movement in which the boundaries between abstract forms and transparent visual representations are explored. In this case, the structural organisation derives in large part from the filmed materials rather than from a script that existed prior to shooting. Thus, a path is negotiated in the films between the filmmakers' preconceptions and the contingencies of everyday life.

The exploration of filmic material is an experimental pursuit, although exploring materials is part of the creative process, not the artistic end-result. Filmmakers wouldn't want to present unfinished fragments to audiences, and it is unlikely that audiences would be interested in such raw materials. The completed film articulates how its makers have benefited from the fruits of their experimental labour and how the choices made have eventually fallen into place. By exploring and experimenting with materials it is possible to gradually ascertain the best direction in which to proceed. In general one can choose between several directions. Once such choices have been made, it is possible to arrive at results that could not have been foreseen, in which case the initial aims have to be reviewed. In general, the most detailed preconceptions fly out the window at this point, replaced by simpler modes of expression. Shedding materials is an important part of the process, as discursive initial ideas gradually find their form.

In practice it is impossible to differentiate between music and sound, because when putting a soundtrack together the priority is always to strive for the best possible audiovisual whole. At times music is prioritised, at

others sound. The soundtrack always responds to the corresponding visual track, in which case it makes little difference whether the most apt form of expression is sonic or musical. For me, the boundary between musical composition and sound design is determined by whether one is working with sounds in an abstract way or underlining everyday activities or aspects of the acoustic environment with sound. In cases of the latter, footsteps, urban noises, the ringing of a telephone, etc., are the results of sound design. But if a distinct level has been created in a film by the use of sound that has its own abstract character, then one has taken a step towards musical expression.

Occasionally it is easy to find the right direction for a soundtrack, but often it takes longer to place all the pieces of the puzzle. When working with a successful composition one sometimes experiences moments of "revelation", when you think that the approach taken in this instance will be applicable in all future work. But this is rarely the case for me. Typically, what works in certain audiovisual contexts will not work in others. A new point of departure, with different sound materials and a different context, generally forces me to begin working afresh. There is invariably an aspect of anxiety when beginning a new piece, which may not be as fruitful as that which preceded it. But eventually this new piece with its new point of departure will stimulate the imagination bringing its own distinctive fruits.

In experimental projects filmmakers generally work in small units. Very often the scriptwriter, cinematographer, camera operator, director, film editor and producer are the same person. The budgets allocated to such projects are not large, but working in small groups tends to be propitious to motivation and creativity. The activities of the filmmaker are independent and unfettered: artists have ample opportunity to experiment and the various "cogs in the machine" that slow down large organisations are not a problem. The workgroup behind a

project controls all aspects of production and it alone is responsible for seeing the project through to completion.

The making of films and videos is contingent on the equipment used and the availability of this equipment imposes certain constraints on ways of working. But provided the musician has his or her own audio equipment at home, this ensures some degree of independence from commercial or corporate music studios. Working at home offers a degree of autonomy, since there is no need to reserve a recording session or to pay for studio time, and outside parties such as studio technicians and other intermediaries have no say in the musical outcome. When working with moving images things are not as simple. It is still rare for filmmakers to have their own editing equipment in a home studio or as software on a laptop, which makes it necessary to use outside facilities when editing, combining sound and visual tracks, and working in the final stages of postproduction.

In experimental film projects, outside parties do not impose conditions, restrictions and aesthetic preconceptions on the filmmaking practices of the production team. In our projects, we have always enjoyed considerable artistic freedom. The producers of *Texas Scramble* were the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation (Yleisradio) and Illume Ltd. In the final stages of work on this project, the producers were provided with a synopsis and a short extract of the film material and they were notified in advance of the estimated duration of the film. But even in this case, all aspects of production remained in our hands throughout the project. The only detail which could considered a concession was the addition of subtitles to the TV1 Finnish television broadcast. The film includes an English language text, which the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation wanted translated into Finnish. This was contrary to our wishes, since the primary purpose of the text was not to

provide denotative information. The text in question runs in three levels across the screen. It would be impossible for the spectator to read everything on the screen and this was the intention.

***Texas Scramble* (1996) and *The Blow* (1997)**

I first met Sami van Ingen in 1995 and our collaborative work started with the film *Texas Scramble.* We began to formulate ideas together in early autumn and continued at the Lux Sonor exhibition in Helsinki. Each of us prepared separate pieces for this exhibition, organised at the Helsinki Kunsthalle in November to December 1995. In the same year Sami had completed the film *Sweep*, a collaborative project with director Philip Hoffman, who had worked in the past with the likes of director Peter Greenaway. *Sweep* is a "road movie", which follows the travels of a narrator who himself tracks the director Robert Flaherty's footsteps in Canada. The foundation for Sami's work in *Sweep* is the genre of documentary. This approach would continue in *Texas Scramble* and *The Blow*. These films do not tell a story or document events, although *Texas Scramble* has been called an "experimental documentary". The spectator is presented with figures, surfaces, events; but the labour of constructing interpretations and forming associations on the basis of these impressions is left largely to the viewer. Projects completed in the 1990s include three collaborative pieces, the first two of which are audiovisual: *Texas Scramble* (1996), *The Blow* (1997) and *Free Zone* (30—65 kHz ultrasound installation, 1998).

At the core of *Texas Scramble* is van Ingen's observation that: "we are today what we thought yesterday. Our present thoughts engender our future. Our lives are the creation of our mind." These thoughts originating in Buddhist philosophy can also be applied to *The Blow*. The foundation of both *Texas Scramble* and *The Blow* is the idea of memory as informing experiences of lived reality. The pieces have much in common, but of

course they also differ.

Texas Scramble was filmed in Ireland, England, and St. Petersburg, among other places, and the film is visually darker. *The Blow* is colourful and bright due to the fact that it was filmed in the sunshine of India. Each piece is a study on temporality, but in *The Blow* this aspect is taken further as the filmic material is radically stretched (slowed) in time. All the cutting for *Texas Scramble* was completed before I began composing the music. With *The Blow*, the music was completed first and Sami cut the video to music. *Texas Scramble* is based on concrete sounds, *The Blow* on synthetically produced sounds. The soundtrack of *Texas Scramble* works purely on the level of sounds, whereas *The Blow* employs notes and rhythmic materials and it is traditionally speaking more musical (i.e, more like a music video). The sound world of *Texas Scramble* is coarse, "down-to-earth", and angular. *The Blow's* music, on the other hand, is mellifluous, dreamlike, and because of its synthetic production the sounds are cleaner. While there are differences between the two, *Texas Scramble* and *The Blow* are sister pieces. Each film is ascetic in its own way and this stylistic solution seems to work.

The audiovisual world presented in experimental films differs significantly to that which viewers of standard television programming are accustomed to. Television companies require materials presented on TV to conform to "general standards of production", which dictate that they should be of "high technical quality". Makers of experimental films on the other hand approach technology from a different perspective. For aesthetic reasons directors sometimes prefer, for example, to work with older technologies, to explore the possibilities offered by Super-8 or 16-millimeter cameras and to utilize the colour palettes offered by these devices in order to discover new hues. Instead of sharp focus, the picture may be permitted to cloud over

creating indistinct forms. Experimental film is supposed to be gritty and abrasive, because filmmakers want to develop new forms of expression that interrogate the premises of filmmaking.

In direct parallel to the techniques of experimental film, electronic music makes use of both low-tech and high-tech sounds. By juxtaposing low and high technologies, it is possible to create a more multidimensional sound world. Old technologies can continue to thrive and open up new creative avenues when considered from a contemporary standpoint.

When *Texas Scramble* was complete, we delivered it to the Finnish Broadcasting Company (TV1). It was not long before the company contacted us to discuss some clicking noises in the soundtrack. TV1 asked if we could do something to solve this "problem" prior to the transmission. The clicks in question were an intentional aspect of the recording, however, since we wanted to impart to the soundtrack some of the scratchiness of the vinyl LP format. The technical quality of the film was also "tampered with" visually. In certain shots of *Texas Scramble,* van Ingen rubbed grease onto the camera lens in order to make images foggier. Instead of modern cameras, *Texas Scramble* was filmed using Super-8 film. Sami uses a Super-8 camera regardless of the format (16 or 35 mm film or video) his work is published in.

<insert figure 1 here>

Figure 1. Blurry image of a dog in *Texas Scramble*.

Van Ingen filmed *The Blow* on his family's plantation in India. The point of departure was historical material

pertaining to his grandfather. Faded photographs and materials from the area of the plantation are included. Tigers are occasionally seen, a species connected with Sami's grandfather's business enterprises. Stuffed tigers are included in some of the shots, for which the van Ingen name was known around the world in bygone days. Customers of the business included the Persian Shah and museums of natural science in several countries. Later the tiger trade was consigned to history and in recent years the plantation has produced coffee.

The Blow is a factual work but its realisation is not purely that of a documentary. The piece occupies a grey area between the genre of documentary and abstraction. Like *Sweep*, *The Blow* should originally have included a linguistic text, and Sami had intended to read extracts of text. Following the first demos, the text was omitted, however, because reading it would have disrupted the intensity of the slowly moving images. Without textual associations the piece would become more abstract.

I composed the soundtrack for *The Blow* using a sonic language comprising synthetically produced musical "notes". The synthetic sound world, minimalism, and a regular rhythm seemed to match the atmosphere of the film. This was a departure from my earlier musical style, although it was not a conscious choice. *The Blow* was composed from countless sketches that I explored together with Sami. When working with sounds it is sometime difficult to find the best sound for a scene. The music might match the moving image reasonably well using a certain sound, but by changing the sound to a different instrument it was possible to find a better match. There seemed to be no obvious rationale for the choices made in this film. It was simply a question of trying out sounds in combination with the scene, since some sounds seemed to match the colours of the images whereas others did not. Composing film music using digital equipment offers many advantages. It is easy to make loops out of sound materials, which you can allow simply to run alongside visual materials, and on that

basis you can decide whether to continue along a given path or to choose another.

A prominent characteristic of Sami's aesthetic is time-stretching. *The Blow* was an experiment of Sami's part in how far it is possible to go with such an approach. As a result the movement of images is in some cases extremely slow. In places the picture almost comes to a standstill and all that can be seen are slowly gliding coloured surfaces and textures. Half-jokingly we discussed the possibility of extending such processes further and making an alternative version of the film that would last several hours.

As far as compositional work was concerned, the resulting sense of timelessness, colours and their rhythms were some of my fundamental concerns (these features made a vivid impression already during the first viewing). On this basis I began to shape the sound materials. In the initial stages of composition it was simply a question of trying out different ideas. My approach was anything but systematic.

Before composing the music, I first examined all of the footage Sami had filmed. There were hours of material from India, which we viewed selections of during a two-hour session. The extracts were raw and unproduced, comprising no fades or other forms of editing. After the screening we had meetings in which we discussed points of departure, visions, the schedule, funding and other matters related to the project. At this point, Sami condensed his materials into a demo, which gave me a better idea of what lay ahead. Importantly, I was able to glean from the demo a sense of the nature of the film, the world it portrayed as well as its editing rhythm. Importantly, the demo allowed me to work through musical ideas in the studio.

While working on *The Blow*, it was possible to go though visual ideas one at a time and develop

corresponding musical ideas. I was able to sift through my sound repository and construct new sounds. By experimenting with different combinations of sound and vision I was able to find solutions that felt right: seeds that would form the basis for ideas. The most import thing was to find *points of attachment*: moments when sound materials and images fitted together well. I remember trying out myriad ideas, from concrete to purely electronic sounds.

In autumn 1996, I composed music demos for *The Blow* in my home studio, after which we set up listening sessions in an audiovisual room in Helsinki's *Lasipalatsi* ("glass palace") centre. At this time I had composed about twenty minutes of music, sections of which were nearly complete, while others were mere fragments that could be extended and developed if the basic idea felt right. Together the two of us reflected on which ideas to pursue and which to discard. The second section of *The Blow* was the first to fall into place. In the first demo the music was played on the organ, and it was in this form that the composition took shape from the outset. The first musical idea was a bass figuration in 5/4 time, on the basis of which modal rhythmic fragments were generated. These were programmed into sequences using a keyboard. Initially performed live, a great deal of tweaking was done using a midi editor: I changed the order of phrases, adjusted rhythmic accents, and ironed out the creases of the live performance.

The organ sound was not a good match for the film, so I began looking for a more appropriate sound. An exotic string sound from the Kurzweil K2000 synthesizer's sound library was an excellent match. Once I had found this sound, we were able to agree on the music for the second section. When this section was complete, it provided a musical starting point for the rest of the film. At this time, we prepared a demo that was used to apply for additional funding for the project. Support was given by the Finnish organizations SES and AVEK.

On the basis of the script alone, Sami had earlier received support from Visek. There was little point in rushing to complete the composition in its early stages, since the material had not been tested with the accompanying images. It was enough to make short fragments of music, from 30 seconds to a minute, which we tested with images in screenings. Sami suggested that *The Blow* should be cut to a complete soundtrack, so I was able to continue with the compositional work freely. We agreed on an overall duration of twenty-one minutes, which is also the duration of *Texas Scramble*. For a "short film", twenty-one minutes is quite long, but the film nevertheless found its way to short film festivals.

Like the second section of *The Blow*, the theme in the final section was originally played using an organ-like synthesizer sound. Musically, the organ sound worked well, and I performed the music like this in live concerts; for example, at the Charm of Sound festival in Helsinki in 1997. But when combined with the film, the sound was overly dramatic and ponderous, so I looked for a lighter alternative. I ended up using a sinewave-like sound programmed on the Kurzweil K2000 synthesizer. After finding this sound, the music of the final section fell into place.

The first and third sections required something more tranquil to counterbalance the rhythmic activity of the sections already written. I stumbled across suitable sonic landscapes for these sections by accident. I was playing some of the minimalist figures from the piece on the Kurzweil, and accidentally switched to a foggy sound texture. It worked with the music, so I decide to stick with it. Since the synthesizer sound is soft and the initial attack of the sound extremely slow, the listener is unable to perceive this busy texture as the musical backdrop to the slow sections. The ear is only able to perceive a blurry musical colouration of surface sonic textures resulting from the underlying flow of materials.

The Blow can be divided into four sections. The first is subdued and its sonic colours change slowly. The second is in 5/4 time is coarse and rhythmic, and the timbral qualities of the music invoke Asian musical styles. The third section is a variation of the tranquil first section and serves as a bridge to the final section. The 7/4 time (3/4 + 4/4) fourth section is a rhythmically propulsive, minimalist ending to the film.

***Days* (2000)**

Days was assembled musically in a similar manner to *The Blow*. In September 2000, Sami sent me an edited composite of material he had shot in India. This was a "working copy", its purpose being to give a general sense of the subject matter of the film. On the basis of impressions from the tape, we agreed that I could begin composing the soundtrack. Again, Sami edited the film only after the soundtrack was complete.

<insert figure 2 here>

Figure 2. A tiger's skull in *Days.*

In the film's slow motion shots one can see tigers, both stuffed and living. There is an explanation for this choice of subject. Sami had seen a BBC broadcast which predicted that the wild tiger would become extinct within two hundred days. An extreme example of man's indifference to nature, the report told how even jungle life was besieged in the current environmental climate. Researcher and video artist Kari Yliannala comments:

> *Days* is a subtle depiction of time, man and culture and through its (encaptured) presence, the absent tiger. Van Ingen's films are about extended duration, slowly unfolding images whose meanings are gradually

> revealed, and the viewers patience is rewarded as pleasure arises through the activity of realisation. (Yliannala 2001.)

In *Days* I used both concrete and synthetic sounds. Concrete sounds include the sound of a dog's bark and several musical extracts. The piece can be divided into four sections. The first and the second are based on textures derived from concrete sounds, whereas the third and fourth were composed using a synthesizer. Because of the low pedal point of its opening section, the beginning of *Days* resembles that of *Texas Scramble*. The sections in which human feet stamp on the tiger's hide to soften it are accompanied by a sampled wind instrument figure, which I slowed to accompany the subdued imagery.

Towards its end *Days* is transformed into a more electric and rhythmic sonic entity. The fence scene has as its foundation a steady beat, against which short, partially atonal, synthesizer motifs are stated. Following a short moment of silence, the finale begins: this is based on a 7/4 rhythm and minimalist music that inclines towards techno. My midi instruments were a Kurzweil K2000 synthesizer and a Reality software synthesizer. In part, the sinewave melody has been programmed using the K2000 – while other sounds were constructed using a Reality synthesizer.

Days was first performed at the Koko theatre in Helsinki on October 30, 2000. In addition to the film screenings, I have performed the first two sections in live concerts with the LumoDuo, an electronic duo comprising composer Juhani Nuorvala and myself, at the Valon voimat (Engl. Powers of light) festival in 2000, and in a solo concert at the Helsinki Sound festival in 2001.

***Tomato One / Navigator* (2006)**

The music video *Tomato One / Navigator* (2005—06) was first performed at the Expo 2005 World Fair in Aichi, Japan, the theme of which was "Nature's Wisdom". The American musician and whale expert Jim Nollman was responsible for the execution of this performance. He had commissioned *Navigator*, a composition based on sounds produced by Karelian Beluga whales, a year and a half earlier for the *Belly Of The Whale* CD.

Typical whalesong cannot be heard in the work, however, since I chose to use only unidentified noise fragments from whalesong as the point of departure for the piece. *Navigator* was finished in April 2004 and it was performed in underwater concerts in Sweden and Germany the same year. At the end of 2004, Sami van Ingen began work on the video. Images of bomber planes formed the starting point for Sami's video.

<insert figure 3 here>

Figure 3. Image of a bomber plane in Tomato One.

A special feature of the World Fair performance was a kiosk designed by Nollman that was equipped, among other things, with a program designed by the company Native Instruments. Visitors to the interactive kiosk could activate whale sounds as well as sounds of other marine life, and combine the sounds to produce an original musical performance. Native Instruments were responsible for the technological running of the kiosk and for the design of the interface.

Tomato One / Navigator was part of the interactive program of the kiosk. We were asked to provide a copy of the music video as early as the beginning of 2005, since the technicians at Native Instruments needed the audiovisual materials for programming purposes already months in advance of the performance. The piece was completed on time, although Sami and I continued to work on it, making adjustments to both music and images even after the World Fair performance. I tried to ensure that the lengthy fade-out of the original music would work with the images, changed the ending and at the same time made small changes to the ticking foundation of the track.

The final version of *Tomato One / Navigator* received its debut performance as part of the Experimental Intermedia festival curated by Phill Niblock and Katherine Liberovskaya in New York in March 2006.

2. Transforming everyday life: analytical perspectives on experimental film soundtracks

John Richardson

My first encounter with Petri Kuljuntausta's music for film was at the 1997 debut screening of *The Blow* at the Lyhyt Kevät (Short Spring) festival on short films in Helsinki. Invited by Petri, I joined a hall full of enthusiasts in the aptly named Bio Illusion cinema to immerse myself in the unique pleasures of his and director Sami van Ingen's narratively oblique yet strangely evocative audiovisual meditations. *The Blow* and another film, *Texas Scramble,* were later broadcast on national television in Finland, not long after which I invited Kuljuntausta to speak in a lecture series on film music I was organising at the time at the University of Jyväskylä. This lecture

would become the template for the first section of this article. How the filmmakers approached audiovisual relations in these films diverged significantly from other films in the series, with the possible exception of the Reggio/Glass "qatsi" films (*Koyaanisqatsi* 1982; *Powaqqatsi* 1987; *and Naqoyqatsi* 2002).[2] Not represented, but an equally valid point of reference, is Brian Eno's music for film, the gently unfolding, dream-like quality of which has much in common with Kuljuntausta's approach.[3] Cinematically, the emphasis on visually unfolding processes and phenomena occurring at the boundaries of perception is most firmly rooted in the experimental filmic tradition, as represented by avant-garde avatars like Stan Brakhage, whose collaborative work with musicians like Jim Tenney (*Interim* 1953) and John Cage (*In Between* 1955) served as a model for at least two generation of filmmakers working in the experimental sphere.[4] The Structural school of filmmaking, mentioned in Petri's initial section of this essay, is a further reference point, although the way the films discussed here straddle an engagement with "subject matter" and abstraction sets them apart from this cinematic lineage. In the context of the lecture series, the van Ingen/Kuljuntausta films undoubtedly represent a very different audiovisual world to that of mainstream cinema; and this difference evinced a wide range of student responses, from enthusiasm to bafflement.

The release of *The Blow*, *Texas Scramble*, and a third film, *Days*, on the *Three Films* DVD, is one example of how experimental filmmakers are finding new ways of reaching audiences, beyond those traditionally available to artists working in the avant-garde (another is the internet). What impact these expanded

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[2] The aesthetics of Philip Glass's music for the operatic stage is discussed at length in Richardson 1999.

[3] Particularly Eno's early films scores, such as those found on the album *Music for Films* (1978, E.G. Records) and in the film *Sebastiane* (dir., Paul Humfress & Derek Jarman, 1976). For more on Eno, see Hamm (1989).

[4] For a brief but illuminating discussion of experimental film soundtracks, see Lack 1997, 232-239.

performance contexts will have on patterns of consumption and changing tastes remains to be seen. But it might be expected that incursions into new media and channels of distribution will open up the artform to a broader audience base than it had previously enjoyed. A percentage of those who "stumble across" experimental films as a result of this new exposure will undoubtedly be surprised to find that it is not as strange as they had presumed; this is a form which in its avoidance of conventional points of temporal reference is arguably very much of its time.[5]

Theorising experimental film

In this section I will attempt to piece together a theoretical foundation for the study of experimental films that will be tested in a brief analytical consideration of the three films included on the DVD. Readers may wish to compare these analyses with personal impressions of the films, with a view to gauging the extent to which it is desirable to seek consensus when it comes to avant-garde forms, whose *raison d'être* is often to sidestep conventional modes of expression and thereby to encourage a broader range of experiences. Despite this inbuilt flexibility in reception, Peterson (1996, 117) has made the plausible point that when it comes to avant-garde film, a greater uniformity of response can be expected than in relation to mainstream genres due to high levels of interpretative competence among audiences. "The avant garde", he writes,

> expects viewers to be familiar with current issues and ideas, and takes steps to promulgate these issues and ideas to them. Journal essays, university courses, program notes and the filmmaker's pre- and

[5] I refer here to writers who have noted a tendency in recent music away from teleological and linear ways of structuring musical time, towards cyclical, iterative, and transformative patterning (e.g., Kramer 1988; McClary 1991).

> post-screening presentations all ensure that a common fund of specialized knowledge circulates among the avant-garde's critics and its normal viewers alike. So, while it is fair to say that the avant-garde film supports a much broader range of experience than most kinds of cinema, the avant-garde's own discourse suggests strong regularities in the range of experiences supported by the avant-garde cinema … (Ibid.)

The present writing can easily be seen as complicit in this process of priming audiences for reception, although it has to be noted that when it comes to *audio*-visual analysis, very little academic writing has been forthcoming, a point that is compellingly made by Kassabian in her essay in this volume. It is true that the didactic aspect of academic writing could be understood in Benjaminian terms as part of a project to transform audiences into critics (e.g., Benjamin 1968, 228) – more discerning consumers whose comprehension of film is infused with reflexive consciousness. The revolutionary implications of such critical practices are limited, however, due to the low levels of avant-garde competence among mainstream audiences, a situation that is unlikely to change dramatically as long as avant-garde practitioners conceive of what they do in oppositional terms (which the term avant-garde *by definition* implies). Without falling into the trap of a species of fatalism that some critics have associated with poststructuralist writing on power relations, it could be argued that avant-garde opposition on some level affirms the very practices it subverts.[6] Indeed, some writers have argued that the avant-garde is destined to remain a critical force predominantly at the margins—whether this is for purely conventional reasons compounded by certain artists' separatist inclinations (cf., McClary 1989) or because of the perceptual demands such forms make on audiences (cf., Carroll 1988).

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[6] I refer here to criticism of the writing of Derrida and Foucault, particularly arguments that see power relations between ostensibly opposing forces as complexly and paradoxically interdependent. Countering charges of fatalism, Hoy (2004) argues that critical resistance is still possible even in light of the apparently ubiquitous ideological positioning and counter-positioning that has been charted in poststructuralist writing.

Viewed reductively, such observations might seem to encourage a degree of scepticism towards artistic experimentalism. They might, if recent years had not witnessed a breaking down of the boundaries between avant-garde and commercial forms, with avant-garde values "trickling down" into the mainstream and artists at both ends of the commercial/experimental divide "crossing over" into the other's territory with ever greater frequency. A part of this is the permeation of a self-consciously arthouse or "indie" aesthetic into the domain of internationally distributed film and television, as evidenced in at least two of the essays in this collection (Davison and Välimäki), suggesting a bridging function between experimental and mainstream practices that may facilitate nomadic affiliations; and consequently a broader base of audience competency than has been the case in the past. This would seem to borne out by examining recent mainstream cinema, where a tendency in certain genres towards iterative musical practices and an emphasis on sound *per se* over traditional narrative underscoring has been noted (e.g., Lack 1997; Kassabian 2003; Donnelly 2005, 2), a phenomenon that has been presaged in several decades or experimental and arthouse film production.

Despite the scepticism that has been expressed in recent years towards "film theory"—which snowballed following provocative interventions by Bordwell, Carroll and others' (e.g., Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson 1985; Bordwell & Carroll 1996) —, it is contended that much would be lost were several decades of research in areas such as psychoanalytical theory, feminism, critical theory and theories of spectatorship *not* brought to bear on the materials of this kind. Here it is easy to concur with Koivunen (2004), who notes an uncanny resemblance between the Bordwellian school of neoformalist film theory—comprising methods from analytical philosophy, cognitive psychology, style analysis, film historiography, and "empirical history"—and the studies that are the object of their criticism. These two poles are united, she argues, by an emphasis on the

analysis of filmic *texts* and by a conspicuous neglect of context (ibid., 238-239).[7] Bordwell's disdain for interpretation and what he calls Grand Theory is brought into sharper relief when one considers the practices he holds to be exemplary of the "new" methodological regime, one of which is (presumably pre-1990s) musicology, which according to this writer "developed [a] rich research tradition […] before Grand Theory intervened" (Bordwell 1996, 29). This may be true, yet this was a discipline whose formalist bias largely precluded serious consideration of multimedia forms and which was characterised by an almost total absence of critical reflection on a wide range of issues, including feminism. Without contesting the Bordwellian point regarding the need for further historical and empirical research, a view of the field of film (music) studies that takes no account of the everyday personal, cultural, institutional, and political realities of filmmakers and their audiences, and which bypasses altogether research done under the "cultural" banner, is at best incomplete and at worst negligent. Moreover, a truly historical view of any subject requires cognisance on the part of the researcher of the extent to which preconceptions ("top-down" ideas) come into play when formulating hypotheses concerning historical knowledge; these preconceptions are *theories*, which are tested in research and revised as necessary (cf. Koivunen 2004, 236-237).

One discursive aspect that is particularly pertinent in discussions of experimental genres is the intersection of economic factors with the labour and artistry of filmmaking, which over the years has impacted directly and indirectly on aesthetic questions. Whether by design or necessity, experimental filmmakers propound a lo-fi aesthetic that is intended by producers and widely understood by audiences to stand in opposition to practices in mainstream commercial film. This is explicitly commented on in Kuljuntausta's preceding essay, a point of view that is by no means untypical. Techniques that foreground the agency of filmmakers and the material

[7] See also Davison 2004, 19.

actuality of the filmic media—including such radical techniques as scratching directly into the film stock to produce an image, or smearing grease onto the lens of a camera (a technique employed by van Ingen in *Texas Scramble*; see Kuljuntausta's essay)—in this way serve as markers of resistance, in contrast to mainstream techniques in which traces of mediation are routinely effaced. In this and other more direct ways, experimental film has, since its initial proliferation in the 50s and 60s, articulated an obvious political subtext; so much so that Adorno and Eisler's (1994 [1947]) impassioned treatise against Hollywood practices of standardisation in filmmaking, as propagated by a pernicious "culture industry", can be recognised as prefiguring the sentiments of many a cinematic experimentalist. [8]

A key mode of artistic intervention championed by these writers, as well as numerous other theorists and practitioners, including Eisenstein, Cocteau, and Godard, converges on the question of audiovisual synchronism. Some degree of fuzziness has plagued academic discussions of synchronisation, much of the confusion stemming from uncertainty as to whether one is discussing purely temporal phenomena that are asynchronous or addressing a situation where conflicting registers of mood or meaning imply a kind of emotional counterpoint.[9] Adorno and Eisler were among the first to speak of a causal relationship between the

[8] Adorno and Eisler's scathing indictment of conventional Hollywood practices employs the headings leitmotif, melody and euphony, unobtrusiveness, visual justification, illustration, and geography and history, stock music, clichés, and standardized interpretation. Readers looking for more detailed critical appraisal of this work should consult Gorbman 1987, 99-109; Flinn 1992, 70-90; Davison 2004, 23-28, and others.

[9] This fuzziness is evident in many of the more influential theories on audiovisual counterpoint, but it is passed down with the least resistance in the accounts of those with little musical training approaching the issue from the standpoint of visual culture (e.g., Nasta 1991, 43-107).

two, arguing that conventional filmic technique favours a confluence between media wherein the intrinsic "rhythms" of the visuals—both of the filmed world and transitions between shots and scenes—are mimicked either slavishly or complemented by the music in a simplistic and redundant manner: "[as] long … as one remains at the level of generalities about 'rhythm'", they write, "and looks for an accord of the two structures, the actual result is likely to be an affinity of moods—in other words, something suspiciously trite that contradicts the very principle of adequacy to the motion picture in the name of which that 'rhythm' or 'higher movement' is invoked" (ibid., 69). The solution for these writers inhered in the Eisensteinian concept of "montage". Exactly what Adorno and Eisler mean in their use of this concept is unclear, but it seems that some notion of alienation is implied in a Brechtian sense, according to which the points of entry and exit for music and visual media should not coincide precisely, and a general antithetical relation between the media that is productive rather than redundant should obtain. Invoking both Eisenstein and Brecht, the following passage makes explicit the sociological rationale for an aesthetics of audiovisual divergence in contrast to the prevailing taste for convergence: "[t]he alienation of the media from each other reflects a society alienated from itself, men whose functions are severed from each other even within each individual. Therefore the aesthetic divergence of the media is potentially a legitimate means of expression, not merely a regrettable deficiency that has to be concealed as well as possible" (ibid., 74).

Adorno in particular is commonly cited as championing the music of European modernist composers to the exclusion of more euphonous styles. In his writing on film with Eisler, however, for whom communicability in musical expression was paramount, this is only part of story. It is true that Adorno saw the music of Shönberg, Bartòk, and Stravinsky as exemplifying progressive approaches to film composition in the 40s (ibid., 32); that he regarded Eisler, for a while, as the inheritor of the Shönbergian mantle (ibid., xxvii); that both authors

include euphony in film music as one of the bad habits proliferating among film music composers at the time (ibid., 6-9). And yet, dramaturgical considerations take priority in Adorno and Eisler's considerations of film, with no dogmatic affiliation to any specific musical style being in evidence. In audiovisual contexts dissonance between media took precedence over purely musical dissonance: "[a] piece full of dissonances can be fundamentally conventional", they write,

> while one based on comparatively simpler material can be absolutely novel if these resources are used according the constructive requirements of the piece instead of the institutionalized flow of musical language. Even a sequence of triads can be unusual and striking when it does not follows the accustomed rut and is conceived only with regard to its specific meaning. (Ibid., 33.)

In light of the taste for the unexpected expressed above and elsewhere, it is surprising that these writers resist the idea of "accidental synchronisation", championed in early experimental cinema by Jean Cocteau, as representing a "synaesthesic" sensibility in which the qualities of one media are arbitrarily transferred to the other, resulting in "the magic of moods', semi-darkness, and intoxication" (ibid., 72).[10] Their distrust of this mode of production avails itself of the Benjaminian concept of "aura", "degenerated" in this case by cinematic expression in which "the spell of the here and now is technically manipulated" (ibid.). Again, what this means is not spelled out, although one could take it as implying scepticism towards the mystical sense of convergence (after Jung, "synchronicity") that can result from arbitrary combinations of audiovisual materials – an aspect that was knowingly played up in the mythological subject matter and Cimmerian atmosphere of Cocteau's

[10] Adorno's use of the term synaesthesia has little to do with strict definitions of the term. For a consideration of the phenomenon of synaesthesia from historical and analytical perspectives, see Cook 1998, 24-56.

films. Technological manipulation was certainly a part of this, bringing about an upended version of "everyday" temporal causality that could be understood as "mythical".[11] The aesthetic view espoused in *Composing for the Films* demanded an approach in which the creative agency of the filmmakers, and the rational, stable subjectivity this implies, was not downplayed—for Adorno and Eisler, mystified—in this way. This is consistent with other aspects of Adornian thought: notably, when it came to aleatory or "chance" music, he could not countenance a style whose "material laws … seem to preclude the subjective intervention of the composer" (Adorno 1992 [1963], 268). Experimental filmmakers' interest in stochastic procedures is arguably, therefore, where they part company most resolutely with the Adornian vision of the avant-garde.

While Adorno and Eisler's writing on Hollywood film seems to prefigure some of the modes of resistance afforded by video art soundtracks, Chion (1990) offers some of the keenest insights into their audiovisual workings. Features distinctive to video art include an engagement with changing speeds and stop-action (the former is a central concern in the materials discussed here); a greater speed and lability of camera movement in contrast to mainstream cinema, where most of the movement is concentrated within the frame; the confrontation of different expressive forms, including dance and written language (both *The Blow* and *Texas Scramble* contain written texts); a concentration on the textures and rhythms of the moving image, which imparts to it a communicative volubility that largely supplants the need for dialogue and other conventional narrative cues, including musical ones; the foregrounding of rhetorical techniques, such as focus, as expressive means in themselves as well as in relation to other audiovisual elements (a technique employed frequently by van Ingen); and a flexible conception of "frame", in which what is depicted in the video is recognised as being

[11] For a discussion of accidental and loose synchronisation in Philip Glass's operatic reworking of Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* and the internet phenomenon of "synchronicity", see Richardson 2007.

only a partial representation of the depicted reality. The indeterminate status of the last of these categories extends to performances (screenings) of video art, some of which take place in lighted venues such as art galleries (in contrast to the darkness of the cinema auditorium), employ multiple screens, or are conceived as one expressive element in a larger installation or performance. (Ibid., 161-165.) All of these elements destabilise convention oppositions between "art" and "life", as well as problematising the ideology of aesthetic autonomy in art.

Chion expresses some disquiet as to the status of sound within this artform, noting that "video makers often don't know what to do with sound, aside from providing a neutral background of music or a voice" (ibid.,163). He attributes this neutrality to the inherent "musicality" of the images, in which "everything involving sound in film—the smallest vibrations, fluidity, perpetual mobility—is already located in the video image" (ibid.). Notwithstanding these reservations, it is clear that the open nature of creative activity in video art has brought about a situation in which preconceptions when it comes to audiovisual relations exert little less influence over filmmaking practices than in mainstream forms. Different video artists, sound designers and composers have come to grips with the challenges of this artform in different ways. Kassabian's essay in this volume charts a range of approaches that have been taken by Armenian homeland and diasporic artists. In the remainder of this essay, I will critically appraise van Ingen and Kuljuntausta's responses to the challenges of this artform in the films that comprise the *Three Films* DVD, as well as their implicit challenge to those who approach audiovisual materials less reflexively.

The Blow

The indistinct timbres and forms of the opening section loosely parallel forms found in the cinematography.

Here Kuljuntausta's pensive and slowly changing textures provide an apt sonic backdrop to the visuals, which take as their subject matter an evocative sepia-toned photograph. No contextual information is provided on the photo, but the combination of music and visuals serves to invest this artefact with imagined significance. In his influential The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, Benjamin comments on the emotional pull of photographic portraits thus: "the cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty." (Benjamin 1968, 226.) Barthes shares these sentiments attributing the unique power of photographic images, especially those of the dead, to their ability to signify presence at the same time as they encapsulate absence (Barthes 1993, 96; 106).[12] Here it is the material particularity of the images that tugs at the viewer affectively, what Barthes would call their *punctum*, as the camera pans along a row of shoes before resting on a blurry and faded line-up of faces (Figures 4 and 5). Among the faces is van Ingen's grandfather, a fur trader in colonial India; an occupation that becomes a central motif of the film as the changing attitudes of generations become etched onto the filmstock in images that accentuate the irrevocable passage of time, infused with an undercurrent of loss that is reinforced in the amorphous, brooding tones of the music.

<insert figures 4 and 5 here>

Figures 4 and 5. Images of a photograph in *The Blow*. Note the attention to detail in the shots of shoes in figure 4, and the reflection in figure 5. At the end of the scene, attention is focused *literally* on the face of this man.

[12] Barthes' ideas on photography and melancholia are elucidated in some detail in my discussion of Maija Vilkkumaa's music video 'Kesä' in another essay in this anthology.

An abrupt transition takes place in the music and the visuals: in the section which follows and much of the subsequent action, the music "temporalizes" the images and vice versa. This term, coined by composer and film theorist Michel Chion, describes processes whereby the simultaneous presentation of conflicting media results in a sort of temporal overlap in which the qualities of one medium are projected onto the other (Chion 1994, 13-16). In this case the image is already endowed with well-defined temporal animation: as the rungs of a ladder pass before the viewer's eye, so the addition of strident rhythmic patterning in a musical timbre that is both regular and rich in high frequencies brings about a potent sense of rhythmic convergence that cannot fail to capture the spectator's attention (see Table 1). This is one of the "points of attachment" Kuljuntausta mentions in the first section of this essay; in fact it was the first music composed for the film, which explains its prominence.

Chion elaborates on the consequences of temporal coincidence with the help of the neologism *synchresis*: a compound of *synchronism* and *synthesis*. This concept accounts for the psychological processes that permit even the most unlikely sounds and images to be combined in audiovisual coagulations that seem natural. Thus, a gunshot or the sound of a fist striking a face can be associated with an infinite variety of sounds, none of which might have anything to do with authentic sound production. Yet, there is a tendency for the listener to accept the perceived sounds unquestioningly. (Ibid., 63-65.) Despite its gestaltist basis, Chion notes that "[t]he effect of synchresis is obviously capable of being influenced, reinforced and oriented by cultural habits" (ibid., 64), a fact that is particularly striking when one considers the soundtracks to Japanese martial arts movies, whose acceptability is largely contingent on familiarity with the genre and the cultural assumptions that go along with it. Rhythm plays a significant role in determining whether synchretic combinations will "work" or not.

Sufficient accuracy and number of synch points will go a long way towards ensuring some degree of sensory transferral between media. As Chion comments: “certain experimental videos and films demonstrate that synchresis can even work out of thin air—that is, with images and sounds that strictly speaking have nothing to do with each other, forming monstrous yet inevitable and irresistible agglomerations in our perception. The syllable *fa* is heard over the a shot of a dog, the sound of a blow with the sight of a triangle.” (Ibid., 63.)

In this instance, synchronisation is relatively loose. Appearances and disappearances of rungs on a bamboo ladder coincide on numerous occasions with the rotation of musical cells. More importantly, when they do not, the tension between the two media is tangible. A dialectic of temporal convergence thus becomes integral to the viewer/listener’s engagement, his or her tracking of instances when the film *yields to* and when it *resists* the soundtrack extending beyond the strictly iconic. Namely, a dichotomy of “organic” versus “synthetic” is also engendered by this convergence of media, with the qualities of each to some extent spilling over onto the other. Thus, the bamboo ladder takes on some of the synthetic qualities of soundtrack. In particular the initial “metallic” attacks of notes in the soundtrack’s ostinato patterning seem to transform the qualities of the depicted materials, rendering them harder, less compliant, insofar as they are likely to be perceived synaesthesically as physical “strikes” against the ladder’s rungs. Conversely, it is possible to project the organic qualities of the images onto the music by positing an acoustic instrument as the sound source (although it has synthetic qualities, the sound is timbrally close to that of an ud). Finally, the connotations carried by such (organically produced) acoustic instruments suggest “Asian” and “archaic” qualities, in contrast to the prevailing ethos of the music, which is “contemporary”, even “futuristic”. On both auditory and visual planes, therefore, a dichotomy is established early on between rival temporal and geopolitical realities, modern/archaic, post-industrial/agrarian, European/Asian, colonial/colonised, which to the extent that the perceiver is complicit

in the process of (re-)constructing meaning, feeds into his or her understanding of the film and the issues raised by it.

The passage that follows is a clear example of temporalization, as the sound and image tracks part company temporally and the pace and excitement of the music become the primary factor establishing the film's tempo. In this context the music animates the images, which move slowly and are semi-focused. This relationship of occasional audiovisual convergence interpolated with extended periods of divergence, or counterpoint, characterizes much of Kuljuntausta and van Ingen's collaborative work, and speaks to a sense of synchronisation that takes its inspiration from everyday life. The closest parallel is the transformation of everyday life brought about by the use of portable music players, such as the Sony Walkman and the iPod. Users of these devices commonly report a heightened sense of aesthetic awareness brought about by the superimposition of musical structures and meanings onto lived experience.[13] Recent writing has further noted that an aleatory sensibility characterises audiovisual relations in a wide range of present-day audiovisual contexts (e.g., Kassabian 2001, 80; Richardson 2007).

[13] For a discussion of this phenomenon, see the chapter "Filmic cities and lived aesthetic experience" in Bull 2000, 85-96. Bull ultimately takes a pessimistic position on the use of portable music players, arguing that they constitute an escapist denial of the contingency of everyday experience (ibid., 171-183). An audiovisual perspective on the issue opens up other possibilities, however, in which the external world is seen as not so much denied as consciously transformed by users. For more on the aesthetics and politics of everyday life, see DeNora 2000 and Light and Smith 2005. Further commentary on aleatory aesthetics in relation to Apples iPod shuffle can be found in Richardson 2006b.

Nowhere is this sensibility more apparent than in the opening moments of *The Blow's* third section, where musical and visual structures do not coincide exactly. Following an abrupt cessation of the previous section, marked visually by a fade to black, the initial moments of this section are presented in complete (diegetic and non-diegetic) silence. The camera follows the movements of a small red beetle over uneven ground. Provocatively, no attempt is made to conceal the camera operator's shadow in this shot or in subsequent shots that feature an extreme close up of a human eye. The visual material here is characterised by a considerable amount of surface level movement, what Chion (1994, 16) calls visual microrhythms, as the insect's legs move in agitated step and its antennae restlessly scan the terrain. This would seem to call for some form of auditory commentary, but none is provided. Only gradually is a muffled sonic wash introduced, which reaches its highest level of intensity towards the end of the section. Discussed by Kuljuntausta in the previous essay, the music of this section is not, in fact, static since there is a considerable amount of rhythmic/melodic activity going on under the surface, as it were; the choice of sound masks the initial attack of the sound, however, is such a way that a general pulsional quality takes the place of rhythmic kinesis.

<insert figure 6 here>

Figure 6. Extreme close up of a human eye in *The Blow.*

A fourth section is reminiscent of early minimalism (Glass and Reich) and derivative music (e.g., Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*). Through a gradual accretion and occasional secretion of materials—starting with gently shifting textures, becoming more rhythmically involved with the addition of rapid-fire flute-like arpeggio figurations—a crescendo is brought about that ends abruptly as it reaches its zenith. A blurry montage of

fleeting indeterminate forms accompanies the opening moments of this section, but the dramatic impetus of the music is paralleled only intermittently in moving images in the remainder of the section. At about its mid-point, there is a significant audiovisual convergence, in which the microrhythms of the camera's horizontal movement across the diamonds of chain-link fence provide one rhythmic stratum, against which the music provides a kind of polyrhythm, occasionally falling into line with the rhythms of the cinematography before pulling away. This ebb and flow of complementary and contradictory rhythms is once again the *modus operandi* of the film. This could be compared to the experience of sitting in a train that is departing from a station at the same time as another train is leaving from an adjacent platform. Both have their own momentum and neither is related to the everyday temporality of the surrounding environment. A similar sense of disorientation results in both instances. Sound and vision converge one last time in the film's final moments, where a creeping upward tilt from the trunk of a tree to its outermost branches is paralleled musically by a sizeable accumulation of instrumental intensity. Before long, both media drop out abruptly, leaving only darkness and the alienated sound of a binary electronic bleep. Evocative of the monitoring devices in hospitals, it is on this melancholy note that the film finishes, much as it had started, with an irrevocable yet not fully comprehensible sense of loss.

Kuljuntausta's use of a limited palette of sonic materials in this soundtrack warrants further commentary. That the entire composition was produced using a vintage Kurzweil K2000 syntheziser is difficult to guess solely on the basis of the sounds. The repetitive drone and accompanying ostinato figure from the second section sound as if they could have been produced using a combination of samples from non-European string instruments, like the ud, and a heavily processed electric guitar. Kuljuntausta's background as a jazz guitarist could well have been a factor in the handling of materials here. The synthesizer "washes" in sections one and three are idiomatic of electronic genres, with attention to subtle timbral transformations superseding large-scale narrative

configurations.[14] The music in these sections invokes a spatial landscape that is expansive, even panoramic in design, in contrast to the iterative rhythms of sections two and four, which connote a sense of spatial proximity and kinetic force.[15] This in turn makes the images feel more immediate, more substantial, and imparts to them a sense of gravitas (literally, the *weight* of corporeal apprehension) that would be missing in the absence of such an audiovisual contract. The almost orchestral build up of musical materials in the final section brings this home quite directly, although the operative word here is *almost*. The accretion of musical texture negotiated here invokes procedures from 1970s and 80s post-minimalism (Adams, Glass, Reich, Nyman) more than it does the core orchestral repertoire spanning classicism to high modernist serialism. The nature of the build-up is that of an inexorable, mechanically implemented additive process, driven along by the engine of a telegraphic monotone pulse. This complements the paired down, low-fi aesthetic implied by the synthetic sound palette utilized throughout the film, which rather than sounding "organic", as might be the case in the expansive washes of the "slower" sections, unfailingly draws attention to its own artifice in its (unfaithful) reproduction of traditional acoustical forces. This could be understood as articulating parodic distance, just as the ubiquitous "subjective camera" of the experimental filmmaker—invariably hand-held and therefore human, contingent, fallible, and unmistakably the property of an identifiable *auteur* subject (rather than being transcendent)—intervenes in the communicative exchange, thereby deflecting attention away from an all-encompassing sense of the epic. Employing what Tagg calls "hypothetical substitution" (2000, 85-86), it is worth considering how this final section would be different affectively were the *ciné-vérité*-like camerawork to be replaced by slick Hollywood production values, or even the reflective grandeur of a director like Reggio; or were the electronic tones of the synthesizer to be replaced in this final section by a majestic orchestral rendition

[14] On the perception of electronic "microsounds", see Roads 2001.

[15] On the implied spatial qualities of music, see Chion 1994, 69-71, and Smalley 1997, 122-124.

of “the same music”.

Texas Scramble

Texas Scramble starts with a low drone reminiscent of a didgeridoo accompanied by indecipherable light effects. As in the previously film, the influence of non-European syles is suggestive rather than direct. From these abstract beginnings the concept of the film emerges. A quote from the Buddhist Dhammapada tells the viewer that the film is concerned with how memories condition present and future actions. If the visuals are a study on memory—through the use of repeated materials—and of light—through the use of dramatic contrasts and overexposure—much of the music is a study on tone quality and the relation between silence (never absolute) and sound. The music is unobtrusive throughout, timbre invariably playing a more prominent role than other musical parameters such as rhythm or melody. In this respect the music is typical of the electroacoustic tradition, although its restrained, gradually unfolding nature brings to mind a lineage that includes Cage and Eno.

A sense of the uncanny is brought about when lighting effects from the opening passages coalesce around shots of a fairground on a bright sunlit day. The power of the juxtaposition is largely contextual; we know what a fairground is supposed to sound like and it has nothing to with these brooding electronic tones. In fact, the music only begins to “make sense” as the picture cuts to shots of a small gothic castle, filmed in black and white. Here there is audiovisual congruence, the music’s overtone-rich oscillations offering a convincing auditory commentary on a visual play of light and shade that was filmed under an overcast sky in ominous surroundings. This sequence undoubtedly casts a shadow retrospectively over that which preceded it, which the music helps to draw the viewer’s attention to.

<insert Figure 7 here>

Figure 7. Close up of gothic castle in *Texas Scramble*.

In another unexpected transition, the music fades to silence as the picture cuts to shots of a verdant golf course. The soundtrack here is an admixture of diegetic sounds and verbal commentary, but the sounds do not belong to the images. They are taken from a television broadcast of a golf competition, evidently of US American origin. A character in the film (presumably, its director, Sami van Ingen) plays golf, but he does not appear to be competing and the way the shots are filmed is far from conventional with a predominance of extreme close ups and subjective-angle shots (such as the putter looking down the hole at the putted ball). All of this imparts to the scene a subtle ironic edge. This scene invokes the title, *Texas Scramble*, which denotes a popular golf game that can be played in teams, but this allusion is loose and indeterminate. The words are evocative *as words* more than anything else, just as those that are represented visually in a number of short sequences interpolated between this film's sections, resonate in a way that is suggestive rather than semantically determinate. This is true of the text "spontaneous process", which flashes briefly across the screen and could be understood either as a philosophical precept or a description of how the film was made. Processes and the indeterminate end-results they occasion, be they filmic or musical, seem to be a large part of what the film is "about", both in terms of compositional technique and "subject matter". Much of this is encapsulated in images whose shimmering microvisual and microsonic surface textures (grass blowing in the wind, water rippling on the surface of a canal, waves breaking on a beach) have to them a kinetic attraction that draws the viewer/listener in, at the same time supplanting the need for explicit narrative content.

Particularly imposing are images of the castle, referred to above, and later, a church, which serve as *objets fixées*, static and unyielding amidst a flurry of outdoor activity. Similarly unyielding are shots of a grotesque parade of stuffed animals in a museum, which are made to seem all the more inert by the shots that precede them, which track the ecstatic slow-motion movement of a white dog (see Figure 1). These shots have a dream-like quality due to the blurring of the visual field presumably caused by van Ingen rubbing grease onto the camera's lens; this emphasises the distinction between these shots and those that follow, which are clearer in quality. Here it is tempting to look for a biographical subtext relating to director van Ingen's personal history. More than eschatological musings, this juxtaposition reads as a veiled critique of his grandfather's legacy: specifically, his trading in tiger hides, which furnish museums around the world (see Kuljuntausta's essay). On more than one level, the film unfolds as a process of self-discovery, employing such familiar metaphors as a compass and passage through the hedged paths of a labyrinth. In this treatment, however, even a game of golf becomes a pretext for self-discovery, as the filmmaker unpacks his past for public consumption in an engagement with the unravelling present that nevertheless keeps the spectator/auditor guessing.

In keeping with the extracts of Buddhist text with which it is interspersed, much of the film could be thought of as a meditation on the transience of life, although some relief from the relentless arrow of time is offered by the cyclical motifs that permeate both the visuals and the music: on one occasion, the camera follows the line of a centre circle in a sports field, and there are several 360 degree whip pans, the last of which is negotiated with the help of a compass. Kuljuntausta's music similarly comes full circle, ending as it had begun with an evocative low synthesizer drone.

Throughout the film, there is no evidence of a compulsion on the part of the filmmakers to stuff the visual

package to the brim with sonic filling. Both music and diegetic sound come and go with apparent freedom and the former is in no obvious or consistent way bound to the transitions between shots or scenes. Both disarming and empowering, the film thus negotiates a path between aesthetics and everyday life that helps the spectator/listener to recognise the presence of the former in the latter.

Days

In *Days*, the rhythms and textures of organic life are juxtaposed with those of technology, the apparent conclusion being that the cost of human civilization to other life-forms has been unacceptably high. The film opens with an accelerated montage of media images, which resembles in its media-critical tenor similar sequences in the Glass/Reggio "qatsi" trilogy, or the multiple television scenes in Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976). Is this Baudrillard's "ecstasy of communication", an exuberant phatic buzz of information that infuses all aspects of contemporary life, whether we like it or not, and that masks the absence of epistemological depth? Or is it as Virilio would contend more of a substitution that a simulation, in which an enticing array of delusional pastimes diverts the alienated hypermodern subject away from the requisite salutary contacts with Objective Reality? (Qtd in Armitage 2000, 43; Virilio 1991 [1980].) Before jumping to premature conclusions, it is worth taking a closer look at the cinematography. A central technique is the use of extreme slow motion shots, which serve to detach images from their temporal imperative. Meanings conventionally attached to movement in "everyday time" are here replaced by more granular textures produced by slowing the visual sequence to such an extent that jumps between the frames become visible. This imposes its own rhythm on the film, producing a steady visual microrhythm, "a quasi-physiological pulse" (see Cubitt 2000, 189), that paradoxically imputes a stronger sense of movement in time than when the film is played back in "real time"—even a sense of *acceleration*. The same is arguably true of the handling of sonic materials,

where sampling and time-stretching techniques bring into the realm of the audible microrythmic patterns that are not perceptible in real time. This could be thought of as inducing a kind of technological "alienation effect", in which "accelerated" contemporary time is measured out and put under the microscope for the viewer's contemplation. If one further pursues the line of inquiry advanced by Virilio, this might lead to an enhanced awareness of the visual trickery employed in all photomechanical media (see Virilio 1991; Cubitt 2000, 189—recall the Bio Illusion cinema from the beginning of the essay); which could encourage critical reflection.

<insert examples 8 and 9 here>

Examples 8 and 9. Television in the opening moments of *Days*; chain link fence in *Days*, behind which the blurred image of a tiger can be perceived.

Looked at differently, however, both pictures and sound partake of a sensibility that is meditative more than it is contemplative; joyful more than judicious. Moreover, there is evidence of pleasure taken in the use of low-fi recording and instrumental media, and the microsonic and -visual textures produced with them, that belies any pessimistic agenda suggested by Marxist readings —particularly when it comes to technology. Caught up in an intoxicating swirl of light and sounds, arguably what grips the perceiver's attention most firmly is the challenge of solving the mystery of an unfolding present in which indeterminate drifting patterns are gradually transformed [16] into recognisable forms (along with their personal and conventional associations[17]). This perceptual guessing

[16] For more on the concept of transformations, see Smalley 1993. A convincing consideration of transformations in Kaija Saariaho's music is found in Sivuoja-Gunaratnam 2005, 212-215.

[17] In this respect, the kind of apprehension I am suggesting goes beyond the Shaefferian concept of reduced listening (*écuite réduite*) (e.g., Chion 29-33; Smalley 111), which is ardently prescriptive in its rejection of

game is arguably at least as significant, for composers and audiences alike, as the more reflective levels of meaning discussed above, *but it does not preclude these*. Once again it possible to identify a parallel phenomenon in electronic music, where the use of concrete, acoustical or electronic sounds encourages active strategies on the part of listeners, whose predilection is to relate initially abstract and unidentifiable sounds to real or imaginary sources. Smalley refers to this game of perceptual catch as "source bonding" (1997, 110), and it is of special relevance when it comes to listening to music of this ilk, where samples gleaned from concrete sounds and the sounds of acoustic instruments have been manipulated electronically (see Kuljuntausta's essay). Thus, on both auditory and ocular levels, the viewer/listener is invited to participate in bout of "bonding play" (ibid.), which allows the "real world" to be seen and heard with fresher eyes and ears – not naively or reductively, but undoubtedly from a different angle. This, too, is a form of distancing, or alienation, but not distancing from an Other, as the classic Marxist argument would have it.

Days represents the most eclectic sonic conception so far, combining elements of electronic composition with more familiar tonal materials. The dominant idiom here is postminimalist, although the treatment of materials owes more to electronic music—both that heard on dance floors and taught in university music departments. The faster pace and rhythmic regularity of most of this music resembles the final section of *The Blow* and with similar audiovisual consequences, thus providing a satisfying sense of continuity between the three films. Audiovisual relations are loose, once again, but both the music and the visuals serve the principal subject of the

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discursive or "casual" listening strategies. For similar reasons, I would embrace the notion of "technological listening", which Smalley (1997, 108-109) dismisses because it distracts attention away from "the music itself". I would add the caveat, however, that reduced listening has a significant role to play in analytical and compositional practices.

film, which would seem to be about a course of actions (a process) that once initiated is difficult to stop. Technology is without question implicated in this process, although (in the film, unseen) human agents are undoubtedly responsible for bringing about this less than satisfactory state of affairs. Characteristically, no easy solution is offered to this problem.

The conclusions of this essay are likewise open-ended. Experimental films do seem to conform to a politics of alienation resembling that outlined by Adorno and Eisler in *Music for the Films* and endorsed over the years in various guises by a distinguished line of theorists and filmmakers. A sense of audiovisual detachment does characterise these films, which could be understood as homologous with "alienated" relations between production and consumption in a wide range of everyday contemporary activities. The very presence of an acousmatic soundtrack that "substitutes" for its (inaudible) diegetic double, brings home this aspect of audiovisual "distancing" most directly. Furthermore, even when diegetic sound is introduced, as it is in *Texas Scramble*, it is just as likely to be an ironic commentary on everyday reality as its faithful representation. It would be a mistake, though, to attempt to pin down the audiovisual strategies in these films to a rigid Marxist agenda. Returning to the question of "subject matter", environmentalism and media-scepticism are just two aspects of these films that sit comfortably with an Enlightenment agenda and which seems to articulate an aesthetics of resistance. On another level, however, a sense of *ritual* is imputed that is located in the repetition and transformation of everyday practices. This is manifested both in the actions of "actors", as in the softening of the leopard hides by foot in *Days*, and those of the filmmakers themselves, whose invocation of the quasi-physiological pulse of the filmic media, and whose engagement with compositional processes that once initiated take on a life of their own, draw attention to the performative pleasures of creative activity. These pleasures are as much about the renunciation of the self as its dynamic assertion – a project Adorno, for one,

would not have accepted. More than anything the social nature of experimental films is inscribed in their mode of production, which points to an aesthetics of convergence *paired with divergence* that can be recognised as a form of dialogue. Depending on the backgrounds and interests of audiences, therefore, it is possible to understand the films, after Blacking (1973, 89), as a way of modelling "soundly organised humanity".

<insert table 1 here>

Table 1. "Point of attachment" or convergence at the beginning of section two, *The Blow*.

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bar 1 bar 2 bar 3 bar 4 bar 5 bar 6 bar 7 bar 8 bar 9 bar 10

Bamboo ladder appears with the start of section 2.
The music is based on an ostinato pattern in the compound time signature 5/4.

The appearance of each new rung coincides roughly with the downbeat of each bar of music.

Even when a second ladder appears on top of the first, the rate of appearance remains quite constant. The presence of two rungs at a time increases the chances of coincidence with the music and accentuates syncopations as well as the downbeat.

In bar 9, a third ladder appears stacked on top of the other two.

Spatial immediacy is suggested by the presence of an urgent rhythm that is rich in high frequencies. This contrasts markedly with the previous section, characterised by an amorphous wash of sound. Affectively, there is a transferral of qualities from one media to the other due to the tendency Chion calls synchresis*: thus, the "metallic" quality of the music is transferred to the images, making the ladder seem harder, less compliant. Conversely the sound absorbs some of the organic properties of the ladder, suggesting that it was produced using an ("organic") string instrument, such as the ud.*

bar 11 bar 12 bar 13 bar 14 bar 15 bar 16 bar 17 bar 18 bar 19 bar 20

The synchronisation now is not so precise but this matters less because with the presence of three ladders there are a greater number of potential synch points. And the fact that the time signature of the bass figuration is an angular 5/4 offers listeners more options for sub-dividing the meter. The texture of the music becomes denser with the addition of the third ladder, thus paralleling the visuals.

In bars 17 and 19, first one, then another ladder disappears from sight, now in closer synchronisation with the music, at the rate of approximately one rung per bar. The subtractive nature of the disappearance loosely parallels the music, where the addition and subtraction of textural layers, over an unchanging ostinato, is a key constructive principle.

bar 21 bar 22 bar 23 bar 24 bar 24 bar 26

The third ladder disappears rung by rung, in close synchronisation with music. A blurry upward swish brings into sight a sunlit open field. Here the pace of the visuals clearly diverges from the music, initially fast but then setting into a relaxed tempo as the camera operator walks slowly through wooded terrain and then an Indian village. Here the music *temporalizes* the imagery by projecting its own pace and sense of excitement onto the relatively static images.