

# **'Sound as inner movement in the transmission of experience in film: a phenomenological approach'**

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This doctoral dissertation on 'Sound as inner movement in the transmission of experience in film: a phenomenological approach', presents the research results about the singularity and defining characteristics of perceived sound in film and the way sound guides the viewer/listener in experiencing (and perceiving) a film. The director, through choices regarding sounds, regarding the nuances in the sounds and deciding on the auditory spaces, through the composition of sounds and the mixing, can transfer an experience and steer the way a film is perceived. The task of the viewer/listener is to fix his or her attention when confronted with a multitude of complex informations and to *constitute* sound as *intentional object*. The perception of a film is an active event in which each viewer/listener establishes his or her individual coherence.

The aim of this research was to provide a contribution to film theory and artistic film practice concerning aspects of the sound that do not lie at the very surface (i.e. being less than immediately obvious), but that are potentially determinative and motivating when perceiving a film in its totality. Many implicit dimensions of the (experience of) sound, thus not immediately capturing our attention, lack until now a detailed theoretical and conceptual study and analysis. Whoever has sat at the editing and mixing table at the final stage of a film, is, however, familiar with the implicit dimensions of the (experience) of sound. The slightest nuance – adding a sound or removing it – can have a huge impact on the film as a whole.

The *leitmotiv* of this research consists of three aspects: (1) the sensory perception of recorded sound and sound as energetic movement in relation to the images, (2) the *com-pository* nature of film in which sound takes up a specific position in relation to music-compositional ideas and (3) the perception of the viewer/listener which is correlated with the experience the director wishes to convey in the compositional aspects of the sound and the film.

The thesis of this research is introduced by means of the opening scene of *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé* (1956) by Robert Bresson and Bresson's ideas on film. Bresson's way of film-making does away with causal relations between the filmic elements; as such he introduces a new status of sound in film, sound being on a par with the images. Film for Bresson is *cinématographe* (the writing of movement), which enables him as director to convey in a nuanced way his inner involvement with what he shows in his films to the public. I have investigated this new status of sound in further depth through case analyses of sound in *Elephant* (1989) by Alan Clarke, *Gerry* (2001) by Gus Van Sant and *Three Monkeys* (2008) by Nuri Bilge Ceylan. A closer look at the theme has generated the insight that, as long as one takes the viewing as 'dominant perceptive attitude' as point of departure, the sound can be rendered the status of accessory to the image, as was elaborated by Michel Chion (1990, 2003). Due to this, however, sound remains subordinate to the image. Gilles Deleuze disconnects the evident link of image and sound in his film theory (1983, 1985) and introduces the concept of the *heautonomy* of sound and image. Deleuze puts an interspace in between viewing and listening, a space that is made into a unity by the viewer/listener in the act of perceiving. However, Deleuze does not explain how this unity actually comes about. This study provides an alternative and novel phenomenological approach of sound in film, an approach that ties in with the essay 'L'écoute filmique' (1999) by Véronique Campan.

A phenomenological study of the sound in film implies a study of auditory perception in and of film that is not necessarily object-directed. Sound can also be experienced or lived in a non-object-directed way.

The conceptual framework of this approach is Edmund Husserl's genetic phenomenology, as interpreted by Dan Zahavi (2003) and the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in which the resonant body takes up a central position. In Husserl's genetic phenomenology the emphasis is on the intentional act that is motivated by kinaesthetic experiences and which is not yet reflectively constituted in origin. A thematic experience will only happen under the condition that the kinaesthetic experience and inner time awareness have occurred. Following this view, it is possible to consider a pre-reflective, non-thematic awareness of sound. I am expanding on this through Merleau-Ponty's 'thinking in movement' which is a steppingstone towards a conceptual thinking and which continues to co-exist with it. Via Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, a perspective is offered to engender the unity of a *composition*. The bodily scheme serves as a basis to orient oneself towards the world; the space first and foremost is given form in the bodily

motor system. The unity of *situational* space is not defined by a geometrical or objective 'system' imposed from outside, but by bodily intentionality that leads to a passive synthesis. This passive synthesis in its turn can lead to an active synthesis (an object-directed intentionality). By making passive and active syntheses in listening co-exist and by putting the emphasis on transmodality, sound as inner movement can establish a connection between inner and outer worlds. As such the sensory perception of the transmodal sound can evoke motor as well as visual images.

Sound in film is a fairly complex phenomenon since the listening act of the director (in the sound recording) and possibly the listening of the character in the film and the listening of the viewer/listener have to be taken into account. Moreover, listening to film is always a combined action with watching the film. To discuss this complexity, I introduce the concept of the audiovisual chord that is established in audiovisual perception. An audiovisual chord can be constituted as the result of various viewing and listening perspectives. An audiovisual chord can be regarded as a intersecting or assembly point of lived spaces in the field structure of time, as Husserl describes the structure of the inner time consciousness. After all, sound can evoke the experience of lived spaces. Through these evocations inner worlds can be conjured up through sound in different and more concrete ways than through the score. The body of the viewer/listener resonates with the energetic movement of the sounds. In transferring an experience, sound acts as an inner movement that evokes lived spaces and universes that do not necessarily crop up as reflective mental images; rather, in their vibrating openness they make the body of the viewer/listener alert and receptive without bringing about an object-directed intentional act. This is what Merleau-Ponty (1945) calls a synchronizing modulation: the viewer/listener attunes his or her body to what he or she is hearing.

With this phenomenological approach I take two unconventional standpoints that I further elaborate on: *the spatiality of sound as parameter of the recorded sound* that positions the listener in relation to a sound and *the perception of sound through the resonant, positioned body of the viewer/listener*. As a consequence of this, the motor aspect of sound as energetic movement becomes the point of departure.

Through analyzing films and the creative practice, this comprehensive study of the auditory space and the spatial perception in film brings into focus the difference between a musical composition and a *sound composition*. The listener is positioned differently in relation to sound than to musical compositional elements. This has its effects on the *com-posing* of sounds. To render the spatiality of the recorded sound, I made a distinction between *environmental sound*, *the sounds of the surroundings*, *soundscape*, *aural architecture*, the distance between the *source of the sound* and *the point of perception*. The auditory (*egocentric* and *allocentric*) space that comes about in the listener depends on various factors. Next to the spatial aspect, the motor aspect of sound plays a key role. Perceiving sound occurs in a transmodal way: whilst listening to a sound the other senses are also appealed to. Sounds also bring out tactile, visual and motor impressions. The neurophysiological and neurophenomenological insights of the last decades throw a different light on aisthesis (sensory perception). One has gained a deeper understanding of the mutual connection between viewing and listening, and movement has gained an increasingly central position in the perception and the establishing of meaning (Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1919; Berthoz 1997; Noë 2006; Thompson 2007; Gallagher & Zahavi 2008).

In the final chapter I have further developed the consequences of pre-reflective embodied listening within the framework of cinematic creation and perception. It was important to me to connect the insights that have stemmed from my practice with the analyses and the theoretical system that I have developed in my research. Through a consistent approach with the emphasis on the experiencing of the recorded sound next to the perception of sound in film I have brought in some novel perspectives to discuss sound in film, viz. the *first-person perspective* in describing how a film is perceived and in analyzing how a film is created; the superposition of the auditory and visual spaces that are brought together as a *polytopos* in perception (and not in the composition of the filmic elements); the *audiovisual chord* as a time object and a moment in a *lived time field* and the possibility to make inner and outer worlds connect in sound. By putting the emphasis on *pre-reflective embodied listening*, I have provided an in-depth analysis of *sound as inner movement in film* and opened it up for further discussion.