

[A] ‘As if from the sky’: Divine and Secular Dramaturgies of Noise

[B] Benjamin Halligan

What now? [Pause.] Words fail, there are times when even they fail. [Turning a little towards WILLIE.] Is that not so, Willie? [Pause. Turning a little further.] Is not that so, Willie, that even words fail, at times? [Pause. Back front.] What is one to do then, until they come again? – Winnie, Act One, Happy Days (Beckett, 2006, 147)

This chapter concerns just such a question: what is to be done, until words – as forming a discourse that makes some sense of the world, and that shapes and articulates meanings to interpret it – are possible once again? It is in the moment before that possibility, an interregnum therefore between stretches of clarity, that words, suddenly insufficient, seem to fail. Such a moment typically ‘defaults’ to noise. But in the examples discussed below, noise does exist as simply denoting the lack of possible meaning or interpretation – as non-meaning or non-sense. Rather, noise here works to push beyond meaning and sense: to continue to articulate something even once words have failed or reached the limits of their expressive possibilities.

In the first instance, this lexical crisis occurs in respect to the unknowable nature of the divine. In the second instance, this chapter argues, such a lexical crisis persists even ‘after’ the divine, on into secular times. Looking to post-structuralist models of analysis, and Derrida’s concept of the ‘aporia’ in particular, the noise to which the ineffable gives rise can be isolated and analysed. Indeed, noise would seem to liberate the text to move beyond the limited expressive possibilities of the words

that fail, and breaks with and so modernises dominant modes of discourse and thought. This tendency is examined in examples drawn from cinema, poetry and theatre.

[B] Sound and vision

The aural is typically cast in a subservient position to the visual in cinema. Sound arrived belatedly, and then struggled to redefine the role of mere speech and incidental accompaniment that had fallen to the audio components of the film experience. While technology pushed the possibilities for the image, sound remained in a marginal place across the subsequent decades. It was a full half century beyond the first feature film presented as a 'talkie', The Jazz Singer (1927, Alan Crosland) that, Biskind notes, George Lucas brought about the junking of tinny PAs and the installation of Dolby stereo equipment for cinemas wishing to show Star Wars (1977) (Biskind, 1999, 335). **Only the fear of jeopardising future income finally** exerted the need, as the Dolby company put it, to 'implement and staff a film sound programme' across many 'disparate segments of the film industry' (quoted in Sergi, 2004, 21).¹

At this point, mere speech and incidental accompaniment were no longer sufficient. This Star Wars-centred 'expanded cinema', which by the late 1970s was anticipating and shaping the 'High Concept' cinema to come, countered the previous model of 'expanded cinema'. For Youngblood (1970), that expansion of cinema was countercultural, a waystation on the path to expanded consciousness. This new cinema of the early 1970s, he argued, was intrinsic to the happening and the psychedelic liquid light show, and was seen as only a beginning.² The late 1970s expansion was clearly merely industrial, in simply terms of greater box office returns. But it would be ahistorical to see these two phases in dialectical terms. There was

clearly a continuum of ideas developed or associated with the former phase of expansion, and now technologically enabled and accommodated. Enhanced sound was for enhanced experience – and Youngblood and Lucas shared the sense of cinema as experiential. But wonderment or envelopment or immersion – or ‘tripping’ – to what ends? There is undeniably a shift in the popular imagination of the future in these half dozen years: from revolt and communalism to the new state forms of cosmic imperialism.³ In terms of semicapitalism (in respect of which, Bifo hails 1977, the year of Star Wars, as a watershed moment; Berardi, 2009, 14-29), the imaginary was being reassigned, from countercultural spheres to the techno-militaristic. As Paul Virilio argues (1989), cinema soon came to function as a showcase for the new armoury, and indeed continues to develop hand-in-hand with it. Speech and incidental music, in this context, are bare essentials: noise, atmospherics, ambience and vibration are the primary colours of the soundscape. It is ironic that the **catalyst** for this – Dolby technology – was advertised at this time as a matter of ‘noise reduction’. For Michel Chion, Dolby, ‘a physical reaffirmation of sound’, fully achieves ‘a sort of aerodynamic aesthetic of sound’ (Chion, 2009, 124-125), which became central to the cinema experience. He identifies 1975 as marking the ‘return of the sensorial’ in this regard (Chion, 2009, 117-145).

This sensorial development was apparent, prior to Star Wars, in the disaster movies cycle: the moment at which a hi-tech cinema experience was sold, and an attempt at dramatic and sensory overload was made, so as to reinvigorate the most commercial wing of the medium, as if staging a counterattack on the New Hollywood films of the 1970s. Thus the sonic battery of Earthquake (Mark Robson, 1974), rendered via the Sensurround system, reportedly (albeit in the sense of urban legend) caused nausea and induced nose bleeds in some audience members, and cracked

cinema ceilings. Prior to this, sound was a matter for the foley artist, who was placed in a lowly position in the credit pecking order and was understood to be doing their job well when nobody noticed their contributions (shuffling stock sounds for doors opening, footfall, keys in locks and so forth): a technical endeavour. Now the ‘sound designer’ (as a parallel to set designer), or those engaged in ‘sound montage’ (parallel to editors) rapidly rose through the credit ranks: now a creative figure, mediating between art and new audio technologies.

The Megasound system created by the Warner Bros company in the early 1980s was utilised to full effect, in 70mm, by two film-makers known for a tendency to immerse their audiences in a sensory rendition of the worlds of their films. Ken Russell’s Altered States (1980) placed the notion of the expansion of consciousness at the meeting point of religious ecstasy and scientific research – an endeavour that embodies exactly the Youngblood/Lucas tension. The film concerns a disillusioned Harvard scientist who, in the late 1970s, returns to his late 1960s experiments in altered consciousness but now armed with more powerful hallucinogenics. This time he seems to achieve the alteration of his physical form as well as mind, and accesses a universal consciousness in both mind and body as well as, seemingly, a fifth dimension. The ‘trip’ sequences induced by these experiments were to be experienced more than viewed (and with the low frequency rumblings and roarings to be felt as well as heard), and this was achieved via soundscaping in Megasound as much as through liquid lightshow-like visuals. (Russell recalled that stoned UCLA students would wait in the cinema lobby to be called in by one of their number for the hallucinatory sequences: the ‘dialogue’ was of little interest to them [Russell, 1989, 187]).

As with Altered States, Michael Wadleigh's Wolfen (1981) also finds a dramatic trope entirely appropriate to the consciousness-raising concerns of this new sensorial cinema. This occurs via a dramatisation of the notion that since the body is merely the expression of the soul, it is essentially unstable in its outward form and capable of shape-shifting. The film, which combines elements of horror and the techno-thriller, follows two New York detectives who investigate a series of murders that seem to be at the behest of big business or terrorist groupings. The murders are soon revealed as wolf attacks, at which point the one surviving detective begins to surmise that the wolves literally are itinerant, landless and disenfranchised Native Indian workers. So for Wadleigh, co-adapting Whitley Strieber's 1978 novel The Wolfen, Indian folklore becomes the access to expanded consciousness whereas for Russell (drawing on Paddy Chayefsky's 1978 novel), it is attained via LSD use and sensory deprivation tanks.

Experientialism in Wolfen occurs via wolf-eye, point-of-view, long take, travelling shots in solarized/psychedelic imagery as a thermal rendering of the blurred, moving surroundings. The image is degraded in this way, for these 'trip' sequences, and sound is upgraded – becoming a pre-eminent and heightened sense. Sound is the way of navigating and negotiating the ruins of the Bronx for the wolves. Here sound is dragged down several frequencies so that the points of registering an event, in terms of a sort of 'spectrum of cognition', seem both oblique and much expanded. Thus crashes and thumps leave static traces, the breathing seems deeper and closer as the wolf watches, or psychically visualizes, a protagonist making love, and the cavernous echoes of gun shots in an abandoned church overwhelm the initial crack of the bullet as discharged. Even spoken word is subjected to a Vocoder-like treatment, and so seems guttural, and emanates from the throats that are target to the

wolves' attacks. In this way, noise reorganizes the world of the film, and begins to assert a dramatic, narrative and aesthetic dominance over the image.

But Russell and Wadleigh are the exceptions in their uses of sound at that time: typically, within the predominant schema of naturalism and realism, sound offers an aural verification, as a quality of the reportage ontology of the mise-en-scène. Gianluca Sergi makes the case that not only has critical and academic writing largely ignored film sound, leading to an 'image bias that is so predominant in most film theory and history' (Sergi, 2004, 9), but also that no satisfactory critical lexicon exists should attention be turned to sound. Consequently, basic questions – 'how to define sound' (Sergi, 2004, 6), for example – remain,⁵ and the aural perspective on disaster movies is usually little more than a footnote in most critical writings on them. Altered States and Wolfen, which blended art and commercial appeal, and were hitched on the back of the disaster film cycle, occurred at roughly the point of the cycle that Feil identifies as 'the final downturn': the moment at which '[box office] disaster strikes disaster movies' of 1978-1980 (Feil, 2005, 19). High Concept cinema was more straight-forward in aural terms: bangs for the explosions.

[B] Seeing with ears, hearing with eyes

The confusions induced by this dramatic and sensory overload were typically offset by the disaster movie hero: in the 'classic' heroic mode, that larger-than-life figure, marshalling resources, improvising makeshift weapons, and corralling and leading the survivors. In the case of the on-screen presence and persona of Charlton Heston this endeavour is seemingly part of a trajectory that includes Cecil B. DeMille's Biblical heroes⁶ with their WASP make-over of foundational Judeo-Christian myths of disaster, exodus and civilisation. The combination of individualism, individual vision

and action rights the balance of social, political and civil upheaval unleashed by natural and technological disaster: new lines of command emerge, rematerializing old hierarchies of order in the midst of the upheaval. In these respects, the sensory overload can be seen to make critical, but not completely destabilize, the certainties and very materialism of the worlds that the films conjure. What is exceptional about the circumstances of disaster only ever becomes the exception that ultimately proves the rule, or rules, of law and order and the indestructibility of civil society. Most disaster movies grind to a halt at this conjunction. The God of crisis (a diabolical deity for secular times, one residing in the ecosphere or technosphere or, alternatively, heading-up non-Judeo-Christian religions in the standard racist portrayals of non-WASPs) may demand that sacrifices are offered (in the deaths of Hollywood A-list stars), but these trials always result in the people being led to the promised land.

The testing itself, however, suggests a profound collective psychic dissatisfaction with existence in contemporary urban societies of the West. Erich Fromm, writing in 1974, diagnosed that this ‘tnew wave of destructive films’ is

catering to the ever more rapidly increasing passion to destroy (necrophilia) [...]

Necrophilia is the outcome of the increase of a certain socially conditioned and shared pathology of cybernetic man [...] he has created a lifeless world of total technicalization and bureaucratization in which man becomes an appendage to the machine. (quoted in Feil, 2005, 11)

For Fromm these imagined realms of death, as desired by the disaster movie viewer (in which cities, aeroplanes, skyscrapers, ocean liners and so on become imminent death traps), and with the enforced re-acquaintance with morality on a massive scale,

speak of the modern condition. Man, with his characteristic fallibility and vulnerability, imagines himself as doomed by his own, Frankenstein-like creation: the encroaching technosphere, with scientific advance merely a wilful charge into the valley of death. Fromm suggests this subjectivity, fed and nurtured by the disaster movie, is a form of perversion which is centred on or displaced onto fetish objects: corpses.

Russell and Wadleigh attempted to push beyond this conjuncture, and these restrictions of imagination (which could be termed, in a Manichean way: civil society or barbarism), into uncertainty. The reorganizing of sense and experience is seemingly in order to do so – so that the notion of visualizing/‘seeing’ with ears, and the aesthetics and subjectivity of an aural image, and audio scanning/‘hearing’ with eyes would seem to be in operation. In this respect, film becomes, to borrow Chion’s term, ‘audio-vision’.⁷ The flaky contexts from which both films originate are merely a pretext: an excuse for an entrée into ‘expanded realms’ of the mind, for experiential cinema. In Altered States, a decade beyond the Berkeley riots, the hippies are now in the laboratories they once occupied, running mind-expansion experiments and revealing or summoning up Jungian archetypes and Darwin-esque primal hordes from the human subconscious. In Wolfen, a decade beyond Wadleigh’s own Woodstock documentary (1970), a new counterculture begins to emerge, a bridge between the ‘wisdoms’ of the living remnants of Native American Indian subcultures and those of interplanetary messengers (of Strieber’s later concerns with UFO abductions and alien contact). Both these narratives require a breaking with cognitive reality: to see and hear ‘beyond’ the everyday. And both could be said to represent a retreat from the high tide of political activism of 1968 to a safer and more amenable ground where the

enemy is not the political economy and its state institutions but merely, obscurely, spooky or theological, and conspiratorial rather than ideological.⁸

In both cases conflicts with producers and studios resulted in the released films, Wadleigh's in particular, being a far cry from the original intentions of their directors. But in both cases these films were bound to fail on any number of grounds. How could they not? The new visual and aural lexicons the films assembled and offered in order to navigate these new worlds – solarized, psychedelic, superimposed blurs of imagery, plundering the semiotics and iconography of everything from Roman Catholic theology to monster B-movies – become the progressive elements of the films themselves. The films are merely experiential rather than philosophical; it was in the saying, not in what was to be said, that the films effectively functioned. The UCLA students that so bemused Russell were perhaps, after all, reacting in an appropriate or timely way to the cliché-ridden, absurdity of Altered States – as Macbeth put it (Act V, Scene V): 'it is a tale / [...] full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing'.

And yet more dramaturgically rigorous applications of noise to the experiential has resulted in films that seem to detract from rather than expand the expected aural spectrum – in, for example, Elem Klimov's Come and See (1985), which aligns the experience of the mise-en-scène with hearing loss, or Irreversible (Gaspar Noé, 2002), which works to discomfort and unnerve the cinema audience. Where Russell and Wadleigh rupture, realign or even invert the standard relations between the aural and the visual, Klimov and Noé return their soundscapes to the historical supporting role – underlying and underlining the visual.

[B] Dramatic crises

What is apparent in this overreach on the part of Russell and Wadleigh, for which sound and noise come to take on dramaturgical functions otherwise typically assigned to expository dialogue, is the attempt to deliver some kind of ‘primal scene’ or fundamental meaning. The ambition is that of showing something of the origins of civilization and/or mankind for the secular or post-secular age, and sensorially realising the same. These films do not have the luxury of summoning up Gods (as with DeMille) or demons (as with William Friedkin’s 1973 adaptation of William Peter Blatty’s The Exorcist). The way in which Russell and Wadleigh and their collaborators then flunk their answers is beside the point.⁹ Perhaps emboldened by their adherence to genre, and with the acceptance by the late 1970s of some of the ideals of the counterculture that these films also embody, Altered States and Wolfen do not flinch or look away where other films and film-makers would tentatively decline to pass comment. Or, put another way: the films bravely, or foolishly, avoid a complete negation of clear narrative meaning at moments of dramatic crisis.

Such dramatic crises are typically found at the point of confronting, to employ a Lacanian term, ‘the big Other’: the symbols, figures and orders of authority. Civilization is, as argued above, one such encounter. Heston’s essential role could be said to be to re-establish the symbolic order at times of upheaval or crisis: to become or attain ‘the big Other’ in the wake of the big Other’s sudden and alarming absence – connecting Heston’s ‘executive’ actions in disaster movies to his appearing as Moses on Mount Sinai carrying The Ten Commandments, in DeMille’s 1956 film of the same name. But a variety of other possible dramatic crises and their related Others present themselves.

The effect of coming up against such absolutes and imponderables is akin to the Angelic injunctive given to Lot prior to God’s destruction of Sodom: not to look

(Genesis 19: 17). And typically, in film, this occurs when the big Other is one that touches on foundational Judeo-Christian myths: evolution and the prohibitions against incest (in Freud's terminology, 'totem and taboo'), and God and resurrection/afterlife. Invariably it is 'auteur cinema', films of a poetic and philosophical bent, that tend to venture into such territories, or raise such existential questions, and so encounter or engender just such crises. In the examples that follow, all the films reach the point at which such questions are unavoidable, only to then enter into a state of avoiding clear answers while at the same time declining the possibility of withholding any answer. And this difficult operation is mostly achieved through shunning the image and employing, or 'applying', noise instead. Indeed, God does not extend the injunction against listening too. In terms of film analysis, this application of noise could be identified as a return of the repressed: that marginalized and subdued component of film, the aural, steps into the breach at such critical moments, scrambling narrative meaning via its 'aerodynamic aesthetic of sound' (Chion, 2009, 124-5). The aural not only usurps the visual in terms of narrative import, but effectively censors the visual: screen-bound aesthetics, that threaten to show too much, and so disobey the injunctive not to look, are – to use Chion's description – suddenly put into flight, and diffused into the auditorium, via the aural.

Such censorship can be achieved visually, and can be said to come into operation at such critical moments too. Bernardo Bertolucci's drama of Oedipal tensions, La Luna (1979), for example, opens with the protagonist as an infant, who then loses his mother's care and attention once she becomes distracted by the arrival of a mysterious male. A record is played on a turntable and the mother and the male dance on the ledge of the veranda where the child plays, both seen in silhouette against the light of the sun reflecting off the sea. The male playfully waves a newly

caught fish, and his fish gutting knife, rhythmically at the mother, thrusting them between her legs – and this dance, very apparently a visual metaphor for sexual intercourse, is coded as a shot seen from the child's point-of-view. From this precise vantage point, and with the framing of this opening sequence as a distant or suppressed memory on the part of the child (introduced as an adolescent shortly afterwards), the film communicates the way in which the child's imagining of the parents copulating is both distressing (in that it denotes the loss of the mother for the child, and the phallic superiority, and knife-wielding, castrating potential, of the father) and determining. He, crying, toddles into the house and, years later, his heroin addiction is presented as a seeming replacement for the similarly excessive sweetness of the affection of his mother – before the arrival of the male in this first scene, the mother feeds her child honey from her finger, on which he chokes.

The actual seeing of the act of copulation by the child, for Freud, was not necessary since this 'primal scene' becomes effectively manifest in other ways: hearing, imagining hearing, and via displacement to metaphors such as this dance with its phallic stand-ins, and prohibitions flowing from the father's authority. Bertolucci adheres to this authority: he does not show the scene of intercourse, the 'primal scene', but, comically, the metaphors of its displacement. This is a kind of visual buffering on Bertolucci's part, a self-censorship, and it occurs again later in the film when the mother, learning of her son's addiction and trying to catch sight of his syringe-pierced underarms as they play a piano duet together, winds up fighting with him. The son uses physical authority to gain dominance over the mother and at this stage his father, having suffered a fatal heart attack, is absent, and so the location of authority is now uncertain. This fight in itself would seem to be a displacement of sexual inclinations and such a reading does not require a Freudian basis to explain

what is ‘really’ going on: ‘light’ incest does occur in the course of the film, and so the incest taboo is effectively broken. The evolving physical relationship, and the showing of the relationship, could therefore be said to be transgressive. And so for this fight Bertolucci again effectively censors himself: the camera tracks with the couple, aligning a large, open grand piano lid in parallax so that the view is blocked and, while the fight is heard, it can no longer be seen. In these moments Bertolucci declines to show the stand-in (fighting) for the un-showable (fucking) and so honours the word of the incest taboo if not its spirit. And yet Bertolucci never fails to show such intimations of the un-showable: the silhouetted dancing and the obscured fighting. In this, his dramaturgy mimics Freud’s position on the imagining of the primal scene. In effect he allows the image to ‘fail’ rather than point his camera directly, and indecently, at the scene of all meaning. The following two examples, which both deal with resurrection (as part of the evolution of man, and as overcoming death) also consider climatic sequences in which the images, nevertheless, ‘fail’.

The monolith of 2001: A Space Odyssey (Stanley Kubrick, co-written with Arthur C. Clarke, 1968) functions in a way to simply defer, in the final analysis, clear meaning: blank and black, it resembles nothing so much as a censor’s mark over offending images. The monolith is placed in a role that suggests a variety of possible interpretations of the narrative: both marking the geographical points of human evolution and as an agent of human evolution, or even the evolver, itself. So the monolith appears in the film at key moments of evolution – from prehistoric times (as primates learn to use weapons) to future times (the extension of war into space, in tandem with watershed moments in man’s exploration of space). Such a role for the monolith is neither associated nor disassociated from the sense of the active presence of an external benefactor – God, or alien intelligence. Deleuze delineates the monolith

precisely in respect to the themes of the film ('[t]he black stone of 2001 presides over both cosmic states and cerebral stages: it is the soul of the three bodies, earth, sun, and moon, but also the seed of the three brains, animal, human, machine') but still addresses the concluding image of the film – a human fetus in an amniotic sac, floating in space – in terms of the mysterious: a moment of 'the chance of entering into a new, incommensurable, unknown relation, which would convert death into a new life.' (Deleuze, 1989, 205-6) For Youngblood the film, although deficient on a number of levels, is an aesthetic harbinger of the 'cosmic conscience' and achieves a didactic mass communication of 'the spiritualism in science' (Youngblood, 1970, 139). Eco, on the other hand, dismisses all such mystifications: 'the final images are kitsch (a lot of pseudo-philosophical vagueness in which anyone can put the allegory he wants), and the rest is discographic, music and sleeves' (Eco, 1986, 145).

Clear meaning remains a matter of conjecture in 2001. The monolith marks and could even be said to police the limits of the horizon of explanation. Its unreadable blackness, its very blankness – in the final analysis – represents the failure or unwillingness to dramatize or show or fully explain. Readings can be projected, and all will pass without a comment. But this operation only occurs on in terms of visualization; Kubrick's use of György Ligeti on the soundtrack, accompanying the monolith's appearances, could be said to dramatically and empathically underscore the moment of evolution, in a typically Hollywood (even crude DeMille) style, despite Ligeti's high avant-gardism – as Eco seems to indicate. Ligeti's myriad voices (of Atmosphères, Lux Aeterna and Requiem), Gregorian, choral and crescendoing, underscore the dramaturgical importance of such moments.¹⁰ So while Kubrick and Clarke are happy to decline any clarity by ultimately evacuating meaning from the image, they retain control of the tenor of possible meanings via non-diegetic sound.

The image is allowed to fail while the significance of the moment is shored up via the soundtrack. Despite the avant-gardist/Modernist trappings of 2001, which come to the fore at such moments, the conception is little more than the voice of God (Heston) as emanating from the burning bush in The Ten Commandments.

Scorsese, drawing on Nikos Kazantzakis's 1960 novel for his 1988 film The Last Temptation of Christ, had less room for manoeuvre than Kubrick: the moment of transition is precise and locked into a Biblical narrative that has no qualms about bringing characters back from the dead as final proof of divine intervention. As Christ dies on the cross the problem is clear: is this understood to be the end or not? Scorsese appends a twenty second psychedelic lightshow to the film at the point at which Christ (Willem Dafoe) closes his eyes. In part this sequence recalls the 'Star Gate' sequence of 2001, in part the dying point-of-view shot of Larissa Shepitko's The Ascent (1976), but most particularly Scorsese's technique recalls Ingmar Bergman's, of Persona (1966). The celluloid itself is suddenly seen, in Persona and Last Temptation, as if detached from its sprockets and flapping wildly in front of the film projector's beam of light, as in a film run-out. It is as if the film has become damaged, or the projection apparatus, as if baulking at immense dramaturgical pressure, has ceased to project. Mixed in to this, for Scorsese, would seem to be – from the general reddish hue (suggestive of sunlight seen through skin, and the eyelid skin of the bloodied visage of the protagonist), and seemingly subliminal shots of the eyelashes of closing eyelids – a literal point-of-view shot of the dying Christ. It would be enough to have the film 'revolt' over the fundamental questions now encountered (regarding the existence of God, the afterlife, resurrection and so forth), and so go no further in what is shown, and in so doing maintain the blindness of the faith required (faith being without evidence, and therefore a matter of belief rather than calculation).

And it could be said that Scorsese suggests to the viewer, at this moment, that he times his film (in the sense of metres of celluloid) to run out as his protagonist's life terminates so as to cease to offer further comment. Film, a material medium, can only travel with Christ through his material existence, and cannot go further... if indeed, there is a 'further'. Lars Von Trier's Melancholia (2011) ends in just such a way, unable to offer narrative beyond the end of the world.

But in reality Scorsese, unlike DeMille (who expresses no doubts at all), hedges his bets. Christ smiles and the closing light show merely suggests uplift, things after death, and a verification of Christ's happiness at, in his dying words, '[sic] [i]t is accomplished'. This sentiment is advanced not so much through the colour montage as the use of Peter Gabriel's non-specific ethnic voices and 'Western' drumming on the soundtrack, and then with a groove derived from a scale of what sounds like sampled church bells (as the closing credits are found waiting on the other side of the light show, against an orange background). It is as if this is the noise of all religious practices, distilled into a few seconds and finding common ground. Rather than offer precise meaning at this critical point of meaning, and rather than declining to offer meaning altogether, Scorsese fills the screen with vague meaningfulness, couched in a joyous tone via non-diegetic sound.

It is with such states of visual failure that the possibilities for and potentials of noise are opened up. And in these states, in the examples above, noise would seem to be ushered in: noise as a new lexicon, to denote or explore or communicate what cannot be described both in terms of speech (verbalized) and in visual-dramatic terms (visualized). In terms of the interplay of suggested meanings and implied readings in the spaces of interpretation, the aural would seem to function as a dramaturgical 'solution', of sorts, to the insolvable. To fully function in this way, and Kubrick and

Scorsese falter in these respects, the aural must first jettison the possibility of yielding clear dramatic readings. Or, to put this another way, the aural must attempt to neutralize any semiotics of sound. In this, then, the aural is – to paraphrase Dolby – ‘reduced’ to noise. Noise then marks abstraction, negation, crisis of dramaturgy, and the dramaturgical solution to that crisis.

[B] Divine and secular aporia

To look away at the hand of God is a reflex that predates cinema to the extent that it could be said that visual cultures conflict with ancient injunctions against looking: at the sun (for fear of blindness), at the face of God or God’s handiwork (as with Lot) and at images of saints or the Prophet (in Protestant and Muslim traditions). And the vista of what can be seen – the fallen world – is not one that, at any rate, is apt to yield divine manifestation, or its typical domain. To claim hard evidence of God in the everyday remained, even into the twentieth century, a blasphemous matter. The reverberation of this general position is apparent in conceptions of art at the dawn of modernity. After a visit to the South Kensington (now Victoria and Albert) Museum in 1882, Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote to his colleague Robert Bridges:

In the arts of painting and sculpture I am, even when most I admire, always convinced of a great shortcoming: nothing has been done at all equal to what one can easily conceive being done. For instance for work to be perfect there ought to be a sense of beauty in the highest degree both in the artist and in the age, the style and keepings of which the artist employs. Now the keepings of the age in which for instance Raphael and [Michel]Angelo lived were rich, but unsatisfactory in the extreme. And they were both far from having a pure

sense of beauty. Besides which they have several other great shortcomings.

But in poetry and perhaps in music unbetterable works have been produced.

(quoted in Phillips, 2007, viii; Hopkins's emphasis)

The aural here (and, arguably, by extension, in the sonic subtexts of Hopkins's own poetry) is the 'unbetterable' way of circumnavigating or overcoming the fallen state of the world: of attaining artistic expression of divine worth in spite of the all-pervasive, infectious nature of this fallen state ('original sin'). Sound (music, poetry as spoken word; freeform, as existing in air) seems the way to access the 'pure sense of beauty' once the image (of and as found in the museum: canvases and sculptures – that is, fixed, tangible, materially extant images) has inevitably failed. Sound transcends the limitations of the visual imagination while adhering to the injunction against seeing. Indeed, in Judeo-Christian traditions, hearing the voice of God on earth is not that unusual. Years earlier, when considering how his initial intention to be a painter had given way to that of becoming a priest, Hopkins voiced his doubts as to the – seemingly – moral dangers of the creation of images: '... the fact is that the higher and more attractive part of the art put a strain upon the passions which I [sic] shd. think it unsafe to encounter' (quoted in White, 1992, 159).

Hopkins's sentiment, and this injunction, translates readily into post-structuralist terms. Now it is the impossibility of revealing, to use Žižek's deployment of Lacan's term, 'the Real' – the hidden or unspoken truth of the matter, a truth that structures or finds a symbolic order or personification in the 'big Other'¹¹ – that results in this turning away. Turning away becomes a matter of deferring meaning: a rekindling of blind faith for the secular age – the truth will be revealed, but not at this moment, even as the truth is imminent to this moment. And the materially uncertain

sphere of the aural (aerial, invisible) is better suited than that of the visual (visible, readable) to allow for such a deferral. In terms of brushing against ‘the Real’ – and promising to articulate what cannot actually be articulated – this aural preference, and the obliqueness of a dramaturgy of noise, effectively pre-empts, and so neutralizes, the inevitable failure.

What does not translate so readily as blind faith is an analogue of Hopkins’s faith in transcendence. Mystery is necessarily upheld in the Victorian frame of theological thought: man, in his fallen state, is incapable of knowing, and cannot hope to know. Indeed, it is this position that gives rise to forms of religious practice that can ultimately only exist as practice, and familiar to Hopkins the Jesuit: the ritualism of the Oxford movement, for example. Hopkins the poet is merely tactical in respect of his dealings with such an assumption. He qualifies the protean, dizzying nature of the dappled (rather than pure or consistent) beauty of the natural world, in his 1877 poem ‘Pied Beauty’, with respect to God’s creation, with ‘(who knows how?)’. That micro-view, of and revealed in the ‘fickle [and] freckled’ wildlife, as much as the macro-view of ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’ (1875-76), which posits divine order and ordering in the ‘[w]orld’s strand [and the] sway of the sea’, repeatedly abandons final explanation. Explanations cannot be known, merely isolated and beheld. Hopkins’s respectful blind faith, in its post-structuralist extension or parallel, cannot be sustained. Blind faith now becomes the blind spot: an instance of aporia, the looking away at the moments of dramaturgical crises discussed above. Mystery is not replaced by revelation, but by the deferral of the anticipated and promised revelation. And it is the tone of this deferral (that is: the suggestions and intimations of the nature of the revelation) that, as with Deleuze and Eco, becomes a matter of debate or derision. Dramaturgically, then, sound comes to determine that tone – from bombastic

and grandiose for Kubrick, and the use of the ‘noise’ of avant-garde forms of music, to the layered liturgies of noise for Scorsese, in the sequences discussed above.

In Derrida’s description, such constant deferrals, making for such a halting state – forever encircling the point of unknowing, a ‘barred passage’ as he puts it (Derrida and Attridge, 1992, 399) – comes to represent the final discourse itself:

the question of knowing what it means ‘to experience the aporia’, indeed to put into operation the aporia, remains. It is not necessarily a failure or a simple paralysis, the sterile negativity of the impasse. It is neither stopping at it nor overcoming it [...] Let us ask: what takes place, what comes to pass with the aporia? (Derrida, 1993, 32; Derrida’s emphasis)

In a different context (roughly, the question of the possibility of one’s own death, as the ‘passage’ of oneself from life to death – moving from the known to, as the anonymous Middle Ages mystical tract puts it, the ‘Cloud of Unknowing’), Derrida writes, when he first encounters the possibility of aporia:

the difficult or the impracticable, here the impossible, passage, the refused, denied, or prohibited passage, indeed the nonpassage, which can in fact be something else, the event of a coming of a future advent [événement de venue ou d’avenir], which no longer has the form of the movement that consists in passing, traversing, or transiting. It would be the ‘coming to pass’ of an event that would no longer have the form or the appearance of a pas: in sum, a coming without pas. (Derrida, 1993, 8)

The aporetic analysis is applied by Derrida and by subsequent post-structuralists, and with a characteristic looseness (breaking with the ‘scientific’ dogma of structuralism), to the fields of ethics, politics, law, and philosophy itself. The aporia highlights the point, or nodes, of the unqualified assumptions in such discourses, their blind faiths that persist so idiosyncratically into the secular age. In this way, aporetic analysis corrodes the total readings seemingly, or potentially, possible with structuralism (or earlier manifestations or versions of structuralism). The aporetic analysis prompts a search for the irreducible underpinnings of the argument, the area which remains in a state of being unaccounted for by or within or, finally, as, the parameters of the argument.

The aporia is quite other to the structuring thought that determines the text (the author, or dramaturg) – in Derridean terms, this person is a ghost to the live text, or the uncanny to the canny; the impossible, uninvited, undesired agent that then casts doubt on the entire enterprise by ‘explaining’ what it all means (this is a trope typical of ‘auteur cinema’). This otherworld of the inexplicable is revealed through a close, textual examination of that which is, as often as not, in the text itself, fudged, circumnavigated, overlooked or dissolved into strategies of avoidance. In the aporetic analysis of Derrida’s ‘Aporias’, the aporias multiply, auto-engender, so to speak, until a climax is reached; it is more apparent here than in Derrida’s earlier writing that the aporia is not a minor or accidental appendage to the text – an oversight, or dramaturgical failure. It is, rather, the very condition that engulfs the text – that enables it, in the sense of allowing it to be created, and then provides a motor or conceptual foundation for that creation. The aporia is the very condition of the text. In this respect, an aporetic analysis allows for a radical rereading of the text – a ‘negative form’ (Derrida, 1993, 19; Derrida’s italics) that splits the text asunder and reveals the

workings of the conceptual foundation. Indeed, it could still be said, in relation to Sergi's and Chion's criticisms of the methodologies of film analysis discussed above, that noise itself remains the aporia of the disciplines of 'film studies'.

As an aside, the aporetic analysis is not a meta-criticism that, as with God's destruction of Sodom, levels all in its way. It is, rather, a way of enabling the challenges posed by the big Other or 'the Real' to be parlayed into artistic forms. The aporetic condition allows for the universal, archetypal and cosmic and allows for a dealing with the fallen state of the world in artistic terms. In the video A Portrait of the Artists as young men Gilbert and George perform as if for a currently nonexistent audience – for that audience of the future who, one surmises, are intrigued, in the light of the anticipated successes of Gilbert and George (hence 'the artists'),¹² and now wish to see old footage of the pair. To the contemporary audience, their performance is barely fathomable: in medium shot, they seem to act, or adopt, slow-motion movements, and seem unaware of each other, themselves, their immediate surroundings, and the raging thunderstorm heard on the soundtrack. The pair seem lobotomised, narcoleptic, in a trance, or semi-comatosed. As with performance experiments at the time (the piece is dated 1970) conducted by the Zanzibar Group of film-makers, the Living Theater, or Werner Schroeter, Gilbert and George seem to be living rather than performing roles under temporary conditions of artificially-induced neurological impairment. The relatively lengthy duration of the performance (and its cheapness: blurry, black and white, committed to videotape rather than celluloid), and their quiescence throughout, induces unavoidable questions for the viewer: what is wrong with them? Don't they have something else to do, somewhere else to go? Why is no information forthcoming about them? Why am I watching this? But the title of the piece announces a deferment in terms of answers to these questions. They can be

answered – or will no longer be in need of an answer – when these artists are no longer young men: in the anticipated (and seemingly dreadful) future to come where, one assumes, this will be seen as quite normal behaviour, the video itself will be seen as entertaining, or rich in the kind of information that cannot at present be extracted from it. In short, the key to A Portrait of the Artists as young men is that the aporia engulfs the text: the video merely looks to something that it cannot yet be.

The use of noise, as discussed above, finds a more certain role in the aporetic. Noise becomes the way of securing the moorings of the text even in extremis: resurrection, evolution, totem and taboo, civilisation. The internal pressures that would split the text asunder are alleviated by the application of noise. Noise allows unqualified assumptions to be placed safely outside any stress testing that must inevitably arise at such moments. To use this ‘negative form’ of rereading, one could say that Kubrick’s and Scorsese’s films, discussed here, could only function on the understanding that their key questions are not to be absolutely answered. It is acknowledging this limit, and grappling with it, rather than (as with Russell and Wadleigh) attempting to overcome it, that positions noise in a privileged space – one that breaks with the processes of interpretation, and signals that breaking in the name of the impossibility of showing. Noise is a dramaturgical operation: for Hopkins, aural and auratic (in the sense of attaining a divine aura), in Derridean, post-structuralist terms, aural and aporetic.

[B] Coda: ‘As if from the sky’.

In Chekhov’s The Cherry Orchard (first performed: Moscow Arts Theatre, 1904), the problematic truth of the world of the play gives rise to conditions of denial. Denial is apparent in both the *dramatis personae* and, by extension, more generally in the

fictional off-stage (that is, educated Russian society of the end of the nineteenth century, as refracted in Chekhov's characters) and concerns the coming termination of this bourgeois lifestyle enjoyed by the happy (or, for Chekhov, unhappy) few. This shift that will prove to be ideological, industrial and ecological. Chekhov suggests a number of melancholy metaphors for this state of affairs and places the cherry orchard itself (unkempt, unattended, abandoned, to soon be chopped down) as the central poetic image of the play. Mid-point during a conversation in Act Two (which seems to occur during a rest break during an evening stroll near the cherry orchard) an arresting stage direction, without explanation or further elaboration, is given:

Gayev. The sun has set, ladies and gentleman.

Trofimov. Yes.

Gayev (softly, as if declaring). O nature, wondrous nature! You shine with an everlasting radiance, beautiful and indifferent; you that we call Mother united within yourself existence and death; you give life and you destroy it...

Vatya (imploringly). Uncle!

Anya. You're doing it again!

[...]

Gayev. I am silent. I am silent.

They all sit lost in thought. Silence. All that can be heard is FIRS muttering quietly. Suddenly there is a distant sound, as if from the sky: the sound of a breaking string – dying away, sad.

Ranyevskaya. What was that?

Lopakhin. I don't know. Somewhere a long way off, in the mines, a winding cable has parted. But a long, long way off.

Gayev. Perhaps a bird of some sort... something like a heron.

Trofiov. Or some kind of owl.

Ranyevskaya (shivers). Horrible, I don't know why.

Pause.

Firs. It was the same before the troubles. The owl screeched, and the samovar moaned without stop.

(Chekhov, 1990, 33)

This interjecting noise, which Chekhov seems to decline to specify exactly or even locate ('as if' from the sky, and its echo seems of more concern),¹³ lends itself to numerous interpretations. Lopakhin, Gayev and Trofiov are pragmatic and realistic – and yet these are the characters whose fates, and that of Tsarist Russia, are tied up with a failure to anticipate the coming revolution. Gayev's ode to nature locks human fates into its eternal cycles, implicitly undermining any reason or hope for decisive action to change the course of events. Nature, for Gayev, is a paradoxical process which occurs, at any rate, 'beyond' our simple understanding: nature is 'beautiful and indifferent' and 'existence and death'. It is a philosophical position of and for such landed gentry, conservationist and conservative. And yet Gayev's response to this outlandish and unusual noise-utterance from nature is dismissive: the message will not be heeded.

The most historically accurate interpretation, albeit one of precognition, is offered by befuddled, muttering Firs, the 87 year old house servant seemingly in the last hours of his life. The sound is a portent of disaster to come and in this respect Firs' comments recall Horatio's in Hamlet.¹⁴ The breaking of the social and civil order that has coloured Firs's life (as with the emancipation of the serfs, which Firs here refers to as 'the troubles'), and that will sweep away these aesthetes and estate managers, and that will determine, in Lewin's phrase, the Soviet Century, is near. But to suggest any reading – ornithological or precognizant, on the part of Chekhov's fictional characters, or via pat critical explanations – is to reduce the defiantly inexplicable to the rational. And, via the mouth of Firs, Chekhov might just as well have been discounting the obvious interpretation (which would otherwise be in keeping with Chekhov's elegiac tone) while continuing to decline to clarify further himself – or finding himself unable to clarify further. The negation is precise: the sound represents that which occurs beyond the limits of verbal or visual perception. Thus the possibility of meaning is suspended, and this is denoted via noise.

The same equivocation is found in critical responses. For Braun (for whom 'there is nothing "symbolic" about the cherry orchard (or the breaking string, for that matter) in the sense of the universal, the transcendental or the ineffable' [2000, 115]) and Rayfield, additional materials (entirely inadmissible) are brought in to support Lopakhin's reaction; (Braun, 2000, 115, 120 footnote 14; Rayfield, 1994, 74, 107).¹⁵ Tulloch's structuralist analysis is open to wider interpretations: the sound is 'from the technological world these nursery people have ignored' (Tulloch, 1980, 202) and dramatically works to delineate the position of each character in terms of their concerns. When a tramp-like passer-by appears shortly afterwards, to whom Ranyevskaya gives some money, he 'emerg[es] as if out of the sound of the breaking

string' (Tulloch, 1980, 194). Cross notes the difficulty of staging this moment and that, quoting Maurice Valency, the string that breaks is

the golden string that connected man with his father on earth and his father in heaven, the age-old bond that tied the present to the past [...] the symbol is broad; it would be folly to try to assign it a more precise meaning than the author chose to give it [...] its quality is not equivocal. Whatever of sadness remains unexpressed in The Cherry Orchard, this sound expresses. (Valency quoted in Cross, 1969, 510)

The dramatic, thematic and conceptual importance of this moment is such that Valency's study of Chekhov is called 'The Breaking String' and his aesthete's florid analysis becomes positively Lacanian in its implications. The sound is a kind of 'surplus value' of the elegiac, which bursts beyond the materialist confines of naturalism and finally denotes rather than directly articulates, that which may not have then been clear but seemed apparent nonetheless.

Chekhov later repeats the sound, and solely to Firs, at the close of the play. The scene could be said to represent a last breath revelry for Firs who, forgotten by the others, is accidentally locked in the house. Here Chekhov remixes and recontextualizes the sound so as to verify Firs's analysis:

The stage is empty. There is the sound of all the doors being locked, and then of the carriages departing. It grows quiet. Through the silence comes the dull thudding of the axe. It sounds lonely and sad. Steps are heard.

From the door on the right comes FIRS. He is dressed as always, in jacket and white waistcoat, with his feet in slippers. He is ill.

FIRS (goes to the door and tries the handle). Locked. They've gone. (Sits down on the sofa.) They've forgotten about me. Well, never mind. I'll just sit here for a bit... [...] (Mutters something impossible to catch.) My life's gone by, and it's just as it I'd never lived at all. (Lies down.) I'll lie down for a bit, then... No strength, have you? Nothing left. Nothing... Oh you... sillybilly... (Lies motionless.)

A sound is heard in the distance, as if from the sky – the sound of a string breaking, dying away, sad.

Silence descends. And the only thing that can be heard, far away in the orchard, is the thudding of the axe.

CURTAIN.

The locking of doors, the unintelligible mutter, the noise from the sky, the thud of the axe and even Firs's stream-of-consciousness monologue, make for a soundscape that could be termed variations on the themes of The Cherry Orchard. Increasingly fragmentary words and sounds alone could be said to attempt to articulate 'the Real' of the drama rather than replace or stand in for it.

This emergent modernity of form in Chekhov, fired by his chafing at the limits of language (as with Hopkins), would not prove to be a resolvable crisis. Indeed, to

chafe in this manner – to confront and test, to make critical, and then to begin to render language obsolete in meaning and function – would characterize strains in Absurdist theatre (to which Chekhov has a critically unresolved relationship). ‘Words fail’, as Winnie puts it in Happy Days, and yet Badiou finds in Samuel Beckett an imperative to speak nonetheless, or to make noise, that is autopoietic: the reflex to talk is one that is enacted in, or upon, “‘the speaker” of The Unnamable [who], trapped in a jar at the entrance to a restaurant, is rendered immobile’ (Badiou, 2003, 46). When words fail, noise rather than silence is the result for Beckett: blabber and gabbling, and then increasingly ‘post-dramatic’ garbling (as with Not I), or merely breathing (as with Breath).

Thus Beckett anticipates or signals, as Begam (1996) has it, ‘the end of modernity’ while Chekhov’s modernity of form can be quite precisely located at the start of this cycle. Chekhov marks the start of the evolution from the notion of the ineffable to that of the Absurd, which is also the passage between the divine and the secular, and a passage which upholds and glosses the injunction to look away (from God, or the big Other), with noise.

[B] References

Badiou, A. (2003), On Beckett, ed. N. Power and A. Toscano. Manchester: Clinamen Press.

Beckett, S. (2006), The Complete Dramatic Works. London: Faber and Faber.

Begam, R. (1996), Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Benedetti, J. (ed.), (1995), The Moscow Art Theatre Letters. London, Auckland, Melbourne, Singapore, Toronto: Methuen Drama.

- Berardi, F. [aka 'Bifo'] (2009), Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation. London: Minor Compositions.
- Biskind, P. (1999), Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n Roll Generation Saved Hollywood. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Braun, E. (2000), The Cherry Orchard in V. Gottlieb and P. Allain, (eds.), The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid: Cambridge University Press.
- Chekhov, A. (1989), Anton Chekhov: Five Plays, trans. R. Hingley. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____ (1987), The Cherry Orchard, adapted by D. Mamet from a literal translation by D. Nelles. New York: Grove Press, 1987.
- _____ (1990), The Cherry Orchard, trans. M. Frayn. London, New Hampshire: Methuen Drama.
- Chion, M. (1990), Audio-Vision – Sound on Screen. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Chion, M. (2009), Film, A Sound Art, trans C. Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cross, A. G., (1969), 'The Breaking Strings of Chekhov and Turgenev' in The Slavonic and East European Review, Vol. 47, No. 109, pp. 510-513.
- Deleuze, G. (1989), Cinema 2: The Time-Image. Minnesota: Athlone Press, University of Minnesota Press.
- Derrida, J. (1993), Aporias. California: Stanford University Press.
- Derrida, J. and D. Attridge, D. (eds.) (1992), Acts of Literature. London: Routledge.
- Eco, U. (1986), Travels in Hyperreality, trans. W. Weaver. Florida: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

- Feil, K. (2005), Dying for a Laugh: Disaster Movies and the Camp Imagination. Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.
- Halligan, B. (2010), 'Disco Galatica: Futures Past and Present', in Kaveney, R. and J. Stoy, Battlestar Galactica: Investigating Flesh, Spirit and Steel. London: I B Tauris.
- Hopkins, G. M. and W. H. Gardner (1985), Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Prose. London: Penguin Books.
- Keane, S. (2001), Disaster Movies: The Cinema of Catastrophe. London and New York: Wallflower.
- Lewin, M. (2005), The Soviet Century. London: Verso.
- Phillips, C. (2007), Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Visual World. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rayfield, D. (1994), The Cherry Orchard: Catastrophe and Comedy. New York: Twayne Publishers.
- Russell, K. (1989), A British Picture: An Autobiography. London: Heinemann.
- Schaeffer, P. (1946), 'L'élément non visuel au cinéma' in Revue du cinéma 1 (1–3), pp. 45–48, 62–65, 51–54.
- Schaeffer, P. (1977 [1966]), Traité des objets musicaux: essai interdisciplines. Paris: Seuil.
- Sergi, G. (2004), The Dolby Era: Film Sound in Contemporary Hollywood. Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press
- Shakespeare, W. (2005 [c. 1599-1601]), Hamlet. London: Penguin Books.
- Tulloch, J. (1980), Chekhov: A Structuralist Study. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Unknown, and C. Wolters (ed.) (1978 [late C14]), The Cloud of Unknowing. London: Penguin Books.

Virilio, Paul. (1989), War and Cinema: Logistics of Perception. London: Verso.

White, N. (1992), Hopkins: A Literary Biography. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Youngblood, G. (1970), Expanded Cinema. London: Studio Vista.

Žižek, S. (1999), 'The Undergrowth of Enjoyment: How Popular Culture can Serve as an Introduction to Lacan' in E. Wright and E. Wright (eds.), The Žižek Reader. Oxford: Blackwell.

¹ For more on the innovations in sound developed and utilised for Star Wars see (Sergi, 2004, 24-29, 51, 101-102).

² Youngblood tentatively delineates and sketches out the various imminent spheres of image-making and image-exchange – shared images as an evolving and global forum for human communications, and a process which can be read therefore as forming or fomenting the next level of consciousness. Cinema is a near-obsolete stage in this transformation. When Youngblood conducted an interview with Lucas for the Los Angeles public television station KCET in 1971, their differences in conception of cinema were already apparent, with Youngblood talking of images and feelings and the desire to film dreams, and Lucas at times more concerned with 'what works' and dealing with 'studio executives'. The interview (George Lucas: Maker of Films, Jerry Hughes, 1971) is available here: <http://www.slashfilm.com/votd-interview-with-27-year-old-george-lucas/>

³ On the matter of revolt in a 1984-like future, Lucas's earlier films (Electronic Labyrinth: THX-1138 4EB, 1967, and THX 1138, 1971), which are the subject of his

discussion with Youngblood, are key texts. On the shift from countercultural sci-fi to neoliberal sci-fi, see my discussion of the original and ‘reboot’ Battlestar Galactica series, (Halligan, 2010, 81-109).

⁵ Sergi’s identification and formulation of a critical field for this endeavour (‘Suggestions for Sound Analysis’) is of limited use for this discussion of film sound. Chion (2009) also begins to assemble a glossary of terms and concepts. In this, and more generally, Chion’s work is influenced by Pierre Schaeffer whose writings on ‘l’élément non visual au cinéma’ (see Schaeffer, 1946, 45-48, 62-65, 51-54) and in ‘Traité des objets musicaux’ (1977), ‘developed a universal classification of sounds that does not bother with distinctions between the sounds of noises, speech, or music.’ (Chion, 2009, 204)

⁶ Such a continuum allow Keane to talk of the ‘unexpected pleasure to see the man who parted the Red Sea in The Ten Commandments [DeMille, 1956] get washed down the drain at the end of [Earthquake].’ (Keane, 2001, 43-44)

⁷ Chion does not see this development so much as a belated equality between image and sound but as the achievement of an aesthetic totality. For Chion, therefore, his first ‘core idea’ is that ‘[t]here is no soundtrack’ (Chion, 2009, xi; Chion’s emphasis): ‘The inadequacy of the term soundtrack and of the kind of thinking it implies [...] leads to totally ignoring the sounds suggested by the image that we do not hear but that are as important as the ones we do hear.’ (Chion, 2009, 170; Chion’s emphasis) – a reading then applied to The Birds (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963), a film in which, for Chion, the protagonists are at times attacked by sound alone, (cf. Chion, 2009, 165-167).

⁸ In these respects, other films from that period suggest themselves: the battles with the paranormal, the metaphysical and the limits of scientific possibility in The Entity

(Sidney J Furie, 1981), *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper, 1982), *The Exorcist II: The Heretic* (John Boorman, 1977), and *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (Nicholas Roeg, 1976) and *Brainstorm* (Douglas Trumbull, 1983), respectively.

⁹ At any rate, the answers provided by these two films represent a more proactive tangle of dissenting ideas than official stabs at clarifying mystifications: for Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), the UFO encounter is presented in infantile, Disney-like terms. For Disney's own *The Black Hole* (Gary Nelson, 1979), a Medieval vision of Hell is reintroduced as a possible endgame scenario – just as much for 'bad' computers and technology as for humans. Here experientialism gives rise to the immobilising sense of wonderment. And a trip to Heaven for Warren Beatty, in *Heaven Can Wait* (Warren Beatty, Buck Henry, 1978), only lends him the enlightenment necessary to lecture businessmen on the economic advantages of responsible market capitalism back on earth.

¹⁰ Hence the impact of the Portsmouth Sinfonia's celebrated 'bad' rendition of the theme associated with *2001* – a performance art project associated with Brian Eno. At the crucial moment of the alignment of the planets, the appearance of the monolith and so forth, the uncouth noise of amateur and semi-amateur musicians trying to interpret their scores, all out of time, many out of tune, undermines the now grandiose associations of the music.

¹¹ For Lacan, 'the real' resides, in psychoanalytical theory and practice, in or at the moment of trauma. To move beyond psychological strategies of displacement of guilt for example, reveals or identifies such a structuring and difficult presence: 'the Real'. This may be a matter of the flouting of the authority of the big Other. For Žižek, 'the Real' becomes the 'irreducible kernel of *jouissance* that resists all symbolization' and

so functions much as the notion of the aporia, in this discussion – repelling the looker, or asking for that look to be directed elsewhere; see (Žižek, 1999, 14).

¹² The terms suggests a number of meanings in relation to the problematization of art and the figure of the artist-producer, typical of Gilbert and George’s work in general, and retain the humour of Joyce’s use of the self-aggrandising description for his 1916 novel A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

¹³ Hingley’s translation adds a note of uncertainty not found in Frayn’s of 1990: ‘It seems to come from the sky....’ (Chekhov, 1989, 267). In Mamet’s version the direction becomes ‘Suddenly a sound is heard as if from the sky, like the sound of a snapped string, dying away mournfully.’ (Chekhov, 1987, 49). All three translations reproduce Chekhov’s original direction: the sound is not necessarily located in the sky at its point of origin, but would merely seem to be.

¹⁴ ‘A little ere the mighty Julius fell, / The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead / Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets –’ (Act One, Scene One), (Shakespeare, 2005, 10).

¹⁵ One such piece of evidence is the Moscow Art Theatre’s 1904 prompt book; even a cursory examination of letters between Chekhov and the producers illustrates Chekhov’s profound disagreements with their interpretation (cf. Benedetti, 1995, 170-190). Rayfield cites instances of a similar sound in Chekhov’s short stories, where clarity is given, as if the field of interpretation once established necessarily covers the entire oeuvre of an author.