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2020

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/15336>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Greene, Liz: Sound and the audiovisual essay, part 1: Dialogue, music, and effects. In: *NECSUS_European Journal of Media Studies*. #Method, Jg. 9 (2020), Nr. 2, S. 435–437. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/15336>.

Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here:

<https://necsus-ejms.org/sound-and-the-audiovisual-essay-part-1-dialogue-music-and-effects/>

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Sound and the audiovisual essay, part 1: Dialogue, music, and effects

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NECSUS 9 (2), Autumn 2020: 435–437

URL: <https://necsus-ejms.org/sound-and-the-audiovisual-essay-part-1-dialogue-music-and-effects/>

Keywords: Alan Splet, audiovisual essay, David Lynch, Disney, documentary, George Bruns, music, offices, sound, soundscape, voice, Whitney Houston

My focus as guest editor of a special two-part audiovisual essay section, in Autumn 2020 and Spring 2021, is on sound and music. I solicited audiovisual essays that are concerned with sound and/or music to advance an understanding of both in order to consider the integrated nature of sound and music in film. This issue of integrating sound and music in film is one that I have tackled previously in a co-edited collection with Danijela Kulezic-Wilson, *The Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design and Music in Screen Media: Integrated Soundtracks* (2016).[1] There my interests focused on the liminal aspects of the soundtrack, where boundaries were blurred in the pursuit of an integrated soundtrack. Within this two-part section I want to advance that written approach to propose that audiovisual essays are a form for furthering that integration.

In 2015, Catherine Grant curated a section of audiovisual essays titled 'Turning up the volume? The emergent focus on film sound, music and listening in audiovisual essays' for a special issue on film sound in *The Cine-Files*. [2] There she astutely addressed an old bias within film studies, that of 'image centric' research. Grant suggested 'what better medium' than 'the more rounded and complex approaches to film studies than the *audiovisual* essay form'. Grant went on to suggest, 'It may take a while for this call to be properly answered, however.' It has been five years since Grant's special issue was published and to my knowledge there has not been an extensive *video-graphic* focus on sound and music in film published since then. However,

there has been some important progress, there have been panels at conferences dedicated to this topic, but, as of yet, not much of this audiovisual scholarship has been published, or it has been published in isolation and not drawn together in an integrated manner. To address this, the four audiovisual essays presented in this first part focus on dialogue, music, and effects. Much like the DME tracks (dialogue, music, and effects) of the re-recording process, each audiovisual essay is discretely addressing one aspect of these traditionally distinct areas. The advantage for the video essayist is their capacity to focus in on one area of research, allowing for a deep dive into close analysis in the production of videographic criticism.

In my audiovisual essay, *'The Elephant Man's Sound, Tracked'*, I present a critical post-production study which focuses on the clean-up of a line of dialogue which led me to explore labour issues in the transition to New Hollywood workflows. Jaap Kooijman, in his *'Talking [Heads] about Whitney'*, draws out the polyvocality of two generic documentary films made about Whitney Houston and, through split screen, offers a new narrative to these stories. Oswald Iten, in his audiovisual essay *'Beyond the Catchy Tunes: George Bruns and the Craft of Transparent Underscoring'*, highlights the craft of underscoring in animated films and specifically focuses attention on Walt Disney Studio practices with graphic illustrations of the score. Cormac Donnelly, in his *'Sonic Chronicle, Post Sound'*, offers a binaural mix of fiction film newsrooms to test R. Murray Schafer's soundscape theories and their applicability to film sound studies.

Considering all four of these works together offers a further way in to appreciating the integrated soundtrack and the sonic potential of the audiovisual essay to suggest new findings. All four of these audiovisual essays invite the audioviewer to listen closely to what has been crafted by the filmmakers, but also by the video essayist themselves. Sound and/or music is not only the subject of investigation here, it is also deployed as part of the creative practice of research. This first part in a double section of audiovisual essays on sound and music in film clearly demonstrates the appropriateness and vitality of videographic approaches to film sound and music studies.

Author

Liz Greene is a Reader in Film and Sonic Arts at Liverpool John Moores University. Her research interests are in film sound, the audiovisual essay, and documentary film. She has published articles and audiovisual essays in a number of journals and edited collections and is the co-editor of *The Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design and Music in Screen Media: Integrated Soundtracks* (2016).

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Notes

- [1] Greene & Kulzic-Wilson 2016.
- [2] Grant 2015, np.