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## Sound and the audiovisual essay, part 2: The theory, history, and practice of film sound and music in videographic criticism

Liz Greene

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**Keywords:** audiovisual essay, film, film studies, sound

This is the second part of a curated two-part audiovisual section on sound and music for *NECSUS*. The first section (<https://necsus-ejms.org/sound-and-the-audiovisual-essay-part-1-dialogue-music-and-effects/>) contained four audiovisual essays that centred on dialogue, music, and effects and was published in Autumn 2020. This second part (in the main) addresses theory, history, and practice in film sound and music through the creative re-use of audiovisual examples, from early cinema, experimental film, French cinema, the Hollywood blockbuster, short film, and audiovisual essays about pop music in screen media.

All five works advance an argument through example, illustrating how we can think about sound and image in screen media. These audiovisual essays are distinct. Johannes Binotto offers a compelling example of sync and the early use of Walkman sound in film, unpicking theories of film sound, the split subject, and disruption on screen. Ian Garwood riffs on his *Indy Vinyl* project, [1] by producing an audiovisual essay that considers how pop music is and can most effectively be used in this format. John Gibbs and Douglas Pye allow us to listen in the dark to their binaural recording of a conversation about Max Ophüls' *Le Plaisir* (1952). Catherine Grant investigates musical accompaniment in early film through remix practice and textual engagement with film music theory and history. Greene's audiovisual essay puts Michel Chion's discussion of the acousmètre into dialogue with two film texts to ask how we might interpret a process of paratextual de-acousmatisation.

Theory, history, and practice are entwined in these works as each scholar/maker uses found and unfound material to advance their arguments. Interestingly, four contributions rely on text, without the use of voiceover (a frequent mode of narration within videographic criticism), whereas one places voiceover at the centre of the discussion and uses it creatively to advance an argument in film criticism. In three of these works the text comes in the form of quotation. Two of these works – Gibbs & Pye, and Greene – are best listened to through headphones. Each audiovisual essayist also chose to submit their work with an accompanying written text, to situate their work within a larger discussion, but these audiovisual essays could all be considered stand-alone works in their advancement of film sound and film music. Their engagement with rhythm, pause, slowed down footage, mixing of sound and music, and the placement of text within the visual image, reaches for the musical potential of videographic criticism.

Danijela Kulezic-Wilson asserts the need to consider the musicality of film when studying film, film sound, and film music. In doing so she concludes,

Looking for the musicality of film means opening channels for watching film audio-visually. It means allowing oneself to watch, hear, sense and process the experience without discarding intuitive revelations which might not be obvious in the script or on the screen. Realizing the musical potential of film means aiming for rhythm, balance, a sense of inherent logic within or outside the conventions of formal structuring, a sense of flow and that indiscernible quality by which an artwork can affect us profoundly, so we can see the world and ourselves differently. [2]

Kulezic-Wilson was not arguing for the use of videographic criticism in the presentation of scholarly research, but it is tempting to suggest that this mode of making is a natural ally to what Kulezic-Wilson was hoping would be achieved in film studies. What is a real achievement across all five works is how they at times address similar subjects and yet render that argument in a unique way.

### Author

Liz Greene is a Senior Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Reading. She is an editor of *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* (Liverpool University Press) and the co-edited book *The Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design and Music in Screen Media: Integrated Soundtracks* (2016). She publishes research in written and videographic forms. Greene is currently completing a feature length social documentary film that stemmed from the research project *Brews and Brows: Shaping Stories from Eyebrows to Scousebrows*, and is embarking on a new research project on *The Wizard of Oz* universe.

### References

Garwood, I. 'Indy Vinyl: Records in American Independent Cinema: 1987 to 2018', 2019: <https://indyvinyl.gla.ac.uk> (accessed on 23 February 2022).

Kulezic-Wilson, D. *The musicality of narrative film*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

### Notes

[1] <https://indyvinyl.gla.ac.uk/>

[2] Kulezic-Wilson 2015, p. 185.