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**‘Connecting hearing to viewing and knowing to feeling’: Sound as evocation in non-fiction film with particular reference to *No Escape* (Cox, 2009)<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

This article investigates the early historical context of the relationship between sound and image in film, and how contemporary theorists have drawn on this to suggest new creative aesthetic modes. The practical realization of such suggestions will be illustrated primarily by an analysis of my own film *No Escape* (Cox, 2009), which explores the combination of live piano music, diegetic sound and image. It draws on my collaborative work as sound designer and composer with film-maker Keith Marley, whereby we have attempted to challenge the perceived relationship between sound and image in documentary film (e.g. *Cider Makers*, Keith Marley, 2007 and *A Film About Nice*, Keith Marley and Geoffrey Cox, 2010), a relationship seen as stratified or hierarchical in the sense that sound is often treated by film-makers as subordinate to image in a genre that is dominated by what Bill Nichols calls a ‘discourse of sobriety’.

**Keywords**

Dziga Vertov

documentary display

making strange

constructivism

*The Art of Noises*

sound object

performance

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<sup>1</sup> *No Escape* is available on DVD on Huddersfield Contemporary Records ( July 2011), with piano played by Philip Thomas: [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Nothing-hours-Huddersfield-Contemporary-Records/dp/B005EWEF64/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?ie=UTF8&qid=1313325129&sr=8-4](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Nothing-hours-Huddersfield-Contemporary-Records/dp/B005EWEF64/ref=sr_1_4?ie=UTF8&qid=1313325129&sr=8-4)  
Extract: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRQamfJSU1Y>

## Introduction

The original inspiration for *No Escape* came from a performance of Charlie Chaplin's *Easy Street* (1917) on 11 September 2007, accompanied by Donald MacKenzie, resident organist at the Odeon Leicester Square, England, in which the live improvised music brought the film to life in ways I could not have imagined without witnessing it. The simplicity of a single instrument, and its nuanced flexibility in the hands of a skilled performer, brought great subtlety to the relationship between sound and image, and made me look at the film differently; instead of the slapstick silliness I normally associated (and indeed 'saw') with/in Chaplin, the film was revealed, in part, to be a serious and quite hard-hitting social document. This contrasts with the more rigid and tightly synchronized contemporary approach of such collaborations as Steve Reich with video artist Beryl Korot (e.g. on 'Hindenberg' (1998), the first part of their *Three Tales* 'video opera' trilogy (2003)), which, though powerful, lacked this transformational/evocative capacity. Thus, the plan was formed for a film with live piano (a more practical instrument to use than organ and a stronger link to the use of the piano in early film screenings), and this plan led into further research in early cinema sound in order to inform my creative process. Particular attention is paid to the use of sound and image in early non-fiction film, and especially some of the theoretical basis for its more radical manifestations, and thus to Dziga Vertov's influence on my work. This is laid out below and linked, where appropriate, to *No Escape*, and is followed by a more detailed look at the film itself.

### I. Early cinema sound: A performance-based aesthetic

Notwithstanding Rick Altman's challenge to Irving Thalberg's dictum 'there never was a *silent* film' (Altman 1996: 648), the fact that so-called silent film often employed a variety of parallel sonic compliments is nevertheless a central trope of film studies of the era, and the use of live music, lecturers, 'barkers', the phonograph and live sound effect troupes is well documented (see Altman 1992; Lastra 2000; Blandford et al. 2001). However, the years c. 1895–1907 (before narrative cinema began to dominate) were clearly a formative period for two new technologies, cinematography and phonography, in which they

[...] combine[d] to form an integrated sensory experience that was neither audio nor visual, but distinctly audiovisual. However, the proper ratio between the senses – between hearing and seeing – was open to vigorous debate and competing models. Was the cinema an essentially aural medium, born of the spirit of publicly performed music, to which spectacles of various sorts could be appended, or was it a narrative form to which sound could only be an ‘accompaniment’? (Lastra 2000: 93–94)

This was the era of Tom Gunning’s (1990) cinema of attractions, ‘cinema as a series of visual shocks derived from short scenes of action’ (Beattie 2008: 17), the illustrated song, ‘in which the song – *sound* – was clearly dominant over the image’ (Lastra 2000: 100), slides and motion picture lectures – often travelogues (another sound-dominated but proto-narrative form) and barkers and phonographs used to attract passersby into the theatre. Musical accompaniment often consisted of a drummer (who in the early days would often use the occasion to show off his skill, sometimes to the detriment of the images) and piano or organ, mostly playing compiled scores. Importantly, the combinations of sound and image were much more varied than in the later talkies: sound often dominated proceedings and was given structural priority over image. Competition between cinemas was often based on the success of various sound strategies, including films specifically made to motivate particular types of sound accompaniment, all of which tended to emphasize performative skill and the ‘liveness’ of the film experience (Lastra 2000: 99–103). After c. 1907, narrative cinema did begin to dominate, but

sound accompaniment was probably the element of the show most resistant [to narrative pressures] because its functions and effects were only occasionally narrative. In excess of their narrative functions, music, lecturing, and effects spoke directly to audiences in a celebration of their fleeting community. (Lastra 2000: 97)

By 1910, image had begun to take precedence over sound, with narrative forms becoming longer and more complex. One intriguing aspect of the years immediately preceding this change is the performance of live sound effects behind the film screen by skilled troupes such as that led by Lyman Howe. They emphasized realism and their capacity to deliver it, and according to contemporary accounts were remarkably successful. Howe’s effects man LeRoy Carleton is singled out for praise as a vocal

performer in the *Views and Film Index* from 1908, who 'in the course of one performance is called upon to make 115 changes of voice in his vocal mimicry of both humans and animals' (Lastra 2000: 107–08). One reviewer from the *Pittsburgh Post* of 1908 argued that

the 'noise' portion of the show – the use of stage effects to make the pictures more real – is the best that has ever been used in Pittsburgh. Conversations of the subjects of the pictures, expressing every emotion as depicted in the faces of the pictures: the whirr of the machinery, rumble of railroad trains, swish of water in marine scenes, and various other things that help the onlooker to imagine that he is witnessing the real thing instead of a counterfeit presentment. (Lastra 2000: 108)

Musical accompaniment also began to change c. 1910 from the mode of episodic attractions (songs, compiled scores, etc.) to providing continuity from narrative beginning to end, and the psychological element of underpinning the emotion of the scene was emphasized by several authors. Here for the first time we see writers such as S. L. Rothapfel in 1910 claiming the supremacy of the image: 'the people pay to *see the picture, not hear the pianist*, so therefore, play softly when occasion demands, and always remember *the picture comes first*' (Lastra 2000: 111).

Thus, after 1910, sound gradually began to become a servant to the image and to narrative, but, as Lastra points out, the early traditions of sound survived 'on the margins of the classical style or in alternative modes such as the avant-garde' (2000: 119). It is perhaps this latter category that *No Escape* fits into. Certainly its use of intermittent diegetic sound 'effects', sounding quite suddenly as if from somewhere else than the associated images (behind the screen?) and live piano (underpinning the emotion of the whole film rather than scene by scene), owe a debt to the evolving sound strategies explored in the early days of 'silent' cinema. Importantly, they are employed in such a way that sound tends to *dominate* the image.

## **II. Early cinema image: Non-narrative display**

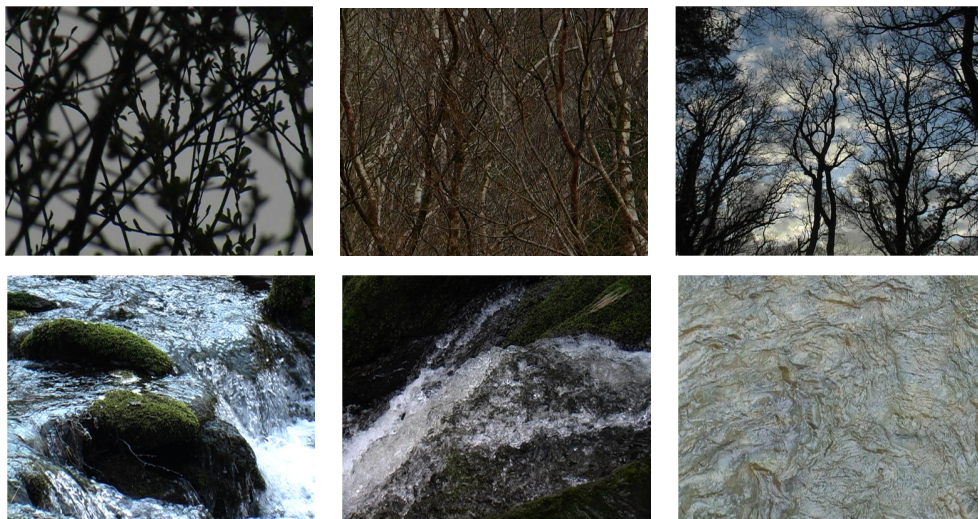
*No Escape* is a non-fiction film that eschews narrative drive and encourages sensual rather than cognitive engagement. The majority of films made prior to 1907 were of this sort (Gunning 1990: 56); Richard Barsam has described the Lumière brothers' early films as crucial to the development of non-fiction film: '[t]o them, art

was not an imitation of reality, but a direct, nonnarrative record of people doing actual things' (1992: 28). David MacDougall notes, 'documentary was born in the pleasure of watching such ordinary events as leaves shimmering on a tree or a train arriving at a station' (Beattie 2008: 13), and highlights the Lumières' emphasis on movement for its own sake, which in America was allied to sensation. One of the most extraordinary films of this sort, Thomas Edison's *Electrocuting an Elephant* (1903), features

an elephant [...] secured to a large electrified plate, which is switched on. Smoke rises from the elephant's feet and shortly thereafter the animal falls on its side. 'The moment of technologically advanced death is neither further explained nor dramatised' (Gunning 1994: 116). As with the Lumière brother's film, *L'Arrivé d'un train à la Ciotat* [1895, the first screened publicly for a sizeable audience], viewer curiosity is aroused and fulfilled in 'a brief moment of revelation typical of the cinema of attractions. This is the cinema of instants, rather than developing situations'. (Beattie 2008: 18)

Though *No Escape* contains no such sensationalist footage, the idea of movement in imagery for the sake of sensual stimulation alone, without any obvious logical narrative thread, is important in the film, though each image does have a more long-form structural place. For example, close-up shots of trees moving in the wind and a fast-flowing river can be viewed as allegories for escape, but also in purely aesthetic terms (Figure 1). These images then return later in a very rapidly edited section that alludes more explicitly to the idea of escape.

**Figure 1**



*No Escape* is also a kind of travelogue, a term coined by Burton Holmes and in vogue from c. 1908 (Barsam 1992: 42), and is mostly made up of a montage of outdoor images shot on various journeys around Great Britain and Ireland. This provides a very loose narrative, and as Lastra notes, '[t]he collection of views typical of the travel lecture, which were united into a continuous whole [...] particularly by the fiction of a journey, offered a persuasive model for multi-shot narratives in the early cinema period' (2000: 100). Such travel films were numerous and varied, for instance making a successful contribution to the 1900 Paris Exhibition, and

[i]n the United States between 1902 and 1904, William J. Keefe presented an entertainment in which the audience, seated in an open-sided railway car, rode through a tunnel and saw the scenic motion pictures made from a real train. The illusion of realism was heightened by devices that made the car vibrate as if it were on a real track. (Barsam 1992: 29)

Gunning notes that the subsequent version of this fairground-like attraction, sold to George C. Hales and launched as 'The Pleasure Railway' at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition, also featured 'sound effects simulating the click-clack of wheels and the hiss of airbrakes' (1990: 58).

Extrapolating from Gunning's cinema of attractions, Keith Beattie describes these early filmic modes as examples of 'documentary display [which operates] within scopical forms and spectatorial effects reminiscent of those of early cinema' (2008: 13). His idea of documentary display counters the traditional notion of documentary as a service for public education and for disseminating knowledge by instruction:

[...] the imposition of textual meaning via *telling* – being told – displaces the possibility and potential of gaining information and knowledge through an open-ended process of interpretation and which productively exploits the knowledge and pleasure (knowledge as pleasure) located in *showing* – the visual capacities of what is here referred to as the act of documentary display.

This idea of documentary film as a form of instruction or propaganda began in the 1920s with the Soviet non-fiction experimental film-makers (Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, etc.) and with John Grierson, 'the father of the documentary movement in the English-speaking world' (Barsam 1992: 77) and inventor of the term documentary in 1926 (Barsam 1992: 81). Though Grierson talked famously of the 'creative treatment of actuality' (Barsam 1992: 90) and allowed that the documentary 'vision [...] may rise to

poetry and drama', he concluded that 'the basic force behind it was social, not aesthetic' (Barsam 1992: 85). He regarded himself as a propagandist and the cinema as his pulpit, writing in 1935 that at the GPO Film Unit he led from 1933 to 1937, 'the artist is not pursuing entertainment but purpose, not art but theme [...]. How much further it reaches and will reach than the studio leapfrog of impotent and self-conscious art' (Barsam 1992: 101). Beattie cites John Corner to attack this notion head-on:

[The] fusing of the reality of [the] world with the motivation of the imaginative design [which] is often stimulating in its bringing together of recognition with kinds of 'making strange' or, less radically, what we must call re-seeing. Here the connections made between our apprehension of the physical realities shown and the subjective [...] world that also forms the documentary topic are significant. Feeling and ideas condense upon objects, bodies and places, modified by the physical at the same time as the physical itself is perceived within the developing thematics. Such a dialectics at once sensual and intellectual, referentially committed yet often possessed of a dreamlike potential for the indirectly suggestive and associative, is central to *documentary as an aesthetic project*. (2008: 14–15)

This statement could almost be taken as a manifesto for *No Escape*, with the important addition to the 'physical realities shown' of those realities also heard.

### III. Making it strange: Dziga Vertov

The idea of making the everyday strange can be traced back to Viktor Shklovsky, a Russian formalist poet, more akin to the Russian Futurist movement according to Viktor Erlich (1973: 630), and specifically his 1919 essay 'Art as Device' in which he suggests that 'rather than translating the unfamiliar into the terms of the familiar, the poetic image "makes strange" the habitual by presenting it in a novel light, by placing it in an unfamiliar context [thus creating] "a sphere of new perception"' (1973: 629). Similarly, and a deep influence on Shklovsky, constructivist photographer Aleksandr Rodchenko's 'most experimental photographs employ extreme low-angle shots of buildings, smokestacks, bridges, trees [...] that would transform ordinary objects into symbolic visual signs' (Petric 1987: 11). There is also some irony here in relation to the Grierson story in that Grierson was responsible for introducing several Soviet non-fiction films to Great Britain, and for developing the concept of the Soviet propaganda documentary into British documentary (Barsam 1992: 77). One of these films, Dziga



Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1928), a 'city symphony' made up of a composite of urban life in Odessa and several other Russian cities that shows Soviet citizens at work and at play, and interacting with the machinery of modern life, is marked by great formal experimentation, especially in the often allegorical montage of images, use of multi-screen and very rapid editing. This is in the service of propaganda and "'aesthetic" reconstruction of the external world' (Petric 1987: 8), and owes a debt to Rodchenko's use of low-angle shots and Shklovsky's *ostranenie*/making-it-strange (Petric 1987: 11). Barsam describes *Man with a Movie Camera* as the first 'self-defined nonfiction film, calling attention to itself, in its own opening credits, as "an experiment in the cinematic communication of visible events [...]"' (1992: 72), and as a film with a complex theoretical underpinning that attracted a following of cameramen and editors who he called *kinokis*/film-eyes:

[t]he heart of his [Vertov's] theory was his belief in the 'kino-eye,' a special form of cinematic observation that could penetrate the essence of actual events. For Vertov, the cinematic eye was better than the human eye, not only because it had the technological ability to transform reality, but also because it was not limited existentially by its human qualities and was, thus, infinitely perfectible by man. (1992: 70)

The opening film credits continue by stating that the film is 'without the aid of a scenario, (a film without a script)', and in Petric's summary of the substance of the film-eye theory, number four of his 'twelve commandments' states:

[t]he cameraman does not need a 'pre-written scheme' (a script), nor has he to follow any pre-conceived idea about life; he does not attune himself to the 'director's instructions' and the 'schedule made up by a scriptwriter'; he has his own view of life and personal vision of the future film. (Barsam 1992: 70)

Thus, 'Vertov's vision [in *Man with a Movie Camera*] is inseparable from the individual perception of a single cameraman' (Barsam 1992: 72); it is by and about the cameraman, a city symphony that is also about film-making itself. Though Vertov drew great inspiration from the constructivist principle that the artist should be like an engineer 'whose duty was to construct "useful objects"' in the pursuit of 'building a new society' (Petric 1987: 5), the idea that 'filmmakers should treat film footage – the recorded "life-facts" – according to their ideological views' differed from many Soviet Futurist and constructivist artists, who had little time for subjective interpretations,

insisting instead on 'the absolute dominance of "facts" in art' (Petric 1987: 8). His method was to combine his concept of film-truth (maintaining the integrity of each shot, what one might call 'actuality') with film-eye – the recreation of events through editing (Petric 1987: 80), something that later influenced Grierson's idea of the 'creative treatment of actuality'. In doing this, Vertov also draws attention to the editor (who is shown in the film along with numerous shots of the cameraman) through virtuosic and radically complex editing. Jean-André Fieschi says of the film editing:

[the film] contains an astonishing play (back and forth) between document (testimony, evidence) and reconstruction; or rather, a radical and progressive *task* of fictionalizing the documentary, to a degree where a genuine *dislocation* takes place, and one finds oneself far removed from the raw material. (Barsam 1992: 73)

Petric describes this approach as leading to 'a more profound vision of reality than conventional observation can allow' (Barsam 1992: 74), and by linking it to his 'documentary display', Keith Beattie concurs:

In Vertov's approach this 'film-eye', the montage of associated shots, interacted dialectically with film-truth [...] to reveal a new, progressive reality hidden below the surface details of experience. The combination of film-eye and film-truth vigorously inscribes a form of documentary display which relies on showing, not telling, to achieve aesthetic resolution and a perception of revolutionary reality. (2008: 44)

*No Escape* is specifically influenced by the notion of the non-fiction film being a personal vision of the cameraman, and should be viewed as if one is looking through that individual's eyes (in this case, mine), and also the concept that, in some senses, by fictionalizing the documentary by creative treatment of actuality via montage editing techniques, one can get closer to a more profound truth, albeit a subjective one. This is particularly evident in the climax of the film, where very rapid editing (with shots of only a few frames in length) pays direct homage to the final section of Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* in which a close-up shot of the editor's eyes (the film-eye) is repeated 38 times a few frames apart (Petric 1987: 189), and in a progressive reduction of frames (and hence giving a sense of acceleration), interspersed with varied but repetitive images, mostly of urban scenes (especially trains), such that the blur of images is dominated by this ever-present eye. In *No Escape*, the eye is replaced by a shot of a

wave on a beach, the rest being increasingly frenetic images of previously viewed scenes of travelling and movement; the implication is that the beach becomes progressively dominant in the *mind's* eye as a destination of potential escape (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**



#### **IV. Photographing sound: *The Art of Noises***

Vertov was also influenced by the Futurist and constructivist ‘principal of creating a nonsequential structure that reflects the essence of an urban environment and the dynamism of a technological age’ [declaring,] “‘long live [...] the poetry of levers, wheels, steel wings, the metallic clamor of movement and the blinding grimace of the scorching electric current’” (Petric [1924] 1987: 7–8). This is remarkably similar in tone to a passage from Luigi Russolo’s letter to Balilla Pratella of 1913 in which he outlines his famous *The Art of Noises*: ‘[w]e will amuse ourselves by orchestrating together in our imagination [...] the varied hubbub of train stations, iron works, thread mills, printing presses, electrical plants, and subways’ (Russolo [1913] 1986: 26). Indeed, before turning to film, Vertov studied violin, piano and music theory for three years from 1912, and was introduced to the work of Rodchenko and the poems of Vladimir Mayakovsky from 1916, themselves deeply influenced by Russolo’s *The Art of Noises*:

For Vertov the mix of writing, music, and noises within the adventurous milieu of the avant-garde ‘turned into an enthusiasm for editing shorthand records [stenographs] and gramophone recordings. Into a special interest in the possibility of documentary sound recording. Into experiments in recording, with words and letters, the noise of a waterfall, the sounds of a lumbermill, etc.’ (Kahn 1999: 139–40)

In his attempt to build a ‘Laboratory of Hearing’ in 1916, Vertov declared (somewhat disingenuously, given Russolo’s precedent), ‘I had the original idea of the need to

enlarge our ability to organize sound [...] to transcend the limits of ordinary music. I decided that the concept of sound included all of the audible world' (Kahn 1999: 140). Limitations in the technology of the wax cylinder phonograph recording proved too much for him (and indeed the Futurists), and in terms of his transition to film he remembered how

one day in the spring of 1918... returning from a train station. There lingered in my ears the signs and rumble of the departing train... someone's swearing...a kiss... someone's exclamation... laughter, a whistle, voices, the ringing of the station bell, the puffing of the locomotive... whispers, cries, farewells.... And thoughts while walking: I must get a piece of equipment that won't describe, but will record, photograph these sounds. Otherwise it's impossible to organize, edit them. They rush past, like time. But the movie camera perhaps? Record the visible....Organize not the audible, but the visible world. Perhaps that's the way out? (Kahn 1999: 140)

These ideas of harnessing the sounds of the everyday world for artistic purposes of course later came to fruition in 1948 in Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète* and his concept of the 'sound object' and of reduced listening, whereby a sound is listened to in terms of its sonic properties, rather than its referentiality. The use of sound in *No Escape* owes as much to Schaeffer as it does to Vertov or the Futurists, but Vertov's concept of documentary sound recording and 'photographing sound' is important. A central section of the film, in which some of the images are held for long periods of time, describes a kind of condensed day-in-the-life in sound – I fixed a microphone to myself as I went about my daily work – and the sound narrative is purposeful. This may or may not be transparent to the listener, however, and therefore the emphasis is as much on the sonic properties and interplay of the sound 'objects' for their own sake. Vertov did attempt to use sound somewhat in this way in *Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Don Basin* (Vertov, 1930), a propaganda film about the Don coal miners' attempts to fulfill their Five-Year Plan quota in just four years, and one of the first films in which sound was recorded on location. He was a strong advocate of synchronous sound recording: as early as 1925 he developed the idea of 'radio-truth' to accompany his film-truth (and thus also the 'radio-ear' to his film-eye), urging his *kinoks* to 'campaign with facts not only in terms of seeing but also in terms of hearing' (Petric 1987: 58). Though Vertov's enthusiasm for synchronous sound recorded on location went against the

prevailing notion that it would 'destroy the culture of montage' (Eisenstein in Petric [1929] 1987: 59), he took a montage approach to both image *and* sound and particularly their complex interaction in *Enthusiasm* (which also included original music composed by N. A. Timofeev). This counters the more usual sense of the term synchronization, since in *Enthusiasm* 'both sound and image "articulate" one another, ignoring the conventional divisions and hierarchies appropriate to narrative' (Lastra 2000: 121). Charlie Chaplin commented on the film that 'never had I known that these mechanical sounds [the rhythmic sounds of Stalinist industry] could be arranged to sound so beautiful. I regard it as one of the most exhilarating symphonies I have heard. Mr. Dziga Vertov is a musician' (Petric [1930] 1987: 63). Again, it is this montage approach to sound that was picked up by Schaeffer some eighteen years later, and Chaplin's description could just as well apply to aspects of Schaeffer's *musique concrète*, a movement John Mackay goes as far as to suggest owes its origins to Vertov (Mackay 2003a: 2).

In 1933, Vertov urged engineers to develop better portable sound recording equipment (Petric 1987: 58) after severe technical and logistical problems had plagued *Enthusiasm*, resulting in the loss of many location sound recordings (Mackay 2003b: 3). Nevertheless, the coming of synchronous sound did engender its innovative use in later documentaries of the 1930s such as the Grierson-produced *Night Mail* (1936), written and directed by Basil Wright and Harry Watt, with score by Benjamin Britten and verse narrative by W. H. Auden, lending it a more poetic thrust generally. Summaries of the history of sound conventions in documentary film by Corner (2002) and Jeffrey K. Ruoff (1992) suggest, however, that after this innovative, and sometimes structurally functional, use of sound (and especially music) in the promotional and propagandist documentaries of the 1930s and 1940s, a journalistic mode began to dominate from the 1950s onwards. Consequently, 'rational imperatives and concern[s] about "balance"', make it likely 'that music will seem extraneous if not wholly suspect, an importer of unwelcome emotion and feeling' (Corner 2002: 358). This was followed by the equally important *vérité* and 'direct cinema' modes of 'sustained observational film-making' (described by Barsam as descendents of Vertov (Barsam 1992: 71)) that 'embraced a degree of depictive purism that places question marks alongside anything likely to

adulterate a direct relaying of the primary events' (Corner 2002: 358). In terms of sound, this outlaws the use of all asynchronous material (particularly music) or the creative treatment of on-screen sound: 'the aesthetic (as distinct from the cognitive) possibilities of sound in documentary are in most cases not significantly mobilized at all' (Corner 2003: 98). Even Beattie downplays the role of sound in outlining his concept of documentary display:

Display is grounded in narrative, though the narrative function is often attenuated and placed in the service of the expressive visual effects of the work. The visual also supersedes, but does not displace, a work's auditory components, and the auditory register is frequently employed to reinforce visual effects. (2008: 13)

This of course follows the displacement of sound by the image in film generally after 1910 (as instructed by Ropthal above), and has remained so ever since. Film-makers such as Ingmar Bergman express the conventional view that 'the primary factor in film is the image, the secondary factor is sound, [...] and the tension between these two creates the third dimension' (Potter 1990: 6), and even advocates of the crucial importance of the theory and practice of film sound such as Michel Chion, concur:

[...] although sound has modified the nature of the image, it has left untouched the image's centrality as that which focuses the attention [...] [it] has not shaken the image from its pedestal. Sound still has the role of showing us what it wants us to see in the image. (1994: 144)

In terms of the documentary, all this is summed up by Nichols' contention that the conventions of documentary production implicitly create aesthetic restraint in the text; thus, a 'discourse of sobriety' emerges whereupon 'aesthetic innovation is subservient to documentary conventions' (1991: 35). It is this notion that Beattie and Corner want to counter. Regarding sound specifically, Corner calls on documentary makers to use music to connect 'knowing to feeling and hearing to viewing', and to employ music in 'a more varied, inventive and risk-taking' way so it '[c]ould be a welcome part of the wider and continuing exploration of the role of art in the quest for understanding' (2002: 366).

In summary, comprehension in the filmic modes described by Beattie as examples of documentary display is sensuous and affective, produced by sound and sight (listening and looking), and operating through subjective rather than cognitive

impressions and processes. Like Lastra, Gunning also emphasizes that despite the dominance of narrative imagery after 1907, the effects of the cinema of attractions do not disappear but are incorporated into fiction (the action movie) and especially avant-garde film. Beattie concurs: '[i]t is this tradition – the cinema of attractions merged with avant-garde practices, as opposed to the Griersonian documentary film – that constitutes the central lineage of documentary display' (2008: 19) and, indeed, underpins the rationale for *No Escape* that owes a debt to the poetic, sensual and subjective approach inherent in this concept. It also holds a belief in the supremacy of sound and music in terms of their power to generate structure in film and, as Robert Bresson says, their capacity to be 'more evocative than an image, which is essentially only a stylization of visual reality' (Burch 1985: 200). *No Escape* thus tries to answer Corner's call to connect 'knowing to feeling and hearing to viewing' by allowing 'ideas [to] condense upon objects, [...] places' and, of course, sounds. It looks at film as a performative event as witnessed in the days of early cinema, and employs the non-narrative and at times complex montage approach of Dziga Vertov in order to attempt to create a 'more profound vision'. It also views the film as a personal vision of the cameraman as espoused by Vertov: it is by and about that person, i.e. me; one should see the film as if looking through an individual's eyes, though he or she (almost) never appears.

#### **V. *No Escape*: Connecting knowing to feeling**

*No Escape* is 25 minutes long, during which time the piano plays for about sixteen minutes. The film is divided into four main sections, which are delineated as movements within the piano score as I, 'Arrive'; II, 'Depart'; III, 'Escape'; and IV, 'No Escape', and these are interspersed with other sections in which the piano does not play, resulting in varied combinations of image, live piano and diegetic sound (Figure 3). The images are mainly of outdoor urban and rural scenes (sometime starkly juxtaposed) that can be quite static in the frame, but this is often mitigated by shots being taken from (or of) moving transport – trains, boats, cars – or on foot (Figure 4).

**Figure 3:** Structural diagram of *No Escape* showing film sections, the varying combinations of the sonic resources and image content.

Score movements	Film sections	Time	Sonic combinations	Content	Length
I. Arrive	1a	0–1:55	Pno	Rural	01:55
	1b	1:55–4:57	Pno (occ. diegetic)	Rural (occ. urban) then urban from 4:04	03:02
	2a	4:57–6:49	Diegetic (no piano)	Urban (occ. rural)	01:52
II. Depart	2b	6:49–10:26	Pno (occ. diegetic)	Urban then rural from 7:57	03:37
	2c	10:26–12:00	Pno solo	No images	01:34
	3a	12:00–17:14	Diegetic (no piano)	Indoor urban (occ. rural)	05:14
	3b	17:14–17:26	Diegetic (no piano)	No images	00:12
III. Escape	4a	17:26–19:56	Pno (occ. diegetic)	Urban	02:30
	4b	19:56–20:42	Pno + diegetic	Urban/rural rapid interchange	00:38
	4c	20:42–21:54	Pno (occ. diegetic)	Rural	01:12
IV. No Escape	5	21:54–26:07	Pno	Rural	04:13



**Figure 4**



The trope of travelling represents an attempt at physical escape, but the title refers to the idea that though we may travel to get away from something, there is no escape from the inner life (either positive or negative in emotional terms). This is represented by the piano music, which varies within fairly restricted limits, delineated by close control of intervallic relationships. The opening chord of the score, which occurs at the very beginning of the film and forms a basis for all the music that follows, is a bi-tonal hexachord of D major and C# major. This is followed by a melodic sequence of the remaining six notes of the twelve semitones that make up the chromatic scale (Figure 5).

**Figure 5:** The opening bars of *No Escape*, I 'Arrive'. From the low B at the end of the first bar the procedure described above is reversed but the distinction between melody and chords is not made.

Handwritten musical score for piano, showing the opening bars of 'No Escape, I Arrive'. The score includes tempo markings (♩=40, ♩=55, molto rit.), dynamics (mf, p, mp), and performance instructions like 'Ped.' and 'Not hopeful'. The music is written on a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The first section is marked with a tempo of ♩=40 and the instruction '(Not) hopeful'. The second section is marked with a tempo of ♩=55 and 'molto rit.'. The score shows a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with various dynamics and articulation marks.

Within some sections, transpositions of this material are also used, normally of a third, as in the first section that later uses combinations of F major and F# major and then Bb minor and B minor. Each section progressively ‘expands’ the interval between the two chords making up the bi-tonal hexachord (sometimes resulting in a pentachord), whilst retaining the higher chord from the previous section. The six or seven notes of the chromatic scale that are left over from this process are formed into a melodic, and sometimes chordal, sequence that has a similar shape and uses similar intervallic relationships to the sequence of the opening bars. Thus, ‘Depart’ is based on D major and E major (an intervallic gap of a major second); ‘Escape’ on E major and Ab major (a major third), and then later Ab major and Db minor (a perfect fourth); and ‘No Escape’ on F minor and C major (a perfect fifth). The use of rhythm and dynamics in the opening section is also broadly mapped across the other sections in a comparable way. All this is mitigated to a greater or lesser degree by quite free use of the method described in terms of repetition and recapitulation of material, combining the melodic sequences into chordal ones (Figure 6) and rhythmically arpeggiating the bi-tonal chords (Figure 7).

**Figure 6:** The opening bars of III ‘Escape’ showing, in bar 133, the bi-tonal pentachord of E and Ab major followed by the other seven notes of the chromatic scale presented as single notes or combined to form chords (the Bb and D are repeated). A variation of this process is repeated in bars 134–135 and begins again in bar 136.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for Figure 6, covering bars 133 to 136. The score is written on a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 40. Bar 133 begins with a bi-tonal pentachord of E and Ab major. The chromatic scale notes are presented as single notes or combined to form chords. The Bb and D notes are repeated. The score includes dynamics like ppp and ppp, and performance instructions like Ped. and accents.

**Figure 7:** Rhythmic arpeggiation of the bi-tonal chord of F and F# from I ‘Arrive’. The other six notes of the chromatic scale are here distributed between iterations of the hexachord.

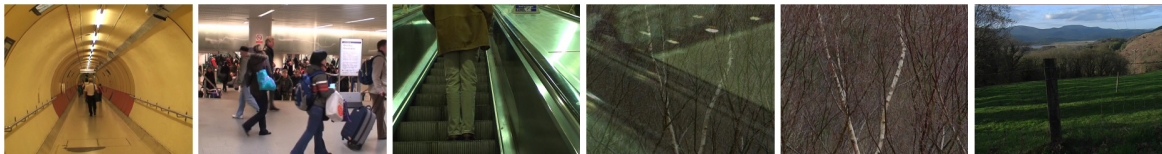
The image displays three staves of musical notation, numbered 10, 11, and 12. Each staff consists of a treble clef and a bass clef. The music features a series of chords and melodic lines, with triplets and slurs indicating specific rhythmic and phrasing elements. A horizontal line with a triangle symbol is drawn below each staff, likely representing a section of the music.

The overall purpose of this strategy is to allow enough harmonic, melodic and rhythmic variation whilst retaining quite a narrow expressive palette. At the same time, the progressive widening of the interval between the two chords (from a minor second in 'Arrive' to a perfect fifth in 'No Escape') creates gradually less dissonant music – the agitation and energy of the attempted escape gives way to a calmer, if more resigned, acceptance; some form of catharsis has occurred. The music (each section of which was composed before but concurrent with the image editing) does generally drive, and occasionally respond to, image choice and editing, but the overall sense should be that one cannot escape, and that these responses are fleeting; the external environment generally and specific locations can only affect underlying emotion temporarily.

In general, the use of diegetic sound in *No Escape* heralds the intrusion of the 'real' world and its everyday cares. For example, on-screen sound is first heard quite

suddenly at around two minutes with the appearance of a bus on a busy street amidst shots of the sea and the seaside, and a little later a long shot of an approaching van on a country lane is suddenly accompanied by its synchronous sound as it passes the camera and leads into a longer section of mixed urban and rural scenes. The following section of shots of the London Underground (the beginning of 'Depart') and a figure's feet walking through its tunnels are dominated by on-screen urban sounds that are occasionally interspersed with sounds and rural images of gushing water, the implication being that the walker is thinking of these places of 'escape'. As these sounds fade out, the piano returns, more joyful now, and the rural vistas takeover completely; the everyday world is forgotten and a more dreamlike one ensues in which escape seems temporarily possible (Figure 8).

**Figure 8**



In the latter half of the film, from 'Escape' onwards, no new sounds are introduced; instead, sounds (and some images) heard earlier are repeated either in loose synchrony with logically associated images or in stark contrast to them. Though this section reaches a climax as the attempted escape reaches a frenetic peak, the sonic world is indicating that the attempt is in vain, and as the images return to panoramic sea views, sounds of the city drift across and then fade, allowing the piano to takeover until the end, the latter now assuming the role of the call to reality.

The sense of movement and travelling in the film does provide a very loose narrative, and harks back to the early travelogues; for instance, the film begins with a sequence of shots of the sea whilst travelling to an island on a boat and ends with a similar sequence leaving the island. The whole of these sequences feature no on-screen sound, concentrating instead on the piano music, and thus providing a sonically structural and loose image narrative base. However, the island itself is not shown in the first sequence, and the imagery is quite different due to starkly different weather and

sea conditions: sunny, bright and very rough on arrival; cloudy, grey and calm on departure. So it is not intended or important that the viewer necessarily believes that it is the same island, but the juxtaposition of the sunny scenes and fairly lively music to match the rough seas at the start is designed to suggest that the possibility of escape is real, if fraught, whereas the more gentle and somewhat resigned music, grey skies and calm seas of the end suggest the realization that escape is not possible after all (Figure 9).

**Figure 9**



It should be emphasized here that *No Escape* is a form of documentary, if 'fictionalized' in the manner Feishci says of Vertov so there is no 'true' chronological narrative, use of 'real' continuity sequences or 'developing situations'. Nevertheless, the attempt to escape is real and there is a genuine personal subtext being worked out in the film –all the images are of actuality and mostly shot by me, alone on various journeys around Great Britain and Ireland, whilst trying to 'escape'. The film-truth of each shot is maintained as the film-eye and radio-ear focus on the futility of emotional escape through physical displacement, whilst allowing for the sensual pleasure of listening to sounds and music and looking at images to be an aesthetic end in itself. However, the specific personal aspects of this story are not important to the audience experience of the film and thus do not form any explicit part of it, and since the idea is that any understanding of implied 'knowledge' for the viewer/listener is gleaned via a

poetic, sensual engagement with sound and image, it is accepted that this understanding may vary widely.

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