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No Escape (2009)

The initial idea for the film came from an inspiring performance of Chaplin's *Easy Street* (1917) accompanied by Donald MacKenzie, resident organist at the Odeon Leicester Square, which led me into researches of early cinema (c1895-1907), a period described by Tom Gunning as the 'cinema of attractions'. James Lastra points out that during this time competition between cinemas was based on the success of various sound strategies all emphasising the 'liveness' of the film experience and films were made to motivate particular types of sound accompaniment. Particularly intriguing was the use of live sound effects performed by a skilled troupe from behind the film screen to produce 'realistic' sound effects. This is translated in *No Escape* into the manipulation of on-screen diegetic sound, also inspired by Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète* and his notions of the sound object and reduced listening. The interaction between the live piano and the onscreen sound is crucial to *No Escape* as is that of the piano and images, which exist alone together for long stretches.

The visual content and structure of the film draws on the city symphonies of Walter Ruttmann and especially Dziga Vertov whose formal experimentation, startling juxtaposition of images and very rapid editing is important to *No Escape*'s non-narrative and at times complex montage of British rural and urban vistas. Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) is by and partially about the man with the camera as is *No Escape*, the title of which refers to the idea that though we may travel to get away from something, there is no escape from the inner life. This is represented by the piano music, which varies but within fairly restricted limits. It does respond or drive image choice and editing but the overall sense should be that one cannot escape and these responses are temporary and fleeting

Extrapolating from Tom Gunning's cinema of attractions, James Beattie's concept of 'documentary display' - a poetic, sensual and subjective approach which encourages listening and looking rather than cognitive understanding - underpins the aesthetic of *No Escape*, as is a belief in the supremacy of sound and of film as a performative event.