

TALKING PICTURES: THE INTERACTIVE POETICS OF IMAGINED SOUND

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ABSTRACT

A combination of complementary senses gives us our place in the world. As we examine a work of art, be it a painting, a sculpture or a photograph, we possess the capacity to “hear” as well as see it based on numerous clues it provides. Just as the old radio truism, “the pictures are better in sound” offers us the imaginative relationship between the ear and the mind, so the power of the visual to suggest sound unlocks a new layer of meaning in the world of apparently static and “silent” images... By consciously tuning the ears to partner the eyes, we interpret the visual world with new strata of experience and meaning. Unbound by restrictions of nationalism and linguistics, we listen to messages from international voices expressed through art in our own language while remaining true to the sounds of their recreated worlds.

KEYWORDS

Art; listening; painting; poetry; radio; sound

RESUMO

O nosso lugar no mundo resulta de uma combinação de sentidos complementares. Quando analisamos uma obra de arte, seja uma pintura, uma escultura ou uma fotografia, temos a capacidade de “ouvir” assim como de ver essa obra com base em numerosas pistas que ela providencia. O velho truísmo radiofónico que diz que “as imagens são melhores em som” também nos sugere uma relação imaginativa entre o ouvido e a mente. Da mesma maneira, o facto de o visual ter poder para sugerir som abre a um novo nível de sentido num mundo de imagens aparentemente estáticas e “silenciosas”. Ao conscientemente sintonizarmos os ouvidos com os olhos, interpretamos o mundo visual com novos estratos de experiência e sentido. Sem as restrições do nacionalismo e da linguística, ouvimos mensagens que vêm de vozes internacionais e se expressam através da arte na nossa própria linguagem, embora continuem a ser verdade para os sons dos seus mundos recriados.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Arte; escuta; pintura; poética; rádio; som

INTRODUCTION: EYES THAT LISTEN, EARS THAT LOOK

We affect a seemingly empty space by our very presence in it, even as we seek to record the experience of that space, either electronically or imaginatively. A room full of listeners changes the character of that room. A single person recording an unpopulated landscape negates the idea of human absence. By being present to hear, by being a witness to the see-able and audible, our consciousness contributes actively to the

experience. We are makers at the same time as we are observers. Likewise an apparently mute image does not offer silence but a receptacle in which the imagination can create its own personalised sound world, just as in darkness the mind may generate its own pictures to people the void. A picture, a sculpture, a building or a text can call forth a mental response from us beyond the visual and cognitive be it conscious or subliminal, be it an internally articulated thought; more subtly, it offers the potential of a sonic signal offering interactive emotion. We may have linguistic limitations, but to move beyond words is to enter a world of sound suggested by the other senses that truly knows no frontiers. The coming of sound to motion pictures immediately placed barriers to communication that had not existed before. We are participants in a sound work, and we personalise the world internally, but it is an acquired skill, to train eye and ear to relate to one another, utilising memory to provide references. The poet and artist Charles Tomlinson could picture his beloved Gloucestershire valley through the sound of it:

The closed eye can explore
the shapes of the vale
as sure as the braille
beneath a blind finger.

In all its roused cells
the whole mind unlocks
whenever eye listens,
wherever ear looks.

(Tomlinson, 2009, p. 441)¹

Sound specialists have long been aware of one of the great strengths of audio, that of communicating pictures in the mind. Because we hear, we “see” imaginatively, and in this respect, instrumental music is truly international. As the old truism has it, “in radio, the pictures are better”. In this writing, however, I would like to explore the idea that this imaginative sonic signalling between sound and image is in fact two-way, that we possess the capacity to make sound from pictures, just as we make pictures from sound. The sound suggested to our imagination by a work of art may be a literal interpretation evinced by clues uttered by the object itself, or it may manifest itself as an abstract or associative sound. Certain images may indeed by the same token produce a profound silence within the brain: that in itself is an emotional dialogue. In short, the auditory response may be narrative, subliminal or emotional – or a combination of them all; we hear with our ears, but we listen with our minds. That is why radio, sound and poetry have kinship.

PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

Between October 2017 and March 2018, the Fondation Louis Vuitton staged an exhibition, “Being Modern: MoMA in Paris”, which distilled a collection of key works from

¹ I acknowledge with gratitude permission granted by Carcanet Press to publish these lines from Charles Tomlinson’s poem.

New York's Museum of Modern Art, an institution established in 1929 that enabled the preservation of much European art which would almost certainly otherwise have been lost in the turbulent years that followed. Works by Cezanne, Dali, Picasso, Kirschner and many others thus returned to the continent that bore them, and the "voices" of the artists – individually and collectively – spoke and sang within the refreshing "acoustic" of a changed environment. At a time of rising nationalism, the performance of this international choir was well timed. Indeed the first catalogue in 1942 of the MoMA collection expressed such a concept explicitly in darker times: "it is important in a period when Hitler has made a lurid fetish of nationalism that no fewer than 24 nations other than our own should be represented in the museum collection" (Bajac, 2017, p. 22). In the Paris selection alone over one hundred artists from both sides of the Atlantic filled the galleries with the colours of sound and the sound of colour.

Visiting an art gallery or museum is an auditory experience even before specific art works are examined; every room has its own acoustic, and the cumulative memory of such a visit is often retained as a sonic echo in the mind. The environment provides a series of circumstances through which the visitor moves, hearing the acoustic of place, ever changing as the crowds move and shift, and then focusing attention on art pieces in turn. The Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky, in his work, *Pictures from an Exhibition*, provides us with a clear musical interpretation of this experience, juxtaposing as he does a theme representing the *promenade* of the visitor between individual art works themselves, each of which Mussorgsky represents in sound. Mussorgsky's work was created after visiting a memorial exhibition of work by his friend, the young Russian painter Viktor Hartmann, held at the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg during February and March, 1874. The exhibition contained over 400 of the artist's works, and Mussorgsky's suite, made up of ten representations of individual paintings linked by a theme depicting the progress of the viewer through the rooms, was completed in just over three weeks, from 2-22 June, 1874.

Our own overall sonic experience of a gallery provides the soundscape into which are placed the focused specifics of the individual art objects, each with the potential to evoke its own sound world in the imagination: internalised sound placed within the context of physical sound. Leaving the room, we carry the memory of it, of the objects we have seen, the impression they made upon us, but also of the place itself. Physically, it was a shared experience with other visitors, while in audio terms, every personal response remains unique and of our own making. As Franz Kafka said, "everyone carries a room about inside him. This fact can even be proved by means of the sense of hearing" (Kafka, 1991, p. 1). We may choose to purchase a catalogue as a souvenir of our experience; when we open it in a new environment, say our home, office or classroom, the sound of this new place provides a changed audio backdrop, while the "music" of the images as we turn the pages may – or may not – remain the same as on first seeing. A broad analogy would be the experience of *live* music in the concert hall, contrasted with a recording of the same artist and/or work listened to within the environment of the home; one provides a direct witness to the event, while carrying with it all the unpredictability

such a happening brings, while the alternative of a reasonably controlled situation, listening to the same work as a purely auditory experience may aid contemplation, but through the medium of a copy. One could argue that neither is totally definitive, and indeed such a reading of the performer's original intention could only really occur were the *live* performance itself to take place in the presence of the listener alone. Nevertheless, we find ourselves returning to experience the original *in situ* in order to replenish our mnemonic and thereby nourish our experience of the work itself. In other words, a painting performing *live* is a happening of its own. Later we shall explore the affect of an auditory work when augmented by the visual and acoustic properties of great spaces, such as a church, in which the sonic properties of the space itself as a part of experience is important in the event and its memory. A dry external acoustic compared to the liquid reverberations of a cathedral is a part of the performance of the world. John Hull, an academic who became blind at the height of his career, commented that "if only rain could fall within a room, it would help me to understand where things are in that room, to give a sense of being in the room, instead of just sitting on a chair" (Hull, 2013, p. 27).

Were a composer to orchestrate a response to *Being Modern*, the sound forces would indeed be various. The sheer range of work, historically and creatively, were as diverse as the decades represented, and every voice spoke of its time and across time. The three sections – from the earlier work of MoMa's first decade, through Minimalism and Pop Art, to the most recent acquisitions, including such pieces as Kerry James Marshall's "Untitled (Club Scene)" – eloquently evoked in the mind of the viewer a variety of internal imaginative sound responses. There were indeed sound installations that spoke for themselves, such as Canadian Janet Cardiff's *Forty-Part Motet* from 2001, forty speakers, each a black box at head height sounding Thomas Tallis's 16th century 40-part motet, *Spem in Alium*. In this work, curator Quentin Bajac's description of the collection in the catalogue as "polyphonic" was given literal expression; applied to the exhibition as a whole such a word was both appropriate and exact in referencing the imaginative and metaphorical murmur of sound generated by work experienced both externally and internally as a partnership between vision and sound in the mind. To take one example from *Being Modern*, is to demonstrate the potential analogies between visual and sonic art, and our personal interpretation of them. Mark Rothko's "No.10" (oil on canvas), some seven feet by nearly five feet in size, painted in 1950, is a series of horizontal blocks of colour, shades of off-white, grey, dull blue and yellow. It is the epitome of Rothko's mature style, in which he left all vestiges of figuration behind in favour a solid fields of colour. In so doing, as Margaret Ewing has said, this work and others like them "demonstrated the artist's transformation of his canvases into vessels of vessels for emotional response" (Bajac, 2017, p. 108). In 1943, Rothko and his artist friend Adolph Gottlieb sent a letter to *The New York Times* in response to a critic bewildered by the apparent lack of meaning in the artists' biomorphic abstract paintings: "no possible set of notes can explain our paintings", they wrote. "Their explanation must come out of a consummated experience between picture and onlooker". (Rothko & Gottlieb, 1943 quoted in Bajac, 2017, p. 108). For the confused critics, one would hope that this was helpful advice; an even more useful guide might have been to encourage the viewer to allow the visual to

touch the senses in the same way as music, by-passing the intellect and pressing buttons of emotional response beyond rationalisation and interpretation. As Beethoven wrote on the manuscript score of his great mass, *Missa Solemnis*, in 1824, presented to Archduke Rudolf of Austria, to whom the work was dedicated: “Von Herzen – Möge es wieder – Zu Herzen gehn!” [“From the heart – may it return to the heart!”].

“THE HUNTERS IN THE SNOW”

The concept of a piece of sound art has become increasingly accepted within gallery culture. In the summer of the year 2000, the musician and writer David Toop curated “Sonic Boom: the Art of Sound” at the Hayward Gallery, London. Toop was conscious of the context in which we hear sound: the inspiration for Akio Morita and Masuru Ibuka to develop the Sony Walkman had been, after all, the ability for listeners to avoid conflicts caused by competing external noises while listening to music. John Cage’s response to listening had been the opposite. In his 4’33” he had encouraged the audience to consider the sound of the location in which the so-called “silent” piece was “performed”. Likewise, Toop, in his introduction to the Hayward Gallery exhibition, wrote:

all the artists in Sonic Boom are alert and responsive to the richly clamorous environment in which we are now immersed. Rather than searching for ways to cancel out the murmurings, hummings, pulses, whistles, alarms, signals, irritations, pleasures and shocks of the contemporary soundscape, they focus on their essence, impact and effect, so shaping new meanings for a bewildering range of aural events. (Toop, 2000, p. 15)

This is therefore a self-conscious acknowledgement of the sound environments within which we experience art, whether it be sonic or apparently silent, just as, in John Berger’s words, “photography is the process of rendering observation self-conscious” (Berger, 2013, p. 19). And if it is so for photography, surely it may be said to be true of all visual art? What if maps could talk? What if the cartography of shape and place could be tethered to the cartography of thought and imagination? What if the earth’s apparently silent voice could be translated into sound? In 2015, the AV Festival in the North East of England toured a sound installation by Susan Stenger, called “Sound Strata of Coastal Northumberland”. Stenger’s 59-minute work was a sonic representation of a 12-metre long hand-drawn cross-section map of the coastal strata from the River Tyne to the River Tweed, created by a nineteenth century mining engineer and cartographer called Nicholas Wood. Her work in this context is based on the sound of drones from Northumbrian pipes, a bed upon which other sounds – song, industry and imaginative abstract compositional techniques – riff and intertwine. In an essay accompanying his map, Wood referred to the area under his consideration, from Newcastle to Berwick-upon-Tweed in musical terms, as a “suite of rocks”. Stenger in her turn gave terrain, geology and cultural history a range of voices that overlaid one another as do the strata of the earth’s fabric. In other words, she “read” Wood’s “score” imaginatively and articulated it in sound.

This is exactly what we do within our head when we read a poem or a book, a mental process that gives us the instrumentation to orchestrate the printed codes into imagery. In fact, the internal process goes further, turns three hundred and sixty five degrees, because it takes a picture, be it a visual or an audio image created by another mind, filters it through the neutral medium of words and reinvents it through personal experience and circumstance to make a drama that in turn is mitigated by our own personality and placed in our memory bank. Gilles Deleuze has written: “musical art has two aspects, one which is something like a dance of molecules that reveal materiality, the other is the establishment of human relationships in their sound matter” (Deleuze quoted in Stenger, 2014, p. 15). The miracle of composition is the revelation of patterns of sound placed on silence that touch a chord of recognition in us. We are each of us composers, and our orchestra is our imagination. Stenger’s sound work is rooted in a partnership with the visual. As she has said: “when I think about a new sound work I often visualise it and draw my ideas. I can thank my art teacher mother for this; she taught me about visual composition – organising line, shape, texture, colour – at a very young age...” (Stenger, 2014, p. 52). She adds elsewhere, “I think ‘sonic incarnation’ is a good term” (Stenger, 2014, p. 63). So it is.

Likewise we possess the capacity to sonically incarnate and articulate any visual image presented to us. We can verbalise our response to it of course, describe it in language or philosophize upon its content as for example, did the poet W.H. Auden on Bruegel’s “The fall of Icarus” in his poem, “Musee des Beaux Arts”. In such ways we bring an object into the world and consciousness through new ways, giving a thing a life independent of but dependent upon its original manifestation. Before this, however, the work has to “speak” directly to our consciousness, and to recognise its sonic potential is to develop layers of meaning that can greatly enhance its richness to us and the complexity of our response. In other words, we *translate* it. To illustrate this, let us take as an example another painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, known variously as “The hunters in the snow” and “The return of the hunters”. Painted in 1565 as one of a series, five of which survive, depicting different times of the year, the original is housed in the Kunshistorisches Museum, Vienna, and it is a useful example to discuss, partly because of its obvious sonic qualities, but also because it is one of Bruegel’s most famous works, familiar to many and widely available in second-hand images.

The scene is set in the depths of a European winter, during December or January. In it, three hunters are returning with their dogs from what would appear to be an unsuccessful hunting trip. They trudge wearily through the snow, and their dogs hang their heads. One carries the body of a dead fox, an indication of the paucity of their efforts, and there are the footprints in the snow of a small animal, possibly a rabbit, showing missed opportunities. They have come to the brow of a hill, and below them is their village stretching before them towards a strangely spectacular crop of a mountain range, clearly uncharacteristic of the rest of the view, and certainly invented rather than painted from reality. It is a mythic landscape imagined on a still, overcast day, and the snow on the ground would seem to be fresh-fallen. Skaters are moving across frozen ponds,

playing hockey and curling; there is a frozen water-wheel, birds swoop from the bare, leafless trees above the men's heads, and nearby several adults and a child are preparing food at a fire outside a wayside inn. It is all muted in terms of colour, and the smoke rises straight and hangs in the windless air. There is about it that particular stillness after snow has recently fallen, when every sound carries far, and distant voices ring out across the landscape. Absorbing the scene, we may find ourselves identifying with the cold of the scene. However, if we allow ourselves to absorb the suggested *sound* within the painting, we move into a three-dimensional, stereo perspective that echoes the visual impact. There is indeed a soundscape playing in our heads that runs parallel with the world depicted within the picture itself; muttered voices and whines from the hunters and their dogs in the foreground, voices and the crackling fire to our left from the inn, the cries of birds above our heads. Beyond that there is the sound that comes to us from below, rising up from the village and its skaters, borne up to us on this bluff through the still icy air. It is that moment when, surmounting the crest of a hill, the sound of the scene suddenly revealed before us opens up and a kind of wide-screen stereo impression floods into the consciousness. It is a painting that rewards meditative study, and it is no coincidence that "The hunters in the snow" has featured in a number of motion pictures; Lars von Trier's film, *Melancholia* (2011) contains its image, as does Alain Tanner's *Dans la ville blanche* (1983) and it was the inspiration for Roy Andersson's 2014 film, *A pigeon sat on a branch reflecting on existence*. Most significant of all, because of his poetic use of sound in all his work, is its presence in *The mirror* and *Solaris* by the great Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky. Notably in *Solaris*, in which several of Bruegel's seasonal paintings are depicted on the walls of the space station, the sonic aspect of "The hunters in the snow" contributes to the presence of a nostalgia for the absence of earthly humanity. The camera lingers over details in the picture, and we hear the sound of its story, the trees, birds, dogs, and footfalls on snow. The landscape of earth is brought into the sterile environment of the space station, and it is a longing for another place, just as Bruegel himself may have been suggesting, at a time in the 1560s of religious revolution in the Netherlands a reference to an ideal of an idealised past time in rural life. This year, "The hunters in the snow" will once again appear on Christmas cards around the world, and – as in many of Bruegel's paintings – its suggested sound world will speak, perhaps subliminally, in parallel with its visual message. The exercise of exploring a painting in terms of its sound may be applied to an infinite range of images, and I would suggest that anyone interested in pursuing this line of enquiry select their own examples, thus demonstrating through personal experience the imaginative music held to a greater or a lesser degree within otherwise seemingly mute visual objects.

STUDIUM AND PUNCTUM

In the summer of 2015, The National Gallery, London staged "Hear the painting, see the sound", an exhibition in which six noted musicians and sound artists generated soundscapes to accompany a painting of their choice, drawn from within the Gallery's collections. The word "staged" is appropriate in this context; each of the paintings

selected was bathed in a spotlight, surrounded by subdued twilight, and the aural accompaniment enabled the viewer to linger in front of the works, experiencing them almost as theatre. The artists and composers chosen for the project each had distinguished pedigrees in their respective fields; natural history sound recordist Chris Watson selected Akseli Gallen-Kallela's "Lake Keitele", Susan Philipsz chose Holbein's haunting and mysterious picture, "The Ambassadors", and Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller interpreted "St Jerome in his Study" by Antonello da Messina. The American composer Nico Muhly used the 14th century "Wilton Diptych" as his subject, Jamie xx of the electro duo, The xx selected Théo Van Rysselberghe's "Coastal Scene" and the French film composer Gabriel Yared created a score to complement "Bathers" by Cezanne. In introducing the project, National Gallery director Nicholas Penny, interviewed by Helen Brown in *The Daily Telegraph* on 7 July, 2015, stated that "when sounds have been composed in response to a work of art, they can encourage – even compel – concentration"². While this may be true, the concept of an imposed sound commentary to a work of art is problematic, in that it can intrude on, and negate the viewer's personal sonic interpretation. A poem or a piece of prose fiction is an imaginatively creative partnership between its author and the reader, and the relationship between a radio producer or sound artist and the listener exists in the same kind of balance. We may justifiably extend this analogy to our response to a visual object or event: the experience of the direct encounter is personal, it belongs to us and us alone. Thus, reviewing the exhibition for *The Daily Telegraph*, art critic Mark Hudson considered that "a painting should generate its own music, its own soundtrack in your head that is entirely personal to you. This experiment is an engaging novelty, but it essentially limits the viewer's response"³.

The issue here is directly linked to our individual response to works of art, and in particular to specific details that may draw the eye (and imaginatively, the ear) and which may vary with each individual. In his essay, *Camera lucida*, Roland Barthes explored this idea in relation to photography, turning the eye of the beholder back upon him or herself as an exposition of their own mind: "the photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here" (Barthes, 2000, p. 80). In moving from painting to photography, we take a highly significant step, away from considered interpretation to a direct and immediate interplay with the moment. At the same time, in doing so, we come closer still to direct emotional and imaginative sonic response. Barthes, in developing his ideas of the mind's interplay with photographic images, employs the terms *studium* and *punctum* as concepts of personal reaction. (Barthes, 2000, pp. 40-47). In order to define these words before proceeding, we must identify them within the context of a picture. The photographer George Powell, in his online article of 2008 exploring the aesthetics of photography, "Studium and Punctum", saw Barthes view of *studium* as

² Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/11731370/What-do-paintings-sound-like.html>

³ Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-reviews/11716020/Soundscapes-National-Gallery-review-painfully-unambitious.html>

the element that creates interest in a photographic image. It shows the intention of the photographer but we experience this intention in reverse as spectators; the photographer thinks of the idea (or intention) then present it photographically, the spectator then has to act in the opposite way, they see the photograph, then have to interpret it to see the ideas and intentions behind it⁴.

Thus the *studium* belongs to the photographer, and grows initially from the intention behind the photograph. (One could significantly also apply this to the work of the sound recordist during the development, for example, of a radio feature or similar.) The *punctum* on the other hand, Powell tells us:

is an object or image that jumps out at the viewer within a photograph-*punctum* can exist alongside *studium*, but disturbs it. *Punctum* is the rare detail that attracts you to an image. Clearly this second element is much more powerful and compelling to the spectator, changing the 'like' of *studium* to the love of an image. As a photographer an understanding of *punctum* could potentially allow me to make stronger images, although I feel that *punctum* needs that accidental quality about it to be most effective because it is so personal and could be different for everyone. Basically it could be anything, something that reminds you of your childhood, a sense of *deja vu*, an object of sentimental value. The *punctum* is very personal and often different for everyone⁵.

The key element in our relationship with an image – visual or aural – is the response that occurs within us, and the potential mistake we may make in our assessment of how that relationship operates lies in a failure to appreciate that seeing and listening are not passive, but active and creative acts. As Gaston Bachelard says, “contemplation is essentially a creative power”. (Bachelard, 2011, p. 49). Quoting Shelley’s memorable passage from his poem “Prometheus Unbound”, he draws attention to the power of the dynamic imagination to compare sound – harmony – now to night, now to light. Here, for example, is the winter flute, a completely experienced image of that substantial clarity which unites the *clarity of winter air* and the *clarity of a shrill sound* so that the inspired soul accepts it readily:

Listen too,
How every pause is filled with under-notes,
Clear, silver, icy, keen, awakening tones,
Which pierce the sense, and live within the soul,
As the sharp stars pierce winter’s crystal air
And gaze upon themselves within the sea.

⁴ Retrieved from <https://georgepowell.wordpress.com/2008/07/01/studium-and-punctum/>

⁵ Retrieved from <https://georgepowell.wordpress.com/2008/07/01/studium-and-punctum/>

Bachelard asks us to “listen to the rays of winter light. They flash from every direction. All space vibrates with the lively noises of the cold. There is no space without music since there is no expansion without space. Music is vibrating matter” (Bachelard, 2011, pp. 49-50).

It also becomes clear that the *punctum* in a picture, the detail that draws our attention and may obsess us to the point of defining the whole picture, can be auditory as well as visual. While Roland Barthes found himself focusing in spite of himself on a part of a picture – say the belt on a woman’s dress or a pair of shoes – that defining detail might also evoke the idea of a sound in the viewer’s mind. To return to the example of Bruegel’s painting, there might be an *auditory punctum* evoked within a *visual punctum*; the fire to the left of the picture, for example, may, as we meditate upon the picture, become a *heard* image as well as a *seen* one. Likewise the birds flying over the hunters heads are surely crying and calling to one another? This idea in turn leads to another, because sound is temporal; indeed both a visual image and recording play with time and space, although in different ways, as we shall discuss later. A photograph freezes a moment in time, while the sound we “hear” as we look at it moves through time, walks alongside our consciousness for a while. A photograph differs from a painting, in that it is the act of an instant, whereas a painting is an act of deliberation and prolonged observation of an object or scene that may be changing as it is observed, and yet which ultimately becomes frozen in the finished work of art. When the work of the observer begins, the fixed images of both photograph and painting are subjected to objective interpretation, and the evocation of sound is a part of that observation. We interpret the world through a combination of senses as creatures of call and response, and contemplation takes many forms; at root, it is recognition, partnered by memory, that touches a poignant chord of need in the human spirit. Aleida Assmann has movingly suggested that “as the wound of time cries out to be healed, memory, continuity and identity become urgent issues” (Assmann, 2013, p. 86). Remembering is crucial to consciousness, integrating the past with the present, as John Locke wrote: “consciousness, as far as it can be extended... unites existences and actions very remote in time into the same person... That with which the consciousness of this present thinking thing can join itself makes the same person and is one with it” (Locke, 2008, pp. 213-214). It is in the partnership between the photograph, that image that is both metaphor and medium for memory, that chemical process that gives “material form to light radiated from an object” (Assmann, 2013, p. 209), and the passing invisible messages provided by sound as both commentator and image-maker in its own form, that memory and consciousness find their most profound internal expression.

LIGHT. SPACE. TIME.

Thus the relationship between the apparently autonomous visual image and the sound that it evokes through suggestion in the mind is more complex than we might at first imagine. We have long understood that a sound can evoke a visual reverberation of its meaning, so it should come as no surprise to realize that the reverse is also true. It is the concept of time as an element in the making of both image and sonic signal however,

that we must consider if we are to gain a fuller understanding of relationships and differences. To study “The hunters in the Snow” is to absorb a fixed image, but the sounds of the moment captured affect the imagination in real time. A photograph is an even more precise, fixed record of a moment, in the sense that the device which recorded it responds to the will of the photographer in an instant. The novelist John Fowles, writing an introductory essay to a book of photographs by Fay Godwin expressed “an almost metaphysical horror before photographs, that they freeze time so, snatch their fractions of a second from it and then set them up as the ultimate reality of the thing photographed”. Fowles used as an example, a photograph of the poet Thomas Hardy standing with a bicycle in front of his house, Max Gate in Dorset, England, taken by his friend, a local parson and amateur photographer, Thomas Perkins, in the late 1890s. It is a fixed, secure image, but as Fowles asks in his essay, “what happened five seconds before? What happened five seconds after, when the photographer took his head from beneath the black cloth and announced that the very recent present was now eternal future?” (Fowles quoted in Godwin, 1985, p. x). In such an instance, imaginary sound may help provide a temporal context. The *idea* of a place – its sonic presence such as bird song, trees stirred by the breeze, the crunch of an approaching footfall on the gravel path, sounds from the house beyond – all of these can offer a soundtrack to the silent instant of the photograph. It may not be an exact recording of the moment in the way that the photograph can claim to be, but it is a kind of poetic truth, belonging exclusively to the individual viewer of the picture. Indeed the whole process of extending the sensitivity of our sensory powers to absorb complementary signals from the world around us, requires us to apply a form of poetic response to our environment.

Notwithstanding, Fowles’s “metaphysical horror” requires us to address it, because a visual image forces us to confront the idea of time. Sontag has written:

photography is an elegiac art, a twilight art. Most subjects are, just by virtue of being photographed, touched by pathos...All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt. (Sontag, 1979, p. 15)

On the other hand, sound too is a metaphor for our mortality because it is always disappearing, because it is temporal as are we. The loudest sound only emphasizes the silence that surrounds it, so in its bleakest incarnation, sound too is a *memento mori*. Taken this way, the tolling of a single bell which may be seen on one level as a bridge between the material world and that of the spirit and the imagination, may also be heard as analogous for life vanishing gradually into death. To examine a painting related to social or industrial history, for example one of the north of England cityscapes by L.S. Lowry, is to hear the bustle of the crowd on their way to work, the hoot of the factories and the murmur of the town beyond, while at one and the same moment being reminded – if we choose to remember – that these places are now changed, these times are gone and

these people – both those reproduced and the artist himself – are all dead. While it may be melancholy to look at the image of a deceased loved one; yet it is harder still to listen to a recording of their living voice, the sound moving through time once more, as it once did in the everyday world of the living person. These things are poignant precisely because they can unexpectedly reach out and touch our consciousness “like the delayed rays of a star” (Barthes, 2000, p. 81).

We should continue to remind ourselves of how relatively recent is the technology of the media that allows the clues of memory to be held; as Assmann says,

shortly before the invention of photography, De Quincey thought of the human mind as a palimpsest, in which images of life stored themselves layer by layer and then, later, suddenly, became readable again through the chemicals of the restorers. What for him seemed like a miracle became everyday technology thanks to photography. (Assmann, 2013, p. 209)

Likewise the strangeness of the ephemeral medium of radio, the almost supernatural invisibility of wireless signals and voices through the air, was not lost on its pioneers, awestruck by the power and possibilities of their new discovery. At the same time, the development of recording, fixing the memory of sound and pulling it back from the darkness of death contributed to the scientific revolution that helped to make human memory more self-conscious, reminding itself of its presence in the shaping of lives.

In 2008, I made a radio documentary about the history of domestic recording, with the producer, Andy Cartwright. As part of the research for this programme, we discovered a privately made cylinder recording of a family sharing Christmas festivities in their home in Salisbury, Wiltshire, in the southwest of England. The year of this rare recording was 1917, the First World War was in its darkest time, and it was clear from the comments on the recording that some male members of the family were absent. We do not know who these people were, and they are all gone now. Nevertheless, as the recording played, they came alive in a touching way, offering as the sound did, a temporal, spontaneous glimpse of lives living a brief moment from a century before. Were we to be able to locate a photograph of this family, it would probably be a formal one; they might be seen posing stiffly, waiting for the camera technology of the time to freeze the moment, and consign it to history. Yet here in their recording, they lived and breathed, laughed and played, sang and joked in a startlingly normal and everyday manner that in one sense removed the strangeness of a far-off time, while on the other, heightened it, making it uncanny. At one point, a young woman is heard to say, directly to the listener: “hello. Merry Christmas to you”. Suddenly, coming through the patina of a century-old wax cylinder, the voice of a dead person I shall never know, speaks a greeting, seemingly specifically to me. This as I listen now, becomes the sonic *punctum* of the experience, and it is written into my memory forever.

Both a photograph and a sound recording play with time, just as our consciousness absorbs visual and aural messages, and both have the capacity to move from the moment as it is lived, into memory. We might also consider that sound itself possesses

the facility of imaginative photography, and the most eloquent (in every sense) example of this may be found in our capacity to absorb music. The explanation of this is linked to the mystery of music itself and its relationship to time, which is constantly moving through a permanent present. Sound – and in this case music – is effectively time made audible, just as the voice may be considered to be air made audible; the experience of it is constantly current. The brain absorbs a newly heard piece of music on both a conscious and a subconscious level, and when this occurs, we are actively absorbed in learning, and processing information that we then store, pending retrieval. As Oliver Sacks has said: “When we ‘remember’ a melody, it plays in our mind; it becomes newly alive...We recall one note at a time and each note entirely fills our consciousness, yet simultaneously it relates to the whole”. (Sacks, 2008, p. 227). As we listen to music, we are hearing the moment, while relating the moment to the immediate previous moment, and moving within a split second into the next moment. It is hearing, having heard and being about to hear in one and the same instant. It is in other words, very close to the experience of having our attention caught by striking photographic image. We might take this further into the realm of language, and consider the images words evoke pictorially through speech, including meaning but also through timbre, pitch, pace and volume, and in this context view the printed word as a kind of musical notation, a record of thought that manifests itself through the eyes, being absorbed by the brain and then translated into sound, either spoken aloud or imagined internally. It is the partnership between sound and image – the sonic responses produced in us by art and the pictures sound makes – that place us in the world. Once that response has been set up, it has the further capacity to become lodged in memory, thus evoking an image of itself and often, of one’s first experience of it. We are ourselves part of a huge audio-visual work, and while Berger may say “It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world” (Berger, 1972, p. 7), we might add emphatically, “and listening”. As a carefully conducted experiment, to open one’s front door, or a window onto the world outside in the morning with the eyes closed and the ears and mind alert offers an unexpected field of aural “vision”, providing stereophonic layers of meaning built of pitch, volume and perspective. “To listen to everything all the time and remind yourself when you are not listening” (Oliveros, 2010, p. 28) is to unlock a sense of place that is startlingly immediate and strange.

Thus we may say that a sound can be a sonic form of photograph, printing itself on the mind. Visiting Lublin, a city in eastern Poland recently, I visited a small museum dedicated to the life and work of a local poet, Józef Czechowicz. As someone who has worked in radio all my life, and as a poet, I felt an affinity with Czechowicz, although he remains, particularly to English readers, somewhat illusive, in that little of his work has been translated. Czechowicz worked as a writer for Polish Radio in Warsaw before the Second World War, but his poetry is strongly associated with his home town. When war broke out, Józef returned to Lublin, believing himself to be safer there, but in September 1939, in one of the first German air raids on the city, he was killed; he was 36 years old. In the museum dedicated to him, there is little in the form of personal artefacts; almost nothing remains apart from a tiny brass bell that once stood on his writing desk. On

my visit, the curator told me that Czechowicz, a melancholic man, would sometimes ring this bell to lift himself into a better place emotionally. I was allowed to ring the bell myself, and to record it. Now, when I play that sound – tiny, almost momentary – while sitting in my office in Liverpool, England, I have before me a clear mental image of myself in that room, with the curator beside me, the moment, and Monday morning Lublin passing by outside the window. Because I hear it here and now in real time, as I heard it there and then, the moment transmits itself and the memory develops and prints the experience as an emotional picture.

CONCLUSION – MNEMOSYNE: THE MOMENT UNDER THE MOMENT

Early writings on broadcasting shared an awed concept that there was within the “ether” something that brought the technical and the metaphysical together. Cecil Lewis, the British Broadcasting Company’s first Organiser of Programmes, who had come from the world of pioneering aviation to broadcasting, saw within two years of the birth of the BBC, the potential for the medium to expand literally without limitation:

the human voice has annihilated space. It becomes endowed with the infinite range of light, for the concerts of last year are still spreading out and on beyond the range of the visible stars. Wireless waves, like light waves, travel at an incredible speed and have greater penetration. Thus, when we speak, it is not to the listener, or even to the world, but to the universe. (Lewis, 1924, pp. 144-145)

Sound and light are capable of travelling great distances, but the human imagination has the potential to be limitless. In his book of essays and short stories, *The moment under the moment*, Russell Hoban wrote of his custom of listening to music broadcasts from All India Radio while relaxing in his London apartment:

sometimes reception is beautifully clear, and the chromatic splendours of the classical Karnatak style build palaces of sound all round me in my Fulham workroom. Swaying painted elephants and iridescent peacocks, chanting priests, multitudes of worshippers, solitary mystics and astronomers, saffron-veiled beauties and dancers with ankle bells glisten in the misty drizzle of the London night outside my window, all India vivid with my ignorance. Great wild eastern dawns and screaming birds rise where the red and green lights of the District Line wink to the passing of the golden windows rumbling townwards, rumbling homewards. Distant passengers, perhaps seen every day, perhaps never to be seen again, pass in the passing windows among painted elephants and the clash of ankle bells, the marble and the filigrees. (Hoban, 1993, p. 217)

Just as a sound can transport the imagination across the globe, or even the universe, a musical phrase or a harmony has the potential to move the mind through a

lifetime, or through centuries. Recalling the many-voiced chorus that sang through the rooms of Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris during the winter of 2017-2018, I am drawn back to the last work in the exhibition, Janet Cardiff's 2001 sound installation, "Forty-Part Motet". I have known Tallis's *Spem in Alium* for much of my life, but I was unprepared for the effect of experiencing it in this context, coming at the end of a diverse and multi-national expression of disparate art unified by turbulent times. Now, after the event, at first in memory I see the technology, the forty speakers on stands, in a circle, singing to one another across a bare white room. There is an elegance about it, a pleasing minimalism. Beyond that however, there is the sound of late 16th century churches, sonic instruments in their own right, the great spaces in which this music once echoed, and in which even today it finds its truest expression. It is music created in partnership with sacred architecture, and when I hear it, I see the vaults of the great cathedrals of Europe. The interweaving of the voices is seamless; I am reminded of Tallis's mastery of the polyphony of his day, and Allesandro Striggio's great choral masterpiece, *Ecco si beato giorno*, which inspired this counterpart. The blend of the voices makes it impossible to hear the breathing of the singers. English Tudor polyphony and its European equivalents sought to create the music of angels, and angels (of course) not being mortal, have no need of breath.

Listening to Tallis's music – its notes as they pass, one by one – even in a recording, the mind is transported by association to the giant reverberating spaces for which it was conceived. I am taken too by the mind's suggestion from this room into other acoustics, and to recall other ancient music made for them, such as the soaring spaces of Renaissance Venice, where the architects Sansovino and Palladio worked in partnership with composers such as Adrian Willaert in the development of the polyphonic choral tradition and its relation to place, specifically in that instance, in St Mark's Church. I have been fortunate enough to have seen these places as reality, stood in the midst of them and wondered at the architecture; and because of this, the mind provides me with the reference of a mnemonic image which in turn informs the sound I hear in another physical context but at the same time, internally; as I stand and listen, my sonic universe is expanding before my very ears. Cardiff's work is art that – while through sound it evokes the memory of architecture – simultaneously sends its own message from its inward-facing speakers, seeming as they do to discourse together, and it is the metaphor contained in this manifestation that in the end rings most strongly, that of voices in harmony, be they contained within a room in an art gallery, or reaching us imaginatively and culturally from half a world away. The presence of sound either as the art work itself, or as an idea suggested by it literally or tangentially in the mind, enhances the experience of our visually immediate creative environment, and perhaps changes it while adding layers of meaning. As Picasso's "The Old Guitarist" (1903) confronting the accepted conventions of the art establishment of the time by flattening and fragmenting pictorial space, and as the Second Viennese school composers such as Schoenberg and Berg led music into new realms of sound in the early years of the 20th century, so might we bring our personally created soundscapes to what we see, challenging ourselves by finding new and strange sonic worlds within worlds, and like the poet Wallace Stevens and his "Man with the Blue Guitar" come to understand that things may not quite as they are... or seem to be.

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