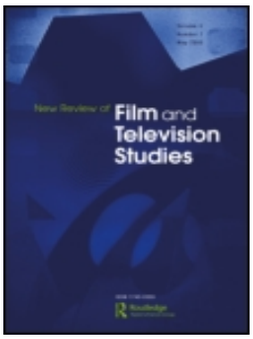

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sounding alien, touching the future: beyond the sonorous limit in science fiction film

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In this paper I examine two particular aspects of sounding science fiction film: first, the ulterior, Othering sounds of the alien, whether it is creature, object, technology or environment; and second, the soundscape that accompanies or underscores the type of space travel that crosses temporal and spatial thresholds. In both instances of sounding science fiction film I suggest that human limits are reached and breached, leading to a deterritorialization of the self and a hearing that touches the future which is a moment of pure becoming. I focus on the womanly sonority of the alien to suggest that patriarchal and heterosexist sound devices can be ultimately corrupted. In the analysis of sounding space travel I suggest that science film can create a series of moments in which one experiences the double sublime. This spectacular rendering of a liquid chaos enables the viewer to experience the logic of sensation beyond bodily integrity. In this paper my over-arching position is one that hears in science fiction film the profound potential of a radical alterity that exists beyond the sonorous limit.

Keywords: sounding alien; alien alterity; deterritorialization; sounding time travel; maternal; monstrous soundings; sounding sublime

Sounding alien

Shh! Listen! The unfamiliar, strange sound of something not yet quite visible stirs in the image. It is a high pitch wave in the semi-darkness; a coated metallic sound that whirs with the purr of dissipated rotor blades; it is wet, organic sludge on dry gravel; a hot anvil hit with microchips; a tortured wail of broken dialling codes; and it is the trombone and the cymbal in atonal fusion, washing the still air with its liquidity. These alien sounds, at one both strangely familiar and uncomfortably other, begin to bring into existence the particular intense qualities of the creature, object, technology or environment of the science fiction film. For example, in *Planet of the Apes* (Schaffner, 1968), the alien-ness of the earth-like planet the astronauts have crashed landed onto is conjured up through high, attacking percussion sounds, 'metal twangs produced by stainless-steel mixing

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bowls' (Bazelon, 1975, 86–7) when they first come across life-like scarecrows strung up on scaffolding.

These alien sounds rest innately on a realist-future tense paradox that lies at the heart of sounding science fiction: making the unknown heard through the materials to hand in the here-and-now. Since they are conjured out of the alchemy of sound design, Foley work and ADR, and are drawn from everyday sources and the audio conventions of the genre, one has heard fragments and recordings of these sounds before but not necessarily in this combination or composition. One draws on one's experience and understanding of sound-in-the-real-world, and the generic sound of science fiction, to make sense of what one hears, but this only gets the hearer so far. One's ears strain to make sense out of the sounds, to render them comprehensible or intelligible. Familiar, relatable sound-images flood the mind but do not suffice since they cannot be connected to what is so far known in the film world. *This sounds like a science fiction creature/alien spaceship/advanced technology but I cannot fix an image of it because it does not yet visually exist*. The not properly seeing and the hearing strange produce a terror of what the future of the image holds. *What could possibly produce such an uncanny sound?* The paradox of sounding science fiction, one in which sounds of the present are orchestrated to make the future newly sonorous, sends the hearer into new realms of possibilities, even, or especially when, the image is not yet fully born. As Vivian Sobchack suggests, in relation to in-cinema Dolby stereo trailers:

> It bears emphasis that these sonic reverberations neither 'animate' nor 'thicken' the image as it has already been formed and given but, instead, cause the image – calling it forth into visible, if tenuous, temporal being. (2005, 6)

At the beginning of *Tetsuo* (Tsukamoto, 1989) an unnamed character wanders through an industrial yard before he enters a disused, worn out shed. The viewer is both positioned behind him, and intermittently takes his point of view, so that his face is never revealed, while one sees the yard through his eyes. Sound is naturalistic and yet amplified as if his (our) senses have been super heightened. There is something strange, uncanny about this man, these sound-images, which are themselves photographed in monochrome as if the world is being seen with alien eyes and ears. He enters the disused shed in bare feet, dropping a bag of tools as he does so – although it is not clear this is the same man we saw approach the building because of the lack of detail in those shots. The face is still masked by the effects of chiaroscuro lighting, and a cap that hides the eyes. The audio remains amplified so that his feet sound their delicate steps or shuffle with full harmonic range. He sits in front of a broken mirror, opens his shirt, and as the shot fades out and then in, a pounding industrial soundtrack floods the screen as the repositioned camera, without any diegetic context, pans, tilts and tracks across a dense forest of pipes, fans, tubes, cylinders, mesh, cans and photographs of black American runners. The image, the narrative so far, has been cut free from logical, causal certainty. The screen is fragmented, dissected and meaty: the grains, pools

and textures of these industrial cast-offs are captured with sensorial intensity. They are face-ified, to paraphrase Delueze, and yet they are also like body parts and there are also body parts cast-off amongst the metallic debris – at one point the hairs on the skin of a rogue leg or arm is given the same quality as liquid drops on a tin can. However, it is the pounding beat, itself vectorized through atonal chord changes and drops, which animates the rusty images into one organic-mechanical life. It is given the power to hit the objects it scores, and these objects re-materialize as cutting sound-shapes. A knife suddenly rips open a leg and a long coil is tunnelled into it. Blood, the colour of oil, gushes out, the sound of which stops dead the industrial musical score. A long coil is suddenly inserted into the wound, to the sound of a scream, flesh and metal being welded or wet-mixed together. In this monstrous primal scene, a cyborg alien not yet fully seen has been sounded into life.

In sounding science fiction film, acousmatic sound and the acousmêtre are particularly effective/affective in rendering the qualities of the unseen or partially seen alien creature. Acousmatic sound enters a film without its origination being witnessed: an alien voice crackles into a radio broadcast without it, or the emitter seen; or an off-screen synthesized crawl and accompanying wet scream slices itself into a shot of an empty laboratory, intensifying or filling the emptiness of the image with terrifying possibilities. In both instances, the alien-ness of the sound, and the alienation from/of the image that produces it, has embodied effects: the viewer *feels* the hearing and attempts to recoil from it; or reaches out to touch (be touched) by the sound that they cannot see to make it known, safe or to revel in its terrifying alterity. As Elsaesser and Hagener argue, we can 'hear around corners and through walls, in complete darkness and blinding brightness, even when we cannot see anything … The spectator is … a bodily being enmeshed acoustically, spatially and affectively in the filmic texture' (2010, 131–2).

Hearing (without seeing) is a carnal activity: the viewer undergoes physiological changes, and draws on affective memory to ground, to make safe, the sound and/or to confirm (and take perverse enjoyment) in its awe and terror. And the image itself undergoes an embodied transformation since the off-screen space is given an Other 'life', and this alien sounding is itself ghosted into the on-screen world through the imagination of the viewer, and because it will, so convention has it, eventually appear in the film as 'mouth' and more.

The disappearance and reappearance of this alien sound-image is magnified by 'sound en creux' (Chion 1994) or sound in a gap, whereby the sonorous field exists in dissonance and contradiction with the *mise-en-scène*. The establishing and re-establishing shot of an everyday, downtown street may be filled with other worldly mechanical sounds, or an atonal, brass-driven musical leitmotif, both employed to suggest alien occupation, surveillance or conquering interest. For example, in *Invaders from Mars* (Menzies, 1953) the sand dunes at the end of the garden conceal an alien menace that suck people down into its depths.

The foreboding, reverberating musical sounding that accompanies the crooked path to this endpoint disturbs the idyllic setting, arresting the image from its utopic origins. This sound en creux requires a viewer to fill in the missing semiotic or representational properties absent from the image (in this case, the aliens beneath the sand), but because the alien has not yet been witnessed, because it does not have real-world referents, only multiple fantastical origins, the gap can never be successfully filled. Into the gap there emerges the imagination of sensation through which, as I will go on to argue below, the viewer, the sound-image and the image proper, undergo a process of radical deterritorialization.

In sounding science fiction film, this 'acousmatization', where a repeated sound source is denied embodiment, kept at the outer edge of the screen, opens up the full possibility for the alien to take frightening hold of the image, the imagination of the viewer, as its aural vibrations resound across the *mise-en-scène*. When this off-screen orchestration is enunciated as an alien 'voice', sounding science fiction enters the realm of the acousmêtre, or:

> … a kind of voice-character specific to cinema that derives mysterious powers from being heard and not seen. The disembodied voice seems to come from everywhere and therefore to have no clearly defined limits to its power. (Chion 1999, 24)

Generally in film the disembodied acousmêtre is everywhere and nowhere, washing its way into specific scenes, whether they be private/intimate or public/detached, with a power to both read (comment upon) the scene and to implicitly affect its qualities, direction and dramatic intensity – without a 'mouth', without its 'body' being present. The acousmêtre can be both benevolent and malevolent: a monstrous voice intent on foul play, or one that acts/looks kindly on the world it invades. In science fiction film the power of the acousmêtre is intensified, however, since it can be voiced by an alien messiah, a creature that literally has god-like powers, whose absence–presence (a voice without a body) is supported by healing and advanced (beyond the body) transformatory capabilities that changes or alters the film world for the better.

By contrast, the voice-character of the devil messiah, an alien that has come to destroy the world, has engrained into its vocalization its appetite for destruction, while its god-like powers involve such deeds as doubling, body invasion, mind-control and vaporization. That the devil acousmêtre cannot be seen doubles their monstrosity: heinous acts go unnoticed, such as bodily invasion, in the same way that the body that produces these acts cannot be witnessed but only (sometimes) heard. In *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegal, 1978), one truly knows that a human has been taken over, seed-reproduced, through the piercing, strangulated scream that emerges from the mouth of the dead-double as it comes into contact with a human that audibly shows emotion in some way. This howling scream comes from the body hidden within the simulacra, and attempts to 'consume' the human (the imagined viewer) it is directed at.

In both cases, nonetheless, the 'grain of the voice' (Barthes 1977) is important, not just because it gives partial flesh to the acousmêtre, but because its tone and timbre alien-ate and futurize the vocalization. The science fiction acousmêtre is not a simple human voice but one rendered with wet-organic, savage-animalistic or cold-metallic propensities, creating the sense that an abject, borderless, shapeless or advanced entity created it. In terms of Darth Vader's voice, for example:

> The concept for the sound of Darth Vader came about from the first film, and the script described him as some kind of a strange dark being who is on some kind of life support system. That he was breathing strange, that maybe you heard the sounds of mechanics or motors, he might be part robot, he might be part human, we really didn't know. (http://www.filmsound.org/starwars/burtt-interview.htm)

Or else, it is a voice with frequencies and harmonics that give it a 'temporal vectorization' that orientates it to (and from) a future world. In sounding the alien acousmêtre, a near/here/now, far/there/tomorrow union is brought to cinematic life so that the diegesis exponentially expands while simultaneously contracting – a push–pull paradox that further affects the instability of world-building that the alien science fiction film is built upon. This travelling with a voice (without a mouth) uncouples linear space and time so that one floats or orbits or exists in transit (while being grounded) in the beyond-this-world that has been brought-down-to-earth. Time and space are compressed and expanded, with profound sensorial, corporeal consequences. As Vivian Sobchack reasons:

> Temporality is not perceived as elongated or cosmic – although it is certainly elemental in its extraordinarily amplified immediacy and presence. Indeed, its presence and 'present-ness' are felt in the doubling of its 'here-ness' – sound resounding through and amplified both outside and inside our being. We thus reverberate with an accelerated temporality and, more specifically, in an accelerated present, in a sounding that quite literally quickens are our blood and the very internal tempi of our physical – not meditative – existence. (2005, 10–11)

In *Demon Seed* (Cammell, 1977) the sentient computer Proteus sounds out its ominous warnings, desires and needs through various terminals, surveillance cameras and screens. Its rendered voice, full of metallic echo and deep toned vibrations, and its (duplicitous) multiplicity, occupying several spaces and points of time at once, create a sound envelope that is both here/now and there/then; that is both of this world and from very far away. These meaty sonic callings are often accompanied by pulsating, futuristic sound-shapes and celestial imagery, so that this voice without a mouth comes from/out of (time) and space. Proteus' power to sound-survey, and to control the environment it is connected to, fills the film world with dread, and inter-subjectively aligns the viewer to the diabolical containment and rape scenarios that follow. Its alien, mouthless voice, which travels across time and space, holds the film world in its awe, drawing from the viewer their own containment and control fears – which registers on/in/within the body with terrifying propensity.

There is a third order to this alien acousmêtre: one in which through point of view, the viewer is aligned with the (yet unseen) extra-terrestrial's vision and hearing. The alien enters the film world through a point of view shot and through their eyes (ears and mouth) the viewer takes up their position as they run amok, do bad things or silently witness the everyday world go by. No mouth, no eyes, no body has yet been witnessed (to the viewer, sometimes to characters in the film world) but what the viewer sees and hears is the earth world through the perspective of the alien. Consequently, an ulterior embodied alignment takes place in which the sound heard is rendered and experienced as it would be by the alien. The viewer gets to become the alien who has no mouth to speak of. The viewer gets to experience a profound moment of alterity, in which they are an alien body in an alien world. Of course, in these instances the viewer not only hears and sees the world from the point of view of the alien but they hear the alien (as if they are the alien) as it does so. Its fizzy heartbeat, robotic manoeuvres, haunting high pitch frequency or dull, expansive sonic echo are as much a part of the soundscape as the earthly sounds rendered strange by the alien.

This is the impossible 'speech' of the alien, delivered without a mouth, filling the screen (the auditorium, the ears of the viewer) in an envelope of enunciation as if it is nothing but a mouth, or a multitude of mouths. In hearing and seeing alien, in being *within* the alien, in hearing and seeing the world as alien, one is doubled but also divided: one has one's own alienation augmented, and one bears witness to one's own multiplicity that usually lies dormant under the illusion of identity singularity and wholeness. In becoming alien (through an eye that speaks and hears as if it is (also) a mouth or no mouth at all) one undergoes a physical loss of what normally constitutes human perception and comprehension. One is physically transformed into a body without organs. The body-without-organs is the self dismantled and pure potential, 'made in such a way that it can only be populated by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 153). In becoming alien one experiences an atomization of the self, the loss of the body, that stretches out on a 'plane of immanence' (ibid., 27).

In *Predator* (McTiernan, 1987), the cloaked alien is first introduced through its point of view shot of the soldier mercenaries it is intent on killing. Initially presented as a type of infra-red scoping (not in fact alien, but military spying on military) the sounds that accompany this point of view subvert or undermine the reading (the seeing and hearing) that this is an earthly embodiment. The infra-red vision is sounded as reptilian, and the hearing it processes is experienced as electronic translation – a series of audio waves appear on the left-hand side of the screen as the alien tries to make sense of what it is hearing. When it moves it crawls, enveloped in a sound bubble that feels like one is in the head of that which is looking and hearing. Human voices are at first inaudible, and then clear but rendered as the alien adjusts to the environment. Blobs or smudges of colour (the heat traces of bodies) provide a fuzzy but sensation-based sound-image. When the alien's hand appears in its own point of view, as the electric fizz, harmonic

heartbeat and reptilian clicking sounds out the revelation, one fully comprehends that one has been sounding, hearing and seeing the alien all along. *This is my alien hand; these are my alien eyes; these are my alien ears and sounds*.

Jane Bennett suggests that in moments where we become Other, one finds a re-enchantment of human experience:

> The fun of barking like a dog, or walking like an Egyptian, or dancing like a robot, or speaking like a computer, reveals the incredible possibility of our becoming-dog, becoming-other, becoming-machine. To encounter this illegitimate possibility is to experience one of the enchantments of the contemporary world. (1997, 20)

For Bennett, the word 'enchant' is linked to the verb to sing or to chanter, so that to en-chant is to,

> surround with song or incantation; hence, to cast a spell, to bewitch with sounds, to make fall under the sway of magical powers. A dis-enchanted world, then, would be inert and songless, unable to induce a swoon or to conjure the strange and wonderful out of the banal and ordinary. (ibid., 2)

In becoming alien through the chaos of beyond threshold soundings, in becoming machine through sonic or aural alignment or invasion, one is transported from an identity position of lack, sameness, certainty and fixity, to a position of enchanted (sound, song filled) wonderment, difference, uncertainty and fluidity.

Nonetheless, in sounding science fiction, very often the voice that speaks is (strangely) gender encoded: either it is accented as masculine or intonated as feminine. It can be argued, in fact, that the alien voice speaks for and of gender relations, confirming normative binaries or, when the voice is registered as excess, as it so often is, as that which needs to be de-acousmatized, or re-embodied and made 'safe' (recuperated or destroyed) by film's end. The hyper-masculine alien voices speak of fascistic apocalypse while the shrieks, whines and/or sweet lulls of the 'motherly' alien speak of forthcoming species annihilation and (alien) self-preservation. However, the alien voice (without a mouth, without a body to speak of) is also often rendered a-sexual or cross-gendered, its monstrosity or alien-ness outside of heteronormative convention or patriarchal normativity. This is a sounding alien that can disrupt identity borders, as I will now go on to discuss.

Womanly alien

Kaja Silverman has argued persuasively that Classical Hollywood Cinema fetishes the woman's voice and suppresses or contains her speech in the service of patriarchy, of male power. Women may also be coded as duplicitous through the lies they tell, their words a marker of their corruption. Men, masculine characters are seen to control the voice-over, dominate dialogue, auto-position the narrative, in the same way as they hold the gaze:

> By folding the female voice into diegetic recesses, submitting it to the 'talking cure', and anchoring it to the female body, dominant cinema attempts to move the male subject from a position of linguistic containment and subordination to … a

> position of superior speech and hearing. The position is in turn only a reflection of the symbolic order or auditory aura. (Silverman 1988, 99)

When women speak freely on-screen they are very often either: masculinized, their speech an indication of autonomy, albeit supposedly at the expenses of their womanly-ness; sexualized, their quips and innuendos delivered with heated sensuality; or emotional and melodramatic: their 'song' a yearning for romance, for heterosexual coupling, for moral (gender) integrity. When women speak freely on-screen it can be heard as a marker of excess, of trauma, paranoia and hysteria – as if a female speaking too much is a disorder, a manifestation of interior, psychological damage. This may be exaggerated or compounded through the interior monologue, where a female speaks (to herself) without moving her lips – her inner voice rising up and out of her to the fill the audio world of the film but which no one (apart from the viewer) can hear. This interior monologue can be argued to be a manifestation of the malady that lies within her, filling the film world with a voice-that-does-not-have-a-mouth, and a patriarchal Hollywood strategy which 'implies linguistic constraint and physical confinement – confinement to the body, to claustral spaces, and to inner narratives' (Silverman 1988, 45). Paranoid women, who speak too much, or whose fragile psychology is revealed via a mouth that speaks but does not move, also hear things that nobody else in the diegesis can. These noises, aural invasions, spooky sounds can be 'maternal' in kind: both primal and monstrous, or noises that recall mother or which threaten motherhood.

In *Alien* (Scott, 1979), Ripley is initially coded as the paranoid woman, and the ship's life support machine, the computer Mother, its maternal, soothing originator and saviour. Ripley wants to follow Company procedure and not open the quarantine doors on the crew's return from their exploration; a decision that would threaten the life of the injured Kane whose face has an alien creature attached to it. Her cold rationality can be read as a front for excessive fear and anti-maternal sentiments. Mother, by contrast, has sustained the life of all the crew members during their 'incubation' sleep, and they emerge out of its immaculate, technological womb, warm, alive, safe and dressed only in cotton diapers. Ripley speaks and acts like a man (while emoting like a woman) and should not be believed or trusted; Mother softly speaks to the crew and can be. These alien sounds that are first heard by a female character may be coded as monstrous-feminine, or monstrous-maternal, or (perhaps more rarely) maternal yearnings or echoes.

The alignment here, between an over-wrought female who hears (while no one else in the film world truly hears) the strange sounds of an 'abject' femininity or foreign maternal-ness, may suggest a sounding that *belongs* to woman-as-alien and the womanly alien who confers (confirms) this abjection on her. Alien paranoia becomes an essential condition of the (strange) woman who dares to hear and tell. In the *Alien* franchise at large, Ripley is repeatedly aligned, twinned

with and host to the abject creature that resembles her, hears her and sounds her out.

When it comes to the invasion narrative and the paranoid science fiction film, it is very often a female (domestic, lower ranking) character who hears an alien noise first and who is not believed when she retells (often to male authority figures) the sounding and hearing. She is thus sited initially as over-emotional or delusional. By contrast, male scientists (or males in a position of power) who get to *see* and *hear* the alien creature first, are blessed with rational enquiry; are given the knowledge and power to name and define the thing that has been witnessed or put under the microscope. In *Earth Verses the Flying Saucers* (Sears, 1956), Dr Russell A. Marvin (Hugh Marlowe) and his wife hear and see a flying saucer as they drive through a restricted area. On being asked for clarification from his shaken wife, Marvin responds, 'I am going to need time to think, to evaluate this, before we sound off.' Agitated, wrought, she responds, 'of course it wasn't a saucer at all. I just shake like this all the time.' When they get back to the laboratory, Marvin realizes he has recorded the sounds of the saucer as it circled their car, providing him with 'evidence' that can be logically sounded out.

The alien acousmêtre can be a sound-character that has feminine vibrations or intensities and whose eventual de-acousmatization reveals a female alien body or an alien in a female human body (one that has masked the creature beneath it). In both instances the form generally appears to threaten humanity: the female alien wants to reproduce herself, her species, while the alien-in-a-female body wants to reproduce the passivity, the 'silence', the seduction of femininity as a rouse, as performance, to ultimately destroy humanity. In both *Rabid* (Cronenberg, 1977) and *Species* (Donaldson, 1995), the female body is a host for a parasite or alien that seeks to self-reproduce while castrating or consuming those it seduces or comes into contact with. Where the female alien is found to be motherly, they go in peace; where they are species destructive (doubled, duplicitous, aggressive, warrior-like, maternal-transgressive) they must be destroyed (silenced). As Silverman suggests:

> … the maternal oscillates between two poles; it is either cherished as an objet (a) – as what makes good all lacks – or despised and jettisoned as what is most abject, most culturally intolerable – as the forced representative of everything within male subjectivity which is incompatible with the phallic function, and which threatens to expose discursive mastery as an impossible ideal. (Silverman 1988, 86)

In *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegal, 1978), Geoffrey (Donald Sutherland) begins to fall asleep in his alien-pod filled roof-top garden. As he dozes, then closes his eyes, the sonar, sac-like sounds of conception, gestation and a foetal heartbeat swell in the soundtrack. Flower heads open, like expectant vaginas, and an adult human (a copy of Geoffrey) emerges from a pod, its sounding a wet mixture of shell, fluid and howl. This maternal offering, that devours one inert body to give life to its own alien species, born in an abject monstrosity, positions the maternal as ghastly if it isn't singular, heterosexual and monogamous.

Nonetheless, I think one can revisit the arguments and positions so far outlined under this section and find a degree of power and provocation in the sounding of the womanly alien. In each instance, in fact, one can hear (and see) in the alien noise and voice ways to experience one's own alterity, one's otherness as ulterior. As one does so, the opportunity arises to recognize the threshold, the limit of gender identity, and to move beyond or through it.

In the science fiction film, the female character that hears the alien but is not believed is ultimately proved right. Hearing is revealed to be a privileged sense, even if it is vision that denies it ultimately as of first order origin. The woman who is not believed is muted or silenced: she is put under watch, put on medication, hospitalized and is no longer fully trusted. The condition matches or reproduces the medical discourses that operate at the societal level except, that in these fictive scenarios women escape their confinement, release themselves or are released from their exclusion once their/this truth wills out. Women who hear, know and understand the 'truth' are disciplined and punished but are then set free when what they have heard is heard and seen by others. In sounding and hearing the alien, then, female characters find that their authority to say and tell is ultimately validated, while patriarchy's authority comes from such revelations and encounters. Women hear the truth first and find the courage – in a patriarchal-rationalist world – to report it so. If we return to the example of Ripley above, her hearing and seeing things accurately and firstly, ensures her own survival: she is the only character in the film to hear Mother for what it is: a technological imposter. In *Terminator II: Judgement Day* (Cameron, 1991), Sarah Conner is subjected to psychotherapy, invasive therapy, interrogation and confinement/imprisonment until her vision of the future is evidenced, and those who doubt her die at the hands of the cyborg she prophesized.

One can in fact argue that the paranoia that something has invaded earth, is undertaking surveillance, or is abducting or transforming or duplicating humans, points or draws attention to the instability of identity norms. It suggests that the body can be easily penetrated, copied, transcoded and re-embodied, and that consequently gender is not a fixed or fixable category – male aliens can take over/become female human forms and female aliens can take on male personas. Alien-substitution paranoia also suggests that reproduction is not inherently biologically sexed or gendered – humans can be reproduced without human seed, without mothers (and fathers). Finally, alien–human reproduction (cloning, copying, assimilation) may suggest that humans are at least double, malleable enough to be divided and remade, porous enough to be invaded and re-cast. One is a body-without-organs, and one can become woman.

In *Total Recall* (Verhoeven, 1990), Quaid (Arnold Schwarzenegger) attempts to pass through airport security as a woman traveller. When the auditory circuitry goes haywire and he/she repeats the answer 'two weeks' to the guard's questions, the mouth begins to stretch and the voice strangulate. Quaid's womanly face mask begins to slip: eyeballs roll, skin expands and the mouth gets tongue-tied so that words can no longer form, and are instead replaced by an androgynous scream.

Quaid's own head appears (a pushing out and through the prosthetic rendering), and the woman's now detached head becomes an exploding device. Masculine and feminine morph and confuse and conjoin. Further, in this transexual performative scenario, Quaid's gendered transformation draws attention to the vocal confinement that women normally undergo in cinema – when he tries to speak as a woman he very quickly is silenced and reduced to a scream. The woman's mouth holds his tongue still and its own detonation takes place at the threshold space between Earth and Mars, human and alien Other, man and woman.

One can also hear the 'inner lining' (Doane 1980, 41) of the female alien speaking through the human body she has taken over. While not strictly an interior monologue, since the human host's mouth moves as it talks, in a state of fantastic ventriloquism, one nonetheless hears the alien without their mouth speaking. This turns the alien–human body 'inside-out' (ibid., 41), making visible that which has avoided or exceeded representation. This inside-out is human and alien, a conjoining that creates or fashions an impossible hybrid being, and one born in a mouth that does and does not move, that does and does not speak. The alien–human interior monologue respects no bodily borders, and opens up a space for the 'silence' that classically contains and controls woman to be sounded, to be charged with carnal transgression and alien possibility.

Very often the critical clue to the fact of body invasion, and the loss of identity singularity, is given in the voice: tone and timbre shift, magnetizes, hardens, slows, or is rendered to possess metallic or organic echo, for example. The rhythm of speech, speech patterns, and verb and adjective choice can change also, so that the doppelganger or human host speaks as if it is a human–alien hybrid, although something in/of the human has been lost as a consequence. The vocalization of the invasion is meant to suggest that qualities particular to humankind, to the human in question, such as emotion, love, duty, individuality and sociality, has been lost in the re-making and re-casting. Women (and children) are often the first to notice this sounding alien: that something has been lost in the human (partner, father, mother) they know/knew so well. Their supposed pre-determined motherly intuition, gendered intimacy or innocence in the case of the child who hears strange, allows them to recognize – before anyone else – the alien-ation that has been enacted. In *Invaders from Mars* both David (the boy) and his Mother realize that Dad/George is not himself, that something has changed in his manner, in his tone.

Of course, soon after, as noted above, it is often male characters, connected with science or law that confirm the doubling process through scientistic-rationalist means. One could argue that such scenarios confirm gender binaries and the power of patriarchy to decide upon what is knowledge, what is truth and what is understanding. However, I would argue that at a more fundamental level these scenarios throw into doubt and confusion such constructs. The family unit is so easily, readily, alien-ated, as if alienation sits at its centre waiting to manifest in a sounding familiar but strange. The relatively minor shifts in vocalization and behaviour suggest an 'inner' (a double inner) already present but now verbalized

and outed: caring mothers become cold sounding creatures, and doting dads become hard-mouthed authoritarians. The myth of the happy family unit is revealed as such, and it is often woman who first recognizes that all is not well in the home. By contrast, male characters, scientists and law-makers, attempt to resurrect the family myth through evidential proof, rationalization, deduction and conclusion, and by preparing to entertain the fantastic story that aliens are on earth. In doing so, they take on the very Other qualities of the alien–human first witnessed by female characters, engage in the paranoia that is (supposedly) inherently womanly, in a further doubling and splitting that confirms their/our/your/my divided, alienated and alienating life.

There is another science fiction scenario that throws into doubt gender certainty made and confirmed in representation and language. When a female character first hears/sees an alien creature she immediately reaches what Chion terms the screaming point whereby speech, verbalization, does not suffice, cannot comprehend the thing that has been witnessed. Through the piercing scream that follows, one is left with a 'black hole', a wide open mouth in frightful, extended terror. For Chion, the screaming point is the exit of being, or an entry point into experiential chaos where language has failed in the face (mouth) of the inassimilable and unnameable. This chora, 'anterior to naming' (Silverman 1988, 102), has a profound affect on the viewer also, since all they have at this moment is a screaming mouth with which to comprehend the creature not yet seen. This sonic alignment, not only places the viewer in the vortex of the scream, but in an unseen world without language, scored by excess feeling, so that momentarily – for the length of the fright at least – one is inescapably deterritorialized. This body-in-the-mouth often sounds alien, the scream having been mixed with the alien sounding that has produced it. One travels into the mouth but also out of it, towards the unseen alien, from one mouth to another, the inner and outer folding, contracting, expanding and disintegrating. Of course, in sounding science fiction very often sound and image align, are born together under enormous stars, and cosmic explosions, so very far, far away.

Sounding futuristic

The sounding and hearing alien can of course occur alongside the sated splendour of its imaging. A camera cranes up and over a horizon to reveal the structures, transportation, buildings and workings of a colossal, futuristic metropolis at the same time its pregnant electronic sounds, post-industrial rhythms and rationalist tempos fill the air. A cyborg morphs into multiplicities and each time one hears the strangling and the rearranging of atoms and genes as it does so. A ray gun blasts out its deadly heat with a steady pulse rendered synthetic-electric. In short, the 'spectacle' of science fiction iconography and their soundings align to create the intoxicating three-dimensionality that fleshes the genre into full life. The Los Angeles of 2019 we are introduced to at the beginning of *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982) is a profound mixture of glistening score, fire-explosions, of the

near-to-far and far-to-near sound of spinners travelling, and the base hum or flickering heartbeat of the vast metropolis as it is envisioned.

This sounding science fiction not only animates and vectorizes the future world that is being revealed but provides a 'sonic velocity equivalent to visible spectacle' (Sobchack 2005, 4). Science fiction's images of wonderment are accompanied by a sound layering of equal awesomeness, one that arrests the *mise-en-scène* so that it has three-dimensionality and temporal progression *not of this world* and (yet) *out of this world*. High end, big-budget special effect sequences sounded with the epic musical score is a particularly evocative example of this visual velocity: cities, people, contraptions, transport, aliens are given heightened, 'advanced' movement through the enormous, multi-layered orchestration that accompanies their visualization. This rendition sounded in the here-and-now, registers as if it comes from another planet, from a future not yet born. The wonderment, then, is double twofold: visual and sonic, and present-future tense. As Whittington observes, in the Stargate sequence from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968):

> … Image and sound spectacle converge. Bowman's subjectivity is shared with the filmgoer in this psychedelic trip through galaxies, stars, and the unknown. The point of view shots and the privileging and isolation of the music on the sound track encourage this transference. (2007, 50)

Science fiction film can further immerse the viewer in this doubling mechanism through the way it sound-images what can be called the sublime moment: where characters witness the unfolding terror of a world morphing into something else or, situated as passengers or crew on a spaceship, stare wide-eyed and silent as stars and planets – the infinity of space – take a-hold of the image-track. The fusion between incredible special effect world-building and rich soundscapes and musical scores, is often deeply affecting: through this supra-affective alignment, language can fail and representation can falter. The experience is asemiotic, chaotic and results in a loosening of the bonds of the linguistic self as it experiences the sublime. This is particularly the case when a viewer is symbiotically, inter-subjectively aligned with a character as they experience this deterritorializing moment: together (*within* one another) they face the awesomeness of the sound-image before them, and are doubly lost for words. The sounds, musical scores and leitmotifs that help produce this sublime moment speak for/of the unspeakable, while finding it, making it impossible to 'verbalize' it directly. These sublime sound-image scenes suggest an almost infinite temporal and spatial distance while bearing down upon or rather into the ears and through (out) the body of the viewer-character. As Vivian Sobcheck contends:

> … qualities of spatial expansion, amplification, vastness, and immensity are not phenomenologically incompatible with 'intimate' space – and, indeed, they may provide the large and often 'cosmic' or 'elemental' dimensions that allow for a site of less objective reverberation and resonance than the architectural theatre: that is, the 'intimately immense' space that allows for the internal reverberations of *reverie*. (2005, 10)

In an intermodal sense, however, while sound and image compliment the chaos in/of the sublime science fiction scene, it also becomes uncoupled, as the language of the musical score creates its own untethered images; where it becomes lost *in space* so-to-speak. The time travel sequence in which one hears/sees (becomes) the spaceship/capsule/body/mind as it flies through space is a heightened example of this future sounding revere. The time travel sequence, often the centre-piece of the coming together of state-of-the-art special effects and the musical score, attempts to capture what it feels like to break the sound barrier, to cross known physical, geographical and temporal thresholds. Time travel images are animated and vectorized, given an embodied presence, and they are often directly 'housed' in the 'brain' of the astronaut or traveller whose viewpoint the viewer takes up. The viewer hears and sees as if they are wired up, in the vessel, in the headspace of the person hurtling through space. In sound-imaging time travel, however, the hearing and seeing is a catastrophic rendition and rendering, since the present is in free-fall, the future is not solid, and in this liquid collage of abstract assemblages, one cannot predict arrival or landing. One cannot predict when the soundtrack's attack and sustain will decay; and one cannot pull the images together into a whole, out of the cosmic hole they disappear into. In the slipstream of time travel, faces contort, eye-sockets bulge, skin surface ripples, space matter and debris rain down, celestial lights envelope, supernovas streak, blazing comets hurtle, musical notes tremble, harmonies rise and fall, and atonal instruments flood. In sound-imaging time travel the self is deterritorialized, broken apart, melded and scarred by atoms, particles and molecules, and re-cast by vibrations and intensities. This molecular becoming, where one is on the threshold permanently, takes one beyond the sonorous and somatic limit, to a dying happily:

> Music is never tragic, music is joy. But there are times it necessarily gives us a taste for death; not so much happiness as dying happily, being extinguished. Not as a function of a death instinct it allegedly awakens in us; but of a dimension proper to its sound assemblage, to its sound machine, the moment that must be confronted, the moment the transversal turns into a line of abolition. Peace and exasperation. Music has a thirst for destruction, every kind of destruction, extinction, breakage, dislocation. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 330)

In the Stargate sequence from *2001* one experiences an 'accelerated temporality and accelerated present' (Sobchack 2005, 11) as the capsule and astronaut hurtles through (or rather within and without) space and time. The here and now moves faster than the speed of light. In this tumultuous sea of sounds and shapes, vectors and horizons, symphonies and arias, coloured notes and heated lines, one experiences a loss of temporal and spatial connectivity. Consequently or inevitably, 'incommensurable, non-rational links' emerge and void and disconnected spaces begin to appear before one's eyes, in front of one's fingers, in one's entire dazed and confused sensorium. In the Stargate sequence there is breakdown in the sensor-motor system and the emergence of a direct image of time. One becomes a part of the shocking force of these deterritorialized,

repeating, oscillating fragments as one is hurtled forwards and backwards, is surrounded by sound-shapes that stretch out to infinity, and as one is incorporated into smudges, and light and colour strokes full of weight and weightlessness. The eye is wrenched free from its socket and becomes part of the plasma of time and space; the face rattles as if a force is pushing its way outwards, taking the flesh, the mouth with it, and the ears are grafted onto every image, in the same way every image latches itself onto the ear. This is a dying of the body as it becomes organ-less, and purely sensational.

Conclusion

In sounding alien, and in soundscaping the future, science fiction film has the potential to give sonic birth to a deterritorialized self experiencing a moment of pure becoming. One can experience a radical alterity that exists beyond the sonorous limit; a type of semiotic death when one enters the mouth of an alien, or the wide-open mouth of the universe as one hurtles forward (backward) in time and space. As one experiences the ontology of the body give way; as one experiences the flesh of the alien thing as belonging to or within you; and when cracks in the universe are experienced as cracks within you, through which a 'swarm' of intensities hive and host, one senses that one is remarkably, irrefutably, an alien lost in space.

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