



PROJECT MUSE®

Composing in Fragments: Music in the Essay Films of Resnais and Godard

Nora M. Alter

SubStance, Volume 41, Number 2, 2012 (Issue 128), pp. 24-39 (Article)

Published by University of Wisconsin Press

DOI: 10.1353/sub.2012.0023



➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/sub/summary/v041/41.2.alter.html>

Composing in Fragments: Music in the Essay Films of Resnais and Godard

Nora M. Alter

This essay is dedicated to my father, Jean V. Alter (1925-2012).

“Sound, on the other hand, is left out in the
cold in both technology and thinking about
film.” — Jean-Luc Godard, 2000

“It’s the reign of the always identical....
Everything is beginning to look alike.
Cloning is already with us.”
— Jean-Luc Godard, 2001

Research on the audio-visual genres of social cinema and essay films tends to focus on narrative structures and visual tracks as opposed to sound tracks. Especially when looking at French productions, the shadow of Michel de Montaigne’s sixteenth-century *Essais* in tandem with Alexandre Astruc’s twentieth-century concept of the *caméra-stylo* push investigations of this audio-visual genre towards theories that stress visual and literary/philosophical approaches over those that privilege soundtracks.¹ Relying heavily on either literary or philosophical models or on image theory to understand the logic of a medium in which the audio plays such a dynamic role is symptomatic of the dominance of the logocentric and visually (optiphilic/scopophilic) based interpretive methods that circulate today.² These models of analysis and interpretation are clearly derived from literary criticism and art history. My aim is not to argue against the seminal role that either linguistic texts or the study of visual compositions play in the understanding of the audio-visual essay; rather I want to explore *other* ways of thinking non-fiction cinema. For it seems to me that the attentiveness to the textual or pictorial components of audio-visual work all too often comes at the expense of examining systems of representation and signification that are *not* based on purely linguistic or visual constructions.

In this essay—with all of its formal limitations as a written, silent, non-visual document—I will explore the possibility of thinking the essay with an ear to the ephemeral domain of the acoustic, namely music.³ In studies of non-fiction cinema, attention is rarely paid to the careful structure of the soundtrack, especially the way in which music is employed to

create an additional line of meaning. However, the manner in which music is mobilized to produce an acoustic space for the imaginary in non-fiction films is extremely important. But these acoustic sites are often unheard; critical attention is rarely focused on the soundtrack of non-fiction essay films. And yet, music is one of the most important and determining forces in this type of film, for it structures the montage, shapes meaning, establishes tone, and encourages flights of fantasy. Non-fiction essay films, by their very nature, are assumed to be grounded in the "real." Non-diegetic music, however, contradicts the logic of this filmic genre, for it does not belong to the ostensibly factual representation of the diegesis. Hence the non-diegetic music layer in non-fiction essay films produces a tension not only between the on-screen and the off-screen, but also between the real and the imaginary. These sound cues provide access to the tenor of different times and spaces; they allow us to "hear elsewhere," as Jean-Luc Godard would put it, which in turn enables us to see and understand elsewhere as well. More often than not this "elsewhere" is a politically charged terrain outside of dominant discourse.

Music is divided into two primary types: lyric based, and instrumental or a-signifying. I will take examples from both to make my argument. I will begin with an examination Hanns Eisler's composition in one of the most significant productions of social cinema in the postwar period: Alain Resnais' *Nuit et Brouillard* (1955) and conclude with a take on the Rolling Stones's "Sympathy for the Devil" in Jean-Luc Godard's *One Plus One* (1968). In both films, I tune in to a sound of politics as it filters through both classical and popular compositions, shattering temporal and spatial frames. What follows tracks the echoes and reverberations of chords, strains and fragments interwoven into audio-visual compositions.

Writing in 1929, V.I. Pudovkin vehemently proclaimed, "Music...in sound film must *never be the accompaniment*. It must retain its own line."⁴ The use of non-diegetic music to generate what could be called a "mood," to evoke a specific era, and/or to comment on the running image track, is nothing new in film. It is a staple of fictional films. It is predominantly used to match the images through synchronized cooperation, both by mirroring and emphasizing their content as well as by matching one image to the next. Less conventionally, non-diegetic music has been employed to produce discordant ruptures. In either case, it is clear that the sound emanates from a space outside the narrative. Sometimes, however, the musical score is so deeply embedded in the narrative that the neat categories of diegetic and non-diegetic become confused, as in the celebrated case of Fritz Lang's 1931 masterpiece, *M*. Edvard Grieg's haunting "In the Hall of the Mountain King," composed for Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* of 1867, not only serves to propel Lang's child murderer (played by Peter Lorre) to find a new victim (he hears the music inside his head which

produces voices urging him on), but also signals to the spectator that the killer is about to strike again. Indeed, it is ultimately Lorre's compulsive whistling (this sound tic) that betrays the villain's identity to the blind beggar who recognizes him. Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King," functions dually: diegetically it emanates from the protagonist and signals his presence, while non-diegetically it evokes the character Peer Gynt's nightmarish descent into debauchery. The accelerated pace of the music corresponds to a world of madness. Knowing the story of *Peer Gynt* provides an additional layer of understanding by hinting at the psychotic ruptures taking place in the mind of the killer. The composition culminates in a frenzied crescendo that at once references the voices in Lorre's head and the violence of the murder—an act that we never actually see performed on screen. Lang relies on the repetition and signature effect of Grieg's score to produce gruesome images of the murderous deed in the spectator's imagination

Resnais, Marker and Eisler

The year is 1955 and opening credits roll against a black screen. On the soundtrack the music playing is a slow legato string line that echoes itself. The opening repetitive bars produced by the first and second violin pierce the image track and are followed by the call of a trumpet that heralds the unknown. The score, composed by Hanns Eisler, will repeat at several significant instances throughout the film. The year is 1967, with a different film, but the same music plays over a black screen as the credits roll informing us of the filmmaking team—names, places sources. There are no competing images to distract the eye; the eyes read an informational text while the ears hear music. The primary decoding is acoustic, and memory is triggered in this acousmatic space.

The two films, Alain Resnais's 1955 *Nuit et Brouillard* (*Night and Fog*) about the European death camps of the 1940s, and the 1967 omnibus production *Loin du Vietnam* (*Far from Vietnam*), directed by Jean Luc Godard, Joris Ivens, William Klein, Claude Lelouch, Chris Marker, Resnais, and Agnès Varda, about the US war in Vietnam in the 1960s, are connected via a sound bridge that spans a generation. Hanns Eisler's haunting score forges a link between the two catastrophic periods. At the time *Loin du Vietnam* was made, to compare the US war in Southeast Asia with the Holocaust was explosive, especially in Western Europe where the United States was perceived by many as the savior from totalitarianism.⁵ What could not be said or shown—and here it's important to recall that Resnais's films *Nuit et Brouillard* and *Les Statues meurent aussi* (*Statues also die*, 1953) were immediately censored by the French authorities—could be suggested through a musical composition.⁶

As filmmaker Alberto Cavalcanti observed in 1939, “pictures speak to the intelligence. Noise seems to bypass the intelligence and speak to something very deep and inborn.... The picture lends itself to clear statement, while sound lends itself to suggestions.”⁷ The sound bridge between *Nuit et Brouillard* and *Loin du Vietnam* links the atrocities of the Second World War and the systematic aerial bombing of a civilian peasant population by a superpower. Eisler’s music in *Loin du Vietnam* also serves to invoke the final sequence in *Nuit et Brouillard*, during which (over that very same music-track) the commentator asks: “Qui de nous veille dans cet étrange observatoire pour nous avertir de la venue de nouveaux bourreaux? Ont-ils vraiment un autre visage que le nôtre?” (Who among us keeps watch in this strange observatory to warn us of the arrival of new executioners? Do they [Nazis] really have a face different from ours?) The commentator’s use of the shifter “ours” sutures the mid-1950s French public to the perpetrators of genocide in the 1940s. The phrase “the arrival of new executioners” directly alludes to the increasing violence of the French colonial war in Algeria, while, by not explicitly mentioning Algeria, leaving open the possibility of pointing to future violence anywhere. The voice-over concludes:

Et il y a nous qui regardons sincèrement ces ruines comme si le vieux monstre concentrationnaire était mort sous les décombres, qui feignons de reprendre espoir devant cette image qui s'éloigne, comme si on guérissait de la peste concentrationnaire, nous qui feignons de croire que tout cela est d'un seul temps et d'un seul pays, et qui ne pensons pas à regarder autour de nous et qui n'entendons pas qu'on crie sans fin.

(And here are we who gaze sincerely at these ruins as if the old concentration camp monster were dead beneath the rubble, we who pretend to regain hope in the face of this receding image, as if one could be cured from the concentration camp plague, we who pretend to believe all this belongs to one singular time and one singular place, and who do not think of looking around us, and who do not hear that the screams are endless.)

Screams that echo through time and space: from the death camps of the Second World War to the bloody struggle of Algerian independence, and the horrors of the Vietnam War. Screams that have yet to cease.

The story of Eisler’s music, however, does not begin with the atrocities of the death camps. It predates Resnais’s commission of 1955.⁸ Although Resnais thought he had received an original score from the German composer, what Eisler delivered was a recycled composition. It was a piece Eisler had written in 1954 for a production staged by Bertolt Brecht, which had premiered at the East German Berliner Ensemble in January of 1955. The circumstances surrounding the original score and the play are fascinating, and move back in time to the first major defeat suffered by the German Army in January 1941, and across space eastward

to the snow-covered battlefields outside Moscow. The play, *Winterschlacht: Eine deutsche Tragedie* (Winter slaughter: A German tragedy), was initially penned by former expressionist playwright and poet Johannes Becher in 1941 under the title *Schlacht um Moskau* (Slaughter around Moscow).⁹ Becher had moved to Moscow in 1935 and stayed in the Soviet Union throughout the war. *Schlacht um Moskau* was thus composed from the perspective of a native German living in exile and witnessing first-hand his country's attack on his place of refuge. After the war Becher returned to what was then the Soviet Zone of Occupation, and helped to establish the new East German State, serving as its Minister of Culture.

It was during his time at the ministry that Becher first collaborated with Eisler, writing the lyrics for *Auferstanden aus Ruinen*, the East German national anthem. During the 1950s Becher reworked *Winterschlacht*, and gave the play its current title. Eisler composed the score and in some passages Becher's words are spoken over the music. In 1996 Berlin Classics released a music CD, *Hanns Eisler: Works for Orchestra II*, which includes the complete score and phrases used in the play.¹⁰ The drama concerns the tragedy of a young idealistic German soldier, Hoerder, who, horrified by his military experience, disavows war and becomes a pacifist. When he refuses to obey his commander's order to slay two Russians, he is summarily executed on the battlefield. Hence the "tragedy" in the title refers to the protagonist's death for a just cause. *Winterschlacht* thus presents the possibility of an awakening, or a turning point.

But why, fourteen years after the battle of Moscow and ten after the end of the Second World War, did Brecht stage Becher's play? And why did he bring in Eisler from Vienna as the composer?¹¹ The anniversary of the Armistice may be one explanation. In East Germany the battle of Moscow was seen to be an important turning point in Communism's ultimate triumph over Fascism.¹² But there is also a more contemporary explanation. In his introduction to the 1953 version, Becher draws attention to the growing Cold War and to the fact that the very existence of the Soviet Union and its satellite states, especially East Germany, is threatened. Eisler's libretto for the play registers this threat, warning listeners: "Merkt euch: für Feinde führt kein Weg nach Moskau! Den Freunden aber öffnen wir das Herz!" (Pay attention! For enemies there is no path to Moscow, however for friends we open our hearts!). Eisler's *Winterschlacht* thus concomitantly addresses the horrors of the Second World War while pointing to the very real possibility of another one.

The *Winterschlacht* prelude opens with the same bars and strains of string instruments—a first and second violin, bass, and trumpet—as in the music tracks of *Nuit et Brouillard* and *Loin du Vietnam*. This opening

sequence is the dominant theme of the entire composition. At a time when “one of the basic tenets of film music was that it go undetected and not detract from what is taking place on the screen,” we would do well to pay heed to the fact that Eisler’s composition calls so much attention to itself.¹³ In both films, as in the drama, Eisler’s music plays during the opening and closing sequences. It is also introduced during key moments of the narrative. In *Winterschlacht* it resumes during the section entitled “The Horror of War,” when the young protagonist is executed in the midst of the German defeat. The music is meant to evoke images of the battle and conflicting emotions of mourning and triumph.

In *Nuit et Brouillard* the same music emerges in the sequence to which the narrative has slowly been building: the exploration of the interior of the gas chamber. In a close-up, the camera tracks the final marks made by the desperate scratchings on the concrete wall of the gas chamber made by those about to die. The music continues as a series of still photographs of corpses fills the screen. In this passage there are no live witnesses—only abandoned buildings and photographs. The images are indexical traces of the former living; they are all that remains.¹⁴ In this space without witnesses, the index points to a “there was.” And yet the music animates the scene, restoring a faint sign of bare life.¹⁵ That “life,” I want to suggest, is what echoes in the present. Through the montage of documents from the camps of the 1940s and Eisler’s music of the 1950s, the past and the present, *the historical and the contemporary* are brought uncomfortably together and serve as a perpetual warning.

But *Winterschlacht* is not the beginning of the story of this music. Eisler’s composition had yet another life, this one played out in England and medieval Denmark. When Brecht called on Eisler to collaborate with him on Becher’s play, Eisler had just completed staging a production of *Hamlet* at the Burg Theater in Vienna. The composition that Eisler presented to Brecht—and then to Resnais—was conceived to accompany Horatio’s monologue in the last scene of Act V. Hamlet has just died and in his final gasp has commanded Horatio to “report me and my cause aright/ To the unsatisfied.” Horatio’s response is as follows:

And let me speak to the yet unknowing world
How these things came about: so shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fall’n on the inventors’ heads: all this can I
Truly deliver.

Horatio's duty is therefore to bear witness and to tell the "yet unknowing world" how these "casual slaughters" have been brought about by acts of "cunning" and "forced cause." That Eisler wrote the music to accompany Horatio's speech, rather than that of Fortinbras, which concludes the drama, is significant. For whereas Fortinbras's words call for vengeance and bloodshed, ("Go, Bid the soldiers shoot"), Horatio's voice is tempered and full of warning.¹⁶ His monologue loops backward, making everything that has transpired part of his narrative, and thereby thrusting him into the unwitting role of reporter, narrator and historian, whose goal it is to prevent, through the summoning of the past, such "carnal, bloody and unnatural acts" from recurring.

I would like to move forward in time to the end of the 1960s and look at the resurfacings of Eisler's score in the collective anti-war film, *Loin du Vietnam*. In 1967 when the film was produced, anti-Vietnam War protests around the globe had reached a level of heightened urgency. Students, artists, writers, intellectuals and filmmakers in both the United States and Western Europe were joining forces in condemning US policy and aggression in Southeast Asia. Fidel Castro declared 1967 the "Year of Vietnam," and it was the theme of the Leipzig Documentary Film Festival. *Far From Vietnam* was conceived of and organized by Chris Marker. Marker initially sought to bring together like-minded filmmakers to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, where they would make a film about the situation there. However, with the exception of Joris Ivens, the North Vietnamese government denied travel/filming visas to the collective, and they were forced to reconceptualize their project. They changed their strategy and filmed instead sequences of US battleships maneuvering in the Gulf of Tonkin, anti-Vietnam War protests in the US and abroad, demonstrations, interviews and found footage. For his part, Godard employed self-consciously fictive re-creations "to bring the war home" or, as he put it, "to create Vietnam in ourselves."

The result was a film about Vietnam and the war from afar, from outside, at a distance. Whereas *Nuit et Brouillard* faces the challenge of being removed temporally from the events that it sought to confront, *Loin du Vietnam* confronts a spatial challenge. Eisler's score moves both films out of the immediate, visually bracketed cinematic frame. As mentioned, the opening credit sequence of *Loin du Vietnam* visually and acoustically mirrors that of *Nuit et Brouillard*. But that is not the only instance in which Eisler's score can be detected, for it is threaded throughout the film. It emerges at the beginning of the sequence, "A Parade is a Parade," during which the opening theme plays faintly as the camera records an anti-Vietnam War protest in New York. Other parts of Eisler's composition surface later in the chapter appropriately titled "Flashback," which

provides a brief history of US involvement in Vietnam since 1949. As the voice-over announces a series of dates, the music punctuates each significant event—at once underscoring the recent political history of Vietnam while at the same time triggering memories of another time (the 1940s) and place (Europe). This part ends with an amplification of the soundtrack, and Ho Chi Minh's proclamation that "La Victoire reste le seul chemin" (Victory remains the only possibility) over film footage of Vietnamese determinedly rebuilding from the ruins of their war-devastated country. Montaged to these images, Eisler's composition takes on a less mournful and more triumphal tone (as initially intended by Brecht's staging of Becker's libretto) than when heard against the backdrop of images of the dead. The soundtrack, although the same in both cases, signifies very differently in each.

Eisler's music is also used in *Far From Vietnam* at the beginning of an interview with the widow of Norman Morrison, a Quaker pacifist who immolated himself on the steps of the Pentagon in November 1965 to protest the war. The use of Eisler's music in this segment bridges Morrison's death to the death of the soldier Hoerder in *Winterschlacht*, who heroically disavows war at the expense of his own life. The point I want to underscore here is that sound is the element that *triggers* the connection between the two scenes across space and time for the attentive viewer. It colors both scenes with a suggestive and even emotional dimension that is not conveyed by the visual representation.

Eisler's composition thus echoes through time. It vibrates and resonates through scenes of war and injustice, while holding onto the possibility of a better future. Like Horatio, Eisler's task is to track and report "deaths put on by cunning and forced cause." Eisler delivered this through his music. Subsequent directors have mobilized this score to link separate events, placing them in an historical continuum and forging constellations.¹⁷ This use of Eisler's composition by Resnais and Marker shatters the particular cinematic frame of each of the films in question, connecting the historical events. The logic of that connection is not unlike the logic of montage, but in this case it is not the montage of sound and *image*, let alone of *image* and image, but that of sound and sound—what could be called the "sound montage."

In order to overhear these other stories and pursue these flightlines, Resnais and Marker rely on a spectator who is somehow "in the know." The use of Eisler's composition acoustically performs what E. H. Gombrich has referred to in reference to painting as the phantom precept. The phantom precept permits a viewer to extrapolate a unified whole from fragmentary sense data.¹⁸ The mobilization of Eisler's score in the 1960s addressed a committed left-wing spectator urging her to protest and put

an end to the war before it was too late. Music serves as a call for protest and change. Sound forges a counter public sphere or an imagined community against the mainstream media; the music thus encourages us to think about another space and time.¹⁹

Jean-Luc Godard

Filming just after he had finished his contribution to *Loin du Vietnam*, Jean-Luc Godard was involved in another project: *One Plus One*. Music is also used in this film as political trigger, albeit in a different manner. Unlike Eisler's composition, the music used to structure the film has lyrics, which help drive and control narrative meaning. On one level, *One Plus One* is about a rock-and-roll band, The Rolling Stones, and their recording of the hit, "Sympathy for The Devil." On another level it is about the cultural politics of the late 1960s, and the possibilities for popular culture to effect a radical change, or revolution. Godard was not alone in his belief in the emancipatory possibilities produced by "Pop," and was following the path of American artists such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and others. However, in many ways *One Plus One* functions as a linchpin to Godard's increasing skepticism about media culture. If, when he began to make the film, Godard still believed in the revolutionary potential of a refunctioing of commercial culture (in this instance pop music), which could at once be harnessed to politicizing and didactic purposes, he no longer did so by the time the film was released. Rather, this non-narrative compilation of collaged sequences formally stands as a kind of precursor to his filmic productions of the 1970s, especially *Ici et Ailleurs* (*Here And Elsewhere*, 1975) in which a cultural production of the "ever-same" prevents genuine innovation.²⁰ This shift will culminate in a type of oppositional filmmaking that continues today to display its politics in its fundamentally anti-social character.²¹

One Plus One was shot in the heady days of May and June 1968. Godard filmed extensive sequences of the Rolling Stones in the studio recording their latest single, "Sympathy for the Devil." Topical events interrupted the production of the song as the verse "who killed Kennedy?" was made plural by the assassination of the late President's brother, Robert Kennedy, during the lead-up to that year's Democratic convention. The often tedious nature of these scenes in the studio documents the extensive labor—the hours of takes and retakes—that went into recording popular music or, by extension, into producing a film.²² The reception of the film has primarily focused on this footage, and Rolling Stones manager Allen B. Klein (ABKCO) insisted that the film be retitled *Sympathy for the Devil* (although in Europe it was distributed under its original title, *One Plus One*). Hence the film has subsequently come to be seen as a documentary

on the Rolling Stones, rather than an essayistic meditation on the utopian politics of the late 1960s.²³ Indeed, the very act of dropping Godard's original title and renaming the film *Sympathy for the Devil* is significant. "One Plus One" was the slogan of May '68; it sought to bring together the colors of the two political movements of the day: the Red and the Black. Godard's title thus immediately signals the revolutionary politics of the late 1960s, with the Stones and their ominous song subordinated to that theme.

Neither the Stones nor the song "Sympathy for the Devil," are incidental to this film, however. Their function in *One Plus One* is pivotal, as they provide a glimpse of Godard's own political-theoretical position vis-à-vis the role of cultural production—especially cinema—in the context of the political landscape of what has come to be referred to as "May '68." In February 1968, Godard energetically announced that the Rolling Stones were even more relevant than the Beatles. Pronouncing the Rolling Stones's 1968 album, *Their Satanic Majesties Request*, "very advanced," Godard explained during a panel discussion in Los Angeles that "The Rolling Stones are very important because they are popular and intellectual at the same time. That is good. That is what I am trying to do in the movies. We have to fight the audience."²⁴ *One Plus One* also concerns resistance through language—via the revolutionary power of dialects and slang. To challenge conventionally established and accepted modes of speaking was ultimately to challenge the social doxa and thus to subvert social norms. To that end, the film focuses on the syntax of the Black Panthers. "Although we speak the same words," says a figure in the section intertitled "Inside Black Syntax," "we are speaking entirely different languages." Thus the film links the Black revolution in language to a political revolution—the Black Power movement. The political revolution is not merely a model or analogue for the linguistic revolution. Rather, as Julia Kristeva would explain a few years later, "the explosions set off by practice-process within the social field and the strictly linguistic field are logically (if not chronologically) contemporaneous, and respond to the same principle of unstoppable break-through; they differ only in their field of application."²⁵ Like Kristeva, Godard presents the artistic and the political as two modes of the same process; thus revolution in one sphere is equivalent to revolution in the other. This is where the Stones come in, for Godard intuited that in both their music and in their lyrics they adopted the Black revolutionary language. This was a language of resistance which, when coupled with music, was encoded not only in contemporary jazz and soul music ("Say it Loud: I'm Black and I'm Proud"), but ultimately in the Blues music of slavery. Thus Godard advances the Rolling Stones's music as revolutionary. As the final intertitle announced, in a direct reference to the street slogans of May '68, "Under The Stones The Beach."

This was not the case, however, with *Sympathy for the Devil*. Not only does this version of the film now have a new title, but it's producer, Quarrier, who appeared in the film as the proprietor of a pornography shop, also cut eleven minutes of footage from Godard's original.²⁶ Furthermore, Quarrier, in concert with ABKCO, fundamentally altered Godard's work by dubbing the officially-released studio recording of the Stones's *Sympathy for the Devil* onto the film's final scene, over a freeze-frame of the last shot. These changes were made without the director's approval. Indeed, Andrew Sarris recalled that Godard was so furious at the alterations the producer made to his film that during its premiere at London's National Theatre, he leapt onto the stage, punched Quarrier in the nose, and recommended to the audience that they ask for their money back and donate it instead to a fund for Eldridge Cleaver.²⁷

Godard's anger is understandable if one considers the act of the producer as fundamentally transforming the director's open-ended film. For Godard never allowed the entire song to play on the soundtrack. Instead, *One Plus One* operates through fragmentation, incompleteness, openness, possibility.²⁸ By constantly subverting the established rules and conventions of filmmaking, by dwelling on narrative ambiguity, by refusing to exercise closure, Godard sought to foster a culture that upheld the value of discontinuity against that of a more conventional continuity. The fragments comprising the film were meant at once to contradict and complement each other in a dialectical opposition capable of generating new perspectives and a greater quantity of information. And, it should be stressed that these "fragments" operate and exist as much in the image track as on the sound track. This practice of focusing on the fragment may be part of revolutionary language, *pace* Kristeva, who describes a signifying practice that involves the combination, fitting together, and detaching of parts.²⁹

Upon receipt of the prestigious Adorno Prize for criticism in September 1995, Klaus Theweleit, author of the double-volume study *Male Fantasies*, 1977, surprised the academy by dedicating his acceptance speech to Jean-Luc Godard.³⁰ Theweleit acknowledged that Godard, the Swiss-French filmmaker, had a greater impact on his writing than any living writer of fiction, philosophy or criticism.³¹ That Theweleit, upon the receipt of a prize for "high" criticism, chose to dedicate his speech to a filmmaker might initially appear as a public gesture of thumbing one's nose at the German Academy, especially in light of the fact that the prize was named after Theodor W. Adorno, whose antipathy to popular culture, especially film, is well known. However, Theweleit's speech was disrespectful of neither the prize-awarding institution nor the legacy of Adorno. Rather, it was carefully calibrated to demonstrate the critical relevance of Godard,

whose densely constructed films articulate a multi-layered reflection on the contemporary state of culture and politics. Indeed, it might be argued that Godard is one of the few directors, along with Alexander Kluge, who today is producing films marked by an aesthetic practice that has affinities to Adorno. Writing on music, Adorno hypothesizes that “there is no more severe test to which music can be subjected than that of extracting tiny fragments and seeing if they have meaning, if they can be played as one.”³²

If traditional Hollywood-type filmmaking was essentially unambiguous, Godard sought to make *One Plus One* deliberately ambiguous. Likewise, he strove to maintain the open-endedness of the Rolling Stones’s “Sympathy for the Devil,” leaving the song incomplete. This would allow for a variety of potential readings to coexist, with none dominant. For if conventional forms of expression convey conventional meanings and are part of a conventional view of the world, Godard’s unconventional focus allows for a greater scope for interpretation. His presenting the song as a perpetually incomplete production was consistent with his effort to refunction it into a May ‘68 anthem. Yet, by dubbing the final, studio-produced version of the song—now in commodity form—onto the end, the producers framed the fragments and closed the film. In turn, the meanings of both the music and the film were shifted back in the direction of existing rules of interpretation. With open-endedness and ambiguity eliminated, the re-titled film at once reified Godard’s participation and served to publicize the Stones’s new song for ABKCO. Perhaps it was this all too easy cooption and reappropriation that led Godard to abandon the inclusion of “popular” lyrical music on the sound tracks of his subsequent films in favor of instrumental and often avant-garde musical compositions.³³

Godard suggested in *One Plus One* that the critical use of music could disrupt the continuum of everyday life and encourage recollection. To that extent, Godard returns us to that earlier cinematic moment when music structures images. But, it must be stressed, it is a fragmentary use of music on which he relies—one that corresponds to the shattered history of the twentieth century. The shards that comprise these films were meant at once to contradict and complement each other in a dialectical opposition capable of generating new perspectives and more information. These “fragments” operate and exist as much on the image track as on the sound track. Here it is worth recalling that the fragment was central for Adorno’s concept not only of music but, also of the essay as a general mode of critique. And as he wrote about the genre of the essay, “It thinks in fragments, just as reality is fragmentary, and finds its unity in and through the breaks and not by glossing them over.”³⁴ As an essay film, then, *One Plus One* must follow the logic of the essay and think in fragments, both acoustically and visually.

Whether lyrical or instrumental, music in *Nuit et Brouillard*, *Loin du Vietnam* and *One Plus One* is always heard as a part, as a hint, or a suggestion. Music in these essay films does not just complement the image track; it produces a parallel track, thereby freeing the imagination from the constraints of the visible world. Sound is presented as an alternative to visual spectacle. Whereas the cinematic image transforms ideas into visual clichés, sound unleashes thought, producing a world of fantasy in our minds. Through its shards and fragments, it provides the fiction to enliven and enhance the “reality” of the essay film. Vision may have become completely colonized and transformed into second nature, but sound, it seems, still retains the utopian possibility for a different sort of expression. For all of his celebrated pessimism, Adorno to the end stressed the possibility of a future rupture in the continuum of history. This rupture could be produced by a residual memory, which kept alive the utopian hopes and critical energies of previous generations.³⁵ In particular, he firmly believed that genuine art contained a utopian moment that pointed to a future political and social transformation. The music employed in these films registers this utopian moment, this glimmer of hope, as they concomitantly bear agonized witness to the disintegration of art and the decimation of the subject in the postwar era.

Thinking the non-fiction essay film through the realm of the acoustic provides access to layers of meaning that are undetectable by interpretive approaches that focus solely on the montage of text and images. Non-diegetic sound elements such as music are capable of conveying ideas and sensibilities which, for one reason or another, cannot be explicitly stated or shown. They are also capable of summoning different times and spaces, allowing us to hear and therefore to see and understand an elsewhere—a place that is different from the one depicted on the screen. Furthermore, sound elements often bridge different films and productions and enable meaning to be transferred from one to the next. Music is an element that often functions in *excess* of representation in film. Because music’s great power is that of suggestion, we must not overlook that strength and that dimension, lest we miss a key component of the film.

Temple University

Notes

1. See for example, Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009); and the edited volume, *L'Essai et le Cinéma* eds. Liandrát-Guigues, Suzanne and Murielle Gagnebin, (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 2004).
2. I am not exempting myself from this logocentric methodology. For example, see my recent “Translating the Essay into Film and Installation.”

3. Of course the classic text that deals with the tension between images and sounds is Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*. Nietzsche's theory, however, is pre-cinematic, for he only considers how music brings forth images and not vice-versa.
4. V. I. Pudovkin, "Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film," 89.
5. For a comparative discussion on European responses to the Vietnam War see my *Vietnam Protest Theatre: The Television War on Stage*.
6. For a history of censorship of *Night and Fog* see Jean-Marc Dreyfuss "Censorship and Approval: The Reception of *Nuit et Brouillard* in France."
7. Alberto Cavalcanti "Sound in Films," 109.
8. October 18, 1955. For details on the communication between Eisler and Resnais see Ewout van der Knaap "The Construction of Memory in *Nuit et Brouillard*," esp. 22-25.
9. For details about the history of the play see J.M. Ritchie, "Staging the War in German." 10. *Hanns Eisler: Works for Orchestra II*.
11. This was Eisler's second visit to the former DDR after his return from the United States to Europe. It was this trip, which resulted in his ultimate relocation to East Berlin.
12. Brecht describes Eisler's composition as follows: "Triumph über die Besiegung Hitlers durch die Sowjetarmee and Trauer über die Leiden der deutschen Soldaten und die Schmach ihres Einfalls in die Sowjetunion" (1292).
13. Adorno and Eisler note in their 1947 *Composing for the Films* "One of the most widespread prejudices in the motion picture industry is the premise that the spectator should not be conscious of the music" (9).
14. For a detailed analysis of the trace following from Georges Didi-Huberman, see Emma Wilson, "Material Remains: *Night and Fog*."
15. See Agamben on bare life in the context of the concentration camps.
16. The pacifist nature of Horatio's speech had been brought to the fore decades earlier in Karl Krauss's drama critiquing World War I, *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*, a work of which Eisler was surely aware.
17. Another instance of the employment of Eisler's score, is in Alexander Kluge's 1978 *The Patriot* in which, provocatively, the composition is played over shots of dead German soldiers from World War II.
18. Teresa De Lauretis extends Gombrich's principle to film, observing that the precept is also a basic "social contract by which external consistency is given up or traded against the internal coherence of the illusion" (62).
19. Another French essay filmmaker who developed sound as an alternative track is Marcel Ophüls. The problem of how to produce a film that confronts contemporary events without falling prey to or merely reenacting a mediatic spectacle is one that Ophüls has taken on repeatedly throughout his career. He has used a musical soundtrack to provide an additional and often contrapuntal commentary to the official language we hear spoken or the narrative we read through the images on the visual track. As early as *Le Chagrin et la pitié* (1970) Ophüls, as a film essayist, pushed against the then-rigid category of the documentary by inserting narrative elements as well as an ironic use of songs, such as Maurice Chevalier singing "Let the whole world sigh or cry / I'll be up on a rainbow / Sweeping the clouds away." Ophüls continued with his musical insertions in *Memory of Justice* (1976) with popular tunes such as "New Sun in the Sky," "That's Entertainment," and "I Guess I'll Have to Change My Plan," playing against shots of the bleak landscape of Schleswig Holstein, where he had gone in search of a former Nazi physician. In 1990 Ophüls adapted these musical insertions more systematically, producing a non-fictional essay film, *November Days: Voices and Paths*, a "musical comedy" commissioned by the BBC to mark the first anniversary of the tearing down of the Berlin Wall. And this same strategy is at play in Ophüls's next project. *Veillées d'Armes*, 1994 (The Troubles We Have Seen: A History of Journalism in Wartime) in which he interweaves recordings of songs and fictional films into a harsh critique of war and journalism. Such surplus

- meanings are not located so much in the information or symbolism in the film, but are layered musically, just below the level of conscious perception. For a detailed analysis of *November Days*, see my essay, "Marcel Ophüls' *November Days*: German Reunification as Musical Comedy."
20. The concept of the "ever-same" (*Immergleiche*) was developed by Walter Benjamin's readings of Nietzsche's "eternal; return" and August Blanqui's *L'Eternité par les astres*. The static side of history as the "ever-same" became Adorno's primary emphasis after Benjamin's death in 1940.
 21. Here I am thinking of recent work from the past two decades including *Forever Mozart*, *Notre Music* and most recently, *Film Socialism*.
 22. The trope of rehearsal and repetition is a dominant theme in Godard's films. See *Germany Year Ninety-Nine Zero*, *Forever Mozart*, and *Prénom Carmen*.
 23. Unlike Robert Frank's documentary, *Cocksucker Blues*, 1972, which captured the raw energy (sex, drugs, rock 'n roll) of what was in 1970 termed "the Altamont generation," Godard's distanced and aesthetic study of the recording process was more acceptable to the Stones and in concordance with the "official image" they wished to portray.
 24. The interview took place during a panel discussion at the University of Southern California on February 26, 1968. For a full transcript, see Gene Youngblood, "Jean-Luc Godard: No Difference between Life and Cinema" (1968), p. 15.
 25. Kristeva, 104.
 26. The original director's cut (titled *One Plus One*) runs approximately 110 minutes. The film's producers were dissatisfied with this version and deleted eleven minutes, changed the title to "Sympathy for the Devil" to underscore the Stones connection, and added the final version of the title song to the film's soundtrack over a freeze-frame of the last shot. Much of the cut footage featured images of Black Power militants. These changes were made without Godard's knowledge.
 27. Andrew Sarris, "Godard and the Revolution."
 28. On Godard's employment of fragments of music in *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*, see Laurent Jullier's *JLG/ECM*.
 29. Kristeva, 100-104.
 30. The speech, delivered on September 17, 1995, has been published as an extended essay / book: Klaus Theweleit, *One Plus One* (Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose, 1995).
 31. "Ich spreche trotzdem sehr gerne hier, aus 35-jähriger Zuneigung zur Arbeit Godards die, obwohl ich keine Filme mache, sondern Bücher, so wichtig für mein schreiben ist, wie kaum die Arbeit eines Schriftstellers unter den Lebenden." (Nonetheless, despite the fact that I don't make films, but rather write books, I would very much like to speak about the 35 years of affection that I have had for the work of Godard. For his work has been more important for my writing than the work of any living writer.) *Ibid.*, 5.
 32. Adorno, *Quasi una fantasia* pp. 279.
 33. His inclusion of Patti Smith in *Film Socialism* is an interesting return.
 34. Adorno, "The Essay as Form."
 35. Adorno never let himself forget that "It lies in the definition of negative dialectics that it will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total. This is its form of hope." See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (1966), trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1987), 406.

Works Cited

- Adorno, Theodor W. *Negative Dialectics* (1966), trans. E.B. Ashton. New York: Continuum, 1987.
- "The Essay as Form" [1954-58], *Notes To Literature*, Vol. 1. New York: Columbia UP, 1993.
- *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essay on Modern Music*. London: Verso, 1998.
- Adorno, Theodor W. and Eisler, Hanns. *Composing for the Films*. London: Athlone Press, 2001.
- Alter, Nora M. "Marcel Ophüls' *November Days*: German Reunification as Musical Comedy," *Film Quarterly*, 51 (Winter 1998), 32-43.
- *Vietnam Protest Theatre: The Television War on Stage*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996.
- "Translating the Essay into Film and Installation," *Journal of Visual Culture*, 6:1 (April 2007), 45-58.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Gesammelte Werke 17, Schriften zum Theater 3*. Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1963.
- Cavalcanti, Alberto. "Sound in Films," in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia UP, 1985, 98-111).
- Corrigan, Timothy. *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011.
- De Lauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.
- Dreyfuss, Jean-Marc. "Censorship and Approval: The Reception of *Nuit et Brouillard* in France," in *Uncovering the Holocaust: The International Reception of Night and Fog*, ed. Ewout van der Knaap. London: Wallflower Press, 2006.
- Hanns Eisler: *Works For Orchestra II* [Gunther Leib](#) (Performer), [Hanns Eisler](#) (Composer), [Adolf Fritz Guhl](#) (Conductor), [Gunther Herbig](#) (Conductor), [Heinz Rogner](#) (Conductor), [Max Pommer](#) (Conductor), [Leipziger Kammermusikvereinigung des Gewandhausorchesters](#) (Performer), [Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra](#) (Orchestra), [Berliner Sinfonie-Orchester](#) (Orchestra), [Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra](#) (Orchestra), [Elisabeth Breul](#) (Performer), [Gunter Neumann](#) (Performer), [Eberhard Palm](#) (Performer) 1996.
- Jullier, Laurent. *JLG/ECM in For Ever Godard*, eds. Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt. London: Black Dog Press, 2004.
- Knaap, Ewout van der. "The Construction of Memory in *Nuit et Brouillard*" in *Uncovering the Holocaust: The International Reception of Night and Fog*. ed. Ewout van der Knaap. London: Wallflower Press, 2006.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia UP, 1984.
- Pudovkin, V.I. "Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film," in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton. New York: Columbia UP, 1985, 86-91.
- Rascaroli, Laura. *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film*. London: Wallflower Press, 2009.
- Ritchie, J.M. "Staging the War in German." *Forum for Modern Language Studies* vol. XXI, 1 January 1985, 84-96.
- Sarris, Andrew. "Godard and the Revolution" (1970), *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*, ed. David Sterritt. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998.
- Theweleit, Klaus. *One Plus One*. Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose, 1995.
- Wilson, Emma. "Material Remains: *Night and Fog*." *October*, no. 112 (2005) 89-110.
- Youngblood, Gene. "Jean-Luc Godard: No Difference between Life and Cinema" (1968), reprinted in *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*, ed. David Sterritt. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998.