

THE BLOG

In and Out of Synch

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Aura Satz

Film, sound, performance and sculpture artist

My work often pores over the mechanical workings of technology, zooming in visually and acoustically until they become abstracted in scale and context, and reconfigured to evoke a new anatomy or landscape of sorts, an architectural structure, or a writing system.

Historical and literary narratives that suggest technological utopias, metamorphic or sensory-heightened bodies verging on science-fiction, and a constant oscillation between belief and disbelief, yearning and mourning, are crucial inspirations. In the past I have made films which

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explore the metaphysical possibilities of electronic music in the work of Daphne Oram; the possibility of playing the suture of a skull as though it were a groove, using a phonograph needle; and turning a phonograph horn into a giant hearing trumpet which might tune into the vast library of ethereal past sounds.

I am fascinated by archaic and obsolete technologies for their de-familiarized sculptural qualities, as well as their unusual haptic or ergonomic fit. But even more so, they allow me to engage with the uncertainty they engender in terms of bodily perception and human agency, and the way in which they profoundly shift and transform our understanding of language, communication, presence and self. I have worked with acoustic devices and sound technologies, approaching them as outmoded language containers of sorts, carriers of voice and presence, which are densely layered with traces of the past, relics of speech and the attempt to articulate.

In prying apart these ruins, dissecting them visually and bringing them back into speech, so to speak, I aim to highlight the workings of the machine without quite revealing its mechanisms. I am not interested in debunking as much as a reconsidering power structures, making noise around and drawing attention to how ideas of language preservation and dissemination materialise; how matter can be 'read'; and how this can project onto the past and into the future.

My most recent film, *In and Out of Synch*, centres around the optical printing of analogue soundtracks, committing to 16mm film a technology on the verge of extinction, entombing and encrypting its own language

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onto itself. Shot at the post-production facilities of Pinewood studios, London, the close-up sequences feature abstract patterns of sound encoded as light, printed onto the soundtrack area of the filmstrip. The film features the quivering light of a 16mm mono and a 35mm stereo optical sound camera, providing a seismic glimpse at a sound-wave in formation, on occasions flashing like a stroboscopic Rorschach inkblot. Both mesmerizing and assaulting the senses, the visually hypnotic patterns are disrupted by the voiceover, scripted in dialogue with the artist and filmmaker Lis Rhodes. The two voices alternate and coincide, interrogating the sound-image synchronicity and correlation with poetic expressions. The film is accompanied by a live musical performance which animates a Rubens' tube, a device which similarly modulates light in response to sound, creating spectacular waves of flames. In parallel to the film's exploration of sound encoded as light, the event features sound encoded as fire; a more primal, dramatic, and almost pre-cinematic counterpart of the same principle of sound as light.

The intention of the project is to destabilize the relationship of word and image, precisely through the close-up rendering of sound/image synchronicity. Synchronicity or a perfect fit between sound and image is both mesmerising and unsettling, somehow suggesting a truer universal language whilst constantly shape-shifting, slipping away from one's ability to grasp it. Throughout the film phrase 'open score' recurs and this is very much how the film is conceived. The words become constellations, always related yet not quite linear, and perception has to engage in joining the dots, making sense using the senses. The visuals and sounds become a visual score, open to interpretation. The live musical element,

which will change with each incarnation, further embodies this principle, so that the film is the score which the music or voice punctuates, responds to, interprets and subverts.

Hopefully the film will offer spectators a heightened mode of perception, suggesting a complex relationship between what is seen and what is heard. Sound in itself can sharpen the senses, as the act of hearing is always full of doubt, for the most part seeking a visual anchor, which accounts for its existence, latching the sound onto its source. Seeing sound or the visualisation of the acoustic enables one to address the challenge of reading, deciphering, engaging with verbal and visual language precisely through its discrepancies and misfits.

In and Out of Synch premieres at the Tate tanks on the 27th of October and then tours to Arnolfini, Bristol on the 1st Nov. Aura Satz was also nominated for this year's Jarman award:

<http://flamin.filmlondon.org.uk/projects/projectscurrent/jarmanaward/satz>
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