Chapter 6

Sound Image and Resonant Animated Space: Beyond the Sonic Veil

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ABSTRACT

Animation is a synthesis of ideas that often encounters unpredictable, illogical, and imagined domains. In those animated worlds, recorded sound is now part of a coalition of two sensory forms mediated through hearing and vision. Sound has therefore been embedded in the audio-visual toolbox since the successful synchronisation of sound and picture. Sonic elements now contribute significantly to how animators might shape their films and express ideas. These animated worlds also often represent deeply rooted expressions of the interior mind of the artists and animators themselves. This chapter explores the relationship of sound to image in the evolutionary and increasingly variable animated forms that are currently proliferating. It aims to focus on sound as being the primary channel that is best able to reflect those interior ideas within a range of animated media. The exploration seeks to do this through tracing proto-cinematic ideas in the art of the past and animation practice that researches the sonified and animated image using musical and figurative metaphors.

INTRODUCTION

As a contemporary art form that encounters unpredictable, illogical and imagined domains, animation can significantly mediate a range of human responses that can often be deeply embedded. It can do this by exposing those often difficult to articulate ideas through novel sound and picture combinations. These animated works can be resonant with deeply rooted expressions of the interior mind of the artists and animators themselves. Also, sound is considered today as a functioning part of this animated system. This system brings together mainly two sensual experiences that are received simultaneously through hearing and vision. Sound has therefore been embedded in the audio-visual toolbox since the successful synchronisation of sound and picture. Sonic elements now contribute significantly to how animators might shape their films and express...
those ideas. A developing relationship with sound is now the accepted convention in animation. This condition of sound-image and motion picture is almost bound to pose questions of the communicative primacy of the visual that for so long, has been considered as the prime ontological basis that underpins the theorising of the condition of cinema. In the evolutionary and increasingly variable animated forms that are proliferating, this accepted primacy of vision in audio-visual work is drawn into question.

This chapter has a focus on sound as the main channel that is best able to reflect this psychological interior and consider its approach in animation practice and reception. By tracing proto-cinematic ideas in art and personal practice that engages the relationship of the sonified and animated image, a case for prioritising the sonic and its role in probing the imagination is developed.

The concept of added-value in sound and picture combinations that are encountered in animated and synthesised worlds have the potential to expand the idea of audio-vision. This will often go beyond the normalised soundtracks of narrative cinema. The theory of audio-vision relates to sound and visual combinations and their potential to come together with a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts. That is; where the perception of sound affects the visual and that duality of sound and image is brought together as a tangible and transformed reality. (Chion, 1990). This contract in animation is now also expanding a type of meta-animation in forms where audio visual combinations are deployed in ways that evoke an enhanced visual imaginary. It infers that this response is mediated primarily by the hearing sense and the act of listening in action. Furthermore that this act of listening is modal, transient, culturally and subjectively informed.

What is seen and heard simultaneously has the potential to shift the understanding of audio-vision outside of screen space. These contracts in sound and image are now expanding within a type of animation practice that encounters other spaces, objects and new arenas for its reception. Audio-visual combinations are deployed in ways that evoke an enhanced visual imaginary. The chapter argues that this current condition can be primed by the hearing sense and is as much a function of listening as seeing.

A case for the value of sound is made firstly through an examination of sonic evocations in pre-cinematic artefacts. This argues that the currency of the cinematic derives from art forms that precede recorded sound. The case further examines those art forms as tangible resonant spaces that communicate sonic ideas. Secondly, sound theory and audio visual media are considered in relation to this imaginative response by focusing on how hearing combines within a subjective multi-sensory set of conditions that keep us engaged through audio-visual media. Thirdly, by considering the difference and progress from performed sound to synchronised sound and finally through personal practice. These practice projects research the construction and testing of the sound-image. They have been undertaken to ascertain how responses to listening are unique in the production of animated works in relation to the sound-image. The research also proposes future directions for audio-visual analysis and sound reception.

BACKGROUND

The canon of critical and theoretical work relating to the field of animation is mostly derived from broader studies of the film and the moving image. Audio-visual perspectives on sound that comprise another part of the literature emerge from the historical view of animation, which had its origins in photography. It therefore, appears to be primarily understood through vision, and linked to the truth and mythology that surrounds the indexical image. The dominant view holds that sound is a late addition to the genesis of cinema that continues to allocate the greatest importance to vision, both