Sounding the Abject in Contemporary Horror Scoring

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Abstract

This article explores the use of noise in the scoring and sound design of recent horror soundtracks. Using case studies on *Darling* (Keating, 2015), *Crimson Peak* (del Toro, 2015) and the found footage genre, the article argues that the noise is deliberately employed as a signifier of the abject. Drawing on Metz's ideas of music, sound and speech as three distinct channels of communication, noise's ability to move fluidly between these channels and to collapse them into a single sonic channel is identified as a key way in which noise transgresses boundaries and operates as both a symbolic and concrete manifestation of horror.

[8051 words]

Key words

Film music; noise; sound design; diegesis; channels of communication; the abject

Biography

Dr Janet K. Halfyard is Head of BMus programmes at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Her research is mainly focused on music in horror/ supernatural and superhero film and TV, and publications include *Danny Elfman's Batman: a Film Score Guide* (Scarecrow Press, 2004), *Sounds of Fear and Wonder: Music in Cult TV* (IB Tauris, 2016) and the edited collections *Music, Sound and Silence in Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Ashgate, 2010) and *Music in Fantasy Cinema* (Equinox, 2012). Current projects focus on Superhero scoring since 2015 and music in *Game of Thrones*.

A feature of horror scoring for both film and television in the last twenty years has been the presence of noise in places where music might have previously been used, and in this essay I explore some of the specific and imaginative ways in which noise has appeared both with and instead of conventional film scoring. However, this opening statement presents some ontological problems in that 'noise' has become a contested concept in music. As early as 1912, the Italian Futurists embraced noise with Russolo's *intonarumori* (noise-making musical instruments) and his manifesto, *The Art of Noises* (1912), while Varèse's use of sirens in *Ionisation* (1931) is an early use of a non-instrumental sound in the work of an otherwise instrumental composer. This was followed by forays into composition in the early electronic studios in the 1940s and 1950s, where composers worked directly with sound for

the first time, rather than writing notation on paper, using both recordings of real-world sound (*musique concrète*) and electronically generated sound (*elektronische Musik*).

Contemporary composition largely makes no distinction between noise and music – it was Varèse, in fact, who offered the phrase 'organized sound' as a more inclusive way of describing sonic art. Michel Chion, as made clear in the title of his essay 'Let's have done with the notion of noise' (2011), would like discard the word altogether except for noise pollution and to call everything else *sound*, given that at an acoustic level, the division of sound into 'music' (traditionally, arrangements of periodic vibrations, which are heard as a specific pitch) and 'noise' (aperiodic vibrations) is arbitrary, contextual and subjective. He observes that the distinction was never absolute: many percussion instruments do not produce periodic sounds but are considered musical, while the reversing signal of a truck or the hum of a neon light are clearly periodic sounds but one would be unlikely to call them music (see Chion, 2016: 56-57). Contextually, music that one is quite happy to hear in the background during the day becomes disturbing noise when heard in the middle of the night.

> The assessment of noise as noise and music as music is thus a matter of cultural and individual context. It does not inhere in the nature of the elements but for the most part is attributable to the imprimatur 'officially musical' on the source, as well as the perception of a particular order or disorder among the sounds. (57)

Chion rejects noise as a useful term, but I and others would argue that it remains valuable; and the concept has generated considerable discussion in recent years. xtine burrough (2010) identifies very succinctly why it is that noise in the context of a film or television narrative needs special consideration with her example of encountering a noise such as static. In a real-life situation, the noise signifies a negative, the absence of a meaningful signal when, for example, one turns on the television and is greeted by static rather than a programme.

However, if the sound of static were introduced intentionally into a TV narrative, we would understand it to mean something quite different:

> Noise in one situation becomes a signifier of noise in another; where the original noisy signal is used to represent disconnection. In the narrative, the static is no longer noise. Instead, it is a vital part of the narrative, just like the actions, scenery, and dialog. Noise is used to represent miscommunication and the error it causes as an active territory that can be intentional and manipulated. (81)

Marie Thompson makes a similar point: countering Paul Hegarty's claim that noise exists outside the systems and structures of meaning (2001: 194), she argues that

> For me to identify sound as meaningless noise means that it exists inside the structures of signification; it is instilled with signification, albeit as sound out of place, as extraneous, incomprehensible. Noise does not exist beyond the borders of signification, but rather, makes these borders apparent, as the limits of our understanding. (2010: 5)

Chion's assertion that all sound is sound is self-evidently true; nor do I contest the idea that categorizations of sounds as either noise or music are contextual and subjective, but in a cultural rather than acoustic context, those categorizations are not arbitrary. In the context of the overall sonic design of an audio-visual narrative, decisions are clearly sometimes made to do away with conventionally musical sounds and use only sounds from the aperiodic end of the spectrum. Alternatively, the decision may be to create specific contrasts in, for example, the construction of narratively opposed characters by using sounds from opposing ends of that spectrum that are contextually positioned as 'noise' or 'music' in a meaningful way. Because noise is, indeed, contextual and subjective, it remains profoundly meaningful at the level of our responses to it, both in everyday life and in our understanding of audio-visual

narratives – because 'as Justice Potter Stewart said of hard-core pornography in the famous US Supreme Court case, you'll know it (noise) when you see (or hear) it' (burrough: 80).

What I explore below are instances where 'noise' fulfils the roles and functions normally reserved for more conventional music in film sound. This requires me to put to one side Chion's objections to the term, and instead to embrace the importance of the contextual and subjective in what we understand noise to mean within audio-visual fiction. It also requires me to embrace the unavoidable imprecision of the term. Thompson acknowledges that noise is itself 'a noisy concept. It is messy, complex […] [and] fuzzy-edged' (2014: 2). She specifically rejects noise as one half of a binary that usually leads to noise being 'negatively defined in relation to that which it is not […] set in binary opposition to signal, silence and music' (7). For Thompson, noise 'betrays the binary; it is unfaithful to dualistic thinking, perturbing neat categorizations and distinctions. It is not "either/or" but "both/ and"' (8). Although the sounds I explore below are often constructed as a binary of noise versus music, they are also often *both/ and*: both aesthetically noise and functionally music (and vice versa); and as such, they cross and blur the boundaries between Metz's idea of sound (or 'real noises' [1974: 138]) and music (and also speech) as distinct channels of sonic communication.

In understanding how noise is used in audio-visual narratives, it is consistently important that to call something noise is usually pejorative, sound positioned as disruptive (see Goddard, Halligan and Hegarty, 2012: 2). Additionally, Goddard *et al*. observe that noise is often considered 'disorganized or, more appropriately, "unorganized" sound. In this respect it functions as the 'other' to both language and music' (ibid.).

These particular properties – transgressing boundaries, pejorative, disruptive and unorganized – ally noise with Kristeva's notion of the abject, the sonic equivalent of her ideas around the

corpse as the abject body. The corpse – simultaneously an identifiable person and no longer that person - inspires revulsion, decay rendering it unorganized. At the same time, those processes of decay transgress the physical boundaries of the body, the internal and external no longer separate, coherence breaking down. The abject is 'what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules' (Kristeva 1982: 4). It is the way in which noise points to the abject by transgressing the sonic boundaries between musical and non-musical sounds with which I am primarily concerned below.

Noise's capacity to operate as a sonic signifier of the abject has led to the distinction between noise and music in relation to horror having always been particularly fuzzy-edged, because the music of horror has historically employed analogues for noise among its musical signifiers. Isabella van Elferen, charting the sounds that both emit from and surround monsters, observes that 'monstrosity […] is a noisy business' (2016: 2), horror scoring often 'excessively loud and semiotically over-explicit' (14). This can be heard in the infamous shrieking strings in the shower scene of *Psycho* (1960) as Marion is killed, which listeners apparently mistook for sound effects rather than sounds produced by musical instruments; but is also more subtly present in the aggressively (noisily) bowed strings of the main title music. Similarly, Harry Manfredini's scores for the original *Friday the 13th* films in the 1980s are full of noise analogues, including aggressively played strings and heavily accented brass; stabbing cluster chords that obscure a sense of pitch; and also glissandi. As van Elferen puts it, the glissando is 'a radical harmonic destabilization […] caused by a seemingly endless chain of transgressions' (2013: 181); and in that move away from tonal stability, again the sound becomes 'noisy' and disruptive, failing to find a settled sense of pitch or harmony as the instrumental sound slides, usually upwards in a gesture of literally heightening anxiety. In the pre-title scene of *Friday the 13th Part 2* (1981), Manfredini makes a direct connection between glissandi and noise as, immediately after the first murder in this opening scene,

glissando-ing strings merge into the sound of a kettle whistling as it boils and then resume as the kettle is removed from the stove and the whistle is silenced.

Noise, in the analogues that composers have created instrumentally, has long been part of the way that the disturbed and transgressive nature of horror has been evoked. Alongside this, noise samples within the contemporary musical soundtrack of horror are near-ubiquitous, where noise tends to appear as one half of a binary with conventional music on the other, as seen in a score such as *Insidious* (2010). Here, the loving but increasingly sorrowful life of the family is musically represented with lyrical cello and piano scoring, whilst the abject supernatural forces that threaten the family are scored with crashing metallic samples, Ligeti-style clouds of dense, microtonally swirling strings and a distinctive vibrato-glissando string technique in the opening titles that creates a musical image of enormous sonic instability, the disturbingly excessive quavering of an abject supernatural voice.

My discussion of noise in horror focuses on three case studies: surreal and excessive noise in the independent film *Darling* (2015); an examination of how noise and music are used to mislead us in del Toro's much more mainstream *Crimson Peak* (2015); and, in a context where there is nothing at all presenting itself as music, the way diegetic sound/noise is used to fulfil the functions of a musical score in the found footage genre. Within the first two examples, I am interested in uses of noise that do not simply stand in place of conventional instrumental music but bring meanings to the narrative that conventional scoring would not have done.

Music/ Sound: Noise in the Channels of Communication

In classifying film's channels of communication, Metz assigns two channels to visual material – image and text – but three to the sonic domain: voice, music and sound (1974: 58). The dominance of the visual image is focused on a single channel while the sonic realm finds

itself spread across three different, potentially competing channels. From Chion's point of view, these categories, especially those of music and sound, are immediately problematic, although in terms of the film-making process, the division is more prosaic, as these are aspects of production that are usually dealt with by different departments. However, this introduces another fuzzy-edged element into my discussion, in that Metz's category of sound properly belongs within the diegetic space of the film, and music may be inside or outside that space. I do not intend to rehearse the many arguments that have been made in recent years about the less than diametric relationship of diegetic and non-diegetic music, except to draw on the observations made by writers such as Winters (2010), Cecchi (2010) and Yacavone (2012) that the bias toward realism in early film studies led to underscore music, evidently not all 'realistic', creating a problem that was rather poorly resolved with the blunt classification of music as either diegetic or 'non-diegetic'. In the case of Metz's sonic channels, the sounds of actions and environment, the real noises, will tend to be firmly linked to what is visible on screen; music may or may not emit from a seen or implied on-screen source, and is flexibly positioned in what Stilwell (2007) describes as the 'fantastical gap' and Yacavone (2012) as the meaningful 'spaces, gaps and levels' of the film narrative as it is experienced by its audience. These ideas are useful in understanding the way noise operates in horror, and the boundaries that it crosses or threatens. Noise could be either sound or music in terms of Metz's channels, but within the horror soundscapes I explore, it frequently operates in the diegetically fluid spaces, the fantastical gaps that are normally the preserve of music; and the issue of where sound is located within the narrative space of a film is one that horror's uses of noise-as-music consistently explores as an aspect of how the boundary-transgressing abject is invoked.

Darling

The score and sound design for the independent film *Darling* employ moments of extreme sonic intensity where sound overwhelms the eponymous (but otherwise unnamed) central character, corresponding metadiegetically to her mental distress – that is, we hear sound or music that is being remembered or imagined by a character, allowing us to effectively hear what he or she is thinking (see Gorbman, 1987: 22-23).[1] In a film that contains various allusions to *Psycho* (1960) and *Repulsion* (1965), the narrative charts her descent into madness whilst housesitting an elegant townhouse, where there is a locked door that she becomes obsessed with opening. She recognizes a man on the street as someone who assaulted her in the past, lures him back to the house and kills him with a *Psycho*-esque kitchen knife. After hallucinating that he has returned to life, she dismembers his body, but finding his driver's license, experiences a shift in perception: the face and name on the license change and reveal that the man she has killed was not her attacker but a complete stranger. Her instability increases; she finally breaks into the locked room. What she sees affects her profoundly and she kills herself. Throughout this, sound charts her mental fragmentation and experience of the abject with a soundtrack that combines conventional horror music ideas (swirling atonal string clusters, stingers and stabs) with electronica, glitches and hard-core rock beats, the latter becoming more prevalent as the film progresses.

One notable instance comes near the end as we see the woman at the far end of a narrow corridor, breaking into the mysterious room. The soundtrack combines a textured drone; manipulations of the sound of her beating at the door; and her gasps and incoherent speech, which are made artificially reverberant. All three sonic channels – noise, music, speech – are therefore present and working together to create the sense of her desperation and tense anticipation over what lies behind the door. This sonic/ visual state is intercut with flashes in and out of a black screen accompanied by bursts of electronic noise. The woman fetches a knife

with which to force the lock; the visual intercutting and electronic bursts increase until they become a sustained pulsing, leading up to the door giving way.

As it finally swings open, the shot reverses so the camera now points from inside the room, showing us the woman looking in. Immediately, the soundscape alters radically: where before, all three sonic channels were at work so intensely as to overload our aural perceptions, now they collapse into a single sonic output. The noise of the musical soundtrack with its drones and pulses drops out entirely, leaving only the woman's voice, again subject to reverberation as if the room before her is a cavernous space. With a look of absolute terror on her face, she gives a series of gasping intakes of breath, each one higher in pitch. The knife is still in her hand, held aloft. As she comes to the climax of the rising gasps, it falls – making no sound as it hits the floor. It is at this point we realise that not only is the musical channel absent but so is the sound channel: or rather, they have collapsed into one, the voice operating across all three channels of sonic communication. As sound, it constructs the physical characteristics of the space; as wordless, pitched gasps it blends the categories of speech and music in the pitches of the 'arpeggio' of her forceful intakes of breath. We never know what she has seen, but her sense of horror and of the abject is communicated to us by the collapsing of any sense of separation between sonic channels, a representation of her overwhelmed subjective experience in this moment.

Darling also explores sonic substitution of an expected sound with the 'wrong' sound, leading to further diegetic disjunctures. At their most extreme, these can again present the listener with the sense of two (or three) channels collapsing into one, as the level of ambiguity makes it impossible to be certain whether what we are hearing can be described, in the Metzian sense, as 'music' or 'sound' or 'voice'. When the man she has killed apparently comes back to attack her as she is sleeping, she screams as she wakes and sees him. All sound, diegetic or otherwise, has been stripped out of the first moments of the scene. As the woman wakes, the musical cue

begins; but when we see her scream, her voice is absent, replaced by a high-pitched, clearly electronic noise. What should be her diegetic scream comes to us instead through the channel of music, the voice electronically subsumed into the musical cue, these two channels collapsing into one.

In a later sequence the woman dismembers her victim's body in a bathtub with a saw and a hammer; meanwhile, a telephone repeatedly rings, which we know is the house's owner, attempting to talk to her housesitter, who has long since stopped answering these calls. The dismemberment scene comprises a series of shots, some inside the brightly-lit, white-tiled bathroom and others in the almost lightless hallway outside. When we are outside the bathroom looking at a near-black screen, the sound of sawing is clearly that of a manual saw; but when we are in the bathroom and can see that manual saw, the sound we hear is of an electrically powered tool.

In terms of channels, one could therefore argue that the sound of the power-tool is functionally music in the same way that the earlier electronic scream was; this time, the channel of sound has collapsed into that of musical soundtrack but this is complicated by the fact that the substituted sound is 'almost' right. It is in the same category of sounds as the manual saw (i.e. both sounds are the sounds of sawing) and unlike the electronic scream, which was one sound within an electronic musical cue, this is the only sound we hear. It remains exclusively linked to the action of sawing, with no additional sounds to provide it with a wider musical context, and so despite the fact that we know this sound cannot be coming from the action we are watching onscreen, it is much harder to hear this sound as music. Instead, what we hear hybridizes near-perfectly Metz's (diegetic) sound and (non-diegetic) music. This is Thompson's noise as *both/ and*, encapsulating Kristeva's notion of the abject as that which 'does not respect borders, positions, rules' in the sonic underpinning of a moment of extreme body horror.

Noise in the Signal: *Crimson Peak*

In comparison to the surreal sonic substitutions in *Darling*, in Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak*, noise, by means of sound design, has quite literally been substituted for music, and is used as a third element of the film's musical strategy alongside diegetic and non-diegetic music. Each of these three elements is used in the construction of a particular character or character group. Noise is assigned to the various ghosts and on the surface, this appears to be a simple process of drawing attention to their abject nature and obvious Otherness, contrasted with the tuneful orchestral music of the world of the living. However, I draw on one of the definitions of noise offered by R. Murray Schafer (1977: 273) as disturbance or interference in a signal as key to understanding why the ghosts of the story manifest in such a distinctive sonic manner.

Crimson Peak places unusual importance on its sound: alongside a credit for the composer, Fernando Velazquez, the sound designer, Randy Thom, also appears in the main credits. Whilst not unheard of, sound design is usually consigned to the technical departments in the end credits rather than being acknowledged in the main credit sequence, which is reserved for the 'creative' areas of production. The importance of sound design in *Crimson Peak* becomes more apparent if one compares the music on the original soundtrack CD with the film itself. Much of the score did not make it into the final cut, and has been edited, replaced or overlaid by Thom's sound design. Of Velazquez's 36 tracks (just over 75 minutes of music), only four appear to have been used in full, six are not used at all, and the others are abbreviated or re-edited. Much of what remains in the film is associated with Edith, an American heiress and aspiring writer, the agent from whose perspective we experience events. Hers is the most conventional type of film scoring: she has a clearly identifiable melodic theme, which

appears in almost every underscore cue we hear in the film, variously transforming to represent Edith as happily optimistic, heartbroken, in love, uncertain or determined. Her position at the centre of the narrative is confirmed by the way that the original score constructs itself substantially out of this theme and reflects her point of view, very much the musical approach that Kassabian (2001) identified as normally reserved for male heroes that dominated scoring up to the end of the 20th century.

Our first sight of Lucille Sharpe, her sister-in-law, is playing Brahms on the piano as entertainment for guests at a ball. Lucille also has a theme, not primarily located in the underscore but occurring diegetically as a lullaby we hear being sung by a child's voice at the start of the film and by the mysterious singing voice Edith hears at night after she marries and moves to Allerdale Hall. Both are finally revealed as Lucille's voice; and she also plays the theme on the piano on several occasions. The lullaby theme reappears in the underscore in relation to Lucille, Allerdale Hall, and Lucille's brother Thomas, where it represents the influence of both house and sister on him; but the two forms in which we most memorably hear it are sung or on the piano, confirming its link to Lucille as musician. Thomas has no theme of his own and the music scoring him uses either Lucille's or Edith's theme, depending on who he is with, placing him in the subordinate narrative position more commonly associated with female characters in cinema's history.

If Edith primarily commands the non-diegetic musical landscape and Lucille the diegetic one, the (all female) ghosts that provide much of the narrative drive are located between, liminal beings who exist in a sonic space between the diegetic and non-diegetic. Their liminality is signalled by the types of sounds associated with them, sounds created by Randy Thom rather than by Velasquez. Of the CD tracks missing from the film, several relate to the ghosts, including the tracks Ghost 1, Ghost 3 and Optician; and even the cue Ghost 2, whilst used, is effectively buried under a layer of sound design. Velasquez's original cues explore the same

swirling, atonal strings and voices in microtonal clusters regularly used in horror scoring as the sound of mysterious and terrifying Otherness. All the sounds Velasquez employs are produced by acoustic instruments or voices, using extended and unusual techniques that contrast significantly with his more lyrical writing for both Edith and Lucille. As such, his score conforms to horror's use of noise analogues in instrumental scoring. Nonetheless, at some point in the post-production process, a decision was evidently taken to make the sonic distinction between the living women and the dead ones even more overt.

In musicological terms Thom's sound design is unequivocally music, electroacoustic composition rather than orchestral. The sounds he uses are concrete, real-world sounds that have been electronically manipulated – bell resonances, cries (both human and bird-like) and the sound of breathing, sounds that tie the ghosts to the living world, yet which also point to the fragility of that connection through their distortions and manipulations. In another context, these sounds are more likely to have been heard as straightforwardly musical; but in the context of *Crimson Peak*, given that we have a score that exclusively uses conventional acoustic resources, the cues that rely on sampled and electronically manipulated sounds operate as something explicitly sonically Other, positioned ambiguously between diegetic sounds that emit from the ghosts and their environment, and non-diegetic sounds occupying the (musical) soundtrack.

For a first-time viewer, the strategy of using conventional musical sounds for Edith and Lucille and noise for the ghosts serves to play a sonic trick on us that reflects Edith's own misunderstanding of what is happening around her. The processes of establishing the three elements of the musical strategy and of musical misdirection both begin very early in the film. The first sound we hear is the child's voice singing what later becomes Lucille's theme over the opening credits; almost immediately after this, we hear the first version of Edith's theme in a flashback to her mother's funeral when Edith was a child; and this is followed by

the first ghost of the story, Edith's dead mother, who returns on the night after the funeral. Surrounded by the eerie, resonating sounds of Thom's design, she floats down the corridor and into a ten-year-old Edith's bedroom, a blackened, skeletal creature dressed in mourning, who then bends over her terrified daughter and warns her to 'beware of Crimson Peak'. Later, when adult Edith first hears this name spoken by someone other than a ghost (and by which time she is already living in the house thus nicknamed) we understand that the ghost was trying to help, but the medium of the message concealed this and left the warning unclear. The key issue in this message and indeed in all the ghosts' various attempts to communicate with Edith is noise as interference in a signal.

The noise in Edith's mother's message is on two levels. Firstly, she should have said 'beware of Allerdale Hall' – using the hall's nickname is part of the noise in the signal that obscures the message. Secondly, the noise that surrounds her more literally – the low rumbling sounds, bell resonance, breath sounds, high pitched cries, stabbing and scrabbling sounds – also represents noise impeding the signal because we (not to mention Edith) read noise negatively: returning to the ideas from the opening of this essay, linguistically the word 'noise' is used as a pejorative by nature of its association with ideas of sounds that are disorganized or unorganized, the 'Other' to both language and music (Goddard, Halligan and Hegarty, 2012: 2).

This idea of a sonic triumvirate of mutual Others, language, music and noise, also maps well against *Crimson Peak*'s three sonically characterized principals, with the ghosts allied to noise, Edith the writer to language and Lucille the pianist to music. Lucille is able to disguise her monstrousness in part by means of the beautiful music she plays, aided by the fact that the ghosts are occupying the noisy territory that points more obviously toward monsters, danger and dysfunction. Their visual appearance compounds this impression: they are variously oozingly bloody or crumbling, blackened corpses, their obvious abjectness compromising

their coherence and their attempts to warn Edith. Nonetheless, they lead her to the clues that will allow her to decipher their cluttered, noisy message. By the end of the film Edith understands that the ghosts are helping rather than threatening her, even though every element of their visual and sonic construction makes them monstrous. We, with Edith, initially equate the 'unnatural', electronically manipulated and noisy soundworld of the ghosts with a threat to the 'natural' (and tunefully scored) living world. Like Edith, we are tricked by the musical strategy into assuming that the ghosts are the problem and, like her, we are gradually led to a better understanding that what is unfamiliar may not be dangerous, and that it is behind Lucille's attractive and conventionally beautiful music that the real monster lurks.

The Sound of Silence: Sonic Strategies in Found Footage Horror

Although *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) is generally recognized as the first horror film to use the conceit of a fictional narrative constructed from apparently real footage, it was *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) that caught the public imagination and effectively launched a new popular sub-genre in the form of the found-footage horror film.[2] Found footage substantially challenges the conventions and expectations of the horror genre from multiple perspectives, including issues of visual quality, continuity and plot resolution – rather than the 'Final Girl' convention of many other horror films, it is not uncommon for all the characters in a found footage narrative to die, their story only told by the footage they leave behind. Importantly, from a musical perspective, the genre often abandons the musical scoring that characterizes horror as a genre. *Found Footage Critic*, a website dedicated to cataloguing the genre, states quite categorically in its definition that

> [musical] soundtracks have no rightful place in a true found footage film. Budget aside, the inclusion of background music in a found footage film can only hurt the final product, reducing the perceived authenticity of the film. To further the illusion, many found footage filmmakers have also gone so far as to eliminate any music in the opening and closing credits as well. (2017)[3]

Found footage presents a very specific example of a context in which the functions normally performed by music must be rethought, resulting in some distinct sonic strategies emerging from the genre, and some innovative uses of sound, especially in relation to the musical gestures of tension and surprise commonly used within horror scoring. In Metzian terms, all the non-vocal sound in a found footage film is ostensibly 'real noises', anchored in the diegesis by direct connection to action. Sound and music collapse into a single entity, and the 'real noises' must fulfil both their concrete function as sound design whilst also providing the emotive functions normally assigned to music. These sounds also tend to be inherently 'noisy' given that they are diegetic sounds recorded on a variety of microphones attached to cameras, the overall quality markedly more noisy than that of the post-production sound expected from mainstream cinema.

In her discussion of sound in *The Blair Witch Project* (henceforth *BWP*), Rebecca Coyle turns to Theo Van Leeuwen's taxonomy of perspective (see Figure 1), which divides simultaneous sounds into groups, resulting in three potential layers – figure, ground and field – that describe both spatial perspective and the listener's relation to a sound; and in my adoption of this model, I would like to make overt the idea of the listener's degree of attention to a sound, given the specific context here of a viewer who will pay more attention to sounds in the film most likely reveal what is happening.

Figure 1: Theo Van Leeuwen's taxonomy of sonic perspective.

Category	*Distance*	*Listener's relation to sound*	*Expected level of attention*
Figure	Closest	Listener identifies and reacts	Close attention
Ground	More distant	Social world/ surrounding context	Intermittent attention
Field	Most distant	Physical environment	Little or no attention

Adapted from Theo van Leeuwen (1999:18).

The figure is likely to be the spatially closest sound. These are sounds we actively listen to in everyday life and which get our most constant attention in a film. The ground is more distant than figure, and herein lie the sounds of the social world and surrounding context for whatever is happening. We hear them hear without necessarily listening to them both in everyday life and in the context of a film. The field is the most distant layer of sound, reflecting the physical environment itself; and while sounds here may be heard, they are rarely listened to except when no other sounds are audible in the other two layers, something as true in real life as it is in films. Music in film has the capacity to move across all these categories: it is perhaps most commonly located in the ground, present but not closely attended to. Especially when there is no competing dialogue, it may act as figure; and when there is considerable other sonic and visual activity, music might sit in the field.

Coyle uses Van Leeuwen's model to identify three more or less constant levels of sound in *BWP*, where voices are the dominant figure, more distant cries, calls and crackling forest sounds are ground, and the ambient sounds of wind, birds and insects are field (Coyle, 2009: 221). One important narrative device in *BWP* is the hand-held cameras that need a human operator: as a result, until the very end, there is usually at least one person present and awake when a camera is running, and so voices are almost constantly present as figure. Later films introduced CCTV cameras and other mechanisms whereby a camera can be left to record by itself. The *Paranormal Activity* (henceforth *PA*) films (2007-) combine hand-held and automated footage, which may simply involve leaving a camera on a tripod to record; and this has a significant impact on sound. As well as scenes where people operate cameras,

placing their voices into the sonic foreground as in *BWP*, now we also have scenes where characters are absent, asleep or alone and ignoring a CCTV camera – in all cases, no one is talking. Where Van Leeuwen's model assumes that at any point we experience three simultaneous layers of sound, what arguably happens in the *PA* films is that the categories operate in a quite different way, with either a layer of the overall soundscape completely missing, or collapsed into each other; and with horror frequently being signified by sudden, dramatic movement of a sound from the field or ground into the figure as noise predicts, initiates and signals the eruption of the supernatural in ways that mimic the vocabulary of horror scoring, with its drones, stingers and extremes of high and low pitch.

When a layer is missing, perhaps anti-intuitively, it is usually the figure: we have long stretches where no sound operates as figure, and to all intents and purposes all we have is the field, the sounds of the general physical environment to which we would normally pay no attention. So, in *PA1* (2007), a recurring segment is the footage from a camera mounted on a tripod in a bedroom that records the central couple sleeping, with almost no sounds operating above the level of field for long stretches of time; and likewise in *PA2* (2010), a recurring segment involves cycling through footage from the CCTV cameras in various parts of the house and garden, the predominant sound being the field of different pitches and volumes of hum from each microphone, alongside the ground of insect sounds and the automated pool cleaner in the garden shots. What these scenes demonstrate is the way found footage films use the absence of the sonic figure as part of their vocabulary: as audience, we expect and seek the sonic figure but no sound presents itself to focus our attention or impart any useful information. The listener might well find themselves straining to hear (or see) and constantly anticipating a sound (or movement) of some significance. From that perspective, the various electronic hums that dominate these segments take on the same kind of function as the drone or tremolo in a musical horror score: the steady-state sound that we come to expect will

resolve itself into an explosive visual and sonic gesture. The cycle of camera shots around the house at night in *PA2* regularly has no shock/ release moment at all: tension is simply allowed to build as nothing continues to happen, no matter how avidly we examine the images for information; and likewise, there is no sonic figure, just the ground and field of the variously pitched hums and the ambient sounds that the cameras record, creating long segments of unresolved tension.

The safe spaces in these films are often the ones in which someone is actively filming and characters 'perform' for the camera, filling sonic space up with conversation that is exactly the type of sound to which we know we should attend. The unsafe spaces are the ones where the cameras operate automatically, and no appropriate information-rich sounds present themselves as figure, allowing abnormal sounds to which we would not normally attend – hums, distant bumps and knocks – to collapse the three categories into one and ask us to pay unnatural attention to what would normally be the ground or even the field, giving them the same level of attentiveness we would normally reserve for the figure. The silence that invokes the uncanny is not actual silence but a lack of concrete information in these sounds, the absences and gaps in the signal, especially in comparison to voices.

The points where the noise of the soundtrack most obviously prompts our reactions in the way music might are where sound abruptly shifts from one layer to another, and this occurs in two ways: firstly, using the three layers sequentially, so having isolated sounds coming from each of the three positions; and secondly, when the same sound changes its position in relation to how we hear it, moving abruptly from field or ground to figure. As an example of the former, during the second night-time bedroom scene in *PA1* ('Night #5'), we start with only sounds coming from the field, a low rumble (drone) that stops abruptly; we then have a sudden gasp (high pitched stinger) as Katie wakes, and we shift into having sounds only in the figure; and then a thump is heard from the ground (low pitched stab), followed by voices

in the figure. What is notable is that the sonic positions are occupied sequentially, not simultaneously. One might argue that all the various sounds, no matter their distance from us in Van Leeuwen's model of sonic perspective, end up pushing themselves into the figure, including those sounds that have no right to be there. The sonic intrusions into natural order are both symbolic and literal manifestations of horror.

An example of the second category, dramatic shifts, occurs in *PA2*, as Ali, the teenage daughter of the family sleeps on the sofa in front of the TV in a sonic sequence that operates very much as the anticipatory musical drone leading to a resolving if terrifying stinger. We can only hear, not see the TV, which hangs on the wall below where the camera is mounted. Once Ali falls asleep, the sound of the TV show cuts out and is replaced by static (as burrough hypothesized, the static in this instance indicates not simply the absence of a signal but the presence of the supernatural). A shadow emerges from the cellar door and moves slowly across the floor to the sofa. There is a slow shift in the intensity of the static, so slow that it draws very little attention to itself, much like the shadow which is sufficiently pale and slow moving that one could miss it if not paying very close attention. As the shadow reaches the sofa and appears to touch the girl, the static drone culminates in a sudden explosion of noise, shifting the sound abruptly from field to figure, waking and frightening the girl, who screams fractionally after this diegetic stinger. The TV show now suddenly resumes, returning the sounds of the scene to their 'normal' positions, the voices from the TV re-establishing the space as safe after the intrusion of the supernatural.

The *PA* films are classics of the genre, and rigorous in their adherence to a 'no music' rule, but other films adopt other strategies to allow the diegetic noise of supernatural manifestations to function as Thompson's *both/ and*, both diegetic sound and music. *Apartment 143* (2011) tracks a team of investigators called into an apparent haunting in an apartment block. They set up a number of CCTV cameras, used alongside handheld and

headpiece cameras, and the soundtrack provides different sonic states, particularly evident in conversation, between the different microphones. However, the most unusual part of the sonic strategy is the very overt elision of sound design and music: there is no part of the film where the sounds are unambiguously underscore as everything we hear can potentially be attributed to paranormal manifestations, albeit unusually 'musical' ones. The film sets up very early on the idea that rhythmic beats, bangs and wooshing drones and glissandi are things which emanate from within the apartment, and this leaves a considerable ambiguity about where these sounds are coming from later on, whether they are still manifestations of the supernatural or whether they have shifted into an underscore. The strategy effectively allows the film to have its cake and eat it in both adhering to the convention that found footage should not use obviously post-production musical underscore whilst at the same time employing sounds that recognisably serve as a horror soundtrack.

Whilst the use of an expanded sonic palette in film soundtracks is not the exclusive preserve of horror – Dario Marinelli's use of the typewriter in his score, and the sonically designed letter sequence in *Atonement* (Joe Wright, 2007) are notable examples in a quite different genre – noise is the perfect vehicle for communicating horror. Horror requires an embodied response from its audiences: we must feel the fear, feel the dread; we must, frankly, feel the saw going through the bone. Sound produces an embodied response whether it is noise or music – the reasons we have music in film and TV in the first place is because of the way it allows a director to control the audience's empathic response to what we see at a physical, emotionally embodied level. The response to something we contextually hear as noise is both comparable but different from our response to sounds we perceive as musical and here I want to return to the distinction Goddard, Halligan and Hegarty make between music as pleasant and noise as not. Noise represents unwanted sound, wrongness, error. Noise occurs when

things fall apart, when the orderliness of our world fails and error gives horror license to intrude. As Martin Nunes (2010) puts it, talking about errors in the systems of our networked, digital world: 'Error gives expression to the *out of bounds* of systematic control. When error communicates, it does so as noise: abject information and aberrant signal within an otherwise orderly system of communication' (4, italics in original). Noise in recent horror scores is not simply replacing music, but doing things that conventional music cannot do. Thinking back to Metz's five channels, regardless of where it sits in the diegesis we will tend to recognize music as music, voices as voices and diegetic sound as diegetic sound, that these are the particular channels of communication at work. With noise, we don't know what it is we are hearing: even before we start asking where it sits in the diegesis, we have to ask is it music or is it diegetic sound? Which channel is at work in this communication? And whereas music is always music, noise can be music or not – music can move within the diegesis but noise can move both within the diegesis and between channels of communication. It is this liminality and this capacity for transgression that 21st century horror has embraced in its use of noise.

Endnotes

1. A not dissimilar use of extreme sonic intensity is used in the construction of the peculiarities and increasing crisis in the mental state of Will Graham in Brian Reitzell's hybridised score/ sound design for *Hannibal*. See Halfyard 2016: 162-184.

2. David Bordwell observes that the term found-footage was originally used to describe 'films like Bruce Conner's *A Movie* or Christian Marclay's *The Clock*, assembled out of existing footage scavenged from different sources' (2012). Bordwell prefers the term 'discovered footage' films for *The Blair Witch Project* and its successors, but 'found footage' is now so well-established in both popular and academic literature that it has convincingly eclipsed any other way of describing this genre.

3. *Found Footage Critic* does allow for exceptions to this rule but, in the purest sense, only where the music has been added by a character within the narrative before the footage is lost or by the third party who has discovered it.

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