The Audio-Visual Rhythms of Modernity: *Song Of Ceylon*, Sound and Documentary Filmmaking

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With the introduction of sound in Britain a looming possibility in the late 1920s, previously held hopes for a co-ordination between the independent and mainstream spheres, leading to a progressive and technically sophisticated cinema, were shattered. In 1927, *Close Up* editor Kenneth MacPherson wrote that independent and commercial spheres would grow closer together, and feed off of each other, leading to a point where "the power of film will be immense beyond prediction." (MacPherson, 1927: 14) Just over a year later, when sound films were becoming more regularly produced, MacPherson claimed that sound was a "monstrosity… descending full speed upon us." (MacPherson, 1928: 8) In the early 1920s until 1928, at least in Britain, intellectual film writers were interested in both mainstream and independent films; after the introduction of sound, hostility towards the commercial cinema became more marked. The introduction of sound had, contrary to many wishes, increased the demarcation between commercial and independent filmmaking (the latter being made without synchronised sound for a long period).

The lack of any sustained, experimental uses of sound in filmmaking was one of the many factors that led to the demise of *Close Up*, due to the editorial team's increasing pessimism about the artistic status of the medium. Yet ideas about "alternative" uses of sound were kept current within two journals that emerged within the 1930s: *Cinema Quarterly* (1932-1936), which was closely connected with the British documentary film movement, and *Film/ Film Art* (1933-1937), a journal more connected to independent activity outside the documentary film movement, but nevertheless sharing a number of similarities to *Cinema Quarterly*. It is noteworthy that the two journals did differ in their overall stance toward sound in cinema: *Film/ Film Art* was much more attached to a visual aesthetic, reflecting the fact that sound filmmaking within small, independent circles was not a possibility; *Cinema Quarterly*, in contrast and to varying degrees, tended to advocate an *expressive* use of sound in film (reflecting its connections to the documentary film movement, which did acquire sound equipment in 1934).

Whilst many British cinéphiles had at first tended to dismiss sound cinema out of hand, many, in contrast to what they saw as an increasingly theatrical commercial cinema, began to prescribe "alternative" sound strategies. "Poetic" and "expressive" applications of sound began to be promoted and prescribed. "Expressive" here refers to two strategies: to express the inner, psychological fabric of a character or a thematic undercurrent; and to use sound in a creative manner that was expressive of the filmmaker's individual psyche. In some commercial films, sound was often used in creative ways: Hitchcock's employment of sound to express subjective paranoia in *Blackmail* (1929) is the most famous example, but expressive uses of sound were employed sporadically in Asquith's *Tell England* (1931) as well as Brian Desmond Hurst's *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1934), in which sound effects were used to access to the unspoken feelings of characters within the films. It was in the realm of the

documentary film movement, however, that a more experimental use of sound was employed, under the creative influence of Alberto Cavalcanti. In contrast, the more marginal areas of independent filmmaking were largely confined to the production of films without a soundtrack because of financial limitations.

The antipathy towards sound, and the gradual re-imagining of soundtrack conceptions, was not specifically confined to the British context, but was similarly developing within several international countries. These debates had their roots in the emergence of an intellectual and modernist formation of film writers and practitioners in the 1920s, broadly characterised by their commitment to the cinema as a new, modern art form (a "seventh art"), which was internationalist in scope and visual in essence. Many of these writers objected to the ways in which cinema was often run along commercial lines as an entertainment, but also opposed those (such as the *Film d'art* movement in France) who wished to establish the validity of cinema along the lines of more "respectable" artistic media, such as the theatre. In contrast, this formation of cinéphiles, who were arising in many different countries, emphasised the distinctive strengths of cinema as a medium on its own terms and began to sketch out some of its ontological properties (which may have contained elements from other art forms, but could not be reduced to them). In turn, a number of journals devoted to the cinema as an art form sprang up in which such views were aired, whilst a number of specialist exhibition outlets also emerged in which to view films which exemplified cinema as a "new art." Journals include *Le Cinéma* (France), *Filmwoche* (Germany), *Close Up* (Britain) and *Experimental Cinema* (US); exhibition outlets include the Vieux-Colombier (France), the Kamera (Germany), the Film Society (Britain) and the Film Arts Guild (US).

The introduction of synchronised sound in the late 1920s led to much controversy and debate amongst such circles. There was initially a deep antagonism towards sound as it represented a threat to intellectual, modernist film thinkers on two main levels: ontological and economic/political. Cinéphiles had distinguished the uniqueness of cinema through a set of ontological properties, which included components such as montage, rhythm, and fluid camera movement; these elements were seen as progressive techniques in that they established an essentially "filmic" language. Yet the introduction of sound threatened the development of a progressively visual medium by drawing attention away from what was shown and by foregrounding inter-character dialogue. In this sense, many intellectual writers felt that sound threatened to pull cinema into a regressive, theatrical mode; in the words of Rick Altman, sound "represented the return of silent cinema's repressed." (Altman, 1985: 52) This disruption of an ontological vision also threatened the avant-garde status of many film writers. As Richard Abel has argued in relation to the situation in France, whereas theory and criticism had previously seen itself as directing film practice, it was now straining to keep up with it,

> The theoretical positions that had been nurtured throughout the 1920s were now shaken, some almost shattered and others reconstituted anew. In this, French film theory and criticism seems to have been shaped by the pressure or rupture of several historical forces or events, none of which were uniquely French. (Abel, 1988: 8)

On an economic and political level, the introduction of sound threatened the existence of independent, alternative modes of cinema on the levels of both production and exhibition. On the level of production, most small-scale filmmakers could not afford to invest in sound equipment; on the level of exhibition, many of the smaller film societies that had been

established were unable to purchase the necessary equipment for projecting sound films. Many cinéphiles around the world became hostile towards sound because of these factors.

It was the intervention of many Soviet film filmmakers that stimulated British cinéphiles' stances towards sound and film. Soviet manifestoes on sound leaked through to the British cultural milieu via publication of their work in *Close Up* and the programme notes distributed at the Film Society (which specialised in showing films that lay outside the scope of commercial cinemas). Briefly summarised, Soviet theoreticians such as Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov, did not merely oppose the way sound was being adopted primarily to reproduce dialogue, but also proposed ways in which sound, too, could be used in "progressive" ways. In their manifesto on sound cinema they argued that sound should be used in counterpoint to the images, so that both image track and sound track were creatively composed in separation as well as in relationship to each other (Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov, 1928: 12). These ideas were developed in a different climate to that of Britain, in which the use of sound was seen as a political instrument. Experimental filmmakers in the Soviet Union were ensconced within nationalised, subsidised film units, where they had a lot of freedom to experiment aesthetically along generally conformist political lines (though such aesthetic freedom was gradually waning as the 1930s approached). The "counterpoint" theories of Soviet theoreticians were conceived in order to create a dialectical interplay between sound and image that, theoretically, aimed at producing a psycho-physiological response in the viewer.

Whilst the contrapuntal use of sound never took off in a sustained manner in the Soviet Union (due to the increased restrictions of nationalised filmmaking), the early 1930s did see a few films that were admired for their radical experiments. These included, Alexandrov and Eisenstein's *Romance Sentimentale* (which was actually produced in France, 1930) and Pudovkin's *Deserter* (1933), which included experiments such as running the soundtrack backwards, or inscribing and designing the sound so that it could be cut to change or even be warped; whilst Vertov's *Enthusiasm* (1931) was an ambitious attempt by the director to apply his "kino-eye" theories to the realm of sound, in which the subjection of the microphone to a studio-bound position was to be resisted. Vertov attacked "conventional" uses of sound, arguing that it should be used to build up intricate connections in conjunction with images (Vertov, 1931).

Whilst British writers downplayed the specific political aspects of the Soviet theorists, and did not develop explicitly "contrapuntal" theories of sound, the influence of such writings can be found in their desire to promote "poetic" or "expressive" applications of sound. From a contemporary perspective it is easy to declaim the rather simplistic manner by which cinéphiles approached the question of sound in cinema. They accused sound of being an "unnatural" appendage to the apparatus of cinema, as though cinema was itself a natural organism, whereas they had previously hailed technological progress as indispensable to the medium's "natural" artistic development. Of course, the attempt to ontologically freeze a medium in time, as though divorced from the flux of historical forces, is erroneous. Rick Altman has termed this aspect of anti-sound argumentation the "ontological fallacy", in which the primacy of the visual over the aural was established in order to preserve the "poetic" purity of the medium (Altman, 1985: 52).

Many cinéphiles vastly simplified the creative decisions that went in to even the simplest dialogue films, whilst also overstating the homogeneity of such films. Cinéphiles themselves had reacted against the way in which those who dismissed cinema often did so in simplistic

terms, as merely reproducing what was in front of the camera. Rather than being a mere representation, they claimed, the filmic process involved a whole host of creative decisions. But this was an aspect many were blind to when it came to assessing synchronised dialogue and natural sounds, which themselves involved a host of complex decisions and skills (Altman, 1992: 15-31).

Whilst such reactionary elements amongst self-professed "progressive" film writers have been pointed out, we should be wary of adopting an overly condemnatory view of them. They have to be understood in relation to the very real threats posed to independent cinema at the time, in addition to the Utopian hopes invested in the creation of a truly international, visual medium. The paucity of attempts to understand the sophisticated dynamics of sound as used in the majority of commercial productions also led to an extremely *productive* line in sound experimentation that would take hold in the early 1930s. In the remainder of this article, I will discuss such productive practice within the British documentary film movement, particularly focusing upon the complex sound and image design of *Song of Ceylon* (1934).

Alberto Cavalcanti has often been seen as the main creative force behind the experimental employment of sound within a number of British documentary films. Cavalcanti joined John Grierson's General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit in 1934; one of the reasons behind his employment was his technical expertise in many areas of filmmaking, especially within the area of sound. At the time, many of the filmmakers at the GPO were largely inexperienced and, with the purchase of a British Visatone sound system in 1934, sound expertise was particularly desirable. (Swann, 1989: 54) At the time of his arrival, bar a few exceptions in commercial films (a few of which I have mentioned), sustained sound experimentation within British filmmaking was still quite rare.

The British Visatone system that the GPO acquired in 1934 was a rather inexpensive model and was inferior in quality to the more sophisticated German and American systems that were also available. (Aitken, 2000: 49) This, however, did not prevent there being some remarkable experiments in sound; in fact it could be argued that this was one of the most significant creative aspects of the British documentary output of the time. As with the overall output of the documentary film movement, modernist sound experimentation was overwhelmed by more prosaic, straightforward documentaries (which tended to use the soundtrack as a means to narrate events). As with the overall output, however, it was the more self-conscious, ambitious attempts to experiment with sound that gained the most acclaim and which were key to the reputation of the movement.

In *Coal Face* (Cavalcanti, 1935), for instance, though the sound track is focused around commentary, there are some particularly striking sequences where sound becomes structured according to strictly mechanical principles. After hearing sounds of coalminers singing, their voices then become chopped into fragmented bits and synchronised with a monotone beat. Such a manoeuvre reflected the interconnections between man and machine that many of the documentary films emphasised, in order to highlight the regulated dignity of labour.

Cavalcanti's *Pett and Pott* (1934), whilst for the most part a rather eccentric satirical advertisement for the telephone, also contained some interesting sound experimentation. In one sequence, there is a cut from a man reading a newspaper article on suburban burglary on a train, to a woman waking in bed screaming. The loud noise of the train in motion is amplified in order to blend fluidly into a dissonant pitch, expressively representing the sound of her scream; here noise works via an imagistic process of association. Later in the film, as

Mrs Pott trudges up some steps with a heavy load of shopping, the sound track becomes eerily silent, before giving way to a sparse, monotonous drum roll. This use of sound, accompanied by repeated images, becomes an expressive force, pulling away from the narrative in order to portray psychological subjectivity.

These films, such as the above, as well as small moments in films such as *Night Mail* (Wright and Watt, 1936) (when the poetry of Auden becomes regulated in order to mirror the rhythm of the train), can be related calls for a more "expressive" use of sound, as contrasted to synchronised inter-character dialogue. They draw attention to the manner in which a misreading of sound could be used *productively*. It may be that, from our historical vantage point, we can detect the erroneous manner by which those working outside the feature film industry simplified the ways in which sound was employed within commercial movies (caricaturing the complex creative decisions that often fed into such films). Yet on a purely practical plane this simplification proved to be a creative spur that often -- though not always -- led to a radical rethinking of the sound track and its relations to the image track.

The most radical use of sound in the documentary film movement can arguably be found in *Song of Ceylon*, which surely deserves to be considered one of the most complex and radical sound films produced in Britain during the inter-war period. The film was directed by Basil Wright and co-directed by Walter Leigh, who was also responsible for the creation of the soundtrack. Alberto Cavalcanti, who had just arrived at the GPO at the time, was credited as production supervisor. Ian Aitken claims that Cavalcanti played a major creative role in the film, backed up by the fact that neither Wright or Leigh had a track record of producing works of quality prior to this production (Aitken, 2000: 52-3). In actual fact, Wright had demonstrated considerable skills as an editor on the compilation film *Conquest* (1930), whilst Leigh had trained under composer Paul Hindemith, who had previously incorporated a number of disparate musical styles (such as cabaret, jazz and music hall) into his work and who began to experiment with variable speed turntables in the 1930s (Sadie, 1990: 573-587; Chanan, 1995: 140). It may have been true that Cavalcanti played an important role in the technical expertise in the synchronisation between image and visual track, but his creative contribution to this film at least, should not be overstated. Evidence points towards Leigh being the person responsible for the mixture of sounds heard within the film, and his co-director credit points towards the importance of his contribution.

Song of Ceylon was a four-part documentary (originally conceived as four separate films) sponsored by the Ceylon Tea Board and was, in effect, made to advertise an Imperial business enterprise. The filmmakers' interest in experimenting with the medium, however, led to the production of an extremely aesthetic view of Ceylon life which, whilst never totally papering over its Imperial underpinnings, offers a poetic and rather complex aesthetic meditation on Ceylon, its religious life and its relations to modernity. The first part of the film portrays the religious rituals of native Buddhists; the second shows the working life of natives; the third deals with the introduction of modern communication technologies into the country; and the last part shows the coexistence of tradition and modernity. Filmed over three months in Sri Pada (Adam's Peak), the Buried Cities (comprising Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, and Sigiriya), and Kandy, the film is typical of early documentaries' implicit connection with discovering and reconstructing "otherness". Whilst many of the British documentaries filmed the working classes as noble aliens, fascinating yet safely distant behind the screen, *Song of Ceylon* harks back to Robert Flaherty's fascination with "exotic" cultures. This construction of otherness is reinforced by the fact that Basil Wright actually recruited actors to reconstruct Sinhalese life.

The film is a strange mixture of anthropological observation, travelogue, poetic rhapsody and sound-image experimentation. Whilst it incorporates mundane, conventional voice-over narration describing the life depicted on screen, it only does so very sporadically, and even this material is taken from a 17th Century travelogue, thus heightening a sense of the poetic and imaginary over empirical observation; additionally, these words never subject the images to a subservient role, but instead provide a minimal framing context for them. Importantly, such narration is only used on rare occasions; most of the soundtrack consists of a carefully composed mosaic of music, sound and silence. Even more significant is the fact that the film does not include any synchronised dialogue. This stemmed directly from the limited sound equipment that the filmmakers had at their disposal, which made any synchronisation of dialogue extremely difficult. Yet this decision can also be related to a general distrust towards dialogue amongst modernist filmmakers, in which sound was to be used as a poetic, expressive force. This point is supported by Walter Leigh's own ideas about the use of sound in film.

Leigh was thinking about sound in a manner that reflected the influence of Soviet counter-sound theories, yet did not merely regurgitate them, as can be detected in an article that he wrote soon after *Song of Ceylon* was released. He argued that the soundtrack should be carefully and thoughtfully composed of four separate elements: music, synchronised natural sound, counterpoint natural sound, and sound effects. The first was seen as emotional; the second informational; the third expressive; and the fourth atmospheric. Leigh argued that these elements should be combined to make a "sound-score which has a definite shape, and is not only an accompaniment to the visuals but adds an element which they do not contain." (Leigh, 1935: 74)

Leigh created the entire soundtrack bar the commentary, and edited these with Wright (assisted by Cavalcanti). According to Wright, the whole structure of the film was planned in the cutting room, and the sound and image montage influenced each other, so that sound influenced image construction and vice versa. The complexity of the soundtrack is, however, remarkable considering that the recording system could only handle three channels: as there were up to eight different tracks used in the film at once, a cumbersome process of arrangement was thus necessary. An added difficulty was that there was no instant playback: sound had to be developed in the laboratory, which slowed things down and made complex effects difficult to achieve (Leigh, 1935: 74).

The film is initially driven by the straightforward sound of a commentator reading from the travel writings of Robert Knox written in 1680; yet the rather impressionistic elements of such speech become heightened as the narrator begins to recite a prayer, his voice switching to rhythmic intonation as it does so. A replication of harmonic Sinhalese chanting and drumming is then mixed with the more dissonant sound of gongs representative of ceremonial pomp. The sounds are reasonably faithful to their source, yet they are treated for expressive qualities and further mixed into a seamless collage. Throughout the film, Leigh tends to turn sound into rhythm and texture, so that it acts as a kind of dramatic motor in conjunction with the images: that is, the sounds are not only expressive (in a kind of poetic manner) of the images, they also operate as a kind of propulsive force in the absence of any strong pace or narrative logic within the images themselves.

The replication of Sinhalese voices may on first impression appear to be a straightforward modification of the Oriental in the eyes of the Western. Such replication was influenced by technological limitations, however, as Wright and Leigh could not actually record on-location

synchronised sound (Swann, 1989: 54). Leigh thus had to come up with some ingenious methods to achieve a balance between faith to the source and mutation of that source. The gong sounds heard in the film were recorded by swinging a microphone near and far from real gongs and then run backwards, in order to capture the tremulous depth of the huge gongs used by the Sinhalese. The representation of Sinhalese singing was also achieved in the studio; Leigh then applied post-production techniques to this material in order to add a density to the sound, so that it could interact with the images in a non-subjugatory manner (Leigh, 1935: 74). Instead, sound becomes a foregrounded, continuous fabric of sonic texture, which in itself is a source of aesthetic absorption. Divisions between music and sound are also broken down in Leigh's soundtrack, which treats different elements of sound in an equal, non-hierarchical manner.

In the sequence that depicts the effects of modern communications upon the island, "The Voices of Commerce," sounds specifically codified as modern and electronic interrupt the previous pitches and tones: the slow, leisurely collage of traditional replication is supplanted by a much more edgy, rapid montage of sounds. The sound montage is now of the bleeps and crackles of telecommunication systems, of sharp and hasty economic commentaries pieced together. Therefore the soundtrack, like the image track, contrasts the Western, "modern" world (through the sounds of advanced technological systems), to a more exotic, "traditional" culture. The shift of emphasis from human singing and traditional instrumentation to brief and hasty fragments of electronic noise thus represents modernity as a source both of chaos and terror, as well as excitement and wonder.

In one sense, this sudden shift of emphasis marks a rupture, emphasising the chaotic, intrusive nature of the advanced technological systems of the Western world. Such sounds, in combination with the clipped editing patterns, create a kind of mapping of the more ghostly, eerie elements of modernisation, such as the new processes of time and space emerging. As Stephen Kern suggests, the telephone, telegraph and wireless created the ability to simultaneously experience a multiplicity of distant events. These led to new conceptions of time and space, which were seen by artists and philosophers as undergoing compression (Kern, 1983: 67-8). This sequence can be seen as an attempt to contract time and space and represent a new -- and therefore rather confusing -- map of contiguous relationships.

After a while, however, it becomes clear that these radical sound elements also share continuity with preceding sound-image combinations. The terse modulations begin to exert their own rather choppy logic, and the ear begins to accommodate the audio-montage in a way that downplays its initial disconcerting qualities. This process of aural accommodation neatly mirrors the overall message underpinning the *Song of Ceylon*: that the intrusion of modernity into Ceylon will, after its initial moments of disruption, become adapted to in a "natural" manner.

This clash between tradition and modernity is a theme that runs throughout many films made within the documentary film movement, none more so than in *Song of Ceylon*, which uses radical, modernist aesthetic techniques in order to represent nature and tradition. The film favours modernism, however, for whilst tradition and nature are to be respected, they are filtered through a modernist syntax. The first two sections represent harmony through religion and work, which is represented as initially threatened by new machinery and telecommunications systems. Both image and sound track represent sharp contrasts to the symbols connected to Sinhalese traditions. Both sound and image montages are, however, ultimately similar to what preceded them in that they both adhere to a fragmented, rhythmic

logic. Underpinning the superficial notion of disruption, then, is a deeper level of unity, stressing the *continuity* between Sinhalese traditions and Western modernisation.

Such a message is undoubtedly reflective of the Imperialist base from which the film sprang: a propagandist defence of colonial exploitation in which worries are deflected. However, in an age of Kipling-esque jingoism, the film also reflects humane longings: a respect for tradition and an appeal to understand "other" cultures, despite the necessity (artistic, technological, ideological) of having to construct such otherness in a way that was problematic. The use of sound, whose composed nature is explicitly foregrounded, acts as a marker of self-confession: an overt statement that the film is taking aesthetic liberties with its subject; that it is not a straightforward rendering of "how things really are."

If one overlooks the more unpalatable colonial aspects of *Song of Ceylon*, it is possible to understand that the marriage between visual and sound track is a carefully constructed argument in favour of circular evolution. Whilst in one sense the intrusion of rather discordant montage sounds represents a disruption, on a further level this disruption is contained. The more discordant levels of the soundtrack eventually subside and are integrated back into a more leisurely-paced flow. This metaphorically relates to the way in which the film implies that the radical disruptions of modernity are only brief moments through which adaptation occurs. At the end of the film we return to the pace and imagery of the first section and fittingly pan over a palm leaf, an image on which the film opens. This is a circular form of evolution and is a filmic anticipation of some of the ideas proposed by Marshall McLuhan *avant-le-lettre*.

McLuhan believed that the emergence and proliferation of new media such as radio and television were leading to less literate, electronic templates (harking back to older, oral cultures) replacing existing paradigms. The electronic revolution, with its ability to connect people from all around the world, was heralding the re-emergence of a "tribal, integral awareness." (McLuhan and Fiore, 1968) *Song of Ceylon* makes similar claims: transportation, modern communications and cinema itself, are re-establishing, rather than destroying, traditional forms of cultural expression. Many technological proponents wanted to overcome and "coerce" nature in order to advance civilisation, an attitude that sparked alarm in many (Marvin, 1990: 114-121). *Song of Ceylon* contains a message that, whilst nature must be manipulated and tampered with, it should also be respected.

Of course, it must be stated that the above interpretation is a specific reading constructed from a contemporary (and privileged) perspective; contemporary audiences of the film may have not have understood it in this way. The only evidence we have of how the film was received at the time of its release is from reviews, and these show that sensitivity to the colonial underpinnings of the film were not particularly marked; they were not, however, entirely absent. Most readings of the film did not engage with the manner in which it constructed colonial subjects, instead positively focusing upon its formal traits. Graham Greene, for example, extolled the film as a major work of art, emphasising its "circular logic" (Greene, 1935). Charles Day was one of the few reviewers to mention the colonial underpinnings, yet came to a different conclusion than mine. He criticised the third part of the film, which centres on the arrival of telecommunications systems, because it had a "ghostly" feel, whilst the "influence of England on Ceylon is not at all ghostly; it is a forcibly transforming influence, leading to fever and conflict." (Day, 1935: 110)

The use of sound in *Song of Ceylon* should be placed within a lineage not only of sound experiments in film, but also to the process of sound construction more generally. Thus the film should not merely be related to films such as *Ballet Mécanique* (Leger and Murphy, 1924, which had a composed, external sound track provided by George Antheil), *Romance Sentimentale* and *Enthusiasm*, but also to a broader flowering of radical sound experiments. These link back to Luigi Russolo's vision of sound as composed of various modern noises (as opposed to traditional chord sequences) as forecast in his 1913 "The Art of Noises," as well as Walter Ruttman's montage of street life in his radio symphony *Weekend* (1930). Whilst *Song of Ceylon* undoubtedly drew on all of these influences, the way in which it merged sound and image track was applied in a particularly sophisticated manner.

In addition to being placed within a tradition of sound experimentation, the film also can be seen to predate some of the more recognised, radical interventions in sound construction. Firstly, it can be connected to the practice and theories of John Cage, who believed in destroying the divisions between "music" and "noise", so that we think of the whole environment as a living soundscape. Such a link may seem far-fetched, but there are some concrete links between Leigh and Cage. Leigh's mentor, Hindemith, had already experimented with variable speed turntables, a process that Cage would exploit to greater recognition in his 1939 piece *Imaginary Landscape No. One*. The sound track to *Song of Ceylon* also uses the whole sound world as musical fabric, which can be allied to Cage's "emancipatory project" of imposing "musical precepts upon all sounds." (Kahn, 1992: 3) Secondly, the film can be indirectly linked to the practice of *musique concrète*, which came to prominence in the 1950s and involved the manipulation of found sounds via the splicing together of strips of magnetic tape. That the more dissonant sections of *Song of Ceylon* echo some of the experiments by composers such as Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry is all the more remarkable considering Leigh did not have the benefits of magnetic tape at his disposal.

It is no surprise to find that *musique concrète* took its inspiration from film editing in many ways, so that sound was organised according to the logic of montage principles, rather than harmonic sequences. Pierre Henry has claimed that *musique concrète* "proceeds from photography, from cinema" (Henry, 2000: 22), whilst Rob Young has written that "the artistic moment no longer occurred in the written manuscript, nor with the physicality of performance, but became distributed within the manipulation of stock and found sounds, a process resembling film editing." (Young, 2000: 14)

As I hope to have shown, Walter Leigh had conceived the sound track of *Song of Ceylon* along similar lines, by editing the music in a concrete manner and placing sounds alongside images in a modernist way that broke down the distinctions between noise and music. Not only this, but sound itself was a creative tool that could *influence* the manipulation of the image track in the editing room, stimulating a new relationship between sound and image.

The modernist visual-sound collages of *Song of Ceylon* and, to a lesser extent other documentary films such as *Coal Face, Night Mail* and *Pett and Pott*, rendered them more forward-looking than pre-sound documentary films, despite their textual incorporation of traditional markers. Films such as *Drifters* (Grierson, 1929) and *Contact* (Rotha, 1933) were appreciated for their montage strategies and poetic figurations of the real, but both included sound scores with compositions from composers such as Mozart and Rossini. Such romantic musical accompaniment would have taken the modernist "edge" off of such films, which is in sharp contrast to the more dissonant aspects of sound montage included within the more adventurous sound films made within the documentary film movement. However, in the later

1930s more pressing political concerns, such as the rise of Fascism, led to a situation in which aesthetic experimentation became gradually reduced as it was seen as inappropriate. The rise of the informative and educational documentary became prominent. As Bill Nichols has argued,

> a dominant mode arose within the British documentary movement that took hold in America as well. It concentrated sound into speech and yoked speech to a rhetorical assertion…Collage became flattened upon the Procrustean bed of expository logic, in which images serve primarily as illustration for the rhetorical claims of a spoken commentary with its problem-solving bent rather than allowing the potential of images as assembled fragments to attain full force. (Nichols, 1995)

Even in the situations where the expository documentary did not hold sway, a move to a more straightforward, "story-documentary" took hold, as in *North Sea* (Watt, 1938), in which the sound track was mostly concerned with capturing dialogue and "realistic" sound effects. For the most part, then, the modernist sound innovations taking place within the documentary film movement flowered only briefly. One of the few filmmakers to actually continue a process of image and sound collage from the late 1930s and into the 1940s was Humphrey Jennings, a figure who has been heavily documented elsewhere and who unfortunately lies outside the scope of this essay.

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