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Albertine Fox, *Godard and Sound. Acoustic Innovation in the Late Films of Jean-Luc Godard*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd Press, 2018. xiii + 274 pp. Figures, notes, select bibliography, select filmography, index. \$120.00 U.S.(hb.). ISBN 9781784538422; \$39.95 U.S. (pb.). ISBN 9781350199965; \$39.95 U.S. (epub). ISBN 9781786722744; \$35.95 U.S. (pdf. eb.). ISBN 9781786732743.

Review by Vlad Dima, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Albertine Fox's study of Godard's ingenious use of cinematic sound is an excellent contribution to what has, belatedly, yet deservedly, become an important sub-field in film studies: sound studies. Building on the pioneering work of Michel Chion from the early 80s, sound theory specialists have been steadily building up this sub-field, perhaps even catching up in terms of overall production with the widespread theoretical focus on the image. The French director Jean-Luc Godard has been a favorite interest for sound theory specialists, because of his consistent attempts to widen the limits of representation via both the image and the sound (as noise, mostly, but also as voice and music). Fox's study fills a gap in our understanding of Godard's sonic techniques by concentrating mainly on the late productions of the twentieth century (and not just films, but videos and other forms of media), when most of the analytic attention of scholars has been paid to the early phase Godard, the New Wave Godard, beginning with *Breathless* (1960) and culminating with the hallucinatory *Week-end* (1967).

Beside shedding much-needed light on Godard's later films, perhaps Fox's most intriguing contribution is the development of what she calls "acoustic spectatorship," which essentially challenges the primacy of the visual ("the ocularcentric discourses") in theories of spectatorship by shifting the attention of the audience toward active listening (p. 3). While not entirely original,^[1] Fox's contribution certainly buttresses the growing relevance of listening to a film, of making sense of a film through the ear rather than over-relying on the eye. Moreover, the author expertly builds on a long list of canonical works on sound: Chion's work on the soundtrack, on its relationship with the visual, and on audio-vision as a "perpetual mode of reception" (p. 5); Sergei Eisenstein's contrapuntal sound; Rick Altman's theories of spectatorship; Kaja Silverman's acoustic mirror; and Pierre Schaeffer's acousmatic sound (chapter one especially), to give but a few examples.

Since the notion of acoustic spectatorship is at the core of the book, it would be worth exploring it in more detail here. As Fox explains, "The *acoustic* spectator is one who listens actively and reflectively as s/he looks, forever creating new, unanticipated relationships between things and imagining in order to see" (p. 3). The result of this process is that film analysis is decoupled from

a “sight versus sound” (p. 5) dynamic. Furthermore, the process of active listening also “serves to remind us that ‘image’ is not only a visual phenomenon” (p. 5). While, once again, not a new observation [2], its application to Godard’s late films yields fecund and noteworthy observations, such as music being a possible “voice” of film (p. 52) or: “The alignment and criss-crossing of soundtrack and image-track resembles two irregular tape loops that mirror each other but are not quite in sync, forming prisms of movement in between” (p. 51). The expression “prisms of movement” might direct one’s thoughts to Gilles Deleuze’s crystals of time,[3] and I believe that association would have made for a fascinating and meaningful discussion (that is, what happens to/with time when adding sound to the equation?). Nevertheless, Fox does introduce brilliant actual analysis of the music itself, which film studies scholars largely tend to ignore. For example, she connects the light that falls on a character’s face and the patterns that light forms on a wall with specific music terminology (layers, bass, metre, hemiola effect, and so on). It is in these moments of analytic precision that Fox’s book shines the most. Here’s another instance in which she takes advantage of the onomatopoeic quality of certain verbs: “Enhanced by the quivering, tinkling and rustling off-frame diegetic sounds, the fluidity and plasticity of the music and speech dislodge and delimit this sonorous scene from and within the wider soundscape” (p. 61). In summary, thanks to “acoustic spectatorship,” the book allows us to think about “spectatorship differently” (p. 12), as Brechtian [4] entities that enter the body of film through a sonic hook.

Following an introduction that covers historical material as it relates to sound and to spectatorship, the book unfolds over seven chapters. Chapter one mostly deals with Pierre Schaeffer’s research on sound and music. Chapter two settles on *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1979) in order to offer a material example of soundtrack analysis. Chapter three separates musical interludes from the body of the visual film and begins to give shape to the idea of music taking on a visual (imagined) appearance. Chapter four investigates the “interstice between cinema’s past life and its future” by looking at the connections between sound and time (or rather, the experience of time) (p. 110). Chapter five uses acousmatic sound to further separate voice from visual body and to show how this process leads to “uncertainty and ambiguity” and then, consequently, to a stimulation of “the critical faculties of the spectator” (p. 111). Chapter six returns to Chion’s, Altman’s, and Schaeffer’s writings as a way to build “cross-media communities ... a versatile and dispersed musical-sonic-cinematic public” (p. 165), which might find a unique embodiment in Godard’s world. Finally, chapter seven moves into the twenty-first century to study Godard’s increasingly experimental filmmaking and his continued interest in making “the language of cinema musical” (p. 167). The two short codas that end the book put forth general commentary on Godard’s sonic practices and also venture into Godard’s 3D short, *Les trois désastres* (2013).

As the author admits, the book “is experimental and freewheeling in its approach” (p. 2), which, it must be said, stylistically matches Godard’s career. Academic purists might be taken aback by some of the sudden narrative shifts, or by a few unfinalized thoughts, but overall it really works for this reader, as I took these instances to cheekily represent a kind of Godardian jump-cut (an excuse I myself use on occasion to deal with difficult argumentative transitions). Speaking of the jump-cut, Fox cleverly identifies Godard’s montage as being “inherently musical, bound intimately to the materiality and malleability of sound” (p. 82), which eventually leads into a reconsideration of what space is. Godard also poses a problem to academics, because his career is so long and prodigious that inevitably certain aspects of it will fall through the proverbial cracks, when trying to fit it all into one book. As a result, Fox’s lack of sustained interest in the pure New Wave period of the 60s is understandable. However, more attention to this period and to

the work done in sound during this period would have been welcome, even if done sporadically in footnotes. For example, the short section on “Godard’s early sonic experiments” (p. 19–22) could have benefited from remarks about *Contempt* (1963) and *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her* (1967), both of which play with the narrative possibilities of sound. Nevertheless, as already acknowledged, it is understandable that no book can be exhaustive in its scope. Ultimately, though, Albertine Fox’s book is a valuable and truly interdisciplinary contribution to film, sound, and music studies.

NOTES

[1] Please allow me to point shamelessly to my own work on Godard, “The Aural Fold and the Sonic Jump-cut: Godard’s Baroque Sound,” in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 29, 3, (2012): 237–251, and to my book-length study of sound, *Sonic Space in Djibril Diop Mambety’s Films* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2017).

[2] To give but one example, Jacques Rancière quite famously explains that “the image is not exclusive to the visible.” Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), p. 7.

[3] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

[4] Like Deleuze (mentioned just once in the book), Brecht is conspicuously missing from this study. Neither theorist has to be in here, of course, but they are both figures long associated with Godard’s work. Deleuze’s work on Bresson’s representation of hands could have been especially useful for pages 146–148. The lack of references to Deleuze’s work on time is particularly puzzling in Chapter 4, which deals in part with the colliding forces of past and present.

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