

Ethnomusicology and filmmaking

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Introduction

In the history of ethnomusicology, some major figures in the discipline have been passionate advocates for the use of film as a technique and a medium of research. Such figures include Mantle Hood, Steven Feld, Hugo Zemp and John Baily. Mantle Hood famously claimed that ‘the motion picture constitutes a unique and perhaps the most important form of documentation available to the ethnomusicologist’ (Hood 1971:269). Hood attempted to articulate how ‘the ethnomusicological point of view’ could be expressed in filmmaking by arguing that films should emphasize information about the context of musical activities, including technical, social and cultural information about the uses, values and functions of music performances and instruments (ibid.:274). Five years after Mantle Hood’s remarks, Steven Feld suggested that ‘doing ethnomusicology with film is part and parcel of doing better ethnomusicology’ and highlighted the potential of film for sharing ‘aspects of field experience – both its data and interpretation – at a new level of communication’ (Feld 1976:315). Reflecting on a series of four films he made about yootzing and yodelling in the Swiss alps during the 1980s, Hugo Zemp argued that ethnomusicologists should establish a distinctive approach to filmmaking, one that ‘respects the music and the musician’ (Zemp 1988:393) by, for instance, filming a music piece in its entirety and allowing expression of the ‘musician’s point of view’ (ibid.:394). Also in the 1980s, John Baily championed an observational approach to filmmaking and urged stronger interest in film, remarking that, ‘one

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would wish to see the use of film become a matter of *central* concern to ethnomusicologists' (Baily 1989:3, original emphasis).

Despite this advocacy for ethnomusicological film during the 1970s and 1980s, Baily's wish for film to become central to ethnomusicology has not come to fruition over the last three decades, and it is not easy to mark out a distinct terrain of ethnomusicological audiovisuality. Notwithstanding some important contributions by individual ethnomusicologists, 'visual ethnomusicology' or 'audiovisual ethnomusicology' has not developed into a sub-discipline comparable to visual anthropology.¹ This is not to say that ethnomusicologists have not used film and video during their fieldwork, and in the digital age audiovisual representations of musical practices have proliferated. Yet film has remained a marginal pursuit in ethnomusicology and only a few postgraduate music programmes include filmmaking courses.

Interest in filmmaking in ethnomusicology, however, is gaining momentum. Following a conference in November 2014 on the theme of 'visual ethnomusicology' at the University of Valladolid in Spain, an Audiovisual Ethnomusicology Study Group was established in 2015 under the auspices of the International Council for Traditional Music.² The group's mission statement states that it aims to 'investigate the potential of audiovisual media in three main areas of ethnomusicological activity: research, preservation/invigoration and dissemination'.³ The Society for Ethnomusicology's pre-conference symposium in 2019 on the theme of 'Film as Ethnography, Activism and Public Work in Ethnomusicology' is also a sign of the growing focus on film in applied contexts.⁴

This chapter considers some approaches to film/video in ethnomusicology and reflects on new possibilities and directions. It begins with a discussion of what I refer to as the documentation paradigm, which has dominated ethnomusicological engagement with film. This is then contrasted with various audiovisual strategies and techniques that I loosely refer

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to as alternative audiovisual modalities. The discussion of alternative audiovisual modalities is oriented around two issues: sound–image synchronization and montage. My primary aim in focusing attention on alternative audiovisual modalities is to stimulate thinking about the potential of video/film for music research. Drawing on debates in visual anthropology and some musicological scholarship on film music and sound, the aim is to bring attention to some of the properties of the medium of sound film, which might be more consciously and explicitly explored by scholars who conduct ethnographic research about music. My thinking about filmmaking in music research is strongly informed by my experience of making the film *Hanoi Eclipse: The Music of Dai Lam Linh* (Norton 2010), and several sequences of the film will be discussed later in this chapter.

The documentation paradigm

The documentation paradigm refers to the predominant tendency for ethnomusicologists to treat film and video as a form of documentation, data or evidence in support of analysis and the writing of ethnomusicological theory. At the heart of the documentation paradigm is an aesthetic of realism and a belief that footage of musical performance has an intrinsic value for specialist audiences, irrespective of technical quality.

The documentation paradigm takes numerous forms. Its most common manifestations can be seen in ethnomusicological uses of raw footage and the so-called ‘research film’. Like sound recordings of performances made in the field, raw audiovisual footage of music events shot by ethnomusicologists has been used for the purposes of illustration, teaching and analysis. Research films typically consist of an edited sequence of footage without the imposition of a narrative, and like ‘raw footage’ they are often thought of as data to be subjected to analysis to address specific research questions. The value placed on the filmic

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documentation of musical traditions for illustrative, didactic, analytical and preservationist purposes runs deep in ethnomusicology and continues in numerous forms to this day. Here I will just briefly mention a few examples that are indicative of the documentation paradigm, concentrating on ethnomusicological uses of film/video as empirical evidence for music analysis and as a means for documenting fieldwork.⁵

Ethnomusicologists who made the first forays into film in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Gerhard Kubik and Gilbert Rouget, were enthralled by the possibilities of utilizing the visual dimension captured by film in the analysis of musical structures, movement patterns, playing techniques and music–dance interaction. Through his technique of frame-by-frame analysis of East African xylophone performances, Kubik investigated inherent rhythms and body movement in musical performance (Kubik 1962). Gilbert Rouget also endeavoured to use film for the purposes of rhythmic analysis (Rouget 1965), based on a film shot in Mali with Jean Rouch (see Rouch 1966). In recent years there has been renewed interest in musical gesture and entrainment, partly as a result of new technical possibilities afforded by digital video and motion-tracking technology. Ethnomusicological research in this area includes Martin Clayton’s investigations into Hindustani music, drawing on video material shot by multiple cameras (e.g. Clayton 2007), and Lara Pearson’s work on South Indian raga, which employs video and motion-tracking data to analyse the relationship between gesture and melodic movement (Pearson 2016).

In addition to the analysis of music, movement and gesture, ethnomusicologists have often shot video as a kind of fieldwork notebook for the purposes of documenting the process of ethnographic research. John Baily has referred to this kind of documentation as a ‘fieldwork movie’, which he describes as ‘the record of a journey, both physical and experiential’ and serves as ‘an adjunct to anthropological or ethnomusicological research’ (Baily 2009:59). While in the past much of the film/video shot during fieldwork was not

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publicly accessible, web archives with digital audiovisual footage are rapidly proliferating. Specialist archives such the EVIA Digital Archive Project, as well as material uploaded on YouTube and Vimeo, are making video shot during fieldwork more widely available.⁶ Several ‘video ethnography’ journals, with a peer review process for audiovisual materials, have also been established.⁷ In addition, it has become common for music books and journals to have accompanying websites with audiovisual materials, Ethnomusicology Multimedia being one prominent initiative.⁸ Like many ethnomusicologists, I have made use of the opportunity to connect multimedia materials on DVD and companion websites to publications. The DVD that accompanied my book on music and mediums in modern Vietnam (Norton 2009), for example, includes video footage that forms the basis for detailed discussion of musical interaction during Vietnamese mediumship rituals.

In ethnomusicological circles there has been a tendency to align the documentation paradigm with observational filmmaking. This observational approach, which developed in the 1970s and 1980s, has often been associated with a kind of scientific realism emphasizing objectivity, empiricism and truth. Its critics have suggested that it is limited by an old-fashioned ethnographic realism that inhibits innovation, interpretation and explanation (see Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009a). Countering such arguments, Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz make the case that, far from being old-fashioned or naive, observational filmmaking is an exploratory mode of inquiry, a ‘skilled practice’ with enduring potential (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009b:115). Reflecting on the history of observational cinema as well as more recent film projects in ‘experimental anthropology’, they argue that ‘rather than attempting to explain the real or subordinate it to established discursive frameworks, contemporary observational practitioners have sought to render, ever more fully, its ambiguous, mobile nature’ (ibid.:142). By emphasizing how observational filmmakers explore the ‘ambiguity of the real’, Grimshaw and Ravetz have carefully unpicked common misunderstandings of

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observational cinema as conservative and old-fashioned, and instead present observation as ‘a mode of skilled practice’ (ibid.:160) that is radical, open-ended and reflexive. Some films made by ethnomusicologists, such as *Amir* by John Baily (1985) and *Dance with the Wodaabes* by Sandrine Loncke (2012), are powerful examples of the kind of inter-subjective, observational sensibility advocated by Grimshaw and Ravetz. My charge against ethnomusicology more generally, however, is that a lack of understanding of the subtleties and ambiguities of observational cinema has resulted in a tendency to fold observational filmmaking into the documentation paradigm. This has sometimes resulted in observational films being closely aligned with fieldwork footage and research films, whose primary purpose is to provide evidence of music performances to be analysed and discussed in text.

Theory, film and text

Ethnomusicology has been most at ease with film when it has been treated as a supplement to written text rather than as a research output in its own right, as a research tool rather than a medium of research. Most work within the documentation paradigm follows this model. There have been calls, however, for ethnographic filmmaking to be considered as a legitimate medium of research in itself. When John Baily writes about ‘filmmaking as musical ethnography’, he implies such an argument, but he is cautious about such a claim: ‘It is when the argument that documentary films are a legitimate form of musical ethnography worthy of the same kind of serious consideration given to more conventional and traditional forms of scholarship is put forward that difficulties are encountered’ (Baily 1989:17). In light of this, Baily argues that film should be used as part of a broad research methodology in conjunction with other outputs, including film guides to provide contextual information about the research and filmmaking process. Film guides are undoubtedly valuable.⁹ Yet the question of whether

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film is a legitimate form of musical ethnography remains: there is still a danger that film is only legitimated through textual sources outside the film itself and is treated as a supplement to text rather than as a medium of research.

A key issue here is the value placed on text in academia. Timothy Rice provides the following definition of theory in ethnomusicology:

Ethnomusicological theory involves the writing of descriptions, classifications, comparisons, interpretations, and generalizations about music (and possibly sound) in general, about particular musical traditions, about music in a set of related communities or about music in relation to cognitive, artistic, experiential, social, cultural, political, and economic issues, themes and processes.

(Rice 2010b:105)

Some of the important issues that Rice has raised about the writing of ethnomusicological theory have been discussed elsewhere, and this is not the place to rehearse these debates in detail.¹⁰ However, a striking aspect of Rice's delineation of ethnomusicological theorizing is that film, as well as other research outputs that are not exclusively text-based, are not mentioned. This seems to implicitly suggest that audio and audiovisual recordings have made no contribution to ethnomusicological theory. Yet at the very least, cannot film involve descriptions about music in relation to artistic and experiential processes?¹¹

Rice also places 'logos' at the centre of the discipline, and he states that 'ethnomusicology is word-based, reasoned discourse about all music' (Rice 2014:8). It seems fair to say that ethnomusicology has primarily been conducted through the written word and this is reflected in Rice's core definition. He acknowledges, however, that it 'does set up a dichotomy between ethnomusicological study, which results in reports in the spoken and

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written word, and other forms of “studying music”, such as taking lessons and learning to play and compose music’ (ibid.:8). Learning and performing music has been an important part of many ethnomusicologists’ research process and theorizing, including Rice’s work on Bulgarian music (Rice 1994). In an attempt to encapsulate the complexity and diversity of approaches within the discipline, Rice ends up offering thirteen definitions, one of which extends beyond text: ‘Ethnomusicology is the study of world music by any means verbal and nonverbal’ (Rice 2014:10). Music performance – as an embodied, sonic practice that is often also linked to the visual – is probably the most ubiquitous ‘nonverbal means’ of studying music amongst ethnomusicologists (see Witzleben 2010). But there are others too, including theorizing through/with sound (Feld and Brenneis 2004), editing and curating audio and audiovisual recordings (Lobley 2015) and making use of ‘visual evidence’ (Killick 2014), including music notation and material culture (such as musical instruments).

Ethnomusicological work that connects with sound studies has also opened up new ways of listening to, and thinking about, sound as a form of knowledge (see Meizel and Daughtry 2019; Novak and Sakakeeny 2015; see also Harris, this volume) and alternative approaches to transmitting sound knowledge and writing sound theory (Kapchan 2017). Despite an emphasis on ‘reasoned discourse in words’ (Rice 2014:9), then, ethnomusicological research has involved methodologies and outputs that are not exclusively text-based.¹²

Even though ethnomusicologists have engaged with various forms of non-verbal means of research, there has been little discussion of how filmed modes of ethnographic expression have figured in the construction of ethnomusicological knowledge. By contrast, in anthropology the deeply entrenched divisions between text-based and visual knowledge have been hotly debated over several decades. Anthropologists who have been critical of the validity of film as ethnography include Maurice Bloch and Kirsten Hastrup. In the 1980s, Maurice Bloch dismissed filmmakers for having a ‘naive view of ethnography’ (Houtman

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1988:20). In Bloch's view, ethnographic film is useful as data for teaching purposes, but he is emphatic that it cannot make a contribution to 'a discursive intellectual form of anthropology' (ibid.:20). In a more developed piece, Kirsten Hastrup argues that ethnographic films are not on equal terms with ethnographic writing; rather, they are hierarchically related (Hastrup 1992:21). She suggests that this is partly because 'the visual record remains "thin", while the written record allows for "thick" description' (ibid.:15). On the other side of the debate, Lucien Taylor lambasts what he refers to as 'iconophobia' in anthropology and defends 'the idea that ethnography can itself be conducted filmically' (Taylor 1996:86). In response to Bloch's statement that 'The idea that ethnographic film speaks for itself is wrong', Taylor counters:

What if film doesn't speak at all? What if film not only constitutes discourse about the world but also (re)presents experience of it? What if film does not say but show? What if film does not just describe, but depict? What, then, if it offers not only 'thin descriptions' but also 'thick depictions'.

(ibid.:86)

Rather than attempting to 'linguify' film, as visual anthropologists like Sol Worth and Jay Ruby proposed in the 1970s, or endeavouring to make films that elaborate a thesis and mimic anthropological prose, Taylor argues that the distinctive sensory and experiential properties of film are a strength rather than a weakness. Film, he contends, is unique in its capacity to simultaneously embody and evoke lived experience, and is perhaps more like poetry than prose (ibid.:88).

The filmmaker and anthropologist David MacDougall also offers a spirited defence of film as ethnography. He argues that ethnographic films are a distinctive way of knowing.

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Film, he suggests, favours an experiential, affective, embodied understanding of individuals and relations between individuals in specific contexts, whereas text is more effective at explanation and generalizing about culture (MacDougall 1998:80). In highlighting such tendencies, MacDougall does not concede that contextual information, theory and explanation are the exclusive reserve of text or that the ethnographic authority of writings and films are necessarily in a hierarchical relationship, as Kirsten Hastrup has argued. Even though MacDougall acknowledges that film favours experiential understanding over explanation, he argues that explanatory knowledge (the domain of theory) can be found in the ‘structures of editing’ (ibid.:81) and ‘through the very grain of the filmmaking’ (ibid.:76).¹³

Anthropological debates about the value of film as ethnography in the 1980s and 1990s were in part stimulated by various types of formal experimentation in ethnographic film. In the 1980s, films such as *Reassemblage* by Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1982) and *Forest of Bliss* by Robert Gardner (1986) challenged in different ways the conventions of ethnographic film. Although dismissed by some as too ‘arty’ and lacking in anthropological value (Ruby 2000), these films provoked debate about the methods and purpose of film in anthropology. Since the mid 1990s these debates have intensified as formal experimentation has become increasingly widespread. With the sensory turn in anthropology and the ethnographic turn in contemporary art, there have been calls for more critical collaborations between artists and anthropologists (see Grimshaw and Ravetz 2015; Schneider and Wright 2010a, 2013). A collection edited by Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright is concerned with exploring the possibilities of ‘an anthropological practice *with* artists (rather than one that remains *of* artists)’ and of ‘an art practice *with* anthropologists’ (Schneider and Wright 2010b:5, original emphases). Such collaborations encourage further erasing of the boundaries between the artistic and the scientific, between subjectivity and objectivity, and between authored expression and scholarly documentation.

Reflections on the interaction between the practices of anthropologists and artists extend to numerous types of collaborative work with non-textual media beyond film and video (see Cox *et al.* 2016). Specifically in regard to film, there is growing interest in the historical and practical intersections between ‘ethnographic’ and ‘experimental’ film, as illustrated by a recent volume edited by Schneider and Pasqualino (2014). As the editors state, the book aims to ‘challenge and overcome a broad realist-narrative paradigm that – with a few exceptions – has dominated visual anthropology so far’ (Pasqualino and Schneider 2014:1). A central argument in the volume is that the ways in which experimental filmmakers have questioned perception, observation and description through formal experimentation poses some important questions for anthropological filmmakers. With such developments in mind, let us now consider audiovisual possibilities that go beyond the documentation paradigm.

Alternative audiovisual modalities

The phrase ‘alternative audiovisual modalities’ is broad in scope and could encompass many different filmic strategies and techniques. Here I focus on just two key issues: sound–image synchronization and montage. These have been chosen because they offer possibilities for alternative forms of audiovisual representation that challenge some of the central tenets of film as documentation. According to the documentation paradigm, synchrony between sound and image is paramount, and manipulation of the direct sound, recorded while images are shot, is to be avoided. However, sound–image relations are at the heart of film as an expressive medium, and to be restricted to only using direct sound and tight sound–image synchronization is to ignore much of sound film’s inherent potential. Along with synchronous sound, the documentation paradigm favours the long sequence shot from the perspective of a

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single, unprivileged camera.¹⁴ Montage techniques are interesting to consider as they offer possibilities for destabilizing the realism of the long take.

Sound–image synchronization

Theorizing sound–image relations is a growing area of interest in the study of music and the moving image (e.g. Donnelly 2014; Richardson *et al.* 2013; Rogers 2015). With some notable exceptions (e.g. Rogers 2015), work by music scholars has primarily focused on mainstream fiction films. Kevin Donnelly (2014), for instance, concentrates on analysing sound and image synchronization in mainstream narrative films. Donnelly notes how sound–image relations run along a spectrum from tight synchronization, through plesiochrony – where sound and image are vaguely fitting in synchrony – to total asynchrony. His focus is on the aesthetics and cognitive perception of sound–image relations, pointing out how moments of synchrony between sound and image typically constitute ‘a default position of normality’, whereas a lack of synchrony is ‘characterized as potentially disturbing for the audience’ and perhaps even dangerous or upsetting (ibid.:73).

While radical asynchronicity between sound and image is quite rare in mainstream fiction films and documentaries, it has long been used as a disruptive technique by experimental filmmakers (see Rogers and Barham 2017). Well-known historical examples that combine ethnographic and experimental techniques include Peter Kubelka’s *Unsere Afrikareise/Our Trip to Africa* (1966) and Trinh T. Minh-Ha’s *Reassemblage* (1982). Both of these films make use of the direct sound that the filmmakers recorded during their respective trips to Sudan and Senegal, but source sound is severed from images to shocking effect. In Kubelka’s film, the target of critique is the system of colonial exploitation represented by the Austrians on safari, whereas Trinh T. Minh-Ha’s film deconstructs the scientific,

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ethnographic gaze. Combining the words synchronism and synthesis, Michel Chion coined the term ‘synchresis’ to refer to ‘the spontaneous and irresistible weld produced between a particular auditory phenomenon and visual phenomenon when they occur at the same time’ (Chion 1994:63). Importantly, both Kubelka and Trinh T. Minh-Ha use asynchronicity in a way that critically employs synchresis: they play with the tendency for viewers to make meaningful connections between sound and image, unsettling assumptions about what is seen and heard.

Unsere Afrikareise and *Reassemblage* push the boundaries of the conventionally ethnographic through formal experimentation with sound–image relations. Bearing in mind such historical precedents, some recent work on the borders between anthropology and art has shown a renewed interest in asynchronicity as a mode of ethnographic practice. Jennifer Heuson and Kevin Allen, for example, argue that asynchronicity challenges the ‘historical sedimentation’ of traditional ethnographies’ (Heuson and Allen 2014:126). Emphasizing the sensory politics of asynchronicity in their work with video, they propose ‘asynchronous ethnography as a way to deposit dust on the eye in order to remove it from the ear (and vice versa)’ (ibid.:127).

To date, ethnomusicology has made little contribution to debates about sound–image relations in filmic ethnography. I suggest, however, that there is considerable potential for ethnomusicologists to explore the continuum of sound–image synchronization in their work with film. Encouraging ethnomusicologists to consider employing various types of sound–image synchronization goes against an ingrained impulse to document rather than manipulate direct sound. With a view to opening up discussion about synchronization strategies in ethnomusicological films, I now turn to a discussion of sound–image relations in my own film, *Hanoi Eclipse: The Music of Dai Lam Linh* (Norton 2010).

Hanoi Eclipse follows the challenges faced by the controversial Vietnamese band Dai Lam Linh while rehearsing and performing in their hometown of Hanoi. It shows the band recording their debut album and features an album-launch concert in the prestigious Hanoi Opera House. Dai Lam Linh was established by the male composer, Dai, an ex-soldier who fought in the Second Indochina War (commonly known as the ‘Vietnam War’), and two female singers, Lam and Linh. Focusing on the life story of the main protagonist, Dai, and featuring four of Dai Lam Linh’s ‘experimental’ songs, the film explores the band’s story of creative, political and financial struggle in the context of a one-party state where cultural expression is tightly controlled.

While I was in Vietnam making the film, I became increasingly aware of the limitations of maintaining a passive, unobtrusive approach to filming. As highlighted by Jean Rouch and others, the act of filming is based on interaction, and I began to realize how a performative approach – based on encounter, negotiation and even provocation – could be productive.¹⁵ Initially I just followed Dai Lam Linh as they worked on their album. But as the shooting progressed, I became more active in initiating events. With an idea of film narratives in mind, I stimulated encounters that I thought would give rise to interesting material. While this may seem like an attempt to fabricate ethnographic reality, I increasingly noticed the constructed nature of everything I was filming and of documentaries themselves.

In several sections of *Hanoi Eclipse* asynchrony and plesiochrony between sound and image are used for narrative purposes and poetic evocation. *Hanoi Eclipse* is not an experimental film and I did not use asynchronicity as a radical form of critique in the manner of Kubelka and Trinh T. Minh-Ha. Indeed, in some instances asynchronous sound is used to strengthen the illusion of continuity. However, the film does employ sound–image asynchrony for aesthetic purposes, to evoke the feelings and meanings of Dai Lam Linh’s music.

The moves I made towards a poetic mode of filmmaking are quite modest and *Hanoi Eclipse* makes use of a fairly conventional interview-based narrative, with comments from band members weaved together to construct an account of the band's development from the inside. During the editing process I became aware of the extent to which I was thinking about film as a kind of text. From the outset, I decided to use extracts from interviews with band members to construct a script, rather than resorting to a voice-over, and I found it hard to break free from constructing the 'story' through the spoken word. But gradually I realized I was neglecting to think seriously about how filmic narratives can be developed through visual and sonic means, as well as through words. As the filmmaking progressed I made efforts to make use of 'image-and-sequenced-based thought', as well as 'word-and-sentence-based thought' (MacDougall 1998:63). The experience of making *Hanoi Eclipse* made me more aware of the limits and constraints of established filmmaking conventions and the reasons why experimental filmmakers have sought to 'undo' or subvert these conventions.

One of the main ways I tried to move away from a sole reliance on a text-based narrative was to use four of Dai Lam Linh's songs as an integral part of the structure of the film. In contrast to mainstream music documentaries that pay little attention to music and instead favour the story of celebrity musicians and bands (see Edgar *et al.* 2013), I wanted to place the aesthetics of Dai Lam Linh's music at the heart of the film. The aim was to create a 'musical film' by integrating songs into the narrative structure, by treating music as if it was a 'character' or 'protagonist'. Furthermore, I wished to prioritize the aesthetics and meaning of songs through the grain of the film, rather than through overt reference to ethnomusicological theory or through expository methods such as voice-over. Of the four songs featured in the film, here I will discuss just two: 'Solar eclipse' ('*Nhat thuc*') and 'Evening' ('*Chieu*').

The first sequence in the film devoted to 'Solar eclipse' primarily consists of shots of a crowded temple full of worshippers underscored by the recording of 'Solar eclipse' on Dai

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Lam Linh's debut album.¹⁶ Some short interview extracts of Dai and Lam commenting on the meanings of 'Solar eclipse' are included, but the sequence aims to evoke the expressivity and feelings of the song, rather than relying on lengthy verbal explanations.

The song's lyrics, which are taken from a poem by the female poet Vi Thuy Linh, speak of a woman's desolation while she is waiting in vain for her lost lover to return. The woman's state of despair is symbolized through the metaphor of an eclipse, a disruption in the normal balance between day and night, darkness and light, yin and yang. Distraught from her lost love, the woman seeks solace in Buddhism. The poem makes use of the trope of 'Buddhism as refuge', a trope that is common in many Vietnamese stories, poetry and music drama.¹⁷ The poem's religious atmosphere is musically evoked through Lam and Linh whispering, muttering and chanting prayers to Amitabha, the goddess of mercy, and Lam also sings fragments of a Catholic hymn. During an interview I filmed with Linh, she described the musical and religious connection in the following way: 'On festival days the pagodas and temples in Vietnam are very crowded ... Inside the pagoda, many different sounds clash with each other and it sounds chaotic. The beginning of "Solar eclipse" evokes this atmosphere'. Although this comment is not included in the film, it gave me the idea to cut images of Buddhist worshippers to the song. The sequence begins and ends with landscape shots of Hanoi: light, daytime shots are used at the start and darker, dusk shots at the end. This visual framing parallels the symbolic oppositions evident in the song's lyrics.

The entire sequence that focuses on 'Evening' is underpinned by the live audio recording of the song from the concert at the Hanoi Opera House.¹⁸ Shots from the live performance are used intermittently, building in intensity towards the end of the sequence, intercut with a variety of other images and sound that resonate with the themes of the song. 'Evening' is Dai's homage to his compatriots who were killed during one of the fiercest battles of the Second Indochina War in the province of Quang Tri in 1972. The lyrics of the

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song, written by the male poet Nguyen Trong Tao, make no direct reference to war. Instead, they describe the world being bathed in the golden glow of twilight. In the following extract the poem describes how the landscape ('trees' and 'stone') and people ('skin' and 'hair') turn yellow as evening falls:

Yellow trees.

Yellow stone.

Time is fleeting ... like a purple hibiscus sky.

Evening falls.

Yellow skin.

Yellow hair.

Yellow skin ... yellow hair ... yellow people ... yellow trees ... yellow stone.

Evening.

The poem is open to numerous interpretations. In one reading, it evokes a devastated landscape, perhaps due to bombing and the effects of Agent Orange. Dai had a different take: he told me that, for him, the poem's relentless references to yellow conjured up images of the ghosts of war dead.

The 'Evening' film sequence opens with Dai lighting incense and kowtowing in front of the ancestral altar of his first wife's parents and grandparents. This sets the mood for the song, which is faded in during the scene. In the company of two of his friends, Dai then says that he composed 'Evening' in honour of his fellow soldiers who died on the battlefield in Quang Tri. To evoke poetically the connection between 'Evening' and the loss of war, shots of a 'martyrs' cemetery' (*nghia trang liet si*) are cut to the sound of the live performance, which is gradually revealed as the sequence progresses. The shots of the tombs were filmed at

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a cemetery close to the Lanh Giang temple in Ha Nam province south of Hanoi. The caretaker of the cemetery, who was lime washing the tombs when I visited, told me he had been crippled by an injury sustained in the war and that many of his friends who had died in battle were buried in the cemetery. Some of the shots of the caretaker were filmed with a slow shutter speed, giving the images a distant, otherworldly quality. Layered over the sound of the performance and the shots of the cemetery, we hear further comments from Dai:

In this song, I wanted to tell the world about the great loss of the soldiers who fought at Quang Tri in 1972. Nobody can compensate for such loss. The Americans can't. The Communists can't. And I can't repay them by writing a song. I want to pay back the debt to the war dead, but how can I? At night, I often dream about my friends who died.

A notable aspect of 'Evening' is the incorporation of a traditional style of folk song called *Ho Hue*, which has a strong regional association with the area around the city of Hue in central Vietnam. In some of the concert footage used in the film, we briefly see the singer Ha Vi singing *Ho Hue* from behind a hanging sedge mat, adding another layer to Lam and Linh's overlapping vocal phrases. *Ho Hue*, which is traditionally sung while rowing a boat, is characterized by long, arching vocal phrases ornamented with a wide vibrato. Dai told me that he incorporated Hue folk song into 'Evening' to evoke his profound feelings of sadness about war. For Dai, *Ho Hue* reminded him of the time he spent fighting in Quang Tri province, which lies to the north of the city of Hue. The regional associations of *Ho Hue*, as well as Dai's personal feelings about the folk song style, are not referred to directly in the film. Rather than attempting to explain the various musical and poetic layers of the song, the

sequence embraces a more poetic mode of representation that stresses mood and affect. It uses the affective potential of music and the moving image to evoke rather than to explain.

The sound–image relations in the two sequences focused on ‘Solar eclipse’ and ‘Evening’ go beyond the synchronous use of direct sound. The edited images resonate with the music, making visual connections with musical aesthetics. Rather than providing detailed explanation of the meaning of the music, the lyrics and the interview fragments offer poetic allusions with affective potential.

Montage

Recent anthropological debate about montage in ethnographic film, prompted by Christian Suhr and Rane Willerslev (2012, 2013), has some interesting parallels with asynchronous sound–image strategies. Suhr and Willerslev make a case for the use of montage as a technique for disrupting what they refer to as the ‘mimetic dogma of the “humanized” camera’ (Suhr and Willerslev 2012:282). This colourful phrase refers to the tendency in observational cinema to try to imitate the perspective of a normal human participant – that is, to establish a subject-centred vision. Suhr and Willerslev’s aim is not to replace or dismiss realism with radical constructivism, as they suggest that this would only lead to an ‘obscure haze’ that does not enhance social and cultural understanding. Instead, they argue for montage as a manipulative filmic device for occasionally disrupting realism in order to ‘reveal the invisible aspects of social life’ (ibid.:283). Drawing on work by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas, Suhr and Willerslev refer to the invisible as ‘an excess of visibility or an infinite totality of vision that cannot itself be accessed from any actual human perspective’ (ibid.:286). Their point is not that montage can somehow ‘show the invisible in itself’ (ibid.:298), but rather that it ‘provides a technique for evoking the invisible through the

orchestration of different perspectives encroaching upon one another' (Suhr and Willerslev 2013:4).

Suhr and Willerslev's stance maintains a tension between 'a sense of reality' and the destabilizing, defamiliarizing and disruptive potential of montage. Although Suhr and Willerslev do not refer to their own films in their writing, their theoretical reflections about montage are interesting to consider in relation to the film *Unity Through Culture*, which Christian Suhr made with Ton Otto (Suhr and Otto 2011). *Unity Through Culture* features music and dance performances at the Balopa Cultural Festival on Baluan Island in Papua New Guinea. The audiovisual representations of these performances do not attempt to produce an effect of continuity; rather, they disrupt the smooth flow of time, juxtaposing temporally splintered viewpoints. These multiple perspectives on the festival performances transcend the perception of a single viewer and encourage us to see the artifice of the touristic presentation of tradition for commercial ends.

Some of the montage techniques used seem to have humorous, satirical and critical intent. In one sequence, for instance, a male dancer calls out thanks to a governor, who is chairman of the local tourism board, for attending the festival. The dancer declares, 'Without you, what would become of us? We say thank you for seeing our need. We are rubbish men. We are worthless people. Thanks to you we exist'. While shouting these self-chastising words of thanks into a microphone, the man dances on a long, thin wooden structure with a crocodile head carved at one end. At the end of each short sentence, the rows of dancers surrounding the wooden crocodile let out cheer of support in unison. The first shot of the speech addressed to the governor foregrounds the wooden crocodile head, which is bouncing up-and-down due to the movement of the male dancer. This adds humour to the self-deprecating declaration of thanks, undercutting the sincerity of the homage to the governor. Throughout the sequences of the festival performances there are quick shifts in angle and perspective. And the way some

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shots are edited and framed – like the upward-facing shots of the scantily clad, male dancer’s gyrating body, which follow his speech – adds to the feeling that the performers are perhaps not taking the festivalized performance of tradition too seriously. The film uncovers the tensions and disputes in the Baluan community about the loss of tradition and cultural change, and the use of montage in the representation of the festival splices up the ‘natural flow’ of the performances, helping to reveal different perspectives.

A quite different use of montage, as well as experimentation with sound–image synchronization, can be seen in Laurent Van Lancker’s film *Surya* (Van Lancker 2006). The film oscillates between synchronous performances by musicians and storytellers and asynchronous montage sequences that impressionistically evoke the journey of the filmmakers travelling overland through numerous countries from Belgium to Vietnam. In his writing about the film, Van Lancker (2013) discusses his sensorial approach to filmmaking, which prioritizes the evocation of the touch and taste of other cultures. His concern is to produce knowledge via experience, through ‘haptic images and sounds’ and the use of three ‘specific documentary strategies: asynchronicity, decontextualization, and cinematic imagination’ (ibid.:143). Although Van Lancker does not directly discuss montage, the narrative shape of *Surya*, stretching as it does across cultures and artistic encounters, is propelled in large part by contrasts between the observation of performances and the poetic evocation of montage. The performances were devised as part of the imaginative cinematic journey; the filmmakers collaborated with a series of performance artists, storytellers and musicians in the different countries they visited. Experimentation with montage and asynchronous sound–image relations is used to impressionistically trace the encounters of the filmmakers and to evoke the full sensorium of cultures and lived experience. Rather than being a momentary disruption of reality, the asynchronous montage sequences in *Surya* have an equal place in the film’s narrative as the music and storytelling performances; they urge us

to become immersed in the decontextualized flow of sounds and images, and to hear and see them anew.

In *Hanoi Eclipse*, montage is frequently used following conventional methods of continuity editing, rather than as a destabilizing technique.¹⁹ However, something more akin to Suhr and Willerslev's idea of montage as a form of rupture is evident in a section of *Hanoi Eclipse* when Dai meets a committee of government censors.²⁰ The sequence shows Dai listening and responding to the censors, who have just witnessed Dai Lam Linh's concert dress rehearsal. Dai's interaction with the censors is complex. There are different subtexts that are not immediately apparent, especially for non-Vietnamese audiences. The head of the committee of censors, a man called Thang, accepts that the concert will go ahead. Nonetheless, he offers Dai advice about how he could 'improve' his music by reducing the 'noise and screaming' of the vocals. On the surface, Dai accepts Thang's critical advice and concedes that some aspects of the musical arrangement could be refined. As the censors leave, Dai shakes their hands and apologizes, saying, 'I'm very sorry about today, I had no time to do anything for you'.

When I discussed this interaction with members of Dai Lam Linh, they revealed a covert subtext in the apology: Dai was indirectly letting the censors know that he was not able to prepare an 'envelope' for them, an 'envelope' being a common euphemism for a bribe. Dai was unable to give the censors money, as would typically be expected to help smooth the path towards official permission being granted, because a French organization, the Centre Culturel Français de Hanoi, had organized the concert. In an attempt to make evident some of the contradictions between what is being said and thought in the interaction, the spatial and temporal continuity of the meeting with the censors is broken through an abrupt cut to a comment Dai made about the censors in a separate interview. In this shot, Dai remarks, 'It's very clear that they don't like my music. But whether they like it or not, they have still given

me permission to release a CD [and perform the music on the album at the concert]’. This simple juxtaposition demonstrates how montage can thicken filmic depiction by interrogating hidden layers of interaction. In the sequence, the destabilizing effect of montage serves to uncover the messy mechanics of music censorship.

Conclusion

The detailed attention ethnomusicologists pay to music and sound, typically through sustained fieldwork, offers numerous opportunities for bringing ethnomusicological perspectives to bear on audiovisual work. Ethnomusicological engagement with film, however, has tended not to venture far from the documentation paradigm and its implicit requirement to document music performances as faithfully as possible. In ethnomusicology there has also been some slippage between the prevailing scientism of the documentation paradigm and observational film. An overriding emphasis on documentation has enabled music researchers to use film for various research purposes (such as analysing movement and gesture in music performance) and it will no doubt continue to be productive for some types of academic enquiry. However, one aim of this chapter has been to consider some alternative audiovisual modalities that might be used in ethnomusicological film. I suggest that ethnomusicological arguments and theories can be developed through the ‘grain of the film’, through the choices made in shooting and editing, in ways that employ an observational sensibility, but are not limited to a rigid, realist approach. Greater awareness of the possibilities of sound–image synchronization and montage techniques might encourage music researchers to explore creative, critical and evocative audiovisual strategies beyond the documentation paradigm.

In regard to the relationship between filmmaking and theory, as films often involve text and the spoken word, there is no reason why they should not contribute to word-based

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ethnomusicological theory. Indeed, some didactic films use the spoken and written word to provide descriptions, classifications, comparisons, interpretations and generalizations about music, and ethnomusicologists could endeavour to produce better films with more of this kind of text-based theorizing for educational and research purposes. The medium of sound film, however, is not necessarily well suited to the development of theories that involve generalizations based on intertextual cross-referencing. Rather than forcing films to become more like written theory, an alternative might be to consider new ways of working and theorizing that engage with the sensorial, affective, aesthetic, performative and experiential potential of sound film.

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427.

Notes

Queries to notes – Note that queried passages are highlighted yellow; note numbers may change due to the acceptance of Track Changes.

- n.6 - www.eviada.org/default.cfm - **URL inactive**: please supply an active URL, an alternative reference or delete this item and any in-text citations. new url ADDED
- n.16 – 3 minutes 35 seconds, from 8'56" to 11'39" – The time span from 8'56" to 11'39" equals 2 mins 43 secs – not 3 mins 35 secs! Yes 2 mins 43 secs! (corrected below).

¹ Despite the prevalence of the term ‘visual anthropology’, in recent years its usefulness has been questioned. Anna Grimshaw, Elspeth Owen and Amanda Ravetz, for instance, contend that, ‘if once acknowledged as a distinctive site within anthropology, visual anthropology is now widely considered to be obsolete’ (Grimshaw *et al.* 2010:161).

² See Cámara de Landa *et al.* (2016) for proceedings of the conference. Other publications by the Audiovisual Ethnomusicology Study Group include Yu Hui (2018).

³ ‘Mission statement’, International Council for Traditional Music (available at: <http://ictmusic.org/group/audiovisual-ethnomusicology>, accessed 3 April 2020).

⁴ See www.ethnomusicology.org/page/Conf_2019_Special (accessed 3 April 2020).

⁵ Many more ethnomusicological uses of audiovisual materials within the documentation paradigm could be cited. For further discussion of audiovisual work for ‘scientific’, ‘educational’ and ‘informative’ purposes in ethnomusicology, see D’Amico (2012). See also the overview provided by Vignau (2013:103–56) and the chapters in the sections on ‘analysis’, ‘education’ and ‘fieldwork footage’ in Cámara de Landa *et al.* (2016:99–200).

⁶ See <http://eviada.webhost.iu.edu/Scripts/default.cfm>. For a list of archives, see ‘Archives, libraries and museums’, International Council for Traditional Music (available at: https://ethnomusicology.site-ym.com/?Links_ArchLibMus, accessed 3 April 2020).

⁷ Examples include the *Journal of Ethnographic Video* and the *Journal of Anthropological Films*.

⁸ See the Ethnomusicology Multimedia homepage (available at:
<https://ethnomultimedia.org/index.html>, accessed 2 April 2020).

⁹ Following Baily's model of writing film guides (see <http://der.org/resources/study-guides/amir-study-guide.pdf>), I wrote one for *Hanoi Eclipse* (see www.der.org/resources/study-guides/hanoi-eclipse-study-guide.pdf).

¹⁰ For a range of perspectives on Rice's arguments about ethnomusicological theorizing, see Rice (2010a) and the various responses to this piece and its 'call for a new approach' (e.g. Agawu 2010; Koskoff 2010; Stokes 2010). For a detailed discussion of Rice's arguments about 'music theory' (Rice 2010b), see Solis (2012).

¹¹ Elsewhere I have posed similar questions about Rice's definition of ethnomusicological theory and discussed the potential to theorize through the medium of film (Norton 2015). In response to this paper Timothy Rice was prompted to reflect on filmic theory (personal communication by e-mail, March 2016). His subsequent publication on the topic considers how theory might be conveyed in the fascinating film *May It Fill Your Soul* (2011), about his research into Bulgarian music (see Rice 2016). Unfortunately, I did not receive this publication in time to include further discussion of it in this chapter.

¹² In the context of broad reflections on the condition of post-theoreticism in the social sciences and humanities, Martin Stokes notes the increase in 'alternative modes of ethnographic expression' in ethnomusicology: 'Doubt and scepticism as to the very possibility of theory have initiated inquiry into the historical and political conditions of ethnomusicological theory, reflexive attention to fieldwork practice, and vigorous consideration of alternative modes of ethnographic expression, written, recorded, filmed, staged or displayed' (Stokes 2001).

¹³ John Baily suggests that what distinguishes the 'ethnomusicological film' from the 'documentary film about music' is the 'conceptual scheme "behind the film"' (Baily

1989:16). This is revealed, he suggests, through an argument that is ‘covert and lies in the choice of scenes the filmmaker selects from the rushes, and the order in which they are put together’ (ibid.:16). Baily’s suggestion is somewhat similar to MacDougall’s discussion of how explanatory knowledge and argument is evident in the ‘grain of the film’ (MacDougall 1998).

¹⁴ David MacDougall, a proponent of the ‘unprivileged camera style’, refers to it as ‘a style based on the assumption that the appearance of a film should be an artefact of the social and physical encounter between the filmmaker and the subject’ (MacDougall 1998:203–4). This is contrasted with the ‘privileged’ shots of fiction films, which are taken by camera positions that ‘could not be occupied in everyday life’ and which ‘posit an invisible observer with special powers that merge the consciousness of the author and audience’ (ibid.:201).

¹⁵ Rouch eschewed the non-interventionist ‘fly-on-the-wall’ approach evident in American direct cinema of the 1960s and some observational films by anthropologists. Instead, as Steven Feld notes, ‘Rouch insisted that the presence of the camera, like the presence of the ethnographer, stimulates, modifies, accelerates, catalyzes’ (Feld 2003:16). Rouch’s conception of *cinéma-vérité*, as Paul Henley points out, was based on the idea that ‘truths [were] brought to light through the interactions between filmmakers and subjects that take place in the course of making a film’ (Henley 2009:174). See also Nichols (2001) for further discussion of participatory and performative modes of documentary film-making that emphasize interaction and engagement.

¹⁶ The section lasts 2 minutes 43 seconds, from 8’56” to 11’39”.

¹⁷ Two of the most famous examples of the ‘Buddhism as refuge’ trope can be found in the Vietnamese national poem *Truyen Kieu* (‘The tale of Kieu’) by Nguyen Du and the *cheo* music-theatre play *Quan Am Thi Kinh* (‘*Thi Kinh*, the goddess of mercy’).

¹⁸ This section lasts 3 minutes 41 seconds, from 15’32” to 19’13”.

¹⁹ The opening section of *Hanoi Eclipse* is a montage, mixing footage of rehearsals with interview material. This quickly introduces the dynamics and working methods of Dai Lam Linh and establishes Dai's reputation for being difficult and emotionally volatile. Conflict-based drama is a classic convention for encouraging empathy with 'characters' in mainstream narrative documentaries, and the opening montage sequence *Hanoi Eclipse*, which features an argument between Dai and Linh during a rehearsal, makes use of this convention.

²⁰ The section runs from 44'19" to 46'18".