



Events and Exhibitions

What's on today

Forthcoming events

Categories

News 34

From the curators 13

Media 28

Critical Writing 25

Interviews 37

Tuesday 27 September 2016

Galleries Closed

Shop 11am-6pm

Cafe 10am-6pm

Reading Room Closed



← → 1 of 4 - 'In and Out of Synch' performed at The Tanks, Tate Modern, Oct 2012. Photo: Gabrielle Fonseca Johnson/Tate Photography, 2012 ©

Tate Photography

## IN AND OUT OF SYNCH: AURA SATZ IN DIALOGUE



Aura Satz was interviewed by Alastair Cameron on the occasion of her performance of In and Out of Synch at the four-day event Visionary Kingdom at Arnolfini, November 2012. In and Out of Synch was co-commissioned by Arnolfini, Tate and ACE, and will be performed in early June at Ny Musikk, Oslo.



### Upcoming



**Bristol Cathedral: Be a Chorister for a Day**  
Saturday 08 October 2016,  
11:00 to 16:30 Free



Follow us on Twitter

[ArnolfiniArts](#) : "Moving and charged with meaning"  
#DaphneWright works now at @TyntesfieldNT. See more unveiled @ArnolfiniArts 29 Sep...  
<https://t.co/jdmDYhWU6r>

Sep 27, 2016 11:00 AM

**ArnolfiniArts** : See @madeinbristolTV coverage of 'The Cloud' #PCPArts launch at Bridge Farm Primary with

AC: Can you tell me how the performance is structured? How is the Ruben's Tube incorporated with the 16mm projection and live sound?

AS: The film imagery is driven by a pre-recorded voiceover, which is played through 16mm mono and 35mm stereo optical sound cameras, i.e. the post-production technologies that enable the creation of a black and white sound pattern negative which will then be added onto the edge of the image on the filmstrip. The result is various types of light patterns, some readable as synchronous with the soundtrack, others more abstract and perceptually harder to latch onto the sound. The Ruben's tube is an acoustic device which visualises sound as a standing wave of small flames. Similar to the optical sound camera, which is essentially a small light modulating according to the sound and producing a pattern on the moving filmstrip which can then be read back by the projector, the Ruben's tube allows for the visualisation of sound as a shifting light shape, but there is no device which can play it back. I hope that when placed together, in dialogue with each other, the two forms of light modulation create a new reading of each. Whereas the film has as its starting point a specific analogue film technology and creates visual associations which tap into cinema's technological history (some of the stroboscopic flashings of soundwaves recall magic lanterns and phantasmagoria, as well as the obvious connection to flicker films and structuralist film making, though of course there are many more possible readings), the flame device reveals other more primal associations of the word as light, the burning bush, and I suppose a more authoritarian encounter with a disembodied voice. The intention of the project is to destabilise the relationship of word and image, precisely through the close-up rendering of sound/image synchronicity. Synchronicity or a perfect fit between sound and image is both mesmerising and unsettling, somehow suggesting a truer universal language whilst constantly shape-shifting, slipping out of synch in one's inability to grasp it or master the code, and creating all manner of unexpected expansions and contractions of the semantic stability of the spoken word.

AC: What ideas and inspirations led you to *In and Out of Synch*? Was it influenced by the work of other artists and filmmakers?

AS: I have been interested in ways of visualising sound for several years now, and have been seeking out acoustic devices and audiovisual technologies which do this, either for the purposes of demonstrating sound-shapes, or for potential playback. I

artists [#Assemble \(5:35\)...](#)  
<https://t.co/EnglzxJT9j>

Sep 27, 2016 08:36 AM

[ArnolfiniArts](#) : RT

[@BW\\_Initiative](#): Looking forward to the [#DaphneWright](#) exhibition coming to Bristol at [@ArnolfiniArts](#)  
<https://t.co/3YconW4wob>  
[#ChangingBri...](#)

Sep 26, 2016 09:30 PM

suppose my primary source of inspiration has mostly been the material forms yielded by certain technologies, the acoustic codes which don't often get looked at artistically, but seem to suggest all manner of readings which are almost filmic. For example Chladni patterns which reveal metamorphic symmetries. While making films and performances with the Chladni plate I eventually realised it reminded me very much of early abstract animation. I had a similar experience when working with the close-up patterns produced by light reflecting on record grooves. This led me to investigate early experimental abstract film-makers such as Walter Ruttmann, Oskar Fischinger, Mary Ellen Bute and, later, Norman McLaren. But also structuralist film-makers such as Guy Sherwin, Peter Kubelka, Tony Conrad, and of course, Lis Rhodes, about whom more later. Retrospectively I think what I have found most interesting about structuralist theories is their experiments in exposing the cinematic apparatus, revealing its workings, but often, rather than completely breaking the illusion, this would just set-up a different perceptual state, as for example with the flicker film. This was very much coherent with my previous works which aimed to really get inside the technologies, so to speak, but not necessarily for any didactic purpose or to break them, so to speak, but rather so as to enable new perceptual experiences to emerge, and bring about a series of questions, doubts and unease.

AC: The film's voice-over was scripted in dialogue with the artist Lis Rhodes - how did you begin working with her?

AS: I was her student at the Slade between 1998-2002, during which time she supervised the practical component of my PhD. After that we stayed in touch and gradually my practise seemed to align itself more closely to her seminal work with optical sound. But I suppose more crucially I was attracted to her use of language and the very particular mode of conversation that seems unique to discussions with her. I have always felt that when talking with Lis words seem so much more precise - one pays more attention, listens more acutely, questions definitions and slows down thought. Often I had tried to take notes over the years and it never seemed to do any justice to that space that was created between us in conversation. For this film I knew I wanted that kind of poetic engagement with language, a heightened state of attention and an attempt to use language to prise language open. I was seeking a clarity in pace and delivery, which is very particular to Lis' way of articulating and is even evident in the tone of her voice. I was deeply honoured when Lis agreed to script the text with me, and it emerged very fluidly through many

intensive long meetings over many months. Snippets of our talks would slip into the text, which we sent back and forth between us, fleshed out and edited down. Then in recording the voiceover we ended up reworking a further dimension of the conversation, through hearing each other read the whole thing out and echoing each other's speech patterns. The text was obviously inflected by its translation into film and this lent another quality to voice. Lis gave a lot of input and feedback throughout.

**AC:** (How) does your new work try to deal with some of the concerns of her filmmaking? For example, the formal experiments with the visual component of film as a kind of graphic score for the soundtrack (as in *Dresden Dynamo*, or *Light Music*)? The visual score becomes the basis for these films – Rhodes drew a score onto the film and the optical sound track, so that what we see and hear is the score, played (if you like) by the apparatus. How does *In and Out of Synch* – which uses the generation of an optical soundtrack of a 16mm film as the basis of its images - relate to this? Optical sound itself is a kind of score for a movie projector - what happens when it becomes the image?

**AS:** *Dresden Dynamo* and *Light Music* both use the image to produce sound, the filmic image is the score, the notation and the projector becomes the musical instrument. But interestingly after these films Lis started using the sound of voiceovers in a much more distinct way (I am thinking of *Light Reading*, for example). As Lis has written: "Seeing is never believing, or lip sync a confirmation of authenticity."<sup>[1]</sup> Her later works attempt to disrupt and subvert the perception of a perfect fit between sound and image. Like Lis, I am profoundly interested in creating works which seed doubt, create a perceptual uncertainty as to the truth of what is being seen. I find fascinating how abstract patterns, when correlated with sound, create a score of sorts, become notation or text. One starts to latch sound onto image or vice-versa, and this perceptual process can be both reassuring or even synaesthetic, suggesting a kind of universal language through abstraction (cf. visual music or absolute film), but equally opens up to the difficulty of perceptual synchronicity, and the slipperiness of the code. In this film I was keen to use a very clear pattern of speech to ruffle up meaning, as the words, in being visualised as an abstract pattern which seems to correspond perfectly to its sound, suddenly look very different, written in a different mode of encryption as it were. Through the image pattern you start to hear things you don't listen to in the word itself, fricative

sounds, the materiality of a tongue against teeth. Likewise you start to read the words in relation to the Rorschach quality of the image, you project more figurative readings onto the abstract moving shapes but its constant shape-shifting gives the viewer nothing fixed to hold onto. Throughout the film the phrase 'open score' recurs and this is very much how the film is conceived. It is an open score, a mode of breaking into the fixity of script and allowing for the visuals and sounds to be read as a visual score, open to interpretation. The live musical element, which will change with each incarnation, further embodies this principle, so that the film is the score which the music or voice punctuates, responds to, interprets and subverts.

AC: In *Light Reading*, Rhodes quotes Gertrude Stein: "the process of seeing is inseparable from the process of saying". It could be said that that film seeks to propose a specifically female representation, both through voice over and image. Does *In and Out of Synch* also intend to raise questions of the unequal power relationships encoded both within spoken language and the visual language of cinema? Do you think much has changed since the 70s in this respect?

AS: The text definitely used as its starting point the question of voices unheard though not inaudible, though throughout the writing process we chose to remove any specific or literal references, so that it remained abstract. For me this concern was less explicitly gendered and more to do with a resistance to dogma, to authority and the predominance of one voice over another. But of course the female voice features and it is very much a dialogue between two women, talking about voices heard and unheard, and proposing a closer mode of attention. What I hope is apparent in the film is how those two voices explore the space between them, overlapping, pre-empting, interrupting and colliding, so that the speakers are both listening to each other and sharing a voice. This notion of sharing a voice was crucial in the development of the script.

AC: The piece involves both live elements (cello and voice) and a recorded voice over? How do these figure differently?

AS: The spoken word of the voice-over is what drives the film, and it was very important to me that it be two female voices, rather than a male voice or a male and female. What is seen becomes the abstract shapes of the voice, a sight probably most familiar to post-production audio technicians but for us rather unusual. These images are mostly used to monitor the quality of a sound recording. I have made

quite a few works which aim to get inside the technology at stake, be this phonographs or self-playing musical instruments. In this sense, not unlike structuralists, I like to expose the working of the cinematic machine. I am compelled by perceptual encounters with film, and ways of inhabiting the realm of illusion whilst undoing it. The live element, be this voice or musical instrument, serves as a counterpart, a way of both framing the film and accentuating its musical rhythm, attending to its suggestions and open-ness as a score. I deliberately wanted to keep the intelligible, comprehensible words exclusive to the film, whereas any vocal accompaniment is abstract utterances, sounds, gasps, chants. The chords of the cello and the chords of the voice are both coherent with the more general notion of vibration as a movement between points of tension, a destabilising of fixity and a constant oscillation between a number of elements, which resonate beyond themselves. The cello provides a drone sound which is key, it is an immersive sound which envelopes the listener, a sea of vibration which is never one single note, but rather many sounds within what appears to be one continuous sound. The overtones and beat frequencies provide an anchor, a complex line of continuity in which the voice marks out the gaps.

AC: How does the new work carry on some of the ideas you have explored in previous work? For example, I am thinking of *Sound Seam*, which took as its starting point Rilke's idea that you could collect a 'primal sound' by using a record needle to sound the fissures (coronal suture) in a human skull. I think his idea of a "contour... transformed, in another field of sense" relates also to your new work. When discussing poetry in that essay, he also, like Marshall McLuhan later in the century, thought that the modern European world had lost something by over-reliance on the visual sense. What would it be like, asked McLuhan, to organize ourselves around the auditory? In his experiment, Rilke imagined extending the separated "sense fields", but I am also drawn to his idea of the "abysses" that separate them in his diagram - the areas that are unknown to us, and how sound / image experiments might open these up. Is this something you have been thinking about?

AS: Yes, *Sound Seam* led very directly to this film, with a few others in between. I am very much drawn to this idea of the material world containing countless forms of unencoded sound, a sound which was not previously recorded but through using the right technology can be brought into speech and made audible. A recurring theme in my work is the notion of hidden codes or unknown agents inhabiting other objects or things. In the making of *Sound Seam* the grooves of wax cylinders and

acetate discs seen close-up revealed all manner of unexpected stroboscopic patterns which were in themselves very musical. After I made that film I started to look at early abstract film-makers such as Walter Ruttmann and Oskar Fischinger. Fischinger in particular was interested in experimenting with the optical soundtrack in order to produce drawn sound, 'sound ornaments', music created out of images. It was really the animator Norman McLaren who achieved this most successfully. Through this realm of interest I came across Daphne Oram and her Oramics machine, which used similar principles of turning drawings onto 35mm film strips into electronic music, but her concerns were not in creating films but rather composing music. This in turn led me to look at optical sound cameras and the way in which a very conventional soundtrack of a voice might be turned into a sound pattern. It is less an interest in synaesthesia or ways of understanding a sound/image fit, and more a way of testing the perceptual instability of an actual true image of the voice. *Sound Seam* opened up the definition of what constitutes a text, a sound trace or incision, and what might be decoded if we explore this possibility. *In and out of synch* proposes an inverted process, whereby we see a very clear code in the act of being written and encoded, and yet still it resists our reading, and rather than fixing the voice, it opens it up and generates more vibration, more instability, more tension between words. There are various formal gaps in the footage, between the 35mm stereo soundtracks (ie. one voice is left and the other is right), or in the stroboscopic flashes between glimpses of a 16mm mono soundtrack. These gaps are also in the pacing and spacing of the voices and their alternation. The words become constellations, always related yet not quite linear, and perception has to engage in joining the dots, making sense using the senses.

AC: Where for Rhodes, the experimentation becomes a question of producing a specifically female representation – a political question – in Rilke there is a concern with the lover and the poet, both grappling with mysterious descriptions, with a world beyond our immediate senses. I think in some of your work the sense emerges too of the fascination of the early witnesses to the new mechanical technologies of recording. Through our familiarity with electronic media, the magical, spiritual qualities and possibilities that Rilke and others discerned in these technologies, and even the languages they used around it, have been lost. For example, the voices of the dead persisting as a ghostly presence was one of the main uses Edison listed for the phonograph. Clearly, these qualities are not lessened now, but enhanced – it is only our over-familiarity with such technologies that has normalized and hidden their powers to access a world beyond the senses – ghosts, time travel,

hallucinations and so on. As Friedrich Kittler put it: Rilke's urgent demand to put under the needle and tryout a "variety of lines, occurring anywhere," to "complete [it] in this way and then experience it, as it makes itself felt, thus transformed, in another field of sense" is "realized every night in the combination of amplifier and oscillographic display." But, even though the modern rational West excludes such ideas from discourse, don't we encounter them all the time in what Kittler would have called our "media discourse networks" – these technological apparatuses working without our understanding, or even despite it? So that magic and hallucination have become the hidden support to our supposedly rational appraisal of reality?

AS: Yes, I agree with this although I think the interesting thing about magic and similarly technology is that even knowing how it is done does not undo its illusory qualities. We are somehow all the more enamoured of technologies that reveal a certain simplicity in their workings. I have made a talking book of sorts which uses a record needle attached to a book and a disc which one rotates manually. And even so a sound emerges, unstable, wobbly and eerie, but this simple act of amplifying a sound inscription never ceases to provoke wonderment in people. Not because the technology is sophisticated, but because, though rudimentary, it is still magical – a voice brought to life by the tip of a finger. That's also what I love about simple scientific instruments or acoustic devices, they demonstrate something rather magical about the material world.

AC: To bring my ramblings back the new work – I am interested what political and ethical capacities this reconfiguration of sound and image might contain for you?

AS: I would like to think of this film as a suggestion for a more heightened mode of perception, a closer mode of attention, and a more open reading of text as a score. Sound in itself can offer a different mode of listening, sharpening the senses, as the act of hearing is always full of doubt, for the most part seeking a visual anchor which accounts for its existence, latches the source onto the sound. Seeing sound or the visualisation of the acoustic enables one to address the challenge of reading, deciphering, engaging with verbal and visual language precisely through its discrepancies and misfits. I would like people to take from experience a questioning of the stability of words and narrative, a resistance to dogma, a challenge to authoritarian speech, and a greater emphasis on the way in which language can be opened up rather than closed down. The spoken word in this film focuses on the space between words, the constellation which is created between elements of a



dialogue, rather than the closure of a single dictatorial voice. I wanted to make a film which alters the state of perception, produces a phenomenological, sensory disorientation, and, in offering itself as a visual score, gives the viewer a freedom of interpretation. To me this seems the most ethical option.

---

[1] Lis Rhodes, "Flashback from a Partisan Filmmaker," in *Filmwaves* no. 6 (Winter 1998/99)

In and Out of Synch was co-commissioned by Arnolfini, Tate and ACE, and will be performed in early June at [Ny Musikk, Oslo](#)

---

<b>Arnolfini</b> 16 Narrow Quay Bristol BS1 4QA Box Office +44 (0)117 917 2300 Arnolfini is a registered charity (number 311504)	<b>Visit</b> Opening times Getting here Accessibility Schools & Tours Café Bar Bookshop Reading Room	<b>What's On</b> Today Exhibitions Performance Screenings Music Talks Family	<b>Resources</b> Blog Projects Podcast Vimeo YouTube Learning People Archive	<b>About</b> The Arnolfini Story Support Venue hire Jobs Booking Press Cookies Credits	<b>Connect</b> Contact Free e-newsletter Facebook Twitter Pinterest Instagram Google+ TripAdvisor	<b>Private</b> Log in
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

[Arnolfini.org.uk](#) uses cookies to make the site simpler. Find out more about [cookies](#).

AGREE