

SOUND DRAMATURGY

KERSTIN STUTTERHEIM

EDINBURGH NAPIER UNIVERSITY (UK)

Kerstin Stutterheim is a filmmaker and dramaturg as well as Professor for Creative Practice and Director of Research at the School of Arts and Creative Industries at Edinburgh Napier University. She has been teaching and publishing broadly in the field of film and media dramaturgy, her films are internationally recognized.

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Corresponding Author

Kerstin Stutterheim
K.Stutterheim@napier.ac.uk
Edinburgh Napier University
School of Arts and Creative Industries
Merchiston Campus
10 Colinton Road
Edinburgh
EH10 5DT

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Abstract

Sound dramaturgy as part of the aesthetic design of documentary films is invisible but most relevant, although often overlooked. The chapter gives a short introduction to dramaturgy and the importance of sound dramaturgy as most impactful for documentary film productions. The main discussion focusses on sound dramaturgy in films as *The End Of Time* (Mettler); *The Island Of The Hungry Ghosts* (Brady 2018), *The Wale And The Raven* (Leuze 2019) and *El Sembrador de Estrellas* (*The Sower of Stars*) by Lois Patiño. An analysis and discussion of the components of sound and music as part of the overall dramaturgical concept, the narrative flow, and their contribution to the final production and its sensual impact on the audience will allow a more informed understanding of such approach.

Keywords: Poetic Documentary; Sound; Sound Dramaturgy; narrative strategies.

Sound Dramaturgy for Documentaries

Dramaturgy is just as relevant for documentaries as it is for feature films, if not more so. Dramaturgical knowledge can considerably support and facilitate the development, planning, and production of documentaries. Above all, dramaturgical knowledge and advice can both save production time and enhance quality.

Aware of different interpretations of dramaturgy, a brief definition will serve contextualisation to begin with. Dramaturgy is a practice and also an academic discipline. As the latter, it is a sub-discipline of aesthetics. Aesthetics though "is a particular historical regime of thinking about art and an idea of thought according to which things of art are things of thinking" (Ranci re, 2011, p. 5).

One can describe dramaturgy as the art of thoughtful comprehension and logical abstraction of pattern of performative storytelling passed on through time. It reflects on and presents models and possibilities for action, expressing an embedded, implied, meaning implicit theme or aim. In the sense of being a regime of thinking, and thus a philosophical approach, dramaturgy applies to all elements of the aesthetic composition of a narrative-performative work in all its complexity – not only but starting from a treatment, screenplay, or concept. (Eisenstein, 2010; Freilich, 1964; Hasche, Kalisch, & Weber, 2014; Romanska, 2016a, 2016b; Stutterheim, 2015, 2019; cf. Szatkowski, 2019; Waisfeld, 1966) It can be characterised as a "practice-theory" and as such also "a reflective theory", "as production of and reflection on the communication of communications to society about society" (Szatkowski, 2019, p. 6).

Narrative-performative works – from theatre to movies, some games, and VR experiences – follow dramaturgically identifiable conventions, which vary in different regions primed by local traditions. In general, dramaturgy as a discipline contains conceptual knowledge of composition and structure

of artwork and aspects of its effect through performance, independent of local, historical or technical impacts. Dramaturgy hence can be understood as the 'dialectic of performative arts'. (cf. Stutterheim, 2019, p.15) The theory of dialectics is a form of thinking that is not content with the conceptual order but 'accomplishes a feat of correcting the conceptual order through the appearance of objects'. (Adorno, 2010, p. 18)

One can also describe dramaturgy as the art of shaping a work of art in such a way that it addresses an audience as captivating and convincing as possible. To achieve such an affect, it is necessary to be aware of the traditions and rules of an art form, its implicit and explicit levels of dramaturgy – as structural and associative aspects of the aesthetic design of an artwork (cf. Stutterheim, 2019, p. 37-54) and to bring expectations and novelty in correspondence to produce a captivating work of art, in our case documentary films. One of the core elements of the concept of dramaturgy is the principle of a balance between constant and variable components of a narrative-performative work, which evolved from tradition. Constant features provide stability and are relatively easily recognisable. These relate to our body experience, our human experience of reality, shaped by our perception as well as Cultural Memory (cf. J. Assmann, 2002, A. Assmann, 2010). Constant features are next to a story's beginning and ending, the elements of recognition – *Anagnorisis* – and reverse – *Peripeteia*. Variable elements are also derived from tradition and hence well-known and recognisable elements supporting a work's structure, but not necessarily in any case, such as, e.g. a conflict or a 'tragic moment'. As mentioned already, dramaturgy applies to all elements of the aesthetic composition of audio-visual, narrative-performative, and time-based works. The aim of a film production is to merge all aspects of the production into one consistent work. Dramaturgy respective the dramaturg can support to achieve this. Thus, a dramaturg ideally supports the whole production and is not restricted to one period or department. Nonetheless, in dramaturgy, one can abstract and focus on one particular aspect of a production, for example, the sound design.

When the aesthetic design of a documentary film gets addressed in reviews or award ceremonies, it is usually only the visual design discussed. With only a few exceptions, sound design gets less attention. Nonetheless, sound design is of outstanding importance for the effect of the image level, the overall narrative, and especially the dramaturgical consistency of a film. Not only sound designers but everyone experienced in film editing know of the relevance of sound design in giving the picture its visual level of narration, and hence its impact. All these aspects are shaped dramaturgically, consciously or unconsciously, by the filmmakers and their team when considering the rules of cinematic storytelling. Sound dramaturgy is part of this holistic approach. Accordingly, there are some aesthetic components in terms of sound design and composing music in film. As Eisler/Adorno already stated, this consists of the principle of 'not exhausting oneself in imitating the image process or its mood' but of allowing the scene's meaning to emerge. (Adorno & Eisler, 2006, p. 30)

In documentaries, usually applying an 'open form' – dramaturgically speaking (cf. Eco, 1989; Klotz, 1980; Szondi, 1987), sound dramaturgy is of high importance. Thus, the constant elements (Stutterheim, 2019, pp. 33–43) of film dramaturgy are also found on the level of sound design, in interaction with the image level. In most cases, sound design plays an important part in structuring the film, combining different storylines, or connecting places, to give the narrative a coherent appearance. Sound informs the audience about the atmosphere, place and time, and connectivity. It tells about familiar surroundings or warns about danger. It submits an understanding of the emotional and circumstantial states of a person or a situation. As it is common knowledge, we cannot close our ears in the way that we can close our eyes (cf. Schafer, 1994).

Sound is permanent and recognisable; it is more universal than visual signs. The sound of the wind or water, cracking ice, rain, for example, are very similar all over the world. The

same cannot be said for visual signs or colours, which might have different connotations in different regions. Hence, when developing the dramaturgy for a documentary film, the sound is as important as the visual level of narration. It might well be of higher impact. Sound dramaturgy is most relevant for giving a documentary its aesthetic appearance and hence emotional impact on the audience. To explain this in more detail, I have chosen a few examples, and will explore their sound dramaturgy.

First example is Peter Mettler's film *The End of Time* (Mettler, CN/CH 2012).¹ From a dramaturgical point of view, sound and music play an important role in this film 'about perception and awareness. It offers a challenge to see through our conceptual thinking' (Mettler 2012: 5). Mettler discovers the perception and reception of time and how concepts of time influence our lives. He directed the film as an audio-visual composition (Entrevue, 2012). The film first tunes the viewer into concepts of time, but then leaves the world of ideas and takes them through an experience of time, which is not unlike that of listening to music, with the intention to provoke a heightened awareness and associative thinking process (Mettler 2012). Sound and music give this film its narrative/dramaturgical stability and at the same time also provide surprises, intensifying our attention. The sound design enhances the spatial impression, conveys the dimension of time, and has within it a dramaturgical development that works into the overall dramaturgy of the film.

The film's quality is defined by both the cinematography and the sound-music-design. The sonic composition of the first sequence demonstrates this clearly. We are presented with archive footage of the American astronaut, Joe Kittinger, as he jumps from a balloon at the edge of space, to which a sound collage give the impression of experiencing this fall. The sound design here transforms the feelings Kittinger remembers from this jump into an associative sound – a

1 I wrote about aspects related about this film and others in: *Music as an Element of Narration in Poetic Documentaries* (Stutterheim (2018))

spherical sound, breathing through an apparatus, wind. The sonic design is inspired by Techno music, which Mettler sees as 'emblematic of the digital age, so it's interesting to see this digital form come out of this wasteland of the industrial age' (Anderson 2012). These thoughts about Techno music become most evident in the Detroit-Sequence (60–65 minutes into the film), but are true for the film's entire sonic concept. Mettler composed a 'dense and intricately designed soundtrack, which integrates natural sources with original music by a variety of composers including Autechre, Thomas Köner and Plastikman (the latter's alter ego Richie Hawtin is also featured as an onscreen subject)' (Anderson, 2012). As it is common for documentary films and further emphasised by the following examples too, sequences that are supported by tonal design/music are alternated by sequences using ambient sounds. This aesthetic approach allows to emphasise on experienced reality as it was observed in the situation represented – as the outbreak of the volcano and the observation of the lava masses that carve their path. For such sequences depicting natural phenomena, Mettler mixes atmospheric sound with electronic music, which amplifies what the audience sees, such as the thunderstorm (27–28 minutes in) or the lava sequence (at 39 and 41- 46 minutes). He also decided that music which seems organic to one situation can be abstracted and used in another, which may be disconnected in time and space. In that way he was able to establish a correspondence and dramaturgical consistency, by connecting the VJ-sequence with the Detroit-sequence, thus supporting explicit and implicit levels of dramaturgy. Here, not only is the musical design concretely integrated into the plot, but also, in a dramaturgical sense, a moment of recognition and understanding is achieved for this level of narration. Such conceptual design, the dramaturgical approach, allows the reflection about experiencing the moment, the interaction of being human and machines, the virtual and real world. Altogether, the soundtrack of this film is a conceptual framework, stabilising the dramaturgical concept within an open form, which Mettler described this way:

In physics, when particles collide, they go out in a sphere. According to the Big Bang Theory, that's what created our universe, so everything in the universe is spherical. So it makes sense that you would make something round to meditate upon. It went up a notch when my friend Bruno Degazio and Christos Hatzis created this audiovisual composition called Harmonia (Mettler integrates it into the 'Mixxa'sequence). It's actually a picture of harmonics: there are 64 harmonics in all and each time there's an added harmonic, you get a line. So the second harmonic connects two points on the circle, the third harmonic three points on the circle, the fourth four, and so on up to 64. And you hear each of those harmonics as well. This goes back to ideas of Plato and the Music of the Spheres. So all this stuff started intertwining conceptually and visually – I don't have a thesis about it, but there seem to be a lot of relationships with these spherical patterns that we use in science and religion and now music as well. You start to connect all these dots together and offer that to the viewer as an experience, as part of the meditation.

(Anderson, 2012).

The combination of sound combined with music and a focus on ambient sound is grounded in the tradition of poetic documentary. One of the early examples here is *The Man with the Movie Camera*, for which Vertov already collaged ambient sound and music.

A variation of this approach is primary for Gabrielle Brady's hybrid documentary *The Island of the Hungry Ghosts* (Bradly, D/ UK/AU 2018). For this production, Gabriele Brady worked with sound designer Leo Dolgan and composer Aaron Cupples. Here too, the combination of original sounds and music composed for the film gives it its special expression and a condensed impression of experienced reality. Dolgan mentions that his biggest task when approaching "a film is to understand the story in all dramaturgy levels, so we can argue what

sounds or what does not sound how this sound or silence are going to sound.” (L. Dolgan, personal communication, June 16, 2022)

The core theme, the point of convergence transporting the essential meaning (cf. Stutterheim, 2019, p. 73), of the film is the situation of migrants in the detention camp on Christmas Island. Their situation can be compared to imprisonment. Here, the main character, trauma therapist Poh Lin Lee meets a few of the migrants suffering from traumatic experiences. The acoustics of the therapy room mirrors the situation of being separated from the world. Here, the slightest sounds, such as suppressed sobs, stroking through the sand in the box, silence, take on meaning and come to the fore.

“*Island of the Hungry Ghosts* is a film with a rich audio-visual language, sometimes daily contemporary style, sometimes fiction staging, sometimes pure experimental ... So sound has to play the same way. With therapy there is no choice, you need silence, nothing to disturb, it is a place you are invited to listen, so please be respectful and don't eat popcorn during this.” (L. Dolgan, personal communication, June 16, 2022) The silence of the therapy room gets contrasted with the sound of the sea, the sound of crabs moving, of the forest, thus presenting the basic conflict of the film through sound. The transformation of the haptic interaction of the migrants with the sand from the beach as part of the therapy situation allows the addressing of implicit dramaturgy applying visual and sonic references (Rohmer, 2000; Stutterheim, 2015, pp. 42–48; cf. Stutterheim, 2019, 49/50). The explanation of the sand and its usage connects the therapy room with the outside world, the island. Situations at the beach and in the forest, in contrast, are characterised by overlapping sounds, a diversity that reflects both vastness, power of nature, and the geography of the island. Dolgan emphasises that the different sounds of the island were “key to push contrast”. (L. Dolgan, June 16, 2022) He describes the experience of the Island as “a special place” due to “the brutal nature, something jurassic and quite unique” and the experience of a kind of paradise at the same

time. “During shooting (...) the contrast between the island's beauty and the shadow of the detention center was so huge, so evident, that we were pretty sure the Island was going to be a character by itself. So we spent lot of time recording sounds to identify every place, every community, every event. Prayers, whispering, voices, chanting, crabs in all cain of terrain, brown bobbies, bats, baby birds, nights, days, forests, jungles, two way radios... (...) I remember to spent hours in the blowholes cliffs during storm at night with brave sea and the mics inside the rocks to get the most isolated, close and big sounds.” (L. Dolgan, personal communication, June 16, 2022)

Sound design and music enrich each other, are conceptualised, and mixed in a fluid transition. Moreover, the composer carefully includes elements of ambient sound which are part of a different situation. Cupples described his approach as follows:

Drawing on discussions with director Gabrielle Brady, I began to perceive the island itself as the protagonist, with its own ancient rhythms and cycles set against the transitory human stories it endures. It was my intention to give voice to the island through the score. Imagining what this might sound like, emanating from deep within the landscape, I settled on a handmade long-string instrument. This single 13-foot long wire was tuned, bowed, and electromagnetically oscillated to create slowly evolving textures and deep layers of resonance. From this foundation, the score introduces rhythm inspired by traditional Chinese festival drumming and chanting of Buddhist nuns recorded on Christmas Island by sound recordist Leo Dolgan. Working closely with him, the score is intentionally kept dark in timbre to allow a merging with the intricate nature recordings, which often play simultaneously with the score. As the film's narrative unfolds, harmonic movement and finally melody emerge, bringing a theme to the human stories. Their life rhythms and cycles interwoven with those of the island. (Cupples, 2019)

Thus, sound design and composition interconnect the contrasting elements and levels of narration. Altogether, the aesthetic and dramaturgical consistency of the film supports one of the basic rules of dramaturgy – to surprise within familiarity. Also applied is one of the traditional dramaturgical structures for a documentary film: attracting an audience to an enfolding situation, which is not hero-driven or resulting from a personal, private or for the protagonist existential conflict. Such a dramaturgical approach contrasts situations, opinions, or positions, thus working within a dialectical or dialogical arrangement. (Stutterheim, 2023) Whereas, this is to be emphasised here, different dramaturgical concepts can be combined – as it is here the basic concept of ‘analytical drama’ and the dialectic approach.

The first sequence - as a re-enacted situation of an escape - appears like the beginning of an action thriller or almost a horror film already defining the geography by the prominent sound of a Baby Brown Boobie. Leo Dolgan wanted “to present the place as it is. A creepy lonely place for a fugitive slipping away and running at night with nowhere to go. The screaming were also recorded in the jungle to have the real acoustics and mixed with artificial reverb in post to make it more loneliness, there’s nothing scarier than when the only answer you get it your own echo.” (L. Dolgan, personal communication, June 16, 2022) Since this is an untypical, surprisingly upbeat for a documentary, in its design, not the topic, it attracts the interest of a broad audience (or turns the purists off). This impression of a genre movie gets broken in the following scene when the car radio, which the therapist listens to, reports on the escape of a person from the camp. This situation can be identified as application, consciously or subconsciously, of one of the traditional dramaturgical patterns of the structure of an ‘analytical drama’, hence starting with a secret in danger to be revealed or an event of immense impact requiring an investigation. By positioning these two scenes in relation to each other, we are introduced to the theme, the place, and the protagonist. At first emotionally touching, through a situation that seems dramatic,

culminating in a scream; then confronted by a neutrally spoken news message reporting just such a situation. With the observation of the therapist listening to the news, we arrive at the gate leading into this high-secured detention camp. These first minutes give a good impression of the overall design of the film - an alternation of emotionally touching situations and then again distanced observations, allowing a familiar explicit dramaturgical structure to appear. This signals to the audiences’ associative, ‘slow thinking’ (Kahneman, 2012) that although the story enfolding introducing us to – for most of the audience – unknown territory, can be trusted. The overall attractive aesthetic impression might result from this combination of well-planned and non-scripted elements of observation. This mirrors, again, in the sound design, also, as Dolgan emphasises, the main challenge of making a documentary is the ability to be in the moment and at the same time anticipating situations. “The rest of the recording was more conventional in terms of non-scripted sound recording, mic up everyone you can, stop all the noises you can stop, get the boom as close as possible and try to anticipate the future. Anticipate the future is the most important thing during shooting.” (L. Dolgan, personal communication, June 16, 2022)

The film is structured over three narrative levels - the level of the migrants within the camp with the therapist as the ‘central protagonist’ (cf. Stutterheim 2019, p 69/70), that of the therapist and her family representing a life the refugees might hope for. In parallel, there are the levels of the migrating crabs and of the history of the island. This relation of the different aspects related around the core theme, get already well introduced in the third sequence, when the therapist drives along the road, the first crabs travelling on the road too. The sonic design of that situation is a collage of nature sound and music. Bells can already be heard very inconspicuously in this sound collage, foreshadowing the middle section of the film observing a ritual to appease the hungry ghosts of the island by feeding them to lower their anger. This technique prepares the mind of the audience for

the situation happening later, which prompted or echoed through this dramaturgical technique no longer seems to be unconnected or to belong to a different part of the narration. Thus, the sound dramaturgy of alternating sequences primed by ambient sound and those dominated by specifically composed music give the film its overall rhythm. The composer referred in his work to the sound experiences relevant on the Island and for the story told.

As the film's narrative progresses and we get more involved with the human stories, this 'humanity' is reflected in the score with melodic and chordal moments, a nod towards more conventional scoring ideas. This culminates in the last piece, 'Sand Return', which is very much centered around the experience of protagonist Poh Lin as she returns the sand she worked with in her therapy practice to the sea, and this piece feels much more like familiar traditional score music, but still with the undertone of Long-String drones to ground it with the island's thematic sounds, and hopefully remind us that the human stories, the migrating crabs, and the island's ecology, are inextricably intertwined. (Cupples, 30.07.22)

The approach described above intertwines these two different levels of sound design, which in the reception seem to be contrasting and emphasising the conflict. This artistic concept of incorporating defining elements of ambient sound relevant for the different levels of the action into the music gives the music its special dramaturgical power to organically connect all narrative levels of the film.

Both directors and their teams of these two examples discussed above, *The End of Time* and *The Island of the Hungry Ghosts*, apply sound dramaturgy to combine episodes and levels of narration. Sound design informs about space and time and is part of implicit dramaturgy by combining ambient sound with sounds designed for referencing and adding metaphors.

Although such an approach within the sound design is partially true for the following example, the sound dramaturgy of *'The Whale and the Raven'* by Mirjam Leuze is of different relevance. Within this film, sound is central to the constellation of the central conflict the film is about. Or, as Hegel defined such a situation, sound is part of the impetus, the initial incident causing the narration. This incident is relevant for starting a plot. The string of events result from it. Such an incident can be a particular challenge that neither the protagonists nor the narrators themselves have brought about or caused. (Hegel, 1971, p. 295) An incident not triggered by the protagonist but requiring their reaction/action, is the typical starting situation, dramaturgically speaking, for an epic, poetic narrative. (Hegel, 2003) Such a constellation is typical for a documentary.

Director Mirjam Leuze has known one of the two protagonists, Hermann Meuter, for some time already. She knew about his research focus and the region his work is situated within. But it was a specific occasion, as defined as an inciting incident, that changed the whole situation and posed a challenge that led to the conflict the protagonists face and consequent challenges that the film explores. The change of circumstance is primarily of an acoustic nature. The event takes place in an area close to the research station located in Canada, in an area where whales come to calve. Janie Wray, the other protagonist, calls it 'the whale kindergarden'. The two scientists undertake research on whales, Janie Wray specialises on orcas, and Hermann Meuter on humpbacks. One area of research, the one relevant to the conflict, consists of identifying and analysing the whale's voices, their communication structures, and the sound level of the bay. The new constellation that forms the conflict results from a planned route for tankers to transport fracked oil from Canada through the bay and across the oceans to other regions of the world. Accordingly, in the first sequence the audience gets confronted with a monotonous metallic sound that Herman records in the observation station, a moment later turning the receiver off in frustration. That tanker noise spreads far across the sea

to the point where one cannot see the ship any longer. This sound conflict the film is based on, is core to several constellations of situations and their representation within the film, significant for its dramaturgical structure.

Physically, Herrmann lives on earth, outside the water, but acoustically under water, with his ears in the sea. It is his perspective that is adapted for the film. The actual law restricts humans from being in the water at the same time as the whales are, this also has an effect on how the film is conceptualised. Consequently, the two researchers repeatedly emphasise how important it is to them to observe the whales from the shore. And, knowing this fact, the conflict of acoustic intrusion by the big tankers, becomes extraordinarily powerful.

Mirjam Leuze introduces us to the world of whales and the sea, supported by the sound recordists Brent Calkin, Tyler Lucas, Millar Montgomery and sound designer Andreas Hildebrandt. She worked with three different sound recordists, two white Canadian and one with an indigenous background from the area. Although we know that every member of the team is primed by their background and education, Mirjam Leuze remembers how different the perspective and hence recording made by Tyler Lucas was, who for example focussed more on the detailed sound of the nature, no matter how small and seemingly secondary. The director and her team decided that the film would only use sounds originally recorded in the area, no additional sound recordings from a library.

Consequent from the recordings, the editor, Sandra Brandl, made sure that every space kept its specific sound quality. To give one example, there is one scene, in which Janie Wray early in the morning observes the sea using her spot box. Everything is calm and still, but the spot box makes some noise. Through the present noise resulting from moving the box, the stillness becomes emphasised. (Stutterheim & Leuze, 2022)

To the director, it was important to separate the sound of the nature and that of the humans. Other than with the examples discussed above, for the composed music, no material of the natural world, including the song of the whales, was included in the composition. In the final sequence, when the camera is observing the whales from above one could assume to hear the whales, but the composition reflects on the experience of listening to whales. The composer Jesse Zubot refers to the world presented but did not include any of the nature sounds. Leuze emphasises that they decided to respect the natural world and they did not want to include any material or recording for which they could not obtain consent. Like the songs of whales, for example. (Stutterheim & Leuze, 2022) The Inuit, who agreed that the film could be made on their territory, emphasised that every story has an owner. If you want to use these stories, you should make authorship clear and give something in return. The film team adhered to this.

To summarise the dramaturgical specifics of sound design of this film: the conflict core to the story of this documentary, as well as the position of protagonists and everyone involved, is represented through or related to sound. The contrast of stillness, whale voices, and man-made noise represents the conflict constellation and allows an open form structure. The sound design defines the *chronotopos* – relationship of space and time – of the film and supports hence the explicit level of dramaturgy. This dramaturgical concept addresses the basic urge of the audience to be supported by familiar aspects, allowing them to orientate in a space most of the members of the audience have not visited or experienced themselves. But, the arrangement of the sounds of places within the human world provide a connection to almost everyone's experiences and orientation. Thus, the familiar gets combined with elements of novelty, which are arranged in a form based in dramaturgically traditioned pattern and principles.

In the third example, *Aquarela* (Kossakovsky, UK/D/ DK/US 2018), Kossakovsky did not want to talk *about* water, nor observe it from a safe distance. Kossakovsky approaches and

presents water as a character with a right on its own, having 'a voice'. Above all, through the technical and aesthetic implementation of this concept, he aimed to achieve that water and its forms of appearance shall not be presented as nature domesticated by man. His concept was to portray water in various manifestations, to show its power and strength, its character.

Water may not have conventional motivation but it does have cycles rife with dramatic structure. "Water cannot have a human narrative, but it has its own narrative," Kossakovsky describes. "Water is always changing. Water is flying up into the sky, becoming clouds and then reappearing as a lake. It's an unbelievable creature and when you know this creature, you respect its destructive power and are mystified by its beauty."

While preparing to shoot, Kossakovsky consulted with a roster of scientists and environmental leaders to better comprehend his subject. But he chose not to film any or include any factual data in his film. Instead, he left behind all that he learned and headed into production trying to cultivate a sense of open unknown, of questing without answers. (Venice Film Festival, 2018, p. 9)

To achieve this, he and the cinematographer he collaborated with, filmed impressive visuals in 96 frames per second – as *The Hobbit* (Jackson, NZ/US 2012-2014) –, not in the usual frame rate of 24 frames per second. His sound designer Alexander Dudarev recorded the corresponding sounds, supporting the visual level. The sound design is supported by a score to give the film its aesthetic power. Within the first act, the audience get immersed into the film by the sound of breaking ice, for example, which instinctively triggers an instinctive warning sensation. To allow the composition to intensify the sound dramaturgy, Kossakovsky searched for music to complement the original sounds (Venice Film Festival, 2018). To make his production distinct from most of the nature films

known to the audience, he was not looking for soft, beguiling, or illustrative music. He was interested in underlining the impression he had already captured visually. With this film, he also wanted to draw attention to the consequences of climate change. The power of water should definitely be expressed aesthetically. We are dependent on water, human bodies consist of a high percentage of water, but water as an element is stronger than man and also mankind, as demonstrated in this documentary. It was this combination of proximity and danger, Kossakovsky was hoping to find adequate sound for. The compositions of Eicca Toppinen and his Metallica band *Apocalyptika*, which combine classical music and metallic rock, featuring the cello, met his expectations.

The film starts with an aerial shot of the frozen lake, along with music by Metallica, then goes into a very long observational sequence in which a group of people are looking for something. Now, you hear the ice crunching, moving, crashing and also thawing. One fears for the rescue team, who are moving on thin ice close to the breaking point. To maintain this tension, those original sounds were intensified, most likely reverbed in postproduction. There is little talking. Music only resumes when the car that had collapsed through the ice gets pulled out and placed on logs to be transported away. At that moment, one – and the film team too – observe more cars driving in the background over the thin ice. One observes one of these cars, the driver not able to hear voices shouting 'Stop' from afar, also breaks through the ice. Again, the rescue team has to search for a submerged car and try to hack it free; this situation is also initially presented only with ambient sound.

The sound of ice moving, thawing and breaking up, but also the re-emerging of ice accompanies the following sequence, which leads away from Lake Baikal. It is a condensed, intensified travel under and above the ice onto Iceland. Emphasised by sound design combining the sound of thawing ice with that of the wind - we observe pieces that broke away from an iceberg moving on the water in the rhythm of the waves. With the ship sailing along the landscape of icebergs, the roar

of the breaking ice sounds threatening, only to change into a loud rumbling of the wall breaking off and sliding into the lake. Added to this is the agitated chirping of a flock of birds that fly away, startled. The sound design of the various noises that culminate here is what gives the excellent and captivating picture level its dramatic quality. It is the sound that makes the enormity of the icebergs breaking apart and sliding into the sea comprehensible. At the same time, the tonality also lends the events a threatening atmosphere since none of these sounds could be described as pleasant or soothing. Dominating are low tones, hissing and scraping noises. After a few minutes, this collage of nature is complemented by the music of Metallica, which picks up on the rhythm of the calving iceberg, translating it into an alarming musical sequence. In this way, the sounds and music intertwine and allow us to gain a little distance from the maelstrom-like death scene of an iceberg.

In contrast, as we briefly observe the helmswoman of the sailing ship working hard to keep the ship en route, we hear the sounds of the mechanics of the ship, the technology of the world of men, before the gaze and the sound move back to the surface of the sea covered by ice floes of various sizes, in which we see another large chunk of a broken iceberg slowly sinking, also underscored by sounds of dew and the deep sounds made by the plunging iceberg. Here again, the sound of the human world gets contrasted with that of the natural world.

In the subsequent scene, the camera dives under water and glides along the iceberg. The sounds are somewhat muffled now, but still audible as a threatening rumble and a thunderous splash. Which works as a contrast. The sound of thawing ice does not take on a positive tone in this context, in none of these many sequences.

When resurfacing again, flowing water breaks through the surface and makes its way through the layers of melting ice. The entire sequence is dominated by the sounds of

breaking ice and the birds' reaction to it. This natural sound gets contrasted by that of a motorboat's monotonous and loud sound. Nevertheless, that of the breaking ice masses is of higher intensity. In the following situation, the sounds of a hand-operated siren, descending glacier water, howling dogs, and the sound of icebergs get into a dialogue. These get replaced by the sound of dolphins or whales surfacing and jumping back into the sea. Sounds of the ocean waves mix with the persistent sound of melting water. You hear the force of the waves, as progressive movement on the one hand, but also irregular, unpredictable, intensifying and changing as waves and currents collide. Added to this is wind, and the sounds of the boat and the rudder. Over the onset of rain pattering on the ocean waves, amplified by a short music sequence, back to the noise of heavy rain pattering on the waves. Very slowly, with the ship in the wind, music fades in again, complementing the original sounds, which seem to have been sampled, reverbed, and amplified, to then lead into an impressive scene of huge ocean waves. Most impressive is the six minutes long sequence observing and admiring the power of a monster wave. First, again, atmospheric sound underlies the powerful appearance, and the music later adds to this enormous impression a more abstract and distancing gesture. By stepping thus out of the immersive situation, Kosakovsky changes the topic, area, and shape of water again. Here, the motif of rain becomes the new appearance of water, which leads into the next sequence: a flooded region, a flooded cemetery. This next act is dominated by rain and running water. We hear squalls, whistling wind, mean sound of wind hitting buildings and alarms, waves, alarms, falling masses of water, more alarm sounds, sirens, see and hear a dam break, helicopters. The alarms sound continuously as no one can do anything or turn them off, this reminds us of the futility of these warnings when everything is already determined by the unleashed water against which people can do absolutely nothing. The final sequence/act introduces one of the most impressive waterfalls one can find on earth. We can observe a few people covered behind the curtain of falling water and walking to cross behind it. A bird in a nest

is also placed behind this waterfall. All these different manifestations culminate in a rainbow.

As for the examples introduced above, in this documentary, *Aquarela*, again the sound dramaturgy gives the film its coherence and is core to the dramaturgical structure. The sound not only impacts the character but every situation. Sound allows the arrangement and introduction of different aspects of the character of the protagonist, the water. Moreover, as already discussed above, it connects the diverse situations, allows to build up suspense, and to tell a story. Although there are only a few sentences spoken in this documentary, the sound design makes the voice and hence appearance of this protagonist consistent. It seems consequent and adequate to avoid an interpretation and a narration pretending an understanding of a world, we cannot verbally communicate with or translate in human language. The film portraits water in some of its manifestations, but it also portraits our otherness, our position as small and dependent in relation to this powerful part of nature. That might be a new experience for some members of the audience who are used to feeling in charge and independent from nature. Consequently, the documentary allows an intuitive and immersive experience of the power we challenge through climate change.

Overall, regarding sound dramaturgy in this film, it can be summarised, that the respective sequences and acts follow a certain rhythm in the sound design providing dramaturgical consistency. Sequences begin with observations and ambient sound. The sound level then gradually intensifies to draw the audience's attention to the particularity of the manifestation of the water. Very carefully and rather unobtrusively, music floats into the sound design, to then dominate for another scene before the next sequence or act begins. Music also marks a change of act and location. However, this does not get applied throughout, so the design does not seem mechanical and maintains the moment of surprise and specialness in an emerging structure. Consequently, the sound design supports the level of explicit dramaturgy by providing structure

and rhythm, relating the sound design to sounds we – as an audience – can connect to from our experience of the environment we live within. Since the situations depicted in *Aquarela* are mostly out of reach for the common audience, it presents a new, unfamiliar experience within a familiar setting. Kossakovski applies principles of avantgarde films, as *Regen* (Ivens & Franken, NL 1929/1941), *Enthusiasm* (Vertov, 1931), or *Images d'Ostende* (Storck, BE 1929) onto a contemporary documentary.

El sembrador de estrellas (The Sower of Stars) by Lois Patiño Another is an example for a very different use of sound design. Here, the director combines a visual narration with a dialogue not rooted in any real sequence, no actors. This poetic documentary can be situated in a tradition following *Manhatta* (US 1921). The director might also be inspired by Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (Marker, F 1983). The spoken dialogue, dominant for the narration, is connected to the visual level of the film but distanced. When in *Sans Soleil* the author using the French tradition of epistolary novel for reflecting on the situation presented, in *The Sower of the Stars*, the spoken narration is disembodied and associated with spiritual experiences. Patiño constructs that dialogue of possible characters arriving and leaving Tokyo 'from a certain poetic crypticism inspired by the koan-mystical teachings of Zen Buddhism' (LIGHTS ON, 2022). The structure and rhythm of the combination of spoken words, a collage of ambient sound, and the visual narration gives this short but epic film its particular aesthetic, aiming for contemplation and imagination. The dramaturgical focus aims for a rhythm and zen-logic within the dialogue. Everything else, the visual narration as well as sound design supports the level of spoken word. Sound design serves here the concept presented through words, it aims for a spiritual experience by offering an arrangement that gives the aesthetic an appearance of translucidity.

Although these are a few selected examples, they might demonstrate the importance of sound dramaturgy for producing a documentary. None of the sounds or music choices

are just accidental or micky mousing material. Sound is dramaturgically relevant and contributes to the story told in each of these films even though they represent different styles of documentary filmmaking. In particular for documentary films, sound dramaturgy supports the use of open form, of a dramaturgy primed by a theme and thus reflecting on an experience of reality.

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