Fasten Your Seatbelts and Prick Up Your Ears: The Dramatic Human Voice in Film

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1. Introduction

"Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy night!" This is one of Bette Davis's finest lines of dialogue, from Joseph L. Mankiewicz's film *All About Eve* (1950). It is a line delivered by Davis with relish, style and supreme confidence. Her voice is firm and steady, sustaining a deep throaty resonance, husky (not quite croaky), suggestive of weariness, even cynicism. This is the voice of experience. The statement itself comes in two parts. The first advises caution and the second delivers a threat. Consequently, the first part is made up of three relatively long words, producing soft sounds with drawn-out vowels and fricative consonants (f, s), pronounced with a slight drawl and a snide inflection. "Fasten" becomes "festen," the mangled, distorted vowel striking an off note, whilst the sibilance at the end of "seatbelts" produces a hiss, suggestive of a venomous snake. It is all just a little bit twisted, whereas the second part of the line is decidedly bitter. The tone is altogether harsher, the pronunciation more emphatic. Each word of "it's going to be a bumpy night!" is articulated with precision. It produces a more fragmented sound with a jerky (or bumpy) rhythm. Here Davis uses her trademark clipped pronunciation, her upper class New England accent lending her an air of superiority and sophistication. Each word is struck solidly and sharply, with shorter vowels and emphatic consonants, including labials (b, p) nasals (m, n) and a dramatic stop at the end (t or t!). The overall effect of this line is a slow sustained build (creating tension), answered by a dramatic pause (for suspense), and then swiftly followed by a staccato rhythm, punchy and percussive. When the threat is delivered it is rather like being repeatedly poked in the ear, the final emphatic "t" replicating a resounding sharp flick of a finger against the ear. Ouch! It is a magical movie moment: compelling and fascinating; totally unrealistic, totally theatrical, yet totally convincing. Whatever feeling of awkwardness might be caused by the sheer artifice (or, better still, phoniness) of this dialogue is swept away by Davis's commanding performance, her command of body and voice, her conviction in what she is saying and her ability to say it with style. It might not be naturalism but it is credible, pleasurable and most certainly dramatic. As such, it represents simultaneously one of the high points of the movie, of Bette Davis's film career and of classical Hollywood cinema. The ability to deliver a line such as this, in this way and with this affect, marks Davis out as a consummate screen performer: her vocal technique being as polished and pronounced as her physical gestures, bodily movements and facial expressions. All of these are artfully combined to make the line work.

Film critics and scholars are becoming increasingly alert to the significance of the film actor's voice. For instance, David Bromwich, writing an appreciation of James Stewart in the *London Review of Books* in 2002, made the following statement:

> One thing a casual observer learns to love, if he is going to like Stewart at all, is a kind of stammer that trips in naturally and convincingly – a signature

> touch he seldom allowed to pass into self-parody until his late fifties. An anomaly almost as emphatic is the frequent decision to speak in a soft voice, always with perfect clarity and conveying a range of available senses for words. Stewart does this often in intimate scenes with women, but not only with them, and it shows the passage from theatre to a broader naturalist domain of feeling that movies uniquely made possible. Even now, when fewer actors bring the wrong kind of theatricality from stage to screen, the freedom to modulate a speaking voice downward is rarely grasped; and if you listen to the better-known stars of the 1930s and 1940s, only a select company of them appear to have glimpsed and taken the opportunity: Ida Lupino, Barbara Stanwyck, Henry Fonda – were there many more? Even within that group, Stewart is exceptionally resourceful. His voice can be put in the service of feelings as they bubble slowly from confusion to clarity. Or it can be used to signal the intimation of half-thoughts, shadowy promptings of a kind that only a first-rate writer may catch in words. (Bromwich, 2002: 3)

This statement contains a direct question. It asks the reader to think about all those famous Hollywood stars from the 1930s and 1940s and to identify those who spoke in a specific way: softly but clearly, intimately but so as to be heard perfectly by an audience. This is an invitation to scholars researching classical Hollywood stars to pay careful attention to their voice as well as their image. Increasingly, film critics are doing this, hence the first part of Philip Kemp's *Sight & Sound* article on Hollywood actor Claude Rains describes the qualities and the genesis of his unforgettable voice, "Rich, throaty, hinting at infinite reserves of sophisticated irony – the voice of reassuring authority or equally of urbane villainy." (Kemp, 2005: 32) More and more, it would seem that film critics and scholars are paying close attention to the subtle cadences and nuances of film voices. They are also recognising the profound consequences of such subtle features when magnified by microphones and speakers, understanding the actor's allure to lie, in part at least, with the sound of their voice.

This attention to the voice of actors and stars is partly due to a growing interest in the subject of film sound and an increasing sound consciousness among film writers and scholars. Over the last few years a number of books have been published on film sound and a series of conferences have been devoted to sound. Until recently, the leading publications in English on film sound had been three edited book collections: Elizabeth Weis and John Belton's *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (1985), Rick Altman's *Sound Theory, Sound Practice* (1992) and Vincent LoBrutto's *Sound-on-Film* (1994). The French filmmaker, composer, theorist and critic Michel Chion has played a pioneering role in the development of film sound theory, his book *L'Audio-Vision*, first published in French in 1990, appeared in English in 1994. The available literature on film sound has recently been supplemented by David Sonnenschein's *Sound Design* (2001), Larry Sider, Diane Freeman and Jerry Sider's edited collection *Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures 1998-2001* (2003) and Philip Brophy's *100 Modern Soundtracks* (2004). Since 1998, the School of Sound has provided a dedicated forum for sound practitioners, theorists, critics and students from around the world. So far, the School of Sound has organised six symposia (1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003 and 2005). In 2002 and 2004, another forum was held: Sounding Out also brought sound theorists and practitioners together from many different countries in order to exchange ideas, experiences and opinions. These events, combined with a growing roster of dedicated publications and websites (e.g. www.filmsound.org) have been steadily raising the academic profile of film sound over the last few years. One consequence is an increasing interest in aspects of film sound amongst students, resulting in several PhDs, such as Rayna Denison's project on the

star voices used for the English language versions of Japanese anime (University of Nottingham) [*Editor's note:* see Rayna Denison, "Disembodied Stars and the Cultural Meanings of *Princess Mononoke's* Soundscape" *Scope: An Online Journal of Film Studies*, 3 (November 2005) http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/article.php?issue=3&id=83]. The use of star voices in animated feature films is gaining increasing interest, prompted partly by the huge commercial success of films such as *Toy Story* (1995), with the voices of Tom Hanks and Tim Allen, and *Shrek* (2001), with the voices of Mike Myers and Eddie Murphy.

The voice has become a major area of investigation within the larger field of sound studies and publications, conference papers and PhD projects have been dedicated specifically to the subject of the film voice. For instance, Vicky Lowe (University of Manchester) recently completed a PhD on the British screen actor Robert Donat, concentrating specifically on his vocal technique. Whilst aspects of this work will be published as book chapters in forthcoming publications, Lowe has given several conference papers on this subject, including one at Sounding Out 2 (University of Nottingham, July 2004). Here she explored the subtleties of Donat's subdued vocal style, largely a result of acute asthma, in the film *Knight Without Armour* (1937).

To date, many of the published studies of the voice in film have concentrated largely on dialogue. This has included investigations into the way different styles of dialogue have developed over time and predominated within specific genres (see Sarah Kozloff, *Overhearing Film Dialogue* [2000], and Maria DiBattista, *Fast-Talking Dames* [2001]). But there is much more to the voice than dialogue. The dramatic human voice heard in film does not have to be eloquent or articulate. It may not even be used to articulate words at all. The sounds emitted from the human throat and mouth produce profound and powerful effects when recorded by modern sensitive microphones and reproduced in the sonic playground that is the modern movie theatre (see Sergi 2001). Scholars of film sound are increasingly concerned with how vocal sounds are produced, how they are recorded and reproduced and how audiences respond to them. Some have also identified the need for a more precise vocabulary and conceptual framework with which to analyse and describe speaking voices. This issue lay at the heart of the keynote paper on the voice at Sounding Out 2 (July 2004), delivered by the writer, critic and broadcaster, Anne Karpf, who is currently working on a book on the human voice (due to be published by Bloomsbury in the UK and USA in June 2006).

The participation of delegates at recent conferences and the symposia on sound provides evidence that a considerable amount of research into the subject of the human voice in film is currently under way. To achieve a comprehensive investigation these research projects will, collectively, need to be wide-ranging. This might include an assessment of the kinds of voices commonly used in film, the qualities film voices generally possess and the characteristics these voices share with those used in other media (e.g., radio). Comparative analyses of the use of voices in mainstream narrative films, independent, experimental and avant-garde films and in different national cinemas would no doubt prove illuminating. Just as relevant would be investigations into the association of certain kinds of voices with particular film genres (e.g., comedy, romance or horror). No less valuable would be a consideration of the extent to which the voices of film stars form an intrinsic part of their appeal for fans. There is much at stake here for researchers of national cinemas, genre and star studies and, equally, such researchers have much to bring to research on the voice in film.

The existing published studies of the voice in cinema provide only partial answers to these questions. To date the study of the cinematic voice has been dominated by two over-lapping but diametrically opposed psychoanalytic studies, Michel Chion's *The Voice in Cinema* (first published in French in 1982 and translated into English by Claudia Gorbman and published in 1999) and Kaja Silverman's *The Acoustic Mirror* (1988). These two books produced a highly polemical and challenging debate in the 1980s but failed to produce a decisive shift away from the conception and examination of film as primarily a visual medium. The psychoanalytic nature of this work has undoubtedly played a role in limiting the influence and dissemination of research on the cinematic voice. Nevertheless, future studies of sound may well lead to a radical re-conception of cinema, of what it does and how it does it. A large-scale investigation into the role played by the voice as a primary component of film may produce new insights into the medium, providing film scholars and students with an alternative conception of the medium's aesthetic potential. It could also represent a useful starting point to a more comprehensive investigation into the full regime of cinematic sound (including music, noise, acoustics and sound effects/Folely), providing perhaps the most accessible form of entry into sound research for film scholars.

2. The Voice in Film Studies: Setting The Agenda

Michel Chion's book *The Voice in Cinema* (1982) was one of the first major studies of the human voice in film and played a key role in setting the agenda for the debate in film studies. It also provided a number of concepts and terms: most notably, the "acousmatic" voice (i.e. an unseen voice invested with power), "vococentrism" (i.e. the dominance of the voice over all other sounds) and the determining influence of the "maternal voice" (i.e. heard by an infant in the womb). The crucial factor for Chion was whether or not the viewers can see the source of the voice on the screen itself. His primary concern was to understand the uses and effects of voice-over and voice-off (i.e. the owner of the voice heard on the soundtrack is concealed by a reverse-shot, positioning their body outside the frame of the camera and screen). This subsequently became a major concern for Kaja Silverman, who led the feminist debate on the voice in cinema. In chapter 3 of her book *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (1988), Silverman examined and questioned many of the assumptions underlying Chion's conception of the "maternal voice," comparing his articulation (unfavourably) to that of the psychoanalytic theorist Guy Rosolato. From Rosolato, Silverman took the concept of the acoustic mirror (and the title of her book) and produced an even more complex understanding of the maternal voice than that of Chion. Crucially, she understood the maternal voice as a fantasy that had been articulated in psychoanalysis, in cinema and in film theory, proceeding to explore the various versions of the fantasy in order to assess its significance for female subjectivity and for feminism. This was meta-theory, theory about other theories, rather than an investigation into cinema per se. However, Silverman did relate her theories to films and make a number of bold statements regarding the inability of mainstream narrative cinema to assign voice-overs and voice-off to female characters.

Silverman's discussion of cinema was an extension of the "male gaze" debate within film studies, a debate that raged for many years in the wake of Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). Silverman's exploration of the unequal treatment of male and female voices in mainstream cinema not only applied the principles of "gaze theory" to the film soundtrack but also confirmed many of Mulvey's assumptions and conclusions. For instance, that psychoanalytic theory can explain and account for the underlying sexism of dominant cinema, that the classical continuity style of the realist

narrative fiction film is reactionary and masculinist, and that the avant-garde offers a means of articulating more progressive and feminist filmic representations. Silverman concluded that mainstream narrative fiction film preserves voice-overs and instances of voice-off for male characters exclusively, always attaching the female voice to an image of the female body. In this account, the treatment of male and female voices in narrative cinema replicated some of the inequalities that feminist film scholarship had uncovered in relation to visual pleasure. However, whereas Mulvey's thesis proved highly influential within film studies (in many other disciplines and even in the film world beyond academia), the psychoanalytic debate on voice in the cinema proved to be more self-contained. Not that Silverman was alone in making such claims. Other feminist film scholars pursued the subject of the disembodied female voice of Hollywood cinema, most notably Mary Ann Doane.

Mary Ann Doane's essay "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space," (1980) is not entirely psychoanalytic in its methodology (only a section towards the end on understanding the pleasures of hearing the voice is explicitly so), rather her approach is ideological. In short, her major concern here is to describe how the ideology of the voice was sustained and reproduced in the discourses of film practitioners, expressing inequities in the treatment of male and female voices, most notably in terms of voice-off and voice-over. Her claim is that generally in Hollywood cinema voices are anchored to visualised bodies. Also, in her attempt to understand the pleasures of hearing voices in the cinema, Doane (like Silverman) evokes the "sonorous envelope" described by Rosolato, acknowledging that "the traces of archaic desires are never annihilated." (Doane, 1980: 573) She takes the mother's soothing voice as an infant's first model of auditory pleasure and claims that all subsequent auditory pleasures are effectively modelled on and evoke this. Into this, Doane adds the Oedipal scenario, in the form of the father's voice, engaging the desire of the mother and thereby competing with the infant for her attention and affection. For Doane, the father's voice is the "agent of separation" rendering the mother's voice an irretrievable lost object of desire (Doane, 1980: 574). Moreover, she claims that the male voice (and the voice of cinema) retains a potential aggressiveness (i.e. through its association with the father's voice), one that is reduced by techniques, such as Dolby, designed to perfect sounds and remove any grating, unwanted or obtrusive noise.

Such accounts are complex, even at times confusing, presenting hypothetical arguments for the cinematic voice which are hard to corroborate in any meaningful way, largely because they are based less on sustained observation and analysis of cinema than on readings of fantasies articulated within philosophic and psychoanalytic discourses. Moreover, they are concerned almost exclusively with the uses of voice-off and voice-over, with whether the sound of the voice is simultaneously accompanied by the image of the speaker or not. Not surprisingly, many film scholars interested in the characteristics, operations and effects of film sound have shied away from entering into this debate. Others have criticised it directly and sought to expose its weaknesses and contradictions. For instance, Rick Altman in the introduction to his edited book, *Sound Theory, Sound Practice* (1992) has spoken of the "danger" lurking in the work of Mary Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman, Michel Chion and other writers who have similarly "leaned heavily on the psychoanalytic theories of Guy Rosolato." (Altman, 1992: 38) Altman notes that these are trans-historical accounts and he expresses a concern and scepticism regarding their conclusions and hypotheses. He argues that ontological claims about the role of sound have "been allowed to take precedence over actual analysis of sound's functioning."(Altman, 1992: 39) He adds that,

> While it would be unreasonable to cut short speculation on the sources of sound's attraction it is essential that such speculation not be taken as a prescription, as a binding assumption about the way sound must work in all cases. If we are fully to restore a sense of sound's role in creating our sense of the body, we must depend on historically grounded claims and on close analyses of particular films rather than on ontological speculations that presume to cover all possible practices. (Altman, 1992: 39)

Many of the claims that emerged regarding the tendency of mainstream narrative fiction film to assign voice-overs and voice-off to male characters at the expense of females have not been adequately tested. Some researchers may now wish to re-engage with this debate and put its claims to the test. Britta Sjogren, for instance, is currently involved in both challenging and extending the work of Mary Ann Doane and Kaja Silverman, analysing 1940s Hollywood films in terms of how the female voice is used to sustain sexual difference. Her book, *Into the Vortex: Female Voice and Paradox in Film*, seeks to make an intervention into the psychoanalytic debate on female voices, and forms part of an ongoing engagement with the voice in feminist film theory. There is, however, little necessity for such studies to remain fixated with the issue of voice-off and voice-over. Indeed, it would seem problematic for studies of the voice to continue to be dominated by this issue given that it is chiefly preoccupied with image rather than sound, i.e. the image (or lack of image) of the speaker. Film studies would surely gain more from an understanding of the qualities, uses and effects of the voice itself. Furthermore, new research on the voice in film has relatively little to gain from adopting an exclusively psychoanalytic approach. Partly this is because this debate has already taken place, but also because it has (so far) failed to stimulate a large-scale debate within (or beyond) the discipline of film studies. Another approach would be for researchers of the voice in film to pursue different lines of enquiry into the history and the contemporary practice of using the voice in film, along with its reception. Both historical and contemporary practices could be investigated through specific case studies of films and actors, including extra-cinematic material such as film reviews, journalism, publicity and criticism, as well as through interviews with practitioners, performers and coaches. Many people could be drawn into this debate to investigate, analyse and think about the voice of cinema from a range of different perspectives. This might include radio and film practitioners, producers and directors, technicians, writers and performers, along with historians and theorists from a range of academic disciplines, such as biology, psychology, sociology, musicology, philosophy, phenomenology, drama and theatre studies. Such research could evolve as part of an explorative dialogue between a large and heterogeneous group rather than remain as prescriptive hypotheses by a few sharing a particular set of assumptions and objectives.

3. The Voice In Film Studies: A New Agenda

Recently studies of the voice in cinema have been published, expanding the scope of the debate beyond that originally established by the likes of Chion, Silverman and Doane. These include Gianluca Sergi's essay "Actors and the Sound Gang" (1999) and David Sonnenschein's book *Sound Design* (2001). Both studies are accessible, illuminating and engaging. Moreover, they successfully bridge the theory/practice division by incorporating interviews with practitioners alongside detailed film analysis. Michel Chion's book *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (written in 1990 and published in English in 1994) is by no means exclusively concerned with the subject of the voice in cinema. It does, however, contain some interesting ideas and observations about the uses and qualities of the voice in a wide range of films. This book draws upon and expands many of Chion's earlier theories of the voice

without pursuing the psychoanalytic dimension. Consequently, it is likely to find a much wider reception amongst film scholars and practitioners, particularly as it is endorsed by one of Hollywood's most eminent sound designers, Walter Murch, who provides a foreword. It would seem that one of Chion's aims with this book was to bring the debate on film sound to a much wider audience. He notes in the preface that his earlier work had "not yet been influential enough to bring about a total reconsideration of the cinema in light of the position that sound has occupied in it for the last sixty years." (Chion, 1994: xxv) *Audio-Vision*, along with Sonnenschein's book and Sergi's essay, provides insights into the cinematic voice that open up new lines of enquiry that, if taken further, could form the basis for a wider debate. This could well lead to the establishment of a more comprehensive understanding of the voice in film than has so far existed. It could even significantly revise our preconceptions of what cinema consists of, how it operates and how audiences engage with it.

An appropriate place to begin investigating the uses and effects of voices in film would be with the fundamental question of what is a "pure voice," divorced from language and linguistic meaning. Sonnenschein has suggested that scholars of the voice in cinema should analyse films in languages they cannot understand to enable them to hear more clearly the rhythms and melodies of the speaking voice. In this way voices would exist for them as pure sound and bring out the musicality of speech, its prosody. The primary concern here is with the rhythms, tones, pitch, timbre, volume and speed of a voice. Perhaps the most expressive of these is timbre, "the way of creating a voice that's hoarser, more metallic, more full-throated, more sonorous, or less harmonically rich." (Chion, 1999: 173) Timbre is a complicated and ambiguous term to use when defining the prosody of the voice. Compared to volume, speed and pitch, timbre seems more esoteric, subtler and more slippery in terms of what it designates, easily confused with "tone" or "intonation." It appears to be the most musical of the terms used in association with the voice and its value may be precisely that it inscribes a sense of musicality into the speaking voice and forces us to conceive of the voice as essentially musical.

A number of sound theorists have expressed concern regarding the use of musical terms to describe elements of a film's soundtrack, regarding this as a limited way of conceptualising film's regime of sound. For instance, Rick Altman writes that, "While all film sounds have loudness, pitch and timbre, not a single sound in cinema can be adequately described with musical terminology." (Altman 1992: 16) However, in the absence of a subtle and sophisticated vocabulary to describe non-musical sounds and the speaking voice, the attraction of musical terms and concepts remains irresistible. Attaching a term like "falsetto," "bass," "baritone," "soprano," "tremolo," "staccato" or "pizzicato" to the word "voice," conjures up a precise idea of the dominant qualities of a speaking voice. These musical terms help to define speaking voices more specifically than if we were to use expressions such as a "moist" or a "warm" voice. What is signified by a "moist" voice is not immediately clear, requiring elaboration. The English language lacks an adequate vocabulary to define sounds and the speaking voice. Until a range of words have evolved to describe different types of voice, scholars and practitioners will no doubt continue to resort to a musical lexicon more appropriate to defining the singing voice.

An area to be investigated in more detail is how the emotional expressiveness of the voice lies in the relationship between vowel sounds and consonants. Although both sounds are produced through the vibration of the vocal cords resonating in the vocal cavities, they do so within specific frequency spectrums or formants (see Sonnenschein, 2001: 131). Vowel sounds are created in a mid-range frequency and are able to carry a considerable distance.

Consonants, which separate these sounds to form recognisable words, are produced in the upper frequencies of the highest formants and through specific positions and movements of the tongue, narrowing or constricting the vocal tract. Consonants fall into several groups: such as, fricatives (f, z, j), stops (t, d, k), nasals (m, n, ng), and approximants (l, r, wh) (see Sonnenschein, 2001: 132). Clearly this is valuable for analysis of voice in film, enabling us to assess an actor's use of vowels in relation to consonants, and to note what type of consonants are stressed. Moreover, if we concentrate on listening to the way vowels and consonants are used in a speech we may lose the sense of the sounds as words and, in that sense, be more able to ignore their semantic meanings in favour of their rhythmic and emotional qualities.

Film studies would benefit from a more precise understanding of how changes in the rhythm, pitch, volume, timbre, speed and intonation indicate changing states of mind and emotion or stimulate different emotional and perceptual reactions from audiences. Of course, voices are rarely heard in isolation on a film track. Often they are accompanied by sounds such as music, sound effects and ambient noise. So, for instance, Bette Davis's "Fasten your seatbelts" line in *All About Eve* (1950) is accompanied by the subdued murmur of party conversation and, more noticeably, the opening refrain of a jaunty melody played on a piano. This music offsets the malevolence of Davis's line, adding a light touch, enabling audiences to enjoy the comic potential of Davis's words of caution rather than to take them seriously. Much of the existing published work on sound in film emphases the role of the voice as a primary signifier within a regime of sounds, such as music, sound effects or Folely, ambient or atmospheric noise. Michel Chion, for example, situates voice at the apex of a hierarchy of sounds, noting how humans attend to voices more closely than any other sound and describing human listening as "vococentrist" (Chion, 1999: 6). David Sonnenschein, meanwhile, describes the human ear as ‘verbocentric'. He writes that, "Because of the physiology of the ear, the mid-range frequencies are accentuated, helping us to distinguish voice information in a mixed frequency environment." (Sonnenschein, 2001: 74) The conventional strategy is to render the sound of the voice so that it can be heard clearly, above all other sounds. Therefore, voices in film produce a marked effect on the sound design as a whole. With few exceptions, sound designers and film music composers take their cue from the voices of the main actors, the speed, volume, pitch, timbre and tone of the speaker's voice dictating what else will be heard on the soundtrack and at what level. So, for instance, the accompanying music track will tend to lie low throughout a speech, allowing the voice to take precedence, until the last word when the music may rise to anticipate a change of mood or scene. The voice also affects the music track in terms of instrumentation, with woodwind instruments being rarely used as they are too close to the sound of the human voice. This kind of debate invites wider investigation into the way soundtracks are built around specific voices and vocal performances.

A major preoccupation of the psychoanalytically informed film scholarship on the voice in cinema in the 1980s was its relation to the body. This was primarily to do with the visual accompaniment of the speaking body to the originating voice on the soundtrack. However, it is possible to pursue this subject in other ways, for instance, the impact a voice has on a listener's body or the impact a body has upon a speaking voice. Since a speaker's body and its physical movements can be heard in the voice, one could apply the term "disembodied" to a voice that bears no perceptible traces of the speaker's body even though it may be accompanied by the image of the speaker on the screen. Similarly, one could attach the term "embodied" to a voice that contains traces of the speaker's body (i.e., rasping, wheezing, etc.) even if that body cannot be seen on the screen. This would be the kind of voice that Roland Barthes described as having "grain." Barthes' essay, "The Grain of the Voice" is pertinent to

this discussion despite the fact that the subject of his piece was actually the singing voice. Barthes made a crucial distinction between voices that have "grain" and those that do not in order to understand the pleasures of listening to voices in which traces of the performer's body can be heard, inscribing a certain texture or even roughness to the voice. For Barthes, the grain of the voice is ultimately "the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue," in other words, the sound of "the tongue, the glottis, the teeth, the mucus membranes, the nose." (Barthes, 1977: 182) The grain is, in short, the body in the voice. Several writers on the voice in film have used the concept of "grain." For instance, under the sub-heading of "The grain of the voice," Philip Brophy writes that:

> Films which foreground the "grain of the voice" have to resort to the most obtuse methods and uncompromising means, abstracting the voice as delivery to hold onto its physicality. The voice is an undeniable erotic and eroticised device. In cinema, it can be the aurally fragrant wisps of the siren, the orgasmic spluttering of bodies pushing themselves to the limit, the thigh-quivering roar of the omnipotent phallus, the stratospheric soars of the diva, the virginal ripeness of the pre-pubescent androgyne, the arousing maturity of the deep and husky crone. (Brophy, 2004: 14)

Whereas Barthes' writing on the grain of the voice was erotically charged, Brophy's underlines the sheer eroticism of the voice's grain, the grain suffusing a voice with a sexualised body that listeners are alert to and able to revel in. Studies of the voice in film might usefully consider how perceptible traces of the body in a voice (sexualised or otherwise) influence an audience's reaction.

Many sound theorists note the sheer power and physical impact of sound, including the direct affect it can have on the human body of the audience: its temperature, blood circulation, pulse rate, breathing and perspiration, etc. (see Sergi, 2001: 125-126). Different frequencies, moreover, vibrate through different parts of the body, most simplistically with the lower frequencies (below 65 Hz) resonating in the lower back region, pelvis, thighs and legs (affecting sexual and digestive centres) and the higher frequencies affecting the upper body: chest, neck and head (see Sonnenschein, 2001: 97-99). This introduces the notion of "entrainment," a concept that should be as relevant for analysts of the voice as for those investigating the effects of music, noise and sound effects given that deep resonant voices produce different kinds of reverberation than piercing, shrieking, screeching or shrill voices. Some actors are defined by their deep resonant voices (e.g. Orson Welles) whilst others are famous for their high squeaky tones (e.g. Judy Holliday). A major area of interest for scholars of the voice is no doubt the identification of the qualities that make one voice distinguishable from another and one voice recognisable despite changes in performance style, accent, age, pitch, speed, etc. This issue forms part of Esme Davidson's PhD project (Nottingham Trent University), which uses phonetics to explore how voices determine identity (some aspects of this project were presented as a paper at Sounding Out 2, 2004). Much useful work can be done to define the specific and identifiable traits of film voices. Hollywood cinema alone has provided a rich and varied repertoire of distinctive and easily-identifiable voices: Marlene Dietrich, Cary Grant, Bette Davis, James Mason, Marilyn Monroe, Woody Allen, to name just a few. Indeed, there is any number of stars suitable for vocal analysis, whose persona is largely determined by their idiosyncratic sound and whose popularity rests upon the appeal of their voice. In *Audio-Vision*, Michael Chion discusses a concept that has now passed out of use but which, during the early years of the "Talkies" (late 1920s and 1930s), was prevalent: Phonogeny (analogous to Photogeny, i.e. the photogenic). He writes that "Phonogeny refers

to the rather mysterious propensity of certain voices to sound good when recorded and played back over loudspeakers." (Chion, 1994: 101) This may well prove to be a useful concept for film scholars conducting research into particular actors and stars of sound cinema.

The way an actor's voice sounds on film is largely out of their control, as Gianluca Sergi has demonstrated. Sergi in his essay "Actors and the Sound Gang," (1999) discusses how reliant actors are on a large and diverse team of film professionals, namely the sound crew. Their practices and technologies make a profound impact on how a voice is heard. In a sense, there is no such thing as a "pure film voice" given that it is always mediated by technology. The voice heard on the film's soundtrack has distinctive qualities by virtue of having been recorded by one of a number of possible microphones, each one sensitive to different frequencies and tones. This issue was addressed in a keynote presentation on the voice given at Sounding Out in 2002 by John Gray, Visiting Professor at Queen Margaret's College, Edinburgh, former Chief Assistant at BBC Radio Scotland who began his career as a sound-recordist with the GPO (General Post Office) Film Unit in the late 1930s. In his presentation, Gray explained how recording high-pitched voices with microphones positioned above the mouth (e.g. at eye level) accentuates the higher tones and can produce a sound that is uncomfortable to listen to. The same voice recorded by a microphone positioned below the mouth (e.g. level with the collarbone) can often rectify this and emphasise warmer chest tones. After many years of working as a radio producer for the BBC, Gray was acutely aware of the different effects that radio microphones and microphone positioning produce on the voice, affecting the degree of involvement for the listener. He demonstrated how crucial the microphone could be in a relationship between a speaker and their audience, minor adjustments to proximity and angle producing major effects in terms of intimacy.

Whilst being largely dependent upon the types of microphone used and the positioning of them, an actor's voice is also affected by the treatments it undergoes during post-production. This can simply be a small matter of "cleaning up" by a Dialogue Editor, removing any slight sibilance, fluff, hesitation or bodily noise from the voice in order to enhance its clarity. However, this could involve much more serious (and creative) treatment, changing the entire quality of the voice (see Ben Burtt on the creation of E.T.'s voice in LoBrutto, 1994: 147). Whatever techniques are used to render an actor's voice strange, dramatic, alien, realistic or artificial, a fundamental and abiding principal is that the dialogue should be heard and understood by an audience. Most mainstream filmmakers subscribe to this view (see the interviews with Richard Portman, Norval Crutcher, Les Lazarowitz and Cecelia Hall in LoBrutto, 1994, pp. 47, 54, 118 and 198). Again this works against the voice itself, i.e. the realisation and reproduction of the "pure voice," which can best be heard when the meanings of the words are unfathomable. Actors working in the commercial film industry are required to speak clearly and intelligibly. Most scholars of the film voice recognise this as a constraint, however instances do occur where performers are able to satisfy the crew's demand for "dialogue" and simultaneously use their vocal instrument expressively and aesthetically. Mark Rance, film historian and documentarist, discussed such instances in his paper "The Sound of Dialogue" at the School of Sound symposium in 2003, citing Elliot Gould's performance in *The Long Goodbye* (1973) as a good example. This is far from being an isolated case. Hilary Swank's Academy award-winning performance in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) provides another instance where intelligibility is repeatedly sacrificed in favour of expressiveness.

Existing scholarship on film sound provides some insight into the work that goes on in the film industry to produce (i.e. record, modify and edit) the voices of the actors (see the

interview with Les Lazarowitz in LoBrutto, 1994: 118-128). It can also help us to understand how the conditions of filming influence the production of actors' vocal performances. This includes the types of directorial intervention that can occur during a performance, the amount of time allotted for preparation and rehearsal, and the training and coaching actors receive. The work of Gianluca Sergi offers a useful starting point for further research. In "Actors and the Sound Gang," he considers the questions that actors must ask themselves when confronted by a script. This includes the choices they are faced with in terms of their delivery: e.g., where to take a breath, which line or word to stress, how to create an appropriate rhythm or tempo (Sergi, 1999: 130). This raises the issue of how much of this process is thought out and planned, negotiated between actor and director (dialogue director or coach), and how much is down to instinct, spontaneous interaction with cast members, the movement and proximity of the cameras and the microphones. Discussion with actors about their roles, their intentions, reflections and responses is proving instructive here, as is dialogue between researchers and directors, dialogue directors, voice coaches and trainers. Acting manuals and voice coaching books, such as Marion Hampton and Barbara Acker (eds.) *The Vocal Vision* (1997), and Mel Churcher, *Acting for Film* (2003), provide valuable insights into how actors develop their vocal techniques for film and what techniques they commonly use to prepare for a role.

In short, much published material now exists for researchers of the film voice to draw on. There are also forums, symposia and websites, which can put researchers into direct contact with a range of practitioners and other types of scholar in order to engage in dialogue and debate. In this way, research projects on the dramatic human voice in film are currently proceeding, and proceeding in different directions. Whatever form they take, such projects could benefit from a shared vocabulary specific to the speaking voice. At the moment, researchers are being drawn into debates on the dramatic human voice in film from a range of academic disciplines, including linguistics, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, philosophy, phenomenology and speech therapy as well as film studies. Dialogue is being established with writers, performers, trainers and coaches, directors, producers, sound designers, musicians and sound artists working in film and other related media (e.g., radio, television, computer games, audio-books, etc.). Whilst most of these people share a common language, many bring to the debate unfamiliar terms and concepts which are specific to their discipline or profession. It seems vitally important at this stage to find a set of terms that all scholars and practitioners of the speaking voice can use. Finding agreement on this will probably not be easy but it is essential if a true exchange of knowledge and understanding is to flourish across the academic and professional divides. Out of the dialogue and debate on the voice will no doubt come (in time) a shared language and a set of terms and concepts. An on-going dialogue and debate will also stimulate more projects and, ultimately, more publications. Over the next few years, a considerable amount of material on the voice in film will appear in print given that so much research is already under way. New ideas and observations will be put into circulation and these are likely to be disseminated more widely than in the past. The received wisdom on what film is and why people love it may well take something of a bashing when one of the conceptual cornerstones of film studies is undermined. For when the profound power, subtlety and appeal of the dramatic human voice in film is more fully understood, the established notion of film as primarily a visual medium is likely to give way in favour of film as an audio-visual medium where audio really does come first. Something fundamental is at stake here and, consequently, the debate within (and across) film studies may become heated and polarised. Now might be a good time for film scholars to fasten their seatbelts and prick up their ears.

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If you are currently working on an aspect of the voice in film, radio or sound art, I would be very interested to hear from you. I would also welcome any exchange of ideas on this subject, including useful references regarding published works, suggestions of issues to pursue and appropriate questions to ask, examples for analysis, news of related events, forthcoming publications, etc. martin.shingler@sunderland.ac.uk

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