

Creative use of voice in non-fiction narrative film: an examination of the work of Peter Mettler

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Before film, before writing, storytelling was spoken word: the sharing of an experience, legend, poem, or song. Thus storytelling has traditionally been associated with the voice of a narrator or singer, either as part of the story or as the person delivering and performing the story. With some exceptions, notably live narration in Japan's Benshi tradition and the *'bonimenteur'*, early cinema was voiceless for many years. But it did often contain a written voice: elaborately decorated text boxes communicated what actors silently mouthed. With the invention of synchronised sound, these mute and written voices were exchanged for the speech of the sound film.

In documentary film, voice is usually contained in the form of speech as uttered by a presenter, interviews with subjects, or included as voice-over. In particular, 'voice of God' narration is commonly understood as a key trait of documentary. Yet, the inclusion of voice-over in documentary film has been criticised for being pressingly didactic, anti-democratic, and is by some regarded as a sign of an inept filmmaker: 'Voice-over is the unnecessary evil of documentary, the resort of the unimaginative and incompetent' (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 48), and 'Narration is what you do when you fail' (Drew, 1983, In: Ibid, p. 48.). Bruzzi (2006) suggests that the source of this criticism is rooted in the relation between sound and image: voice-over is often extra-diegetic (p. 47). Thus voice is often a mere added sound layer, without a connection to the diegetic film space.

To highlight the creative potential of voice in documentary film, especially in unison and juxtaposition with imagery and sound design, we provide a discussion of the creative use of voice in three films by the Swiss-Canadian filmmaker Peter Mettler: *Picture of Light* (1994), *Gambling, Gods and LSD* (2002), and *Petropolis: Aerial Perspectives on the Alberta Tar Sands* (2009). Mettler holds a prominent place in contemporary cinema, exemplified by many prizes and awards at prestigious festivals across continents. His work embodies and acknowledges the fact that cinema is a constructed illusion. Indeed, his film practice has been described as rigorously dedicated to connections between form and content (White, 2007, p. 50), as pushing cinematic boundaries thematically and stylistically (McSorley, 2005, p. 43), and as having tremendous integrity (Gill, 2006 in White, p. 60). He has directed fiction and documentary films, and has provided cinematography for numerous films, including the documentary *Manufactured Landscapes* (Baichwal, 2006).

As practitioners in various forms of audiovisual media, we emphasize techniques, intentionality and other creative and authorial issues, more so than the cultural or social implications of audiovisual constructions. Authorial intent in relation to documentary filmmaking lags behind the assessment of aesthetics and decision-making in fiction

film. Here we want to demonstrate creative potential and skilfulness in the use of voice in non-fiction narrative film. Where possible, we use vocabulary by the composer, filmmaker and theoretician Michel Chion, who is regarded as the most important writer on the complex relationship between sound and image in audiovisual media. As typically seen in film theory, Michel Chion's analyses are concerned predominantly with fiction film. However, most of his findings have relevance to both fiction and documentary filmmaking. Here we apply some of his vocabulary to the experimental documentary films of Mettler.

The films of Mettler contain various uses of voice: dialogue between subjects; dialogue between Mettler (off-screen) and on-screen subjects; disembodied voice such as radio conversations; crowds of people talking, chanting; and his own voice delivered as a scripted voice-over. A Chion term we will frequently refer to is *acousmètre* (Chion, 1999), a specific type of film character whose body, or at least its speaking part, remains hidden, while having influence on the on-screen action. *Acousmètre* is a telescoping of the words *acousmatic* (of a sound when its source or cause is hidden) and the French *être* (being). According to Chion, voice-over is too external to the on-screen action in order for it to qualify as an *acousmètre*. We argue that Peter Mettler's voice in *Picture of Light* and *Gambling, Gods and LSD* does exhibit *acousmétric* qualities, for example by letting characters briefly lip sync to his words.

Mettler's voice-over sounds warm. It is low-pitched, monotonous, fairly slow, and meditative, but not boring or unpleasant. The delivery of content is dry. He does not entertain. He simply speaks. It is a pleasant voice that is simply there, without forcing an emotion or rigid opinion on to the listener. He is always mindful and open — even on the rare occasions when he presents facts. The quality of Mettler's voice has led him to perform narration for several films, such as the documentary *The Sound of Insects: Record of a Mummy* (Liechti, 2009). Rather than addressing every instance where voice is used creatively, we discuss a few moments where voice, sound, and image intersect in exciting ways. We have chosen parts from *Picture of Light*, *Gambling, Gods and LSD*, and *Petropolis: Aerial Perspectives on the Alberta Tar Sands*. We hope this serves to reveal some of the eloquence of Mettler's practice at large.

Picture of Light

'We live in a time where things do not seem to exist if they are not contained as an image', proclaims Mettler as the voice-over in *Picture of Light*, about 15 minutes into the film. Since the release of the film in 1992, our day-to-day use of screens and

interfaces has increased and, accordingly, this statement has grown in significance. The film is a pursuit of the Aurora Borealis, an enigmatic natural phenomenon that leaves an impression, which cannot be contained as an image. The ungraspable, untranslatable is what underlies Mettler's filmmaking. *Picture of Light* was recorded during two trips to Churchill, a small town in the North of Canada. The film starts in an artificial cooler where the film crew is testing their recording equipment to see whether the (then) new technology is able to cope with Arctic temperatures. The film maintains this reflexive mode throughout. Mettler explains in an interview for *offscreen.com*: 'It is not necessarily about the Aurora Borealis, rather it's about what we believe in and how we relate to each other' (Stefik, 2002). The film demonstrates that perception and experience are mediated by the technology of the camera, sound equipment, television screens, the human eye, and as dictated by cultural dispositions. As White explains (2007, p. 26), what lies at the heart of *Picture of Light* is the imperfect translation from lived experience to aesthetic experience.

Practitioners of Magic

Early on in *Picture of Light*, paired with slow-paced imagery of the film crew on a nightly train journey, we hear:

Practitioners of magic do not like electricity. It confuses magic just as it confuses people. I once took a bus tour where the guide said certain things twice, for emphasis, for rhythm, to fill the quiet space.

After a short pause, with the words still resonating in our minds, the voice-over returns with striking effect: 'Practitioners of magic do not like electricity. It confuses magic, just as it confuses people, he would say twice.' The delivery of the repeated words is essentially the same as the first — monotonous, emotionless, and slow-paced. It would seem that Mettler places himself in the position of tour guide by saying the line twice, and the audience in the position of tourists on a trip to Churchill. Or perhaps the images suggest a different interpretation. Immediately after the first rendition the film cuts to the train operator (though this may also be the sound recordist) slowly turning an intercom microphone away from his face. The quality of the voice-over foretells that it is closely recorded in a quiet studio, evidently not spoken into the microphone shown on screen. It would have sounded vastly different; the type of microphone, reverb, and train movements would have affected the delivery. Is this perhaps an example of the type of confusion ('it confuses magic just as it confuses people') that is alluded to in the

voice-over and may apply to the current scene? Is he teasing the audience? To address this, we need to place the scene in a wider context.

The opening voice-over ends with the sentence: 'As the night closed we agreed to share a path we had in common, the pursuit of wonder'. After 'pursuit of wonder' the film cuts to an unclear view from the back of a train when it departs of a dark, foggy train station with lights barely reaching through the wall of snowy mist. This visual play is aesthetically pleasing, but not extraordinarily beautiful. Mettler is not showing a particular kind of pursuit of wonder. In relation to cinema more generally, Chion notes there are many occurrences in film where the image is modified or chosen to respect the more general nature of the spoken words (Chion, 1994, p. 172). In the case of this scene in *Picture of Light*, the words remain applicable to a greater possibility of wondrous images, as opposed to referring to the particular image on screen.

With 'pursuit of wonder' still in our minds, when 'Practitioners of magic . . .' comes in, it is tempting to draw the following parallels:

- Who are the *practitioners*? Does he refer to the film crew or is the audience practising magic by watching the film?
- What is the *magic* he refers to? Is it wonderment at the Northern Lights, the electricity of film equipment, film itself?

During the second rendition of 'Practitioners of magic do not like electricity . . .' we see a flashing light, a reference to electricity, filmed from a train window. If Mettler clearly wanted to put the audience in the position of tourists (and himself as tour guide), would he not have shown the passing of landscape from a train window?

With the allegory of Mettler as the practitioner of magic, the scene would seem to address technology as an uncertainty ('Mettler does not like electricity'). The status of technology is a theme throughout the film and is the main theme in the opening scene. In the cold chamber the characters have to talk loudly in order to be heard over the noise from the cooler. The volume of their voices is a measurement for the level of technology involved. The louder they have to shout the greater is the presence of the cooler. Chion lists other examples of raised voices due to loud ambient noise that give a sense of the severity of its source such as a storm or ocean waves (Chion, 2009, p. 346). The uncertainty is also felt just before the 'practitioners of magic' scene, when Mettler's voice-over says: 'We were escaping the electrical world with 50 pounds of batteries in our bags', which underlines the dependency on electricity and technological innovation.

Chion discusses repetition in film speech in the context of the genesis of language, ascribing a 'particular resonance' to repeated words (Chion, 2009, p. 329). He explains that the words we normally hear in life-action scenes come from a selection of many takes, but we only get to hear one of the takes. He also refers to the infamous 'Are you talking to me?' scene in *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese, 1976) where the viewer enjoys a certain intimacy with the character because we are in the room with him as he rehearses these words. We hypothesise that the 'resonance' effect is due to how in real life, witnessing rehearsal is only for the privileged, the people close to the rehearser. Hence, the repetition in *Taxi Driver* and voice-over of *Picture of Light* establish an intimacy between the film and the spectators. Interestingly, in *Taxi Driver* the main character asks 'Are you talking to me?', whereas Mettler indirectly says 'I am talking to you'.

The power of the Practitioners of Magic scene is that it embraces both 'not knowing' and technological uncertainty. The words, sounds, and images merely hint at being logically connected, not least because of the logical construction in repeating the voice-over. But it carefully denies exact interpretation with subtle devices, keeping us in a state of not knowing, which follows the narrative curve of the film.



Train operator or sound recordist? © Grimthorpe Film Inc.



Flashing light. © Grimthorpe Film Inc.

Mettler as Puppeteer

In *Picture of Light*, as well as in *Gambling, Gods and LSD*, Mettler occasionally pays a visit to the diegetic space, appearing onscreen without speaking or off-screen behind the camera interviewing on-screen characters. There are long shots of him in both films where we see him filming himself as a reflection in a mirror or a window. In *Picture of Light*, this is accompanied by a voice-over, disconnecting his body and voice and emphasizing the material organisation of the film medium. We never see him speak. Or using Chion's terminology, the voice is never completely de-acousmatized, but the possibility is hinted at. For example, a train passenger is edited so that it seems as though he partly lip syncs Mettler's voice-over (interestingly, with the word 'surrogate'). Mettler's voice-over and bodily appearances can be related to what Chion calls a semi-acousmètre, or partial de-acousmatization, where the 'voice retains an aural of invulnerability and magical power' (Chion, 1999, p. 28). Similar powers are ascribed to the acousmètre (voice without a body) as to the body without a voice (Chion, 1999, p. 97; 2009, p. 327).

Chion notes that due to the nature of the film medium, a talking person on the screen is a combination of two separate recordings — of voice and of body (1999, p.

125). In early sound film this construct was hidden because it was thought that body and voice were only separate due to the methods of recording, not by nature, which it aimed to depict. Chion argues, referring repeatedly to the ancient art of puppetry that predates cinema, that one of the great assets of sound film is this voice-body dichotomy, giving numerous examples from fiction films where the body houses a different voice (Chion, 1999, p. 171). Here we note a scene in *Picture of Light* where Mettler masters the art of puppetry brilliantly.

Approximately a third into the film and after a few minutes of talking head interviews with locals about seeing the Northern Lights, a puppet show commences. Resident of Churchill, Father Verspeek, explains about the mysteries of experiencing the lights, and, as his voice continues, the image briefly cuts to a different person, thus de-synchronising the source of the voice and the body that we see onscreen. The film cuts to an Aboriginal and his translator, but the Father's voice is heard. Still visually with the Aboriginal and his translator, the voice of Father Verspeek is taken over by another off-screen person, to which the film then cuts, bringing voice and body back together to normal screen speech, though in a different person. We then see other characters making gestures over his voice until the sequence ends with a shot panning up into the sky. The result is comical, but also shows the unity in the people and the similarity in their relation to the Northern Lights. The timing of body gestures and voices is carefully executed, with the characters appearing to occasionally lip-sync the voice they cannot hear and did not speak, making gestures that correspond to it.

In this scene, the gestures become more pronounced than the content of what is said. Arguably, it is the voice that is used to emphasize bodily movement and gestures, similar to what Chion calls 'Mickeymousing' (Chion, 1994, p. 121). We hypothesise that this emphasis on body derides the meaning of the words, since the voice has taken the role of sound effect, at least in part. The way the interviewees use their arms and hands to illustrate their words (that we cannot hear) shows us that if we could hear what they are saying, it would most likely be about the Northern Lights because their gestures perfectly follow the movements and shapes of electric drawings in the sky. The emphasis on gestures emphasizes the problem involved with describing in words the natural phenomenon. The film is like the gestures, an impossible attempt to capture and show an authentic experience of the Aurora Borealis.



Mouthing the word 'surrogate'. © Grimthorpe Film Inc.



Gesturing 'edges'. © Grimthorpe Film Inc.

Land and Language: Empathetic Music

Most of *Picture of Light* is shot in Churchill, a small town in the North of Canada. More than half of the population is Aboriginal, of which the Inuit make up a small part. The Old Inuit, as Mettler calls him, speaks a language most of us do not understand. He is neither translated nor dubbed. Instead, we listen to the texture of his voice, its metre, the melody of the language. Then the image cuts to a vista of a white landscape where sheets of ice stand upright, trails of snow blow over the surface, his voice continues and subtitles remain absent. As a result, land and language form a striking audiovisual contract. The two sing together for approximately 25 seconds. The voice stops while the camera pans over the landscape, finding nothing but snow and ice in different formations. With the voice gone, the terrain feels distant; we would need a translator to understand it.

Although the act is simple, an audiovisual analysis is not straightforward. First, consider the chronology of the sequence:

<i>Sound</i>	<i>Sight</i>
1. (31s) Breathing (17s), Inuit's voice (14s)	Old Inuit (talking head), sync sound
2. (27s) Wind, Inuit's voice	Snow/ice terrain, snow blowing in wind
3. (33s) Wind	Snow/ice terrain, snow blowing in wind

Visually, the talking head forms a stark contrast with the terrain. Yet, we perceive the sequence as a smooth transition. The rhythm and textures of the voice seem to correspond with the rhythm and textures of the landscape. In harmonic counterpoint, the landscape articulates the voice and vice versa, a case of what Chion calls *prosopopeia* (Chion, 2009, p. 339), giving the inanimate landscape a voice.

The sound of the voice acts first as speech and then as a kind of music. Speech, because we may expect it to be translated within the scene; this happens earlier in a talking heads scene where a character speaks a language we do not know. To be precise, the Inuit's voice is translated, but not until much later when Mettler's voice-over explains 'The Old Inuit said that most of all he liked to hunt'. A kind of music, because we cannot understand its semantic meaning, shifting our hearing to the changing of rhythms and textures in the voice, which structure time and how the image is perceived. Hence, we are considering the voice here as 'empathetic music' (Chion, 1994, p. 8; Chion, 2009, p. 430), since it is a sort of 'added value' (Chion, 1994, p. 5). Chion defined his concept of 'added value' as the value of what we see in the image



'Old Inuit'. © Grimthorpe Film Inc.



Language Terrain. © Grimthorpe Film Inc.

from the sound that we hear and vice versa. Here, it works both ways. However, the fact that we cannot understand the words does not mean the semantic listening mode is completely switched off (for listening modes, see, 1994, p. 25). We keep searching for meaning, and all we see is harsh terrain.

The land and language scene is clearly powerful as an audiovisual construct in its own right, regardless of its relation to the film as a whole. However, the contrast with an earlier scene is worth pointing out. It is similar in its use of voice-over and landscape, but with the important differences that the voice-over is Mettler's, and the landscape is filmed at night as a long point-of-view shot lit by a torch. The voice-over starts self-consciously with 'You've probably heard that the Inuit have 17 words for ice, but in truth it is much closer to 170'. He then lists the Inuit words with English translations while the camera pans over the terrain. He never gets anywhere near 170. The search is hopeless. Nothing is found by translating the Inuit's language. The camera halts when the voice-over stops and we see a character with a torch searching the dark landscape. The scene reads as a critique of semantic meaning in the voice-over, especially when analysed in relation to the Old Inuit's land and language scene.

Gambling, Gods and LSD

In a similar fashion to *Picture of Light*, *Gambling, Gods and LSD* engages with themes of technology and experience. The film is shot on four locations: Mettler's hometown Toronto, Las Vegas including parts of the surrounding dessert, Switzerland, and India. The focus of the film is the ecstatic in different forms, such as sexual, religious, and drug-infused. The local/global relation also forms a central theme throughout the film, perhaps best exemplified by a scene of the shooting of a Bollywood film in his local Switzerland. In the same way as experiencing the Aurora Borealis in *Picture of Light*, Mettler points out the impossibility of translating the ecstatic to cinema, but this challenge is turned into a highly regarded cinematic experience with similar, though different, moments of ecstasy.

The Problem of the Radio Acousmètre

In *Gambling, Gods and LSD* the radio features as a bridging device between characters and places. Conversations and general radio noise appear and fade of their own accord, often without a visual cue. This takes on different forms: airport control tower conversations; police walkie-talkies; and security staff communicating through radio devices. Sometimes Mettler's camera takes the position of security cameras,



Control tower. © Grimthorpe Film Inc.



Church security watch. © Grimthorpe Film Inc.

and parallels have been drawn between the control room and the editing suite (Russell, 2006). The radio frequencies signal connectivity, travelling, or the global — or combinations of these. Although we can treat them as a single sonic entity, they do not have a single physical body (and therefore no singular visual reference). Furthermore, it has by nature an off-screen element. Hence, de-acousmatization occurs only insofar as we see people and instruments, presumably responsible for a part of the sound's source. It is problematic to denote this sonic theme an *acousmètre* because (1) complete de-acousmatization is impossible and (2) it consists of an unknown number of people and devices.

Before the scene at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship Church, there are some shots from within the air traffic control tower. The radio voice is switched on briefly when we look at the back of someone's head, just enough to remind us of the first occurrence of this sound at the start of the film. However, the dominating voice around these control tower shots is that of the leader of the church, to which the film cuts subsequently. Still in the control room (visually), whilst the voice addresses an audience asking where everyone is from (audio only), we see airplanes landing and departing, watched by the control tower. We note that the source of the radio voices remains hidden, even though we see an on-screen set that could be it. There is still tension.

In the subsequent church scene, the ecstatic state of bodies and voices builds up, accentuated by an eerie musical soundscape at the end, which is mixed with singing and crying voices to which the sound of a ticking watch provides a reference. Before we revisit the airport control tower, the film cuts to electricity pylons — giant, cold bodies in stark contrast with the previous emotional wilderness. The concept of technology forms an overarching narrative in the church scene, with security cameras and screens, reminiscent of the control tower looking at the world from a distance. Back in the control tower, the radio voices are finally, though partly, de-acousmatized. It signals the end of this chapter of the film.

With the distance between body (instruments and people) and voice (instrumental noises and radio voices) cleared, the scene comes to its end, in a manner reminiscent of Chion's discussion of the *acousmètre* in *Wizard of Oz* (1939), (Chion, 1999, p. 28). However, the radio *acousmètre* can never be fully at rest, since the noises we hear refer to off-screen sources. Indeed, the shot from within the control tower room, with diegetic sound, merely marks the end of a scene, while the film travels to the next location, possibly where the sound is coming from.



Petroglyphs. © Grimthorpe Film Inc.



'It is the morning of shot day . . . '. © Grimthorpe Film Inc.

The Radio Suspension

A different type of radio texture comes in over petroglyphs in the Nevada desert. We see human figures carved out in the rocks hundreds, if not thousands, of years ago, while we hear radio voices referring to the present. As with the Land and Language scene in *Picture of Light*, prosopopeia comes to mind, but a dissonant one given the huge vertical time gap in the audiovisual relation. The sound refers to the present, while the visuals refer to ancient history. Chion discusses vertical and horizontal time (Chion, 1994, p. 35), but not in the sense where they are vertically out of sync, as here.

Several shots of the desert follow. We see an old car upside down with bullet holes. The rust on the car and around the holes tells us this is not a recent crime scene. Hence, the vertical time gap remains, but is smaller. Then, the camera takes the position of this new radio *acousmètre*, becoming its body, when we hear it asking over the radio 'Are you there?', looking at a house. The film cuts to another house and the radio voice repeats the question. We see policemen walking, some of whom may be hearing the radio voices that the camera apparently speaks out to them. The joining of camera and radio is reminiscent of the shots of and from surveillance cameras in the church scene. While the voice continues we see shots of the Nevada desert from a police car, noting that this perspective is probably also a constructed illusion.

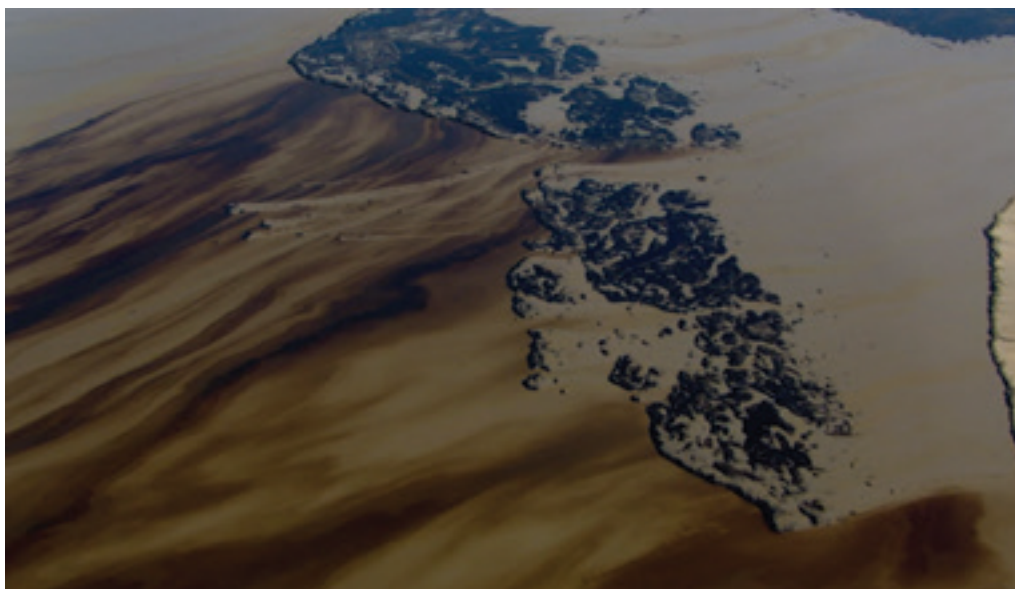
During a panning shot of a red desert slope the radio voice suddenly disappears. It leaves the spectator alone in the desert. In the preceding shots Mettler established a connection between radio, the landscape, and the camera. Suspension is the effect associated with the disappearance of an ambient sound, although the source is still felt in the image (Chion, 1994, p. 131). The wind takes over where the radio stopped. A similar occurrence of this technique is in a later scene taking place at a nuclear missile silo in New Mexico. We hear a countdown to detonation in a radio-type voice, possibly recorded by Mettler's crew at the nearby information centre. At the same time we see a barren desert terrain, giving the impression there is something about to happen here. The explosion features in the film neither audibly nor visually; we only see the landscape and hear some light wind, which then picks up as we see a cloud moving over the landscape.

Petropolis: Aerial Perspectives on the Alberta Tar Sands

In *Petropolis: Aerial Perspectives on the Alberta Tar Sands* the camera sweeps over industrial devastation. The film is shot exclusively from a helicopter with a camera attached to its body that records colossal machines causing the environmental



Trucks as seen from a helicopter. © Grimthorpe Film Inc.



In the year . . . © Grimthorpe Film Inc.

catastrophe below. Throughout the film the movement of changing camera positions is emphasized, visually and also by sound. For 35 minutes the film contains no voice, but when the film is slowly coming to its end, the voice-over enters as a wake-up call.

Mettler's voice starts with a story of a historical hot air balloon flight 'In the year we call 1783, two brothers named Montgolfier flew the first passengers suspended in a hot air balloon: a sheep, a rooster, and a duck . . .'. It contrasts with the extremely modern feel of the entire film, a striking dissonance that can be interpreted as another example of a vertical time gap that we also observed in the previous section. Furthermore, suspension is at work here. As Chion notes, suspension may function according to conventions in audiovisual relations, giving the example 'sun-dappled woods = birdsongs' (Chion, 1994, p. 133). The absence of birdsong generates strangeness, because it is contrary to how we normally experience sun-dappled woods. Similarly, the absence of voice-over narration in a Greenpeace funded activist film, also generates strangeness, as is the case in *Petropolis*.

The voice-over continues after the short story of the hot air balloon: 'Today, in the summer of 2008, we fly a machine, powered by the combustion of petroleum . . .'. Herewith, Mettler makes the film, and thereby the audience, part of the presented problem. The film lets the spectator marvel at the beautifully shot images, before making them aware that these perspectives are dependent on the destructive factors framed.

Conclusion

The voice takes on a variety of forms in Mettler's films. Instead of going through Chion's vocabulary and attaching new examples for the phenomena he describes, we used Chion for context, showing that his vocabulary aids discussions of Mettler's often complex treatment of documentary form. We described parts from *Picture of Light*, *Gambling*, *Gods and LSD*, and *Petropolis: Aerial Perspectives on the Alberta Tar Sands* that we found especially exciting for their use of voice.

It should be noted that creative uses of voice are also present in Mettler's more recent documentary *The End of Time* (2012). To give one beautiful example, consider the scene of a Hindu funeral ceremony. Mettler finds an opportunity here to address both the subject of time and the artificiality of film. The survivors of the deceased repeatedly sing a phrase out loud while they carry the body to the sea shore. Over one of the cuts their voices have drastically changed in both rhythm and tone, the amount of which is a measure for the amount of time passed. A deliberate piece of discontinuity editing, it is reflexive also to the film's subject of time.

It was not our aim to find coherence in Mettler's use of voice, however we did find some. For example, the body and voice are often kept separate, with almost every character entering the film as an *acousmètre*. And when the body enters the screen, Mettler often hesitates to connect the two. For example, the preacher in the airport church scene at the start of *Gambling, Gods and LSD* is first filmed from the back. The voice of the former prisoner, also in *Gambling, Gods and LSD*: is heard for a long time before we finally see his face, which is first shown with lips sealed, while his voice continues. The voice of Albert Hofmann, the inventor of LSD, first starts inaudibly from a television set over a repeated panning shot. At the second visual repetition his words are intelligible, but when we see him as a television personality in diegetic space Mettler first shows the reflections of the television lights on what appears to be the ceiling, retaining the aura of the *acousmètre* just a little longer. And there are also more such examples in *The End of Time*.

Mettler's treatment of characters as dissolving *acousmètres* is one example of his use of horizontal relations between audio and visuals, meaning that a sound heard at some point connects to an image that is shown at some other time. Sometimes Mettler treats non-vocal sounds similarly, such as the rain on a car roof in *Gambling, Gods and LSD*, which is heard long before its source is shown. In *Picture of Light* another example of a large gap in horizontal time is between Mettler's voice-over about the famous Lumière brothers' film of an arriving train *L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat* (1895), and the scene more than half an hour later when Mettler shows an approaching train in a very similar way. We have also observed the use of vertical time differences, both in *Petropolis* and in *Gambling, Gods and LSD*. In both cases the gap seemed to refer to technological advancement in relation to landscape.

As a further indication of coherence, radio-type voices are abundant in all the films discussed here. We have already analysed radio occurrences in parts of *Gambling, Gods and LSD*. Radio features occasionally in *Petropolis* and heavily in *Picture or Light* and *The End of Time*. It refers both to the local (such as the petroglyphs discussed) or the global (such as the air traffic control room). In *Petropolis* it gains in volume when we fly over a residential area, as if the voices are coming from the houses we see, casting a technological shadow on the people who live there.

Language forms an integral part of Mettler's filmmaking process, exemplified by the diverse use of voice. In *Gambling, Gods and LSD* he shows a large array of Post-it Notes with words and short sentences referring to the film we are watching, such as

his thoughts on film, events, and places. His personal notes and files featured in an exhibition about the project (White, p. 39).

He prefers to reveal the limits and artificiality of language, as opposed to reading out facts. For example, the voice-over in *The End of Time* starts with what could be regarded as a Nietzschean claim: 'Things don't have names, we made them all up' (comparable with Nietzsche in *Human, All Too Human*, 1878, about *aeternae veritates*, p. 16). Film provides an excellent ground for such philosophical explorations, only to find new boundaries of course — those of the film medium itself. In the cinema, we cannot authentically experience the Northern Lights nor feel the effects of LSD. The translation from lived to cinema experience is fundamental to Mettler's reflexive style. It is suffused with numerous inventive constructions of audiovisual relations, which we hope to have illustrated by focussing on his diverse use of voice.

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