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Abstract:

The architecture of film sound: the construction of sonic space in Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger*

In this article I examine the spatial relationship that develops between sound, architecture and character identity in the films of Michelangelo Antonioni. Looking at specific examples drawn from *The Passenger* (1975), I argue that while Antonioni developed an interest in the dramatic possibilities of architectural structures (in particular, striking examples of modernist architecture), his films often also develop highly complex sonic evocations of architectural space which take on an architectural form. I show how the sonic architecture of these films (the sonic spaces linked to represented individuals and architectural structures) functions to create space between characters and structures, spaces between fixed points, and between surfaces and reflections. I want to focus specifically here on the ways in which film sound and music can also display architectural qualities which can facilitate the construction of spatiality

and, by doing this, can facilitate narrative and characterisation. The key structural elements of architecture are those that constitute the skeleton of a building (beams, columns, slabs, domes, arches, for example), and the elements that constitute the skin of a building (walls, windows, shells and membranes). Architectural structures can also contain a range of other identifiable aspects, including lines, curves, angles and spirals, and have other distinguishable decorative characteristics such as colour, textures, patterns, and contrasts. I will show that carefully designed and constructed film sound worlds can share such key architectural characteristics. Looking at examples drawn primarily from *The Passenger* (1975), I will show that while Antonioni developed an interest in the dramatic visual possibilities of architectural structures - especially striking examples of modernist architecture - his films also feature complex sonic evocations of architectural space which serve to evoke the existential experience of his characters.

Keywords

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The architecture historian and critic Antony Vidler once argued that film is ‘a sort of laboratory for the exploration of the built world’ (Vidler 1999: 13). After all, film, like architecture, might be comprehended as designed, arranged and manipulated space. Like architecture, film comprises geometric patterns and textures (Schwarzer 2004: 215). Much has been written about the visual representation of architecture in cinema (see for example Albrecht 1986, Penz and Thomas 1997, Lamster 2000, Bruno 2002, Schwarzer 2004, Penz 2012, Tobe 2017). But I want to focus specifically here on the ways in which film sound and music can also display architectural qualities which can facilitate the construction of spatiality and, by doing this, can facilitate narrative and characterisation. I want to argue that film sound can build spatial environments that display architectural qualities. The key structural elements of architecture are those that constitute the skeleton of a building (beams, columns, slabs, domes, arches, for example), and the elements that constitute the skin of a building (walls, windows, shells and membranes). Architectural structures can also contain a range of other identifiable aspects, including lines, curves, angles and spirals, and have other distinguishable decorative characteristics such as colour, textures, patterns, and contrasts. I will show that carefully designed and constructed film sound worlds can share such key architectural characteristics. Looking at examples drawn primarily from *The Passenger* (1975), I will show that while Antonioni developed an interest in the dramatic visual possibilities of architectural structures - especially striking examples of modernist

architecture - his films also feature complex sonic evocations of architectural space which serve to evoke the existential experience of his characters. His films feature carefully designed and constructed architectural sound worlds which evoke tensions between homeliness and unhomeliness, dwelling and non-dwelling, locatedness and drift. Through its architectural construction; that is, its unified design, form, function and structure, and its concomitant emphasis on spatiality, sound in Antonioni's films plays a fundamental role in the construction and reconstruction of his characters' identities.

Antonioni and spaces of existentialism

Antonioni's films are profoundly existentialist (Corona 2001). They feature self-absorbed characters living seemingly meaningless lives, behaving with moral and ethical coldness. These characters live lives of 'spiritual vacuity.' (Chatman 1985: 55) As Gatt puts it: "'Nothing' is the cause of their anxiety. Nothing other than their being in the world.' (Gatt 2001: 9) Antonioni's films are also profoundly spatial and architectural, in aesthetic terms as well as representational terms. They employ film language to explore the ways in which individuals can try (and fail) to reach beyond the material, cultural, social and political structures that contain them in order to potentially open up and escape from the more mundane aspects of their ontological realities. Harrison and Carey usefully notice the spatial aspects of Antonioni's engagement with everyday life, arguing: 'What becomes more questionable in Antonioni's films than any others of his time is the very topology of human subjectivity, prompting a need to map its place in the world.' (Harrison and Carey 2011: 38) Antonioni noticed the potential for architecture to impact upon, or indeed shape, narrative and characterization in film. Indeed, in Antonioni's films, architecture itself

is shown to have the capability to tell stories. Penelope Houston, writing in the 1960s, argued that Antonioni's greatest gift as a filmmaker was 'his hypersensitive feeling about places, and the part landscape plays in mood.' (Houston 1964: 166) However, architecture in Antonioni's films does not reflect the experience of characters in any straightforward way. Instead, human figures themselves often effectively become architectural; arranged, orchestrated and manipulated in expertly designed and constructed representational (visual *and* sonic) space.

It is significant that the first sequence of Antonioni's breakthrough film *L'Avventura* (1960) features shots of a construction site (Tomasulo 1993: 5), and that the closing sequence of *L'Eclisse* (1962) similarly shows buildings being built, as both of these films evidence the fact that Antonioni was interested in exploring the lives of characters whose identities are constantly in the process of being constructed and/or reconstructed, who live their lives by design, or who are attempting to break free from this design. Such architectural spaces under construction in these films serve to evoke and underline the existential uncertainty at the heart of the modern, post-War identities Antonioni is representing. When in *L'Eclisse* Vittoria (Monica Vitti) says 'Love makes an emptiness (*il vuoto*) all around', she gets to the heart of the architectural world view of Antonioni's films: characters exist in space, and their relationships with others (as well as to various visions of themselves) are defined by space and, in particular, by distance. Antonioni's films set up striking visual – but, as I will show, also sonic - architectural contrasts that serve to suggest and evoke such distances.

As Antonioni's films offer a vision of a modern life that signals the crisis of the individual, it is significant that his characters are often searchers or nomads

(Arrowsmith 1995: 43). They tend to be on the move, floating through and beyond the rational, socio-cultural, but also architectural structures of the modern world, all-the-while coping with the spiritual uncertainty this brings about. This is evidently the case with Locke/Robertson (Jack Nicholson) in *The Passenger*, as we will see. But it is also worth pointing out that in *L'Avventura*, Sandro (Gabriele Ferzetti) has a career as an architect, and Maria Schneider's unnamed 'girl' in *The Passenger* is also an architecture student. It seems that even individuals schooled in the design and construction of space can feel lost or cut adrift in Antonioni's world. As K.Z. Moore puts it, 'To be alienated in an Antonioni film is to be resentfully situated in an overly industrialized, capital intensive world that fails to provide a nurturing environment in which the emotions might flourish.' (Moore 1995: 23; see also Schwarzer 2000: 209; Brunette 1998: 131-2) The architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Shulz once argued that 'architecture represents a means to give humans an "existential foothold".' (Norberg-Shulz 1980: 5) But in Antonioni's representational world, architecture tends to do the opposite of this. It serves to emphasise the social, cultural or emotional structures characters feel trapped in, thus affecting, exemplifying, or indeed reflecting their states of psychic or spiritual crisis. Giuliana Bruno argues that 'In Antonioni's cinema, the architectonics of character is topophilically dislodged onto architecture or landscape, where it dwells and moves.' (Bruno 2002: 97) But the architectonics of a character in Antonioni never properly dwells. It always moves. It is always cut adrift from certainty. The spaces created in the sound worlds of the films are key to this.

Much has been written about the specific architectural structures and environments featured in Antonioni's films. Memorable buildings include the EUR (Exposizione Universale di Roma) water tower in *L'Eclisse*, which is initially seen by Vittoria through the window of Riccardo's (Francisco Rabal) apartment, looking like an 'alien

fungoid of an architectural aberration, lurking by the house like a plume of concrete smoke [...] explicit both as a phallic and an atomic symbol.’ (Strick 1963: 12) Frank Tomasulo argues that the EUR’s ‘distinctive modern environment [...] is a metonymy for all the constant human change of the modern age.’ (Tomasulo 1993: 11) This area of suburban Rome is a generically modern space (Forgacs 2000: 103), which in *L’Eclisse* ‘stands in for disenfranchisement and disaffection’ (Tobe 2017: 95; see also Benci 2011). Architectural structures play key roles in many other Antonioni films, too. For example, in *La Notte* (1961), Gio Ponti’s looming 1957 Pirelli Building in Milan provides a ‘haunting presence’ (Tobe 2017: 95). Introducing this skyscraper in the opening sequence, ‘Antonioni fixes architecture as a means of constructing the mood of the film.’ (Schwarzer 2000: 190) Furthermore, at the beginning of *Blow-Up* (1966), the Economist Building and its plaza in west London similarly operate as an architectural manifestation of modernity characterized by alienation.

There is also an abundance of escape and flight imagery in Antonioni, exemplified by recurring shots of windows, doors, cages, and prisons (Arrowsmith 1995: 71; Harrison and Casey: 39). In *L’Eclisse*, imprisoned feelings are expressed through a spatialized, architecturally-informed sense of claustrophobia (Arrowsmith 1995: 67). This is played out, for example, through Vittoria’s touching of objects in Riccardo’s apartment in the opening sequence of this film (Arrowsmith 1995: 68). As Harrison and Carey put it, ‘Considering the magnetic effect on so many of Antonioni’s characters of what lies outside the window (the door, the room, the balcony, the house), the trajectory from familiar and recognizable space toward exteriority, openness, and transcendence seems to constitute the prime narrative thrust of his films.’ (Harrison and Carey 2011: 48) But, more than this, escape imagery is important in Antonioni’s films, because his protagonists often find that aspects of their identities are continually escaping them. So,

rather than offering the promise of freedom, the notion of escape in Antonioni actually brings about anxiety and, as in *The Passenger*, death.

Sonic architecture and the spatiality of film soundscapes

While the relationship between sound and architecture on film remains largely unexplored, the ‘acoustic’ has recently been taken increasingly seriously in architectural theory and practice. For example, Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter have coined the term ‘aural architecture’ to refer to ‘the properties of a space that can be *experienced* by listening.’ (Blesser and Salter 2009: 5) Blesser and Salter explore the ways in which people ‘can hear passive objects and sense spatial geometry’ (Blesser and Salter 2009: 1), noting that in everyday situations our auditory cortex converts the physical attributes of a space into ‘perceptual cues’, ‘which we then use to synthesize an experience of the external world.’ (Blesser and Salter 2009: 2) Furthermore, they note that ‘we can readily visualize objects and spatial geometry: we can “see” with our ears.’ (Blesser and Salter 2009: 2) In other words, the spatiality of architectural structures can be discernable not just through the sense of sight but also through the sense of hearing (and the related sense of touch). Furthermore, as Brandon LaBelle puts it, ‘Sound and auditory experience forms a primary sensual matter in continual contact with the body.’ (LaBelle 2010: 133)

Similar ideas have been articulated by the architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa, who writes, for example: ‘An architectural work is not experienced as a series of isolated retinal pictures, but in its full and integrated material, embodied and spiritual essence.’ (Pallasmaa 2012: 13) Pallasmaa became concerned about the dominance of vision in the ways that architecture was taught, conceived and critiqued, ‘and the consequent disappearance of sensory and sensual qualities from architecture.’ (Pallasmaa 2012: 11)

He instead focused on the tactile and haptic nature of built structures, arguing that ‘Touch is the sensory mode which integrates our experiences of the world and of ourselves.’ (Pallasmaa 2012: 12) Taking this notion further, Pallasmaa has advocated that ‘all sensory experiences are modes of touching, and related to tactility.’ (Pallasmaa 2012: 12) He focussed specifically on the function of sound in architecture, pointing out that ‘Sight isolates, whereas sound incorporates; vision is directional, whereas sound is omni-directional. The sense of sight implies exteriority, but sound creates an experience of interiority. I regard an object, but sound approaches me; the eye reaches, but the ear receives.’ (Pallasmaa 2012: 53) For Pallasmaa - who has also written about Antonioni’s filmmaking (see 2007 and 2013) - recognition of the nature of the relationship between architecture and sound might provide us with a more nuanced understanding of how we become aware of, and engage with, material structures in space.

R. Murray Schafer declared that ‘Hearing is a way of touching at a distance’ (Schafer 1994: 11), evidencing an appreciation of the spatiality of sound which is germane to my argument here. Schafer’s primary aim was to analyze sonic environments from the perspective of ecology. He was particularly concerned with the polluted real soundscapes of the 1970s. But other writers such as Alain Corbin (1998) and Emily Thompson (2002) have subsequently broadened out the term ‘soundscape’ to encompass a wide range of auditory or sonic landscapes, real and representational. As I will show using examples from *The Passenger*, Antonioni’s films develop soundscapes as sonic architecture - distinct, orchestrated and carefully designed representational patterns of sound that serve to evoke distance, surface, interior, exterior

and reflection. Antonioni and his collaborators create sonic walls, doors and windows, as well as other architectural sonic shapes and patterns.

Antonioni's sonic architecture

Writing about Antonioni in 1975, Richard Roud argued that 'Architecture has been described as frozen music. Antonioni's moving camera unfreezes it, and this non-linear, non-narrative thaw ours forth a cascade of sound and images, spatial music.' (Roud 1975: 137) Speaking at the time of making *The Passenger* (released in 1975), Antonioni himself set out the importance of the process of sound design in his films: 'My rule is always the same: for each scene, I record a soundtrack without actors.' (Demby and Sturhahn 2008: 111) The director largely worked with post-synchronized sound (Sisto 2014: 137), preferring to meticulously plan and structure sound worlds after shooting his sequences. It is important to emphasize here that Antonioni's soundscapes rarely depict everyday sounds in any straightforwardly realistic or naturalistic way. As Seymour Chatman notes, 'Increasingly Antonioni limited himself to natural sounds and noises. Despite their apparent banality, it is clear that these sounds were carefully chosen, recoded and amplified.' (Chatman 1985: 134) The constructed nature of the sound worlds in Antonioni's films is foregrounded. His complex and nuanced sonic sensibility developed through collaborations with the innovative sound designers Claudio Maielli, Fausto Ancillai, Mike Le Mare, and Robin Gregory, and composers such as Giovanni Fusco.

In his 2018 article on the use of sound in Antonioni's films, Roberto Calabretto primarily focusses on analysing noise and music in the soundtracks. Examining waveforms, Calabretto argues that 'Antonioni's soundscape often assumes the

semblance of an actual musical score – which was exactly his intention – in which the sounds are woven into melodic phrasings which reflect the rhythm of the visual images.’ (Calabretto 2018: 2) Furthermore, for Calabretto, ‘Antonioni’s cinema demonstrates a cinematographic musicality stemming from a ‘phonographic approach’ to the world’ (Calabretto 2018: 2). But I want to explore a different avenue here, by suggesting that while the sound worlds of Antonioni’s films are indeed musical and do employ ‘noise’ in interesting ways, their sonic qualities might also be understood in spatial, and specifically, architectural, terms.

The opening sequence of *L’Eclisse* (1962) perfectly encapsulates how soundscapes operate as carefully planned and constructed sonic architecture in the work of Antonioni. Here we see (and hear) Vittoria moving through her lover Riccardo’s modern, sumptuously decorated Rome apartment, contemplating leaving him, but already spiritually and emotionally at a distance from him. The near silence in this sequence has the effect of evoking the vast emotional space between them. This architectural sonic space is built around the central, structuring sound of a revolving table fan, and the elaborate patterned clicking sound of Vittoria’s high-heeled shoes on the marble floor. Blesser and Salter write that what they call ‘aural architecture’ can have a ‘social meaning’, and that bare marble floors, for example, can ‘announce’ the arrival of an individual, being ‘cold, hard, and barren’ (Blesser and Salter 2009: 3) Certainly this is the case in this sequence, in which the cold sound of Vittoria’s footsteps echo around the detached, elevated, rarified atmosphere of this bourgeois Rome apartment to create sonic architecture that creates an effect communicating her alienation. But in the films of Antonioni such as *L’Eclisse*, sonic architecture does not usually announce the arrival (or indeed the presence) of an individual in any simple or

straightforward way. Rather, it serves to critique the ontology of constructed ‘individuals’ within the films’ narrative contexts of post-War existentialism. As R.Z. Moore puts it, ‘Antonioni’s protagonists are situated on the horizon of cognition, a liminal zone where representation is unstable and subject to ellipse.’ (Moore 1995: 24) In this sequence in *L’Eclisse*, the constant, spatialized sound of the revolving electric fan produces a mechanical, never-ending drone; a symbolic sound that signifies the lifestyle being offered to Vittoria by Riccardo – mechanical, reliable, predictable, utilitarian. But as sonic architecture this sound also operates as a sonic skin that spatially captures Vittoria at this moment, serving to communicate her emotional and spiritual entrapment. Linked to this, despite the importance of the visual depiction of the architecture of this accommodation and its furnishing and fittings, this is a sound that develops a representational space that produces an effect of a cold, overwhelming unhomeliness. I want to move on now to analyze sequences from *The Passenger* in order to further demonstrate the ways in which sonic architecture is constructed in the work of Antonioni.

The sonic architecture of *The Passenger*

The Passenger was the third English-language film Antonioni made for Carlo Ponti/Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, the other two being *Blow-Up* (1966) and *Zabriskie Point* (1969). It tells the story of David Locke (Jack Nicholson), a journalist experiencing a mid-life crisis, who is in the Sahara covering a guerilla war. Here he spontaneously decides to take the identity of another man, Robertson (Charles Mulvehill), whom he discovers in an adjoining hotel room, dead from a heart attack. As Sam Rohdie puts it, this narrative conceit becomes ‘a way of killing yourself but remaining alive.’ (Rohdie 1990: 109) On assuming Robertson’s identity, Locke travels to London, where he

returns to his house to collect essential papers, and on to Munich, Barcelona, and finally, to rural southern Spain. On this oneiric journey he meets a young unnamed architecture student (Maria Schneider) who helps him try to escape from the authorities and the other individuals on his trail.

In *The Passenger*, Antonioni and his collaborators (the sound mixer Fausto Ancillai, sound effects editor Fernando Caso, foley artist Alvaro Graminga, and sound editors Alessandro Peticca, Franca Silva and Michael Ellis) develop soundscapes that serve to articulate aspects of a crisis of identity explored in the film. Gaston Bachelard once advocated that ‘all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home.’ (Bachelard 1994: 6) But Antonioni’s characters rarely seem at home. This is particularly the case with Locke/Robertson, who moves between hotels, bars, airports, unfinished buildings, roads, deserts, graveyards and churches (Rohdie 1990: 141). As with most of Antonioni’s films, *The Passenger* visually showcases a range striking architectural structures, travelling between north Africa, London, Munich, Barcelona and rural Catalonia. As Lee Atwell puts it, the film explores ‘violently contrasting architectural styles: spare, dusty, adobe dwellings in Algeria and Spain; the dazzling rococo interior of a Bavarian church [...]; the mysterious dream-like Palacio Guell [...]’. (Atwell 1975: 59) Moving between and around these architectural structures, Locke becomes a man who now has ‘a rented identity; he inhabits the body of a dead man, the life of a corpse, a body not ‘his’.’ (Rohdie 1990: 145). I want to begin my analysis by looking at the employment of sound in the sequence in which Locke begins to assume Robertson’s identity.

Locke walks into Robertson’s Saharan hotel room to borrow soap for a shower, and

discovers the other man dead, lying face-down on his bed. Like the aforementioned opening sequence of *L'Eclisse*, the architectural spatiality of the soundscape here is constructed around a central sonic pillar: the sound of a constantly whirring fan, this time hanging from the ceiling. This is a sound that becomes a key structural element of the sonic architecture in the sequence, signalling, as it does (through its timbre and volume) the size and shape of the room and its fundamentally ascetic, spartan qualities. But this is also an example of what Michel Chion termed 'anempathetic sound'; a sound that appears to exhibit conspicuous indifference to what is going on in the film, while at the same time creating a sense of the tragic. For Chion, the best-known example of an anempathetic sound in film history occurs in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) in the form of the constant sound of water during the infamous shower sequence (Chion 1994: 8-9; 221-222). In this sequence in *The Passenger*, the sound of the ceiling fan, through its apparent indifference to the events taking place, has the effect of creating a tense psychological atmosphere, while at the same time helping to communicate the fact that any change in identity that Locke will attempt might ultimately not alter his trajectory as he imagines it will. In other words, this anempathetic sound of the fan produces an effect of alienation, and helps to communicate the futility of any attempt to alter one's destiny through any willed changes to one's character or identity. Furthermore, the rhythmic pulse of this central, structuring sound of the ceiling fan suggests the circular movement of air in the space of the room. This provides a spatialized sonic symbolism, which is important. This, after all, is the beginning of Locke's journey (or 'movement') as Locke/Robertson, a character whose identity enters a vortex, turning in on itself. Thomas Allen Nelson has noticed the circular nature of the narrative of the film; the ways in which actors repeat gestures at different moments in the film, for example. He argues 'It would be tempting to conclude from

the circular narrative of *The Passenger* that Antonioni, rather than suggesting the perils of an identity vacuum, indicates that identity itself is the trap.’ (Nelson 1977: 2016) For Nelson, the film ‘dramatizes the traps inherent in social/political forms and, on a larger level, the dangers in the necessity for making certain “shapes,” psychological and architectural, which in their implacability can strangle rather than release the full complexity of human nature.’ (Nelson 1977: 206). As the scene progresses, the whirring of the fan remains the key sound structuring the sonic architecture. Locke (Nicholson) looks at Robertson’s dead body on the bed. We hear him closing a door and moving around the room. We hear sounds generated by Locke moving Robertson’s body on the bed. These sounds add subtle textures to the sonic architecture. But it is significant that Locke eventually looks up at the ceiling fan. As the camera moves up from Nicholson’s face as he looks up at the fan, and moves down again (without a cut) to show Nicholson now wearing Robertson’s shirt, it is clear that the sound of the ceiling fan has provided a central structuring component of this key moment in the film in which we have witnessed the beginning of a transition between two identities.

A few minutes into this sequence, as Locke prepares to take on the dead Robertson’s identity, another distinct sound - this time the musical sound of a flute - enters the soundscape. This happens at the precise moment that Locke finds Robertson’s diary under his bedding. This flute sound creates an effect of exoticness and otherness in keeping with Locke’s situation in this remote African desert, far away from home. This sound broadly maintains the same volume, timbre and sonic clarity throughout the sequence, despite edits which significantly shift the position of the camera. Along with the sound of the ceiling fan, this flute becomes another key part of the structure of the sonic architecture. As Locke (Nicholson) opens the window, Antonioni cuts to an

external camera looking back at Nicholson leaning out of this window and looking out across the desert. The flute retains its volume through these cuts, while the fan briefly decreases in volume. As the camera moves to capture more of the desert landscape, the sound of a goat can now be heard. This sound has the effect of reinforcing the status of the exotic, remote rural location, but at the same time might be read as symbolic, as goats have been considered to be symbols of sacrifice (Locke's identity is about to be sacrificed). Back in the hotel room, Antonioni gives us close-up shots of Locke looking through Robertson's possessions. The sounds of the ceiling fan and the flute are mixed to retain broadly the same volume here, and are accompanied by other textured diegetic sounds of Locke looking at Robertson's flight tickets. However, the sound of the flute ceases at the precise moment that Locke discovers Robertson's gun. Throughout the sequence, Antonioni never reveals the source of this sound of the flute, so it remains questionable as to whether it is diegetic or extra-diegetic. The tune played on the flute remains simple and child-like, but also mysterious. It does not repeat memorable clusters of notes, but instead sounds unwritten and improvised, creating a dramatic space within the sonic architecture that facilitates Locke's improvisation of his new identity and the level of 'play' inherent in what Locke is doing as he begins to 'play' Robertson. The sound of the flute thereby effects the architecture of the soundscape in very complex ways, problematizing as it does the status of the visual, material architecture of the hotel, but also highlighting the representational nature of not only the identities of the characters in the film but also (as is often the case in the work of Antonioni) of the film itself. Harrison and Carey notice the recurring motif of doors and windows in Antonioni's films (2011: 39). They argue that 'windows, doors, and balconies articulate junctures of the proximal and the distal, the here and the there, the now and the then, and use them to stage leaps of narrative logic.' (Harrison and Carey

2011: 47) Through remaining invisible, the flute creates the effect of a sonic window. While it is a sound that serves to problematize the material space and the visual qualities of the architecture that informs this space (thus evoking Locke's alienation, as we have seen), this is a sound that opens up a route to Locke's imaginative 'elsewhere' and, as such, his imaginative links to another, potentially more exotic and exciting exterior and interior world.

A sequence follows in which Locke switches passports with the dead Robertson, to further become 'Locke/Robertson'. This sequence seemingly juxtaposes different moments in time. Ted Perry notices that a 'continuous camera movement joins Locke in the present with Locke and Robertson in the past, during their first meeting.' (Perry 1975: 2) We hear voices of a past conversation, over shots of Locke switching the passport photographs. It is suggested via a close-up (towards the end of this sequence) that the sound of this conversation is emanating from Locke's tape recorder in playback (see Pallasmaa 2007: 137-8). But the way in which the voices are mixed centrally and foregrounded in the soundscape, with distinct clarity (not unlike standard, classical film dialogue), over non-linear edited images, creates an effect that disrupts linear time and space. The breakdown of the spatial reality of the sound world here aptly evokes and communicates the breakdown of the identity of a character but also at the same time hints that we should not read the sound of the conversation between Locke and Robertson as a recording without recognizing the fact that all recordings – like all films - are representations.

Another key sequence in *The Passenger* constructs sonic architecture to further problematize the ontology of Locke/Robertson's identity. This sequence also features a complex series of cuts that also disrupt space and time in significant ways. Here

Antonioni suddenly takes us from an image of policemen dealing with Locke/Robertson at the Saharan hotel, to a large nondescript office in central London. A subsequent cut shows a close-up of a man's hands pulling Locke's file from a shelf in this office, and opening it, to reveal newspaper cuttings and a photographic portrait of the now 'dead' man. This is followed by a cut to an image of the screen of a television set, showing David's BBC producer Martin Knight (Ian Hendry) being interviewed about his 'late' friend and colleague. The next cut reveals that this television set is located in the sitting room of a large town house. Beyond the television, through an open window to the rear of the property, children can be seen playing in the garden. Over the sound of Martin's voice being broadcast on the television, the playful, innocent sound of the voices of these children can be heard, coming in through the window. The next cut shows the same living room from another angle, revealing Rachel Locke (Jenny Runacre) standing in blue dress, leaning on the back of a chair, drinking a glass of wine, watching (and listening) to Martin speaking about her husband on the television. In response to a question from an interviewer, Martin says David 'had a great talent for observation'.

Immediately after this line is spoken, the film cuts to an image of another external location. Here two men are kneeling down with their backs to the camera, working on the construction of paving stones. The location is the brutalist Brunswick Centre in central London. It is significant that we see an architectural place being 'constructed' here (a common Antonioni trope, as mentioned previously), as Locke/Robertson is now actively constructing a new identity for himself. Indeed, the camera pans right to reveal Locke/Robertson walking into this striking, modern architectural space. No reason is given for Locke/Robertson to be in this location. The film then cuts to Locke/Robertson walking down some wide concrete steps, with the Brunswick Centre in the background.

This building appears like a modern arena here, with a series of floors gradually stepping back from the plaza across which Locke/Robertson wanders. London's Brunswick Centre effectively becomes a performative architectural space. The soundscape focuses at this moment on Locke/Robertson's footsteps, which, bearing in mind the urban location, are unusually loud in the sound mix. This sound of footsteps creates the spatial effect of a man embarking on a lonely journey (psychological as well as material). These footsteps - the architectural centre of this sonic space - are accompanied by quieter, textured ambient sounds, including undistinguishable distant conversations. Locke/Robertson spots a young woman (Schneider) sitting on a bench on the plaza, and, after pausing briefly, subsequently walks out of the frame to the right. Rohdie usefully remarks that 'She and Locke/Robertson are part of the same shot, but not yet, apparently, part of the same fiction.' (Rohdie 1990: 148) The camera remains on Schneider, and moves towards her, eventually hovering over her, foreshadowing similar bodily gestures she will make later on in the film. The soundscape continues to feature distant, soft, ambient sounds of the city.

This sequence takes noises, or what Schafer called 'sounds we have learned to ignore' (Schafer 1994: 4), and uses them to construct sonic architecture which creates an effect of profound distance between Locke/Robertson and those around him, communicating his profound alienation and psychological disturbance. This sequence also incorporates a representation of what Schafer termed a 'hi-fi' soundscape: 'one in which discrete sounds can be heard clearly because of the low ambient noise level.' Interestingly, Schafer's ecological perspective on real soundscapes led him to argue that the countryside is 'generally more hi-fi than the city; night more than day; ancient times more than modern. In the hi-fi soundscape, sounds overlap less frequently; there is perspective-foreground and background' (Schafer 1994: 43) But in this sequence (as in

many other Antonioni films), the representation of an urban environment incorporates a quiet, 'hi-fi' soundscape, which lends it an uncanny, unnatural, otherworldly status.

The film then cuts from a close-up of Schneider sitting on the bench at the Brunswick Centre to Locke/Robertson standing in another location, on the corner of Lansdowne Crescent in Notting Hill, west London. This is a very different type of urban architectural space to the Brunswick Centre, characterized by Victorian villas, mature London trees, and an old church. Locke/Robertson walks alone along the pavement. Brandon LaBelle has usefully noted that 'The sidewalk is a threshold between an interior and an exterior, between different sets of rhythms that come to orchestrate the dynamic passing of exchange each individual body instigates and remains susceptible to.' (LaBelle 2010: 88) If Locke/Robertson occupies any space, it is a threshold. As in the previous Brunswick Centre sequence, the soundscape here is also effectively 'hi-fi', as Schafer would describe it. It is also surprisingly and uncannily quiet for an urban location. This has the effect of signalling the fundamental change in Locke/Roberston's ontology. The sonic architecture here features the sound of a bird singing and Locke/Robertson's footsteps, which are again mixed loudly and centrally in the space, supported by the sonic textures and shapes of quiet, ambient sounds such as distant car engines. Andy Birtwistle points out that 'One thing that characterizes the soundtracks of Antonioni's films from the 1960s onwards, and that distinguishes them from those of classical narrative cinema, is the way in which they feature environmental sounds in fairly long, relatively unmodulated segments.' (Birtwistle 2014: 74) This is one such example.

The film cuts again, and a middle-aged woman walks across the street from right to left, towards the camera (which slowly pans left), reading a magazine as she walks.

Locke/Robertson can then be seen lurking behind a tree, on the opposite side of the street. The film cuts to a shot of him in close up, standing by this tree. Locke/Robertson subsequently walks across the street and up to the front door of his house. An unknown man walks along the pavement outside the house, moving from left to right across the frame. As in many of Antonioni's films, all of the figures we see in this location appear to have been carefully choreographed in space. They are architectural. But the sounds in this sequence are also carefully choreographed in space. The next cut brings Locke/Robertson at the front door of his house. He inexplicably presses the doorbell, and the subsequent sound of a woman opening and closing the front door of the adjacent property can be heard. Distant voices can also be heard here, but, again, words remain inaudible. The barely discernable textured sounds of distant cars and birds singing remain. Overall, the sonic architecture here has created the effect of an unusually quiet, almost ghostly city life, and as such serves to communicate an uncanny sense of emptiness that speaks of Lock/Robertson's alienation.

The film then cuts to a shot of Locke/Robertson entering the house, with the camera positioned in the hallway, watching him shut the front door behind him. He enters the house as a ghostly figure, not fully 'present' in this previously homely space. In the next shot, in the living room of the house (recognizable from the earlier sequence featuring his wife, Rachel), the camera moves slowly towards the television seen previously, and the open window beyond it. Locke/Robertson enters the frame from the left. The loud sound of his slow footsteps can be heard on wooden floorboards, creating tension through an uneasy rhythm. This sounds of the hard soles of his shoes on the floorboards is not remotely homely, so this sonic architecture emphasizes the spiritual emptiness and unhomeliness of the house. The windows are open, and the sounds of the city intrude. As in the earlier sequence in the Saharan hotel, the sonic architecture

operates as a spatial threshold. Through this sonic window, distinctions between inside and outside are once again broken down. On walking upstairs into the bedroom, Locke/Robertson finds his obituary in a newspaper left on the bed, circled in red. Interestingly, though, and unexpectedly, the ambient sounds of the city and the singing bird return to the soundscape here. The sonic architecture continues to actively work to disrupt any sense of clearly demarcated interior and exterior space, and, as such, any notion of 'home'. Matthew Gandy argues that 'The incessant and sometimes dramatic incursions of sound into domestic environments betoken a fragility in the socio-spatial order of modernity.' (Gandy 2014: 8) This sequence employs sonic architecture to further communicate Locke/Robertson's ghostliness, and to further evoke the collapse of his constructed sense of identity. It is significant we see Locke/Robertson find evidence of the death of Locke here, in what used to be his house. Gaston Bachelard once wrote that 'A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability.' (Bachelard 1994: 17) But in this sequence – as facilitated again by complex sonic architecture – any straightforward or traditional sense of home falls apart. Bachelard also wrote that 'It is a strange situation. The space we love is unwilling to remain permanently enclosed. It deploys and appears to move elsewhere without difficulty; into other times, and on different planes of dream and memory.' (Bachelard 1994: 53) The sonic architecture of the Brunswick Centre, Notting Hill, and now the west London house in *The Passenger* denies the type of 'enclosure' that would typically correspond to a sense of not only home but also a fixed, manageable personal identity. Indeed, as Bachelard also put it, 'The house, even more than the landscape, is a "psychic state"' (Bachelard 1994: 72). In this sequence in *The Passenger*, the house - but also the psychic state of Locke/Robertson - are shown to be open and uncontainable, primarily through the employment of sonic architecture. The architecture critic and

historian Gaston Norberg-Schulz writes ‘Man dwells when he can orientate himself with an environment, or, in short, when he experiences the environment as meaningful. (Norberg-Schulz 1980: 5) Drawing on Heidegger’s notion of dwelling as set out in ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’ (1951), Norberg-Schulz argues ‘The place is the concrete manifestation of man’s dwelling, and his identity depends on his belonging to places.’ (Norberg-Schulz 1980: 6) But Locke/Robertson can never become properly acquainted with an environment, even in the house he used to live in. He does not possess schemata of orientation or identification. He evidently cannot access the ‘*genius loci*’ or the ‘spirit of a place’ he once thought of as home.

In Barcelona, when the BBC producer Martin Knight arrives on the hunt for Robertson, the sonic architecture of the street here is dense and claustrophobic. Antonioni provides a more realistic but nevertheless still symbolic soundscape here, featuring generic street sounds (voices in Spanish, car engines and horns) but also the symbolic sounds of caged birds and monkeys, creating the effect of communicating Locke’s looming entrapment. The insistent rhythm of the sounds and the broadly unintelligible nature of the foreign language street dialogue here creates a distinct atmosphere of tension and unease. This is facilitated by the louder sound of a van engine revving. Again, this is an example of what Schafer termed a ‘lo-fi’ soundscape, in which ‘individual acoustic signals are obscured in an overdense population of sounds.’ (Schafer 1994: 43). Michel Chion argued that ambient sound, or ‘territory-sounds’ ‘serve to identify a particular locale through their pervasive and continuous presence.’ (Chion 1994: 75) This is the case with this more obviously realistic representation of a Barcelona street. Schafer notes that ‘On a downtown street corner of the modern city there is no distance; there is only presence.’ (Schafer 1994: 43) But Matthew Gandy argues, ‘The acoustic city has a

porous and disruptive spatiality through which we may encounter “the other” or simply others.’ (Gandy 2014: 7) Locke/Robertson is seen in the presence of ‘others’ here, but still Antonioni communicates his alienation through the symbolism of his sonic architecture.

Trying to hide from Martin Knight, Locke/Robertson enters Palau Güell, a large mansion built by the architect Antonio Gaudi in the late 1880s. Here he meets the Schneider’s architecture student for the first time (although, as he later recognizes in the dialogue, he had previously seen her in London). It is significant that during their conversation here in Gaudi’s striking building, the sonic architecture once again emphasizes street sounds bleeding in through open windows. As in Locke/Robertson’s west London house earlier, the sonic architecture breaks down distinctions between inside and outside in order to emphasize the profound unhomeliness of Locke/Robertson’s identity. Voices echo off the vast marble walls and stairwell. Rick Altman writes of what he calls the ‘sound hermeneutic’ in Hollywood films: ‘The sound asks the question *where?* and the image (or source of the sound) responds *here!* (Altman 1980: 74) But in this sequence in Palau Güell the echo effect problematizes the ‘where’ and ‘here’ Altman writes about. There is no such straightforward correlation between the sound and its source here, which has the effect of communicating the fact that there is no simple relationship between the figure of Locke/Robertson and a fixed identity.

The celebrated penultimate, near seven-minute shot in *The Passenger*, created using a Westcam mounted on a gyroscope, takes place in the Hotel de la Gloria and its dusty courtyard in rural southern Spain. Here the character Locke/Robertson becomes the ‘strange witness of his own death: even the boundaries of subject and object become

blurred. That shot is literally a shot of absence, a movement of death.’ (Rohdie 1990: 50) This shot serves to explore ‘the open-ended work’ [...] “openness” as an idea’ (Rohdie 1990: 3). As this shot begins, the camera initially captures Locke/Robertson lying on his hotel room bed, only his torso and legs visible to the left of the frame, in red shirt and pale trousers. Meanwhile, through a barred window in the middle of the frame, we can see a dusty courtyard, with a substantial, high brick wall looming on the opposite side (the exterior of an old bullring). An old man is sitting under this wall with his dog. The camera moves very slowly through the hotel room towards the window, which, like a screen, pictures a range of activities taking place beyond. Incredibly, the camera eventually floats through metal bars fixed to this window, and out, into the middle of this dusty territory, panning left and right, before rotating 180 degrees and moving back to the entrance to the hotel. As the camera makes its slow journey into the courtyard we see and hear a lot of activity. The old man with a dog sits against the far wall. Another man crosses from right to left. We see and hear a white car with a sign on its roof (a driving school car) moving diagonally from the right upper frame; it exits (lower left). We see the girl (Schneider) walk diagonally across the frame from lower right to upper left. She looks towards Locke's window. A young boy in red shirt and light trousers (suggesting a younger Locke) throws stones at the old man by the wall, and runs off screen. The girl disappears from the upper left frame and a white car crosses the screen (at approximately the same angle as the earlier car). Two of the agents chasing Robertson emerge. One of these men returns to the car and we hear its engine start and what might be the sound of a muffled gun shot. The sounds in this sequence have a slow rhythm, producing the spatial effect of entering a void. The sounds are comprised of a mixture of colours, shapes and textures. We hear distant, indistinguishable voices; car tyres on gravel; birdsong; a bell tolling; a car engine

starting; a muffled gunshot; a Spanish trumpet. Police sirens enter this sonic space. Again, just as the actors and objects and camera are being choreographed in space, so too are the sounds. The sonic architecture is once again 'open' here, as if to emphasise the notion of perpetual movement and mutability. As the camera rotates and moves back towards the hotel it captures a vast, flat landscape beyond the town; the sea just visible in the distance. Eventually the camera watches Locke's wife Rachel hurriedly enter the building accompanied by policemen, before slowly moving back along the external wall of the hotel to the window it exited, where it halts. Peering back in through the bars, the camera registers Locke's corpse lying on the bed. Rachel, dressed all in white, rushes in and crouches by the bedside, as the policemen look on. Locke has evidently been killed while the camera has been on its journey. In this sequence, beyond the extraordinary spectacle of the camera movement, Antonioni encourages what Blesser and Salter term 'attentive listening' (Blesser and Salter 2009: 15). Such attentive listening might allow us to recognize that Antonioni is communicating the fact that death is being figured pure openness here, as an escape from a life lived through constructed experience.

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