# KAIROS: A FULCRUM FOR COMPOSING AUDIO DRAMA

**by**

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**Abstract**

Audio drama, a contemporary term for storytelling through sound whose roots lie in the traditions of radio drama, has long been touted as a "theater of the mind" or "a movie in the mind" as the imagination must render the visual imagery. The reinscribing of audio drama as a visual medium, based on its lack of one in the technological sense, joins efforts to repackage the audio drama form to elicit interest from a wider audience, yielding such terms as the "audio movie" or the "podcast movie". However, the defining characteristic of a movie or film is the presence of the spatial frame that constructs space through which elements move and meaning is created, not only through arrangement in time but space. My practice explores codes of spatial representation that could lend greater authenticity for this comparison to film.

My project, titled *Only Afterland*, utilizes a classical linear narrative to maximize accessibility to a wide audience to complement the spirit of this thesis. It posits a foundational model for my method. Focused on post-production process and anchored by stereophonic positioning, my practice aspires to simulate a filmic environment by artificially constructing space within a stereo-image and creating artistic meaning between the sound elements based on their spatiality, as film does with visual elements.

I call my method for audio drama: KAIROS. This stands for: *Kinematic Audio* through the *Intermedial Representation Of Space*. This intermedial construction of visual space, through which elements move and interact to create virtual movement-images, explores a deeper potential to compose complex filmic worlds using only sound.

## Introduction

Artists develop new forms and practices to sustain the societal relevance of their medium when faced with the impact of the next technological tide. Impressionism provides an example. In response to the invention of the photograph, Impressionists employed vibrant uses of color and celebrated overt brushstrokes that drew direct attention to the apparatus of the painting (Silva 2022). In response to Impressionism, Expressionists also sought to artistically capture what a photograph could not, such as subjective emotional states which were given primacy over the natural renditions that a photograph could produce with instant precision (Titford, 17). In its strokes of high contrast, Expressionism also made use of what the photograph could not yet capture from the natural environment: color. This element was not an option, however, for those expressionists who would later cross over to the film medium, except as a global tint of the monochrome frame.

Emphasizing the contrast between black and white was perhaps the most logical transfer from painting to film for the Expressionist movement. The deep shadows and hard lighting, like the glare of an oppressor, inclined itself toward a bleak aesthetic better suited to communicating negative emotions. This provided fertile ground for the post-war despair and turmoil felt by the filmmakers who pioneered the German Expressionistic film tradition as a response to these dark times (Saul, 104). They sought to depict places that were extensions of the interior anguish or upset caused by the world. The internal feelings of the characters shape the presentation of the mise-en-scène, including how the characters appear, such as Cesare in *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1920) or in *Nosferatu* (1922) or *Der Golem* (1915). The diegetic space becomes an expressive extension of the psychology and emotional states of the characters through its lighting

techniques and odd camera angles, sometimes to express the skewed perception of an unreliable narrator. Deviating from conventional set construction, the scenery would also emote on behalf of the characters with unnaturalistic geometry and odd orientations that created jagged or slanted visual elements. The outer world is depicted through the emotional environment of the inner world, prioritizing character perspective over true-to-life renderings as would be seen by the eye (Saul, 104-111; Titford, 17-21).

The influence of German Expression on my own work is easily detected in my approaches to media composition. This includes high-contrast or sharply defined figures on ground (i.e. voices more in the foreground) as well as veering from naturalistic renditions in favor of artificial constructions that imitate formal aspects otherwise left behind (Saul, 118). That Expressionism came about through a shift in practices in response to a new medium, the notion of new forms manifesting to preserve the relevance of its medium in new times, served as inspiration when I confronted the limitation of no visual dimension for sonic storytelling.

Prior to the arrival of television, radio was the primary source of entertainment (Lewis 1992). The common notion that the visual offerings provided by the new medium had a property that inherently obsoleted radio entertainment was more pronounced in America. This dominant narrative solidified in the 1960s through concerted network campaigns that crowned television as the new king. Meanwhile, it downplayed any future relevance for radio entertainment, characterizing it as a lesser medium for listeners who were distracted or sought "golden age" nostalgia for a bygone era (Patterson 2016). Media scholar Eleanor Patterson wrote:

> This meant, however, that the radio drama most listeners heard was framed as 'old,' and indeed, also literally had keynote sounds that conveyed age, such as earlier modes of radio acting, as well as the hiss and pop of some recordings' physical degradation over time. These elements worked alongside earlier network campaigns that portrayed television as the future of broadcast entertainment, and the prominence of format

> programming, to create the sense among radio industry workers that scripted radio was passé (Patterson, 7).

While the practice of radio drama never fully ceased in The United States, it dropped below the cultural radar, partly thanks to its deep connection to *consumer* culture (Marquis 1984; Lavin 1995). Intermittent attempts to revive it in the mass consciousness, as a viable form of entertainment in the television age, struggled against the characterizations of the medium and attitudes of network executives (Patterson, 9-12). This resulted in radio drama being left to survive in the spheres of public radio with funding from organizations for arts and culture. In some cases, such as National Public Radio's show *Earplay* (1971-1981), it was co-funded by partners in the BBC in London, the Canadian Broadcasting Company, and other European companies (Patterson, 10).

Richard Imison, while Deputy Head of Radio Drama at the BBC, wrote about the decay of radio drama in American culture in his article titled "Radio and the Theater: A British Perspective" (1991, 289-292). He opens with an anecdote in which a firm of marketing consultants advised that the best time to schedule a broadcast for radio plays was 1936, a sad but true joke. He wrote: "There are talented individuals throughout the United States who continue to believe in creative radio and make programs of high quality, but the wheel resolutely refuses to be reinvented on any scale" (Imison, 289).

The traditions carried over through the "old-time" discourse continue today in the podcast age. Now, the practices of radio drama are more commonly referred to as "audio drama" (Brooks 2020). Efforts to repackage audio drama as something new or develop language about upcoming projects that distances itself from previous practices are echoes of what happened in the radio broadcast subculture of the 1960s and 1970s (Patterson, 6-14).

The talking point of audio drama as a "theater of the mind" has persisted from its very beginnings (Patterson, 5). The participation of listeners in the construction of the visuals in their own imaginations lends a powerful intimacy that producers champion as the medium's greatest strength. Renditions of characters and settings are personalized to the listener.

The creation of this mental image facilitates a narrative that reinscribes audio drama as a visual medium, based on its lack of one in the technological sense. This can extend itself to terms such as the "audio movie" or the "podcast movie" (Dudley 2021; Ugwu 2021; Sambhi 2021). Naming is a powerful form of cultural appropriation (Altman, 16), in this case the appropriation of the social capital associated with the popular medium of film.

If the methodology remains the same, however, making the artistic practice under the new term and the old term indistinguishable and the terms readily interchangeable, then this exposes the maneuver for the semantic device that it is. New language is developed to describe unchanged practices in lieu of developing new practices that could be differently described, which suggests how deeply internalized the beliefs in audio drama's limitations are. This repackaging denotes an acceptance of these limitations and unwittingly reinforces the devaluing perceptions that it meant to escape through use of language. It doesn't simply bypass the question as to whether audio drama could adapt its codes of representation and evolve new practices that attend to the expectations created by such proclamations. It proceeds as if there is no valid question to address because the answer is self-evident.

My practice responds to this by exploring this question through an evolving method that I call KAIROS, which stands for: *Kinematic Audio* through the *Intermedial Representation Of Space*. Kairos is a Greek word for time, which is more specific than its sister term *chronos* that refers to the measure and properties of time. Kairos is an opportunity for action, a special

occasion in time when a significant event can happen (Smith 1969). The intermedial construction of visual space, through which elements move and interact to create a virtual movement-image, explores a deeper potential to compose complex filmic worlds using only sound.

My project, titled *Only Afterland*, utilizes a classical linear narrative to maximize accessibility to a wide audience in accord with the spirit of this thesis, which explores the transference of codes of representation from more popular mediums. This science fiction story could be classified in the genre of "weird fiction" in the vein of *The Twilight Zone*, which is renowned for its tackling of social issues and questioning of norms (Murray 2016, 95-107). A departure from the quirkier approaches of my previous work, *Only Afterland* posits a foundational model for my method. Despite the commercial codes of representation at the surface, its effect is the product of experimental practices. Its spatialization schemas draw heavy inspiration from filmmaking and visual composition. My practice seeks to simulate a filmic environment by artificially constructing space within a stereo-image and creating artistic meaning between the elements based on their spatiality, as film does with visual elements. Just as film sound is governed by the primacy of the visual frame in the audio-visual relationship, this sonic environment is subordinate to the schematic space (an artificial frame) constructed within itself: the fulcrum of action and movement in the story. I aspire to challenge the commonly perceived limitations of audio drama and foster deeper investigations of its possibilities.

**Podcasts: The New Radio**

The technical meaning of "podcast" is an umbrella term for the electronic delivery of digital audio files to devices via a subscription service or podcast client. The "pod" of podcast derives from where podcasts began at the turn of the 21rst century: the iPod. This device has since converged with the phone, but its societal effect remains the same. The expression of content through only one sensory modality, that of sound, allows people to multitask while consuming it. People can listen while engaged in other activities. Offering news, discussion on issues, entertainment, or information on any topic to listeners, podcasts allow for the presence of culture and other desired interests during their crowded days. Podcasts can make time for those who complain of there never being enough of it; enhance the quality of time upon which menial tasks have been imposed by occupation or mundane necessity; or offer an act of resistance against the demands of the societal and environmental forces that conspire to monopolize life itself in the modern age.

As Michael Bull, a founder of the discipline of sound studies, observes in his work, people use the medium not only for escape, but to assert their own autonomy and private space that offers relief, a mechanism of control, and empowerment over external forces (Bull, 539-548). The use of headphones enables people to mute their surroundings in favor of a private world of their own choosing. This maximizes the immersive potential of audio drama, which, again, is simply an alternate term for radio drama in the podcast age.

Radio drama was once the primary form of entertainment. Families gathered around the radio for such programs as *Amos 'n' Andy* (1928-1960) that was broadcast at 7 PM every

weekday evening (Lewis, 29). Police and detective shows included *Gangbusters*, *Dragnet*, *The Adventures of Sam Spade*, and *Adventures of Phillip Marlowe* (Vancour, 46). Daytime programming in radio drama yielded the birth of the soap opera whose most popular shows included *Ma Perkins* and *The Romance of Helen Trent* (Marquis, 405; Lavin 1995). The most famous example of radio drama is the 1938 broadcast of *War of the Worlds*, an adaptation of the H. G. Wells story by Orson Welles (Vancour, 34), but innumerable shows were produced at the time. The variety of shows and genres designed to appeal to different demographics formed the broadcasting models that would later continue in visual mediums.

Despite the arrival of television in the 1950s, radio drama persisted in most parts of the world. However, it fell far from its original standing in the United States, all but abandoned by the broadcasting media networks, who had golden age radio drama to thank for their very beginnings. Through the lens of their new priorities with television, they dismissed listeners of the radio broadcast medium as distracted and nostalgia-driven, which led to the dissolution of creative shows designed for more attentive audiences (Allan, 8).

More than half a century later, a boom in podcast fiction elevated awareness of audio drama to American listeners. I experimented with releasing podcast fiction from 2008-2009, hoping to bring more attention to my work as a novelist, but spoken narration came into vivid creative conflict with the experience that I desired as a sound designer. Abandoning novels due to disillusionment with publishing, I concentrated on podcasting assembly for the audio component to the new science fiction magazine *Lightspeed Magazine* (Adams 2010). I also used my talents for voice-acting in various productions. One of them, produced by Julie Hoverson, is an audio drama anthology series called *19 Nocturne Boulevard* (Hoverson 2008). This deeply familiarized me with the modern audio drama form. This variation relies on only dialogue, sound

effects, and music to carry the experience, but avoids the narration from audio book practice and classic radio drama. For my next sonic effort, the modern audio drama *Edict Zero – FIS* which debuted in September of 2010 (Kincaid 2010), I limited extradiegetic voice-overs to spoken credits and scene headers inspired by silent film intertitles. The *Edict Zero – FIS* series is considered by many radio and podcast drama producers to be among the most influential audio dramas of the past fifty years (Brooks 2020).

The makers of audio drama, from its beginnings in radio, celebrate the form as occurring in a "theater of the mind" (Patterson, 5). This can be a direct reference to the tradition of "radio theater" or the "radio play" whose performance roots lie in live theatrical performance. This can be a route to the claim that audio drama is a "visual medium" through association with stage performance that is watched in a theater or opera house. Prompted by auditory cues, the mind imagines what our eyes are not shown. Thus, the listener participates in the creative process with their own visualizations. Audio drama can inform the mind of a listener as to what the character generally looks like, from descriptions provided in dialogue or through performance of the voice actor, but it cannot render the exact appearance of a character as a film frame can. This limit, however, is often counted among its greatest strengths. Characters imagined will be highly personalized, unique to the listener, thereby fostering a powerful intimacy. When characters and their settings become just as much the creations of the listeners as those of the creators, the potential for deeper immersion attains a level that perhaps only the book reading experience could hope to rival. The stimulation of one sensory modality in isolation activates the simulation of others not present, as McLuhan observed:

> ’Comfort’ consists in abandoning a visual arrangement in favor of one that permits casual participation of the senses, a state that is excluded when any one sense, but especially the visual sense, is hotted up to the point of dominant command of a situation. On the other hand, in experiments in which all outer sensation is withdrawn, the subject begins a furious fill-in or completion of senses that is sheer hallucination. So the hotting-up of one sense tends to effect hypnosis, and the cooling of all senses tends to result in hallucination (McLuhan, 41).

While an immersive experience cannot be accessed through the dominant podcast mode of passive listening and divided attention, its bolstering by the podcast as a subscription service offers an opportunity (a *kairos*) to create a new variant that hybridizes more familiar modes of representation to demonstrate greater relevance in the new age. The alternative is lack of growth or something worse: a repeat its earlier fate in the 1960s and 1970s.

Radio drama withered from the narrowcasting logic of the broadcast networks. Networks not only relegated the form to the second-rate value that they believed it to be. They doomed it to confinement by narrowcasting to the only audience that they imagined could exist for it in the brave new television age: nostalgic outliers whose interest came through “golden age” or “old time” discourse (Patterson, 12). Had classic radio drama practices required more than a shoestring budget, in extreme contrast to the high costs of television or film production, radio drama may have found its resting place in relative obscurity in the United States much earlier.

Attempts to repackage the form, using only language, are no more new than various pronouncements of some great reimagining or revitalization of the form. Terms such as “audio movie” arose from this environment (Dudley 2021; Ugwu 2021; Sambhi 2021). Without a measurable design distinction, the new terms become interchangeable with the old, not based on reality but a marketing ploy to attract the social import from a more popular medium. Without attending the expectations created by the inference that filmic modes of representation are applied, this reinforces the popular narrative of this form’s limitations and outdatedness.

To say that an audio drama “sounds like a movie” may seem accurate on the general surface, if we set aside the function of sound in film as a secondary (as well as optional) partner whose organization is governed by a missing visual framework, but it is a misleading statement if it intends to propose that this then qualifies it as a movie. If it truly sounds like a movie, then it is one half of the movie experience, arguably much, much less.

With that in mind, my work embraces the idea as a path to explore where the true boundaries may lie in search of a potential for a deeper authenticity to the claim of an “audio movie”. The first word sets the expectation parameter for the sonic modality of expression. The second word denotes the specific organization of formative elements that defines movie-making practices as distinct from other media forms. The intermedial staging of filmic construction must discuss such matters as the relationship of film sound with image.  First, we must address the technical environment that I work in and why I chose it.

**The Headphone Environment**

My work revolves around a post-production schema. This focuses on an unnaturalistic approach that aspires for the spatial simulacrum of a film screen using amplitude disparities of stereophonic space as expressed through headphones, whose small speakers are placed directly beside each ear. This is not solely to exploit the inherent intimacy of their proximity, an emotional metaphor whose application can be useful in the post-production mix itself as well as recording practices (Coëgnarts, 205; 211-213; Young, 11). This environment need not account for variability of speaker orientations, acoustic spaces, or discrepancies in how sound levels may be perceived in those spaces. It designs its own space. Universally fixed positions of the speakers enact strict control of the stereo image: the range of the artificially spatialized stereo image from left to right. Otherwise, the farther apart the stereo speakers are placed, the more the stereo image is stretched, which expands the perceived physical space between the spatial positions of sound elements.

Surround sound installations prescribe specific setups, but they aim to simulate the experience of the movie theater "superfield" of film sound which is configured for not only the presence of but *the magnetizing primacy of* the visual image (Chion, 150-151). Moreover, a binaural approach to a soundscape simulates how sounds would naturally be heard and perceived as coming from the direction of their source in space. The accuracy of this localization diminishes with distance, quite unlike the pinpoint precision of sight, due to the nature of sound as a pressure wave that bounces off environmental objects. This works well for first-person perspectives, in which we are meant to hear what a character does based on the model of the ear

as a sensory device, as well as VR environments or first-person shooter games, which, like all audio-visual mediums (interactive or otherwise) have the emulation of sight to provide finer spatial location. Otherwise, the design of sound that conforms to naturalistic aural perception troubles the task of locating a fine point of origin in space (Chion, 90-91).

The synesthetic model for my spatial schema is not based on how our ears would hear sounds in nature, but how our eyes would *see* the location of their sources on the frontal presentation of a film screen. The organization of this virtual image means to inform the arrangement of the listener's mental image. This technique attends to codes of representation established by classical film practice. As the positioning of elements in the sound image is a direct expression of where visual elements would be on a screen, classic stereophonic sound is suited to this task, the right tool for the job. Any indulgences with 360-degree spatial sound would counteract the frontal schema, which is based, in part, on how the eye apprehends.

No matter which way our heads or a camera turns, the elements within the container of the visual frame are never behind us.

**Spatial Composition: Framing the Sound Image**

When trying to describe what an audio drama is to others who are unfamiliar with the form, people will sometimes say that it's like a movie with the picture turned off. This can be predicated on the use of orchestral music from the film scoring tradition or the lack of any other readily palpable frame of reference. A claim that the traditional practice of audio drama *is* a movie, even if one "for your ears", misapprehends the function of sound in the audio-visual relationship. When included, sound is a companion to the film screen. All its advancements and expansions from mono to stereo to surround sound cannot unseat the king of the visual frame as not only the center attraction but a defining feature of what a film is.

> A film without sound remains a film; a film with no image, or at least without a visual frame for projection is not a film. Except conceptually: Walter Ruttmann's 1930 limit-case film Weekend is an "imageless film," according to its creator, consisting of a montage of sounds on an optical soundtrack. Played through the speakers, Weekend is nothing other than a radio program, or perhaps a work of concrete music. It becomes a film only with reference to a frame, even if an empty one (Chion, 143).

The frame as a finite container for its content, which cannot exist beyond its borders, is a universal and fittingly *inescapable* conception. The visual elements of the traditional movie experience are confined to its borders and have no capacity to roam the outer regions as sound can, say in the acoustic space of a movie theater. Chion talks about the "preexisting" condition of the frame, which exists independently of the images it contains, and whose dimensions remain unchangeable throughout (164-165).

> For sound there is neither frame nor preexisting container. We can pile up as many sounds on the soundtrack as we wish without reaching a limit. Further, these sounds can be situated at different narrative levels, such as conventional background music (nondiegetic) and synch dialogue (diegetic)—while visual elements can hardly ever be located at more than one of these levels at once. So there is no auditory container for film sounds, nothing analogous to this visual container of the images that is the frame (Chion, 67-68).

Mindful that Chion writes through the context of the audio-visual relationship, I disagree that sound has no frame or container. While it's true that we can add as many elements as we want to a sound image, the same is true for the visual frame in the digital age. Elements can be interposed with or superimposed onto others within the same image in endless supply through any number of post-production mechanisms. The same considerations go into negotiating intelligibility of the whole when positioning these elements, such as density of elements and their balanced locations in the image.

That film sound can operate in other spaces, such as the off-screen diegetic (like the voice of a character not shown on screen) or the non-diegetic (such as the musical score that we can hear but the characters cannot) is not evidence that sound is boundless, only evidence that sound has a larger container than the visual frame that it humbly reveres. Film sound is the hulking titan that serves the tiny king who – if only through the language of the dominant discourse on film – is crowned by the ocular-centric frame (Chion, 143).

From the perspective of the sonic dimension alone, the movie screen exists only as a construct, an idea, a schema. The presence of visual elements is governed by whether they are shown in the smaller container that is the film frame, but a sound element is always present, even if its visual counterpart is offscreen. The existence of sound is predicated on its inclusion by a mediator, the film editor, who must consider the screen, explicitly because the screen itself has no inherent power over its existence.

My schema when synced to the elements of an actual visual image would present cognitive misalignment problems, caused by the differences between sight and sound, as revealed in early sound experiments with film sound (Beck, 206-207). Michel Chion writes of this in *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*:

> During the first years of multitrack sound, attempts at real spatialization were made—that is, really locating the sound on the left side of the screen if its source was shown there. The problem with these efforts is precisely that they ran into this psychological phenomenon of spatialization. Mental spatialization had been a blessing for the sound film, since it allowed movies to function for well over forty years without problems. We only need imagine the mess if sounds had to issue from the points where their sources on the screen were shown: one would have to install veritable beehives of speakers behind and around the screen. Not to mention, of course, the headaches of sound matching that would have resulted (70).

These early experiments yielded such phenomena as the "in-the-wings" effect, which is produced "whenever a sound linked to a cause likely to appear onscreen, or which has just exited, lingers in one of the offscreen loudspeakers to one side" (Chion, 83).

In the traditional scenario, the footsteps of a character walking away would fade out to be absorbed by the soundscape. This would happen at the central heart of the visual image that handles the organization of space, regardless of what side of the screen may have been used to make a visual exit. Otherwise, the character exiting screen right will not be perceived as having walked out of view so much as having been stripped of physical substance or rendered invisible by the edge of the frame, which we are now consciously aware of in our world. Meanwhile, his disembodied footsteps continue in a strange offscreen space whose relationship with the diegetic story world seems tenuous if not entirely severed. The diversity of shots in film – in their framing or angles – spliced together in editing or montage would only serve to heighten the incoherence of its existence.

This situation changes when sound breaks away, like the studious apprentice who carries not only the influence but lessons of his master in a quest to find his own path, to command its own construction of filmic space using the natural resources of its own modality. This is the business of my post-production scheme, whose preexisting and unalterable frame is the stereo image but whose film frame is a constructed space within it. The uses of reverb or timbre or the binaural signal delay techniques remain as effective tools to communicate spatial relationships in a soundscape, but I subvert them to the psychological effects of differing amplitude. "Intensity cues (amplitude difference between sound waves arriving at the two ears) and spectral cues (timbre difference) also contribute to sound localization, especially at high frequencies and in closed environments" (Roederer 1995, 58). The emulation and hyperreal pronouncement of this otherwise naturalistic "intensity cue" provides finer positioning within the headphone environment.

Panning allows for an artificial positioning within a stereo image based on the distribution of the sound signals between the right and left channel. If the amplitude (or loudness) of the sound signal in the right stereo channel is greater than the signal on the other, the localization of the source is perceived as being more to the right. If that signal is panned all the way to the right, so none of it remains on the other channel, it is said to have hit the wall of the mix on the right side (meaning it would only play through the right speaker or, if you're using headphones, you would only hear it in your right ear). These "walls" are the hard borders of the stereo *image*. They frame the soundstage (as it is often called) for a frontal presentation to its audience, much like the plane of a movie screen.

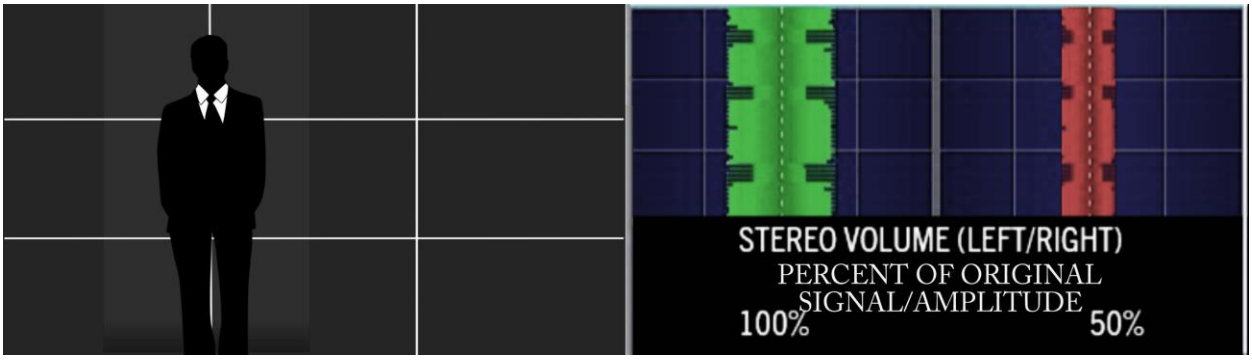

*Figure 1 – Left: Virtual screen position. Right: Sound signal distribution; right stereo channel volume reduced 50%*

A sound signal evenly distributed in a two-speaker stereo installation is perceived as coming from a middle point between them in space, as if there is a speaker there even though there is not (sometimes called the "phantom center" for this reason).

In a headphone environment, that center would be the vector origin of the privatized world in the listener's head. As R. Murray Schaffer wrote in *Music of The Environment*: "In the headspace of earphone listening, the sounds not only circulate around the listener, they literally seem to emanate from points in the cranium itself, as if the archetypes of the unconscious were in conversation" (Cox, 62). This sudden dominion of the virtual world coupled with the extension the listener's body and mind creates a potential that surpasses mere *transformation* or negation of their external world, but *transportation* to another. This virtual space, albeit organized by the media maker, now belongs more to the recipient, whose imagination fleshes it out with personalized mental imagery, connotations, and meaning. As Iaian Chambers put it, drawing from the ideas of Chantal De Gournay about the Walkman experience, it "draws the world into you, reaffirms your body, and laconically signals a 'diasporic identity' put together in transit" (Cox, 172-173). The space of the virtual world has exploded out in a Big Bang from the center of the listener's head, leaving them in the center of it at their spawn point in the simulation.

When applied to mixing for music, it is around this point that the instruments are spatially oriented, balancing the soundstage, each given an individual existence to be heard in their own spatial zones of the stereo image, like bodies that take up space and have mass. I analogize to figures in a visual frame, who have separate embodiments positioned to balance the composition.

In film, no character lingers near the edges of the frame without good artistic reason, as the filmmaker is just as prone to accusations of bad composition as the mixing engineer who allows an element of the stereo image to lean too far and for too long to one side. This imbalance causes displeasure whether it happens in the stereo sound image or the visual image, albeit for different reasons, which helped me to conceptualize a comfort zone in the space between the spatial extremes. I took inspiration from the classical technique known as The Rule of Thirds, which divides a film frame into nine equal spaces like a tic-tac-toe board.

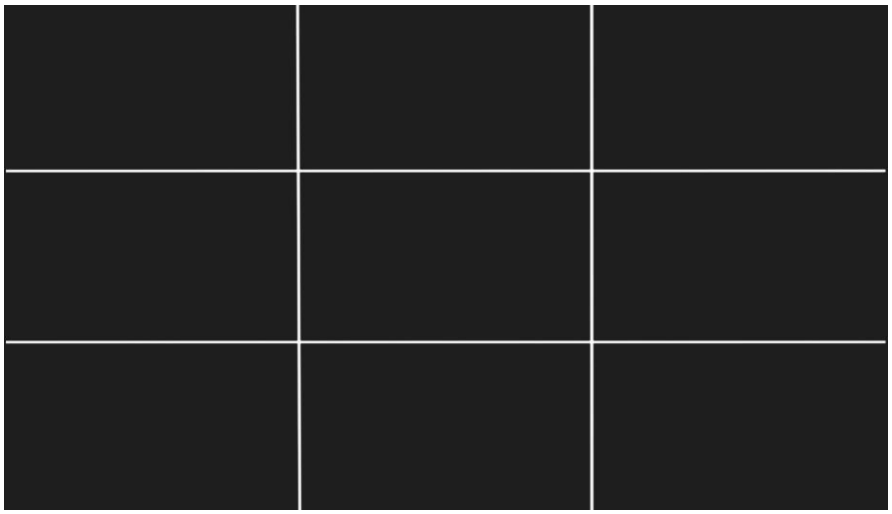

*Figure 2 – Rule of Thirds grid.*

Omitting vertical considerations for the stereo image, I applied this horizontally from left to right. This entails dividing the frame into three equal sections. In the stereo image, the first line falls at the halfway point between hard left (the signal in the left stereo channel only) and the center. The second falls at the halfway point between the center and hard right. I use these as primary spatial positions for characters at the center of the action in the stereo image.

Borrowing from the film convention, Axis of Action, I call these “action lines”. Spatiality translates to percepts as separate entities. A voice speaking with a left stereo lean occurring after a voice speaking with a right lean reinforces that these voices emanate from different embodiments. This is analogous to positioning actors on the screen. While a film can rapidly vary the kinds of shots that capture these characters in montage (the two-shot, close-ups, alternating over-the-shoulder shots, to name a few) the axis of action rule maintains their spatial positions of either to the right or to the left. They remain on their respective axes of action, no matter what kinds of shots are included by a film editor or the personalized inner cinematographer of the listener’s mind.

When I elect the proscenium-style framing of a “five-man band” character group who share the same virtual soundstage, I utilize secondary action lines, which lie at the halfway point between the primary action lines and the edges of the frame (range of the L/R stereo field). This derives from stereo mixing practices for music previously discussed. Counting the center as an action line of its own, the ultimate result divides the frame of the stereo image into six zones,

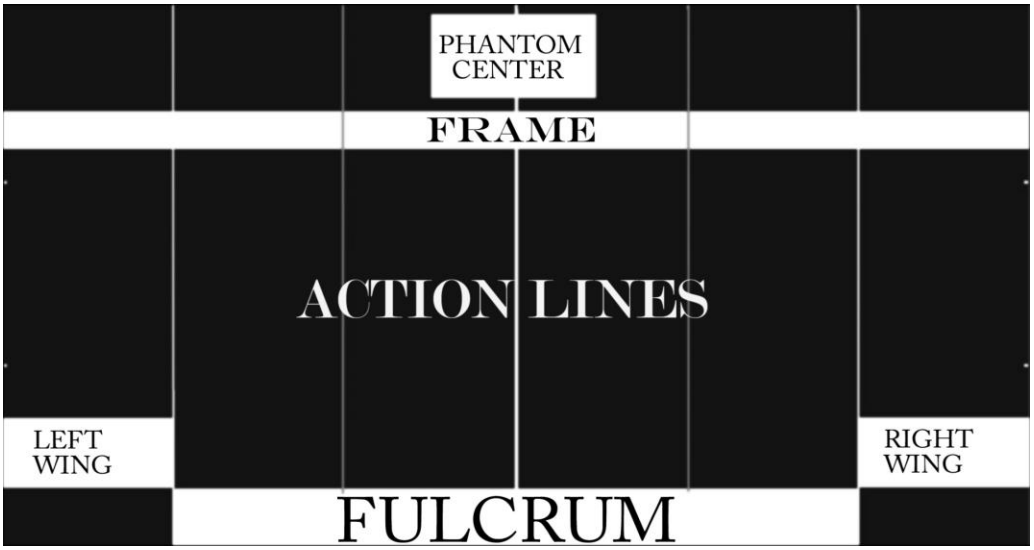


*Figure 3 – The Fulcrum visualization of stereophonic positions, based on the stereo image “frame”*
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which appear in Figure 3 as columns, defined by the five action lines. The secondary action lines (those lines closest to the lines of the edge without sharing them) define a space of four zones. These zones collectively form a sonic simulation that I call *The Fulcrum*.

While comparisons to a theatrical stage are useful to describe the orientation of elements, the analogy breaks down with sound's ability to instantly change the set, transporting the audience into an entirely new environment and situation. Characters and places can appear or disappear instantly without any adieu. This technology-based ability of *instant montage* is shared by film but must be utilized less frequently in audio drama so as not to disorient the listener unless that is the intent. Sound can zoom into action or transport us where theatre cannot take its audience. Theatre can show a car on the stage, but it cannot take the audience inside of it with the characters when they climb into it and take it for a ride.

If we define the camera view of a filmed environment as the diegetic place from which we see, then for its sonic counterpart in our virtual construction, the term "Point of Audition" finds a less contentious reality (Chion, 91). As the camera POV composes the arrangement of profilmic elements for effective balance, the "point of audition" or POA does the same.

The fulcrum as an analogue for the film screen might call into question the use of its edges as action lines, but it is at the edges of the fulcrum where the limitations of the "real" visual frame, from which the fulcrum was derived, meets the more expansive capabilities of the soundscape to frame a richer, deeper world that the fulcrum is situated within. It is at these threshold boundaries where such terms as "offscreen diegetic sound" must be recontextualized to this schema as existing in the wings outside of the fulcrum: the gravity well that draws all dramatic confrontations toward the center.

This is the defining characteristic of my method, KAIROS. The intermedial staging of schematic apparatuses of organization (Méchoulan, 3-5) found in the film medium crafts cinematic worlds of virtual movement-images and time-images, akin to a synesthetic kinematic text (Murray 2020) except with spoken language. Much like the worlds of my cyberpunk stories, it is a simulation.

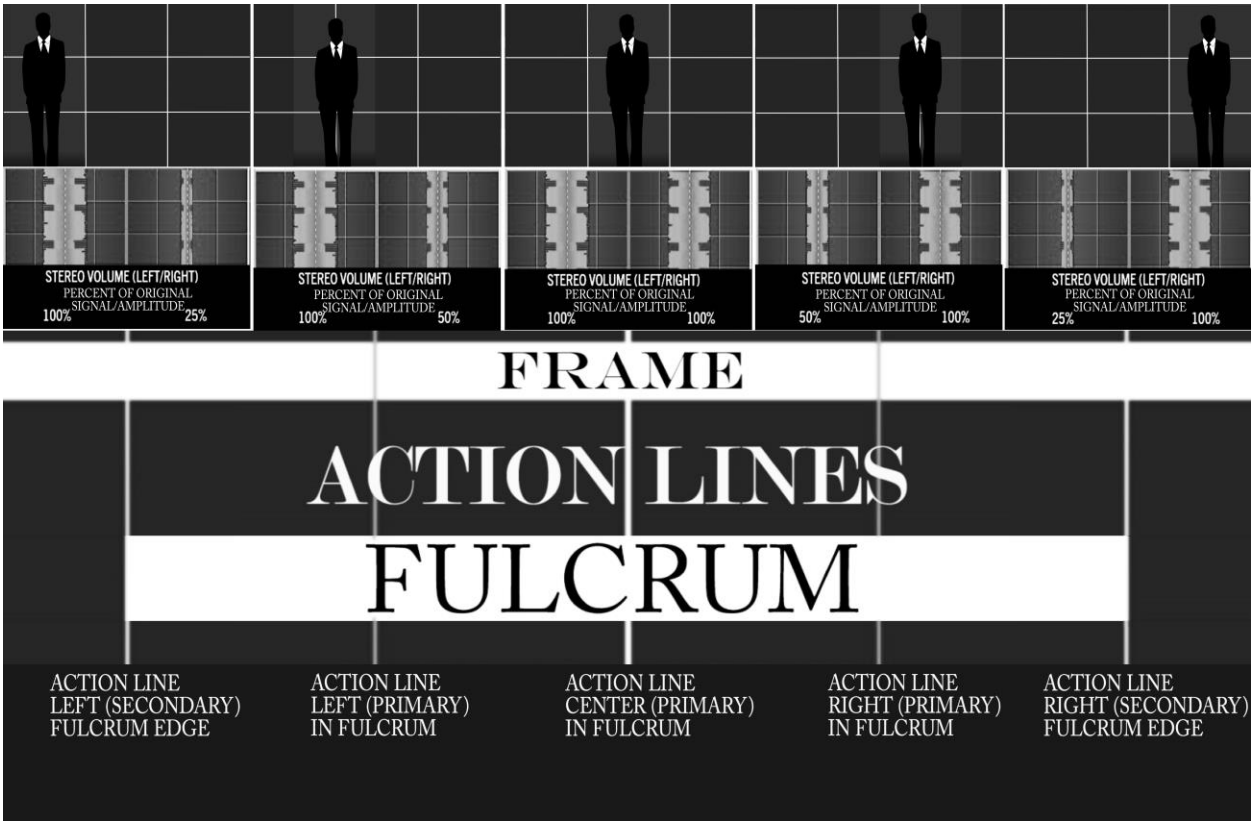


*Figure 4 – Fulcrum full instructional diagram: Top to bottom: framing percept, signal distribution, action lines. This is one technical approach, which utilizes subtraction of volume/amplitude on one channel (R or L).*

**Spatial Composition: Embodiment and Presence**

An integral feature of filmmaking is the orientation of the mise-en-scène. This organization is not limited to its arrangements in time, but also its arrangement through the created space within a frame. The term "movie" comes from motion picture. This motion, even if an emulation of movement, concerns the subjects shown within the space of a frame. Without the spatial modes of representation and the ability for its elements to move in that space, we lack a key property of the filmic environment. In my work, under ordinary circumstances within a scene, characters must travel from one position to another with a gradual pan, even if it happens quickly, which allows the listener to follow their embodied presence and adjust the framing of the mental picture. This new arrangement of character locations continues to create meaning beyond simple distinct positioning or balancing the sound frame.

In *Only Afterland*, when the protagonist Neil Duphery enters a therapy room where the enigmatic Afterland is being questioned by Doctor Flanagan, Neil enters from the left, crossing the threshold of Doctor Flanagan's action line or spatial position. He then steps toward Afterland's position (on the right action line) to rest at center. With Doctor Flanagan as an enforcer of norms and Afterland an outsider who questions them, Neil now stands between these two worlds as a liaison, spatially reinforcing that he is subject to these two opposing influences. As Neil makes this move, we hear the sounds associated with his physical embodiment, such as his footsteps. The use of hyperreal sound effects for character movements, louder than they would be in real life, brings them more to the surface as part of the well-defined figures on ground: that which stands out from the background as separate forms within the world.

The embodiment schema of my practice is conceptualized through visual Gestalt principles, which were developed by such psychologists as Max Wertheimer in the 1920s. Through an underlying theory of how the brain makes sense of the sensory world, Gestalt laws describe how visual elements or other stimuli are grouped together as individual percepts within the whole through principles such as proximity, similarity, and common fate (Wertheimer 1923). A discussion of how Wertheimer and others extended these principles to sound as expressed in time via changes in amplitude, pitch, or beat (also see: Deliege 1987) would digress from the spatialization that helps distinguish my practice.

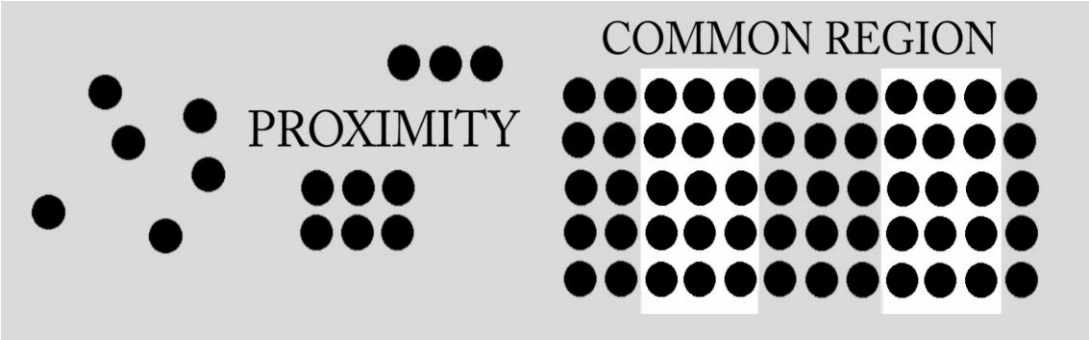


*Figure 5: Those elements close to each other or in a common region are perceived as grouped.*

Through the Gestalt *proximity* principle, which states that visual elements close to each other tend to be cognitively grouped into a single entity, those surface sounds which share the same spatial orientation (Neil's voice and his footsteps) are perceived as one with him. When a character crosses a sonic frame, those sounds that are an extension of his interactive presence in the world must be panned together, keeping the same spatial orientation, or the embodiment is disrupted. The additional Gestalt principle applied here is *uniform destiny* or *common fate*, which states that objects that move (or are angled with implied movement in visual art) in the same direction are perceived as grouped together. Had Neil's footsteps spatially stopped at Doctor Flanagan's action line while his voice traveled to center, violating this schema, perceived

ownership of the footsteps would be left behind, possibly being attributed to Doctor Flanagan, if not an entirely new presence in the space.

Based on my own experiments with violating this schema in released works, this could yield the strange effect of Neil's talking head separating from his body as his voice speaks from the center. Another possible result yields a lop-sided visualization of his embodiment, where – if his footsteps and voice remain locked in association -- he suddenly walks at an impossibly crooked angle, leaning diagonally from left (his feet) to center (his head). Even use of footsteps or movement sounds unique to each character cannot overcome this. As learned through years of practice and feedback, characters are cognitively organized as vertical figures, much like the action lines in the fulcrum schema diagram, and it is upon those lines that sounds which those characters are directly responsible for must be oriented.

A visual frame of a character firing a gun while standing in profile, their head on one side with the gun on the other, does not translate easily, if at all. The character is perceived as not the shooter but the one being shot at, because the gunshots come from a different location in space. Hence, sonic objects directly handled by a character -- such as the book pages that the character Afterland turns -- must also conform to the fulcrum schema.

Embodiment sounds are reinforced through persistent use of sound effects for characters, whether it be their clothes chafing, body movements, or the exaggerated squeaks of a chair that they are sitting on. In an exclusively sonic environment, what does not make a sound loses presence in the mental image of the listener. A visual element can stand still in the frame, retaining its presence through simply being, but a sound element must continue to assert itself.

The visual clock on a wall need only be.

A sonic clock must tick.

**Spatial Composition: Organized Soundscapes**

An established strategy of compensating for the lack of a visual image is expository dialogue that describes other characters, situations, or their surroundings that may be difficult to communicate otherwise, using a variety of narrative devices. This guides the picture created in the listener's mind, but heavy use draws undue attention to itself.

However, detailed soundscapes can assist in speaking for themselves as a living ecology. Their composition in my practice relies on memory of embodied experience and connotations to generate a coherent mental picture of an imaginary location, but also creating its reality as a dynamic place filled with events and responses to events. Like a separate character with its own life and sensibilities, it responds to situations with changes or disruptions in its sounds. It can observe and reinforce the reality of events that have no direct sonic counterpart. My favorite example of this derives from Bill Fontana's sound experiments in 1976 when his "artistic mission consciously became the transformation and deconstruction of the visual with the aural" (Labelle, 233). During the otherwise untranslatable visual event of a solar eclipse, the songs of the birds changed and then fell away with the light, their silence an expression of the darkness.

Fontana's work of dislocating sounds from their original locations to a single focal point functions as a demonstrative analogue to the iPod or Walkman's mediation or negation (Bull, 548) of the listener's local space. Headphones create a privatized and intimate auditory space (Young, 11) that subverts external surroundings. Moreover, Fontana's artificial construction of aural environment through the spatial placement of speakers in a sound installation provides a striking analogy to my post-production environment, where each environmental element is pulled from its original context (230-231) to create a new complex sound image when combined

with other elements. As Brandon Labelle writes of Fontana's work: "Through a complex agility of perception, one finds a place within the total intermixing of here and there, resolving the disjunctive overlay to form a new plateau of perception. The disembodied sound of transmission finds its corporeal partner in the listener, vampiring upon his or her sonic imagination, 'joining source and listener in the instant of sound'" (233).

There is an imperative as the producer of a classical narrative form to resolve listener identification of most sounds as swiftly as possible. This is just as true for film, but perhaps doubly so for audio drama. It has no visual reference, even if it may sonically craft a virtual one. Prior to identification, the sound is--as Pierre Schaefer explored--a "sonorous" form or object (Cox, 133). Its effect is that we listen more closely to experience the qualities of the sound itself. Outside of the narrative experience, that might be the objective of the creator or the listener, such as in modes of "reduced listening" encouraged by such artists as Chion, R. Murray Schafer, Pierre Schaefer, and Hildegard Westerkamp. Although the sound artist Francisco Lopez creates artificially constructed soundscapes from nature recordings, he also advocates for a listening geared toward appreciating the sound object or "sound matter" (Cox, 143).

In the context of audio drama, the priority under ordinary circumstances is to resolve the identity of a sound and what its presence signifies in the story world. If it can't be resolved, it will draw special attention to itself, which promotes the use of hyper-defined sound effects to counter this natural response of heightened awareness. If the sound is resolved as something which belongs, be it in the audio ecology of the virtual setting or in context with the dramatic situation, the special interest it elicits will be reduced, no longer an agent of distraction. Otherwise, an incongruent element, one which seems out of place, can be harnessed to attract a listener's attention to a diegetic event, like a disturbance originating from another place in the

story world, which is about to enter the main action, even if the characters have not yet noticed its approach. Or perhaps it's the gentle croak of a frog indoors, as an alien outside of its natural habitat. The auditory ecology can warn of a stealthily encroaching presence with responses such as birds suddenly taking flight from the trees, their sudden disturbance the displaced expression of another which is hidden.

As a post-producer who often thinks in musical terms, I think of the whole of a soundscape, all sound elements, as parts of an orchestra in service to a symphony that I'm composing (quite often incorporating music from literal symphonies on the non-diegetic music level). R. Murray Schafer encourages this comparison to the natural world soundscape for listening (Cox, 64). His ideas apply to my creation of a diegetic environmental soundscape, or the "mise-en-sonore" as Budhaditya Chattophay calls it (36), but also the composition of the united whole of the experience. While events in the mise-en-sonore are often timed for unity with other elements, such as an aircraft sweeping through to accent a non-diegetic music event, they can sometimes clash with the music, creating an undesired dissonant effect or attracting attention without purpose. Noises also have a musical pitch, as deeply explored by futurist Luigi Russolo. His conception of the "intonarumori" (with its noise instruments meant to be used like those in sections of an orchestral) was a precursor to the wild array of manipulations possible in the contemporary Digital Audio Workstation (Cox, 37, 60). All qualities of a sound can be altered in a variety of ways. This includes changing its pitch or frequency to a desired value through the same means that music samples can be re-pitched. Prohibiting musical sounds from functioning as noise or vice-versa need not apply when employing, as John Cage referred to it, "the entire field of sound" (Cox, 27).

The general logic of my schema remains in play with environmental soundscapes, giving elements their own spatial zones. They compose a background picture in the stereo image while remaining in dialogue with the elements in the fulcrum to create deeper artistic meaning, just as film composition does with its positioning of subjects relative to the visual background elements. The primacy of the fulcrum may be reduced but its action lines remain considered in composition as the Gestalt principle of *proximity* remains a powerful maker of artistic meaning. Examples in *Only Afterland* include ambient elements oriented to the same side of the fulcrum as the character Afterland, such as the sound of the wind, the patter of rain on a window, or the clock which stops ticking when his time in the therapy room is done. Only when a sonic entity in the background comes to the foreground for direct character interaction must it conform to the more precise spatial relations of characters in the fulcrum. Examples include the footfalls of an approaching character, fading in from the "wings" (far left or far right) prior to crossing into the fulcrum: the central area of action.

Soundscapes also maintain the continuity of previously constructed spaces when we return to them. The sounds of these places and their spatial arrangements on the sonic set remains the same, just as furniture, details, and the architectural layout of a real place remains the same when we return to it. We recognize the sounds of a familiar place from previous experiences, which is why I keep the spatial framing of those places consistent. We also recognize the melodies of familiar songs, by their sequential arrangement of tones positioned in time, and it's through this situation that I have used music to reinforce a sense of place, on occasion, as a leitmotif associated with a fictional location.

The musical score operates on a different plane than other sounds and is usually spoken of in terms of diegetic or non-diegetic. My musical influences challenge that binary.

**Blurring the Diegetic: Music as Expression and Presence**

I include the non-diegetic musical layer of a film as part of the mise-en-scène given its power to modify the meaning of the images that it travels with. The classical application concerns itself with shaping the perspective of the audience toward a specific interpretation of narrative events. The musical mood remains congruous with the desired emotional reaction of the audience or the emotion that it means to intelligibly convey. It deviates on special occasions, such as when it is used to counterpoint or express a dramatic dimension that the image alone cannot. I feel that the incongruity effect generated by this audio-visual situation indicates the power of music to not only support but join the sonic embodiment of a character in audio drama, allowing access to more expressive aspects from the missing visual image.

Music has long served to reinforce dramatic emotion shown on the screen. Music with high valence, often achieved using music in a major key, accompanies happy occasions, as the harmony of consonant notes transfers phenomenologically to emotional effect. Darker emotions are the traditional province of sounds with low valence, which employ minor musical keys and dissonant notes that lack harmony with each other (Huron, 21). The tension between dissonant tones translates to emotional tension while consonance is the lack thereof (Coëgnarts, 87). One need only listen to an orchestral symphony to understand that music has its own inherent properties as a carrier of both emotion and narrative, which empowers it to mirror the dramatic content of the visual image.

I offer a simple example to illuminate some key points to the specificity of my practice.

We shall imaginatively call it: *Our Protagonist Receives Bad News*.

Imagine a conversation between two movie characters that begins on an optimistic note but takes a downward turn with bad news for our protagonist, who visibly reacts. If non-diegetic music is used to reinforce what is shown, then the music is apt to follow downward into a minor key of low valence. The more brightly valenced and hopeful the music was to start, the more the disappointment will be felt by the audience. It is this gap between what we expected (the optimistic promise of the high valenced music) and what occurred (the disclosed reality of the let-down) that is central to Contrastive Valence Theory, which originates from the cognitive and neurobiological sciences (Huron, 21) as well as expectation theories from such scholars as Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer.

If the disappointed protagonist doesn't emote with a measurable reaction and proceeds with the conversation as if nothing is amiss, then there is a discrepancy between what's being musically expressed and visually shown. The film has *activated* the musical score as an expressionistic channel for the protagonist's inward state, as if his emotions have pulled the non-diegetic sound layer into the diegetic story world, blurring the boundaries between. The music emotes for him in a way that questions its status as non-diegetic. The music itself, technically speaking, is not diegetic. No one in the story world can hear it. The protagonist can't hear it, even in his head, though by some definitions we could nonetheless classify this as happening on a metadiegetic level (Tan 2017, 620; Sbravatti, 32). Relative to the story world, it is not real, but the emotion that it expresses is.

I argue that this contrapuntal circumstance denotes a special and exploitable correspondence with character embodiment that exists regardless of the editor's intent, which may have had nothing to do with privileging the subjective experience of the character over guiding audience interpretation. Perhaps this was only a means of transporting additional

information into the complex audio-visual message through counterpoint, to which those who denigrate classical mirroring of sound and image in filmmaking would give applause (Birtwhistle, 221). Let us now make one change in the example, however, where the protagonist receives bad news that won't be recognized as such by the audience. Perhaps they lack the context to understand why the music takes a dark turn while the protagonist remains stoic. I argue there is only one possible source in the mise-en-scène for the emotional information provided: from the protagonist embodied within the diegetic world.

When we bring this scene into the context of my audio drama schema, sound is no longer in correspondence with the visual image but with the fulcrum. The precise rendering of characters is gone, leaving behind only the sonic diegetic elements that embody them, positioned in space. The music beneath the dialogue induces a positive outlook for where this conversation goes with its consonant music textures. It then violates the expectation by becoming dissonant or low valenced when the protagonist receives the bad news. Absent of visual cues during the immersive experience, the agility of the ear increases, causing the listener to be more attentive to what sonic percepts are provided.

Lost in translation is any immediate means of communicating that the protagonist has remained consistent in his expression. Continuing to talk with no emotional change to delivery, despite the changed mood of the music, could suggest this. Otherwise, the emotive effect of the music dropping to a low valence will most likely cue an immediate shift to how the character is being visualized by the listener through such mechanisms as the Mirror Neuron System (Coëgnarts, 106-112) or the "reaction response" component of David Huron's ITPRA theory of expectation, which is an immediate but unconscious response to a surprise that suggests a potential for danger (Huron 2006).

Theories of expectation and surprise have become the cornerstone of the musical practices of my projects. Previous works make more complicated and experimental use of musical devices discussed by David Huron, who has profoundly influenced my practice since my discovery of his work during my MFA program. The making or mixing of music to create emotion is intrinsically linked with creating expectations that can be rewarded, delayed for tension, or subverted. It is not the dynamic texture of the music itself but its narrative of changing expectations which create a dramatic experience, one that can enter the matrix of other narrative elements, be they visual or sonic, to create a more complex message in a dance of alternating reinforcement and incongruity.

The leitmotif associates a piece of music with an overarching theme, places in the story world, dramatic situations, certain narrative contexts, or with a specific character (Kalinak, 41). I argue this surpasses mere association to a functional extension of that character's embodiment. It can be so effective at becoming an extension of a character's presence in the story world that we anticipate the arrival of Darth Vader in a *Stars Wars* film when we hear the *Imperial March* theme (Sbravatti, 28). Arguably, this is a temporal Gestalt grouping through the proximity principle, as they repetitively appear together at the same time. Here, Chion's concept of the *acousmetre* (32-33), a character who is heard in off-screen diegetic space but has not yet appeared on screen, finds a meaningful reference in audio drama, except as a *musical acousmetre*. In my previous work, Edict Zero - FIS (Kincaid 2010), the *Dire Ambassador* theme – a slowed down version of Franz Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody* – is so entwined with the embodiment of the Ambassador character that the listeners need not see with their eyes who is in an elevator that just opened, they know. Having deeply established an association, they see their personalized version of him in their minds by the extended presence given to him by the music.

In *Only Afterland*, movements from Johannes Brahms' *Tragic Overture, Op 81*, a leitmotif carried over (to be reinforced anew) from the standalone series, *Captain Afterland* (Kincaid 2023), serves as additional embodiment of the character Afterland. The recognition of the notes and how they move serves as an analogue to our recognition of a distinct and familiar face, which moves as we know it to move. It serves as a physical expression, a specific look that someone known to us makes, one which is distinctly theirs. Variations of that same recognizable musical theme, such as when the arrangement has been changed, can suggest a change in those expressions in reaction to a situation without a change of their associated identity.

Music can do more than animate an imagined face, but an entire body.

**Blurring the Diegetic: Music as Animation**

Some of my methodology for harnessing the power of music traces back to practices from the 1920s when industries were first experimenting with effective uses of sound with cinema. The so-called "Mickey Mousing" technique of music synchronized to the movement of animated films brought the music closer to diegetic story world and its events as an equal narrative partner. Its recurrent leitmotifs and sometimes beat-by-beat mediating of moving images, their meaning, and the action taking place in the story world created a powerful collaboration between sound and image.

In an audio drama context, it's the other sound elements that the music mediates and helps define in a symbiosis. Sonic elements fulfill the roles of visual elements where possible through a mechanism vividly demonstrated by the mickey-mousing practice, which was influential to my earliest understandings of sonic properties as a child. I use the term in audio drama as a reference to this practice, but "remove the picture and there is no mickey-mousing" (Birtwhistle, 206). Only if the sound occurs not as a substitution for a missing sound but a simultaneous alternate expression of it might the term be valid.

As more subtle forms of this audio-visual mirroring are often disparaged on claims of redundancy or a surrender of film sound's independence from the image, most notably by developers of Soviet montage who decreed that film sound should avoid any naturalistic mirroring (Birtwhistle, 221-223), Mickey-mousing is more deeply criticized, despite what its applications reveal about the ability of sound to simulate embodied action. This comes not from the audio-visual relationship which demonstrates it, but through the inherent properties of music

and our cognitive perception of it as moving through space as matter in motion. At the behest of our primal imperative for biological survival, our ears are configured for rapidly detecting motion as a possible threat moving through our vicinity.

As a form of reinforcement, music punctuates physical action with rhythm (movement of a body or other physical entity, the march of soldiers, the gallop of horses), tempo (correlating with intensity of the action or speed of motion as in running), tremolo (shaking with tension as a visual element does the same), or movement in vertical space, such as the sonification of altitude as converted to frequency when the pitch of a sound falls as a character falls (Kalinak, 38; Coëgnarts, 84). When a sound editor syncs an ascending musical figure with the on-screen action of a character going up stairs, the pitch is expressing the rise in space, whereas footsteps themselves cannot communicate vertical information in this way. As Chion writes, "what is being imitated here is the trajectory and not the sound of the trajectory, drawing on a universal spatial symbolism of musical pitches" (Chion, 121).

The cartoon composer most closely associated with this doubling effect is Carl Stalling, who began as a musical accompanist for silent films, the cradle for the highly dynamic arrangements for which he is best known as musical director for Walt Disney and later in the 1930s for Warner Brothers, where he scored *Merrie Melodies* and *Looney Tunes*. Blurring the diegetic and the distinction between music and effect, his work is well-known for its unabashed deconstruction and fragmentation of musical forms unleashed in energetic montages of mickey-mousing, leitmotifs, quotations, musical jokes, non-musical instrumentations beholden to the formal model of accompaniment for "silent" films, abrupt dialogues between high and low culture, and collisions of every imaginable musical style (Birtwhistle, 196-218).

The influence of Stalling's work on my meditations on how music can be harnessed to fulfill functions of the missing visual image in audio drama and on the explorations of my praxis cannot be overstated. These early innovators of film sound, such as Carl Stalling or Scott Bradley from MGM, who improvised cues and often used works from the public domain or from libraries of usable material made available by the respective studios, not unlike the thematic music catalogues that provided stock music to perform during films prior to synchronized sound recording (Birtwhistle, 196). While I do the same nearly a century later, albeit as a noncommercial artist with public domain and creative commons material, I can't help to think of these early innovators of film sound, who were finding their way with a new medium.

I find it not ironic but fitting that the musical techniques first developed to accompany the visual image might hold the key in simulating one in a cinematic experience, at least in the sonic domain that we call audio drama.

## Closing Remarks and Future Explorations

*Only Afterland* means to offer a legible treatment of the methodology described in this thesis. Embedded in the name KAIROS is the intent to seize upon the opportunity created by the development of film practices and the podcast age. Mindful that nothing ends here, I hope that time reveals it as a useful foundational model for future explorations and studies. My other works, such as the *Edict Zero – FIS* series (2010-2024) and *Captain Afterland* (2023), employ a wild range of more complex uses of sound to kinematically generate emotional affect and schemas rooted in incongruity theory, for which an entire dissertation could and perhaps should be devoted. The intermediary layer between the diegetic and non-diegetic that I touched upon is fertile ground for greater development and continued practice in creating filmic modes of experience with sound.

From the beginning, my audio practice angled away from the practice of adapting a story idea to the conventional post-production practices of the audio drama medium, mindful that the conventions are defined by its communally agreed-upon limitations. I instead sought a methodological system designed to simulate or stage *the experience* of another medium to which stories can then be adapted. The resulting hybrid experience hopes to strengthen the possibility of a more authentic analogue to film. As previously described, this entailed assigning new or additional story mediation duties to elements of the sonic mise-en-scène to fulfill functions of the visual image that many would consider to be beyond the grasp of the medium. My practice confronts what conventional approaches to sonic storytelling were configured to skirt around as unmovable obstacles.

Some aspects of my methodology are not foreign to conventional audio drama practice,

whose design discourses revolve around sonic brushstrokes which happen on the canvas of time. This includes music's ability to modify the meaning of whatever it accompanies or provide cues for the visualization of character movement or expressions. This can also include explorations of how headphones deepen the immersive potential of sound. By overtaking the external aural environment and pulling sonic worlds within the listeners, they are placed at the center of a virtual world as if transported. This intensifies the deeper personalization of the images created in the mind, which audio drama makers celebrate as the medium's greatest power.

However, to create specifically for headphones leaves out those listeners who for varying reasons do not consume the medium this way. Despite all the attention that I have given accessibility to the widest possible audience, my greater artistic ambitions come first. These also take precedence over knowing that some will not utilize headphones, resulting in an outcome that I can take no responsibility for. I do not discuss headphones as an optional enhancer of experiences, but as an integral component of the experience that I want to create.

The strictly controlled environment that headphones exert on the stereo image, through the fixed position of the earphones, allow for the synesthetic organization of elements as embodiments which can be "seen" at specific locations in space. The spatial groupings of sonic elements help to create embodied characters (their voices, footfalls, movements, and other actions) as well as objects (devices, vehicles, robots) and zones of the ambient diegetic environment or the mise-en-sonore. Its purpose neither ends there nor with the ability to position them into naturalistic arrangements, as we experience *things* which occupy different locations around us. If treated only as an attraction, then the novelty of being able to position suffices. Hence, the specific spatial arrangement of the mise-en-scène might well be treated arbitrarily if considered at all. The greater purpose of this key aspect of my methodology is to make not only

spatial positioning possible but make possible spatial *composition* in the filmic tradition, where deeper meaning between elements can be forged for interpretation based on their framing in space. This steps beyond the creation of meaning through positioning elements in time and accesses additional layers of artistic complexity.

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