Visual Musicality and the Moving Image

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Date of submission (January 2020)

ABSTRACT

This project focuses on different aspects of City Symphonies. At its origins, it aimed to formulate and to test, through the production of practical work, hypotheses concerning the relationship between moving images and music. While scholars in Film Studies have, over recent decades, published increasingly on film music and soundtracks, there is very little sense in the literature that musical elements of some sort might be discerned within the image track. The City Symphony film genre appeared to be a good starting point for the identification of any such elements, and a ready-made framework for my experimental work, and I travelled to my home city of Sana'a, in Yemen, to do some preliminary shooting and further background research.

A war suddenly broke in Yemen a short while into this work. This created a huge challenge for the project and, having decided to stay with Sana'a as my subject, necessitated a change in direction, and a recasting of my research topic. Noting that the war was garnering very little attention outside the region, but also aware of the complexity of the situation and the need to respect its people, including my friends and family in the city, I began working on a new research question: how to represent the conflict for a wider world in a way that avoids *reducing* this complexity?

At this point, City Symphonies acquired a new relevance, especially as I learned that films of the genre can be seen to engage with urban modernity as contradictory and tension-filled, rather than as a neatly wrapped up and 'objective' fact. Retaining at least this guiding commitment to complexity not only enabled me to produce a consciousness-raising film, but also, I suggest, a new kind of 'City Symphony' to further augment the repertoire of what is a constantly evolving genre.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A film does not need to be understood. It is enough if the viewer feels it. **Michelangelo Antonioni**

A film is –or should be – more like music than like fiction. It should be a progression of moods and feelings. The theme, what's behind the emotion and the meaning; all that comes later. **Stanley Kubrick**

INTRODUCTION

Overture

Before becoming a film maker, I was, like many other people, attracted and fascinated by films through what is projected on the screens. I was, as well, intrigued by how I was able to make connections (especially, emotional ones) through the visual wonders that were displayed on the screens and in combination with any accompanying music and sound effects. This was the case even in the early stages of my life, when films in my country of Yemen were screened in their original languages with no dubbing whatsoever, and English language, in particular, or any other European language, was not comprehensible to me. Those films had two universal languages: moving images and music. For me, their charm and effect were based on those two factors.

At an early stage, I came to embrace the desire and need to forge new and imaginative meanings, and even mundane ones, embed them in my films, and as a consequence try to influence both my culture and society. This is, in my opinion, what makes the exercise potentially exciting and worthy. In the following pages, I will give an account of a film project that was conceived as an experimental piece exploring connections between the moving image and music, but was nevertheless

ultimately transformed into a consciousness-raising film, located within a wider political movement.

There are a number of ways in which I could begin this account but I want, here, to start by telling the story of an ancient Yemeni scroll (known as ***The Sana'a Palimpsest***). This parchment scroll was discovered, in 1972, hidden in the ceiling of the Grand Mosque of Sana'a[1]. It was part of an assorted collection of ancient manuscript fragments. The scroll revealed an oddity of sorts. This fact aroused the curiosity of the researchers who were involved in this ground-breaking discovery: the parchments contained *two* different versions of the Qur'anic text. The original Qur'anic text was erased and written over with another Qur'anic text. The two texts were different in many aspects, mainly regarding the familiar Qur'anic order, as well as the meaning of the verses. This story may be a metaphor for my project as a whole, the full significance of which will be explored later on in the critical commentary on my film. At this stage it is enough to note that the film accompanying this thesis, *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War*, had original aims and ambitions which were themselves, at a later stage, 'written over' by wider historical forces due to the onset of the aerial bombardment of the city of Sana'a, which I had taken as my subject.

The current thesis is primarily written from a filmmaker's perspective. Its thrust and analysis are based on the film *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War*, and together these constitute the outcome of a lengthy process. Researching, preparing, organizing, producing, shooting, editing, and subsequently writing up the critical commentary have all, I hope, enriched the arguments laid out in it. In addition, the act of reflecting on the practice of making this film, and on the wider contexts of

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[1] "Understanding the Sana'a Manuscript Find," *Pondering Islam* website, <https://ponderingislam.com/2015/02/05/understanding-the-sanaa-manuscript-find/> (accessed 28 March 2016).

narrative and non-narrative structures, has been highly significant for any success it might be seen to have achieved.

In its origins, my plan for this project was to conduct experiments in 'Visual Musicality'. I planned to develop a hypothesis regarding affinities between the experiences of watching moving images and listening to musical pieces. My early aim was to produce a film exploring such potential affinities, in the genre of the City Symphony. It seemed to me, at the time, that this was best positioned as an approach, especially as narrative in these films is downplayed, for example, and rhythms tend to be foregrounded. At the same time, I learned through my research about the ways in which City Symphonies can be seen to deal with the many contradictions and tensions thrown up by modern urban life; given my familiarity with both the city of Sana'a and its peculiar set of tensions and contradictions, the location seemed an ideal candidate for the role.

Nevertheless, my investigation was derailed at a relatively early stage by the start of the aerial bombardments on the city of Sana'a on 25th March 2015. The ensuing events made my access to the location, and its inhabitants, impossible. This situation left my project facing a number of difficult decisions. Ultimately, my commitment to my home city, in spite of the access issues, led to a change in course. I also urgently felt the need to raise wider awareness of a conflict that few outside the region were hearing very much about at all. It was clear that the film would need to tell a story, and that I would need to abandon the more experimental aims of the project, especially in light of the limited range of footage I had shot during the only visit I was able to make to the city.

I also had to question whether I should abandon the idea of making a City Symphony altogether, but resolved instead to attempt to retain, as far as possible, certain features of these films. I was aware that the footage I had available to me was

not enough to construct a coherent and carefully formalised model of the genre, at least in the form in which it emerged in the interwar period. I did ultimately succeed, however, in amassing enough footage to create a film that incorporates elements of the City Symphony genre and tradition in terms of its structure, in movements that vary in rhythm and tempo, alongside certain of its other aesthetic features as I will elaborate in the course of the commentary below. In large part, the distinctive contribution the film is making, beyond highlighting a little-known city and a conflict that continues to receive minimal media attention outside the immediate region, derives from its adoption of the City Symphony as a template from which to develop a structure for this documentary about Sana'a and the war.

Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War is above all guided by the commitment it shares with a number of examples of the City Symphony genre and tradition, to adopt a questioning approach to the nature of the modern urban metropolis, and to explore its multiple aspects, rather than simply attempting to represent, more or less objectively, 'the' city as such. As I will go on to discuss, City Symphonies tend to be judged by the degree to which they engage, at the formal and thematic level, with the complexities of modern urban life. Before going into more detail on this topic, which I believe is central to an understanding of my film as a contribution to the genre as well as an attempt to raise awareness of the conflict in Yemen, I will offer here a few more general introductory comments about City Symphonies.

City Symphonies

The City Symphony genre of films emerged in the 1920s, mainly in Europe, but also in the United States of America. I will focus in more detail on key early examples of the genre – *Manhatta* (1921), *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927), *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), and *A Propos Nice* (1930) – in the next chapter in

an attempt to chart some more precise features of the genre. From the start, however, this film genre tried to create what can be deemed as an *aesthetic coherence* through the use of image and sound fragments. The actual sounds and music at screenings were played live most of the time synced, melodically and/or rhythmically, to the shots in the projected film. It was a well-known practice, during silent film screenings, that a pianist, theatre organist, or, in larger cities, even a small orchestra would often play music to accompany the projected films – pianists and organists would either play from sheet music or improvise; an orchestra would usually play from sheet music.

These films adopt the structure and form of a musical symphony, with 'movements' that vary in pace, tone, and passion. It is worth mentioning here that modern art practices in the West at the turn of the 20th century (Impressionism, Constructivism, Cubism, Surrealism, and Abstract art) had a particular influence on the authors of this genre of filmmaking. As Robert McParland notes, 'The phrase itself – one from music – is a reminder of how fruitfully the various arts interacted.'[2] For this reason, one might assert that these films are an example of precisely this mixture of aesthetic influences, as well as being seen as stimulating examples of cinema in its pure form.

Cinema, in general, is also of course allied with music, at least to the extent that both media are based on, and unfold in, durations of time. A further aspect that characterizes the structure and form of City Symphonies specifically is that the symphonic 'movements' usually amount to the depiction of a 'day in the life' of their specific chosen city. These films' structures play an important role in conveying the

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[2] Robert P. McParland, Film *and Literary Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 2.

concept of time, and two key implications of the way in which City Symphonies relate to time are worth noting at this stage.

The first of these has to do with narrative. As documentaries, City Symphony films may adopt either a narrative or a non-narrative approach to their material, although the 'day-in-the-life' structure tends to militate against constructing a formalised narrative sequence. At the same time, their general lack of sustained emphasis on individual protagonists with specific goals to achieve offers spectators little by way of continuity in terms of specific human actors and agents. This feature further identifies the genre with the Avant Garde, as well as opening certain of its films up for criticism, as I will discuss below in my survey of the literature. City Symphonies tried to accentuate speed, rhythm, undulating tempos and tonalities, contrasts between different times of day; this procedure in a way condenses the *city time* to a *film time*. City Symphony films have also, however, tended to transform the 'unavoidable' Aristotelian narrative form of beginning, middle, and end that is associated with most mainstream feature film production.

In City Symphonies the montage tends to be focused rather on establishing more formal aesthetic and/or ideological patterns to the material, with its constituent *fragments* edited together more or less methodically as they occur to the film maker.[3] Authors of City Symphony films do not necessarily require their audience to attribute any importance to one event over another; nor do they necessarily expect their audience to contemplate the ways in which one event might affect another one. Time has a different nature in these films: City Symphonies, in their interwar incarnation at least, do not depict flashbacks, or flashforwards; they do not wrestle with memories; nor, in particular, do they portray causes and effects.

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[3] Jeremy Hicks, *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2007), 57.

The second implication of the way City Symphonies relate to time also has to do with the replacement of the Aristotelian structure of beginning-middle-end and clear narrative causality. City Symphonies tend to present temporalities that are manipulated mechanically and that give a sense of time as a kind of continuously revolving cycle in each and every day. If we use an analogy of language grammar, these films are *'present tense'* films, which make the audience aware of time as a series of 'punctuations' that are repeated every day: in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening, and at night. These are films with firm legs only in the present, and (especially with the seeming absence of clear causes and effects) it is easy to see them as suggesting that the future in these films is *certain* and *perfect*: it will be like this every day, for all of time.

This view, however, risks oversimplifying matters just a little. The present tense is itself in constant motion, and the idea of isolating and maintaining it in any kind of pristine stasis might be more tricky than things might at first appear. The view of modernity as a stable condition (as in the idea that institutions need to 'modernise' – in the sense of updating themselves so as to accommodate to a new set of circumstances) is convincingly criticized by many scholars, especially those influenced by the Avant Garde and subsequent Marxist accounts.[4] A recurring image across a number of City Symphonies is some form of spinning wheel: rotating engines, machinery and parts such as cogwheels and cylinders; revolving doors and carousels; bicycle wheels and decorative pinwheels; even film spools and the cranking handle of a movie camera. Especially in the context of the 'day-in-the-life' structure of the films, such recurring images may appear to refer precisely to the abstract idea of a ceaselessly repetitive, never-changing constant

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[4] See for example Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983).

The analogy would only hold good, however, if the wheel were to be somehow maintained at a distance from the ground, whereas if it were to be *grounded* in some way, the traction gained would point in entirely the opposite direction. To anticipate (and perhaps oversimplify) a point that will emerge in the survey of literature, critics who are interested in more than simply formal aesthetics have tended to evaluate City Symphonies according to the extent that each either gains this kind of traction, or else is seen to be isolating its subject-location from any contact or engagement with the *ground*.

In the most positive accounts, City Symphony films are the embodiment of Avant-Garde documentary films that tried, with success, to assess visually the complex dynamics of industrial urban cities where the slow rhythm of the inhabitants' life were in stark contrast with the rapid pace of the new industrial means that were part and parcel of these new cities, such as the machines, telephone and telegraphic communications, and various types of speedy transport. This alienating situation was provokingly depicted by Charlie Chaplin in the dramatic feature *Modern Times* (1936), where Chaplin shows a world that dehumanises its citizens. This is a world of "punitive" industrialization, especially in the scenes where his Tramp-turned-factory-worker is confused, bewildered and upset by the relentless monotony of the repetitive labour, to the extent that his entire body begins metamorphosing into tools of one kind or another; he is also slapped on the face by the automated plates that are supposed to feed him as he works.

When Walter Benjamin writes about the *'shock'* perpetuated by the rapid succession of frames on the cinema screen, it is as if he refers to a training that the new audiences of City Symphony films go through to learn how to adopt their bodies to such mechanised realities:

> Film is the art form corresponding to the pronounced threat to life in which people live today. It corresponds to profound changes in the apparatus of apperception – changes that are experienced on the scale of private existence by each passerby in big city traffic, and on the scale of world history by each fighter against the present social order.[5]

Reflecting on Baudelaire's writings, Benjamin draws parallels between walking in the city and viewing films in terms of a series of *'shocks'* registered by the spectator during both experiences. His account depicts cinema itself as irrupting into modern urban life, producing its own version of shock, notably in relation to the visual impact of montage.[6]

The author/film maker of a City Symphony is in a position to study creatively the pulse and/or the spirit of a given city, exposing its soul and capturing its heartbeat. This is because these films offer, in Scott MacDonald's words, 'a general sense of life in a specific metropolis, by revealing the *flâneur* of city life from the morning into the evening of a composite day.[7] As Meyrav Koren-Kuik suggests, the camera in City Symphony films assumes the role of *flâneur*, walking the streets of the city and taking in all its distracting and ever-changing visual and sensory stimuli. It becomes a 'mechanical eye' or, as Dziga Vertov coined it, 'Cine-Eye', employing the 'limitless possibility of the photographic act … to move into unknown territories and see the hitherto invisible, only imaginable, realities of life.'[8]

A further characteristic of the debates around City Symphonies, referred to briefly above, is the fact that these films depict the city itself as its subject. Commenting on his 1927 *camera impressions* of the city of New York *Twenty-four*

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[5] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" [First Version], trans. Michael W. Jennings, *Grey Room*, no. 39 (Spring 2010), 33.

[6] Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered", *October*, no. 62 (Fall 1992), 3-41.

[7] Scott MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 151.

[8] Meyrav Koren-Kuik, "A City Symphony: Urban Aesthetics and the Poetics of Modernism on Screen", in *Film and Literary Modernism*, ed. Robert P. McParland (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 14.

Dollar Island, Robert Flaherty said: 'I am speaking of a film in which New York is the central character, not a picture in which individuals are portrayed, which would make New York merely the background for a story. I am talking about the picture in which New York is the story.'[9] The city, as subject, may acquire in these films an identity grounded in the collective lives of the people who inhabit it. This, inherently, may also point towards a political stand expressed by the authors of these films, and this question too, I will go on to show, is central to the critical and scholarly debates on the genre.

Literature Review

Let me begin here with what I found on researching the relationship between sound (in particular, music), and film. Studying sound in film in an academic manner is a relatively recent development in contemporary film studies. Among the early examples are the works of Michel Chion,[10] and a collection of essays anthologised by Elizabeth Weis and John Belton.[11] These works provide some helpful refocusing of film scholars' attention away from the image and towards sound recording and design in cinema.

In the vast majority of the work on film and sound, in fact, the focus has tended to remain quite squarely on the soundtrack, and on the different ways in which it may be seen as interacting with the film image, film audiences, and the broader

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[9] "Twenty Four Dollar Island": A Camera Impression of New York, *Lightcone* online, <https://lightcone.org/en/film-5824-twenty-four-dollar-island> (accessed 11 November 2019).

[10] Michel Chion, *Audio-vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[11] See for example Mary Ann Doane, "Ideology and the Practice of Sound Editing and Mixing", in Elizabeth Weis and John Belton (eds), *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 54-62.

culture. Key examples of this are the works of Russel Lack,[12] James Wierzbicki,[13] and the studies by Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight.[14] All these works have undoubtedly advanced a long-neglected (although, as the works demonstrate, absolutely crucial) dimension of film production and the filmgoing experience, there is very little sense in these works that certain - or even any - musical qualities might reside in the image track.

Nevertheless, and recalling McParland's words, debates on film and music go back much further if we include Avant-Garde artists and early film theorists and practitioners including, but not limited to, film makers such as Walter Ruttmann whose *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* is a ground-breaking film in the world of nonfiction cinema. Drawing on Ruttmann's original notes for his experiments, Jefferson Hunter writes:

> Ruttmann described the editing process as an effort to find, here an image for a "tender *crescendo*," there an optical *andante*, a brazen clang, or the tone of a flute. Even if these aural effects remain stubbornly undetectable in the film as made, the title *Berlin: Sinfonie der Großstadt* does mean something. It identifies a work in which elements are held together thematically rather than programmatically and developed in a quasi-musical sense, with cuts becoming the analogues to symphonic modulations or changes of instrumentation.[15]

A further example of an early film theorist exploring the potential of the imbrications of film, sound and music is the Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein, whose writings on the subject have been discussed in a book-length study by composer and

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[12] Russell Lack, *Twenty Four Frames Under: A Buried History of Film Music* (London: Quartet, 1997).

[13] James Wierzbicki, ed., *Music, Sound, and Filmmakers: Sonic Style in Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[14] Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight, eds, *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

[15] Jefferson Hunter, "James Joyce, Walther Ruttmann, and City Symphonies", *The Kenyon Review* (New Series), v. 35, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 195.

filmmaker Robert Robertson. In Robertson's *Eisenstein on the Audiovisual: The Montage of Music, Image and Sound in Cinema,* the author aims to answer one question: how does Eisenstein contribute to our understanding of cinema as an audiovisual medium? By the term 'audiovisual' Robertson means, in a rather generalized form, 'the interaction of music, sound and film.'[16] The author presents several key ideas that emerged from his reflections on Eisenstein's writings and serve as titles for independent chapters. Amongst them are audiovisual counterpoint, organic unity, non-indifferent nature, and synesthesia. These are four ideas form the chapters and the basic thematic structure of his book. Robertson gives some sense of Eisenstein's work as multi-faceted and encyclopedic in its scope, and notes that he wrote more about film as an audiovisual medium than any other filmmaker. Nevertheless, looking at Eisenstein's accomplishments, the author gazes into the same customary prism that shows music as merely a necessary accessory to the moving image.

On musical or 'symphonic' aspects of City Symphonies specifically, I similarly found relatively little, even in more recent literature, although Jon Gartenburg and Alex Westhelle do comment on the rhythmical dynamism apparent in their selection of New York 'city films'.[17] More intriguingly, Erica Stein's analysis of Berlin hints at the potential and significance of Henri Lefebvre's 'rhythmanalysis' and 'arrythmia' as means of charting and reconfiguring the relations between two kinds of space that

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[16] Robert Robertson, *Eisenstein on the Audiovisual: The Montage of Music, Image and Sound in Cinema* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2009), 2.

[17] Jon Gartenberg and Alex Westhelle, "NY, NY: A Century of City Symphony Films," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* v. 55, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 248- 276.

Lefebvre's analysis distinguishes as conceptual and experiential respectively.[18] Given more favourable conditions, Lefebvre's work on space[19] could provide some useful tools for further analysis, and even inform the crafting of an experimental City Symphony of the kind I originally envisaged. It is worth noting at this stage that Lefebvre's framework has similarities to the contradictory twin image of the modern city developed by Michel de Certeau and discussed at more length below.

Jefferson Hunter and Alexander Graf are two rare examples of authors who go beyond noting the five-part, and general 'day-in-the-life' structure of City Symphonies, to take the film-as-music ambitions of the era more seriously – for the most part in terms of time, rhythm, and editing. Graf sees editing as rhythmical and percussive; while Hunter, despite not seeing much evidence of the detailed correspondences suggested in Ruttmann's notes, at least reads the cuts as 'analogues to symphonic modulations or changes of instrumentation'. Alexander Graf writes, 'Just as in the case of music, the instrumentalisation of cutting rhythm […] is a feature of the dynamics of all true City Symphonies.'[20] This work goes some way towards describing the situation of a spectator engaging with these films and their tempo and dynamics especially, but is still lacking a more fully embodied *sense* of the experience, at a corporeal level, of watching a City Symphony, and how that may or may not be analogous to the experience of listening to music.

My own aim, at the early planning stages of this project, was to produce a film that explores potential affinities including types of shots, as well as simply editing

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[18] Erica Stein, "Abstract Space, Microcosmic Narrative and the Disavowal of Modernity in Berlin: Symphony of a Great City," *Journal of Film and Video* v. 65, no.4 (Winter 2013): 3-16.

[19] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (London: Blackwell, 1991).

[20] Alexander Graf, "Paris - Berlin - Moscow: On the Montage Aesthetic in the City Symphony Films of the 1920s", in *Avant-Garde Film*, eds. Alexander Graf and Dietrich Scheunemann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 82.

tempo, and geared towards maximising corporeal responses along the lines evoked by symphonic musical movements. An initial hypothesis regarding *piano-sequenza*, (a *virtuoso* camera movement that registers uninterruptedly the action without need for editing – also known as the sequence shot) is incorporated, along with other examples of rhythmic editing, in the table of approximations and my experimentations included below as appendices (A) and (B). Immediately prior to the bombardment of Sana'a, my research was leading me away from the literature on City Symphonies, and towards what appeared to be fertile potential in recent work on film and the body. Of particular interest was the work of Paul Elliott on Hitchcock and synaesthesia,[21] and two key texts on embodied responses more broadly: Vivian Sobchack's phenomenological work on the ways the body of a spectator receives a film;[22] and Laura Marks account of the experience of watching a specific type of film that enables a more tactile mode of spectatorship – one based on *'haptics'*, as opposed to the *'optics'* characterising western cinema and the Renaissance legacy (in terms of the visualisation of space) it inherited in its more commercial forms. [23]

The majority of the discussion in the literature on City Symphonies is focused not so much on any specific musical or 'symphonic' aspects of the works, but rather on how this tradition of films engages with urban modernity, and modernism(s) more widely. This dimension of the tradition, which I referred to earlier in connection with the work of Walter Benjamin, became considerably more significant as the research project evolved by force of circumstances. With the bombardment of Sana'a making

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[21] Paul Elliott, *Hitchcock and the Cinema of Sensations: Embodied Film Theory and Cinematic Reception,* (London: IB Tauris, 2011).

[22] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[23] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000).

access to the city impossible, it became clear that retaining Sana'a as a subject would mean abandoning the more experimental aims outlined above, including even perhaps much of the ambition to produce a city symphony as a vehicle for these aims. As I will detail further in my chapter on the obstacles that presented themselves to me following the onset of hostilities in Yemen, the project faced, in particular, issues of how to narrativise the conflict for a wider audience. One of the key issues was to do with balancing the need to tell a story, on the one hand, against the pitfalls of reducing the complexity of the situation confronting the city and my protagonists on the other. At this stage, the City Symphony tradition attained a different kind of relevance for my project, less in terms of its commitment to abstract compositional principles that may or may not be akin to music, and more precisely to do with this issue of the way in which City Symphonies may be seen as treating urban modernity.

Two of the foundational critical statements on City Symphonies are to be found in the writings of documentarist John Grierson, and theorist Siegfried Kracauer. Grierson admires the flowing movements of Ruttmann's film and other examples of the genre, but famously found them lacking in the kind of social purpose that his own view of documentary was championing (a view which gained momentum as the 1930s progressed).[24] In particular, Grierson felt that City Symphonies tended to be too inattentive to the human dimension of modern urban life, and this criticism was subsequently picked up and amplified in the work of Kracauer, who famously chastised 'Ruttmann's formal attitude towards a reality that cried out for criticism, for interpretation.'[25]

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[24] John Grierson [1932], "First principles of documentary", in *The Documentary Film Movement: An Anthology*, ed. I Aitken (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988): 86-88.

[25] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 187.

Kracauer takes issue especially with the editing carried out by Ruttmann, as 'it relies on the formal qualities of the objects represented rather than on their meanings.'[26] For Kracauer, the 'social contrasts' juxtaposed by the montage are 'not so much social protests as formal expedients… Their structural function overshadows whatever significance they may convey.'[27] Echoing further Grierson's concerns about the film's perceived anti-humanist and apolitical stance on its distracting array of urban ornaments, Kracauer continues:

> That everybody is indifferent to his fellow men can be inferred from the formalization of social contrasts as well of from the repeated insertions of window-dressings with their monotonous rows of dolls and dummies. It is not as if these dummies were humanized; rather, human beings are forced into the sphere of the inanimate. They seem molecules in a stream of matter.[28]

For both Grierson and Kracauer, there was simply too much in the way these films were put together that was overly celebratory and Utopian in outlook: the films focused too much on surfaces and forms, and the montage in particular is held responsible for a missed political opportunity.

Much recent work on City Symphonies takes issue, in one way or another, with these perspectives. Erica Stein's analysis of *Berlin*, for example, while agreeing that the film refuses to engage with the tensions of modernity, refocuses the debate in terms of the film's mapping of the spaces of a modern metropolis through the anachronistic form of the microcosm:

> When Grierson and Kracauer intimate that *Berlin* is a fanciful utopia, they gesture towards its representation of technology and stimuli as wonderments, but they miss the film's staging of an actual no-place:

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[26] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 184.

[27] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 185.

[28] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 186.

the integrated spatial practice, representational space, and representations of space that disappeared with the mass culture, technology, and infrastructure characteristic of the modern life that the film only pretends to chronicle.[29]

Stein's claim is that Ruttmann's film spatialises its subject as being in a state of perfection: stable, unified, and objectively knowable, in spite of the many contradictions that are inherent to the city's fabric in actuality.

The core of the debate on City Symphonies in recent years is essentially between these perspectives that read the films, and their attitudes towards urban modernity, as 'optimistic' and 'totalising', and others who see these films, rather, as dealing precisely with the uncertainties, complexities, and instabilities of the modern city and urban living. Moving away from *Berlin*, Vlada Petrić celebrates the forms of *disorder* in *Man with a Movie Camera*, for example.[30] Jeffrey Geiger further cites elements of *Manhatta* (the shots of billowing polluting smoke, along with the bookending scenes overlooking a city graveyard) as evidence that the film puts limits on any potentially over-expansive optimism.[31]

Geiger's discussion of the film further sees it (along with Robert Flaherty's *24-Dollar Island*) as part of a shift in the 1920s US documentary film production more generally, away from Hollywood and toward the more radical Avant-Garde. Geiger is building here on a broader discussion of the intersections between documentary and the Avant-Garde (both of which involve *'the creative treatment of actuality'*, in

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[29] Erica Stein, "Abstract Space, Microcosmic Narrative, and the Disavowal of Modernity in Berlin: Symphony of a Great City." *Journal of Film and Video* v. 65, no. 4 (2013): 14.

[30] Vlada Petrić, *Constructivism in Film—A Cinematic Analysis*: *The Man with the Movie Camera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 7.

[31] Jeffrey Geiger. *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 76-79.

Grierson's famous formulation) by Bill Nichols.[32] Nichols brings forward evidence that the conjuncture within which documentary emerged included a number of Avant-Garde elements that were subsequently marginalised both in practice and in later historical accounts. Nevertheless, Geiger suggests that the Avant-Garde bequeathed a 'legacy of anti-illusionism' to documentary filmmaking and he uses the City Symphony *Manhatta* as a key example in his US context:

> If documentary as a public institutional form came to be associated with a collective belief in a unified or agreed-upon "truth", avant-garde influences always suggested the possibility of a more critical stance, where moving images and the modern technologies that produced them were met, as Elsaesser puts it, with "skepticism and sarcasm" just as much as "wonder and amazement."[33]

Rather than a celebratory Utopia, Geiger finds in *Manhatta* at least a degree of ambivalence about the modern city that the film owes to the Avant-Garde influences informing it and shaping US documentary.

The Avant-Garde, as Geiger suggests, took issue with 'illusionism' in representations (both artistic and historical) that make claims to transparency or access to some final, objective 'truth'. Rather, Avant-Garde artists emphasized fragmentation, multiplicity, and fixity of meanings, making films, for example, that put their own means of representation, and the idea of a stable, unified, and knowable objective 'truth', in question.[34] Geiger cites Juan Suárez on *Manhatta* as 'mongrel practice' and refers to it as a 'complex fusion of presumed opposites' set in a 'fractured

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[32] Bill Nichols, "Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant Garde," *Critical Inquiry* v. 27, no. 4 (Summer 2001): 580-610.

[33] Geiger, Jeffrey. *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 66.

[34] Geiger, Jeffrey, *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 67-73.

space' and emphasising tensions between nature and technology.[35] Jefferson Hunter identifies a similar emphasis on fragmentation and multiplicities in Ruttmann's Berlin, comparing it to certain modernist literary techniques found in James Joyce's Ulysses; Hunter's description of *Berlin*: *Symphony of a Great City* further echoes Suárez' description of Manhattan, with the city represented as a 'cultural jumble'.[36] Vertov's 'city' is, famously, a composite – in itself it destabilises the idea that films should represent objective facts, limiting as this idea of cinema was to the director. Iván Villarmea Álvarez notes that, even as a composite, Vertov's City Symphony remains fragmented, as well as 'subjective and emotional'.[37]

More recently, much non-mainstream documentary filmmaking since the late Twentieth Century has successfully exploited this Avant-Garde legacy to survive and evolve. The postmodern era has after all been described, more generally, as being far less secure about the sorts of notions of objective fact and truth that, for some time, characterised the more official histories of documentary filmmaking critiqued by authors such as Nichols and Geiger, and that appeared to set the mode on such firm foundations. Jean-François Lyotard argues that '[i]n contemporary society and culture – postindustrial society, postmodern culture – the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses."[38] In documentary, more broadly, Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line* (1988) is widely regarded as exemplifying

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[35] Jeffrey Geiger. *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2011), 75.

[36] Hunter, Jefferson. "James Joyce, Walther Ruttmann, and City Symphonies", *The Kenyon Review* (New Series), v. 35, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 199.

[37] Iván Villarmea Álvarez, "Blinking Spaces: *Koyaanisqatsi*'s Cinematic City," in *Culture, Space and Power: Blurred Lines*, ed. David Walton and Juan A. Suárez (Lanham: Lexington, 2016), 42.

[38] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester University Press), 37.

this trend towards a questioning of objective truth and factuality. Audiences of Banksy's *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010) were left with very little solid evidence that what they were watching was even a documentary at all, rather than an elaborate hoax: the film's thematisation of authorship, counterfeiting, and *trompe l'oeil*, combined with the graffiti artist-turned-director's notorious extratextual persona as a trickster positively seemed to encourage skepticism. Papagena Robbins' analysis of her sample of more contemporary City Symphonies draws on the work of Benjamin, and details the strategies adopted as a means to undermine the authority of the archive (and attendant notions of any singular historical truth).[39]

The post/modern city is a complex place of distractions and shocks, as in Benjamin, and also of irrationality, memories, and everyday productive/disruptive spatial practices at ground level. In his account of the composite city, Michel de Certeau's key opening contrast is between the panoptic, detached bird's-eye view, from the top of the World Trade Center, of the regularly-ordered grid of New York streets and intersections on the one hand; on the other, de Certeau highlights the far more subjective experience of living in and navigating those same streets at ground level. Here, the walker takes short cuts, and ignores the plans determined for him/her by these organizing bodies.[40] De Certeau perceives *everyday life* as totally different from the official planned life, a difference like that between poetry and a planning manual; the everyday is of great value because it takes place in the gaps between larger, powerful structures, and rather than planned structures it is about spaces, inhabited spaces.

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[39] Papagena Robbins, "City Symphonies in Reverse" (PhD Thesis, Concordia, 2017).

[40] Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 92.

De Certeau's work proved influential in my project for two reasons. In the first place, it suggests quite compellingly, in its discussion of the two different views/experiences of New York City, that there is always *more than one city* in any urban metropolis. As de Certeau argues, '[a] *migrational*, or metaphorical, city… slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city.'[41] Secondly, as will become clear in the next chapter, his contrast between the planned, unified view of the city and the lived experiences of its inhabitants chimes strikingly with the difference between the daily lives of my friends and family in Sana'a, and the more ossified view of the Old City represented by UNESCO, an organization committed to preserving intact and unchanging the historic fabric of the city in its setting.

Returning to City Symphonies, not everybody, of course, agrees that these films really do inevitably take the kind of questioning approach to their subjects and modernity itself that Geiger and others suggest *Manhatta* might; Geiger himself acknowledges that the film is more ambivalent than many of the genre. For all the fragmentation authors like Hunter finds in Ruttman's Berlin city symphony, Stein argues that the film's use of microcosm and its adherence to traditions that depict the city as more or less stable and objectively knowable is a nostalgic denial of the advent of modernity itself.[42] Álvarez's comments on Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* are intended as a contrast to the harmoniously composed visual patterns of *Koyaanisqatsi*, which the author identifies as lying at the heart of the tension between the modern and the postmodern that minimizes the film's intended criticism of its historical epoch. Whatever position is taken up by the authors in the field, however,

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[41] Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 93.

[42] Erica Stein, "Abstract Space, Microcosmic Narrative and the Disavowal of Modernity in Berlin: Symphony of a Great City," *Journal of Film and Video* v. 65, no.4 (Winter 2013): 4.

there appears to be a consensus that City Symphonies engage in some way with the modern and its tensions, even if only to give these a free pass.

A further point of consensus seems to emerge from the above debates: that, whether or not any specific example of the genre successfully engages with modernity and its tensions, the terrain on which this engagement is drawn is primarily that of montage. In spite of her criticisms, for example, Stein nonetheless acknowledges that there is another, as it were virtual, city of 'differential space' that is kept off-screen by the way Ruttmann's montage 'maps' the city.[43] More critical accounts of other City Symphonies, from *Manhatta* to *Koyaanisqatsi*, are similarly focused on the patterns articulated through the editing, and the key criticism tends to involve, precisely, the perceived conveyance of an uncritical sense of perfection, wholeness, and objective knowability that would be anathema to artists of the interwar European avant-garde.

Ultimately, *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War* remains aligned with the questioning legacy identified with avant-garde practice (and the City Symphony tradition) when it comes to the realities of life in the city it documents, even as it became freighted with the requirement to narrate the story of the bombardment. Given the impossibility of making complete sense of the aerial attacks on Sana'a, and especially given their violent and unpredictable irruption into daily life in the City, it seemed that the research materials on City Symphonies and the Avant-Garde might still hold some potential significance for the project, even if this could no longer be an experiment in visual musicality or even a fully developed city symphony.

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[43] Erica Stein, "Abstract Space, Microcosmic Narrative and the Disavowal of Modernity in Berlin: Symphony of a Great City," *Journal of Film and Video* v. 65, no.4 (Winter 2013): 15.

One thing of which we can be fairly certain is that the conflict itself arose, at least in part, due to a split in the Islamic faith, and dogmatic commitments to a singular, 'true' Muslim faith – commitments that are put into question by the Sana'a palimpsest. If the project was to become more of a narrative documentary, it might therefore still do some justice to the city symphony tradition, and to the city of Sana'a itself, by foregrounding contradictoriness and uncertainty; this approach further seemed well suited to 'translating' the experience of life in the city (in peace and, especially, in war) for a wider audience, and in such a way as to avoid, as far as possible, reducing the complexity of either the city or the situation it was facing.

Visual musicality

During my survey of the literature, I came upon concepts that were helpful in working towards my hypothesis regarding Visual Musicality and the moving image. I include here a tentative reading and contemplation of these works, partly to elaborate some of my initial thinking and the starting coordinates for the project, and in part because these continued to serve as sightlines guiding my practical work to one or another extent, depending on circumstances and resources available to me at given points in the project's development.

The term *Musicality* has traditionally been tied to expressions derived from pure musical experiences defined as sensitivity to, knowledge of, or talent for music. A musical person has the ability to perceive differences in harmonies, pitch and rhythm. The Lexico website powered by Oxford University offers the following definition: 'The quality of having a pleasant sound; melodiousness, as in *"the natural musicality of the language"*'.[44] This points to the conventional understanding of the

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[44] "Musicality," Lexicon website < https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/musicality > (accessed 22 March 2014).

quality in largely positive, harmonious terms – generally set against 'noise' as its opposite – although Jean-Jacques Nattiez' semiotic approach to music cautions that 'in definitions of noise, one is always brought back to … notions of fixity, purity, and order.'[45] The author thus puts the 'music'/'noise' distinction in question, and helpfully notes that 'music is whatever [composers or listeners] choose to recognize as such, and noise is whatever is recognized as disturbing, unpleasant, or both. The border between music and noise is always culturally defined.'[46]

Meanwhile the term *Visual Music*, expanding on these definitions, could be one (or more) of three things: how well or effectively a film's images complement its musical soundtrack; how the image track itself might produce a kind of 'music'; and finally, the experience of watching/'hearing' this kind of film. As discussed in the literature review, there is a very heavy emphasis in the scholarship on film and sound on the first of these three, and my research project, as initially framed, aimed to address the gap in the scholarship in terms of the second and third.

By the term *Visual Musicality*, I mean the visual and bodily sensation derived from watching films that use known filmmaking techniques, but in a way that may be experienced as musical. These include camera movements, mise-en-scene, lighting, colour and editing, which can generate affective responses, involving the body and the senses, in the audience. This in turn creates an *approximation* to what composes musicality in music, taken as our experience of music's manipulation of melody and rhythm, as well as harmony, tone, dynamics, and beat.

Illustrating our normal, everyday capacity for the *visualisation* of music,

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[45] Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, tran. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 47.

[46] Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, tran. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 48.

Sergei Eisenstein remarks that this kind of *visualisation* is an ability shared by us all. There are individual variations and various degrees of expressiveness used to depict with the movement of our hands 'that movement [which is] sensed by us in some nuance of music', and in his practical filming and editing he pioneered the concept of *'compositional'* joining in silent film. [47] The example, and the language used by Eisenstein, all sounds fairly straightforward – it seems obvious that one can use gestures to approximate, for example, a dramatic musical flourish, and films are, after all, precisely *composed* – perhaps deceptively so.

Film is a visual form of communication that uses sequences of images, giving the illusion of continuous movement, for narrative, poetic, or rhetorical purposes. Music, on the other hand, is a more abstract form of auditory communication that incorporates instrumental or vocal tones in a structured and continuous manner, but is significantly less tied to narrative, poetic, or rhetorical linguistic forms. Both art forms share at least two elements on which they depend to convey feelings and emotion: harmony and counterpoint (also known as rhythm).[48] In music, counterpoint is the relationship between voices that are interdependent harmonically – polyphony – and yet are independent in rhythm and contour.

My research suggests that, in film, harmony may be realized by the informed juxtaposing of shots, short but complex camera movements, and/or by employing the kind of long take (*piano-sequenza*) proposed by Eisenstein in his experimentations and theorizing on 'vertical montage' in his 1942 book *The Film Sense*. In an engaging and suggestive analysis of the technique of *vertical montage*, Eisenstein's claim is

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[47] Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, trans. Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 9.

[48] Victoria Williams, "Counterpoint in Music," My Music Theory website < https://www.mymusictheory.com/learn-music-theory/reference/579-counterpoint > (accessed 12 May 2014).

that coordinating the montage *within* a single shot or moment, rather than across a horizontal assortment and/or alignment of shots, may impel audiences to read the shots and what they contain more closely.[49] Eisenstein developed this kind of 'montage' for use in his film *Alexander Nevsky* (1938).

This approach was further developed in the 'Long Take' technique, which does not employ any sort of editing. In fact, the argument runs, thanks to the dynamic nature of the camera, which in this technique covers movement continuously across space, this approach achieves the same effect as editing. The Long Take was also employed by Alfred Hitchcock in his 1948 crime thriller *Rope*, in which he masterfully concealed the splices between reels, necessary because of their limited duration, to make the film appear as though it was shot in a single Long Take. It is also worth mentioning Orson Welles' 1958 Film Noir *Touch of Evil*, which has two *real* Long Take scenes. It is also worth mentioning the Russian film director Mikhail Kalatozov's 1957 film *The Cranes are Flying* which presents mobile Long Takes that would not appear in Europe or the USA until the Seventies, the decade in which the Steadi-cam was invented. Kalatozov employs in one of this film's sequences a remarkably complex, yet effortless and seamless movement of the camera in which the shot starts with a girl inside a bus, then with a continuous hand-held shot follows the protagonist out of the bus and into a crowd of people to finish with a high angle shot taken from a crane. These smooth transitions employ, in one virtuoso movement, a tripod camera, a hand- held camera, and a crane camera.

More recently, Aleksandr Sokurov's *Russian Ark* (2002) unfolded in a single Long Take in movement through the Hermitage Gallery in St. Petersburg, with the camera often following and adopting the balletic movements of the figure that tends

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[49] Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, trans. Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 78.

to be in the frame for much of the duration. At the time of writing, Sam Mendes' *1917* (2019) has just been released in cinemas amid much anticipation of its deployment of the technique.

It is crucial to distinguish the Long Take (and 'vertical montage') from the approach to cinematic realism championed by André Bazin, with which it might perhaps otherwise be confused. Bazin famously attacked those directors who, like Eisenstein and the Soviet *montage* school of the 1920s, 'put their faith in the image' rather than *reality*, arguing that cinema can (and should) depict 'objective reality' by the use of wide-angle shots, deep focus, and long takes, instead of montage; 'true continuity', for Bazin, is a matter for the *mise-en-scène*.[50] Bazin was anxious about the power of cinema editing to destroy actual spaces, and the use of metaphors and juxtaposition to manipulate audiences and create messages to get specific responses, and in all of this he was, of course, in diametrical opposition to Eisenstein. For us to understand what takes place in *vertical montage*, Eisenstein explains, 'we may visualize it as two lines, keeping in mind that each of these lines represents *a whole complex of a many-voiced scoring* [my italics]. The search for correspondence must proceed from the intention of matching both picture and music to the general, complex "imagery" produced by the whole.'[51]

The Long Take technique was subsequently enhanced by Michelangelo Antonioni, culminating in the final epic scene of his 1975 film *The Passenger*. Here, a single sequence shot (or *piano sequenza* as the director used to fondly define the term) leads the spectator through the barred window of a hotel, which was custom built to be pulled apart as the camera makes what is (in the real world) an impossible

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[50] Andre Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (London: University of California Press, 2005), 102.

[51] Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, trans. Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 78.

movement to the exterior. The director's comments on his understanding of what constitutes a filmmaking sensibility both chime with this merging of interior and exterior, and echo Eisenstein's 'two lines':

> I believe that something film makers have in common is this habit of keeping one eye open to the inside and one open to the outside. At a certain moment, the two visions approach each other, and like two images that come into focus, they are superimposed upon one another.[52]

Antonioni's comments elsewhere, that '[s]tories can be made of passages, of fragments, they can be unbalanced, like the life we live,[53] serve as further evidence that he is in much closer touch with Eisenstein than Bazin. At the same time, lived experiences and abstraction are two polarities in Antonioni's body of work in cinema. One can also argue that City Symphony genre films, for their success, rely heavily on these two polarities, and this certainly appears to emerge from the above survey of the literature.

For those on the side of the Avant-Garde, who go along with its questioning of our everyday assumptions about a stable reality to represent in the first place, cinema is, *par excellence*, a means that meddles with reality by the very act of capturing it in an artificial form. Both movements of filmed subjects within the shot frame and the movements provided by the camera (whether linear or complex, rapid or slow, hand-held or else) are complemented, essentially, by the movement that is subsequently created during the editing stage. What we understand as a cut between two shots or an entire film (which is a collection of these cuts) is by itself considered a movement. This process of putting together parts of a film to create meaning is not

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[52] Angela Dalle Vacche, *Cinema and Painting* (Austin: University of Texas Press,1996), 46.

[53] Michelangelo Antonioni and Carlo Di Carlo, *The Architecture of Vision: Writings and Interviews on Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), xxiv.

done solely for the purpose of providing a cinematic flow, essential for coherent storytelling, but also to create styles and ideas, as well as creating *rhythm*. So, the creative process of editing obtains rhythm, which is also based on the idea that *montage* originates in the 'collision' between different shots in an illustration of the idea of thesis and antithesis.[54]

There are of course several further dimensions to the film image that may all play some kind of further role in affecting the bodies and senses of spectators in ways that might be thought of as 'musical'. Beyond shot framing, movement, and editing, there are elements of mise-en-scene, lighting, colour, tone and texture (as well as the sound track) that could play some role in what I have identified as visual musicality. These avenues, which were leading me to further readings on embodied spectators and synaesthesia as above, had to remain more or less undeveloped as the project was forced to take a new direction, although the research that I did manage to conduct on this concept remained with me, and to an extent continued to guide my decisions as the project developed.

As an aside, in today's digital era, if we look at the layout of the user interface in the majority of film editing applications, we see different tracks that look and feel like a music score. Computer software for the production of both of these time-based media, in fact, look strikingly similar. The timeline of the editing software of choice, is presented as coloured blocks of spoken and ambient sound, sound effects, music, transitions, written titles, and, of course, the set of static and moving images. Using all of this we tell our story, and because of all this, the fact that we narrate our stories through editing looks, nowadays, like a deeply musical act.

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[54] Sergei Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (New York, 1949), 46.

Chapter outline

In the three chapters that follow, I aim to accomplish three objectives. The first chapter offers an introductory discussion of four of the 'classic' City Symphonies of the interwar period, which aims to identify commonalities and also divergences. A brief discussion of subsequent developments in the genre will establish that City Symphonies can, and have, taken a diverse array of forms over time and in different contexts. This chapter concludes by introducing the reader to the city of Sana'a, and to its historical and cultural significance. Sana'a is perhaps best known (if at all) outside the immediate region as a UNESCO World Heritage Site; this section of the commentary will also engage with the image of the city that UNESCO mediates to the outside world. UNESCO's conservation remit for obvious reasons encourages a view of (especially) the site's Old City that is static, unchanging, detached, and in stark contrast to the dynamism and forms of political upheaval on the city's actual streets that led, indirectly, to the beginning of the aerial bombardment.

The second chapter is largely narrative and reflective, offering an account of the change in direction forced onto the project once the bombardment began. The chapter gives some detail on the specific problems that presented themselves with the change in circumstances, and reflects on the options that seemed available to me at the time in terms of how I might be able to move forward with the project. The principal issues involved, to begin with, the feasibility of continuing with my initial experimental aims, and the question of whether or not to continue with Sana'a as the subject for my film. Having resolved not to abandon Sana'a altogether, and to attempt to mediate the little-known conflict that was going on, I was then faced with the questions of how to narrativize the events, and what resources I had available with

which I could move the project forward. The chapter ends with some further reflections drawn from my notes of the period**.**

The third chapter offers an extended discussion of *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War*. The formal and thematic analysis includes some detail on elements that have been appropriated or adapted from the City Symphony tradition, such as the imagined 'day in the life' timescale and the structure in five distinct 'movements'. Ultimately, however, the film's claim to affiliation with the genre rests at least as much in its guiding commitment to emphasise dynamism, plurality, and unpredictability as part and parcel of modern urban life, and to mediate the city as itself multiple, fragmented, subjective, and untotalisable, in peace as in war.

CHAPTER ONE

Approaching City Symphonies: A Tale of (more than) Five Cities

Cinema, the city, and City Symphonies

Cinema is often referred to as an urban phenomenon, and with some justification. One of the most important cultural forms of the twentieth century, cinema was an invention of the city itself, which in turn can be seen as the most significant form of social organization in the twentieth century. The nexus between city and cinema is, firstly, historical: film history, by common convention, dates from the first Lumière brothers' film screenings in Paris in 1896[55]. Subsequently, cities were crucial to the development of the industry from store fronts and nickelodeons at the turn of the Twentieth Century to the more plush, opulent picture houses that were decorating city blocks by the 1920s – from peep show to palace, to borrow the title of David Robinson's work.[56] Just as no major European city is without a concert orchestra, no city is without its historic and modern cinema houses.

The relationship between the city and the cinema is also cultural. Cinemas play a significant role in both the built environment and the life routines of a city; they become familiar landmarks on regular trips across town, and (more broadly) they are sites of memories and associations of one sort or another, woven into the urban

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[55] At least one earlier example exists: *Roundhay Garden*, for instance, is a two-second actuality made by Louis Le Prince in 1888.

[56] David Robinson: *From Peep Show to Palace: The Birth of American Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery's *Film History: Theory and Practice* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1985) is influenced by urban history and geography (see for example pp. 202-7).

social fabric.57 Studios for films are also usually located in or near cities; cities have further served both as settings and inspirations for films, providing rich and diverse backdrops and subjects for the cinema. For filmmakers the *'city'* has always represented an enthrallment and fascination since the invention of the Cinematograph at the close of the Nineteenth Century,58 and an association between cinema and the city emerged as fertile ground for creative cinematic representations. Although it is easy to see cities simply as sites of film consumption, then, the relationship between the city and cinema is nonetheless a productive and mutual one.

The city is similarly a key point of focus for those Avant-Garde artists who saw – in its dynamism, fragmentation, and complexity – a figure for their questioning of received ideas about the nature of 'objective' reality. This questioning approach, to a greater or lesser extent, distinguishes Avant-Garde productions from films that take objects, such as cities, for the more straightforward and modest aim of simply reproducing or 'documenting' it, following the conventional understanding of documentary film (as the heir of actuality exclusively) noted above as questioned by authors such as Nichols and Geiger.

City Symphonies emerged among a small group of European and American Modernist Avant-Garde artists in the 1920s, emphasise and formalize the power, complexity, and excitement of city life. Gartenberg and Westhelle (among others) point out that City Symphonies 'represent the articulation of both a defined time frame (most often from morning until evening) as well as a carefully articulated

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57 A sustained study of cinemagoing in the British city of Nottingham is Mark Jancovich, Lucy Faire and Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* (London: BFI, 2003).

58 Bill Nichols, "Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry* v. 27, no. 4 (Summer, 2001): 580-610.

geographic space.59 The 'City' in 'City Symphony' films is a complex organization of building structures, motor, tram, and rail transport circulation, roads, and avenues, 'orchestrated' into dynamic shapes and patterns.

As discussed in the Introduction, there appears to be some possibility of articulating the various fragments through the montage perhaps too 'harmoniously' – i.e. uncritically – which is seen as producing a city that, for all its facets, ultimately remains as a stable, unitary and objective fact. It possibly even risks the promotion of what can be called an 'urban modernist celebratory' point of view. This is a point of view that has a clear characteristic: that of favouring human inventions and built structures over nature and people.

On the other hand, the modernist impulse informing many City Symphony films is to disrupt tradition, to see the world made afresh. Here is a poignant connection with both the disruptive forms of modern art in Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró's persistent experimentations and their lifelong love with non-objectivity, and with modern music as in the work of Igor Stravinsky, which is considered a touchstone of modernism.

This chapter will offer, next, some detailed discussion of the four most famous examples of the City Symphony genre of films: Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta*, Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City,* Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, and Jean Vigo's *À Propos de Nice*. It will also briefly consider one or two subsequent developments in the genre in an attempt to pin down a more precise definition of City Symphonies, before concluding with a few remarks about the city of Sana'a, and some of its key features.

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59 John Gartenberg and Alex Westhelle: "NY, NY: A Century of City Symphony Films," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* v. 55, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 248-276.

Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta* (1921)

We can consider *Manhatta* a major film that changed documentary filmmaking by putting it in the coveted territory of the 'art form'; it is, arguably, the first Avant-Garde film made in the United States. This poetic and modernist documentary work, presents images of lower Manhattan, using cubist perspectives and percussive rhythms.[60] What makes this film different from previous films of the type, which will later be called 'documentaries' by John Grierson, was that it explored the potentials of the movie camera to produce a film that is both a 'realistic' and 'factual' representation of the city, yet at the same time an artistic and poetic expression that stimulates aesthetic emotions about the metropolis.

Directed and photographed by two Americans, Paul Strand (a painter), and Charles Sheeler (a still photographer), this one reel (12 minutes)[61] is a visionary and poetic film based on, and supported by, Walt Whitman's 1860 poem "Mannahatta."[62] Looking at *Manhatta's* literary features, Kristen Oehlrich argues that the poetry of Walt Whitman forms what she calls 'lyric counterpoints to modernist visual imagery'.[63] This pioneering unification between Whitman's lyrical and romantic poetry and Sheeler and Strand's modern film and Avant-Garde imagery, offers a critical exploration of the boundaries between film, photography, and poetry.

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[60] Horak, Jan-Christopher. The First American Film Avant-Garde l919-1945. In *Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's Manhatta*, ed. Jan-Christopher Horak (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 1995. 267-286.

[61] In 2008 Posner supervised a digital restoration which runs for twelve minutes (excerpt from Jeffrey Geiger *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation* Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 73.

[62] The title may also refer to Lenape people's name for Manhattan, meaning "Island of many hills", "The Origin and Meaning of the Name "Manhattan," by Ives Goddard, *New York History* (Fall 2010): 287. Retrieved from<https://repository.si.edu/bitstream/handle/10088/16790/anth_Manhattan.pdf > (accessed 14 February 2017).

[63] Oehlrich Kristen, "Reconsidering Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand's *Manhatta*," in *Film and Literary* Modernism, ed. Robert P. McParland. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, 27.

The film establishes one of the core practices of City Symphonies, depicting a 'typical' day in New York City from dawn to dusk. It opens with a shot of a barge passing the New York skyline, then a ferry arriving at a dock; commuters walk out of the ferry, crowding onto city streets where they are dwarfed by the architecture of New York's skyscrapers.

An inter-title (Walt Whitman's poem) fades-in to a screen showing New York's famous silhouetted skyline:

City of the world

(for all races are here)

City of tall facades of

marble and iron

Proud and passionate city

City of hurried and

sparkling waters

City nested in bays

Slender, strong splendidly

uprising toward clear sky

Gorgeous clouds of

sunset!

Drench with your

splendor

Me or the men and women

Generations after me.

The shots of the film continue, showing workers toiling away in dusty ditches or balancing on narrow crossbeams high amidst the scaffolds that support the high-

rise buildings, towers of water and concrete, chimneys spouting smoke, waterfront and city views, ocean liners, and trains emitting smoke. Here, nature can appear covered, surrounded, and overshadowed by human achievement. Anything seems possible in the film, even the future, which the film proclaims, is at that very moment being built in New York.

Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's film is constructed from shots of ferries, skyscrapers, streets, and long-take static panoramas that 'portray' cityscapes composed of buildings, traffic, as well as gliding shots captured with a camera that is mounted on moving objects: trams, trains, or ferries. In its focus on the city as representation and site of high technology *Manhatta* may be seen as avoiding the human. Echoing Grierson's concerns about the film, and City Symphonies more generally, Robert Flaherty summed up his own sense of the thematic perspective of the film when he pointed out that *Manhatta* is 'not a film of humans, but of skyscrapers which they had erected, completely dwarfing humanity'.[64] The beautifully composed shots of New York's huge, tall skyscrapers, juxtaposed to the miniaturized people who walk in front of them seem to underwrite, in this perspective, Sheeler and Strand's view of *modernity* as synonymous of *progress*. It is quite easy to read the film in these terms, as both straightforward and optimistic about progress, while remaining more or less blind to the possible cost to the human and natural world.

On the other hand, with *Manhatta*, Sheeler and Strand – Sheeler as a Precisionist painter, and Strand as an affiliate of Stieglitz's Pictorialist Photo-

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[64] Quoted in Jan-Christopher Horak, *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Avant-Garde, 1919-1945*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 32.

Secession group[65] – used film as an art medium. While watching this film the viewer notices shadows on the high-rise buildings and high angle still camera positions that look down at New York through iron bars and scaffolds: camera angles that evoke modern painting compositions and the use of what Geiger notes as 'modernist abstraction to defamiliarize scenes of everyday life in New York – the quintessential ready-made urban landscape'.[66] As discussed in the Introduction, Geiger's account (along with others) sees the film as being rather more ambivalent about both technology and the future, and represents instead 'a complex fusion of presumed opposites.'[67] These 'presumed opposites' include not only those of nature/technology, human/industrial, and so on, but also the mixture of a range of media and creative disciplines informing the whole.

Unquestionably, *Manhatta* is a study of *'the city'* but it lacks, to a certain extent, the explicit 'symphonic' structure in clearly demarcated 'movements' that marks the other canonical examples discussed here. It also seems lacking in the more diffuse sense of musical movements where shots play against each other to make one feel that the heartbeat of the city is audible, in spite of the 'counterpoint' Oehlrich discerns in the mix of Whitman's texts and modernist vistas. Reflecting again on its makers' backgrounds in painting and photography, Geiger emphasizes that '*Manhatta* appears almost modest as a cinematic statement, characterized by carefully framed shots that evoke more an impression of still photographs with movement than of

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[65] Alexander Graf, "Paris - Berlin - Moscow: On the Montage Aesthetic in the City Symphony Films of the 1920s," in *Avante-Garde Film*, ed. Alexander Graf and Dietrich Scheunemann (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2007), 78.

[66] Jeffrey Geiger, *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 73.

[67] Jeffrey Geiger, *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 78.

dynamic moving images'.[68] The film further follows the classical tradition of silent films, where the films were structured through a timely interchange of scenes and inter-titles, and where the sequences are based upon a succession of mostly static and panoramic shots. In their film, Strand and Sheeler did not demonstrate any interest in the associative or rhythmic montage typical of the City Symphonies that were produced in the wake of their seminal film.

Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927)

Like *Manhatta*, Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* is about a 'day in the life' of a big city, essentially of a metropolis. The term 'metropolis' is derived from the Greek words 'mētēr' and 'pólis' which, when combined together, mean the "mother-city".[69] There are many aspects that make up a metropolis: it is a large urban centre that acts as an economical and cultural hub for the whole of a nation. In his Berlin film, Ruttmann tries to explore these aspects in various ways: his city (metropolis) acts as a representation, but also as a means to inform spectators' understandings; the City Symphony film has the capacity, as 'real life' documentation, to construct knowledge about the world.

This film is another significant example of this genre, not only because of its title, a prelude to the later term 'City Symphony', but also because it offers today's audiences captivating peeks into the metropolis called Berlin and its people, as well as offering glimpses, no longer possible, of the period in which the film was made. This was just a few years before the Second World War started, when over 30% of central Berlin was leveled to the ground during the Allied bombing campaigns: by

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[68] Jeffrey Geiger, *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 73-74.

[69] "Meaning of *metropolis* in English," Lexico website, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/metropolis> (accessed 20 February 2014).

May 1945, 1.7 million people (40% of the population) had fled[70], changing forever the face of the old Berlin immortalized by Ruttmann's film.

Ruttmann was a key figure of Avant-Garde film, art, and music. He was a cellist and violinist as well as a painter and a pioneer in experimental animation. He studied architecture and painting and worked as a graphic designer (even before the term was coined by William Addison Dwiggins in 1922), becoming associated with and close to such Avant-Garde artists as Paul Klee, and Karl Feininger, among others. His film career began in the early 1920s, and by 1925 he had already completed a four-part Opus series of experimentations in new, abstract film forms. These enriched the language of film, as a medium, with new formal techniques. In his kinetic art experimentations, Ruttmann used painting to create abstract forms that move, in a synchronized melody and rhythm, with music.

Later, and in making his *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, Ruttmann's intention was to establish formal lyrical approaches and impressionistic aesthetic principles by utilizing the visual dynamics of his 'city' and by making 'her' his film's main character. So, this film was, in a sense, Ruttmann's statement for a new approach to documentary filmmaking that viewed the real world as prime material for visual experimentation. In one of his unpublished notes Ruttmann wrote that "[d]uring the long years of my development through abstractionism, I never lost the desire to build from living materials and to create a film symphony out of the myriad moving energies of a great city."[71] Ruttmann's comment on maintaining these 'myriad moving energies' *alongside* abstract conceptualisations of 'the city' remained

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[70] Richard Overy, *The Bombers and the Bombed: Allied Air War Over Europe 1940–1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), 301.

[71] Standish D. Lawder, *The Cubist Cinema*, (New York: New York UP, 1975), 62.

a central point of reference in my own project, as I will go on to discuss later in this chapter.

In the film Ruttmann adopted classic characteristics of music and the symphonic form as the driving force, utilising tempo, rhythm, and formal patterns. Even the critical Grierson allows that, 'in so far as the film was principally concerned with movements and the building of separate images into movements, Ruttmann was justified in calling it a symphony.'72 As a matter of fact, the different parts or episodes of Ruttmann's film are called 'Acts', although there is a clear analogy with the different parts of a musical symphony. Symphonies are large-scale musical compositions that are divided into acts, sections or movements. Musical symphonies usually have four, five, or six movements: in a symphony with four movements, the first is usually fast while the second is often slow; the third movement is dance-like and the fourth comes to a lively conclusion.

Ruttmann's film actually has five movements (Acts), each clearly marked by a number and a title. The first three of *Berlin*'s 'Acts' correspond to the morning, 'Act IV' is the afternoon and 'Act V' unfolds at nighttime.It is easy to detect the changes of pace and to see how Ruttmann succeeded in matching his City Symphony to the rhythm of the music by an accurate selection of fast- or slow-moving shots and by editing. Ruttmann's images on screen swing from man to machinery, rich to poor, train ride to horse race, workplace to fairground as graciously and as aggressively as the score of any composer's symphony.

In the film's opening shot we see water: rippling, undulating water that generates an illusion of movement, making it seem that the camera actually tilts upwards, soon to be dissolved by a linear movement of a train hurtling into the city.

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72 John Grierson, "First Principles of Documentary (1932)," in *The Documentary Film Movement: An Anthology*, ed. I. Aitken, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 86.

Right from the start it is clear that Ruttmann's leitmotif is movement, utilizing rapid montage of close-ups of moving objects cut in montage with abstract shots of trees, clouds, lines of electrical wires, train tracks, and bare crisscrossed windows shot in quick pan movements of the camera. The natural landscape shot from the train windows is transmuted by the effect of speed into sophisticated images, and into Avant-Garde works of abstraction and kinetic art. This is Ruttmann's *Overture,* using a symphonic musical term *par excellence*, and employing geometric and abstract patterns reminiscent of his graphic and kinetic art experimentations. Throughout, Ruttmann's film utilises techniques like fragmentation and abstraction to produce a *creative treatment of actuality,* if we use the definition of 'documentary', the term coined and defined by Grierson himself.

The camera mounted on a train displays in traveling shots calm and empty streets to the gradual process of the city waking up in the early morning. People start to appear, a paper blows along a desolate street, and more and more people emerge as activities build up. The city wakes up. Workers go to work, cars, buses, trams, and trains all move. A worker's hand operates a lever, and we get the sensation that the whole city is effectively switched on. Then a whole industrial machinery spirals to life: production of electrical bulbs, cutting of metal sheets, molten steel, and smoke against the clouds.

The morning 'Acts' show more of the general life of the city: the opening of gates, shutters, windows, doors, people busy cleaning, fruit carts, children going to school. Shops open, and postmen deliver letters. Different classes of Berliners are shown, in buses and trams, while the better-off are driven by chauffeurs in luxurious cars. The city is energetically rushing in motion.

The 'symphony' continues thus until it reaches its climax in 'Act V' devoted to the night in the city of Berlin. This becomes theatre time for some, and work

through the night for others. It is about drinking and flirting for some, and dancing for others. Yet the *leitmotiv*, using another musical term, of moving cars continues, and the city continues to spin wildly until it switches into a firework display as the film ends.

Ruttmann's film, of course, was not immune to criticism. Attacks on the City Symphony, as a form that displaces politics in favour of its aesthetics, have congealed around *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, in part as such a prominent early example of the form. In common with *Manhatta*, *Berlin* has drawn criticism especially for its perceived antihumanism, most notably in Siegfried Kracauer's assessment: 'Human beings are forced into the sphere of the inanimate. They seem molecules in a stream of matter… People in Berlin assume the character of material not even polished. Used up material is thrown away… The life of society is a harsh, mechanical process."[73] In a similar way, Jay Chapman insists that, for Ruttmann, 'the essence of the city is its rhythm, and nothing else': *C*hapman sees the editing of *Berlin* as producing a degree of 'coldness' in the work, which 'exhibits no real feeling for anything', and especially 'not the people.'[74]

As discussed in the Introduction, more recent accounts have also revolved around the issue of *Berlin'*s montage; a central figure is the suicidal woman shown drowning herself towards the end of the film's fourth 'Act'. Stein sees the suicide as the film's 'climactic' episode, noting its high degree of subjectivity, but suggests the water/pinwheel association that enfolds it effectively neutralizes its potentially

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[73] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 187.

[74] Jay Chapman, "Two Aspects of the City: Cavalcanti and Ruttmann," in *The Documentary Tradition*, ed. L. Jacobs (New York: Norton, 1979), 40.

subversive force.75 Hunter draws attention to the staged nature of the scene, although he acknowledges that it becomes just one more episode among many. At the same time, Hunter also notes the shots of onlookers standing by, seemingly unable to intervene, and draws an intriguing parallel with the cinema spectators and their implication in the scene. Ultimately the woman's death is generalized, in Hunter's account, as deriving from 'nothing much more than a sense of accelerated urban *Angst*,' but even though it 'leads to nothing', it nonetheless highlights the 'human cost' of rapid modernization.76

Beattie is even more insistent that there is some kind of a human dimension to *Berlin* and other City Symphonies, and criticizes what he sees as the inattentiveness to this dimension in the scholarly debates.77 His discussion of Ruttmann's *Berlin*, in particular, takes issue with Grierson and Kracauer's acccusations of antihumanism, as well as the sense of the film (conveyed especially strongly in Kracauer) as apolitical. Kracauer focuses especially on Ruttmann's use of rhythmic montage, but even he allows that there are contrasts drawn along the way, and (as above) these include contrasts along the lines of social class – Ruttmann's film was not necessarily timid in criticizing Berlin society under the Weimar Republic. Kracauer, however, compares *Berlin* with Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera*, and emphasizes the *formalization* of these contrasts as a means, in Ruttmann's case, 'to avoid any critical comment on the reality with which he is faced.' For Kracauer, thus, 'Vertov implies

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75Erica Stein, "Abstract Space, Microcosmic Narrative and the Disavowal of Modernity in Berlin: Symphony of a Great City," *Journal of Film and Video* v. 65, no.4 (Winter 2013):13-14.

76 Jefferson Hunter, "James Joyce, Walther Ruttmann, and City Symphonies", *The Kenyon Review* (New Series), v. 35, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 203-4.

77 Keith Beattie, *Documentary Display: Re-viewing Nonfiction Film and Video* (London: Wallflower, 2008), 32-4.

content; Ruttmann shuns it.... Ruttmann's rhythmic montage is symptomatic of a withdrawal from basic decisions to ambiguous neutrality.'[78]

While there have been many critics since who similarly find *Berlin*'s formal attributes as outweighing any social criticism the film may imply, the precise terms of Kracauer's comparison with Vertov remain a little unclear. He points towards some 'lyric enthusiasm' deriving from Vertov's 'revolutionary convictions', and asserts that Vertov's 'cross sections are "permeated with communist ideas" even when they picture only the beauty of abstract movements.'[79] Perhaps what is at stake, in this specific instance, is as much Kracauer's concern to fit Ruttmann's film into his broader thesis about films and 'national character' – with the 'critical' Soviets lined up against a German industry that reflected only the 'collective inner paralysis' Kracauer identifies with the nation.[80]

Critical or otherwise, Ruttmann's *Berlin* formalized a structure for the City Symphony and went considerably further, in terms of mobile cinematography and dynamic editing, than Strand and Sheeler's *Manhatta*. The film's emphasis on rhythms and flows appears to be in a delicate balance with the kinds of aims espoused by socially-minded critics such as Grierson or Kracauer. Nonetheless, through his representation of the metropolis and its human subjects, Ruttmann laid the foundation for a new language of rhythm and evocation. This language, through which the City Symphony genre evolved after his seminal film, invigorated the documentary form, expanded the range of aesthetic techniques by which 'actuality' might be 'creatively

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[78] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 187.

[79] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 187.

[80] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 199.

treated', and evidences a capacity (at the very least) for social criticism.[81]   This capacity has already been suggested as emerging in a more direct way in Dziga Vertov's City Symphony *Man With a Movie Camera*, and in many ways *Berlin* can be considered the blue print for the latter. Together, Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* and Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* provide the opportunity to draw some interesting comparisons (Kracauer notwithstanding) as well as contrasts.

Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929)

A closer study reveals both similarities and differences between Vertov's film and its predecessor. For instance, both films share a structural similarity, portraying 'a day in the life of a city', rather than a narrative timeline over any longer period. Both navigate through the day, from dawn to dusk, showing city people working, doing mundane chores, or playing. In contrast, while Ruttmann's *Berlin* starts with a masterful montage of a train in a dashing movement towards the metropolis, Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* starts, soon after it declares (in its only inter-title) 'This is an experiment in Cinematic Communication', with an empty movie theatre in which a 'film within the film' will soon be played. Immediately, Vertov appears more ready than Ruttmann to engage in the kind of overt, reflexive questioning of the means of cinematic reproduction characteristic of the Avant-Garde. As if to underscore Nichols's and Geiger's suggestions of a history of intersections between documentary and the Avant Garde, this film was recently voted, in a *Sight and Sound* poll, 'the greatest documentary of all time'.[82]

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[81] William Uricchio quoted in S. MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 153.

[82] "The 100 Greatest Films of All Time", *British Film Institute* website, < https://www.bfi.org.uk/news/50-greatest-films-all-time > (accessed 25 July 2015).

Vertov's first film as a director was *The Anniversary of the Revolution* (1919). Two short films soon followed: *Battle of Tsaritsyn* (1920) and *The Agit-Train Vsik* (1921), as well as numerous newsreels documenting the History of Russia's Civil War (1922). In this revolutionary atmosphere, and at a time when the nascent Communist state was fighting battles for its existence, the notion of deliberate spread of information for a cause, seen today as propaganda, was central. Vertov started his job as a film maker in the Bolshevik regime's newly established film unit, and being a communist himself, Vertov understood that the Soviet state sought graphic material that featured striking pictures and rousing slogans to communicate its ideology.

Vertov, in all of his filmmaking, was obsessed by experimenting with expressive uses of cinematography and montage, and aimed to achieve a poetic effect that would attract a large, and (at the time) largely illiterate audience. It is also worth mentioning that Vertov was, further, an innovative experimenter in the utilization of sound in his films, long before the sound revolution came to cinema. He experimented with rhythmic substitutes for the human voice, and alternating the spoken word with images, thus achieving the illusion of off-screen narration.

In this early period of revolutionary ideological fervor Vertov most famously declared the supremacy of the camera/lens combination – the 'Kino-Eye' – over the human eye. For Vertov, the camera was an untainted device that can register, with purity and without any bias or excessive aesthetical considerations, the world *as it is*, unhindered by the all-too-human eye:

> Our eyes see very little and very badly – so people dreamed up the microscope to let them see invisible phenomena; they invented the telescope…now they have perfected the cinecamera to penetrate more deeply into the visible world, to explore and record visual phenomena

> so that what is happening now, which will have to be taken account of in the future, is not forgotten.[83]

Man with a Movie Camera presents an impressive and dazzling portrayal of urban city life, depicting 'the city', but also revealing the camera's ability, assisted by his cameraman's dexterity, to create a striking display of a city in motion and reveal something of its inner dynamics. Vertov's film aims to amplify and augment this capacity, and exhibits exceptional technical prowess: a range of dynamic camera angles, variable speeds and rhythms (including especially a number of virtuoso rapid cuts in Elizaveta Svilova's montage), as well as innovative experimentations in film language such as the use of overt 'trick shots', animation, split screens, and multiple superimpositions to study the pulse of 'the city'.

The film starts with the early hours of any given morning, before the city awakens. The streets of the city are empty, the buses stand still in their depots, a woman is in deep sleep, a poster shows a man putting his index finger on his lips with a hushing gesture, a poor, destitute man is also asleep, mechanical toys and bicycles rest unmoving inside display windows of shops, and the mechanical machines of the city factories are still. Then, gradually, everything in the city begins to move: the machines roll, the woman we saw wakes up and gets dressed, the buses move from their depots, mechanical toys come to life, bicycle wheels turn round and round on their axis, and the vagabond turns over in his sleep and wakes. We see a young man appearing on the screen, wearing a sweater, and carrying on his right shoulder a movie camera. He is seemingly intent on filming everything in the city that appears in front of his lens; the cumulative effect is that of an entire, personified city awakening from sleep.

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[83] Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 41.

Vertov aimed at crafting his films in ways that disregarded time, classic formal continuity, and 'logic'. A remarkable feature of *Man with a Movie Camera* is that – in contrast to the other City Symphonies discussed here – this film did not in fact portray one single city, but a number of different cities: Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, and Kharkiv. In one sense this film can be considered a 'fraud', given the presumption that a City Symphony film 'should' portray a specific city. To the extent that the three cities have common characteristics, however, there is some artistic and thematic unity in the trinity of locations. Vertov was also, of course, one of those artists that Bazin referred to as 'putting faith in the image', and for him the opportunity to create a composite city was testament to the power of film to create a whole new world, rather than to be limited by the constraints of profilmic actuality as it appears to the naked human eye.

These kinds of technique and approach to material brought Vertov both attention and criticism from the Soviet Communist Party, however; this led to a lack of support from the Soviet cultural authorities, who considered Vertov to be an eccentric and dogmatic filmmaker who rejected everything taken for granted in cinema. These charges were, mainly, of extreme and unnecessary 'formalism', which suggested notions of apoliticism and ahistoricism. They were also part of frequent attacks that were directed, not only and particularly at Vertov's film, but also more generally at the kinds of new form of expression, which the Avant-Garde City Symphony films pioneered.

Some of the most significant critics and filmmakers at the time expressed their objections to Vertov's filmmaking practice. Eisenstein attacked particularly what he

called the 'formalist jackstraws and unmotivated camera mischief' of Vertov's film. [84]
Grierson was similarly blunt, claiming that '*Man with a Movie Camera* is… not a
film at all: it is a snapshot album'.[85] Both seem to miss what is perhaps the most
significant and innovatory aspect of the film, which is its extraordinarily high degree
of reflexivity. Time and again, the camera – and the cameraman – is at centre stage;
the film is replete with 'trick shots' that make no semblance of an attempt to represent
the world 'transparently'; the film relentlessly explores its own possibilities and
conditions of existence, as a means to critically engage with both Soviet society and
its 'mechanical reproducibility'. This innovative last aspect of his practice only
reappeared, in the West, some thirty years later in the way filmmakers such as Jean-
Luc Godard, Chris Marker, or Stan Brakhage realised their films.

    Man With a Movie Camera remains, today, a distinctive and enormously
energetic and dynamic engagement with the city and modernity. It has in common
with *Manhatta* and *Berlin* the 'day-in-the-life' structure, and with *Berlin* a more or
less clear sense of demarcated symphonic movements. It does, though, part company
with both of these earlier examples to the extent that it plays with the unity of place in
its representation of a composite city. It further differs from both in its overt
reflexivity, as it continually foregrounds the work of cinematography (as well as
including a sequence to do with the editing of the film) and therefore puts its own
'transparency' and 'objectivity' very much in question. As such, Vertov's film comes
closest of all these four early examples to a sense of a city as multiple, fragmented
and, ultimately, impossible to totalize; this sense, I will go on to show, informs both
many later examples of the genre, and the production of my own film about Sana'a.

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[84] Sergei Eisenstein, *Essays in Film Theory: Film Form*, trans. Jay Leyda (New York and London: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1977), 43.

[85] John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (Faber and Faber, 1966), 127.

Jean Vigo's *À Propos de Nice* (1930)

Part documentary and part travelogue, *À propos de Nice* rather more straightforwardly critiques and pokes fun at the leisured classes in the beach resort where Vigo was convalescing from tuberculosis; the director described his film as a rough draft for a future social cinema. Vigo's film from the start deploys creative editing techniques, juxtapositions of significantly contrasting shots, and Avant-Garde experimentation, and his film has been hailed as a great artistic achievement. Documentary scholar Michael Renov argues that the film combines an 'artfulness' derived from the 'function of purely photographic properties', with an editing style that creates explosive effects – cerebral as well as visceral.[86] While sticking to the classical 'dictum' of City Symphony style by showing us a 'day in the life' of the city of Nice, also builds an overtly critical account about the class differences within the city.

As in the other preceding City Symphonies, *À Propos de Nice* starts with the awakening of the city, and the accompanying preparations for the day. This awakening of the city and its preparations are not, though, for the sake of its inhabitants. They are rather for the pleasure of the wealthy tourists and vacationers who storm this city. Throughout the entirety of his film, Vigo maintains a distinctive way of filming with the intent of uncovering the social and political conditions in Nice, the city of his choice.[87] In his comments on a *'documentary point of view'* Vigo emphasized that such an approach was the basis of 'social documentary' or 'social cinema'. This he saw as a form of analysis, which involves explaining class struggle

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[86] Michael Renov, *Toward a Poetics of Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 32.

[87] Vigo quoted in P.E. Salles Gomes, *Jean Vigo*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), 55.

(a Marxist-Leninist maxim) and portraying it artistically by a well-defined distinction between wealth and poverty.

To this end, *À Propos de Nice* is full of suggestive shots and montage techniques aimed at clarifying this class distinction, and the side the spectator might be expected to take: rhythmic montage of wealthy men visiting women is inter-cut with shots of an ostrich; shots of the wealthy sunbathing *bourgeois* are juxtaposed to shots of crocodiles dozing in the heat. The film continues with its criticism of the conditions in the city with shots of the wealthy seaside flâneurs, starkly contrasted with scenes of the city's poor working-class quarter. This critique of the conditions created by the *bourgeoisie* illustrates Vigo's left-leaning politics and leaps out at spectators from the montage of his intellectual cinema.

À propos de Nice has a number of features in common with *Man with a Movie Camera*, *Berlin*, and *Manhatta*, but again there are certain key distinctions that might be drawn between all four. In particular, and as emphasized here, Vigo's film is very much more direct and overt in its critique of class division in Nice society than any of the other three. The roulette wheel sequence in particular illustrates his theme that Nice is 'a city which thrives on gambling', and acts as a fairly blunt reminder not only that much wealth is a fortunate accident of birth, but also that wealth and fortunes themselves can wax and wane. In *À propos de Nice*, Vigo's human subjects are meticulously foregrounded in a swirling montage reminiscent of Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, and in fact the camera work in this film was executed by Boris Kaufman, Vertov's exiled brother and cameraman. At the same time, this foregrounding of the human and the political distinguishes Vigo's film from *Manhatta* and (in certain accounts) Ruttmann's *Berlin*. *Manhatta* is itself something of an exception in this group in terms of its lack of dynamism and more overtly

'pictorial' and 'poetic' qualities, and the exceptionally reflexive *Man with a Movie Camera* refuses to focus on a single city at all.

All four of these films engage in some kind of play with formal aspects and the language of film – the angles of the panoramic shots and the use of Whitman's poetry in *Manhatta*, for example, or the use of rhythmic and associational montage in the remaining three –taking a creative and original approach to their material, which is most often the 24-hour cycle of a given city. On the other hand, as I hope to have shown here, there are certain key differences that make the search for a stable definition of 'The City Symphony' quite difficult to conclude. More or less demarcated into symphonic movements, more or less static or dynamic, more overtly or latently critical of their selected societies and/or of the means by which they represent it, the early canonical examples of the City Symphony genre appear to have as much to distinguish them from one another as to unite them.

Are City Symphonies an *'Undying' Genre?*

This originality in the form, as well as in the content, and the authors' attempts to redefine cinema's language, might well be the reasons for this genre's enduring popularity, and it was certainly a motivating factor in my own adoption of this genre for my film. For me, the appeal of the interwar City Symphony films resides in a combination of two main aspects: their historical importance as 'documents' (more or less self-conscious), both of locales, and of a certain moment – and movement – in the history of cinema; and their playfulness of form.

The heyday of City Symphonies ended with the introduction of synchronized sound recording to film, although this path was not uncontested. A number of leading Soviet montage theorists and practitioners famously argued in a 'Statement' of 1928 that synchronization of sound, and dialogue especially, would be a loss in terms of

the expressive resources of cinema.[88] For these practitioners, recorded sound offered a further montage element, which might be used 'contrapuntally', in such a way as to render still more complex the associations and connections forged in the edit.

Although the Soviet montage directors' 'Statement' points towards potentially fertile explorations of the relationship between sound and image, Ian Christie points out that these were not really followed up, and that 'most aesthetic discussions of sound in the 1930s come down to the unhelpful assertion that, since film is essentially visual and therefore silent, sound will inevitably distract from its artistry.'[89] In the commercial sector, meanwhile, the overwhelming tendency with the onset of sound was, of course, towards synchronisation. The commonplace use of 'talkies' to refer to cinema in general in the period immediately following is evidence of the extent to which this shift tied sound cinema in general much more closely to narrative and rhetorical linguistic forms. The choices that led to the development of synchronised sound tended to favour especially the clarification and simplification of concrete narrative causes and effects, and kept at a distance the more abstract, poetic, or exploratory qualities associated with the Avant Garde in general, and City Symphonies specifically.

Nevertheless, a document like the 'Statement' is a reminder that other options existed for cinema, and have remained available to filmmakers over the decades. At the same time, the influence and legacy of other forms of City Symphonies have endured. As I will show, City Symphonies have developed over the decades since this

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[88] Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Grigorii Alexandrov, 'Statement on Sound," in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939*, ed. Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, trans. Richard Taylor (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 234-5.

[89] Ian Christie, "Making sense of early Soviet sound," in *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema*, ed. Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (Routledge: London and New York, 2005), 177.

period, and the category has even expanded to incorporate a variety of modifications and new approaches. Even though they blossomed most famously in the 1920s-30s, City Symphony films continue to be made, their scope broadening in terms of both territory and technique; in some cases growing beyond their initial existence as experimentations in Avant-Garde and poetic film making, to the extent that they can be considered as significant cultural texts. City Symphonies remain valuable to us today, not only because these are films that succeeded in exploring and utilising hidden potentials of a still relatively new medium, but also because these are films that celebrate modernity or criticize its decadence and, sometimes, do both.

In this subsequent development, New York City looms especially large, as can be inferred from Gartenburg and Westhelle's survey, and the extensive selection of films discussed in Stein's PhD thesis.[90] Both authors incorporate quite a diverse range of films into the genre, their City Symphonies commingling with 'City Films' or experimental/essay films on the city. Stein's PhD research further includes fictional films, and Stein is not alone in noting the treatment of cities as subjects in their own right in dramatic features. To take just one of a number of examples over the decades, Scott MacDonald argues that – despite its use of a recognizable dramatic narrative structure and synced dialogue among actors – Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) not only deserves inclusion within the framework of the City Symphony genre, but is one of its finest examples from the US.[91]

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[90] Jon Gartenberg and Alex Westhelle, "NY, NY: A Century of City Symphony Films," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* v. 55, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 248- 276; Erica Stein, "An Island off the Coast of America: New York City Symphonies as Productions of Space and Narrative" (PhD thesis, University of Iowa, Summer 2011).

[91] Scott MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 172-82.

Non-fiction films from other cities too – such as Joris Ivens' *A Valparaiso* (1963) or Patrick Keiller's *London* (1994), for example – might be seen as further expanding and enriching the genre through their diverse approaches to their respective soundtracks and, in particular, voice-over narration. Ivens' film is more conventionally 'political', both in its juxtaposition of the life of the city's poor with the 'other world' constituted by the villas occupying the hilltops above, and in the clear rhetorical thesis relayed by its voice-over narration. *London*'s narrator may or may not be omniscient: the voice-over primarily consists of indirect discourse, with the distinctively recognizable voice of Paul Scofield recollecting various conversations with his friend 'Robinson'. The soundtrack, then, is entirely made up of *reported* speech rather than the conventional authoritative-objective accompaniment to the display of empirical (i.e. *visible*) fact. The image track is largely populated with lengthy shots of locales around the city that appear to be associated with the specific recollections, and involve little by way of camera movement.

Papagena Robbins suggests that *My Winnipeg* (Guy Maddin, 2007) and other examples of what she refers to as 'city-symphonies-in-reverse' – *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (Thom Anderson, 2003) and Rick Prelinger's *Lost Landscapes* (2006-2016) film programs – share a common aim: 'to persuade audiences to deal with local pasts themselves without the aid of an infallible historian to create a narrative that assembles and motivates moving image fragments to cohere with other documents into a plausible, and complete narrative.'[92] *My Winnipeg*'s often impassioned voice-over expresses, in a direct and highly subjective way, the filmmaker's complex, intimate, and emotionally conflicted relationship with his 'snowy, sleepwalking' home city. Maddin's account mixes historical detail and anecdote, along with

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[92] Papagena Robbins, "City Symphonies in Reverse" (PhD Thesis, Concordia University, 2017), iii.

elements of memory and (especially) dream, all relayed through a voice-over that playfully ironizes its subject matter and itself, effectively destabilizing any sense of a 'voice of authority' guiding audiences towards a specific response as in Ivens' work, for example.

Terence Davies similarly depicts a tormented and turbulent affair between the filmmaker and his native Liverpool in *Of Time and the City* (2008). Like Maddin's, Davies' narration is subjective and poetic as he wrestles with his affecting memories of home and city life, and their accompanying rituals and routines, as these change across the decades. Any inclinations towards nostalgia are nonetheless countered by the narrator's often-painful recollections of his closeted adolescence. The sound design in Davies' film includes music ranging from classical to contemporary, and is further distinctive in its overlapping of voices and, especially, its use of quotations. These quotations are drawn from a variety of sources – artistic and poetic, legal and religious, historical and sociological – and combine to establish a multi-voiced collage of the history of Liverpool to accompany and comment on the evocative archival footage of a city in hustle and bustle.

There is a similar multi-voiced quality to Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961). The quality in this instance – the flagship film of the new *Cinéma vérité* movement spearheaded by Rouch and inspired by Dziga Vertov's *Kino Pravda* theory – comes primarily in the form of direct responses to direct (and often quite subjective) questions posed to passers-by in the streets of Paris, as well as 'overheard' conversations in various locations around the city. The film markedly avoids voice-over narration, with only occasional exception, for example the introductory announcement that 'this film is not played by actors but lived by men and women'. According to Jamie Berthe, Rouch's films were often about issues and individuals that felt distant to the concerns and day-to-day lives in metropolitan

France.93 But in this film, particularly, Rouch and Morin investigate the lives of Paris inhabitants and stitch together a tapestry of what people's likes, dislikes, thoughts and beliefs in this large and contradictory metropolis. In this sense counter to Grierson and Kracauer's criticisms of the interwar City Symphonies, Rouch and Morin's Paris, as a subject, is a city of people and movements very much at street level.

Fernando Pérez' *Suite Habana* (2003), by contrast, cuts the dialogue almost entirely from its sound track as it follows a day in the life of thirteen residents of the city; the film's juxtaposition of music, song, and everyday sounds with its image track makes it perhaps closest of all these examples to my original intentions for the Sana'a film. A post-screening discussion at The Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies at City University of New York in 2014 included references to the film's powerfully affecting use of music (and silence), and what one audience member described as 'the music of everyday life'; questions of the film's relationship to more conventional documentary modes, as well as neorealism and the 'Imperfect Cinema' movement of the 1970s in Latin America, also drew comment in the discussion.94

Widening the geographical frame significantly, the genre now includes 'Global Symphonies', such as Ron Fricke's *Baraka* (1992) and *Samsara* (2011), and Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) and *Powaqqatsi* (1988). MacDonald agrees with Álvarez Villarmea that there are flaws in *Koyaanisqatsi*'s critique of technology, although he suggests the use of formal devices, and especially slow motion in *Powaqqatsi*, enables the film to mediate the specific temporalities and rhythms of

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93 Jamie Berthe, "Disruptive forms: the cinema of Jean Rouch," *Studies in French Cinema* v. 18, no. 3 (2018): 248-251.

94 Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies, "Suite Habana: Screening and Discussion – September 12, 2014," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4Q7-E0dm18> (accessed May 7, 2020).

individuals in the global South and therefore put them centre stage, short circuiting any attempt by first world audiences to escape complicity in their exploitation.[95]

As well as scrutinizing the claims made by Grierson and Kracauer over the perceived apolitical and anti-human thrust of the City Symphonies of the interwar period, Keith Beattie similarly emphasizes the human dimension in city films originating outside the West and moving beyond western frames of reference.[96] In this regard, he further notes their affinity to the complex assemblies of textures and voices that characterize what Hamid Naficy refers to as an 'accented cinema', an emergent polyvocal form of expression in which, in Naficy's own terms, 'the accent emanates not so much from the accented speech of the diegetic characters as from the displacement of the filmmakers and their artisanal production modes.'[97] For Naficy and Beattie and others, the stylistic elements of these films (especially their shift of emphasis away from the visual and towards bodies and more 'tactile' approaches) represents a questioning, from the margins, of not only received understandings of the world but also ways of knowing it.

Meanwhile, and very firmly within the Avant-Garde sector, Harun Farocki's installation *Counter-Music* (2004) is seen by Michael Cowan as the genre interrogating itself, *and* the very representability of the post-industrial city – now a closed space of rationalism, circulation, control and invisible mechanisms, as opposed to a space that opens up for pondering possibilities rational *and* irrational.[98] Cowan

[95] Scott MacDonald, *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 137-46.

[96] Keith Beattie, *Documentary Display: Re-viewing Nonfiction Film and Video* (London: Wallflower, 2008), 37-41, 51-5.

[97] Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 4.

[98] Cowan, Michael, "Rethinking the City Symphony after the Age of Industry: Harun Farocki and the 'City Film'," *Intermédialités/Intermedialities* no. 11 (Spring 2008), 69-86.

claims that Farocki's installation puts spectators' bodies in the position of pondering its automatically-produced symphony, as a kind of *translation* of urban experience that is concerned overall with 'the impossibility of visualizing the city's increasingly unspectacular operations.'[99]

As this discussion suggests, the City Symphony genre has changed, developed, and expanded over time, and is malleable rather than stable; taken as a group, these films exhibit a significant variety of styles and modes. Furthermore, while the repertoire of options available to filmmakers working in the genre has similarly expanded, the 'critical option' appears to have remained more or less a constant from its inception. Over the course of the history of City Symphonies a number of examples of the genre have seized the opportunity it affords to engage, more or less directly, with the social and cultural realities they document *and* the means by which we may (or may not) be able to comprehend them.

Whether or not the four early examples discussed above can be deemed as wholly critical in approach to their subject matter, this was certainly one direction taken by the genre subsequently: Stein claims her PhD research, in part, 'contributes to film studies by rejecting the careless description of city symphonies as "utopian" depictions of the city."[100] The genre is seen as wide enough to allow for a variety of approaches, and it changes over time. As above, even its canonical examples have perhaps too many distinctions between them to constitute any stable formal paradigm beyond their 'day-in-the-life' structure (and even here, Vertov's city, as a composite,

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[99] Cowan, Michael, "Rethinking the City Symphony after the Age of Industry: Harun Farocki and the 'City Film'," *Intermédialités/Intermedialities* no. 11 (Spring 2008), 81.

[100] Erica Stein, "An Island off the Coast of America: New York City Symphonies as Productions of Space and Narrative" (PhD thesis, University of Iowa, Summer 2011), 218.

does not strictly observe the unity of place imposed on the other examples). All of this seems to indicate that City Symphonies, like documentary more broadly in Geiger's account, might be best considered 'more as the sum of a lengthy social and historical process than as a logical or pre-given category.'[101] The category constituted by City Symphonies is similarly fluid, the evolving sum of a series of processes, which should therefore perhaps not be understood as attempts to adhere to some kind of official, formalised or standard definition.

These kinds of definitions tend to keep things very abstract, and can fail to catch the pulse and life processes of their objects. There is an analogy here with de Certeau's aerial view of New York City: the abstract and panoptic perspective offers an appealing fantasy, to the extent that it 'makes the complexity of the city readable,' but at the same time, it also '*immobilizes* [my italics] its opaque mobility in a transparent text.'[102] De Certeau's words bring us back to cities and the need to include the tumult of life at ground level alongside the rational 'urban planning' perspective. Life at street level, for de Certeau, is constituted creatively by the 'ordinary practitioners of the city' – the 'walkers… whose bodies follow the thinks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it…. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces'.[103] The everyday life of a city is a dense multiplicity of practices – full of tensions and complexities, and wholly untotalisable – operating alongside (and often

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[101] Jeffrey Geiger, *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 66-7.

[102] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 92.

[103] Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 93.

in contradiction to) the more strategic interventions deriving from the perspective of city planners and institutions entrusted with its management. Up to this point remarks about 'the city' in this commentary have themselves been quite abstract, and it is perhaps time to introduce Sana'a, and one of its key tensions, in some more specific detail.

Sana'a

Sana 'a: Symphony of Peace and War sets out to depict (in fragments) the effects of urbanization, industrialization, and the communication revolution in a city that both 'lives in the past' and struggles with the present. In recent years Sana'a has undergone radical social, cultural, and political changes, combined with the effects of the Arab Spring upheavals and the US-led global '*war on terror*' with all the good and the bad these different kinds of movements in the area entail.

Geographically, Yemen lies to the south of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and shares borders with the Sultanate of Oman to the east. Sana'a has long been the major city of Yemen's highlands at an altitude of 7,220 ft. The city is built over mountains with lavish green valleys underneath. It is also a city deeply rooted in legend. In fact, some heritage books about Sana'a mention the Story of Shem, son of Noah, who was looking for a better homeland. He finally found an appropriate place and built the Palace of Ghamdan, still one of the well-known landmarks of Sana'a.[104] Thereafter, the city of Sana'a was named *Sam City* or the *City of Shem*, and is still known by this name.

Sana'a is also little known in the West, in part, due to the fact that it has never been colonized by any Western power at any given time, with only one exception: the

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[104] Al-Ḥasan ibn Aḥmad Al-Hamdāni, *The Antiquities of South Arabia: The Eighth Book of Al-Iklīl*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1938), 8-9.

Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent's troops entered it in 1547, but the Yemenis reasserted their control over the territory in 1602. The Ottomans, however, returned briefly in the 19th century. Sana'a has always been challenging to the desires of colonial armies. The British succeeded in colonizing the city of Aden in the southern part of Yemen from 1937-1963, but never ventured to the rest of the country, including Sana'a. Regional powers also attempted to attack and conquer it, but never succeeded. In 1934 King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia took control of Najran and the Asir region, areas closely linked with Yemen, but was unable to conquer Yemen and signed a peace treaty with the Imam.

In the more modern history of the city, we see that Sana'a was the key battlefield of a popular *coup d'état*, led by young revolutionary military officers, against the Imam's monocratic rule, which had lasted for a millennium.[105] The *coup d'état* of 26th September 1962 succeeded in the founding of what became known as the Yemen Arab Republic. This was five years before Yemen's southern regions gained independence from the British rule and established the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. In 1990 both Yemen(s) united on the eve of the American invasion of Iraq. Despite millions of dollars of development aid over several decades, Yemen remains the poorest country of the Middle East.

Sana'a was also the main arena of a recent popular upheaval against the autocratic, corrupt and unpopular regime of President Ali Abdalla Saleh, who had been in power for more than three decades. This 'Arab Spring' upheaval, was a series of consecutive popular protests against ruling governments in Arab countries that started mainly in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. The protesters succeeded in toppling the heads of state in their respective countries (except for Syria, which is

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[105] The Imams were kings who ruled Yemen from 897-1962.

another story altogether). In hindsight there is considerable debate about the actual degree of political change that the Arab Spring produced, despite the removal of long-standing dictators. In Yemen, the protesters succeeded in deposing Ali Abdalla Saleh, as head of state, in February 2012.

My film shows Sana'a in 2013-14, a little after the *quasi*-success of the 2011-12 popular upheaval and at a time when an GCC Arab Gulf states' sponsored agreement, led by Saudi Arabia and imperfect, even fatally flawed in some eyes, was imposed on the young leaders of the upheaval. Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, Saleh's deputy head of state, became the president of Yemen for an interim period of one year until elections could be held. Elections never took place and Hadi called in the Saudis in March 2015 to intervene militarily after he was overthrown by an internal coup. This coup was led by an alliance of the Houthi movement, supported by a number of northern tribes and army troops still loyal to Ali Abdalla Saleh, who together captured Sana'a. While I am writing this, Hadi is still 'president', but only in title. The second part of my film moves on to show Sana'a right after the 2015 Saudi-led Coalition's aerial bombardments of the city, hence the eponymous *'peace'* and *'war',* evocative of Tolstoy's famous novel, in the main title.

My choice to make the city of Sana'a as the main subject for my research and cinematic experimentations was the result of many questions that ran around my mind before and after the bombing began. The city of Sana'a, the capital of Yemen, is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world[106] with an old city protected under the aegis of UNESCO. It is a city I am more than familiar with, because it happens to be my hometown, and my sense of affinity with its rhythms and pulses, its tensions and complexities, made it an ideal candidate for the City Symphony at the centre of

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[106] According to UNESCO Sana'a has been inhabited for more than 2500 years: < http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/385> (accessed 30 April 2016).

my thesis and experiments on *visual musicality*. It is also a city that is not celebrated on the cinema screens of the world, and the ongoing aerial bombardments have struggled to garner attention very far beyond the region in any sustained way, so both the city and the conflict seem to call for wider mediation. The city of Sana'a in the film is seen through the eyes of intellectuals and artists who were born and raised in the city, including a poet and scholar, an artist and academic, two photographers, an actor/singer, a videographer/musician, and an FM radio presenter. Insofar as these perspectives are in a kind of dialogue with the view of Sana'a (and especially the Old City) promoted by UNESCO's online *World Heritage List*, one of the only global platforms on which the city makes an appearance, it is worth considering in some detail how the organisation presents the city to the world.

Sana'a and UNESCO

The Old City of Sana'a was inscribed on UNESCO's *World Heritage List* in 1986, under three of the organisation's criteria for inclusion. The first of these is UNESCO's fourth: 'to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history'. Secondly, the Old City was seen to meet UNESCO's fifth criterion: 'to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.' Finally, the Old City was also deemed to meet UNESCO's fifth criterion: 'to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with

ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.'107

The city's entry on UNESCO's *World Heritage List* emphasises its historical and cultural significance, especially its role in the early spread of Islam, and focuses in particular on its architectural authenticity and homogeneity. The buildings of the Old City as a whole are said to form 'an outstanding example of a homogeneous architectural ensemble,' with the houses representing 'an outstanding example of an extraordinary masterpiece, traditional human settlement [sic].'108 The web authors have also uploaded a brief video montage of the Old City and many of its most exquisite architectural jewels. The images are beautifully lit; there are very few signs of the modern era (such as power lines or traffic), and next to no camera movement whatever. The city is presented as a series of more or less static postcard images, accompanied by stirring local music on the soundtrack.109

The *World Heritage List* entry on Sanaʾa itself notes that 'the city in its landscape has an extraordinary artistic and pictorial quality', although the site's authenticity and integrity are repeatedly described as 'vulnerable as a result of contemporary social changes.' In the background there are changes to the city's legal frameworks for planning and management of the site, which are detailed further in an

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107 UNESCO, 'The Criteria for Selection', *UNESCO World Heritage List*: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/ > (accessed 9 January 2020).

108 UNESCO, 'Old City of Sana', *UNESCO World Heritage List*:< https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/385/> (accessed 9 January 2020).

109 *Old City of Sana'a* (UNESCO/TBS, undated):< https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/385/video > (accessed 9 January 2020).

inventory of the Old City jointly published in 2008 by UNESCO, along with the Italian Foreign Ministry and the Yemeni Ministry of Culture.[110]

The *Inventory* offers further detail on 'New threats from diffused and uncontrolled transformations', and identifies a number of ways in which new elements of the city's modern, day-to-day life introduce contrasts and inconsistencies to the picture postcard quality referred to earlier. These include non-traditional architectural and building/renovation practices, along with spatial incursions, of one kind or another, of the 'new' into the Old City. Sana'a's *World Heritage List* entry concisely summarises UNESCO's concerns: as well as highlighting 'incorrect conservation practices', the entry warns that 'in certain quarters of the city, acceleration of new development is eroding its character. The visual integrity of the property is threatened by an increase in new modern hotels and telecommunication towers in the surrounding landscape.'[111]

Similarly, explaining the key to the colour-coding system by which the buildings of the Old City are represented – and evaluated – on the *Inventory*'s maps, the two lowest-ranking colours are 'ordinary' ('building or construction whose typological and architectural features don't reflect necessarily the traditions of historic Sana'ani architecture') and, at the lowest level, 'inconsistent': 'building or construction whose typological and architectural features contrast with the traditions of historic Sana'ani architecture. It doesn't conform to the surrounding urban pattern

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[110] Daniele Pini, *The inventory of the historic city of Sana'a: A tool for urban conservation* (UNESCO, 2008), 21-26: < https://whc.unesco.org/document/101853 > (accessed 9 January 2020).

[111] UNESCO, 'Old City of Sana', *UNESCO World Heritage List*: < https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/385/ > (accessed 9 January 2020).

(street alignment, adjacent building heights, etc.), and/or represents a rupture with, and a heavy visual intrusion into the historic urban fabric.'[112]

UNESCO's response to these threats to the authenticity and integrity of the fabric of the Old City, in both the *Inventory* and the *World Heritage List* entry, is to work towards the implementation of the World Heritage Committee's recommendation for a 'buffer zone around the Old City' at the time of its inscription, and to further isolate it from potentially *dissonant* incursions through regulation aimed at preserving buildings, streets, and open spaces intact and unchanging for posterity.[113]

Given the organisation's conservation remit, it is not surprising that UNESCO is pursuing these aims. At the same time, Sana'a is a living city, full of bustle and movements that inevitably threaten to disturb the harmony of the historical architecture and environment, as in the following concern (which in a sense has to do with 'noise'):

> a widespread "soukization" of the residential quarters near the
> historical gates and the new openings in the city walls, with
> the introduction of new retail activities at the street level.
> These are felt to be in contrast with the traditional sense of
> habitation of the Sana'ani residents.[114]

Although the *Inventory* acknowledges that this specific example has to do with class, and the exodus of wealth from the old centre of the city in particular, the issue is not pursued. Similarly the demands for more living space and improved living standards are acknowledged, although the survey avoids going too deeply into

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[112] Daniele Pini, *The inventory of the historic city of Sana'a: A tool for urban conservation* (UNESCO, 2008), 42-3: < https://whc.unesco.org/document/101853 >(accessed January 9, 2020).

[113] UNESCO., 'Old City of Sana', *UNESCO World Heritage List*: https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/385/ (accessed 9 January 2020)

[114] Daniele Pini, *The inventory of the historic city of Sana'a: A tool for urban conservation* (UNESCO, 2008), 15-16 : < https://whc.unesco.org/document/101853 >(accessed January 9, 2020).

the specific complexities of this problem, or those of the more general movements 'at the street level' (to recall de Certeau's divergent experiences of New York City).

The city of Sana'a is admired by UNESCO as an icon of traditional heritage, depicted as a relic of the past, an ossified city shown occasionally to the world as a visual background to an occidental classical music, a city that should be immune to any intrusive modern innovation. In the film, I wanted to see Sana'a not through the 'traditional' UNESCO panoptic and monocular view of an exotic city, with no attention to its people, to what it means to them, to the ways they creatively engage with it. Heritage is not only confined to some museum-like past, but lives on through people who see it in unique and individual ways. In my film, Sana'a is archaic, yes, but still a city like any other: full of human contradictions and tensions, for example, between deeply established traditions and the unruly advance of modernity. It is a city with legs wedged in the *past*, but with a mind that envisages a well-deserved and fine-looking *future*.

Sana'a is a multi-layered city, an exquisite *fugue*, to draw a further term from the musical lexicon: the musical term *fuga* is related, in its Italian origins, to both *fugere* –'to flee' and *fugare* – 'to chase'. The term refers to a contrapuntal compositional technique in two or more voices, built on a subject (a musical theme) that is introduced at the beginning in imitation (repetition at different pitches) and which recurs frequently in the course of the composition.[115]

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[115] Definition retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fugue#References> (accessed 29 September 2015).

Before the bombardment

I went to Sana'a in mid 2014 to speak to a carefully selected number of its artists and to assess their relationship to, their work in, and their ideas about the ancient city in which they live. I then decided, with their full consent, to have on tape their answers to my questions. Being mostly intellectuals and well-regarded artists of Yemen, in general, and of Sana'a in particular, they were all aware of the fact that my research would be useful in showcasing the beauty, the present plight, and the future of our city. It was both their and my true intention to try to balance our commitments to avoid harm, and at the same time to try and do what was deemed, by us all, to be good for the city of Sana'a.

The time at my disposal was very short. As a matter of fact, I did not finish filming all the shots I planned for. I hastily left the city of Sana'a, after filming some initial shots of the city and the interviews with the film's main characters, because of looming dangers in the horizon. People in the city, the capital as well as the seat of the interim Yemeni government and the country's political institutions at the time, were exchanging stories regarding the interim president Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi being put under house arrest by the Houthis and the former president's military forces. The state of the streets of Sana'a was consistent with, and reflected, what was being rumored by its inhabitants: armed personnel in the main intersections of the city, road blocks, all in all a distressing atmosphere and a prelude to war that nobody missed at the time.

I spoke to the contributors of my film over the phone, one at a time, due to the impracticality of a face to face get-together or meeting them together in one place. Because of the above-mentioned situation, I told them of my plan to leave as soon as possible, but with the promise to come back to Sana'a once those dark clouds have

dispersed. My plan, again, was to go back to Sana'a to finish the remaining shots of aspects in the daily life of the city.

As soon as I left Sana'a, the situation deteriorated. In mid 2014, the former president of Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh reconciled with the Houthi rebel group. Later, in the same year, both Saleh and the Houthis seized the capital Sana'a and overthrew the interim president Hadi. In early 2015 their combined troops progressed towards Aden, one of the major ports on the Indian Ocean, and seized it. By that time, president Hadi was under house arrest; however, with the help of some of his former bodyguards, he subsequently managed to escape from the presidential palace where he was arrested to the city of Riyadh, capital of Saudi Arabia. As soon as he arrived in Riyadh, he announced from there that he requested help from the government of Saudi Arabia to intervene militarily and to help his interim government regain its 'legitimate' power in Yemen.

The Saudi government hastily put together a coalition of nine African and Middle Eastern governments for the purpose of reinstating president Hadi. The Saudi-led coalition started what was known as 'Operation Decisive Storm', which on 25th March 2015 started aerial bombardments that still continue as this project enters its final stages. They also exerted a total blockade on all the major aerial and naval ports of Yemen. This was the first major policy enterprise of the newly crowned King Salman of Saudi Arabia, and his son, Prince Muhammad bin Salman who became the Defense Minister and the Crown Prince.

'Operation Decisive Storm' was not unanimously supported in the region from its inception. The Sultanate of Oman, which has borders with Yemen, declined to be part of the Saudi led coalition. Two main Saudi allies, Pakistan and Egypt, also refused to provide troops for the war. The parliament in Pakistan voted unanimously

against sending troops to fight in Yemen. Until this day president Hadi resides in Riyadh.

Nevertheless, the airstrikes have continued. On the 12th of June 2015, Saudi military planes bombed the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Sana'a Old City, killing at least six people and destroying some of the ancient buildings. The then UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova said in a statement that she was 'profoundly distressed by the loss of human lives as well as by damage inflicted on one of the world's oldest jewels of Islamic urban landscape.'[116]

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[116] "UNESCO condemns bombing of Sanaa's Old City", *EuroNews* website, <http://www.euronews.com/2015/06/12/unesco-condemns-bombing-of-sanaa-s-old-city/> (accessed 13 July 2015).

CHAPTER TWO

After the Bombing Started

In this chapter I will reflect on the key problems that the bombardments of Sana'a in 2015 left me facing. I will outline and discuss these problems in the course of narrating how the project developed and will also try to lay some groundwork for the analysis and evaluation in the chapter that follows.

When I started this PhD journey, my intention was to revisit and research the City Symphony genre of films, investigating in particular elements of 'Visual Musicality' embedded within them. These films had always fascinated me as works of pure visual language that hold analogies with musical compositions in terms of our perceptions of and responses to them. So, my intention was to explore this genre of films to identify possible traits of Visual Musicality, and my enthrallment with this project increased still further as I decided to test the validity of my undertaking by producing a creative piece on my native city, Sana'a.

I travelled to Sana'a and started filming its people, in general, and making test shots of some of its artists in particular; I discussed their impressions of the city to include in my research, and I also filmed its millennium-old buildings, streets, and some aspects of life in the city. These were initial forays, for the most part test shots, although some of the material was usable, and I planned to return after further academic research to make a formal start to my practical work.

What happened next was arbitrary and beyond my remotest expectations: a war suddenly broke in Yemen. Some of the detail about the events leading up to the bombardment has already been recounted above; in terms of the timeline of the project, this occurred well before I was able to arrange and embark on my second

journey to Sana'a in order to shoot more footage, and to get close to minutiae I missed on my first journey. This created a huge challenge for me and, at this point in time, my whole endeavour risked reaching an impasse. I had to contend with this new reality. I did not want this stumbling block to halt my project's completion, so I had to reconsider my whole approach.

As already mentioned, my purpose was not to make a conventional documentary film about my city, but to collect images that encompass within themselves my impressions on the life of a living city. My goal was to interweave abstract imagery with renditions on various levels, comprising music and text. My initial intentions for the film was to follow the City Symphony tradition in filming bits and pieces as they occur to the film maker, or 'author'. These would be edited together at a later stage into poetic metaphors and shot juxtapositions, producing my own take on an Avant-Garde film. My realization that this would be nearly impossible, due to the war, left me with the feeling that I was trapped in a Catch-22 situation.

As the crisis continued, I was in the dark about the new path that my project and my film might or would take. My initial intentions were not realized, and I was now in a situation where I could not fathom a viable outcome for my film. That is when I reached the conclusion to include sequences on the war into the film, although at this point I did not have any footage of the war. In light of the war, I also had to make sure my characters, who at this point in time were in the midst of one of the most brutal air bombardments in the history of the region and of Yemen, were safe and were able to communicate and be contacted by me. This, as anyone may imagine, was very difficult, and at times and in some cases impossible. Suddenly Sana'a was without electricity. By consequence, land line telephones, mobile phone

communications, and the internet were shut down. The whole country was under a severe aerial, land, and naval siege.

Sana'a in shutdown

I was left facing a number of issues. In particular, I had shot limited footage, and was without any foreseeable access to the city for follow-up shots. Several options passed through my mind, like scenes in a suspense film. Should I move elsewhere and carry on my experiment, or stay with Sana'a and tell the story as it was evolving before my eyes? I wrestled with the idea of choosing another city for my City Symphony film. I asked myself why I was so stuck on Sana'a and why I choose it in the first place.

Then it dawned on me that my beleaguered city of Sana'a was distinctive and full of contradictions, as was always the case with the cities chosen by the film makers in the genre of the City Symphony. A number of the artists I had spoken with had alluded to this aspect of life in the city; there were also some interesting contradictions and tensions between their accounts, which might be productively juxtaposed. The fact also remained that I was myself intimately familiar with this city, with its buildings and with its people; I had also been particularly acquainted and connected with its artists and intellectuals. The prospect of acquainting myself with another city to anything like the same degree was a daunting one.

Still, on paper it seemed that the obvious and practical choice available to me, with the onset of the bombardments on Sana'a, was to find a different city. To continue my experiment in Visual Musicality without using the city of Sana'a as the main subject for my film would have allowed me to pursue my intellectual goals, completing and writing up my project on visual and musical aesthetics. I was

completely aware that nothing, in a technical sense, about experimenting with Visual Musicality inevitably requires Sana'a specifically as a central focus, and my research had taught me that all cities can be seen as complex and riven with contradictions.

On the other hand, forsaking Sana'a would leave me feeling quite uneasy, in an ethical sense, for two reasons. In the first place, it would involve abandoning my contributors I respect along with the city I love. This emotional factor had to be weighed against any advantages to be gained from relocating my film shoot to another city – especially one with which I would be far less familiar. Compounding my sense of unease was the wider global reality that the bombardment of Yemen, and Sana'a in particular, was for months almost absent from news reports outside the region. I do not have any statistics available to cite in terms of how infrequently Yemen appeared on the TV network news. Nevertheless, it was obvious that this conflict was largely overshadowed, in the West especially, by the lengthy war in Syria.

These two factors, along with the reasons I already elucidated in the first chapter of this thesis about how much fertile potential Sana'a holds as a filmic subject, ultimately tipped the balance and solidified my commitment to Sana'a over any other site for my film. The ethical and political urgency of the situation, the need to tell the story of Sana'a and the conflict to a wider world, outweighed the desire to produce an experimental work exploring the interface of music and the moving image. Towards the end of my film, after the onset of the bombardment the young Videographer's message in his video contribution is clear: 'Our work, during the war, has become more humanitarian. This is not the time for art.'

Because of all I have mentioned, Sana'a presented itself to me with an ethical obligation not to abandon it and cancel it from my project because of the difficulties we were both facing. For me, the story of Sana'a was struggling to achieve wider

visibility, so I decided that I wanted the world to know and be aware of its history, its daily struggles, and its ongoing tragedy through the eyes of the artists and intellectuals that I had met and managed to talk with on my first scouting trip. Nevertheless, with the above question at least resolved in my mind, the other crucial set of issues revolved around another question: *how to narrativise the evolving situation of the crisis?*

As if to illustrate how the bombardment further intensified the sense of contradiction and uncertainty around the city, the young Videographer I referred to above suggests in his video diary contribution that art, all the same, 'may still have a role to play', and that his work may make some contribution to ameliorating the war situation. This highlighted to me, upon reflecting on it at a later stage, that the *'message'* of my film is geared towards raising awareness of a situation in a little-known conflict and a little-known location. At this point in time, I was well aware that the imperative to tell a specific story represents a major departure from the City Symphony tradition, and from my own earlier aesthetic impulses too.

Narrative options

In pondering on the question of how to narrate the events, and to clarify further the reasoning behind my resolution above, I had to consider different options: firstly, the idea of using a straightforward expository mode; and secondly, adopting an approach that draws, rather, on what Jeffrey Geiger argues to be the legacy of the Avant-Garde to documentary filmmakers, as referred to previously in my literature survey and discussion of the City Symphony genre. [117]

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[117] Jeffrey Geiger, *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 73.

In explaining the expository mode, Bill Nichols writes: 'The expository text addresses the viewer directly, with titles or voices that advance an argument about the historical world… Expository texts take shape around commentary directed toward the viewer; images serve as illustration or counterpoint. Non synchronous sound prevails.'[118] Nichols also reiterates that, generally, the audiences of this kind of documentary mode expect a 'commonsensical world' to be revealed to them, 'in terms of the establishment of a logical, cause/effect linkage between sequences and events.'[119] The aim, and intended effect, is one of transparency and objectivity about the profilmic facts unfolding before the spectator's eyes.

Still in the planning stage, I concluded at first that adopting the expository mode approach could enable me quite straightforwardly to narrate the events happening, both in the city and to the city, very directly to my audience. This would greatly assist my project's agenda in terms of raising awareness of the conflict in Yemen and the toll suffered by the people of Sana'a. Nevertheless, this approach raised for me several problematic issues. Above all, there is the long-standing criticism of expository mode documentaries, in particular, in terms of their claims to access and mediate, more or less directly, some objective factual truth. This is the key danger in utilising a "voice-of-God" commentary, as in the most familiar examples of these documentaries. [120]

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[118] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 34-35.

[119] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 37.

[120] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 37.

In asking what he identifies as the 'overriding ethical/political/ideological question to documentary filmmaking' – the question of how to represent people, Nichols suggests that each documentary mode 'addresses this question somewhat differently and poses distinct ethical questions for the practitioner.' For Nichols, using the expository mode 'raises ethical issues of voice: of how the text speaks objectively or persuasively (or as an instrument of propaganda). What does speaking for or on behalf of someone or something entail in terms of a dual responsibility to the subject of the film and to the audience whose agreement is sought?[121] These were difficult questions for me, especially in light of an effective 'silencing' of the city; at the same time, the expository mode's emphasis on conveying objective facts, or at least connoting objectivity, seemed to run counter to my sense of both 'the city' that I had found in the critical literature, and the city I call my home.

As I discussed in the Introduction, Nichols elsewhere brings to light the role of Avant-Garde artists and ideas in the formative years of documentary film and highlights their contribution to a tradition that subsequently denied this.[122] Following Nichols' argument, the Avant-Garde influence represented a problem for documentary filmmakers and historians keen to shore up documentary's truth claims, or its status as mediating exclusively objective facts. My 'realistic' deduction at this point became that the kind of authority, omniscience, certainty, and objectivity that the expository mode implies was in short supply by the time the bombing strikes erupted over Sana'a.

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[121] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 37.

[122] Bill Nichols, "Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant Garde," *Critical Inquiry* v. 27, no. 4 (Summer 2001): 580-610.

This brings me to my second alternative: to follow precisely the more Avant-Garde tradition, to emphasize uncertainty, ambiguity, unpredictability and provisionality. Adopting this approach would enable my project to retain at least one of my key starting coordinates: to highlight the city's tensions and contradictions, as Geiger sees even the relatively static *Manhatta* as doing, for example.[123] It could also hold greater potential for retaining the musical element of counterpoint as part of this process, although this could entail problems in terms of the footage available for the edit.

This option of drawing on the Avant-Garde legacy of the City Symphony tradition would have also enabled me to communicate the experience of the city and the conflict, and to *translate* that experience – disorienting and jarring as it is – at a far more visceral level than the potentially dry appeals of the expository mode's voice-over techniques. I was conscious that my aim to raise awareness of the conflict would be competing against any number of other documentaries, not necessarily about Yemen. For me, a key component of getting the message out was to aim to produce a distinctive and engaging documentary, and for all of these reasons I made the choice to retain, as far as possible, the reference points and coordinates I gathered from my research into the City Symphony genre and Avant-Garde filmmaking.

Notwithstanding, this approach would also bring with it one or two potential pitfalls: the first of these is that the commitment to abstract compositional principles, and the foregrounding of tensions and contradictions, should not be allowed to muddy the clarity of the situation. Given that the city and the conflict were so little covered outside the region, spectators would need to have some sense of how the conflict erupted and what was at stake. This kind of intellectual context can be very difficult

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[123] Jeffrey Geiger. *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 73-79.

to communicate without verbal language. I ultimately, effectively, committed to retain so far as possible the guiding coordinates from my preliminary research into experimental film and City Symphonies. At the same time, the imperative to narrate the events would act as a kind of tempering constraint on my creative practice.

A further potential pitfall is slightly less obvious, but I have already raised how, in certain readings of some City Symphonies, this kind of commitment to abstract aesthetic principles has come under scrutiny. [124] Rather than any specific message that may be communicated (or muddied) at the explicit level, the object of criticism here was rather the implicit sense that these films can convey about cities, and modernity itself, as totalisable, knowable, and masterable. This sense emerges in these films, according to Stein and others, precisely because their formal aesthetics seem to rely on principles connoting harmony, wholeness, and perfectibility (if not perfection itself). Let us remember Grierson's and Kracauer's responses to City Symphonies as overly celebratory works of utopian modernism; but Stein goes further, seeing Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*'s insistence on everything being in its place in a well-ordered scheme of things as *'a nostalgic denial of the advent of modernity'* itself [125]. In all of these readings, any desired criticism of modern urban life is potentially blunted in terms of the formal qualities of the film as a whole.

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[124] Erica Stein, "Abstract Space, Microcosmic Narrative and the Disavowal of Modernity in Berlin: Symphony of a Great City," *Journal of Film and Video* v. 65, no.4 (Winter 2013): 3-16. See also Iván Villarmea Álvarez. "Blinking Spaces: *Koyaanisqatsi*'s Cinematic City," in *Culture, Space and Power: Blurred Lines* (Lanham: Lexington, 2016), 33.

[125] Erica Stein, "Abstract Space, Microcosmic Narrative, and the Disavowal of Modernity in Berlin: Symphony of a Great City," Journal of Film and Video v. 65, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 7-8.

Taking stock

The resolution of this second set of issues, around how to narrativise the city and the conflict, would itself also be determined to an extent by my practical circumstances and available resources. At the initial stage of my project I had some test shots of the city itself, along with some interview footage that I managed to capture in Sana'a prior to the conflict. The advantages of having this material were clear, in terms of including original shots and sequences of the city. However, the material from this initial trip, which was primarily a sort of a scouting expedition, were really very limited, and did not include, crucially, any damage from the subsequent conflict. In order to broaden the range of materials available to me, I chose to focus in my film on extracts from a series of interviews (intended initially as backgrounding footage) I undertook with some of the Sana'a city's artists and intellectuals. Added to this were any video messages my contributors would be able to send to me, as well as broadcast news footage watched by me as the conflict was unfolding in front of my eyes on TV screens and the internet.

The interviews with the artists were originally intended purely for my own background information as I formulated my experimental work. They were not intended to be used as my project envisaged a more melodic City Symphony film. After all, and in spite of my comments about the genre in chapter One, interviews are quite a break from the City Symphony tradition. When I did the interviews, I did not have any formally planned set of questions, and what I asked these distinguished artists and intellectuals of Sana'a orbited generally around their personal experiences, intellectual and/or artistic work, as well as questions on their aspirations in and for the city they were born in.

Because of my inability to go back to Sana'a, I thought my contributors could help me overcome this situation that had been forced upon me. I let the ones I could

contact know about the shortage of the filmed materials available to me, at that stage, and asked them if they would film and send video diaries about their daily life during the bombardment of the city. In response to my requests, some of my contributors succeeded in sending me sporadic footage. They succeeded despite the obvious difficulty (if not impossibility) that one can expect from inhabitants of a city that was daily bombarded by war planes at the same time as a total aerial, naval, and land siege. The material they did send helped me to broaden my range of available material. The film clips that came back were not long, nor of high resolution, but nevertheless, they were informative and poignant, even heart-breaking.

The last type of additional material was news footage. I found this material following the events on TV and the internet. Much of this footage was shot by ordinary people, which underlies my point about a lack of awareness, on this conflict particularly, outside the region. The process of gathering the material was arduous. The shots were wobbly and amateurish, but they were as current as they could get.

The most obvious advantage of including all this additional material was that it addressed the basic lack of available resources, which was a key problem at this stage in my project. This experiment, for me, became purely an exercise in making the most of these limited resources. A similar lack of basic resources was one of the spurs to the development of Soviet montage. Jay Leyda wrote that 'before the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917, Russia for all practical purposes had no native film industry.'[126] Julian Graffy, on his part, highlights the dire situation facing Soviet filmmakers following the relocation of Russia's entirely foreign-owned film

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[126] Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983).

industry and infrastructure after the October Revolution.[127] This was on top of the ideological dimensions of the movement that have tended to dominate discussion of its origins.

A further advantage of including the additional materials had to do with the fact that they added variety. The interviews, the video messages, and the news footage all came from quite different sources, both in terms of the perspectives and thematic concerns involved. The qualities of the images, including the aspect ratio for footage shot on mobile phones, for example, were also markedly different in each case. The diversification of the kinds of footage therefore could have expanded, in my reckoning, not only the source material for the narrative basis of the film, but also the range of textures and tones, which held out the hope of enabling a multiplication of possibilities in terms of the montage and editing dynamics.

The inclusion of some of the interview footage and the video messages would have necessarily represented quite a departure from the City Symphony tradition, which (in its interwar mode at least) tends to avoid sync sound and verbal dialogue. Nonetheless, apart from assisting with my key problem of having such limited material to work with, including this footage would further, crucially, allow spectators to hear voices from the city during the conflict. Thus, it could make for a more engaging film and improve its chances of wider viewing and discussion, especially as I aspired from making my film to give voice to the people in Yemen who are regularly, as I have painfully come to realise, brushed aside by media in the West, by its audiences, and by power players in the mainstream media and film industry.

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[127] Julian Graffy, "A hundred years of Russian film: the forgotten and the under-rated," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* v. 2, no. 3 (2008), 327-354.

The interviews and video messages could therefore make a significant contribution towards the goal of raising awareness of the conflict outside the region. In the end, this was the deciding factor behind the choice to steer the project away from its aesthetic-musical origins. Again, this reminds me of the Videographer's statement that there should be 'no more art', and that there were significantly more urgent matters requiring attention.

The interviews and video messages would also entail some problems in terms of regulatory issues and the ethical framework of the research. However, in my plan initially, I did not envisage nor intended to include the interview footage in the original film. I omitted to gain the necessary ethical approval in terms of signed consent for the footage to be incorporated in my film. Although I managed to get in touch with some of my contributors after the onset of the conflict, I could not reach all of them. In any event, the regulations were quite clear: any research involving human subjects required signed consent from participants *prior to carrying out the research*; this is to some extent common courtesy, as well as a way of protecting the participant's legal right to privacy, not to mention forestalling potential litigation. Be that as it may, my institution remained inflexible on the issue of prior consent and insisted that, in the case of film, and my documentary specifically, including any participants in the finished piece of work without it would require rendering these participants anonymous.

Further potential problems, legal rather than purely institutional, were identified when it came to the use of copyrighted news footage. However, the inclusion of the news footage allowed me, principally, to augment both the volume and dynamic range of the film. In the final analysis, gaining the rights to use the material could prove costly and time-consuming, but without it there was still precious little footage of the conflict. A solution was needed that could allow for the

inclusion of this footage without the need to request permission and wait for responses; I had requested footage from Al Jazeera TV, for example, but after a lengthy delay, their response came back negative. In the end, technology to an extent mitigated both of these issues. I was able, on the one hand, to use video editing software to obscure the faces of my participants. These steps involved learning and mastering this technical task, and the process produced some unexpected and interesting results that I will discuss further in my next chapter.

Because I started following the news on various types of screens, and I made sure that my daily practice of watching the news was on camera, this led me to also investigate potential solutions for my dilemma about the copyrighted news footage. After some research I came across the *Screenium 3* application. I proceeded to purchase this software in order to capture the screens on my hard drive. This screen recording software uses a computer's camera to record viewers' responses to any film material currently being played on its screen; it then overlays that recording onto the first, incorporating it in a smaller frame embedded into the frame of the original recording, with both recordings in sync. The process as a whole sufficiently alters the original footage so that it no longer falls under copyright. In the case of *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War*, it also produced one of the least expected results of the project, which again I will discuss further in the analysis to follow this chapter: my own appearance in the film.

This chapter has focused on the ways in which the conflict impacted on my project, and my reflections on a variety of steps I took to accomplish its necessary reconfiguration. In each case, I have attempted to outline the issue facing me, and to consider the pros and cons of options that were available to me, or that I made

possible in one way or another. The bewildering series of decisions that faced me have been distilled here, to three central issues.

The first of these was the question of whether or not, in the midst of the conflict, I could somehow forge ahead with my City Symphony and the experiment in Visual Musicality. Given the nature of the conflict and logistical problems arising, including especially the issue of access to the city, its inhabitants, and my contributors; given also the limited awareness that the conflict had garnered beyond the immediate region, I resolved, on both a practical and an ethical basis, to reconfigure my planned City Symphony to accommodate some more conventional narrative documentary elements.

This in turn raised the remaining questions of how to proceed with constructing the narrative, and the resources available to me with which to do so. I offered an account of the ways in which I augmented my scarce resources to include a broader variety of footage types, from my contributors and the news media. In this way I addressed the lack of footage, and could further anticipate that the expanded range of footage types, each with its own specific qualities, might assist with what had become the film's twin aims: to draw on the legacy of the Avant-Garde in its representation of Sana'a, bringing out the city's own specific tensions and contradictions in the Twenty-first Century, at the same time as raising awareness of the conflict in the wider world.

CHAPTER THREE

Filming Peace and War: Analysis of *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War*

The first chapter of this thesis established the basic starting coordinates of the project, while the second chapter outlined a number of obstacles it encountered during production and reflected on possible options for ways forward. In this final chapter I will offer an analysis and evaluation of the finished product. *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War* was inevitably transformed, and reconfigured by necessity, in the months and years following the outbreak of hostilities in Yemen and the onslaught of the aerial bombardment of its city subject.

While *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War* exhibits a number of differences in comparison with the classic City Symphonies of the European interwar period, the production process remained so far as possible informed by this project's starting coordinates and the City Symphony tradition. With the film further tasked with telling the story of the bombardment, the aim was to use these coordinates so as to mitigate the risk of telling the story in a way that reduced the complexity of the events, and the people living through them. My aim, here, is not so much to prove that the film can be categorized as belonging definitively to the 'City Symphony' genre. It is, rather, to demonstrate that it retains and nods, in various ways, towards the City Symphony tradition, in order to 'map' Sana'a in a way that refuses any final, singular or stable 'truth'. This claim can be evidenced most clearly by examining the aesthetic elements derived from the preceding discussions of Visual Musicality and City Symphonies, linear and non-linear thematic and structural elements, and the film's use of montage editing techniques.

Musical Aesthetics

     Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War, as it stands now, is informed by musical aesthetics, and is in particular divided into the 'movements' typifying so many City Symphony films. To clarify further, symphonies are structured in 4-5 movements: a *sonata*; an *andante*; a *scherzo*; an *allegro*; and sometimes, a *finale*. The *sonata* is the lively and energetic first movement, while the *andante*, as the second movement, is usually lyrical and slow; the *scherzo* is the light-hearted third movement, and the *allegro* is loud and rollicking, leading in many cases to the *finale*, which usually tends to decelerate the musical composition and wraps up the symphonic work.

     Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War starts with a lively and energetic exposition of the film characters. This is my *first* movement, where the film displays the six different characters of the film in short brisk, dynamic, and quickly sequenced shots, as it would be achieved in a symphony's *Sonata* movement. Interestingly, in terms of intersections between music and film, musicians refer to this part of the first movement as the *exposition*. The characters chosen for the film are drawn from the artists living and working in the city: a poet and academic, and an artist who is also an academic; two photographers, and a videographer who also composes fusion music with a solid following; and an actor who is also a singer and activist for women's rights. The exception to this rule is the FM radio presenter who is used in the film to punctuate the different times and 'movements'.

     As detailed in the previous chapter, the decision to use the footage of these informal interviews was primarily dictated by circumstance; this is an important consideration, as the focus on artists specifically might be read as somewhat

exclusive or even elitist in certain respects. Nonetheless, these artists without exception engage creatively with the city in their body of work, although of course the nature and extent of this engagement varies between contributors, as I hope to make clear. The mix of contributors in the film further manages to maintain a balance in terms of gender and, in line with the City Symphony tradition, attempts to avoid assigning any more significance to one perspective over another. Crucially, although they do not represent the street life of the city in its everyday aspect, nor do they represent the 'city planning'/UNESCO perspective; rather than remaining aloof and detached from either, however, they are positioned in between the two, and in contact with both.

The next sequence of the film moves into a typical slow *Andante* form. This is my *second* movement, beginning with a sleepy city, a city which is greeted by a *'Good morning'* uttered by one of the film characters, the FM Presenter, as a high angle shot pans to gradually denude the city of the haze wrapped around it. This is accompanied by a succession of slow-paced shots of the poet who speaks about the city and its history, followed by the photographer's sequence, as he walks through sleepy streets of the city, and wanders in quiet alleyways, all the while taking photographs with an air of absorbed concentration. This is followed by a *quasi-dystopian* sequence that portrays the melancholy of a very young female photographer surrounded by her work.

In the sequence that follows, the film depicts the practices of a young videographer, the camera following him during a shooting session with a group of young break dancers in Sana'a. A GoPro camera attached in turn to the wrists, shoulders, and heads of these modern break dancers was used to achieve dynamic, light-hearted shots that are well synchronized with the cadenced flow of the modern Yemeni-Western music accompanying them. The intention here was to attune the

visuals to the rhythmic movements of their dancing bodies, and for me, this is the *Scherzo* sequence of the film: the *third* movement.

As we can expect from the typical progression of musical symphonic movements, the unexpected happens. The film takes a sudden and abrupt turn. We hear loud bombs and war sirens. It is the war on the city, signaled by the start of the aerial bombardments. The characters are symbolically shattered. The shots take a quasi-*rondo* trail. Is this an *Allegro* movement in shots? That is what I argue my *fourth* movement is. The film takes its onward course towards a *finale*, which is known for its decelerated effect. A character reads a poem that portrays Sana'a as the *capital of the spirit*. With this approach, I believe that I fulfilled my aim to simulate, in my film, a *quasi-* structural resemblance to a City Symphony by simulating musical movements. Before moving on to the formal analysis, it is worth including a slightly more detailed account of the people, actions, and events of *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War*.

Synopsis

The opening title of the film starts with a slowly burning historical palimpsest: it is one of the oldest Quranic manuscripts in existence, the Sana'a palimpsest, discovered in the Grand Mosque of Sana'a in 1972. From the film's opening static image, we hear the crackle of fire, and suddenly, thereafter, we see what appears to be a puddle of blood, or if you wish, a splash of red ink. Then, slowly, the film title appears superimposed on the burning papyrus and the red puddle: *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War*, and underneath we read: *As Told by its Artists*. The static image of the scroll burns slowly in front of our eyes; and a green leaf gradually appears and rests on the upper tip of the last 'A' of the word 'SANA'A'.

Formally, in presenting the palimpsest, I wanted to pay homage to the kinds of title that recall the silent era: it is well known that, in the 1920s, titles on silent movies were depicted or printed on animated or static, often ornamental, cards. They were photographed normally or in stop-motion technique, and then included in the films. My decision to greet the spectator with this opening image was in one sense due to the fact that I wanted to make the spectator see an archaic relic being taken down, symbolically, by fire, complete with a slowly growing spot of blood. This was a nod to the effects of war, and a sort of premonition to the catastrophic events that will take place in Sana'a during the second half of the film. Nevertheless, the green leaf is a symbol of hope, good future, and prosperity. This was my homage to the tradition of City Symphony films in their known use of written and hand-drawn boards for the titles and inter-titles of their films.

In my mind, as a filmmaker, I was also convinced that this particular image would state a lot about the city of Sana'a. It has a millennial tradition as a city that was best known in earlier days for embracing what is new. In this particular case, the Quran as a scripture could be considered at the time as a new and revolutionary phenomenon in the history of the world, in general, and of the region in particular. The palimpsest/title, which is splashed with blood and burning before our eyes, alludes to the tensions and torments suffered by the city of Sana'a throughout its history.

At the same time, during my filming of the city at the early stages of this project, many crucial and unrelenting questions were persistent in my mind regarding the continuity of Sana'a's 'Arab- Islamic' characteristics in the modern era that is 'overlaying' it. I am still asking myself whether Sana'a is the quintessential example of what might be called an 'Arab-Islamic city', a culturally and intellectually 'intact'

and active city similar to what it used to be in the past. Or, is it by now utterly transformed by the challenges of modernity that have little in common with a traditional – or 'traditional' – Arab-Islamic city?

My decision to start with the aforementioned image could have served, in my opinion, as an eye-opener for my audience at the start of the film and as a teaser for what will happen later in the film. But I also want to emphasize three crucial ways in which the Sana'a Palimpsest is the core motif of my film: firstly, it is a metaphor for the project as a whole – a planned experimental City Symphony film that was *'written over'* by adverse historical events; secondly, it embodies the split at the heart of Islam that is, in part, responsible for the outbreak of hostilities in Sana'a; finally, I will argue below that my film, like the palimpsest, introduces contradiction and uncertainty and refuses to communicate a final single 'truth'.

After a brief, preparatory and introductory sequences of the six characters in the film through their soundbites, the FM Radio presenter, who acts as the *timekeeper* of the various slots during a day in the life and travails of the city of Sana'a, opens the first shots of the film with a warm greeting to her radio listeners: '*Good morning Sana'a!*' This coincides with high angle shots of the old city of Sana'a basking in its glorious morning sunshine. The camera paints the city in early morning as both a spectacle that is experienced externally by the audience, but also with an internal rhythm that speaks to a sense of anonymity and intimacy; this sense is amplified by the dramatic voice of a female singer who sings, as from a remote and legendary world, 'I am Sana'ani'.

The first of the main characters to appear in the film is a Yemeni poet who wrote extensively about Sana'a. The poet is a very old intellectual and scholar, with a thorough knowledge of the city he loves so much. I filmed him surrounded by his

books and took him to his favourite part of the city (the amphitheatre of Sana'a) for a brief filming tour. This part of the film is slow paced, as in the beginning of any musical symphony. However, it is full of insights and touching moments rendered in post-card style shots inspired by the poignant words of the poet. His words reflect on the tensions experienced by the city throughout its history. He talks about the old city's parameters, about the beauty of its inhabitants and its buildings, about the occurrences that inspired him to write his poems, about childhood images of the city in which he first opened his eyes, in 'awe and wonder', and how the city has changed and still is changing in front of his eyes, only now for the worse.

The poet's desire is to rewind time and stop any modern alterations in the landscape of the old city of Sana'a; he is therefore closest of all the contributors to the UNESCO perspective, from which the film becomes increasingly and dramatically distant. He besieges the authorities again and again to take their development projects outside the confines of Old Sana'a. Sana'a for him should remain the beautiful post-card city he recalls from his wide-eyed childhood: 'a woman who fell from the sky in robes of dew and became a city.' He continues, asserting the city's need for 'an artist, a filmmaker who can display her historical poignancy' and, turning to the lexicon of music, give expression to 'her rhythm and the old melodies that are engraved in her stones and that flow through the corridors of her old houses.'

In this section of the film the camera is slow paced as if imitating the manners of the elderly poet, and the behavior of the camera is, in one sense, respectful of the character it is filming – in the majority of the shots of the poet's section the camera keeps its distance, for example. The editing rhythm in this part of the film is similarly slow-paced. The stately pace and 'postcard' images underline the character's sense of the place, which is not unlike the pristine relic in UNESCO's *World Heritage* List.

There is a flow of accumulating sequences that are juxtaposed to what the audience hears about the implacability of change.

The poet loves his city, and speaks passionately about it, but the city he speaks and writes about in his poems does not resemble the city he lives in now. Many changes brought in by modernity render this city unrecognizable to his eyes. The images that are juxtaposed to his words are those romanticized images of the city, a city that hangs in his mind as a beautiful woman descending like 'drops of dew from the sky'. I made the shots of the city as static as possible. Nevertheless, the camera hovers over these static images of the city in different directions: pans to the left, pans to the right, tilts up, tilts down, diagonal movements of the camera as if the city of Sana'a reacts to the intermittent flow of words from the poet, sometimes appreciating what he says, and at other times contradicting or questioning his perceptions.

This tension leads to an interruption by the FM radio presenter who announces in her radio broadcast a shift in time, a sort of a *crescendo* towards something new in the city where we are introduced to the photographer. The photographer is a city stroller, a typical *flâneur* or 'city walker', as depicted by Walter Benjamin and referred to by Michel de Certeau.[128] The camera wanders along with him in the streets and alleys of the city, while trying to see the images through the lens of his camera, all the way interacting with what he captures with his lens. The backdrop is a tapestry of the city with the photographer drifting in its foreground. The shots are composed in such a way that enable us to interact with the city's

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[128] Martina Lauster, "Walter Benjamin's Myth of the 'Flâneur'," *The Modern Language Review* v. 102, no. 1 (January 2007): 139-156; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 92.

dynamicity, a city that is lodged deeply in its millennial facade, but that nevertheless struggles to free itself from its aging 'shackles'.

In the photographer's sequences we are presented with a city totally different from the poet's city. This city is bustling with life: markets are full of merchandise; street restaurants are full of customers; children are playing football in alleyways; streets are crisscrossed by people, cars, and pushcarts; wire lines high up in the sky are ornate with dangling electrical lamps. All the while our photographer's lens tries not to miss anything, his gaze never failing to capture moments in time. Here, in a clear contrast to the poet's sequence, the film camera is dynamic, hand-held, and follows frantically the photographer wherever he goes. It tries to look at him while also (perhaps in a gentle nod to Vertov) impersonating his artistic scrutinising and contemplation of the city while he takes his pictures with great bravura and dexterity.

The city plunges into end-of-day darkness, while the photographer disappears into a dark alley way. We hear our *timekeeper* telling us about the shift in time and laying the ground for the appearance of the third character in the film: a very young female photographer. She is an amiable, good-natured, intelligent looking young girl. From the first shots of the sequence we become aware that this character is surrounded by a modern setting: a well-appointed sitting room with modern curtains, a vase of dried flowers, two candle lamps on the table, and a digital still camera. We also see her fingers maneuvering through a set of her photographic work on a laptop.

This photographer is accustomed to Sana'a just because she was born there and this is where her friends live. This is the extent of her emotional involvement with the city. She loves the faces of old people because they are 'the memory of Yemen'; she also loves the traditional costumes, and she loves the children and the women of the city. What she does not like (and this in stark contrast to the poet) is the romantic setting and scenery of the city, which she considers to be archaic,

folkloristic, and restraining. She does not want to 'be buried alive' in this city, and seeks new horizons and experiences away from her city of birth. For this photographer, picturesque as it may be, the city of Sana'a risks becoming a giant, ornate tomb, or a mausoleum for the living.

The music accompanying the shots of the young female photographer is played with two instruments: the Arabian lute (oud) and the zither instrument (qanun). The music is sad and melodic and signifies the photographer's status of mind. While speaking, the image track shows a wall, over which her photographic works are displayed, in a succession of shots that slowly glides towards the wall from all directions. A shift in the film's stylistic register takes place right after this sad sequence, however, signalled by a new kind of lively music, a sort of a fusion of tradition and modernity: the players are now performing on traditional Yemeni instruments alongside Western electronic musical instruments.

This musical fusion rhymes with the dancing movements that are performed by a new breed of Sana'ani young artists, the Break Dancers of Sana'a. This segment constitutes a 'film within the film', and the dance sequence is composed of a number of perspectives: we see through the lens of the young videographer (who is the film's fifth character), as well as that of a GoPro action camera strapped to the body parts of the dancers; at the same time, the sequence is intercut with rapid series of shots of the videographer as he is filming the dance sequence. These last are taken, obviously, by another camera from a more neutral, or seemingly 'objective', point of view.

This mixture of perspectives is geared towards a blurring of boundaries between what is subjective and what is objective in the points of view of the entire sequence. Our videographer is also portrayed, in this sequence, as a valiant and committed artist. He comes across as an artist/activist who does not waver and tries, as a modern-day acrobat, to dare himself, as well as his camera, to film from difficult

angles. Again, there is an echo here of Vertov's cameraman, and this is a *homage*, on my part, to one of the many techniques used by Vertov, who always maintained that the camera is not only a tool, but it is also part of the operator's and the audience's body.

The energetic break-dancing sequence may further be seen as the culmination of a kind of progression in terms of perspectives on the city. The ideas of the young videographer in this part of the film are the exact antithesis to the ideas of the poet and, to a lesser extent, also to the ideas on the city expressed by other characters preceding him in the early sequences of the film. He loves Sana'a because of the *awe-inspiring colours that surround the city!* But he also prefers to focus his documenting activity only on the modern aspects of the city: modern malls and cafés, the Sana'a skaters and break-dancers, young professional artists and musicians. He is a musician himself, a contributor to the new modern musical and theatre scene in Sana'a, and a local activist who had worked to counteract the worst aspects of the 2011 uprising against Saleh, with the city in the midst of a slow-motion collapse because of fuel and job shortages and fears for the future, and the threat of Yemenis fighting against each other in a civil war looming large.

The young videographer is at the heart of the contradictions and (sometimes violent) tensions besetting the city, which the film has been formalizing as existing, principally, between an abstract and static perspective on Sana'a (and especially its Old City) exemplified by the poet and UNESCO, countered by other perspectives that value more or less highly the dynamic, modern aspects, even with their accompanying sense of risk – the young female photographer going so far as to liken the Old City to a tomb. The dance sequence might be seen as an oblique expression – energetic and embodied – of these contradictions, following the work of Dick

Hebdige on 'subcultures', more or less disempowered social formations that Hebdige identifies and analyses precisely in these terms.129

As a fusion of traditional and modern, local and global elements and instrumentation, the music playing on the soundtrack during the Break Dancers' sequence pertains to the thematisation of contradiction. The music is further significant in terms of the relationship between sound and image tracks during the sequence. Before filming, the Videographer (who also composes music) offered me a selection of his compositions from which to choose the music for the sequence. At the editing stage, a long time after the actual filming, I experimented with cutting the shots, which were by themselves dynamic, to the rhythm of the track I had chosen. Although the dancers had been performing to the same tune, editing the footage together in the order in which it was originally shot was not contributing greatly toward the blurring of perspectives, subjective and objective, at the heart of the scene; nor did it fully convey the dynamism and expressive energy of the movements themselves. Ultimately, reordering the shots to maximise the rhythms and energy of the performance involved unmooring the image tracks from the sound recorded on location: the rhythms and beat of the music, rather than the chronological sequence of the shots, determined the final sequencing of the dancing segment.

The sixth character in the film is another who engages (in a less oblique manner) with the contradictoriness and tensions of life in Sana'a, a female actor and singer, a feminist and a revolutionary. She is a figure that embodies the struggle against the exploitation of workers, the demeaning of women, and the belittling of artists in Yemeni society, especially women artists. Her work, whether it is in theatre or television, acting or singing, is the work of an artist who takes upon herself the

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129 Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), 132-3.

burdens carried out by her fellow women in the society. This sequence (for me, as part of the *scherzo* movement) had to be dramatic and premonitory, and had to lay the ground for what will happen in the next sequences of the film regarding the climactic conflict and the impact of the war.

The musical term *scherzo* is Italian in origin and usually translates to English as 'joke', or 'jest'.[130] This might imply that this movement should be light-hearted in nature. Nevertheless, it is also well known that composers interpret this movement in their symphonic compositions very freely indeed, based on the feelings they want to convey to their audience. In four of his well-known 'scherzo' movements for piano, Frédéric Chopin's renderings come off as dark and dramatic rather than as comical.[131] In this sequence, the actor/singer shares her love of Sana'a with us: 'I go through moments where I need to be in peace with myself…to run away from the chaos of reality or the stress of work. My spiritual fulfilment in these moments is achieved when I walk through the streets of Sana'a'. But Sana'a is not simply a comforting retreat into the past – echoing the female photographer, the actor clarifies: 'I do not say we should be trapped in the past and weep at the ruins.' Sana'a, for her, is a battleground, and she tries to fight on it for and on behalf of women and the deprived.

One of the most significant moments in this sequence is encompassed in the scenes of a video clip shot by another character in the film (the videographer), with lyrics written by the poet audiences encountered at the start. In this video clip our actor/singer sings for peace and reconciliation in Yemen:

It is not acceptable, nor is it possible

That our beloved Yemen falls into ruins

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[130] "Scherzo," Dictionary.com website <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/scherzo > (accessed 12 May 2014).

[131] Chopin's best-known scherzo movement is his Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 31.

That it should burn in flames

Ignited by its own people

….

A country sold on the pavement

For a handful of money

From Israfil and Izrail[132]

Woe to the martyrs, how they fell

So the opportunists could clothe themselves

With the crown of power.

I decided to compose the scene of this song in post-production. I tweaked the colour of the clip, presented it in black and white, layered scratches (as if of time past) onto it, and projected it onto an image of the wall of one of Sana'a's old buildings, In one sense this was simply outright homage to the City Symphony films of the 1920s – I always considered that City Symphony films were about technology and pioneering Avant-Garde, and they were clearly ahead of their time by any account. The result, however, in its layering of images, also makes the scene complex and not immediately 'obvious' for the spectators' gazes; as such, it gestures in a small way towards the more 'tactile' kind of cinema understood, by critics such as Hamid Naficy and Laura Marks, as a challenge to Western norms of visibility and knowledge. I further made use of innovative technology to add writing to the wall, in another juxtaposition of new against old and a further nod to the Sana'a palimpsest, with all the significance that this entails.

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[132] **Israfil** with alternate spellings as: *Israfel, Esrafil;* and **Izrail**, also with alternate spellings as: *Azrael, Izrael*, are two of the four archangels mentioned in the Qur'an. The first being the angel who blows into the trumpet before Armageddon, and the second being the "angel of death" – *Malak Al Mawt*, which corresponds to the Hebrew term *malach ha-maweth*.

Rendering this image opaquer still, I was also required to blur the face of the actor/singer, as outlined in the previous chapter. As an aside, it was intriguing and surprising to note the blurring of the faces of my contributors, which I had not remotely planned, at least as counterpoint to my earlier intentions for the film. This act of blurring produced a succession of shadowy, ghostly figures who are, perhaps, an implicit reference to the City Symphony tradition. As Grierson and others noted, much of the time we see in these films figures rather than individuals, types standing in for specific dimensions of city life.

The actor/singer is, however, all too aware that being an artist and at the same time a woman is very difficult in Sana'a: 'Even the male artist in the Yemeni society faces problems being an artist and this is due to a vision… I do not say of the whole society but a relevant majority…. What do you expect, then, if the artist is female?' The actor further refers to 'a long historical legacy of women oppressed', a subject on which she had once wrote a theatrical monologue, and she asked me if she could perform it for me on camera. The piece is dark, dramatic, and conveys conflict. It is about the arranged and forced marriages of very young girls to elderly men. She addresses an imaginary judge in a cave-like court:

Your Honour!

I beg you before you judge my case

I am fatigued by fear

I am not afraid of this cave

Because I also lived in a cave

I found myself wedded to a man

Older than me tens of years

I couldn't grasp what was happening

Until I found myself in a house that is not my house

And with a human being who is not human

He was a beast

His claws protracted

And killed my innocence and my childhood

He then started beating me

Beating…and beating…and beating…and beating…and beating

Please STOP!

As an artist who campaigns and aspires to bring about political and social change, our actor/singer has a long involvement in social justice struggles around, especially, class and gender relations. What she sees around her in Sana'a (and the nation more broadly) does not inspire her with a great deal of confidence, even though she maintains her commitment to social betterment. The scene gradually becomes intense and grave. When I ask her off screen whether there was anything else she would like to tell the audience of this film, her answer, in a gloomy voice, is strikingly short: 'I'll just say, pray for Yemen, for the Arab world, for all human beings, so we can be alright'.

The *scherzo* movement leads to the *allegro* movement. Even though the English translation of the Italian word *allegro* is *cheerful*, the use here is intended as *dynamic, lively, animated,* and *loud*. This takes the form of a *Rondo*[133] in which we are presented with a doomsday, symbolised by a sudden malfunction of the screen in front of us. This malfunction is analogue and digital, visual and auditory. Here the FM radio presenter announces that 'nights are beautiful and romantic in Sana'a.'

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[133] Rondo form is a piece of music where the musical material stated at the beginning of the piece keeps returning. Definition retrieved from: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/rondo-form-in-music-definition-examples-quiz.html>.

Suddenly, we hear air raid sirens, followed by a thud of a horrific explosion caused by Saudi military planes that started, on the night of 25th March 2015, their air attack on Sana'a. The first part of the film is abruptly overwritten here by this sudden change in tempo and thematic material. Now a new chapter in the film is signalled, and it appears as though a new film. This is reminiscent of both the Sana'a Palimpsest, overwritten by a new text, and the trajectory of my own filmmaking journey and my change in direction.

In this sequence, some of the film's contributors return. The changing mood is apparent in the city of Sana'a, and especially in the faces of my characters. They are totally different than the outward looking/thinking artists that were portrayed in the first part of the film. The war has taken a heavy toll on them and yet they remain realistically optimistic. The film structure had to contend with the drastic change brought about by this sudden start of hostilities. I decided to accentuate the rhythm and to opt for more dynamic *montage* editing for the subsequent scenes of the film.

It was possible for me to arrange the sequences in this part of the film through the use of symbolism and juxtaposition of the shots. In addition, I used a multitude of musical tracks, some traditional and some a fusion of both Yemeni music and modern Western musical arrangements. These were accompanied by photographic images I shot during my initial preparations for the film. Subsequently, I turned to the well-known 'Ken Burns' cinematic effects that mimic camera panning, tilting, and zooming movements at the editing stage. The sequence includes the use of natural sound, and synchronization between the music and what the characters were saying in their video contributions about the horrors of war and their personal experiences of the bombardment.

There is one exception to this general synchronization of the music on the soundtrack with the contributors' words and moods, in the use of the German

composer Johann Pachelbel's 'Canon in D Major' to accompany the videographer's description and footage of the horrific conditions in a city with no electricity and very limited access even to water. There is a real Baroque character and buoyancy in the piece, with the familiar 'Baroque' impulse 'to evoke emotional states by appealing to the senses, often in dramatic ways'; it is also true to its genre, which is often compared to the irregular, or imperfectly shaped, pearl.[134] The Canon's repeating bass pattern (*basso continuo*), and its strong chord progression gradually form a whole that, in emotional terms, is hauntingly beautiful, simple and subtle, delicate and heart wrenching. From its initial simple motif, through its harmonious unfolding layers generated by just a few instruments, the piece establishes a steady *crescendo* (of volume and complexity) as it makes its way towards its grand *finale*. This steady accumulation of layers in the music track, of course, recalls the film's central motif of the Sana'a Palimpsest.

The Canon performs a further function in relation to the specific images it accompanies at this point in the film. Betsy Schwarm describes Pachelbel's work as 'serene yet joyful', as well as noting that the piece is now widely used at weddings in the US;[135] it is also, incidentally, routinely performed at graduation ceremonies at the University of Essex, and this is perhaps precisely because of the way in which its somewhat ethereal, stately and elegantly formalised development evokes progression across thresholds towards a (presumed higher, more *developed*) condition. As such, and in its association with the western classical tradition, the Canon points listeners towards the lofty high water marks of western 'civilised' values. Its use in this

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[134] "Baroque: Art and Architecture," *Britannica* website, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Baroque-art-and-architecture> (accessed 20 March 2020).

[135] Betsy Schwarm, "Pachelbel's Canon", *Encyclopaedia Britannica* online: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pachelbels-Canon, last updated May 1, 2020 (accessed May 4, 2020).

sequence, therefore, in juxtaposition with the description and images of the situation on the ground in Sana'a, ultimately alludes to the conflict as connected or bound up with the legacy of western colonialism in the region, questioning the kinds of 'civilised' values and 'modernizing' accomplishments often associated with the era.

The film would need to include a closing movement, which would usually be understood as an end that wraps-up the film and culminates in a closing message: a summational and revelatory *finale*.136 After all, films have the capacity to influence people, affect their spirits, and change their minds, and these were also aims of my own film. On the other hand, this would also need balancing against the problems that a high degree of narrative closure might bring, however clearly it might frame a message for the film. In the first place, the situation in Sana'a itself remained unresolved, and I had not been able to contact all of my contributors, which left things feeling quite uncertain. Equally, the project's guiding commitment to representing the city, its people, and the conflict in a complex way, and avoiding as far as possible reductive approaches to the material, would seem to point away from such a step.

I decided to finish my film with a note of ambiguous optimism. The corresponding *finale* movement in my film is static, a single long take of a girl, silhouetted against a black wall with gaping holes that emit pure white light. She is reading a spiritual poem about Sana'a composed by one of the film's characters (the Poet), while leaning towards a modern-day condenser microphone. The poem reads:

She is the Capital of the Spirit…

Flooded by light and incantations.

The trees of my memory blaze with light when I enter her…

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136 "Finale," Encyclopaedia Britannica website, <https://www.britannica.com/art/finale > (accessed 13 May 2014).

and I see her, in her tattered rags, incandescent…

naked under the embers of midday

I remember her…

I was a child with overwhelmed eyes

I saw her charms and the shadow of her veil

I followed the flood of her steps

I drank her fragrance

I bathed my eyelids in the moisture of her shade…

while my heart saw angels painting the horizon,

with plains and palaces and arcades.

Thematic elements and narrative tensions

In terms of the layering of thematic content into this broad structure, *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War*, in its current state, offers a multitude of sub themes – personal, religious, emotional and political – all under the umbrella of the main theme of *conflict*. A variety of pointers appear and disappear throughout the film, among them: Sana'a and the effect of poverty; the relationship between the developed and the underdeveloped Worlds; travel and fascination with the `exotic other' through the activity of the camera; the horrors of war; autobiography and my personal role and stake in the process; and religion (which apparently lingers but is not pronounced).

In line with the priorities established in the preceding chapters of this commentary, *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War* embeds its themes in both narrative and non-narrative structures. It may surprise some to read that documentaries make use of narrative structure at all but Nichols suggests that it was

one of three key elements – along with 'photographic realism' and (as we have seen) 'modernist fragmentation' – responsible for the birth of documentary film itself.137

For Nichols, the perception that narrative leads clearly toward fiction might lead some to underestimate the value of the documentary, and few would claim that documentary is an evolutionary progress of fiction's narrative legacy.138 Hayden White suggests that narrative is viewed, from the perspective of professional historical studies, neither as the basis for a method, nor as the product of a theory, but rather as a form of discourse.139 This, according to G. Elton and J. H. Hexter, can be utilized for the representation of historical events, in various ways depending upon 'whether the primary aim is to describe a situation, analyze a historical process, or tell a story.'140

Narrative, in such accounts, further not only works on making time more than a simple duration or sensation, but infuses it with historical meaning; documentary, in its use of narrative, bestows what takes place on screen with the significance of historical events. Meanings, however, can be multiple and may well be in contradiction to one another: expository documentaries that aspire to transparency and access to 'the objective truth' about the events they depict tend to need to clarify and stabilize this 'significance', through the use of 'omniscient' voice-over, for example. There are one or two such 'stabilising' forces at work in *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War:* I used music to highlight and comment on what is unfolding on

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137 Bill Nichols, "Documentary Film and the Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry* v. 27, no.4 (Summer 2001): 580-610.

138 Ibid.

139 Hayden White, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," *History and Theory* v. 23, no. 1 (February 1984): 1-2.

140 G. Elton, *The Practice of History* (New York, 1967), 118-141; and J. H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History* (New York, 1961), 8ff.

the screen, and on some of the emotions experienced by my film's characters; as in certain City Symphony films, such as Vigo's on Nice, I applied superimposition of text on the screen, in my case to convey information and updates about characters and the story quickly and directly.

Sana'a in pieces

On the other hand, the film also incorporates a number of elements that work against the impression of a clear, seamless narrative and transparent objectivity, especially in its lack of absolute systematization and fully-developed themes, and in terms of the multiple stories that begin to jostle with the perspective of the filmmaker. I tried to push the boundaries of the film's theme rather than its plot or narrative as a way to re-imagine the formal properties of City Symphony films. Nonetheless, some segments of *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War* are also edited using juxtapositions of shots cut together in quick succession to attain the kind of symbolic and metaphoric associations familiar to the genre, as in the image of the Sana'a palimpsest that herald's the film's opening.

The film's themes are stitched together in the more or less fragmented style that one might expect from a film that aspires to have links to the City Symphony tradition – not to mention the fact that the film also deals with a war. The different sequences that compose the film body are often cut abruptly by the FM presenter, who acts as the time punctuator – not simply to label the various temporal slots of a day, but also to create rhythm and punctuated *tempos* in combination with the film's soundtrack. The intertwining character of the recurrent themes in the film is anchored by the physical and auditory presence of the FM Radio presenter.

These intertwinings and recurrences aim to create a combination of more or

less 'melodic' and rhythmic arrangements, and the film as a whole aims to avoid imposing much more of a system on the different sub-themes contained in it. Opinions and sentiments are put forward from time to time, and with varying degrees of subtlety, but they are not used as fundamental structural blocks in the construction of the film. When suppositions are presented in the film they are not presented to the viewer as foregone conclusions; they certainly cannot be used as any basis for an all-embracing theory to inform a conclusive argument, as is often the case in the documentary genre's more 'expository' examples. A similar point may be made about the series of stories or 'tales' – including the poetry, films-within-films, and performances – contained within the film. These are not linked 'dramatically', and are not presented to the viewer according to any of the conventions of narrative development in general, nor those of narrative closure in particular.

Crucial to the understanding of the structure of the film is the skepticism, or *dis*belief, of the filmmaker. My presence in the film was not for the purpose of visibly and audibly narrating its events to the audience, nor that of implying a role for the viewers in constructing 'the' meaning of the film. The exigence of this presence was dictated by the sudden change of the situation in Sana'a, under circumstances discussed in the preceding chapters.

As an account emphasising subjectivity, autobiographical elements play some role in the subject matter of the film. But the film does not chart a complete and systematic account of my life, as the filmmaker, nor does it offer a complete account of any episode in my life. The autobiographical element of the film is most visible in my sporadic talking to the camera, at the start of the war. This is an exceptional moment in the course of the film, made prominent both by its positioning in the last part of the film, and by the specific way it brings me directly into the film: the Screenium software is recording a *restaging* of my sudden realisation that a war had

just started in my country of origin: presenting the viewer with my dilemma in this way, and somewhat inadvertently, enabled me to further accentuate my subjectivity and interrogate any 'objectivity' on the part of the narrator.

This subjectivity is further put into contact with other voices and perspectives with the addition of the video diary footage after the point at which I appear. While my own image is shocked, uncomprehending, barely articulate and (as above) *restaged*, the authority in any narrative the film presents resides much more clearly with the residents of Sana'a as they record their messages from the ground. As a result, any 'truth' in the film is limited, and could not claim to be all-embracing. The authority of the film is not in the systematic presentation of themes and views, but in the experience presented by the filmmaker and the experiences of my contributors; even thus 'authorized', I suggest that the film remains a provisional and tentative reflection.

Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War is therefore not a systematic, organized, or complete display of one or more of its themes. The film does not present a single story, although its central theme can be easily identified, and it allows different types of footage and perspectives to comment on one another. The sub-themes in the film do not go through processes of elaboration or enlargement, exposition or development – all usually identified as central to narrative in its fictional *and* documentary modes. At the same time, the uncertain circumstances of its production prevent any sense of narrative closure or clear-cut conclusions.

My film thus aims to emphasise a lack of coherence, in an old 'relic' city whose inhabitants grapple with an archaic past/present legacy. The female characters of the film in particular speak about women's traditional standpoints against the backdrop of a new generation of Yemeni women who are defiant and desire radical

changes. Some of the film's characters speak passionately about Sana'a's beautiful setting and location, although others belittle the city's lyrical scenery; they also complain about the lack of important modern services, about poor management and the city's current lack of cleanliness, about the importance of new technical and technological installations like electrical wires, satellite dishes, and so forth. Some of them, echoing the *UNESCO World Heritage List*, speak about the city being impenetrable and upholding fiercely to traditional and archaic cultural values, as set against new forms of modernity that are gradually reshaping the city's landscape. As to the future, and as with narrative closure, there is still more uncertainty: some of the contributors, to a certain degree, believe that human behaviour has the potential to defy conventional systems of values, and bring about change. Others, however, believe that this is unpredictable by nature.

I have aimed to structure my representation of this 'imperfect' city, overall, to emphasise precisely this ambiguity and uncertainty. The film includes contradictory ideas and senses of the conflict as it charts its route through its series of fragments. The montage is both rhythmic and associational, and at points, as above, the juxtapositions are geared towards symbolic or metaphorical readings. In this respect, there is some affinity with the method of 'dialectical montage' pioneered by Eisenstein, who famously aimed to instill a 'third meaning' from the juxtaposition of two distinct and seemingly contradictory shots in his work of the 1920s. On the other hand, in line with the thesis developed in this commentary (and in contrast to Eisenstein), there are also points in my film at which the juxtaposition of two seemingly contradictory shots might point less towards a more or less clearly identified 'third meaning', and more towards the difficult and complex experience – which might also be thought of as a central experience of urban modernity and the city itself – of holding two seemingly contradictory elements *at the same time*.

Conclusions

This commentary aimed to offer an account of the practical component of my submission, incorporating both the background research and some of the crucial decisions this motivated and underpinned during the filmmaking process. Both the film and the commentary begin with the Sana'a palimpsest, which stands as a metaphor for the project as a whole not least to the extent that it was 'written over' by wider historical factors. The aerial bombardment of the city forced a change in direction for my practical work, and I had to abandon my proposed experiment in 'Visual Musicality' for lack of appropriate footage. The film that eventually emerged – a film geared as much toward raising awareness of the conflict among a wider public as abstract experimentation – nonetheless still bears the traces of its origins (and of the texts that inspired it) in its formal and aesthetic approach to the material. Over the course of this commentary, I hope to have clarified some of the ways in which these elements derive from the background research and have been embedded in the finished product.

The primary focus of my research has been City Symphonies, initially as a vehicle for me to formulate and pursue my experimental hypothesis. Films of the genre remained central to my project subsequently in terms of what I learned from the critical literature about, especially, their innovative approach to the condition of urban modernity and representing cities to a wider world. A survey of this literature is included in the Introduction, following some general preliminary remarks on narrative, time, and causality in City Symphonies; these sections together establish the key terms of critical engagement with films of the genre, highlighting in particular the risk they pose of leaning toward too coherent and polished a view of their city-subjects.

Although the critics and scholars disagree about the extent to which one or another City Symphony might adopt this kind of view, there is broad agreement, firstly, that it risks reducing complexity and dynamism into a seemingly stable, and more or less 'objective' entity. This runs counter to both Avant Garde approaches to the world in general as untotalisable and subjective, and Marxist understandings of modernity as an ever-evolving series of processes and change. Meanwhile, for other critics, the issue is slightly recast, becoming one of the possibility of the films (re)producing overly abstract perspectives on their specific locations, at the expense of the bustle of daily life and its contradictions. This line of criticism emerged early in the history of City Symphonies and is associated especially with John Grierson and Siegfried Kracauer, who both shared reservations about some potential antihumanism in spite of their admiration of the films' formal achievements.

A second point of broad agreement appears to be that, in all of this, the montage plays a crucial role in establishing or refusing this tendency toward abstraction and antihumanism. To the extent that it is seen to produce a more or less stable 'cross section' of the city, isolated and immobilized in spite of any dynamism that section may contain, such a film would afford only a partial view. An analogy was drawn with the composite city described by Michel de Certeau, made up of both the aerial, 'city planning' perspective, an 'objective' fiction of transparency and legibility, and the multiplicitous walkers in the streets with their myriad and elusive practices, unknowingly conspiring to destabilise or undo such fictions. To the extent the montage emphasizes fragmentation, complexity, contradiction, unpredictability, and uncertainty, the film will be more in step with the rhythms of modernity, and can be more attuned to – or at least less reductive towards – the 'subjects' involved in it.

This lesson, in particular, remained central to my practice throughout the remainder of the project's duration. It was especially crucial as the initial hypothesis,

regarding commonalities between the moving image and music, was recast as a research question: how to represent the city, the conflict, and my contributors, in a way that might avoid, as far as possible, simplifying the place, its people, and the issues they were facing. In the film, and in the first chapter of this commentary, I have emphasized the ways in which Sana'a, in common with any modern city, is not only the 'picture postcard' city eulogized in UNESCO's account of its World Heritage Site, which would have the Old City preserved, static and unchanging, 'perfected' – and isolated.

Sana'a is a site of dynamism, unpredictability and complexity, full of tensions, contradictions, and the irreducible stuff of life. I also included in my Introduction some of my observations and reflections about my initial topic area that seemed to chime with this emphasis on the plural and the multiple, drawing on my early research into the work of Eisenstein and Antonioni in particular. In the work of both there is an emphasis on film as requiring a mixture of (at least) two progressing 'lines'; these are identified, in Antonioni, as inner and outer 'visions', and in Eisenstein's work the director-theorist emphasizes the internal complexity of each.

As discussed in Chapter Two, nonetheless, this needed to be balanced against both my lack of appropriate footage and the need to tell the story of the bombardment to the world outside Sana'a. A relative lack of media attention outside the region, combined with my allegiances to the city and its inhabitants, including my friends and family, drew me to the conclusion that I could not simply leave Sana'a and try to make my experimental film in some other city elsewhere. There is some clear narrative progression in the film, most evidently from peace to war; as the war erupts in the film there are even some elements associated with the 'expository mode' of documentary, with its well-known pretensions to objectivity and omniscience, in the explanatory on-screen text. Any steps in this direction were felt to be required so as to

allow spectators to understand a little of what was going on on-screen, and in some respects it could be suggested that the film could even have supplied more context to make sense of the bombardment. I hope to have supplied some of this kind of material interspersed through the first and second chapters, which also offer further detail on my decision to keep Sana'a as my location.

On the other hand, there are aspects of this sequence, and the film as a whole, that call into question the objectivity of the account. The appearance of the text on-screen is also the point at which the subjectivity of the filmmaker is brought clearly into view, and this perspective is marked by incomprehension rather than any claim to an empowered omniscience. I was especially anxious that the series of events should not become focused on me, and in fact the voices of the contributors in their video diaries are 'authorised' to a far greater degree by the film, not least through their physical emplacement at the heart of the conflict in the city. In this sense there is an element of reflexivity in the film, although to a far more muted degree than in Vertov, for example. Finally, there was also a stubbornly senseless aspect to the events; the open-ended nature of the overall narrative foregrounds the uncertain circumstances of the film's production, and refuses to seal off the city by representing it as a coherent, stable, and objectively knowable entity, as in Stein's criticism of Ruttmann's 'microcosmic' *Berlin*.

The video diaries and my own appearance referred to above came about as part of my attempt to address the lack of footage with which to construct my narrative, especially if I were to avoid leaning too much towards the expository mode. I reached out to my contributors and some of them managed to send me one or two video diaries that they shot for me on their mobile phones. I also incorporated news footage, using specialized software to add my own image as a more or less helpless spectator-bystander to the screen images unfolding before me. Technology enabled

me to solve a number of problems I was encountering, which are further detailed in the second chapter. At a different level, addressing the lack of footage similarly helped to mitigate the potential risk of overly cohesive/expository tendencies, as the process contributed to the overt subjectivisation of the material film fragments.

The process further brought a greater diversity of perspectives and voices, textures and tones, and (in the case of the video diaries sent by some of my contributors) the inclusion of eyewitness testimony from residents of Sana'a during the conflict. To situate the film in its wider context, this mixing of voices and forms – the 'epistolary' video diaries and 'critically-juxtaposed narrative structure', to use Hamid Naficy's terms – along with the specifics of its artisanal production process (including its (dis)location) might indicate that *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War* belongs to the body of work that Naficy refers to as 'accented cinema'.[141]

Naficy's category, as an emergent and as-yet-unformalised 'structure of feeling', is reasonably broad. There is, however, considerably less emphasis on the tactile qualities of the image in my film than in many of Naficy's examples (although there is some use of layering in, for instance, the projection of the music video onto one of the city walls). On the other hand, the value of this kind of 'tactile' approach to film, for Naficy as for Laura Marks, is that it puts spectators in touch with ways of experiencing and knowing the world that dethrone, to an extent, Western 'optics' and the primacy of vision in terms of central ('city planning') perspective. Insofar as my film has worked to question the privileging of a specific 'objective' perspective on the city, *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War* may perhaps be considered for inclusion within this loose grouping.

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[141] Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001); Naficy's list of stylistic elements constituting what he describes as 'by no means an established or cohesive cinema' is on p. 4.

The film might further be aligned with what Patricia Zimmermann identifies as a broader movement of disparate works that, in various ways, act as a counter to the erosion of the public sphere under global neoliberal hegemony.[142] In one of her chapter epigraphs, and in terms that echo the distinction between the abstract, aerial 'city planning' perspective and the multiple and contradictory practices occurring at street level, Zimmermann notes:

> Official documentaries nearly always deny the ground and bodies (or fictionalize them) because they are too anchored in the aerial, disembodied fantasy of nationalism. Therefore, an insurgent documentary practice must retake the ground, reposition bodies, deploy multiple technological formats, and engage in reconnaissance in order to devise new offensive positions.[143]

While it was not possible to fulfil all the criteria Zimmermann proposes, given the way that the bombardment constrained my choices, the film is certainly a record of the war, and a pluralistic approach to the city, that aimed to raise wider public awareness, discussion, and action. It also embraced new technologies and emphasizes subjectivity, and retained as much as it could its guiding commitment to fragmentation and multiplicity at the formal and thematic levels. Its central motif, the palimpsest in flames, may be seen as standing for the multi-layered and combustible nature of all 'sacred texts' and the hegemonic structures – especially, in Zimmermann's account, 'the' nation – they underwrite. For these reasons *Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War* might further be seen as making its own contribution, on one front, in the wider struggle that Zimmermann identifies.

A film, like a city, is never just one thing. Ultimately, then, and in addition to the contexts described above, I would also like to make a modest claim for seeing

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[142] Patricia R. Zimmermann. *States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. xx.

[143] Ibid. p. 87.

Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War as a kind of City Symphony. Although I had to abandon my early, more experimental aims as a result of the conflict, my research into the City Symphonies of the interwar period and their successors did encourage me not to abandon altogether the idea of producing something that may be considered at least affiliated to the genre. Even the initial canonized examples discussed in Chapter One seem to have few features in common, and the subsequent expansion of the genre across the globe similarly indicates that 'City Symphony' is a broad and evolving category, rather than a static model to be adhered to or emulated. I resolved not to let go of this ambition entirely, even when there was inadequate footage with which to piece together a more coherent and polished City Symphony – the day-to-day complexity, uncertainty and unpredictability characterizing Sana'a and all cities had, in any case, only intensified with the outbreak of war and the bombardment of the city. Initially I felt the incorporation of some of the genre's more overt distinguishing features and characteristic modes into my own film about Sana'a (footage permitting, of course) could be intended as homage to this tradition, and at least an implicit nod to its vexed relationship with urban modernity. Through my research into City Symphonies, I further came to realize that the genre is perhaps indeed broad enough to include my own 'symphony of peace and war'.

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25. *Rope,* dir. Alfred Hitchcock, feat. James Stewart, John Dall, Farley Granger (Transatlantic Pictures, 1948).

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27. *Russian Ark*, dir. Alexander Sokurov, feat. Sergei Dreiden (Seville Pictures, 2002).

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33. *The Cranes are Flying*, dir. Mikhail Kalatozov, feat. Tatiana Samoilova, Aleksey Batalov (MOSFILM, 1957).

34. *The Passenger*, dir. Michelangelo Antonioni, feat. Jack Nicholson, Maria Schneider, Steven Berkoff (Carlo Ponti, 1975).

35. *The Thin Blue Line*, dir. Errol Morris, feat. Randall Adams, David Ray Harris (Mark Lipson, 1988).

36. *Touch of Evil*, dir. Orson Welles, feat. Charlton Heston, Janet Leigh, Orson Welles (Universal Pictures, 1948).

37. *Twenty-Four Dollar Island*, dir. Robert Flaherty (USA, 1927).

Appendices

Appendix (A): Table of Approximations

The following table is an attempt to form equivalences, analogies (or approximations) of well-known musical terms *vis-à-vis* well-known film terms. In it I tried to equate certain methods in music reflected by their respective terms), that produce affective responses in listeners, to practices and methods perfected by film makers, visually, to acquire the *'same'* affective responses from their audiences.

Musical Term	Meaning	Equivalence in
1. A Battuta	Return to normal tempo after a deviation	Editing, shooting a long take
2. Abbandono	Free, relaxed	Shooting, editing
3. Accarezzévole	Expressive and caressing	Mise-en-scene, composition, camera movement
4. Accelerando	Gradually increasing the tempo	Shooting, editing
5. Accelerato	Suddenly increasing the tempo	Shooting, editing
6. Accentato/	Accented; with emphasis	Editing, camera

accentuate		angles
7. Acciaccatura	Crushing; i.e., a very fast grace note that is "crushed" against the note that follows and takes up no value in the measure	Editing
8. Adiagietto	Rather slow (but faster than adagio)	Camera movement
9. Adagio	At ease; play at ease	Camera movement
10. Adagissimo	Very, very slow	Camera movement
11. Ad libitum (commonly ad lib; Latin)	At liberty; the speed and manner of execution are left to the performer	Editing, shooting long takes
12. Affrettando	Hurrying, pressing onwards	Camera movement
13. Alla breve	In cut-time; two beats per measure or the equivalent thereof	Editing
14. Allegro	Cheerful or brisk; but commonly interpreted as lively, fast	Editing, camera movement
15. Amabile	Pleasant	Mise-en-scene, lighting, camera movements
16. Andante	At a walking pace; at a moderate tempo	Editing

17. A niente	To nothing; an indication to make a diminuendo that fades out *pianissimo* until nothing is heard	Editing audio and visual footage
18. Anima	Feeling, soul	Mise-en-scene, lighting
19. A piacere	At pleasure; i.e., the performer need not follow the rhythm strictly, for example in a cadenza	Editing
20. Armonioso	Harmoniously	Editing, camera movement
21. A tempo	In time; the performer should return to the main tempo of the piece (after an *accelerando* or *ritardando*); also may be found in combination with other terms such as *a tempo giusto* (in strict time) or *a tempo di menuetto* (at the speed of a minuet)	Editing
22. Attacca	Attack or attach; go straight on at the end of a movement, a direction to attach the next movement to the previous one, without a gap or pause	Editing, choice of shots and their angles
23. Bis (Latin)	twice; repeat the relevant action or passage.	Editing
24. Bridge	Transitional passage connecting two sections of a composition, also	Editing

	transition.	
25. Bruscamente	Brusquely, abruptly	Editing
26. Cadenza	A solo section, usually in a concerto or similar work. It is used to display the performer's technique, sometimes at considerable length	Editing
27. Calando	Falling away, or lowering; i.e., getting slower and quieter; *ritardando* along with *diminuendo*	Audio editing
28. Capriccio (capriccioso)	A humorous, fanciful, or bizarre composition, often characterized by an eccentric departure from current stylistic norms	Shooting, editing, lighting
29. Coda	A tail; a closing section appended to a movement	Visual and/or audio editing
30. Come prima	Like the first (time); i.e., as before, typically referring to an earlier tempo	Composition, editing
31. Crescendo	Growing; progressively louder	Long takes, visual and /or audio editing
32. Da capo	From the head; i.e., from the beginning.	Audio editing
33. Decelerando	Slowing down	Camera movement,

		editing
34. Decrescendo	Opposite of *crescendo*	Long takes, visual and /or audio editing
35. Dissonante	Dissonant; unmusical	Editing
36. Doppio movimento	Twice as fast	Editing, camera movement
37. Espansivo	Effusive; excessive in emotional expression	Visual and/or audio editing
38. Fermata	Finished, closed; a rest or note is to be held for a duration that is at the discretion of the performer or conductor (sometimes called bird's eye); a fermata at the end of a first or intermediate movement or section is usually moderately prolonged, but the final fermata of a symphony may be prolonged for longer than the note's value, typically twice its printed length or more for dramatic effect	Visual and/or audio editing
39. Freddo	Cold; depressive, unemotional	Mise-en-scene, lighting
40. Fuga	Flight; a complex contrapuntal form in	Visual and/or

	music. A short theme (the subject) is introduced in one voice (or part) alone, then in others, with imitation and characteristic development as the piece progresses	audio editing, captions
41. Intro	Opening section	Visual and/or audio editing
42. Lasciare suonare	Allow the sound to continue, do not damp; used frequently in harp or guitar music, occasionally in piano or percussion. Abbreviated "lasc. suon."	Visual and/or audio editing
43. Lentissimo	Very slowly	Camera movement, visual and/or audio editing
44. Lento	Slowly	Camera movement, visual and/or audio editing
45. Marcato	With accentuation	Camera movement, visual and/or audio editing

46. Melisma	The technique of changing the note (pitch) of a syllable of text while it is being sung	Visual and/or audio editing
47. Medley	Piece composed from parts of existing pieces, usually three, played one after another, sometimes overlapping	Editing
48. Morendo	Dying away in dynamics, and perhaps also in tempo	Editing
49. Muta (from Italian verb 'mutare')	To change into something	Camera movement, visual and/or audio editing
50. Niente	"Nothing", barely audible, dying away	Visual and/or audio editing
51. Ostinato	Obstinate, persistent; a short musical pattern that is repeated throughout an entire composition or portion of a composition	Visual and/or audio editing
52. Pastorale	In a pastoral style, peaceful and simple	Mise-en-scene, lighting
53. Penseroso	Thoughtfully, meditatively	Mise-en-scene, lighting
54. Pezzo	A composition	Camera

		movement, visual and/or audio editing
55. Piacevole	Pleasant, agreeable	Mise-en-scene, lighting
56. Prestissimo	Extremely quickly, as fast as possible	Camera movement, visual and/or audio editing
57. Presto	Very quickly	Camera movement, visual and/or audio editing
58. Ravvivando	'Reviving'; quicken pace (as *"ravvivando il tempo"*, returning to a faster tempo that occurred earlier in the piece)	Visual and/or audio editing
59. Rinforzando	Reinforced; emphasized; sometimes like a sudden *crescendo*, but often applied to a single note	Camera movement, visual and/or audio editing
60. Ritmico	Rhythmical	Visual and/or audio editing
61. Ritornello	A recurring passage for orchestra in the	Visual and/or

	first or final movement of a solo concerto or aria	audio editing
62. Rubato	Robbed; flexible in tempo, applied to notes within a musical phrase for expressive effect	Visual and/or audio editing
63. Scatenato	Unchained, wildly	Camera movement, visual and/or audio editing
64. Scordatura	Out of tune	Visual and/or audio editing
65. Scorrendo, Scorrevole	Gliding from note to note	Camera movement, long take shots, visual and/or audio editing
66. Sforzando	Made loud; a sudden strong accent	Visual and/or audio editing
67. Sostenuto	Sustained, lengthened	Shots, camera movement, visual and/or audio editing
68. Syncopation	A disturbance or interruption of the regular flow of downbeat rhythm with emphasis on the sub-division or up-	Visual and/or audio editing

	beat, e.g. in Ragtime music	
69. Tempo	Time; the overall speed of a piece of music	Visual and/or audio editing
70. Tempo Rubato	Robbed time; an expressive way of performing a rhythm	Visual and/or audio editing
71. Tenuto	Held; touch on a note slightly longer than usual, but without generally altering the note's value	Visual and/or audio editing
72. Volante	Flying	Camera movement, visual and/or audio editing

Appendix (B): Experimenting on the concept of Visual Musicality

The following are two examples (among others that I did not include here) of a series of experiments I performed to clarify what I mean by the notion 'Visual Musicality'. I tried in these experiments to illustrate steps that aim to build-up in the following shots what can be considered as *melodical* or *rhythmic* in filmic sequences. This might sum-up my concept of *Visual Musicality in the moving image*.

Melody:

(Effect to be obtained by a well organised **one Long Take**)

One long take (3-4 minutes).

Subject: a girl

Location: field of roses

ECU: girl's fingers touching a red rose. Camera gradually moves diagonally (tilt and pan) along her arm. Camera reaches in a CU the girl's sensual and smiling red lips. Camera tilts up toward the girl's smiling eyes. Camera pans (360°) around the girl's head while slightly dollying out and craning up to give us a high-angle MLS of the girl in the middle of a field of roses. Camera slowly descends down to the field of roses in foreground (sharply focused). The Girl appears out of focus in the background. Camera at this stage dollys out rapidly to give a Long deep-focus shot showing the girl surrounded by the field of roses. CUT.

Rhythm:

(Effect to be obtained by tempo in the editing stage)

60 shots

Subject: 2 boys and 3 girls looking at: tower clock, hand watch, water tap, bird, mobile phone

Location: Park

1. MS: Boy looking up

2. CU: Ticking clock on tower

3. MS: Girl looking down

4. ECU: Hand watch ticking

5. MS: Boy looking left

6. ECU: Water drips from tap

7. MS: Girl looking right

8. ECU: Bird tweets

9. MCU: Girl looking down

10. CU: Mobile ringing

11. MS: Boy looking up

12. CU: Ticking clock on tower

13. MS: Girl looking down

14. ECU: Hand watch ticking

15. MS: Boy looking left

16. ECU: Water drips from tap

17. MS: Girl looking right

18. ECU: Bird tweets

19. MCU: Girl looking down

20. CU: Mobile ringing

21. MS: Boy looking up

22. CU: Ticking clock on tower

23. MS: Girl looking down

24. ECU: Ticking hand watch

25. MS: Boy looking left

26. ECU: Water drips from tap

27. MS: Girl looking right

28. ECU: Bird tweets

29. MCU: Girl looking down

30. CU: Mobile ringing

31. MS: Boy looking up

32. CU: Ticking clock on tower

33. MS: Girl looking down

34. ECU: Hand watch ticking

35. MS: Boy looking left

36. ECU: Water drips from tap

37. MS: Girl looking right

38. ECU: Bird tweets

39. MCU: Girl looking down

40. CU: Mobile ringing

41. CU: Ticking clock on tower

42. ECU: Hand watch ticking

43. ECU: Water drips from tap

44. ECU: Bird tweets

45. CU: Mobile ringing

46. CU: Ticking clock on tower

47. ECU: Hand watch ticking

48. ECU: Water drips from tap

49. ECU: Bird tweets

50. CU: Mobile ringing

51. MS: Boy looking up

52. CU: Ticking clock on tower

53. MS: Girl looking down

54. ECU: Hand watch ticking

55. MS: Boy looking left

56. ECU: Water drips from tap

57. MS: Girl looking right

58. ECU: Bird tweets

59. MCU: Girl looking down

60. CU: Mobile ringing

Appendix (C): Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War Script

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War
FILM SCRIPT</td></tr>
<tr><td align="center">VIDEO</td><td align="center">AUDIO</td></tr>
<tr>
<td>

• Dark screen for 5 seconds.

FADE IN SLOWLY to an image of the Sana'a Palimpsest starting to catch fire. Title FADES IN:

Sana'a: Symphony of Peace and War.

A small green leaf rests on the last 'A'of the title.

FADE OUT-FADE IN to secondary title:

Seen Through the Eyes of its Artists

FADE OUT

</td>
<td>

Sound of cine-projector. Musical score (an old Yemeni song). Crackle of fire.

</td>
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<td>

• High angle image of the old city of Sana'a:

CAMERA SLOWLY PANS TO THE LEFT TO REVEAL THE CITY's SKELETON

</td>
<td>

Musical score continues-Audible sounds of the city increase in volume

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<tr>
<td>

• MS: The Poet (Yemeni prominent poet) talks while his image dissolves with the city's image.

DISSOLVE

</td>
<td>

<u>The Poet</u>: I wrote, and I still write about this city that lives in my soul. In my mind it is connected to my childhood memories. I saw this city for the first time when I was six years old. I moved to it from the countryside, from a small village.

</td>
</tr>
</table>

• MS: The Artist (well-known Yemeni fine artist and academic) talks while her image dissolves with the city's image. DISSOLVE	The Artist: I moved to Sana'a as a child. I expected Sana'a to be quite different: a modern capital with skyscrapers such as western cities. But I was surprised that it is very old, with a history whose importance I was not aware of at the time.
• MS: The Photographer (2) (Active Yemeni photographer and videographer) talks while his image dissolves with the city's image. DISSOLVE	The Photographer (2): I was born in Sana'a. This is my birthplace. I belong to Sana'a more than anywhere else. This city deserves to be immortalized. It combines two opposites: History and Modernity. This is Sana'a in a nutshell.
• MS: The Actor/Singer (Famous Yemeni TV actress and theatre performer) talks while her image dissolves with the city's image. DISSOLVE	The Actor/Singer: I go through moments where I need to be in peace with myself.. To run away from the chaos of reality or the stress of work. My spiritual fulfillment in these moments is achieved when I walk through the streets of Sana'a. I feel as

	though I am in another world. For me this city looks like a dream.. an illusion.
• MS: The Photographer (1) (Young Yemeni photographer) talks while her image dissolves with the city's image. FADE TO BLACK	The Photographer (1): The truth is that Sana'a is a place very rich with visuals. You can get the most beautiful images here. Its people are very simple. No complications. I consider myself lucky to be a photographer here.
• ELS: Panoramic view of Sana'a – SLOW PAN TO THE RIGHT	Musical score (an old Yemeni song)– FM Presenter: Good morning Sana'a. It's 8 o'clock and what a beautiful weather, So where ever you are, what ever you're doing, where ever you going to feel the beautiful breeze around you, and enjoy our kick-off song for this morning. Stay tuned. OLD YEMENI SONG FADES OUT- NEW YEMENI SONG FADES IN.
• MS: The Photographer (2) (photographer) prepares his morning tea.	SONG CONTINUES IN BACKGROUND

• ECU: His hand putting YEMENTON tea in a yellow mug.	SONG CONTINUES IN BACKGROUND
• MLS: Takes tea mug – PAN – moves to a table on his left side and sits.	SONG CONTINUES IN BACKGROUND
• ECU: Holds camera lens and with the other hand cleans the lens.	SONG CONTINUES IN BACKGROUND
• CU: The Photographer (2)'s profile while cleaning the camera lens- hold the camera to his eye. Two-tier lower third: **The Photographer**	SONG FADES OUT The Photographer (2) (VO): I was born in Sana'a
• MS: The Photographer (2) putting down his camera. Grabs his tea mug.	The Photographer (2) (VO): This is my birthplace
• MS: The Photographer (2) exits his house – moves toward the camera holding his camera bag and a tripod – he exits left of the frame.	The Photographer (2) (VO): I belong to Sana'a more than anywhere else
• MLS: The Photographer (2) continues walking - he exits left of the frame.	The Photographer (2) (VO): This city deserves to be immortalized

• MLS – Low angle: The Photographer (2) driving his car.	The Photographer (2) (VO): It combines two opposites: History and Modernity
• MS: The Photographer (2) profile driving his car- stops his car - grabs his camera from the car's back seat, and aims at a shot from inside the car.	FM Presenter: Hello every one. I hope every one is enjoying their time here and it's 5 pm and you know that is the perfect timing to go out and see all around Sana'a. So before we start our show for today lets enjoy this coming up song by Abdo Sana'ani, and we'll back soon. Stay tuned. YEMENI-WESTERN FUSION STYLE SONG KICKS IN
• LS: Old buildings of Sana'a with a farm in the middle.	YEMENI-WESTERN FUSION STYLE SONG
• MLS: The Photographer (2) snapping shots with his camera. • MLS: The Photographer (2) walking through Sana'a old streets taking photos.	The Photographer (2) (VO): This is Sana'a in a nutshell. Sana'a is unique in its small details.
• MS: Old ornamented building – Low Angle – Camera tilts down to	The Photographer (2) (VO): When you go to old Sana'a, you see decorations,

reveal The Photographer (2) from the back while he takes a picture of the building.	ornaments.. some go back to the ancient Himyari era.
• MS: Same building from another angle. • MS: Light post against a building – Tilt up- one lamp is lit, the other dim.	The Photographer (2) (VO): You see, often, the fusion between these details in one place.
• MS: A heap of incense in an old market – Diagonal Pan- a young salesman talking on his mobile phone	The Photographer (2) (VO): You see a seller of modern items in an antique kiosk... with walls fitted with ancient decorations
• LS: The Photographer (2) taking pictures of kids against the old Sana'a buildings. Then moves towards the kids.	The Photographer (2) (VO): You see people moving everywhere. A rare mixture you cannot see anywhere else. But when you mention Sana'a abroad... the only thing that people picture in their minds is Old Sana'a.
• MLS: The Photographer (2) shows the kids their pictures from the camera's tiny screen.	The Photographer (2) (VO): Another significant feature of Sana'a is its people.
• MLS: The Photographer (2)	The Photographer (2) (VO):

walking in the streets of Old Sana'a with camera in one hand and tripod in the other hand- Camera follows him.	Their expressions when they meet new people, guests, photographers like me. Their expressions of friendliness.
• MS: The Photographer (2) continues shooting pictures- Camera still follows him.	The Photographer (2) (VO): As a photographer, anything, which is new...
• LS: The Photographer (2) taking pictures of exciting kids.	The Photographer (2) (VO): or can make a good composition, always appeals to me When I walk around taking pictures in Sana'a, I look for beauty.
• MS: The Photographer (2) from Low Angle in an alley, taking pictures.	The Photographer (2) (VO): Also, peoples' movements in the market... Merchants' movements and expressions.
• MLS: The Photographer (2) enters the market with his camera and equipment bag.	The Photographer (2) (VO): Every time you go there you get a new story. Sana'a always gives you inspiration to portray images.
• CU: Beautifully decorated shisha stick against colorful blurry image of	The Photographer (2) (VO): Everything in it enchants you. Its buildings, its people, the general

the market – TILT DOWN.	atmosphere. Even the way its clouds form above you.
• Continuation of first part of film until the end of pt.1.	
Part 2.	
• MLS: The Poet (prominent Yemeni poet and academic) in an old open Amphitheatre in Sana'a.	<u>VO The Poet</u>: I would like to say a lot about this historic city, which is one of the oldest remaining cities on our planet. It did not disappear despite the many centuries that have passed, and the various dire situations suffered by it.
• MS: The Poet in his office.	<u>The Poet</u>: Old historians say it is the first city built after Noah's flood. And that the first man to put the city's foundation is Sam, son of Noah. That is why it was called, and remains, until now, to be called "Sam City".
• MS: The Poet in the library displaying some of his books on Sana'a.	<u>VO The Poet</u>: I wrote, and I still write about this city that lives in my soul. In my mind it is connected to my childhood memories. I saw this city for the first time when I was six years old. I moved to it from the countryside, from a small

	village.
• MLS: The Poet looking towards houses in old Sana'a.	<u>VO The Poet</u>: The moment I first saw it I was mesmerized by its architecture and historic buildings. It fascinated me in my childhood, and I embraced those magical moments, and began to make them mine for years. Truth is, since I started writing poetry and Sana'a is an obsession of huge dimensions. It lives in my heart and soul.
• **Different shots alternating between The Poet's direct interview and his VO with Sana'a images juxtaposed in a way that is consistent with what he says and displaying contrasts as in the best traditions of montage.**	<u>VO The Poet</u>: The city is fading away. More than one city came out from the womb of old Sana'a, Fortunately, the Old Sana'a, the city that lives in my soul and in the hearts of those who loved and still love it, that particular Sana'a lives, confined in its old geographical framework, and to some extent, still preserves its architecture, its shape, and way of life. While this deterioration stretches outside its old borders, this new expansion has some aspects to it: modern and beautiful buildings, aristocratic neighborhoods etc. Nevertheless, they lack the historical architectural style that was characterized by Sana'a. I figured I wish I could be less afraid of these negative aspects .. this careless expansion within the old city's parameters. Old Sana'a was surrounded by orchards and gardens, farms,

| | mountains and shaded trees, but unfortunately it is overshadowed by un-systematic urbanization without architectural study .. Chaos... Striking chaos, with the exception of some of the neighborhoods that I referred to. From here negativity germinates and multiplies.
Concrete is not used in few of these houses and only in some neighborhoods as the city expands. But there are also many neighborhoods where population still uses stone and bricks for construction, which can be considered a kind of extension of the historic Old Sana'a, but in a narrow and limited framework.

This city in fact exists in myself and inhabited in my conscience, and if I read something about it it's added to my reminiscence, so the impact is less than can be imagined. When I invoke Sana'a it really evokes my childhood .. Sana'a 's old neighborhoods .. Sana'a's holidays .. events .. The Sana'a that lives in myself and not the one I read about, whether in prose or poetry or historical reading. For me, sometimes it would be what is published or written about the legends of Sana'a a catalyst and motivation to write, but mainly I depend on those images that Sana'a left in me at our first meeting, my first wonderment, the first moment my eyes hit its architecture, those |

minarets, domes, streets. The truth is that nobody so far did justice to Sana'a, especially in art, in the movie business, and if Pasolini, the famous Italian director has introduced her in his film "One Thousand and One Nights" some deviant modernization shocked him and impeded him from displaying her as he wanted to. That is why Sana'a still needs an artist ... a film director who can display her historical poignancy... her rhythm and old melodies shattered from her houses' windows... engraved in her stones ... and flowing through the corridors of her old houses.

Unfortunately, there are many things I do not like in Sana'a: the entrance of cars, which threatens the city itself ... Sewage that has not yet been fixed, which threatens to drown the city. These are order-of-the-day issues. Successive official bodies indicate that the city is in grave danger and that it might be exposed to collapse at any time. We might wake up one morning and discover that this historic city does not exist anymore. UNESCO also warns. Also, the use of synthetic paint which is not the typical paint of this city's buildings... Hygiene is no longer as it was. Sana'a was very clean. When Ibn Battuta visited her, he said that it is the cleanest city in the world, that rainwater is being conducted down into streams and

	nothing of it remains. The streets were paved with stone. Now those were dislodged and became dust. In this city there is a lot that makes you grieve, and there is a lot that really hurts. FADE OUT
• MS: The Artist hands mixing colours on a colour palette.	The Artist VO: I moved to Sana'a as a child. I expected Sana'a to be quite different: a modern capital with skyscrapers such as the European cities. But I was surprised that it is very old, with a history whose importance I was not aware of at the time.
• MS: Her face while painting on a canvas.	The Artist VO: When I became a teenager, and I started drawing at the time, I liked a lot old Sana'a, and I used to walk in its streets a lot, I visited and admired its silver handicraft shops, but my real relationship with Sana'a began at high school.
• MLS: The Artist speaking to the camera in her atelier.	The Artist: The true relationship with this city began when I became aware of its importance. I became aware that the city personified its inhabitants to a large degree, and that the houses of old Sana'a

	resemble its inhabitants very much. These houses are part of the Yemeni human identity.
• Different Shots of Sana'a.	<u>The Artist VO:</u> An emotional relationship began between the city and me and I started collecting, even at the time, whatever was written about Sana'a, and began to read Al-Humayni poetry of Al-Aanisi, Sharaf al-Din and Al-Ansi. My relationship with the city has become somewhat intimate.
• **Different shots alternating between The Artist's direct interview and her VO with Sana'a images juxtaposed in a way that is consistent with what she says, and displaying contrasts as in the best traditions of montage.** • **Shots of some of her paintings.**	<u>The Artist VO:</u> My Master of Arts degree dissertation was about "The Symbolic Dimension of the Decoration of Facades of the Traditional Architecture in Sana'a". The study was very complex to the point that when I discussed it my supervising professors suggested that it be developed to a Ph.D. research, but the bureaucratic system in our country did not allow it, so I had to change the subject of my doctoral thesis. I became interested in

	studying symbolism and decoration and their relationship with philosophical concepts, and this was because of my previous study of philosophy and arts at a bachelor's level. Therefore, this issue was important to me. I also began to include images of the city in my paintings: the city and its houses as I see them. A lot of art critics have written that I see the city through the eyes of a child. The houses in my paintings were simple and moving and human-like, moving with the movement of people within the paintings.
• **Different shots alternating between The Artist's direct interview and her VO with Sana'a images juxtaposed in a way that is consistent with what she says and displaying contrasts as in the best traditions of montage.** • **Shots of some of her paintings.**	The Artist VO: The creatures in my paintings are part of the city and its houses. I was also inspired by the folklore. You can find a lot of folk tales in my work, not literally, but by the presence of a myth flavor in some of my work, and I was very keen to inset the animals amid these houses.

	This city has a clear distinctiveness. It is a living city .. a city that has not been transformed into a museum like many of the historic cities in the world. As you can see, people live in old Sana'a, co-exist with these houses, and try to incorporate it with some modern features from the inside that make it suitable for living. That is why it remains alive and its people did not leave her, as did many people in other cities.
	There are two sides to Sana'a: a positive side and a negative side. The expansion of the city is an important issue because we cannot restrain life in an ancient city that cannot accommodate people. There are houses that are being built with traditional old-fashion designs, and perhaps we see in many areas in Sana'a that some people are building very large villas in the old Yemeni style even though in their interiors we see some modern features.

	Nevertheless, they insist that these houses retain the traditional motifs of Old Sana'a like the uniquely Yemeni stained glass windows (Qamariyat) and the traditional portals .. The use of stones that come in many colors and forms. But there are sometimes extraneous features. We find houses that do not belong to the city and to the spirit of the city. Houses, for example, with roofs of brick where the local features disappear, some of them look like typical European houses or with Arabic architecture, for example. There are areas where you feel like you're in Jordan or in Beirut, and this is extraneous, for a city like Sana'a, to go out and draw peculiarity from constructions that are not like Sana'a's. Nevertheless, I believe that this issue is due to the tastes of house owners and architects. Sometimes the distorted perceptions of these architects forget that this city needs to develop from

	the inside and not to Recruit new features from abroad.
• **Different shots alternating between The Artist's direct interview and her VO with Sana'a images juxtaposed in a way that is consistent with what she says and displaying contrasts as in the best traditions of montage.**	<u>The Artist VO</u>: I think that the Yemeni society does not oppress women poets or artists. The problem in Yemeni society is with music and acting. People are still confined to their conservative views of these two professions. People view painters with great respect, even simple people. I think I did not face any problem with Yemeni street as a fine artist. Contrariwise, I noticed a lot of respect, and since the first art critics wrote good words about my work which I may not have deserved... Society highly and warmly welcomed the presence of a female artist within the city. There is a lot of encouragement and support.
• **Different shots alternating between The Artist's direct interview and her VO with Sana'a**	<u>The Artist VO</u>: Despite my love for this city, there are many things I do not

images juxtaposed in a way that is consistent with what she says and displaying contrasts as in the best traditions of montage.	like about it. Sana'a is a closed city and maintains a fierce traditional culture and sometimes rejects all forms of modernity. For example, young people are suffering. I am not just talking about Fine Artists; I mean the nascent young people who are working in Graphic Design and animation and new forms of modernist installations. These young artists suffer with the city; the public does not understand them. Traditional forms of expression are required in Sana'a more. Also, traditional archaic music is prevailing. Music in Sana'a has not evolved at all since tens of years. We are still with the oud, and with traditional styles of playing instruments, and traditional singing, and this is also another problem.
• **Different shots alternating between The Artist's direct interview and her VO with Sana'a images juxtaposed in a way that is consistent with what she says and displaying contrasts as**	The Artist VO: I would like to say that the Sana'a for me and for many of the artists here is like a jewel ... a Jewel in the hands of a Collier, as we say

in the best traditions of montage.	sometimes. A jewel that just needs some kind of polish and attention. Sana'a is a unique city and I remember some friends, foreign authors, who saw Sana'a for the first time, said that they have been transported to the Middle Ages. Pasolini came here with his Art Directors and set decorators, but when he saw the city, he told them: we do not need to add any, just remove all modern cars from the scenes. Dreaming of fairy tale cities, you should find that there is a real fairy tale city that exists. For this reason, it should be at the top of Sana'a concerns.
• **CU. FM Presenter speaking to the radio microphone.**	FM Presenter: Good evening everyone. Hope you are enjoying this evening. It is 8pm. Make sure you spend it with your loved ones, because nights are just amazing here