

## Sound and Fury. Lending an Ear to Francis Bacon in *The Shout* (dir. Jerzy Skolimowski, 1978, UK)

Nicholas Chare

Volume 10, numéro 1, juin 2023

Du disque à l'oeuvre  
The Recording at Work

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1101788ar>  
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1101788ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Observatoire interdisciplinaire de création et recherche en musique (OICRM)

ISSN

2368-7061 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Chare, N. (2023). Sound and Fury. Lending an Ear to Francis Bacon in *The Shout* (dir. Jerzy Skolimowski, 1978, UK). *Revue musicale OICRM*, 10(1), 53–78.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1101788ar>

Résumé de l'article

*The Shout* (1978), réalisé par Jerzy Skolimowski, est un film d'horreur qui se concentre sur un homme, Charles Crossley, capable d'exécuter un cri si intense que ses effets submergent ceux qui l'entendent. Comme le suggère le titre du film, les phénomènes acoustiques sont au coeur du récit. Un autre protagoniste clé, Anthony Fielding, compositeur d'avant-garde, teste différents bruits en réalisant des oeuvres de musique concrète. Des reproductions photographiques de peintures de Francis Bacon sont exposées dans le studio d'enregistrement de Fielding et symbolisent, d'une part, ses sources d'inspiration. D'autre part, les oeuvres de Bacon informent aussi la mise en scène de *The Shout*, constituant ainsi une partie du tissu du film – ce ne sont pas de simples accessoires. Dans cet essai, je soutiendrai que l'esthétique du film, incluant sa bande-son et sa mise en scène, doit être comprise comme une forme d'écriture artistique qui imite des éléments de l'esthétique de Bacon, une esthétique que je considère comme *queer* et enracinée dans l'intérêt de l'artiste pour le BDSM.

# Sound and Fury. Lending an Ear to Francis Bacon in *The Shout* (dir. Jerzy Skolimowski, 1978, UK)

Nicholas Chare

## Abstract

*The Shout* (1978), directed by Jerzy Skolimowski, is a horror film that centres upon a man, Charles Crossley, capable of executing a shout so intense that its effects overwhelm those who hear it. As the film's title suggests, acoustic phenomena are central to the narrative. Another key protagonist, Anthony Fielding, is an avant-garde composer. He experiments with various noises as he makes works of *musique concrète*. Photographic reproductions of paintings by Francis Bacon are displayed in Fielding's recording studio and, on one level, symbolize his sources of inspiration. Bacon's works, however, also inform the mise-en-scène of *The Shout*, comprising part of the fabric of the film. They are not simple props. In this essay, I will argue that the film's aesthetic, including its soundtrack and mise-en-scène, should be understood as a form of art writing that imitates elements of Bacon's aesthetic, an aesthetic I argue is queer and rooted in the artist's interest in BDSM.

Keywords: art writing; BDSM; First Nations Australians; queer acoustics; shouting.

## Résumé

*The Shout* (1978), réalisé par Jerzy Skolimowski, est un film d'horreur qui se concentre sur un homme, Charles Crossley, capable d'exécuter un cri si intense que ses effets submergent ceux qui l'entendent. Comme le suggère le titre du film, les phénomènes acoustiques sont au cœur du récit. Un autre protagoniste clé, Anthony Fielding, compositeur d'avant-garde, teste différents bruits en réalisant des œuvres de musique concrète. Des reproductions photographiques de peintures de Francis Bacon sont exposées dans le studio d'enregistrement de Fielding et symbolisent, d'une part, ses sources d'inspiration. D'autre part, les œuvres de Bacon informent aussi la mise en scène de *The Shout*, constituant ainsi une partie du tissu du film – ce ne sont pas de simples accessoires. Dans cet essai, je soutiendrai que l'esthétique du film, incluant sa bande-son et sa mise en scène, doit être comprise comme une forme d'écriture artistique qui imite des éléments de l'esthétique de Bacon, une esthétique que je considère comme *queer* et enracinée dans l'intérêt de l'artiste pour le BDSM.

Mots clés : acoustique queer ; Australiens des Premières Nations ; BDSM ; cris ; écriture artistique.

## INTRODUCTION: INTO THE MOUTH OF MADNESS

Robert Graves's short story 'The Shout' tells the tale of a mysterious man, Charles, who befriends Richard and Rachel Fielding, a young couple living in a small coastal village. Graves wrote the story in 1926 while in Cairo and revised it in London the following year (although it was not published until 1929) (Figure 1). He asserted that the story was true rather than a work of fiction or an UFA film-scenario.<sup>1</sup> A film adaptation of the story, directed by Jerzy Skolimowski, was released as *The Shout* in 1978. It is frequently categorized in the horror genre.

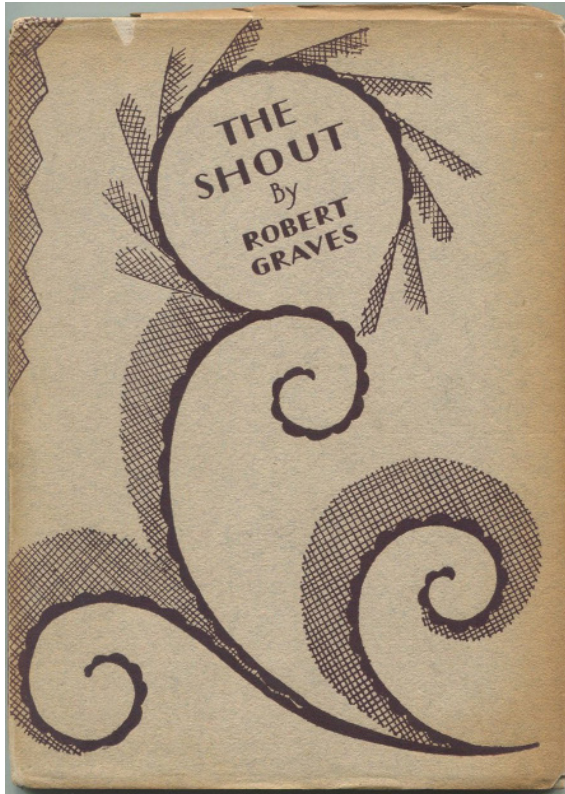


Figure 1: Robert Graves, *The Shout*, 1929.

Graves's tale is narrated by Crossley, a patient in a mental health hospital who is keeping score at a cricket match, to a visitor acting as the other scorer. In Crossley's story, Charles seems to possess supernatural powers and gains a hold over Rachel by stealing a buckle from her shoe. Richard is a musician and Charles excites his curiosity by claiming to possess a shout that can be fatal to anyone within a certain radius who hears it. He explains that he learnt this shout from the "chief devil" of the Northern Territory while living in Australia. Richard wants to experience the shout,

<sup>1</sup> UFA or Universum Film-Aktiengesellschaft was a German film company that produced a number of highly regarded films during the Weimar Republic. In this context, Graves may have had the 1918 film *The Eyes of the Mummy* (*Die Augen Der Mumie Ma*) in mind. Directed by Ernst Lubitsch, it is a costume drama set in Egypt and the narrative has some moments of crossover with "The Shout," particularly through the presence of a figure with hypnotic powers, Radu, who mesmerizes a woman. As Selma Karayalcin (2011, p. 142) has recognized, Charles seems to have a hypnotic power over Rachel.

so Charles takes him to some remote sand dunes where he demonstrates it. His ears protected by wax, Richard blacks out when he hears the bellow but is not killed by it. Upon reviving, he finds his hand resting upon a stone which he picks up. It makes him think of shoemaking. He returns home. Mulling things over, he comes to believe that the stone holds the soul of the local cobbler and that the souls of all those in the village are held by stones in the vicinity.

Later, Charles instructs Rachel to sleep with him and she agrees to. Distraught, Richard rushes to the dunes intent on smashing the stone containing Charles's soul. He has a pang of conscience, however, and decides to smash his own instead. Richard selects what he thinks is his stone, one about the size of a cricket ball, and breaks it with a hammer. As nothing happens to him, he supposes it was madness to believe that the stones housed souls. On his way back to Rachel, he encounters a group of men in the village who are talking about Charles, he is no longer all there and has been taken to the local psychiatric hospital. The narrator explains: "Crossley's soul was cracked in four pieces and I'm a madman" (Graves 2008, p. 20). He has, for the first time, referred to Charles as Crossley revealing that he is telling a story about himself. A thunderstorm interrupts the cricket match and the head of the hospital enters the scoring box where he argues with Crossley. The latter threatens to shout so the other scorer flees. Lightning strikes the box. The corpses of Crossley and the medical officer are found inside: "Crossley's body was rigid, the doctor's was crouched in a corner, his hands to his ears" (*ibid.*, p. 21).

#### THE SHOUT AS ADAPTATION

The film adaptation differs from the story in that it complicates the love triangle. Anthony, the name given to Richard's character in the film, is having an affair with the local cobbler's wife. He is not simply a musician but is shown to be an avant-garde composer, an advocate of *musique concrète*. In a nod to the author, the scorer at the cricket match who hears the tale, unnamed in the short story, is called Robert Graves. At one point, Crossley plays footsie with Graves, an act which, as Adam Lowenstein (2014, p. 523) suggests, connotes queerness. In this context, the choice of Alan Bates to play Crossley was a canny decision as he was well known for the homoerotic wrestling scene he performed with Oliver Reed in Ken Russell's 1967 adaptation of D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*.<sup>2</sup>

The film strengthens some of the themes present in the story such as sound's potentially destructive aspects. It draws attention to noise much more frequently.

---

2 It was in 1967 that homosexuality was decriminalized for men in England and Wales. For a discussion of the impact of the wrestling scene, see Chapter 8 of Barry Forshaw's (2015) *Sex and Film*. Bates also plays a sexually ambiguous character (repressed homosexuality is subtly implied) in the 1962 John Schlesinger film *A Kind of Loving*. Donald Spoto's (2007) biography of the actor discusses his male and female lovers. John Hurt plays a gay character (the writer Quentin Crisp) in the 1975 film *The Naked Civil Servant*, directed by Jack Gold. Susannah York was famously cast as a lesbian in the 1968 Robert Aldrich film *The Killing of Sister George*. The three main actors in *The Shout* were therefore each associated extratextually with queer roles at a time when such roles were still relatively rare. This may contribute to *The Shout*'s queer atmosphere.

Acoustic phenomena, such as glass shattering and doors slamming, are repeated (Figure 2). Sounds of insects buzzing and of the wind blowing recur. *The Shout* exploits the emerging sound technology of Dolby Stereo to craft the score and the shout.<sup>3</sup> When first released, it was an acoustic cinematic event, showcasing Dolby's capacity to reshape audience perceptions regarding the importance of film sound. Skolimowski has discussed the use of Dolby to create the yell, noting that the main sound was of "a man shouting like hell" but that this was one of 40 or more tracks that were combined to produce the intense vocalisation that is the shout. The other tracks included sounds such as "Niagara Falls, the launching of the Moon rocket, everything" (Strick 1978, p. 147).



Figure 2: Shattering a glass with sound. *The Shout* (Jerzy Skolimowski, Recorded Picture Company, 1978).

Although considerable emphasis is usually afforded the shout itself in the story's cinematic adaptation, the impact of Dolby manifests equally strongly in the broader soundtrack. Dolby can enhance faint sounds, giving them greater fidelity and clarity (Deslandes 1995). It has made it easier to render cinematic 'environments', producing acoustic mise-en-scènes (Beck 2016, p. 204). This is particularly noticeable when Anthony is shown at work, composing in his sound studio. Michel Chion associates Dolby with hyperrealism, granting greater accuracy and richness to film sound (Chion 1981, p. xii). Chion also believes Dolby impacts cinematic temporality, fostering a pressing sense of the present moment, and additionally encourages a more passive use of sounds that emerge from out of shot (these no longer function as narrative drivers but simply to delimit a given space or to contribute a sense of atmosphere).<sup>4</sup>

3 « The Shout », IMDb, [www.imdb.com/title/tt0078259/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078259/), accessed October 12, 2022.

4 These two characteristics are linked to mainstream narrative cinema by Chion and seem less representative of the use of Dolby sound in *The Shout*.





Figure 3: The sound of a wasp buzzing. *The Shout* (Jerzy Skolimowski, Recorded Picture Company, 1978).

The film *The Shout* also differs from the story in that the modern artist Francis Bacon is a central point of reference.<sup>5</sup> In 1929 when ‘The Shout’ was first published, Bacon was an interior designer creating furniture. The only art referenced in the short story is seemingly classicist. In Graves’s tale, Rachel tells Richard she had a dream similar to his, about a Black man “who wore a blue coat like that picture of Captain Cook” (Graves 2008, p. 9).<sup>6</sup> The Black man in the blue jacket, part of naval dress uniform, also appears in the film adaptation. The actor in this non-speaking role is uncredited, another nameless ‘exotic’ extra burdened with representing alterity.<sup>7</sup> The First Nations Australian of the film, as a figment of the European imaginary, functions to signal primitivism, to stand for mystery and difference. The shout from which the film takes its title is said to originate with this man, it is a vocal skill that Crossley learnt while living with First Nations Australians and has now brought back to England. Acoustic references to the music of Australia’s First Peoples are also present. In one scene, Rachel is cutting roses and the noise of a wasp buzzing

5 Skolimowski has painted since the 1960s and some his works have been compared to Bacon. Tadeusz Brzozowski, Włodzimierz Ksiązek, Gerhard Richter, and Bogusław Szwach are among other possible influences. For a discussion of his art, see Aleksander’s Hudzik’s 2022 review of a retrospective of Skolimowski’s works: Aleksander Hudzik (2022), “Exhibition. Jerzy Skolimowski. In Painting I Can Do Anything”, *Manggha*, <https://manggha.pl/en/exhibition/jerzy-skolimowski-in-painting-i-can-do-any-thing>, accessed March 10, 2023.

6 There are several paintings of Captain Cook wearing a navy-blue jacket, including E. Philips Fox’s *Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770* (1902) and Nathaniel Dance-Holland’s 1776 portrait. It is probably the portrait that Rachel has in mind as it has been displayed in London since the early nineteenth century. In the portrait, Cook points to the coast of Australia. It is a painting that indexes colonial violence, showing a Britisher with blood on his hands. Rachel’s dream replaces the colonizer with the colonized, yet dressed in European garb, creating an ambivalent figure split across two cultures (mirroring Crossley).

7 I have been unable to establish the actor’s identity. As an embodiment of the Black Other in the White imagination, the naval officer can be compared to named Black actors such as Bolaji Badejo and Kevin Peter Hall, who appeared in *Alien* (1979) and *Predator* (1987) respectively, where they are made to figure radical alterity. In the films they are rendered unrecognisable, effaced as subjects beneath makeup and prosthetics, anonymized in another way. For a discussion of the typecasting of the Black man as alien, see Chare (2012, p. 164).

can be heard (see Figure 3). The droning is reminiscent of a didgeridoo. The scene cuts to the studio where Anthony is recording a wasp imprisoned in a jar. He has a metronome that sounds like clapsticks. The deliberately cultivated acoustic reference to Indigenous music of Australia as fantasized by Europeans, like the shout itself, seems designed to register as acoustic Otherness.

There is no shout practiced among Australia's First Nations peoples. Unlike Graves's short story, however, the film does reference a known practice, bone pointing (which was performed by *kurdaitcha* men in the Northern Territory into the 1950s) (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Bone pointing. *The Shout* (Jerzy Skolimowski, Recorded Picture Company, 1978).

In the ritual, a bone is pointed at a victim, a gesture that will cause their eventual death. The man in the naval jacket seems to possess a killing bone which he points towards the camera, towards the film's audience. Crossley is also shown with a bone when he encounters Anthony and Rachel, as well as when narrating his story in the scoring booth. He can be read as representing a product of interethnic contact, as forming a European fantasy of the effects of embracing cultural hybridity. One way in which Crossley's mixed cultural heritage manifests is acoustically, he speaks with a cut-glass English accent but is also capable of the shout, a vocalisation that is alien and Other. His voice, by and large familiar, also possesses an air of mystery.

## TAKING SOUNDINGS

Both the short story and the film have received considerable critical attention. Grevel Lindop (2001) seeks to trace the literary influences of the story and foreground links with Graves's later work *The White Goddess* which explores the roots of literary creativity. Virginia Cotterrell Kenny (1999) reads the tale as, in part, a response to Graves's time at the military hospital of Craiglockhart where he convalesced after being injured in fighting during the First World War. There, Graves was treated by William Rivers, the neurologist and anthropologist. Rivers had some sympathy for Sigmund Freud's ideas as his 1917 paper 'The Repression of War Experience' demonstrates. Upon its publication ([Rivers 1918](#)), the paper was received enthusiastically by Freud's acolyte Ernest Jones. Graves seems to have been less open to Freud's

ideas and to Rivers's use of them. The figure of the medical officer in the story is probably a caricature of the neurologist. Crossley observes of the healthcare professional: "I invent significant dreams for him to interpret; I find he likes me to put in snakes and apple pies" (Graves 2008, p. 8). For Kenny, Graves' short story attests to the horrors he witnessed in the trenches and represents a kind of traumatic residue from his war experiences.

In relation to the film, William Johnson (1979) provides a sophisticated early reading that notes possible psychoanalytical and social historical interpretations but prefers to understand *The Shout* as a work of moral philosophy (exploring absolutism versus determinism and engaging with determinism versus probabilism). In his 1979 review of the film, Richard Combs notes the importance of nonnarrative elements, describing "the camera's insistence on dwelling on [...] blankly foreboding spaces" which he reads as acting as magical correspondences (Combs 1978, p. 143). For Combs, some of these correspondences suggest affinities between English culture and that of First Nations Australians as the film imagines them. They also serve to disrupt the "smooth continuity of the story" (*ibid.*). More recently, echoing Johnson, Ewa Mazierska (2010) has suggested *The Shout* lends itself to psychoanalytic interpretation as a tale of Oedipal anxiety and can be readily understood as a critique of the failings of bourgeois culture. She also reads the film as Skolimowski engaging in self-reflection. In an essay from 2014, Adam Lowenstein examines *The Shout* as an expression of ethnographic surrealism, a critical attitude, and a mode of representation that encourages unexpected juxtapositions. Like Combs, he picks up on the use of repeated, related imagery to trouble narrative order (Lowenstein 2014, p. 532).<sup>8</sup> Lowenstein also draws attention to the film's depiction of a porous boundary between dream and reality and between self and other. In Graves's short story, Crossley claims near the end that he is Richard. In the film, the actions of Crossley, Anthony and Rachel sometimes mirror each other, potentially suggesting the trio embody a self divided rather than three discrete individuals.

Both Lowenstein and Mazierska refer to the use of Francis Bacon's paintings in *The Shout*. Copies of three of Bacon's works, *Head VI* (1949), *Lying Figure* (1969), and *Paralytic Child Walking on All Fours (From Muybridge)* (1961), can be seen in the sound studio (see Figures 5-7).<sup>9</sup>

8 Lowenstein (2022) also discusses *The Shout* in Chapter 2 of his book *Horror Film and Otherness*.

9 *Paralytic Child Walking on All Fours (From Muybridge)* is henceforth referred to as *Paralytic Child*. A work by Edvard Munch is also visible, *Vampire II* (c. 1895).





Figure 5: Francis Bacon, Head VI, 1949. *The Shout* (Jerzy Skolimowski, Recorded Picture Company, 1978).



Figure 6: Francis Bacon, Lying Figure, 1969. *The Shout* (Jerzy Skolimowski, Recorded Picture Company, 1978).



Figure 7: Francis Bacon, Paralytic Child Walking on All Fours (From Muybridge), 1961. *The Shout* (Jerzy Skolimowski, Recorded Picture Company, 1978).

Mazierska (2010, p. 136) suggests the painters “twisted, suffering figures convey the suffering and weakness of Anthony” and signal the invisible forces that hurt both Anthony and Crossley. Lowenstein discusses Bacon at some length. He reads the paintings as symbolizing, on one level, Anthony’s “alienated, conflicted soul” (Lowenstein 2014, p. 531). He also notes how references to Bacon extend beyond the literal reproductions displayed in the studio and contribute to the *mise-en-scène*. For him, Skolimowski exploits this practice to challenge habits of meaning making, thus unsettling the viewer and prompting them to continually question their identifications and understandings (*ibid.*, pp. 532–533). This renders the director an exponent of ethnographic surrealism.<sup>10</sup> Through the use of unexpected juxtapositions and cultivated incongruities, Skolimowski brings into question seeming normalities and stabilities.

At one point, Rachel Fielding’s movements echo *Paralytic Child*, a reproduction of which is tacked to a loudspeaker in Anthony’s studio. In doing this, she simultaneously replicates Eadweard Muybridge’s photographs of the child from the ‘Pathological Locomotion’ section of his *Animal Locomotion* of 1887 and, by extension, the child’s own locomotion. Lowenstein identifies the following questions that are posed by this incarnation of the painting within the film:

Is painting possessing film here, or vice versa? Is this an image of Rachel’s actions or Anthony’s imagination of her actions? Is Rachel under the influence of Crossley’s magic or is she responding to Anthony’s split loyalties, captured so hauntingly in Bacon’s painting through divided visual structures? Or is she somewhere outside and above the two men, as it seems in the film’s beginning and end when she appears to hold more knowledge about her relationship with each of them than either do on their own? (*ibid.*)

For him, the aim is not to answer such questions but rather to create a situation of continual tension, of disquiet, doubt and irresolution. Bacon’s work is particularly potent in this context since, as Lowenstein emphasizes, the painter has been referred to as a ‘modern surrealist’ (*ibid.* p. 531).<sup>11</sup> Surrealism is associated with illogic and the unexpected.

Skolimowski’s own take on the references to Bacon in *The Shout* is that the painter’s works resonate strongly with Anthony’s character. The movement in the paintings, the twisting and squeezing, links them “with the masochism of the composer, who has to go through very painful experiences in his work” (Strick 1978, p. 147).<sup>12</sup>

---

10 For an extended discussion of the nature of “ethnographic surrealism” see Clifford (1981).

11 The most notable reading of Bacon’s work as surrealist is probably that of Dawn Ades (1985). András Farkas (2002, p. 130) argues that, at least stylistically, Bacon is not a surrealist.

12 Skolimowski understands masochism here in the broad sense of deriving pleasure from difficulty. My own readings of Bacon have privileged his engagement with sadism and masochism in the sexual sense of the terms, arguing that the artist’s corpus is shaped by his interest in BDSM. I examine this at length in my book *After Francis Bacon* (2012). Inspired by some remarks made by John Paul Ricco, aspects of *After Francis Bacon* were devoted to the possibility of embracing a radical masochism in my encounters with the paintings, seeking not to make them mean, not to dictate terms to them, but rather to submit to them, to let them take the lead in relation to issues of sense and significance. My prose, however, remained too controlling and the experiment was unsuccessful.

Anthony identifies with the ‘maimed’ figure in *Paralytic Child*. He too is ‘tortured’, racked by uncertainty. Skolimowski also suggests that at some unconscious level the painting acts as a provocation to Rachel, who will come to embody the insecurity it articulates. For the director, then, the artworks provide a shorthand for affective states and contribute to the chains of associations or correspondences operating within the film.

Both Skolimowski and Lowenstein connect the use of the Bacon paintings with Anthony’s profession as a composer. Skolimowski detects resonances between Bacon’s art and Anthony’s desperation; for him, they are on the same wavelength. Lowenstein suggests *The Shout* sounds Bacon’s paintings, exploiting their acoustic suggestiveness. He asks if Anthony’s dog Buzz, with their vocally imitative name, is a “manifestation of the painting as sound” (Lowenstein 2014, p. 531). It is this linking of Bacon’s paintings with sound that I wish to develop here, attending in particular to the emphasis placed on screaming in his works. I will suggest that both the scream and the shout can be heard to embody a queer potential.

In *After Francis Bacon*, I have already briefly discussed how noise connects Bacon’s painting to *The Shout* (Chare 2012).<sup>13</sup> There, I sought to read the Baconian scream in psychoanalytic terms as an abject residue of the Real (*ibid.*, p. 70). I examined the vocalisation in the context of a broader art historical exploration of the role of noise in Bacon’s corpus. The artist’s works provided a way to think through the nature of noise as distinct from sound, with noise conceived as a non-thing not yet shaped into sense, as uncountoured and uninterpreted. Here, I am more interested in the singular queerness of Bacon’s acoustics and how they resonate with the yell at the heart of *The Shout*.

## FILM ON BACON

*The Shout* is far from the only film to reference Bacon’s work. *Batman* (dir. Tim Burton, USA, 1989), *Last Tango in Paris* (dir. Bernardo Bertolucci, Italy/France, 1972) and *Theorem* (*Teorema*) (dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italy, 1968), show works by Bacon either on display in a gallery or reproduced in the pages of an art book. In *Theorem*, the character known as the Visitor employs a book of Bacon’s paintings as part of his seduction of the artist Pietro. Among the works shown are *Two Figures* (1953) and *Two Figures in the Grass* (1954) which can be read as portraying lovemaking or tussling (or a combination of the two).<sup>14</sup> In *Theorem*, Bacon’s paintings are a shorthand for homosexuality. They are specular, reflecting potential desires and their fulfilment. James Norton reads the paintings as employed by the Visitor to ‘tenderize’ Pietro.<sup>15</sup>

---

13 The book grew out of an article, “Regarding the Pain” (Chare 2005), that was based on a paper I gave at the 2003 conference *Warp. Woof – Aurality, Musicality, Textuality* organized by Barbara Engh in Leeds.

14 For a discussion of Pasolini’s use of Bacon’s work in *Theorem*, see Hava Aldouby (2020, p. 231).

15 James Norton (2008), “Theorem. Pasolini’s Family Affair”, *Vertigo*, vol. 3, n° 9 (Spring-Summer), [www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo\\_magazine/volume-3-issue-9-spring-summer-2008/theorem-pasolin-is-family-affair/](http://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/volume-3-issue-9-spring-summer-2008/theorem-pasolin-is-family-affair/), accessed October 13, 2022.

The opening credits of *Last Tango in Paris* feature two of Bacon's paintings, *Double Portrait of Lucien Freud and Frank Auerbach* and *Study for Portrait (Isabel Rawsthorne)*, both from 1964. Bernardo Bertolucci claims that seeing the Bacon retrospective held at the Grand Palais from October 1971 to January 1972 shaped his vision for the film as he found himself inspired by what he interpreted as a vision of "carnal despair" and the sense of danger the pictures exuded (Bertolucci 2014, p. 3). The two Bacon paintings at the start of the film are intended to convey this danger. Bertolucci invited the film's cinematographer, set designer and costumier to view the exhibition. He also toured it with Marlon Brando (who plays the role of Paul) as he wanted the actor to make his character like the portraits, with their "faces eaten by something from within themselves" (Bertolucci 1987, p. 118). Additionally, Bertolucci indicated that the formal arrangement of the paintings at the retrospective, the distance between them, "a little like planets in the boundlessness of space," carried into the film (Bertolucci 2014, p. 53).

Bacon's 1954 painting *Figure with Meat* appears in *Batman* where it is the sole artwork saved from destruction when the criminal known as the Joker embarks on an orgy of iconoclasm at the Gotham City Museum. In *Batman*, the Joker spares the Bacon painting in a gesture that reveals something about his warped personality: he only values ugliness. The painting is therefore a prop employed to showcase his psychological disposition. The makeup used by Heath Ledger in his role as the Joker in *The Dark Knight* (dir. Christopher Nolan, USA/UK, 2008) was also inspired by Bacon's art, specifically by the distortions and colouring of some of his portraits.<sup>16</sup> The film's director Christopher Nolan has identified *Study After Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953) as an influence (Shone 2020, p. 191). He is said to have advised Lindy Hemming (the costume designer for the film) to use the screaming pope as a source of insight into the essence of the Joker (Jesser & Pourroy 2012, p. 123). One story has it that when Nolan met the composer Hans Zimmer to discuss the score for *The Dark Knight*, Zimmer had a copy of a Bacon painting taped to his computer monitor, as he was using it as "visual inspiration" while composing music for another project.<sup>17</sup> Nolan, however, had long been aware of Bacon's works, first encountering them as a teenager (Shone 2020, p. 190). He views Bacon's art as reflecting "barely contained horror, this idea of the primal barely held in by the structures of society" (*ibid.*, p. 189). Nolan also notes the artist's use of voids and gaps, implying an indebtedness to formal aspects of the works.<sup>18</sup> *The Dark Knight*, is an effort to 'echo'

---

16 Charlie Wherlton (2013), "How Francis Bacon Influenced 'The Dark Knight'", *Art History Abroad*, [www.arthistoryabroad.com/2013/12/how-francis-bacon-influenced-the-dark-knight-by-aha-alum-charlie-wherlton/](http://www.arthistoryabroad.com/2013/12/how-francis-bacon-influenced-the-dark-knight-by-aha-alum-charlie-wherlton/), accessed October 13, 2022.

17 "How A Painting On Hans Zimmer's Desk Inspired the Look of 'The Joker'", *Score. A Film Music Documentary*, [www.score-movie.com/single-post/2017/02/13/how-a-painting-on-hans-zimmers-desk-inspired-the-look-of-the-joker](http://www.score-movie.com/single-post/2017/02/13/how-a-painting-on-hans-zimmers-desk-inspired-the-look-of-the-joker), accessed October 13, 2022. Zimmer has also described Bacon's paintings as an influence for the score of *The Dark Knight*. See Alex Billington (2008), "Interview. Hans Zimmer and James Newton Howard on the Dark Knight's Score", *FirstShowing*, [www.firstshowing.net/2008/interview-hans-zimmer-and-james-newton-howard-on-the-dark-knights-score/](http://www.firstshowing.net/2008/interview-hans-zimmer-and-james-newton-howard-on-the-dark-knights-score/), accessed October 13, 2022.

18 Tate (2013), "Christopher Nolan Was Inspired by Francis Bacon", YouTube video, <https://youtu.be/u1R4CFUxj9c>, accessed October 19, 2022.



Bacon's paintings cinematically. As an endeavour to capture or reproduce the 'mood' of Bacon's art, it is similar to *The Shout*. The film does not provide an interpretation but rather seeks to replicate the 'feel' of the paintings.<sup>19</sup>

Another film that alludes to Bacon in complex ways is *Herostratus* (dir. Don Levy, UK, 1967), in which stills of the central character, Max, show him with his face blurred and distorted in poses that are reminiscent of portraits by the artist.<sup>20</sup> At one point, these stills are intercut with a scene of a leather-clad woman strolling with an umbrella. The woman with the umbrella is a recurring presence in *Herostratus* as is footage of slaughterhouses and meat lockers, incrementally calling to mind Bacon's *Painting* of 1946 which depicts a figure overshadowed by an umbrella, against a backdrop of a hanging carcass. There is also a scene on a set for a commercial that includes a shot of Max in shadow surrounded by scaffolding, the image redolent of Bacon's *Head VI*. Such visual affinities are employed cumulatively to reinforce a sense of Max's existential angst. The film also juxtaposes an erotic dance with the slaughter of a cow in a way that resonates with Bacon's delight in fleshy stagings of violence. Like *The Dark Knight* and *The Shout*, *Herostratus* can thus be read as an affective homage to the painter.

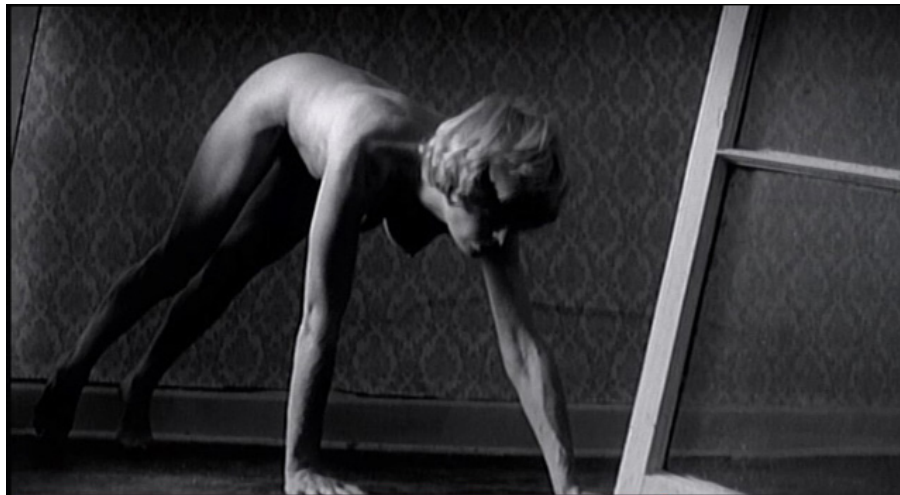


Figure 8: *Tableau vivant*. *The Shout* (Jerzy Skolimowski, Recorded Picture Company, 1978).

In *The Shout*, along with exploiting the suggestiveness of specific Bacon paintings and providing parallels between the distorted images and Anthony's use of distortion in his music, Skolimowski allows some of the works to inhabit the fabric of the film.

19 The chest-bursting alien in *Alien* (dir. Ridley Scott, UK, 1979) was inspired by Bacon's *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of the Crucifixion* but the overall feel of that film is informed by the art of H.R. Giger. For a discussion of the relation of Bacon's work to *Alien*, see Chapter 6 of *After Francis Bacon* (Chare 2012). Jeremy Powell (2014, pp. 313–314) suggests that elements of the mise-en-scène in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* echo Bacon's art.

20 Sarah Street (2020) reads these stills as using the same "extreme distortion" seen in paintings such as Bacon's *Self-Portrait* of 1969 (a picture which he gifted to Valerie Beston). Works by Bacon that predate the film, such as *Portrait of Lucien Freud* (1965), employ comparable disfigurements. One of the stills from *Herostratus* was used as a cover image for Peter Wollen's (1969) *Signs and Meaning in Cinema*.

These *tableaux vivants* function as more than props or prompts (Figure 8; Figure 9).<sup>21</sup> Going beyond supporting character development and aiding the film narrative, they function to draw attention to the queer potential of Bacon's paintings. In this role, they contribute to the film as art writing. Art writing is writing about art that does not seek to explicate but rather, as a practice, to realize (something about) a work by way of processes akin to repetition or imitation (Rifkin 2021, p. 233).<sup>22</sup> This practice bears some similarity to Serge Cardinal's description of a mode of film writing that allows a film to speak for itself through the writer talking in its language.



Figure 9: *Tableau vivant*. *The Shout* (Jerzy Skolimowski, Recorded Picture Company, 1978).

In *Profondeurs de l'écoute et espaces du son*, Cardinal (2018) suggests that if a writer can learn the language of a given film, then analysing it becomes akin to playing a musical instrument.<sup>23</sup> I take this to mean the writer not bending the film to a pre-established framework of interpretation, not making it speak a specific methodological tongue, but rather modifying their approach to reflect its form and wants. In this sense, the film or artwork 'plays' the writer, takes them over, in a process that might be compared to the "silent possession" described by the Finnish musicologist A.O. Väisänen in relation to kantele playing.<sup>24</sup> Väisänen identified this approach as trancelike, with the player "staring into the middle distance" (Väisänen 1990, p. 43).<sup>25</sup>

21 Monika Keska describes how Bacon's paintings are transformed into *tableaux vivants* in *The Shout*. See Monika Keska (2012), "The Visual Sonority of Francis Bacon's Painting in Jerzy Skolimowski's *The Shout* (1978)", <https://artmargins.com/the-visual-sonority-of-francis-bacons-painting-in-jerzy-skolimowskis-the-shout-1978/>, accessed October 24, 2022.

22 For Rifkin, artwriting is a single word, a gerundive, encompassing an obligation on the part of the writer.

23 See the Introduction to Cardinal 2018.

24 For a discussion in English of Väisänen's ideas see Arja Kastinen (n.d.), "Quiet Exaltation – When the Instrument Plays the Musician", *Temps*, [www.temps.fi/en/2019/03/24/quiet-exaltation-when-the-instrument-plays-the-musician/](http://www.temps.fi/en/2019/03/24/quiet-exaltation-when-the-instrument-plays-the-musician/), accessed October 27, 2022.

25 The term rendered here as "middle distance" is *epämääräisyyteen* which could be translated more literally as "vagueness."

When possessed in this way, the musician becomes the music that they are playing to such an extent that exterior distractions (such as Väisänen taking their photograph) pass unnoticed (Väisänen 1990, p. 43). The kantele plays them as much as it is played by them. In the context of writing about (or, more properly, together with) a given film or artwork, this might translate as avoiding practices of instrumentalization.

In *The Shout*, Skolimowski does seek to *use* Bacon's paintings, instrumentalizing them to support character and plot development. In a common response to the artist, the director understands Bacon to be an existentialist. Other popular interpretations have included Bacon as surrealist; Bacon as gender non-conformist; Bacon as sadomasochist; Bacon as aberrant modernist; Bacon as political historian. The film, however, employs Bacon's paintings in ways that are unable to wholly frame their reception, to anchor their significance. The *tableaux vivants* contribute to this non-instrumentalized excess that is pregnant with possibility. *Tableaux vivants* involve figures imitating works of art, bringing them to life. This animation often paradoxically occurs through human figures adopting a studied stillness, an arrested vitality.<sup>26</sup> The use of *tableaux vivants* in cinema has therefore been linked to slowness and stasis (Pethö 2014, p. 53). In *The Shout*, however, the tableaux are formed and disappear in quick succession and are not of this order. They form one dimension of the film as art writing, contributing imitations of specific paintings.

### THE SHOUT AS ART WRITING

In reading *The Shout* as art writing, resonances with Gilles Deleuze's ([1981]2003) engagement with Francis Bacon in *The Logic of Sensation* are inescapable.<sup>27</sup> Elements of *The Shout*'s repetition of Bacon's works are clearly similar to Deleuze's interpretation. For Deleuze, Bacon is a painter of sensation. Painting as sensation is not a practice of representation but a carnal experience that discourages reflection, acting immediately upon a viewer's flesh (*ibid.*, p. 34). It cannot be accounted for by semiotic approaches to the study of painting; it is not something that requires decoding. Deleuze refers to sensations as affects, they register as intensity rather than sense (*ibid.*, p. 39). He sees the Figure in Bacon's paintings as a body without organs, as resisting structuring principles and privileging affective forces. The Figure is a figural rather than figurative phenomenon, a thing sensed rather than ratiocinated (*ibid.*, p. 2). Figural artworks do not entirely abandon resemblance but achieve resemblance through sensation rather than symbol driven imitation (*ibid.*, pp. 115–116). Focussing on Bacon's use of the triptych format, Deleuze also sees him as bringing a musicality, a rhythm, to his paintings (*ibid.*, p. xv).

Deleuze's logic provides a forceful reading of Bacon's work, but one that is essentially straight. Bacon's use of painting as a means through which to articulate his queer desires, particularly his interest in BDSM, goes unremarked. This is not to say that Deleuze is necessarily oblivious to the roles played by BDSM in Bacon's corpus.

26 Marion Froger distinguishes the immobility required for the tableau vivant with the more relaxed stasis of the model posing for an artist (Contogouris 2019, pp. 176–179).

27 I am grateful to John Mowitt for pushing my thinking in this area.

He acknowledges sadomasochism, for example, as one mode of approaching the body without organs.<sup>28</sup> Deleuze, however, is not attuned to queer aesthetics and is not interested in queer history. His libidinal politics is also impersonal. He therefore provides a vision of Bacon that is radically ‘dequeered’ and, in many respects, ahistorical and hermetic. Deleuze’s analyses are often formal, only saved from being grossly reductive by way of their combining with a recognition of the importance of attesting to the role of economies of intensity in the paintings. Through looking at form, but also crucially beyond it, Deleuze is able to offer affective as well as compositional insights. *The Shout* approaches Bacon’s corpus differently, acknowledging their queer potential. It can be read as embodying a logic of sensation but, as a writing of Bacon, its emphasis is not restricted to the sensational.<sup>29</sup>

In this context, the choice of works that are directly referenced is noteworthy. The 1969 painting *Lying Figure* (see Figure 6) that features in the film has been identified by Macushla Robinson as an instance of “gender trouble” in the artist’s corpus.<sup>30</sup> She notes that although ostensibly a female nude (based on a photograph of Henrietta Moraes posing naked), the figure “seems to have a penis”. Robinson suggests that the phallic smear of paint is “too provocatively placed to be incidental.” For her, the work therefore subverts the genre of the female nude, questioning the nature of female embodiment. Up close the figure’s gender is rendered unclear. Robinson argues that such instances of gender undecidability occur repeatedly in the artist’s works. Her insights are echoed by Dominic Janes (2016), who also reads Bacon as engaging in gender transgression, arguing that he queered the men he painted through his use of cosmetic effects. Drawing on paintings such as *Lying Figure*, there is potential to read Bacon as genderqueer *avant la lettre*, articulating a conception of gender that refuses to conform to binary logic. This genderqueerness is coupled with a queer sexuality, a non-normative relationship to sex. It is possible to interpret works such as *Lying Figure* and the 1975 canvas *Studies from the Human Body* (another of Robinson’s examples), as expressions of genderplay, as painterly modes of exploring gender and escaping limiting labels, stepping outside the restrictive pictorial vocabulary of gender that was prevalent in mid twentieth century Britain.

Bacon developed a qualitatively different queer aesthetic to that found in paintings by contemporaries such as John Craxton, John Minton and Christopher Wood. All these men shared his connections to the queer subculture of Soho.<sup>31</sup> In the 1950s, several queer clubs and pubs were located there.<sup>32</sup> Although each of the artists had

---

28 For a recent reading of BDSM through the prism of the idea of the body without organs, see Holmes *et al.* (2017).

29 In contrast to *Herostratus*, for example, which, as a film referencing Bacon, comes closest to framing his works in ways that resonate with Deleuze’s logic, speaking directly to the beholder’s flesh.

30 Macushla Robinson (n.d.), “Francis Bacon’s Gender Trouble”, [www.macushlarobinson.com/francis-bacons-gender-trouble](http://www.macushlarobinson.com/francis-bacons-gender-trouble), accessed October 24, 2022.

31 I am very grateful to Adrian Rifkin for insights he has shared regarding these artists.

32 For a discussion of these, see Farson (1987). Queer rather than gay was often the preferred term of self-identification for men who were sexually attracted to other men. In the context of Bacon and of *The Shout* as it relates to him, my use of the term as a noun is therefore historically motivated.



a singular outlook there are instances of crossover. Craxton and Minton share a similar tender, rose-tinted appreciation for their artistic subjects (the sailor and the beefcake respectively). Queer desires are given seemly expression through works that are, at once, powerfully erotic and unerringly polite. Bacon's works from the late 1940s and early 1950s (including *Head VI*) show a comparable attention to detail but are, by contrast, grubby and rough. They are also subtly perverse rather than openly yearning. His desire, his sadomasochism, registers in occasional details and through formal elements such as the treatment of surface.<sup>33</sup> Works from the 1960s onwards (including *Lying Figure* and *Paralytic Child*) are more formulaic, exhibiting a brusque sadomasochistic shorthand that manifests in violently tender smears and spats, in a markedly humiliated facture. These later works are less contemplative and complex, as if the artist had lost patience with exploring and encoding his desires. Across Bacon's corpus there is nonetheless a similar depth of purpose, a commitment to making BDSM visible and sayable. It is a dimension to his practice that is still often sidelined.<sup>34</sup> Anthony Bond (2012, p. 19) observes that exploring sexuality was "not the purpose or subject of [Bacon's] work." Readings of Bacon's paintings that focus on his "sexual deviance" have sometimes been treated as leger, as if queerness in art lacked gravitas.<sup>35</sup> Discussion of the importance of BDSM to the artist's corpus is gagged, his love of kink kept under formalist wraps.

The scream in Bacon's art, which is frequently read as a cry of existential despair (much like Edvard Munch's *Skrik* or *The Scream*), a bleak comment on human existence, can be viewed through a queer lens as a manifestation of pleasure, as exhibitionistic in tenor. Brandon Labelle (2021) has explored queer acoustics, discussing the existence of 'good' or 'fitting' sounds, normative sounds that echo the ideas and values of some communities at the expense of others. Normative sex, for instance, privileges the moan over the scream.<sup>36</sup> In BDSM, by contrast, screaming is common in

---

33 In relation to detail, I am thinking here of the overdetermined, carefully modelled safety pin in *Study from the Human Body* (1949) or the ecstatic open mouth in *Head VI*.

34 Martin Hammer (2012, p. 24), for example, minimizes potential links between Bacon's interest in Nazi imagery and his sexual desires, reading the artist's use of fascist imagery as straight political commentary.

35 Bacon only refers to his sexuality on rare occasion in interviews. Since interviews with the artist have contributed significantly to shaping the reception of his works, this has frequently led to their sexual aspects being downplayed or ignored. There are nonetheless salutary engagements with the role of Bacon's sexuality as it intersects with his art including, most notably, Simon Ofield's (2001) ground-breaking 'Wrestling with Francis Bacon'. Other important readings include Rina Arya (2012), Richard Hornsey (2010), Dominic Janes (2020), Simon Ofield (2008), Macushla Robinson (2012) and Gregory Salter (2017). None of these analyses, however, give substantial consideration to how Bacon's interest in BDSM inflects his queerness and his art practice. Beyond biographies of the artist, acknowledging Bacon's interest in BDSM in the context of his works still seems something of a taboo. Janes (2016), however, does notably reflect on Bacon's masochism, which he reads as granting the artist a qualified empowerment. My own engagement (Chare 2012) with Bacon's BDSM considers how both sadism and masochism inflect his art, with a 'switching' visibly at play across his corpus.

36 See, for example, Sally's celebrated moans and shouts in *When Harry Met Sally* (dir. Rob Reiner, USA, 1989). Olneythelonly (2010), "Meg Ryan's Fake Orgasm from 'When Harry Met Sally'", YouTube video, <https://youtu.be/b0OeM6UUAoI>, accessed October 25, 2022. The emphasis on moaning as a vocal signifier of erotic pleasure is not restricted to heterosexual sex. Nguyen Tan Hoang (2014, p. 38) discusses

pleasurable situations. The scream, as D. Ferrett has explored in a different context, can potentially incarnate bliss, jouissance (Ferrett 2020, p. 21). Bacon's screaming figures can thus conceivably be read as registering ecstasy rather than despair. Receiving the artworks in this way requires an openness to Bacon's sadomasochistic pictorial vocabulary.

Labelle cites Nina Dragičević's work on lesbian acoustic communities as an example of queer acoustics. Dragičević has traced the way music played in bars may assist in "narrating otherwise unspoken communications, where potential partners may stand in or identify with singers, or those being sung to" (LaBelle 2021, p. 88). For her, songs provide an "acoustic affordance enabling the expression of lesbian desire" and offer a means to construct and maintain queer life (*ibid.*). She recognizes the existence of destructive and emancipatory sonorities (Dragičević 2020, p. 55). Loudness can speak to power, acting destructively, silencing. Yet, along with certain types of music, specific sounds such as screaming and shouting can also form acts of vocal resistance to normative acoustic regimes. In a laboratory of sexual acoustic experimentation such as Bacon's paintings, the scream becomes a display of queer acoustics, of painful pleasure vocalized loudly and proudly.<sup>37</sup>

## BLOW OUT

Although Crossley's shout has been compared to Bacon's screaming popes, shouting is manifestly a different vocalisation.<sup>38</sup> What then is it? After first demonstrating his vocal ability, Crossley strides to the shoreline and stares out to sea. The immensity he confronts speaks to the spatial vastness of his shout: it is voice uncontained and unconstrained.<sup>39</sup> Yet to say it is Crossley's voice would seem misplaced. He does not inhabit the shout and it is not expressive of him even though it is also clearly all he is. In this sense, it is not indexed to him. He condemns Anthony's compositions: "I've heard your music. It's nothing. It's empty."<sup>40</sup> Crossley, by contrast, feels himself to be *something* by virtue of his shout. He uses the promise of it to lure the composer into his orbit. Once Anthony realizes its power, Crossley also uses the threat of it to

---

generic moans in gay pornography in *A View from the Bottom*. Sexual vocalizations such as moans can, of course, potentially morph into what are described as screams, hence the 'screaming orgasm'.

37 I am drawing here on Michel Foucault's ([1982]1996, p. 330) description of the BDSM scenes of New York and San Francisco as "laboratories of sexual experimentation."

38 For a brief discussion of the distinction between screams and shouts, see Chare, Hoorn and Yue (2019, p. 6).

39 This unboundedness echoes the noise of the whistle in M.R. James's ghost story "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad." For a reading of this story that attends to its acoustic dimensions, see Chare (2023).

40 Here Crossley echoes Claude Levi-Strauss's ([1964]1983, p. 23) critique of *musique concrète* as "floundering in non-significance." Crossley may view his shout as authentic because he does not seek to transform it into something it is not, taking a sound and making it a noise. The shout is a real noise, it is unfiltered and untransformed: 'what you hear is what you get.'

bully and goad.<sup>41</sup> It makes him a man of substance. Without the shout, he would be nothing, yet he is also only a relay for it. It derives from elsewhere.

In “The Shouted Voice” the phoniatician Aude Lagier and her co-authors note that little research has been conducted on the topic of shouting. They describe a shout as “a sudden loud outburst, a very specific form of communication motivated by an emotional or situational context” (Lagier *et al.* 2017, p. 141). Someone who is shouting “seeks to convey an emotion (joy, fear, pain, disgust, anger, excitement) or to warn of danger or of emergency” (*ibid.*). Shouting, often aggressive, can be a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (Straud *et al.* 2022).<sup>42</sup> A shout’s nature “differs greatly in character from a speaker’s conversational voice” (Lagier *et al.* 2017, p. 141). When used to shout, “the voice can convey a universally understandable message of emotion regardless of the intelligible content” (*ibid.*). Vinay Kumar Mittal and Bayya Yegnanarayana (2013, p. 3050) describe a shout as an “extreme deviation from normal speech in terms of loudness level.” Shouting in this understanding is still a kind of speech but one rendered distinct by its volume. These conceptions of shouting link it with intensity and emotion. The former Manchester United football manager Alex Ferguson’s famed “hairdryer treatment” when he would angrily shout at his players with such force and so much in their faces that it purportedly resembled a blast from a hairdryer provides a good example of this kind of shout. The content of Ferguson’s shout was probably less important than the force and anger it expressed. Shouting as a form of “voice intonation” in psychoanalytic settings often indicates that the analysand is accessing an emotional experience (Levitt and Morrill 2020, p. 235).



Figure 10: A performance of tumescence. The Shout (Jerzy Skolimowski, Recorded Picture Company, 1978).

In Skolimowski’s film, Crossley’s shout does not readily conform to any of these definitions. He does not seem to shout words thus his shouting is divorced from

41 At one point, he states “Get out of here Anthony...or I’ll shout your bloody ears off.”

42 Shouting in this context is a form of psychological aggression. Crossley’s shout is qualitatively different in that it constitutes physical aggression, injuring or killing those who hear it.

speech. His shout also registers no obvious emotion, it is not wrathful, for example, nor celebratory. What can be established is that Crossley's shout is clearly very loud and has the capacity to kill. It also appears linked to his masculinity. Crossley bends to inhale then straightens up, holding himself erect as he shouts in what can be seen as a performance of tumescence (see Figure 10). Such a reading is in keeping with Graves's story, in which Charles's face hardens as he prepares to shout.<sup>43</sup> Michel Chion, likewise, reads the shout in the film as a "phallic cry" that displays power and marks out (acoustic) territory (Chion [1982]1999, p. 78). It is 'bestial', akin to the roar of Kong in *King Kong* (dir. John Guillermin, USA, 1976). After hearing Crossley's shout, Anthony is vocally emasculated, even his technologically enhanced bellow turns out to be no match for the virile yell.

Chion also asserts that the shout is an "absolute," that it is "outside of language, time, the conscious subject" (*ibid.*). Language, as Mladen Dolar (2006) has explored, is the enemy of voice. He writes in *A Voice and Nothing More* that the inaugural gesture of phonology was the total reduction of the voice as the substance of language. Signifying has stripped the voice of its fleshliness, its materiality subsumed by the sign although always only partially. There is nonetheless something leftover, something vital in the vocal that adjoins the dead tissue of signification but cannot be equated with it. Dolar mentions accent, intonation, and timbre. Might Crossley's shout as a senseless vocal amplification also embody such an excess to the sign? As pure wordless 'voice', the shout is anti-phonic. If it enacts a stripping, it is of the sign. The shout pares the voice from the sign, granting the shouting subject a means to not mean. Crossley's shout, full of noise and roary, enunciates nothing. It is sonic intensity unaccompanied by indication or signification. It is loudly indifferent, not even tinged with affect or feeling.

As an adherent of *musique concrète*, Anthony's being seduced by the promise of the shout is unsurprising. In his *Treatise on Musical Objects*, the composer Pierre Schaeffer (2017, pp. 263–264), a key exponent of *musique concrète*, elaborates a mode of hearing, "reduced listening," that brackets sounds from sense and from indexicality.<sup>44</sup> The shout in the film bypasses the listener's need to consciously bracket the sound because it is meaningless. It also does not index Crossley, who becomes strangely negated through his act of non-utterance. Reduced listening usually requires an active ear and is "an exercise in power" (*ibid.*, p. 273). Here, however, Anthony is passive as this sound event does not require him to pare it of source and sense. The shout, of course, is audio-visual, seen as much as heard. When he bellows, Crossley is reduced to his open mouth, a mouth formed of lips and teeth that rim a black hole, a visual nothing (see Figure 11). The centre of his mouth is as empty of significance as the sound it enables. The shout, then, is both an acoustic and a visual nothingness that refuses to be bound by the sign.

---

43 Graves (2008, p. 15) writes "Charles's face, that was usually soft and changing [...] now hardened to a rough stone mask."

44 For nuanced readings of Schaeffer's notion of "reduced listening" see Chapter 1 of Brian Kane's *Sound Unseen* and John Mowitt (2020, p. 213).



This emptiness is what grants the shout its queer potency. Although, as alluded to earlier, the shout is a symptom of xenophobia, a sonic shorthand for the fear of Otherness, it also operates in excess of that fear, drowning it out.<sup>45</sup> Vacated of meaning, Crossley's mouthing becomes a come hither to the sign, inviting sense to come to be. Through this, the shout carves out a space of queer possibility within the outwardly heteronormative dynamics of the film. As a hole the mouth is a substitutable opening (or point of egress) that can stand for itself or for the anus or the vagina or another orifice, it acts as a potential locus of attraction and sexual satisfaction. Crossley sucks and blows to shout, takes in and gives out; he is open to multiple interpretations, encouraging multifarious desires and their fulfilment.<sup>46</sup>



Figure 11: *A black hole*. *The Shout* (Jerzy Skolimowski, Recorded Picture Company, 1978).

## CONCLUSION: A QUEER TECHNICS

Anthony wants to appropriate the shout, to possess it, and he must therefore be shown to fail. His motivation, vocal domination, is inappropriate in the context of *The Shout's* celebration of queer indiscipline. Alongside Anthony's futile efforts at sound ownership, his frustrated will for technological mastery, the film provides an alternative 'vision' of sound technology through Crossley's shout, one that is a potential source of queer emancipation. As a figuration of voice, the shout resists heteronormative cultural acoustics.

The queerness of the shout registers strongly in its early stages, it begins with a bent figure and can be read as necessitating what Sara Ahmed refers to as a "queer slant," a bending forward and bending backwards, before there is a becoming upright that

45 Shouting has been linked to homophobia. In this context, Crossley's shout reappropriates a bodily male practice associated with aggressive affirmations of heterosexuality and employs it for queer ends. For a discussion of shouting as it relates to masculinity, see Nayak and Kehily (2010, pp. 217–218).

46 Alan Bates's attraction to the role might, in part, be explained by this polymorphous quality.

seems to signal the force of the vertical (Ahmed 2006, p. 107).<sup>47</sup> The shout therefore demands a queer orientation for its successful generation. In this, it echoes the scream in Bacon's paintings. In Bacon's paintings, the scream registers pleasure, it is an effect of queer sexual practices. The shout in the film, by contrast, is not a record of ecstasy but its *cause*. Anthony is overcome by Crossley's noisy ejaculation, falling in a faint, a sonically induced swoon.<sup>48</sup> The other men who buckle at Crossley's shout can similarly be read as exhibiting post-coital quiescence, as victims of a little death (*la petite mort*), rather than of the literal death a straight reading of *The Shout* invites.<sup>49</sup>



Figure 12: Audio technology and possibility. *The Shout* (Jerzy Skolimowski, Recorded Picture Company, 1978).

It is crucial to remember here that in the film, the shout as a tool of pleasure is not a human creation, or not entirely so. Alan Bates who plays Crossley does not actually perform the shout we hear. When the actor shouts, he is dispossessed of his voice, silenced. He only makes the gestures that seem to generate it. What we hear is a manufactured vocalisation: an artificial concoction. In the film narrative, once Anthony has experienced the yell, he tries to make a similar one through amplifying his own shout but even with all the audio technology he has available, he cannot come close to emulating Crossley's effort. He is unable to acoustically please himself. The reality, however, is that the very audio technology portrayed as *wanting* in the story makes the shout that we hear possible (Figure 12). The cry is a designed sound, an effect of technological artistry. There is therefore a dialectical relationship to sound

47 My thinking here is indebted to LaBelle's exploration of queer acoustics through the prism of Ahmed's ideas.

48 In the short story, Graves (2008, p. 15) describes Richard as fainting.

49 In this context, the killing bone that appears in the film, while outwardly registering European fantasies about alterity, can also be read as a reference to the self-murdering boner, the hard-on as an unstable symbol of phallic potency, one that metaphorically disappears upon ejaculation when the erect penis deconstructs itself, softens and physically dissipates. The bone outwardly indexes the transmission of traditional knowledge from the (fantasized vision of a) First Nations Elder to Crossley. It may also be read as something Crossley not only gets *from* the Black man but *for* him, as it is present when he recalls his past, opening up possibilities of cross-ethnic gay desire.

technology developed in *The Shout*, with the queer vocalisation emerging out of a space of contradiction, the technically possible cast as impossible.

Anthony's compositions work by way of the amplification and/or distortion of pre-existing sonic materials. As the shout is radically different to the sounds he has access to, his inability to replicate it in his studio is faithful to the film's narrative. He desires to pin down the shout but it remains fugitive.<sup>50</sup> The vocalisation is un beholden to the sonic regimes Anthony is familiar with. Because queer acoustics often emerge through disrupting everyday cultural practices and productions rather than being radically singular, on the surface the shout therefore presents a queer form of queerness.<sup>51</sup> Queering is frequently heard as a kind of interference troubling binary categories, yet in *The Shout* queerness registers as a new kind of sound that is un beholden to existing idioms of acoustic expression. Shown as an irruptive force within the sonic environment, the shout is constructed as foreign, a vocal outsider. The presence of the sound technology as prop within the story, however, crucially invites an audience to reflect on the artificiality of the film's own soundtrack. In that sense, awareness of the manufactured nature of the shout is encouraged.

As a product of recording technology, the sounds behind Crossley's shout are pre-existing, potentially familiar. *The Shout* is therefore revealed as more conventionally queer, working with recognized sounds (the bellow of a man, the roar of a rocket and the rumble of a waterfall, for example) that are then rendered transgressive of sonic normality.<sup>52</sup> The film's self-referential employment of sound technology also reveals the shout as an index of alterity to be a manufactured fantasy. The racist aurality embodied in the shout is shown to be a product of the European imagination. Audio technology thus works to disrupt the shout as a racist sonic trope, calling attention to its status as an acoustic invention. It has no audible fidelity to the sonic cultures of First Nations Australians. As vocal exoticism it does, conversely, echo European anxieties and delusions about Australia's Indigenous communities.

The shout's disruptive force is not restricted to revealing European projective imaginings of the Other. It also performs a valuable role as a mode of art writing, inviting the film audience to attend to pain as jouissance as it inflects Bacon's paintings and the film more broadly. *The Shout* offers an imitative amplification of the noisy pain-pleasure and the genderqueerness that is present in many of the artist's paintings. The actual shout forms part of this process of amplification, contributing to the film's articulation of what many scholars of Bacon still seek to deny, suppress, or downplay, namely the celebration of BDSM that cuts across numerous oeuvres and also the openness of his works to being read as studies in non-binary identity. In this

---

50 The fugitive quality of the sound contributes to its queerness. For a discussion of queerness in relation to fugitivity, see Chare (2015). It is noteworthy that Crossley is himself a fugitive from (Western) justice.

51 For a discussion of 'queering' as a verb, as a doing word, see Susan S. Lanser (2018).

52 The sonically normal here is understood as commonplace, readily recognizable sounds. The recognition of what a sound is often involves a visual dimension, the sound indexing an entity that is visibly identifiable as its source. The sounds that are combined to manufacture the shout are detached from their physical sources, which are thus rendered invisible.

sense, *The Shout* can historically be viewed as a powerful vocalization and visualization of Bacon's queer potential. It gives an important shout out to an artist whose work sought to 'voice' aspects of BDSM, to find a pictorial language adequate to its expression and also articulate what would today be referred to as genderqueerness. Even as *The Shout* resonates with Bacon's art, however, the film is not bound by it. Bacon's works, in fact, play a subservient role in *The Shout*'s broader exploration of queer acoustics and queer technics.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Karine Bouchard, Serge Cardinal, Solenn Hellégouarch and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions relating to earlier drafts of this essay.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ades, Dawn (1985), "Web of Images", in Dawn Ades and Andrew Forge (eds.), *Francis Bacon*, London, Thames & Hudson, pp. 8–23.
- Ahmed, Sara (2006), *Queer Phenomenology. Orientations, Objects, Others*, Durham, Duke University Press.
- Aldouby, Hava (2020), "Fellini's Visual Style(s). A Phenomenological Account", in Frank Burke, Marguerite Waller and Marita Gubareva (eds.), *A Companion to Federico Fellini*, Hoboken, John Wiley, pp. 223–236.
- Arya, Rina (2012), "Constructions of Homosexuality in the Art of Francis Bacon", *Journal for Cultural Research*, vol. 16, n° 1, pp. 43–61.
- Beck, Jay (2016), *Designing Sound. Audiovisual Aesthetics in 1970s American Cinema*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press.
- Bertolucci, Bernardo (1987), *Bertolucci par Bertolucci. Entretiens avec Enzo Ungari et Donald Ranvaud*, translated by Philippe-André Olivier, Paris, Calmann-Lévy.
- Bertolucci, Bernardo (2014), "Le monologue-hurllement de Bacon", translated by René Marx, in Fabio Francione and Piero Spila (eds.), *Bernardo Bertolucci. Mon obsession magnifique*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, p. 53.
- Bond, Anthony (2012), "Francis Bacon. Five Decades", in Anthony Bond (ed.), *Francis Bacon. Five Decades*, Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales, pp. 17–30.
- Cardinal, Serge (2018), *Profondeurs de l'écoute et espaces du son. Cinéma, radio, musique*, Strasbourg, Presses universitaires de Strasbourg.
- Chare, Nicholas (2005), "Regarding the Pain. Noise in the Art of Francis Bacon", *Angelaki*, vol. 10, n° 3, pp. 133–143.
- Chare, Nicholas (2012), *After Francis Bacon. Sex and Synaesthesia*, Farnham, Ashgate.
- Chare, Nicholas (2015), "Fugitive Aesthetics. Embodiment, Sexuality and *Escape from Alcatraz*", *Paragraph*, vol. 38, n° 1, pp. 37–54.
- Chare, Nicholas (2023), "The Fabric of Gothic Modernism. Powers of Horror in M.R. James's 'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad'", in Maria Margaroni (ed.), *Understanding Kristeva, Understanding Modernism*, New York, Bloomsbury, pp. 179–196.



- Chare, Nicholas, Jeanette Hoorn, and Audrey Yue (2019), "Re-reading *The Monstrous-Feminine*. New Approaches to Psychoanalytic Theory, Affect, Film, and Art", in Chare, Hoorn and Yue (eds.), *Re-Reading The Monstrous-Feminine. Art, Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, New York, Routledge, pp. 1–34.
- Chion, Michel (1981), « Une esthétique Dolby stéréo », *Cahiers du cinéma*, vol. 329, n° 18, pp. xii–xiii.
- Chion, Michel (1999), *The Voice in Cinema*, translated by Claudia Gorbman, New York, Columbia University Press.
- Clifford, James (1981), "On Ethnographic Surrealism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 23, n° 4, pp. 539–564.
- Combs, Richard (1978), "The Shout", *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 45, n° 528, pp. 142–143.
- Contogouris, Ersy (2019), "Pour voir le passé d'un tableau. Les tableaux vivants de l'*Allégorie du ministère parfait* d'Eustache Le Sueur (1653) dans le film *Une disparition* (2017). Entretien avec Éric Méchoulan et Marion Froger", *RACAR. Canadian Art Review*, vol. 44, n° 2, pp. 175–182.
- Dagičević, Nina (2020), "Sappho Was Not a Poet. The Sonoric Character of Poetry and its Emancipatory Potential", in Andrej Zavrl and Alojzija Zupan Sosič (eds.), *Go East! LGBTQ+ Literature in Eastern Europe*, Ljubljana, Ljubljana University Press, pp. 53–57.
- Deleuze, Gilles (2003), *The Logic of Sensation*, translated by Daniel W. Smith, London, Continuum.
- Deslandes, Jeanne (1995), "Une esthétique Dolby stéréo", *Ciné-Bulles*, vol. 14, n° 1, pp. 42–45.
- Farkas, András (2002), "Prototypicality-Effect in Surrealist Paintings", *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, vol. 20, n° 2, pp. 127–136.
- Farson, Daniel (1987), *Soho in the Fifties*, London, Michael Joseph.
- Ferrett, D. (2020), *Dark Sound. Feminine Voices in Sonic Shadow*, New York, Bloomsbury.
- Forshaw, Barry (2015), *Sex and Film. The Erotic in British, American and World Cinema*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foucault, Michel (1996), "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act", translated by James O'Higgins, in Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), *Foucault Live. Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, New York, Semiotext(e), pp. 322–334.
- Graves, Robert (2008), "The Shout", in Linda Graves (ed.), Robert Graves, *Complete Short Stories*, London, Penguin, pp. 7–22.
- Hammer, Martin (2012), *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda*, London, Tate Publishing.
- Hoang, Nguyen Tan (2014), *A View from the Bottom. Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation*, Durham, Duke University Press.
- Holmes, Dave, et al. (2017), "Degenitalizing the Sexual. BDSM Practices and the Deterritorialization of Bodies and Pleasures", in Dave Holmes, Stuart Murray and Thomas Foth, *Radical Sex Between Men. Assembling Desiring Machines*, London, Routledge, pp. 117–141.
- Janes, Dominic (2016), "'Famous for the Paint She Put on Her Face'. London's Painted Poofs and the Self-Fashioning of Francis Bacon", in Simon Avery and Katherine M. Graham (eds.), *Sex, Time and Place. Queer Histories of London, c. 1850 to the Present*, London, Bloomsbury, pp. 167–183.
- Janes, Dominic (2020), "Queer Juxtapositions in the Art of Francis Bacon and *Lilliput Magazine*", *Visual Culture in Britain*, vol. 21, n° 3, pp. 275–295.
- Jesser, Jody Duncan, and Janine Pourroy (2012), *The Art and Making of the Dark Knight Trilogy*, New York, Abrams.
- Johnson, William (1979), "The Shout", *Film Quarterly*, vol. 33, n° 1, pp. 53–59.
- Kane, Brian (2014), *Sound Unseen. Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

- Karayalcin, Selma (2011), *Representations of the Muse in the Writings of Robert Graves. A Study of Five Prose Texts (1944-1950)*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Northampton.
- Kenny, Virginia Cotterrell (1999), "Magic Realism and Selfhood in Robert Graves's 'The Shout'", in Janeen Webb and Andrew Enstice (eds.), *The Fantastic Self. Essays on the Subject and the Self*, North Perth, Eidolon Publications, pp. 168–175.
- LaBelle, Brandon (2021), "On Acoustic Justice", in Brandon LaBelle (ed.), *The Listening Biennial/Reader*, Berlin, Fliegende Teilchen, pp. 79–96.
- Lagier, Aude, et al. (2017), "The Shouted Voice. A Pilot Study of Laryngeal Physiology Under Extreme Aerodynamic Pressure", *Logopedics Phoniatrics Vocology*, vol. 42, n° 4, pp. 141–145.
- Lanser, Susan S. (2018), "Queering Narrative Voice", *Textual Practice*, vol. 32, n° 6, pp. 923–937.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude (1983), *The Raw and the Cooked*, translated by John and Doreen Weightman, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Levitt, Heidi M., and Zenobia Morrill (2020), "Measuring Silence. The Pausing Inventory Categorization System and a Review of Findings", in Aleksandar Dimitrijević and Michael B. Buchholz (eds.), *Silence and Silencing in Psychoanalysis*, London, Routledge, pp. 233–250.
- Lindop, Grevel (2001), "'A Fine Milesian Tale'. Exploring Robert Graves's *The Shout*", in Ian Firla (ed.), *Robert Graves's Historical Novels*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, pp. 57–71.
- Lowenstein, Adam (2014), "Horror's Otherness and Ethnographic Surrealism. The Case of *The Shout*", in Harry M. Benshoff (ed.), *A Companion to the Horror Film*, Hoboken, John Wiley, pp. 519–535.
- Lowenstein, Adam (2022), *Horror Film and Otherness*, New York, Columbia University Press.
- Mazierska, Ewa (2010), *Jerzy Skolimowski. The Cinema of a Nonconformist*, New York, Berghahn.
- Mittal, Vinay K., and B. Yegnanarayana (2013), "Effect of Glottal Dynamics in the Production of Shouted Speech", *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, vol. 133, n° 5, pp. 3050–3061, <https://doi.org/10.1121/1.4796110>.
- Mowitt, John (2020), "Out of Her Depths. Playing with Pauline Oliveros", *parallax*, vol. 26, n° 2, pp. 209–221.
- Nayak, Anoop, and Mary Jane Kehily (1996), "Playing it Straight. Masculinities, Homophobias and Schooling", *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 5, n° 2, pp. 211–230.
- O'Field, Simon (2001), "Wrestling with Francis Bacon", *Oxford Journal of Art History*, vol. 24, n° 1, pp. 113–130.
- O'Field, Simon (2008), "Comparative Strangers", in Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens (eds.), *Francis Bacon*, London, Tate Publishing, pp. 64–73.
- Pethő, Ágnes (2014), "The *Tableau Vivant* as a 'Figure of Return' in Contemporary East European Cinema", *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies*, n° 9, pp. 51–76, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ausfm-2015-0003>.
- Powell, Jeremy (2014), "David Lynch, Francis Bacon, Gilles Deleuze. The Cinematic Diagram of the Hall of Time", *Discourse*, vol. 36, n° 3, pp. 309–339.
- Rifkin, Adrian (2021), "'The Answers are the Question'. A Conversation about Art History, Artwriting and Historical Time", in Nicholas Chare and Mitchell B. Frank (eds.), *History and Art History. Looking Past Disciplines*, New York, Routledge, pp. 213–236.
- Rivers, W.H.R. (1918), "The Repression of War Experience", *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, n° 11, pp. 1–20, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2066211/pdf/procrsmed01153-0005.pdf](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2066211/pdf/procrsmed01153-0005.pdf), accessed May 11, 2023.
- Robinson, Macushla (2012), "Lying Figure. Francis Bacon and the Female Nude", *Art Monthly Australia*, n° 255, pp. 13–15.
- Salter, Gregory (2017), "Francis Bacon and Queer Intimacy in Post-War London", *Visual Culture in Britain*, vol. 18, n° 1, pp. 84–99.

- Schaeffer, Pierre ([1966]2017), *Treatise on Musical Objects. An Essay Across Disciplines*, translated by Christine North and John Dack, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Shone, Tom (2020), *The Nolan Variations. The Movies, Mysteries, and Marvels of Christopher Nolan*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf.
- Spoto, Donald (2007), *Otherwise Engaged. The Life of Alan Bates*, London, Hutchinson.
- Straud, Casey L., et al. (2022), "Aggression and Violent Behaviour in the Military. Self-Reported Conflict Tactics in a Sample of Service Members and Veterans Seeking Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder", *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, vol. 66 (September-October), 101734.
- Street, Sarah (2020), "Colour and the Critique of Advertising. *Privilege* (Peter Watkins, 1967) and *Herostratus* (Don Levy, 1967)", *Frames Cinema Journal*, n° 17, unpaginated, <https://doi.org/10.15664/fcj.v0i17.2072>.
- Strick, Philip (1978), "Skolimowski's Cricket Match", *Sight and Sound*, vol. 47, n° 3, pp. 146–147.
- Väisänen, Armas Otto (1990), *Hiljainen haltioituminen*, Helsinki, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Wollen, Peter (1969) *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, London, BFI & Secker & Warburg.