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The composer as bricoleur: Notions of contemporary opera in the genesis of a short film

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Chapter Two: The Challenge

This chapter explores the challenges faced by presenting opera on screen. It includes a discussion on verisimilitude and suspension of disbelief, the ideas of Siegfried Kracauer (1970) on the realism of screen and artificiality of opera, and the operatic voice. In searching for a resolution between these two forms, this chapter examines the ideas behind the works of Robert Ashley, Steve Reich and David Lang, whose contemporary notions of the operatic voice were adapted for Out of Sight / Out of Mind. Spoken dialogue, manipulated dialogue, singing and whispering were used to create this short film, and these voices can be identified and analysed through diegesis — a film convention that is defined and discussed in context to this research. To trace the aural elements of a score, this chapter also introduces Anahid Kassabian’s (2001) approach to sound and music through assimilating and affiliating associations. It also discusses the composition as organised sound in bringing together operatic voice, sound and music, and defining the short film as screen opera. Lastly, it identifies surrealism as a movement that welcomes the artificiality and irrationality of opera.

Verisimilitude and the Suspension of Disbelief

Verisimilitude is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (2015c) as “the appearance of being true or real; or a resemblance of truth”. In film, the notion of verisimilitude may be examined by the plausibility or believability of the narrative. Stephen Neale (2000), an analytic philosopher, noted that, in film, the criteria for verisimilitude vary between genres. He offered the example of a musical, in which it is probable and expected for a character to burst into song because this aligns with the systems of expectation of a musical genre. Neale (2000) noted that the interaction between an audience and the film they are viewing is related to the “specific systems of expectations and hypotheses” (p. 158) that the audience carries. As they watch the film, these ‘systems’ allow the audience to recognise and understand the film. Neale (2000) explained:
Genres] help render films, and the elements within them, intelligible and therefore explicable. They offer a way of working out the significance of what is happening on the screen: why particular events and actions are taking place, why the characters are dressed the way they are, why they look, speak, and behave the way they do, and so on. (p. 158)

Thus, verisimilitude in film is dependent on an understanding of the codes and rules specific to each genre. Verisimilitude results from the interaction between the audience's expectations and ideas of these codes in the film's genre.

The codes and systems of genres allow the audience to disregard the implausibility of events and accept what is shown as being believable. In fact, films (and stories) work because of their ability to coax an audience into disregarding major and minor plot holes to remain focused on the film's narrative. This phenomenon is known as “willing suspension of disbelief” (Coleridge, 2005). Samuel Taylor Coleridge (2005), a nineteenth-century literary critic and poet, coined the phrase “willing suspension of disbelief” when he wrote:

> In this idea originated the plan of the ‘Lyrical Ballads’; in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. (p. 145)

Willing suspension of disbelief is the act of overlooking aspects of untruths to accept what is being told or shown. It can be found in numerous examples in the arts, from the earliest cave paintings to the newest Hollywood blockbuster. As humans, we are highly perceptive of what may or may not be real. Despite this, we often disregard what may be unreal or illogical for the pleasure of following a story (Ferri, 2007).

In cinema, to will an audience into a suspension of disbelief, the invented situation must maintain consistencies and avoid complex plot lines that require extended explanation (Martin, 2011). There are no strict rules as to how far one can push an audience — only that once believability is lost, the story loses credibility and the audience becomes disengaged from the film, and more fixated on its flaws.
In screen opera, it is essential to consider which genre codes or systems are available to offer verisimilitude to allow the audience to suspend their disbelief of a sung dialogue. In reviewing the body of screen operas, I noted that the filmed versions of staged operas assert a sense of verisimilitude. This may be because of the documentary nature of the film. However, cinematic operas remain less convincing. When creating Out of Sight, through much of the research period, I grappled with the use of a traditional operatic voice and its representation on screen. As my research progressed, it became clear that, through omitting sung dialogue and adapting the operatic voice for screen opera in a contemporary fashion, I could gain verisimilitude and achieve the suspension of disbelief. However, I would have to remove the artifice and convention of opera with which many typically associate opera. In an extra effort to diffuse the artifice of opera, I unwittingly employed surrealism and its systems in the construction of the short film.

**The Realism of Film and Artifice of Opera**

The realism of film is a theory or movement in film that believes in using the cinematic screen as a canvas to showcase the real world. André Bazin (2005), Sergei Eisenstein (2014) and Siegfried Kracauer (1970) are film theorists who have examined the realism of film in varying terms. For these theorists, the realism of film is a theory that celebrates film as a series of photographic images based on reality, rather than through the verisimilitude of the film (Bazin, 2005; Giannetti, 2002; Kracauer, 1970; Lehman, 1997). For Kracauer (1970), realism can be found in film’s conventions, such as long takes, deep focus, *mise-en-scéne* and minimal editing. By reproducing real-life objects in a series of images, film records reality. In this discussion, I focus on Kracauer’s theory because he has criticised opera films based on the mismatch between the realism of film and artifice of opera.

The artifice and absurdity of opera relates to the embellished and stylised singing, costumes and theatrics that often lead to the story being caricatured
and parodied — as most memorably highlighted in the animated cartoon short, *What's Opera, Doc?* (Jones, 1957). Despite its irrational nature, opera has been a popular and sought after form of entertainment. A review from the eighteenth century famously described opera as “exotic and irrational entertainment that which has always been combatted, but has always prevailed” (Johnson, as cited in Fredman et al., 2003, p. 1). To further illustrate the point, Myer Fredman et al. (2003) added: “In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century operas this often led to farewells taking far longer than in real life yet the endless setting of *addio* or *lebewohl* is able to persuade the audience to overlook any irrationality” (p. 2).

The conventions of opera involve dramatisation by:

1. frequently conversing through song instead of speech
2. exaggerating words and actions for effect
3. repeating words and phrases for emotional and musical emphasis
4. using music that, in this context, is able to suspend action and time (Fredman et al., 2003).

While viewing a presentation of opera on stage, the genre codes and conventions of theatre and staged opera allow the audience to overlook the irrationality of the events unfolding. However, on film, the same genre codes and conventions cause the audience to disengage from any suspension of disbelief and verisimilitude (Kracauer, 1970). According to Kracauer (1970), cinematic operas have the ability to produce an unbelievable and consequently unsuccessful film, in which the audience may feel like they are being “torn asunder” (p. 155).

Kracauer (1970) wrote:

> opera as an art form opens up a world bathed in music and sometimes seen rising out of this music — a world more irrevocably remote from common reality than any other stage world ... The operatic world is, whatever else, a world of magic invocations. Its arias stop time; its landscapes are grounded in melodies; its sung passions transfigure physical life instead of penetrating it. The world of opera is built upon premises which radically defy those of the cinematic approach. (p. 153)
For Kracauer (1970), cinematic opera is a “collision of two worlds detrimental to both” (p. 153). The fusing of these two arts “invariably reveals itself as an eclectic compromise between irreconcilable entities — a sham whole distorting either opera or the film or both” (Kracauer, 1970, p. 154).


Kracauer suggested that opera on film can only be successful if cinematic conventions are suppressed. However, all four films are adaptations of staged operas. Thus, one has to question if this rule still applies to an opera written specifically for screen, rather than the stage. In an area of film in which there are two diametrically opposing conventions, it appears that one convention will have to give way to the other in order for the film to work.

In *Out of Sight*, I focused on film conventions to balance the artifice of opera. However, the conventions that I employed are counter to the conventions for realism of film. Instead, the style of editing, nonlinear story line and use of montage evoke a sense of surrealism. In addition, I readapted the operatic voice in an effort to address the absurdity of sung dialogue and resonant and embellished singing in the context of a contemporary screen opera.

**Operatic Voice**

The operatic voice is the singing voice of an opera singer. It is a voice that has changed and developed since the invention of opera itself (as discussed in Chapter One), and carries a rich and complex history as a result of varying influences, including changing ideologies, fashion, theatre, musical tastes,
musical instruments, technology, politics, social structure and architecture. The operatic voice as a convention and instrument has posed challenges not solely on screen, but also on stage.

On stage, the operatic voice requires the audience to suspend their disbelief in order to accept the irrationality and artifice of a sung dialogue in its storytelling. The perceptibility of words is another challenge for this voice. Given that opera is normally sung in a foreign language, the ability to fully comprehend the text is difficult. Even when sung in the native language of the listener, the words are often misinterpreted. In addition, although less of a challenge in a stressed-accent language such as Italian (in which it is more natural to stress or over-articulate words), the weak and contracted forms of speech, varied accents and varied patterns of intonation in English can result in a forced and unbelievable performance (Fawkes, 2000). Using this forced voice on screen may unhinge the suspension of disbelief for an audience. Not only is this type of voice not typically found in the real world, but the concentration required to decipher its text can become tiring. In film, the framing of the screenplay and the context for this voice must be significantly compelling to allow the voice to exist.

As stated by Salzman and Desi (2008), the over-projected voice and exaggerated gesticulations of theatre and opera are counterintuitive to the realism of amplified sound and magnified image in cinema. The natural speaking voice adopted by mainstream cinema is a reactionary response to the realism of screen where the voice from theatrical dialogue becomes mismatched within the realism of screen. For screen opera, the operatic voice would have to adapt to its screen environment in the same way that it adapted to suit a larger opera house. In Out of Sight, the operatic voice was readapted to suit cinematic conventions through using spoken, sung, manipulated and whispered voice as the screen opera’s voice.
Readapting Operatic Voice for Opera on Screen

The operatic voice for screen was readapted by composers Ashley (1978–1983) and Reich in their respective operatic works for screen, Perfect Lives and The Cave (Reich & Korot, 1993). In Ashley’s Perfect Lives, the operatic voice is a highly rhythmic speech with minute inflections in intonation. Ashley (as cited in Gross, 1997) stated:

I like a very close-up take on the pitch inflections of singing. I like to hear a very subtle kind of selection of pitches that is possible by using microphone techniques. It seems to me that it’s very good for the English language. English sounds better that way than when you try to adapt it in the old-fashioned opera style. I think it’s peculiar that the English language that we hear on television is so lively compared to trying to set English to a contemporary operatic orchestration. (para. 22)

However, Ashley (as cited in Gross, 1997) did not define this type of singing as a naturalistic approach. For Ashley, this was essentially using microphones to detect minute pitch changes from a singer, rather than using the operatic voice to project, as in an opera house.

In Reich and Korot’s (1993) The Cave, pitched variances of normal speech were harmonised to music to create a melodic line. This was then edited to create fragments of rhythmic and melodic motifs. For Reich, using bel canto voices without acknowledging that they conjure Italy or Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can lead to an inadvertently humorous work (Kim, 2002). In his interview with Geoff Smith about his objection to operatic voice, he stated:

the operatic voice was created for a reason. It was created in the early days when it had to be heard over the orchestra. Along comes Wagner with a big brass band section and, baby, we’re talking big voices because it was an acoustical necessity. I understand that ... To recreate even the Mozartian opera voice now when we have microphones, or to amplify that voice, seems to me absurd, and a musical mistake in very bad taste. I think it’s vulgar. (Reich, as cited in Smith, 1993, p. 18)

Neither of these operas for screen use the highly melismatic or declamatory voice associated with opera. Instead, they employ singing-speech. Singing-speech in English is easy to understand, and removes the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century stigma of opera. Thus, for opera to work on screen, a novel approach to operatic voice may be required to enable clarity and believability.
In May 2013, composer David Lang (2013) premiered his opera, *The Whisper Opera*. This is an intimate opera comprised of minimal instrumentation, set and performers, and performed in a small space. In *The Whisper Opera*, the singer whispers anonymous secrets contributed via the Internet. In Lang’s opera, the operatic voice is not a sung voice, but a whispered voice. It is an affected voice that uses the rhythm of dialogue, minor inflections, pauses and nuances in speech coordinated with music to form the operatic voice (Video Clip 3).

Here, Lang (2013) explored the difficulty of live performance and creating a work that challenged both the performers and audience in deciphering the music and text. Although this was a staged opera, in which the goal was to create an intimate response between the performers and audience, the whispered voice has merits in exploring operatic voice in the context of contemporary opera. It also exemplifies how the operatic voice and its environment have adapted for one another — in this case, by choosing an intimate space for the acoustically soft performance.
Voice is used in both singing and speaking, with both requiring the altering of pitch, intensity and timbre of the voice. The recorded voice can also be altered digitally post-recording using equalisation techniques and a range of effects to enable ‘musical’ manipulation. In contemporary screen opera, the whispered voice can be used because microphones can record the smallest changes in sounds and relay an intimacy between the recorded performance and the audience. Thus, operatic voice is not just a sung voice. Musicality in speech can account for operatic voice by the minor inflections in speech itself, and by processing it digitally (Ashley, 2015; Reich, 2011).

In a contemporary screen opera, performers may be speaking, singing or whispering. This raises the question of where dialogue ends and the libretto begins, or whether they can be one and the same in screen opera. By considering the entire audio track as music, and thus a composed score (see Chapter Four), spoken, sung and manipulated words may all be considered libretto. To differentiate between the different types of operatic voices in my work, I considered diegesis — a convention of film that allows the categorisation of sounds and music.

**Diegesis**

The word ‘diegesis’ has been used since the time of Aristotle and Plato, when it was used to distinguish narration that ‘told’ in comparison to narration that ‘showed’ (mimesis). In relation to the sound and music in a film, diegesis draws strongly from its literary beginnings. In conventional film, music or sound is considered diegetic when the source of the sound is understood to emanate from the story world. It is considered non-diegetic or extra-diegetic when the music is ‘scored’ (for example, as underscore), or when the sound cannot be explained as a source that emanates from the story. As such, in musicals and screen operas, there may be confusion regarding diegesis because the characters may be singing at all times. In these cases, the rules of diegesis vary. The next section outlines the definition of diegesis as it applies to musicals and screen operas.
There has long been debate among scholars on categorising film sound and music through diegesis (Kassabian, 2001; Winters, 2010). I acknowledge that there are varying classifications in diegesis, as well as sub-classifications linked to categorising film sound and music. In this research, I took the approach described by Claudia Gorbman (1987) that film music may be categorised as (i) diegetic, (ii) non-diegetic or (iii) meta-diegetic.

Just as music or playing an instrument in film can be defined as either diegetic or non-diegetic, so can singing. In musicals and operas, singing is classified as diegetic when the characters are aware that they are singing (van der Lek, 1991). Conversely, singing is non-diegetic when the characters are not aware that they are singing (van der Lek, 1991). This idea may be applied equally to screen musicals and screen operas.

In the scene shown in Figure 2, from *The Sound of Music* (Wise, 1965), Maria is teaching the children to sing ‘Do-Re-Mi’. The singing and music in this particular scene are diegetic because the characters are aware that they are singing.
In contrast, in the scene from *The Sound of Music* in which the nuns are discussing a problem with Maria through song (Figure 3), the singing may be considered non-diegetic because the nuns are not aware that they are singing. As discussed earlier, through the suspension of disbelief, the audience may be able to accept that the nuns are unaware of their singing. In this manner, it may be possible to immerse an audience in the film, and have singing at the same time.

A third level of diegesis is meta-diegetic. This refers to sound or music that is hallucinated or imagined by the character. There are many examples of portraying the inner sound world of a character in films. A clichéd example is when a character approaches an empty stage or sports field and hears the chants and roars of an imagined crowd. These sounds are often treated with reverb, delay or echo to provide the perception of recalling something from the past, or an imagined future. In *Out of Sight*, I used these effects to allude to Amelia’s mental state.
Sound in Film

Sound is defined as the vibrations that travel through air and other mediums that become audible once they reach our ears. In film, sound may include music, sound effects, Foley, designed sound and directly recorded sound. Sound is usually the last element that is finalised during the post-production of a film to enhance the film. It contributes a realness that makes the film believable and tangible.

The enhancement of a film through sound has been examined in reviewing the prologue sequence of Ingmar Bergman's (1966) film *Persona*. Case studies on this sequence involved removing the audio completely and considering the visuals only. These case studies noted that, without sound, the viewer notices the cuts and jumps in shots that are created as part of the edit. Sound smooths out these edits by linking the images. Through their synchronicity with the moving image, a cohesive story may be formed — one that is partly directed by aural means (Chion, 1994). In *Out of Sight*, sound was employed throughout the film. The layers of sound included natural sounds that were recorded on the day of the film, atmospheric sounds that filled the rooms or spaces in which we filmed, dialogue, music and sound design. Sound design — first coined by Walter Murch and Francis Ford Coppola in 1972, is defined as the manipulation and creation of sounds through pre-composed or recorded audio material (Chion, 1994).

Musical Associations

According to Kassabian (2001):

Music draws filmgoers into a film’s world, measure by measure. It is, I will argue, at least as significant as the visual and narrative components that have dominated film studies. It conditions identification processes, the encounters between film texts and filmgoers’ psyche. (p. 1)

Throughout history, music has played a role in both sacred and secular settings. In Western classical music, meaning was often sought in specific
musical phrases or scales. In the Renaissance period for example, the proportions of music was believed by Martin Luther to be strongly connected to God. However, by the twentieth century, the role of music became viewed by some as absolute. Stravinsky (as cited in White, 1984) wrote:

I consider that music is, by its very nature, powerless to express anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature. If, as is nearly always the case, music appears to express something, this is only an illusion and not a reality. (p. 566)

Film composer Irwin Bazelon supported this idea. Bazelon (1975) stated that listeners’ responses to music are like daydreams — stories created by the listeners’ own experiences that are “[triggered] by undirected or lazy listening habits, and perhaps by associations deep-rooted in childhood” (p. 74). He wrote:

The language of music expresses only musical aesthetics: ... in its pure and absolute state [music] does not describe anything ... [T]he images it seems to conjure up in the listener’s mind’s eye are not implicit in its pure sound environment. (Bazelon, 1975, p. 74)

One may question how music contributes meaning to a film, and how an audience is able to identify with what is heard. Kassabian’s (2001) offers an explanation to this in her research on tracking identifications in contemporary Hollywood film music. Kassabian centres her research on the following principals:

First, any story of identifications with films must take account of engagements between filmgoers and film scores. Second, those engagements are conditioned by filmgoer’s relationships to a wider range of musics [sic] both within and outside of their film going practices. Third, the study of film music both requires and enables the study of the political and social relations of contemporary life. (p. 2)

What Kassabian referred to as “identifications” in her research may be justly translated into musical associations. She wrote: “Identification processes through film music cannot be understood in a single way — not all scores offer similar paths to identifications” (Kassabian, 2001, p. 2). Here, she indicated two types of identifications: assimilating identifications and affiliating identifications. These may also be thought of as assimilating associations and affiliating associations, respectively.
In assimilating associations, connections of an emotional, psychological or physical nature may occur when a score composed specifically for a film is perceived. The composed score may transport the perceiver into “socially and historically unfamiliar positions” (Kassabian, 2001, p. 2). Kassabian (2001) stated that, in composed score scenarios, there is no relationship or history between the score perceived or the identity position (that is, the association of the perceiver). Kassabian (2001) noted that assimilating associations are rigid because they are able to influence the perceiver “towards a tightly controlled position that tends to line up comfortably with aspects of dominant ideologies” (p. 141). Production music libraries are exemplary of this because they supply music with which the general audience identifies. Composed scores and production music libraries achieve this by using generally accepted or known musical associations (Kassabian, 2001). Examples of musical associations include music indexed by geography (such as Western, Oriental or African tribal) and mood (such as foreboding, sadness or elation). In reading these examples, we may already be generating this music in our minds. For Kassabian (2001), this acknowledges some form of relationship and history between the audience and the music they hear. Composed scores must use this to direct the audience — the perceiver — through edited images and sound in order to achieve the film’s goals.

The second type of musical association relates to compiled scores. Kassabian termed this ‘affiliating associations’. Compiled scores are music tracks that are commonly audible through the radio, television and other means. They are both recognisable and referential, and subsequently carry weight through their associated history. Kassabian (2001) stated that affiliating associations influence the perceiver in a less rigid manner, and rely more on the perceiver’s own “psychic formations and histories” (p. 142). Affiliating associations therefore work partly as a result of generally known or accepted musical associations. Just as music indexed by geography or mood carries musical connotations, so do compiled scores. Compiled scores may be categorised by genres, such as blues, classical, soul, instrumental, tempo, tonality and even instrumentation. All these have their own set of musical associations that may
be juxtaposed or enhanced, depending on how the film is filmed and edited to the score. In Chapter Four, I discuss how assimilating and affiliating associations were applied to analyse the soundtrack of my creative component and my intentions in shaping the narrative.

**Organised Sound as Musical Composition**

In *Out of Sight*, considering the entire audio track as a composed score via the composer as bricoleur encouraged sound, music and operatic voice (dialogue/libretto) to be examined as the musical composition. This idea embraced the presentation of *Out of Sight* as a contemporary screen opera, in which music must be an integral element of the work. Again, this required the application of ideas of contemporary composers such as Cage (2011), Reich (Reich & Korot, 1993) and Ashley (1978–1983) in seeking to express my approach to notions of contemporary screen opera — where the audio track, as the musical score, is the product of composition.

Unlike traditional ideas of composition, the layering of sounds — rather than specifically notation on a page — represents the composition. Thus, the soundtrack incorporates traditional notions of composed music through using underscored music, diegetic singing, operatic voice, spoken and manipulated dialogue, and background atmospheric sounds. In addition, the pauses between sound that create moments of silence or unnoticed noise may also be considered composition, which incorporates Cage’s philosophy on music and noise in which “[e]verything we do is music” (as cited in White, 2004, para. 8).

In 1961, Cage (2011) published a series of lectures and writings in which he asserted:

> Every film studio has a library of ‘sound effects’ recorded on film. With a film phonograph it is now possible to control the amplitude and frequency of any one of these sounds and to give it rhythms within or beyond the reach of the imagination. Given four film phonographs, we can compose and perform a quartet for explosive motor, wind, heartbeat, and landslide. (p. 3)

With the technology available for musical composition through sequencers (see Chapter Four), film composers often match, sample, compile, manipulate
and effect sounds to create a composition through layering and organising sounds. Cage (2011) asserted: “If this word ‘music’ is sacred and reserved for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century instruments, we can substitute a more meaningful term: organization of sound” (p. 3).

The notion of removing the boundaries between noise, sound and music allows a blending of aural elements. Figure 4 diagrammatically presents the relationship between instrumental music, dialogue, and natural sounds and sound effects as three key, interconnected components of sound in film. These three components are often considered only in their individual entities in a film, and not regarded as a whole in their design. As a composer and bricoleur, I treated these entities as part of a whole by finding musicality both in their individual states, and when crossed or hybridised. For example, music and dialogue may be crossed to create a song or hybridised musical dialogue — ‘composed dialogue’. Similarly, natural sounds and sound effects can be composed around dialogue in a musical manner. At times, the musicality in the hybridisation is obvious. At other times, musical nuances may be found after careful examination and understanding of the musical process.

Specifically, I used and hybridised principals of several composers:

- Ashley’s (2015) concept of an operatic voice that uses the microphone to capture the minor inflections in speech (Gross, 1997)
- Reich’s (2011) lack of singing and manipulation of voice for effect and dramaturgy (Kim, 2002; Smith, 1993)
- Cage’s (2011) approach to silence and noise as music (Brooks, 2007; White, 2004) and the organisation of all sounds as musical composition.

In Chapter Four, I break down moments of my film as examples of composition in the audio track.


Surrealism

The artifice of opera has been presented as a challenge to adapting opera from stage to screen. As stated in Chapter One, one of the more successful adaptations of opera to film has been Syberberg’s (1982) *Parsifal*. In Syberberg’s adaptation, puppetry, costume, set design and the use of multiple actors for one character were employed to create a surrealistic work. In this section, I discuss the history of surrealism to contextualise its use in embracing the artifice of opera on screen. Later in Chapter Four, I relate the influences and techniques in surrealism specifically to *Out of Sight*.

Surrealism is an avant-garde movement in arts and literature that developed in the early part of the twentieth century. Emerging from the Dada and symbolic movements, surrealism was formally defined in 1924 by poet and writer André Breton (1969) as “psychic automatism [or stream of consciousness] in its pure state” (p. 26). A strong influence in the ideologies of the surrealist movement was the writing of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. In surrealist artworks, Freud’s (1913) ideas of tapping into the subconscious translated into reoccurring themes of dreams and resolving the contradictory conditions of dreams and reality. Irrational scenes that combine nonsensical and logical everyday objects or themes became a common element in surrealist art (Coombs, 2008; Grindon, 2011). Surrealism as a movement also
“questioned social, moral and religious conventions” (Coombs, 2008, p. 19) and argued that the unconscious production of art enabled honesty or “some kind of universal truth” (Coombs, 2008, p. 20).

Surrealism on screen first appeared in French cinema in the 1920s. The collaborative efforts of two Spaniards, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, were particularly influential in establishing surrealist cinema (Coombs, 2008; Harper & Stone, 2007). In their short film, Un Chien Andalou (An Andalusian Dog), Buñuel (1929) and Dalí removed all logical associations and applied dream logic in an effort to capture irrationality. Buñuel (1983) later wrote of their process:

> Our only rule was very simple: no idea or image that might lend itself to a rational explanation of any kind would be accepted. We had to open all doors to the irrational and keep only those images that surprised us, without trying to explain why. (p. 104)

In Un Chien Andalou, Buñuel (1929) and Dalí juxtaposed grotesque images (such as a hand with ants crawling out of its palm) and subversive behaviour with everyday events (Coombs, 2008). Although lacking a logical storyline, these images provoke a reaction from the audience and affirm the ideologies of the surrealist: “to explode social order [and] to transform life itself” (Buñuel, as cited in Harper & Stone, 2007, p. 3).

Since the 1920s, surrealism has continued to be embraced on screen, from advertising to animation. A notable 1980s surrealist filmmaker is the Czech animator, Jan Švankmajer. By employing live action, animation and puppetry, Švankmajer’s films create a world that is grotesque and surreal, through which he expresses social and political commentary (Coombs, 2008). Famously, his retelling of Lewis Caroll’s (1865) Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland in Alice (Švankmajer, 1988) is regarded “a meticulously constructed infantile dream” (de Bruyn, 2002). While the film employs a linear narrative, Švankmajer evokes a sense of surrealism through using stop-motion animation, combined with live action, extreme close-ups, and the uncanny use of real and found sounds. The themes of childhood are contrasted by the motif of “decay and entropy” (Coombs, 2008, p. 91).
Švankmajer’s work is worth discussing due to the obvious parallels between presenting animation and puppetry on film and presenting opera on film. In both accounts, there are elements of artificiality as a result of their irrational presentations. In puppetry, inanimate objects gain the ability to speak and move. In opera, people sing (often in an exaggerated manner) instead of speaking. In surrealist films, a fundamental convention is the depiction of the unconscious mind and its desires, which are normally repressed (Haywood, 1996). These can be presented as dream sequences, irrational behaviour, grotesque imagery and sexual fantasies — to name a few. With respect to opera, surrealism consolidates its primary convention — namely, the expression of (at times) unconscious desires — through irrational singing. Here, the irrationality of sung dialogue and even the artifice of a projected voice on screen may be applied without breaking the audience’s sense of disbelief. Thus, surrealism presents a world in which the artificiality of opera and the abandonment of logic for irrationality can exist on screen.

**Chapter Summary**

The conventions of opera — sung dialogue, using music to suspend action and time, exaggerated words, and repetition of words and phrases — require the suspension of disbelief to achieve verisimilitude. In a screen opera, the realism of film — the amplification of sound and image (as suggested by Salzman and Desi [2008]) and representation of reality through images (as suggested by Kracauer [1970]) — invalidates the need to use an over-projected voice or exaggerated movements. The operatic voice, presented as a challenge in the conflict between cinematic and operatic conventions, provided a solution to resolve an aspect of the artificiality of opera on screen. Through examining the operas of Ashley, Reich and Lang, I was led to understand the possibility of readapting the operatic voice for screen.

This chapter examined diegesis (diegetic, non-diegetic and meta-diegetic), and employed diegesis to analyse the operatic voice, sound and music on screen.
This chapter discussed the role of sound and music in film, with particular focus on the work of Kassabian (2001) regarding how an audience identifies with sound and music through assimilating and affiliating associations. In analysing a film score through diegesis and its aural associations, sound and music may be used to relate back to the arias and recitatives of a traditional opera.

This chapter analysed a screen opera for its success as a film — Syberberg's (1982) *Parsifal*. The use of surrealism in this film demonstrated a possibility for the artificiality of opera to exist on screen. By examining surrealism's history and surrealist cinema, this chapter noted the fundamental ideas of the surrealist movement. The presentation of the unconscious mind through film replicates the automatistic expression of thoughts — similar to the idea of dreams revealing one's true feelings. Here, the existence of irrational thoughts, images and desires may be represented with a disregard for logic. The abandonment of logic to embrace irrationality is at the heart of opera, and surrealism presents an opportunity for opera and screen to coexist.

To conclude, the conventions of opera may still exist without the use of a traditional operatic voice producing an opera as film. The composition of dialogue, sounds and music become the musical components of the operatic film instead. The use of surrealism can be used in instances where singing is required to balance realism of film and the irrationality of a sung voice. The next chapter examines the study's collaborative journey in relation to research as practice, bricolage and reflectivity through microblogging.