

## OPPOSITE OR COMPLEMENTARY CONCEPTIONS? WHAT DO RUDOLF ARNHEIM AND MICHEL CHION HAVE IN COMMON?

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*Artistic media combine [...] as separate and complete structural forms. The theme to be expressed by a song, for instance, is given in the words of the text and again, in another manner, in the sounds of the music. Both elements conform to each other in such a way as to create the unity of the whole, but their separateness remains evident, nevertheless.<sup>1</sup>*

Like the music and lyrics of a song, Rudolf Arnheim maintains that even when deployed together, image and sound should retain their respective integrity and separateness as sensory phenomena. This claim is born of his notion that sound and image are two distinct media, as “separate and complete structural forms.” Furthermore, it is only when the two media are distinct from one another that the work constitutes art. In line with Lessing’s distinction between the visual arts and literature, sound and the moving image engage their audiences in different sensory experiences, the aural and visual respectively. In direct contrast to Arnheim’s theories of sound film, fifty years later Michel Chion maintains that the cinema is defined by its marriage of sound and image, that the two belong together in an interdependent relationship of creativity. For Chion the ultimate goal of sound-image relations in the cinema is a utopian state analogous to the symbiotic relationship between mother and child in the womb.<sup>2</sup> Chion argues that the sound film is unique due to its eternal striving for this unity, a unity it will however never fully realize because of the inevitable physical separation of sound and image. For Arnheim, this separation is the sound film’s greatest weakness and for Chion it is its creative force. Chion recognizes that while the sound and image tracks are materially distant (sound is recorded with a different mechanism, exhibited through speakers that are physically removed from the screen, and so on), they are, and, in the sound cinema’s most outstanding examples, should be, experienced in perfect sensorial unison. Similarly, the two theorists are opposed in their assessment of the intrinsic worth of sound film. On the one hand, Arnheim is so damning that it is impossible for sound film to be considered art. Chion, on the other hand, celebrates the possibilities of sound film: it is a highly sophisticated and complex audiovisual medium. While on the surface these two conceptions may appear radically opposed to one another, on closer inspection they are surprisingly compatible. They are both driven by the same premises: they are based on similar conceptions of cinema as a unique perceptual experience. And in both cases, this experience is marked as unique by the fact that the cinema does not merely duplicate reality. For both Arnheim and Chion cinema also presents a distinct art form. To achieve this distinction cinema must use the intrinsic properties of its medium. Lastly, both reject the notion that the coming of sound in 1927 ushered in a critical shift in film aesthetics.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years Chion's work on film sound has been the subject of respect and analysis within Anglo-American film studies. It has been praised for its "fresh and rigorous thinking about the complex relations between sound and image,"<sup>4</sup> its offer of "new ways to think about structures and effects of audio-visual experience"<sup>5</sup> and its attention to a hitherto neglected area of film criticism. Rudolf Arnheim's 1938 theory of talking pictures however is often dismissed on the basis of its naivety and conservatism.<sup>6</sup> More usually, Anglo-American works on the history of film-sound theory ignore Arnheim's work altogether. In this article I argue that despite the superficial polarities, in their common search for a perceptual experience of a cinematic reality, Arnheim and Chion produce complementary theories. It is only due to the disparity of the respective historical moments within which they write that the two theories assume such discordant attitudes toward the sound film. Chion conceives optimistically of an artistic, "adventurous" sound cinema. And it is only due to developments in viewing conditions and available technologies for film production that he is able to excavate, theorize and celebrate the complexity of sound-image film relations. In turn, Arnheim's pessimism about the future of sound film is undergirded by the limitations of sound technology in its earliest days, the historical moment in which he was writing. If we strip away Arnheim's and Chion's dependence on their respective historical moments, the two theories are, I would argue, congruous. I want to draw attention to this congruity as a way of challenging our rush both to denigrate the productivity of classical or modernist film theory, and, to assume the value of more contemporary, though no less compromised, theories. When classical film theory is viewed within its historical context, freed of its oftentimes problematic theoretical assumptions, it has much to offer our understanding of film and our experience of the cinema.

While Arnheim is not against the combination of two media *per se*, he is pessimistic about the successful marriage of sound and image in the cinema. Chion also states that image and sound are always physically isolated, and yet, he also believes that it is possible for the two to be *perceived* as complementary and unified even if they are not unified in production and exhibition. Herein lies the fundamental difference between the two thinkers. Arnheim maintains that in cinematic realism the spectator hears and sees what is given to him or her. Therefore, if the sound and image are physically separated in production and exhibition, they are necessarily separate to the human senses. However, according to Arnheim, even in "composite" media such as the theatre, a combination of visual action and dialogue, one medium dominates and the other "completes" or "supports" the role of the dominant. Thus, *prima facie*, it would appear impossible to achieve perceptual integration in any composite medium.

Unlike the theatre, the visual action of (silent) film is always complete. In film, human characters may, but do not necessarily, assume center stage. Rather, for Arnheim, humans are only a part of the world of the film: the medium is more concerned with "the world animated by man than with man set off against his world."<sup>7</sup> It is the interaction of the human characters with the events which take place on the screen that is, according to Arnheim, an essential quality of the cinema. Due to this objective quality of film, for Arnheim, the addition of dialogue has disastrous results. Either, the dialogue *replaces* action as a means of articulation, an instance in which the visual becomes subservient to speech and the film shows no more than a static close-up of a character talking. In such a film all other events are backgrounded. Thus instead of pursuing its natural purpose as a medium of animated action, film supposedly lapses

into pursuing the purpose of theatre: it articulates characters' subjective states through dialogue.<sup>8</sup> According to Arnheim, such film is no longer an art, it is filmed theatre. Alternatively, in the "talking film" the "dialogue is fragmentary; it consists of pieces that are separated by unbridgeable interruptions."<sup>9</sup> Arnheim does not offer precise details of the films to which he is referring, however, his comments apply to many of the early sound films in which conversations with sound were included to display the capacities for synchronized sound.<sup>10</sup> Because of the difficulties of producing synchronized sound, there was often very little talking and these moments did appear somewhat incongruous with the rest of the film's silence. The conversations were said to disrupt the viewing experience: they came as a "ludicrous surprise" in an otherwise silent film. Rather than using the dialogue to support the image, to complete the visual, these snatches of dialogue were utilized as a means of "condensing" the visual.<sup>11</sup> For Arnheim, this condensation of the visual disrespects the distinction of film as art. It is more like filmed theatre. As he attests in an earlier essay, for the "acoustical film" to continue the groundbreaking work of silent film as a unique and separate art form, sound would have to be able to be montaged in the vein of the visual montage of films such as *Variété* (E.A. Dupont, 1925) and *Der letzte Mann* (F.W. Murnau, 1924).<sup>12</sup> Arnheim makes it clear that although sound and image may coexist in certain art forms, there is no place for sound in the cinema if film is to retain its integrity as art and a sensory phenomenon.

Arnheim's scathing critique of the sound film is born of a number of factors. At the time he was writing, the technological developments for the recording and editing of sound were still in their infancy. As a result, the disruptions to the viewing experience referred to by Arnheim are also due to the crudity of production techniques. Likewise, filmmakers were still developing aesthetic techniques for the integration of sound and image in the cinema. They were novices of the medium. Thus, the films upon which Arnheim bases his critique did not exhibit the most sophisticated integration of sound. Similarly, as Sabine Hake postulates, Arnheim's vitriolic attack of the sound film was in part motivated by his reservations of the increasing emphasis placed upon the economic viability of films.<sup>13</sup> The introduction of sound accelerated the economic success of cinema as a form of standardized mass entertainment.<sup>14</sup> The cinema's rising economic motivation was understood by many as detrimental to its artistic development and consolidation. Although Arnheim himself was reluctant to attribute the decline of artistic excellence to increased industrialization and economic exigencies, he does not towards the imbrication of the two.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the most important motivation for Arnheim's rejection of sound cinema is the fact that, quite simply, it did not accord with his theory of film as a purely visual medium.

Despite the limitations of Arnheim's conception of the separation of sound and image, his thoughts on this matter are consistent with his larger theory of film as an art unique unto itself. Like many other film theories of this period, Arnheim's *Film as Art* is driven by the imperative to legitimize the cinema as an art.<sup>16</sup> This project was a reaction to the rejection of the artistic capacities of photography – and by extension, cinema – among art and literary theorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Neither photography nor cinema was considered art: they were deemed mere mechanical reproductions of reality. As slavish mechanically reproduced imitations of nature, film and photography were unable to express the creative individuality of the artist, a central condition for the determination of any medium as art. In a response to

this dismissal of cinema as art, in *Film as Art* Arnheim illustrates that the cinema is neither a mechanical duplication of nature or reality nor a replica of any other art, namely, the theatre. He does this by arguing that the cinema as a perceptual experience differs from a mechanical duplication of our normal perceptual experience of reality. Like fellow classical film theorists such as Béla Balász or Siegfried Kracauer, Arnheim argues that the cinema manipulates, transforms and magnifies the profilmic reality, and in so doing, is more than a simple replication.<sup>17</sup> Our perception of film is distinct from our perception of the everyday world. Arnheim provides many examples of articulations that are unique to film in order to support his theory. Among these he lists: the two-dimensionality of the cinematic image, the absence of constancy in size, the use of lighting, the absence of colour, the absence of the space-time continuum achieved through editing, absence of non-visual sense experience and various other techniques.<sup>18</sup> However, the use of these techniques alone does not legitimate film as art. Not all films are art, rather, film has the potential to be art. Arnheim claims that a film is art if these techniques form the basis of “expressiveness.”

*In order that the film artist may create a work of art it is important that he consciously stress the peculiarities of his medium. This, however, should be done in such a manner that the character of the objects represented should not thereby be destroyed but rather strengthened, concentrated, and interpreted [...] the various peculiarities of film material can be, and have been, used to achieve artistic effects.<sup>19</sup>*

This “artistic effect” is what Arnheim later refers to as expressiveness. As Noël Carroll points out, Arnheim’s concept of expressiveness is vague and inconsistent. Carroll summarizes that in *Film as Art*, the meaning of “expressiveness” ranges from the “forcefulness” of a particular character achieved through an extreme low angle shot, through the evocation of powerful emotions in the spectator due to specific framing devices, to, broadly speaking, a “coexten[sion]” with the idea of communication.<sup>20</sup> Irrespective of the imprecision of Arnheim’s notion of the “expressiveness” yielded by film as art, it is important to recognize that the specific perceptual conditions of the cinema be utilized with the purpose of achieving this expressiveness.

Attributes of the cinema that ensure its divergence from a mechanical reproduction of normal vision are imperative to Arnheim’s theory of cinema as art. As noted above, the *absence* of sound is a limitation of film that enables it to manipulate reality through the use of properties which are intrinsic to the medium. According to Arnheim, sound is not intrinsic to the medium as it also belongs to everyday reality. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that he would be so adverse to the *presence* of sound: in short, the sonic dimension of film takes it closer to the specter of duplication so anathema to Arnheim’s theory of the cinema. The very silence of film affords it its “impetus as well as the power to achieve excellent artistic effects.”<sup>21</sup> The cinema, like no other art form, has the capacity to *visualize* that which is otherwise communicated aurally. Arnheim draws upon a number of examples of this visual communication of sound such as Charlie Chaplin’s pronounced movements and facial expressions, and the spirited rhythmic dancing of people at a political meeting in *Les Nouveaux Messieurs* (J. Feyder, 1929) which effectively visualizes the music they dance to. He also cites the visualization of a scene from *The Docks of New York* (J. von Sternberg, 1928) in which a gun shot is fired. In this sequence birds are seen to rise abruptly, scattering in the sky following the gun

shot. Arnheim argues that the spectator “sees” the quality of the noise: “the suddenness, the abruptness of the rising birds, give visually the exact quality that the shot possesses acoustically.”<sup>22</sup> The spectator sees the dramatic impact of the gunshot through the reaction of the birds. Therefore, the silence of the film does not reduce it to a mere pantomime, but rather, for Arnheim the sonic dimension of on-screen events is enhanced due to the absence of sound. Absence of sound is one of the perceptual conditions that marks the cinematic image as something other than mere recording of reality and can, as in the case of the scene from *The Docks of New York* imbue the image with a forceful expressive effect.

Among his other reservations about the sound film Arnheim claims that sound gives the image a three-dimensional quality, it reduces the frame to a mere opening, without any particular characteristics. As such, the cinema is no more than a replication of reality. Sound also burdens each scene with an unnecessary naturalism, thereby preventing the play with other realities and making impossible quick transitions between shots; in this case, film becomes a “technically perfected theatre.”

Writing fifty years after Rudolf Arnheim, in his concept of “audio-vision,” Michel Chion insists upon the integration of sound and image in the narrative film. Unlike Arnheim, Chion is not posing a prescriptive theory of the conditions of film as art. Rather, in *Audio-Vision* Chion sets out to *describe* the perceptual qualities of film sound and, from here, to demonstrate the particular “reality” of the audio-visual combination in sound cinema. Thus he does not bring a pre-interpretative theory of film to bear upon his conceptualization and consequent judgment of cinematic audio-vision. He uses the perception of filmic sound-image relations as a basis for a subsequent theorization of the cinema.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Chion ends up with a theory of cinema that, like Arnheim’s embraces its extraordinariness, and privileges the artistic effects of its peculiar reality. In addition, like Arnheim, Chion focusses on the perceptual experience as the defining characteristic of cinema. As I shall argue, it is only due to developments in film technology, production and exhibition that for Chion the cinema of “hyperrealism” is a sound cinema.

Like American film scholars such as Rick Altman and James Lastra, Chion is not only disenchanted with the general lack of critical attention paid to film sound, but he is also concerned to highlight the integrity of sound to cinematic production, exhibition and reception.<sup>24</sup> For Chion, sound is fundamental to a specifically cinematic perception. In contradistinction to early theorizations of sound which spoke of the *counterpoint* of filmic sound and image, Chion argues that the two parameters are always interdependent, never autonomous.<sup>25</sup> Each owes its existence and coherence to the other. The grounds of this claim are relatively straightforward. In the case of sound’s dependence on the image for its existence and coherence as film sound, Chion repeatedly asserts that whilst “a film without sound remains a film; a film with no image, or at least without visual frame for projection, is not a film.”<sup>26</sup> If sound does not have a locus, or reference in the spatial parameters of the projected image, then it is not film sound, rather, it is radio. Chion attributes the dependence of the image upon the sonic dimensions of the medium to the “added value” effected by sound. He defines it thus:

*By added value I mean the expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image so as to create the definite impression, in the immediate or remembered experience one has of it, that this information or expression “naturally” comes from what is seen,*

*and is already contained in the image itself. Added value is what gives the (eminently incorrect) impression that sound is unnecessary, that sound merely duplicates a meaning which in reality it brings about, either all on its own or by discrepancies between it and the image.*<sup>27</sup>

To give one example offered by Chion, the sonic dimension of a human punch or physical blow adds an expression of temporal instantaneity to the visual dimension. According to Chion, without the auditory perception of the blow, the image of the punch would not be registered by the spectator: it “would not become engraved into the memory, [it] would tend to get lost.”<sup>28</sup> The sound of the blow serves to emphasize or announce an action and its “reverberations” within the narrative, an action that the eye would not otherwise register as significant. Similarly, the sonic enunciation of the visual action ensures that the significance of the blow registers in the spectator’s “consciousness” *immediately*. If the image is not accompanied by the sound of the punch, the spectator will only recognize its significant reverberations in retrospect once it is contextualized by the ensuing images. Due to this temporal instantaneity afforded the film by its sonic dimension, sound “adds value” or expressiveness to the visual.

There are already striking similarities between Chion’s necessary integration of the aural and the visual and Arnheim’s otherwise polar belief in the separation of the same two parameters. Chion readily admits that sound modifies the image when it, for example, relieves the image of its responsibility to structure space. It is no longer the image’s task to demarcate the space of the narrative, but rather, the “vast extension” of ambient sounds map the much larger spaces within which a film takes place.<sup>29</sup> Thus, like Arnheim, Chion recognizes the re-spatialization of the image brought through the use of sound: sound affords the image a three-dimensional quality. This added dimensionality is unwelcomed by Arnheim as it takes film closer to reality, away from an exploration of the intrinsic qualities of the medium. Chion, however, considers sound’s alteration of the dimensionality of the image an *enhancement* of cinematic perception. He points out that the modification “has left untouched the image’s centrality as that which focuses the attention”<sup>30</sup> and that sound simply indicates what warrants the spectator’s attention. More notably, both Arnheim and Chion locate “expressiveness” as the key to the perceptual conditions of film as art and cinematic reality respectively.<sup>31</sup> And yet, in keeping with his applause for the visualization of the sound of the gun shot in *The Docks of New York*, the acoustic articulation of a punch would for Arnheim rob the film of its status as art. To announce the punch with sound would be to *replace* the image with sound, and thereby, disrespect the particularity of the medium, a medium that has the capacity to communicate all sensory phenomena via the image. Similarly, such a strategy would take the film closer to a mere mechanical duplication of reality. In short, the film would be empty of all expressiveness. Likewise given Chion’s celebration of the sonic dimension of the punch, the flurry of birds following the gun shot in *The Docks of New York*, would be an image with no “expressive or informative value.” It would lack the temporal instantaneity achieved through synchronous sound as the spectator only registers the impact of the gun shot after the fact when the birds scatter and rise into the sky. The very same silence which guarantees film as art for Arnheim impedes the creation of a cinematic hyperreality for Chion. And yet, Arnheim’s “expressiveness” and Chion’s “added value” both adhere to the notion that the unique cinematic reality is a heightened reality, a reality above and beyond, distinct from that experienced in the

everyday. Both writers are looking for the same extraordinary reality of the cinema. It is only due to their historical circumscription, that they find it in radically different places. But firstly, let us turn to Chion's larger theoretical concerns.

Unlike Arnheim, Chion does not bring a pre-interpretative theory of film to his conceptualization of sound cinema and therefore his is not motivated by a theoretical impetus. Nevertheless, Chion's description of the audio-visual experience of the cinema is governed by a specific theory of perception. His interpretation of cinematic perception assumes a spectator who perceives the structural phenomena of cinema as an organized whole, rather than as an aggregate of distinct parts. Although Chion only mentions Gestalt psychology in passing,<sup>32</sup> it can be strongly inferred that his model of perception is drawn from this school. Certainly, in keeping with Gestalt psychology, Chion maintains that the significance of the structured whole of cinematic perception does not depend on the specific constituent elements of the audio and the visual. He is not interested in analysis of sound and image as independent components of the cinema, but rather focuses upon the importance of each as relational structures for perception. Despite the fact that this assumption regarding the nature of perceptual experience does permeate the text, it is not a theoretical foundation for his argument. That is, he does not impose this model of perception onto the filmic moments he describes. Rather, the Gestalt theory of perception appears to be one of a number of biases which inform the instances of audio-vision he describes, namely instances of cinematic synchronization and synchresis. Chion only chooses moments in which sound and image work together to produce a concerted effect. There is no room in Chion's argument for the radical sound-image relations of avant-garde films such as those of Jean-Luc Godard of the 1970s. His only references to filmmakers such as Godard, whose practices overtly challenge the unified and coherent integration of filmic sound and image, are superficial and unconvincing.<sup>33</sup> Although Chion's attachment to a certain model of perception may influence the cinematic instances he chooses to describe, the descriptions which form the basis of his consequent understanding of cinematic reality are empirically determined. Like the example of the punch mentioned above, Chion offers a common sense characterization of the experience of perception.

Like Arnheim, Chion maintains that cinematic perception is of a different order to that of normal perception, thus the cinematic reality is distinct from a mere technological reproduction of reality. However, Chion is not concerned to delimit film as art, only to demonstrate the specific reality of the audio-visual combination as one in which each sensory phenomenon influences and transforms the other. For Chion the cinema's sound-image relationship renders a "hyperreality,"<sup>34</sup> by which he seems to mean a reality that is more real or "natural" than any reference point beyond the reproduction. Like much of Chion's terminology, his notion of hyperreality is nowhere clarified in *Audio-Vision*. However, he does claim that the cinematic sound-image perception "supplant[s] unmediated acoustical reality in strength, presence, and impact," and that it offers "a more direct and immediate contact with the event."<sup>35</sup> Consequently, the immediacy and directness of this experience heightens the reality of the perceptual event. It is this augmenting of perception that ensures the distinction between cinematic and everyday reality. Similarly, there is an intimacy to the experience of cinematic fiction that has no equivalent in lived reality. The cinema facilitates the sensuous experience of cartoon characters walking, of ghosts such as Dr. Mabuse talking, even of punches being thrown. To take the example of the punch once again: in real life a

punch does not always make a noise, indeed it is possible to see someone being punched and hear nothing. However, in the acoustically mediated reality the sound of the punch is obligatory if the spectator is to believe that it has been inflicted.<sup>36</sup> Thus the spectator does not determine the truth or reality of the cinematic punch in accordance with her pre-existing acoustic experience of punches in the real world, and yet, it is only true or real to cinematic perception if it bears the quality of synchronous sound. Hence in the hyperreality of cinematic perception, sound and image are perceived to be in perfect synchronization. In addition, in direct contrast to Arnheim's understanding of the unique film reality, sound is indispensable to the constitution of Chion's reality. Because the sonic dimension of the cinema is what gives the image its hyperreality, the integration of audio-vision is critical to the manipulation of the intrinsic properties of the medium.

Chion bases this theory of cinema's hyperreality upon two conditions of normal perception. Firstly, as in the case of the punch, in "concrete experience itself" sound and image are not necessarily integrated or unified as they are in the cinema. Secondly, in concrete experience the distinct elements of sound, such as volume, nature, colour and resonance will vary in accordance with each other. Therefore, for example, an increase of volume in an enclosed space will cause echoes and vibrations. However, due to the sophisticated technological capacities of the cinema each element of sound is manipulated in isolation from the others. Therefore, an increase in volume will not cause distortions to the entire sound event as volume is purified in isolation from the other ingredients.<sup>37</sup> Thus, in contradistinction to the commonly accepted claim that the reproduction of sound does not suffer a loss in dimensionality, according to Chion, like the reduction of a three-dimensional to a two-dimensional image, the transposition of sound renders it two-dimensional.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the reduction of the dimensionality of the sonic component of cinematic reality, heightens the "realism" of the perceptual experience. Again, like Arnheim, Chion maintains that it is the limitation of film's properties that is instrumental to cinematic perception. For Arnheim it is, for example, the absence of sound and for Chion it is, among other things, a loss in the dimensionality of sound.

For both Arnheim and Chion, the distinction of cinematic reality is dependent on an effective use of the intrinsic properties of the medium. Nevertheless, for Arnheim these properties are dependent on a separation of image and sound as sensory phenomena and for Chion they are the result of the integration of the two parameters in the narrative film experience. Similarly, both are concerned to put forward a perceptual experience that is unique unto itself, an experience that is not a mere duplication of reality. Despite the identical premises upon which the two scholars ground their theories of film, their assessment of the intrinsic worth of sound film is diametrically opposed. Arnheim is damning of the sound film: for him, it impossible for sound film to be art. Despite his celebration of sound film, Chion's perception of it also has limitations. Due to the emphasis he places on synchronized and "syncretic" sound-image perception, instances in which there is a slippage between sound and image would not effect a cinematic hyperreality in Chion's terms. Perhaps more problematic than the inapplicability of this theory to certain avant-garde sound-image practices, if sound films are to represent the cinematic reality of Chion's theory, they must be projected in a theatre or an acoustically modified space with the technical equipment to isolate and further manipulate the various properties of the sonic dimension. Certainly, an old 16mm screening in which the voices blur and the sounds are interrupted by imperfections in the record-



ing or reproduction are what “we might call caricatural.”<sup>39</sup> Thus the logic of Chion’s argument leads to the implication that a sound film seen in anything less than a multiplex does not render a cinematic perception. Despite his continued interest in film and visual aesthetics Arnheim has never discussed the “artistic effects” that have been made possible by increasing sophistication in film technology in the latter half of the twentieth century. It is true that Chion has paid close attention to both the films and screening environments of the past.<sup>40</sup> However, even when he discusses the innovative sound-image relations of films such as *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (F. Lang, 1932-33) or *Psycho* (A. Hitchcock, 1960), Chion still interprets the films’ momentum toward cohesion and unity. The voice is an “umbilical chord” that literally and metaphorically connects Mabuse to Dr. Baum in Lang’s film and Norman Bates to his mother in *Psycho*. Chion’s analysis of the initially disparate sound-image relations in these films is still driven by his biases towards contemporary modes of filmmaking. Thus, both Arnheim’s and Chion’s ideas are firmly circumscribed by the films, technologies and intellectual culture in their environs.

This juxtaposition of Arnheim’s and Chion’s conceptions of sound cinema encourages an appreciation of their convergences and complementarity. While critics might dismiss or ignore the significance of Arnheim’s film theory, his ideas are the forebears of Chion’s lauded work on image-sound and sight-audition integration in narrative cinema. Arnheim may not explain the production processes of the most up-to-date sound cinema. For that we must turn to a more contemporary critic such as Chion. However, Arnheim identifies our desire to experience something extraordinary, something that extends beyond our everyday reality when we go to the cinema. And more significantly, before Chion, Arnheim connects the fulfillment of this desire to the technological rendering of the cinematic representation. For both thinkers, the medium’s technological capacities are the potential site of sound and image integration, and this integration is at the basis of a cinematic expression that ushers forth a unique viewing experience. The commercial demands on the cinema may insist that it embrace the latest possible sound technologies, thereby relegating Arnheim’s theory to a historical curiosity. However, the demands of commercialism are still in the service of creating a unique cinematic reality and a unique perceptual experience of that reality – just as Arnheim demanded nearly sixty years ago.

- 1 R. Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), p. 207. See also R. Arnheim, “A New Laocöon: Artistic Composites and the Talking Film,” *ibid*, pp. 199-230; R. Arnheim, “Der tönende Film” (1928), *Kritiken und Aufsätze zum Film*, hrsg. H.H. Diederichs (München: Carl Hanser, 1977), pp. 58-61.
- 2 Although this aspiration for unity permeates Chion’s conception of the sound film in *Audio-Vision*, it is most vividly argued in *The Voice in Cinema* in which he analyses a number of very sophisticated films that the strive to integrate sound and image, but ultimately fail to reach this goal because of the instability of the voice. I focus here on *Audio-Vision* as this book represents a bringing together of the ideas in Chion’s previous books on sound and music in cinema. See M. Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. C. Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); M. Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. C. Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

- 3 To endorse this break would underline the notion that silent film and sound film represent two different media and that silent film has no sonic dimensions.
- 4 J. Rosenbaum, "Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen," *Cinéaste*, vol. 21, nos. 1-2 (1995), p. 94.
- 5 C. Gorbman, "Chion's *Audio-Vision*," *Wide Angle*, vol. 15, no. 1 (January 1993), p. 67. When discussing the field to which Chion's book contributes, Gorbman does not even mention Arnheim's founding essay. See also S. Prince's review of the book in *Film Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 4 (Summer 1995), pp. 40-42.
- 6 N. Carroll, "Lang and Pabst: Paradigms for Early Sound Practice," in J. Belton and E. Weis (eds.), *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 265; M. Rubin, "The Voice of Silence," *ibid.*, p. 285. See also Carroll's scathing critique of Arnheim's theory of film in his *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 17-91. There are of course exceptions to this rejection of Arnheim's theories. See for example, L. Fischer, "Applause: The Visual and Acoustic Landscape," *ibid.*, pp. 232-46. Fischer acknowledges Arnheim's observations on the spatiality of sound and the separation of the sound and image tracks as a basis for her interpretation of Mamoulian's *Applause*. For exceptions to this assertion see also the thoughtful analysis of the strengths of Arnheim's theory in S. Hake, *Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany 1907-1933* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993). Also, V. Petric offers an earlier appreciation of Arnheim's theory as the first attempt to conceive of an integrated (as opposed to counterposed) system of sound and image. See V. Petric, "Sight and Sound: Counterpoint or Entity?," *Filmmakers Newsletter*, vol. 6, no. 7 (May 1973), pp. 27-31. German film studies has given more consideration to Arnheim's theories. A recent issue of *Montage/av* is devoted to Arnheim's theories and includes sensitive interpretations of his sound theory. See *Montage/av: Zeitschrift für Theorie und Geschichte audiovisueller Kommunikation* (9 February 2000). See also H. H. Diederich's introduction to the recently reissued German edition of R. Arnheim, *Kritiken und Aufsätze zum Film*, hrsg. H. H. Diederichs (Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 1993).
- 7 R. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, cit., p. 227.
- 8 For Arnheim theatre is character-centered and the visuals merely serve to expedite or "improve upon" the spoken word in the development of human character.
- 9 R. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, cit., p. 209.
- 10 Alfred Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (1929) is a film in which we see and hear the talking heads in long uncut conversations that remain incomprehensible because the recording technology is not sophisticated enough to boast clarity or creativity. The film's two moments of innovative sound-image usage are conceptually (directorially) as opposed to technically creative. I am referring here to the "sound close-up" of the narratively crucial "knife" and the woman's scream on finding the dead body that creates a sound bridge.
- 11 Arnheim does not explain how these fragments of dialogue "condense" the visual. However, it can be assumed that, as is the case with the "all-talking" picture, the dialogue is an attempt to communicate character as opposed to doing the same through action. Curiously, Arnheim does not mention the fact that these intermittent sounds were often introduced by filmmakers as a "celebration" of the capacity of film to "speak." Thus, it was also as a celebration of the technological developments.
- 12 R. Arnheim, "Tonfilm-Verwirrung" (1929), in *Kritiken und Aufsätze zum Film*, cit., pp. 61-64.
- 13 S. Hake, *Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany 1907-1933*, cit., p. 280.
- 14 He also mentions this in the abovementioned essay, "Tonfilm-Verwirrung", cit.
- 15 R. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, cit., p. 230.

- 16 For the lively debate on cinema as an art form in Germany, see A. Kaes (ed.), *Kino-Debatte: Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film 1909-1929* (Tübingen: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1978).
- 17 See B. Balázs, *Theory of the Film* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1972); S. Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- 18 See R. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, cit., pp. 34-134.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 35. My italics.
- 20 N. Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory*, cit., pp. 35-43.
- 21 R. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, cit., p. 107.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 108.
- 23 M. Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, cit.
- 24 See R. Altman, "The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound," and "Sound Space," in R. Altman (ed.), *Sound Theory, Sound Practice* (New York-London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 15-31 and pp. 46-64. See also Altman's introductory essays to each of the sections of this book: J. Lastra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
- 25 In keeping with the vagueness of many of the criticisms Chion levels at film theorists and critics, he never indicates which works he is referring to when he makes these claims. However, in the case of his dissatisfaction with the use of the notion of counterpoint and the musical analogy of film sound, it can be assumed that he is referring to the work of Sergei Eisenstein. Similarly, Chion's characterization of harmonic counterpoint is confusing and ill thought out. As this and other references are somewhat tangential to Chion's argument, I have chosen not to concern myself with a critique of his characterization and use of other texts.
- 26 M. Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, cit., p. 143. Arnheim makes the exact same claim in his essay "Philosophie des Ach so" (1933), in *Kritiken und Aufsätze zum Film*, op. cit., p. 74. Of course, for Arnheim the claim is justification of his attack on the sound film. Chion does not see that it might compromise his argument.
- 27 M. Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, cit., p. 5. Chion's italics.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- 29 A good example of this innovative use of sound would be any of Alfred Hitchcock's single set films. In a film such as *Rear Window*, the sounds of the street faced by Thorwald's apartment and a ship's horn on nearby water extend the set beyond the four walls of the apartment courtyard. Sound is used to mark the spatial parameters of the diegesis and to let an otherwise claustrophobic set breathe.
- 30 M. Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, cit., p. 144.
- 31 Chion is as vague and inconsistent in his determination of what constitutes "expressiveness" or "added value."
- 32 M. Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, cit., p. 58.
- 33 See, for example, Chion's discussion of the ruptures in sound-image relations in "Godard's *Nouvelle Vague*" as "serv[ing] to reinforce the tension of the action." That is, he interprets these ruptures and tensions as being in the service of a narrative development. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 103-104.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- 37 *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.
- 38 *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97. Balázs, Metz and more recently Levin all maintain that based upon the notion that sound is a volume of vibrating air waves, when reproduced it retains its three dimen-

sionality. See B. Balázs, *op. cit.*, p. 216; Ch. Metz, "Aural Objects," *Yale French Studies*, no. 60 (1980), p. 29; T. Levin, "The Acoustic Dimension: Notes on Cinema Sound," *Screen*, vol. 25, no. 3 (May-June 1984), p. 57.

39 M. Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, cit., p. 99.

40 See especially his film analyses in M. Chion, *The Voice in the Cinema*, cit.