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The Knotweed Factor: Non-visual Aspects of Poetic Documentary

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The Knotweed Factor:
Non-Visual Aspects of Poetic Documentary

T.J. Coles

A thesis submitted to Plymouth University
in partial fulfilment of the degree of
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Dedication

Martha Blassnigg, 08.09.1969 – 27.09.2015.

In memoriam.

Author's declaration and word count

At no time during registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee.

This study was self-financed. The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

The word count of the main body of the thesis is: 44,502 words.

T.J. Coles,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T.J. Coles', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

8 March, 2017.

T.J. Coles

The Knotweed Factor: Non-Visual Aspects of Poetic Documentary

Abstract

This thesis is an inquiry into the creative processes of poetry and poetic expression in documentary. The practice-based element is a 60 minute video about a poet living in Exeter, UK, called James Turner. The documentary is entitled, *The Knotweed Factor*. This written element of the thesis contextualises the investigation as a discourse on blindness and visual impairment.

There are few representations of blindness and/or visual impairment (VI) in *The Knotweed Factor*. Rather, the documentary is concerned with how visual information (e.g., filming a poet) is translated non-visually (e.g., the sound of the poem being recited). It also addresses the issue of how the non-visual is translated into the visual. I argue in this text that blindness/VI is marginalised in visual studies/culture. This is unfortunate because blindness/VI studies provides valuable context for understanding the dynamics of sound and vision in creative media, which is a central concern of *The Knotweed Factor*.

The rationale for taking this approach is as follows: During the editing, it was noticed that Turner (who is sighted) provides a kind of unprompted audio description (AD) of events in

his environment to the audience, as if he is participating in a radio documentary. This raised questions, not only about the ekphrastic possibilities of his technique, but also about the potential to contextualise such scenes as a disquisition on blindness/VI. Blindness/VI is an important and under-theorised element of visual studies/culture (VS/C).

Many films, plays, animations, documentaries, and television programmes are audio described. AD enables the blind/visually impaired (also VI) to comprehend and enjoy visual action. It is suggested here that AD theory is an insufficient model for critically reflecting on the creative processes in *The Knotweed Factor*. This is because the field is presently more concerned with practicability than with aesthetics. It seemed more helpful to address the broader question of how blindness/VI is positioned in VS/C. Doing so has highlighted instances of exclusion and marginalisation in VS/C.

In the course of the video production, it was discovered that the interaction of dreams, memories, and ideas (the mindscape) informs the temporal creative process. Most analytical models within VS/C (e.g., Deleuze) offer a dialectical approach to understanding creativity. Henri Bergson, however, proposes a theory of multiplicity, which considers the interplay of phenomenological creativity of the mindscape as a homogenous, multifaceted process, in place of a dialectical one. Martha Blassnigg interrogates Bergson's responses to audiovisual media and argues that Bergson's multiplicity formula is more useful for understanding these processes, both for artist and audience.

Blassnigg interprets Bergson's theory as a universality of idea communication. This thesis considers what the universality of audiovisual experience implies for blindness/VI studies. It does so by contextualising the written research as a discourse on VS/C. In *The Knotweed Factor*, the emotions, sounds, and visual ideas, memories, and dreams which inform James Turner's creativity are conveyed to the audience in two ways: 1) By sound (Turner's recitations, interviews, and conversations), and 2) by the documentary's abstracted

audiovisualisations of Turner's poetry and mindscape. For Turner, the 'image' is a personalised, innate phenomenon. It is ephemeral, intangible imagination. Turner's experience (audiovisualised in *The Knotweed Factor*) is compared in this written part of the thesis to pre-Socratic ideations of image-making. It is argued that for many cultures, the image was (and for some remains) an emanation of spirit or idea. In other words, the image was considered a transcendent force, and the 'soul' of the image eternal and universal.

This transcendence is considered in this written element of the thesis as a bridge between the present academic gap in the fields of blindness/VI studies and visual studies/culture. In this text, *The Knotweed Factor* serves as a case-study to test how non- and minimal-visual elements of audiovisual art and media are positioned in VS/C. Constructed here is a history of the interpretation of blindness and the image, from pre-Socratic aesthetics to the Enlightenment, where ideas concerning the phenomenology of blindness and visual impairment were transformed into epistemological inquiries. This approach enables the researcher to reflect critically on the aesthetics of *The Knotweed Factor*, using the framework of the non-visual (in this case recited poetry) to test and interrogate the visual (i.e., 'poetically' visualised poetry).

Introduction

Structure and Limitations

SUMMARY

This Introduction explains what the thesis—both this text and the practice-based piece—is about. It poses the main research question and sub-questions before briefly considering the theoretical and practical achievements and limitations. It also discusses some of the key texts and modes of production concerning the documentary. Having done so, it provides a chapter-by-chapter breakdown of the content of this written element.

The question concerns the dynamics of sound, vision, and how the former translates into and informs the latter (and vice versa). Ekphrasis, imageless film, poetic documentary, and visual studies/culture are considered as methodological fields in which the research questions can be considered. This text specifically concerns blindness/visual impairment (VI) and its relation to ekphrasis, imageless film, and poetic documentary.

The limits of discussion include defining and contextualising ‘blindness’ and ‘visual impairment’. Specialist literature (in the fields of cognitive psychology and neurology) provide fairly detailed distinctions, but visual studies/culture does not. When discussing ‘imageless film’, for example, scholars reference ‘blindness’ and assume that audiences know what it is (as opposed to light-perception blindness, degraded peripheral vision, impaired

central vision, and other forms of blindness/VI). It is argued here that, following these limitations, neuro-visual studies (examined briefly in Chapter 4) have the potential to contextualise blindness/VI but that this potential is not realised in current visual studies/culture theory. It is argued here that more research into this specific field of visual studies/culture is needed in order to incorporate post-Cartesian Enlightenment ideas of vision and its relation to other modalities into modern visual studies/culture.

It is also argued that, despite these limitations, blindness/VI studies is an important field for exploring our broader research questions, namely the relationship between audio and visual in the documentary medium, and how sound is translated into picture (and vice versa).

The Introduction also contains a brief subchapter outlining my practice-based methodologies and rationale for analysing blindness/VI.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In this written part of the thesis, I use the terms ‘blind’ and ‘visually impaired’/‘visual impairment’ (both abbreviated as VI).

Here, ‘blind’ describes individuals who have no light perception. It also describes individuals who have limited light perception and perhaps the visual ability to detect movement. For the purpose of this written part of the thesis, persons who are blind can see almost nothing and find it difficult or impossible to distinguish colours. The use of the term ‘blindness’ and ‘the blind’ is sometimes used in this written part of the thesis in a historical context. Taxonomies like blindness, visual impairment, partial blindness, partial sightedness, legally blind, and so on, are recent developments in the history of blindness/VI studies.

The majority of these terms appear to have come into use in the latter-half of the 20th century (see Conclusion p. 147 for more details). In this written part of the thesis, I discuss Descartes, Diderot, and other philosophers who studied blindness. They used the terms ‘the blind’ and ‘blindness’ as a blanket taxonomy for what we might refer to today as sightlessness, partial blindness, and VI. Today, specialist literature (in the professions of cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and medicine) recognises the need to distinguish between blindness at one end of the sight spectrum and partial blindness or partial sightlessness on the other.

When discussing Molyneux, Locke, Diderot (Chapter 4), and other philosophers up to the mid-20th century, it is historically appropriate to use the term ‘blindness’, even though one might be referring to partial blindness.

I use the term VI in this written part of the thesis to describe individuals who are able to see more than light and detect more than movement. VI is a much broader spectrum than blindness because it can include persons who are able to distinguish colours (exactly how many and to what degree is an open question that requires more research) across the spectrum to persons whose eyesight is below 20/70 in a standard eye-test. VI can include the ability to see text up close with visual aids (such as specialised magnifying glasses), a lack of central vision, a lack of peripheral vision, loss of sight in one eye, and the ability to detect colour, big movements, and large objects. VI can also be time- and place-dependent, such as night blindness.

There is a great deal of what I call ‘specialist’ literature on how to define, distinguish, and understand blindness and VI. The ‘specialist’ literature, for the purpose of this written part of the thesis, includes dedicated work on blindness/VI in the fields of cognitive psychology, education, medicine, neuroscience, ophthalmology, and sociology (see Conclusion p. 147). As this written part of the thesis proceeds, I shall argue that the specialist literature has not

translated well into visual studies/culture, where the term ‘blindness’ is used without qualification. VS/C tends to employ blindness as a metaphor rather than exploring empirical questions about the nature of sight, sightlessness, and the relation to the visual.

Largely outside the specialist literature, there is ongoing debate about terminology. For example, Kleege refers to blind persons as “the blind” (1999, p. 31). Kleege describes herself as able to detect colours and objects. She used to use the phrases “visually impaired” and “partially sighted” (*ibid.* pp. 1,2). Eventually, however, Kleege began self-describing as “blind” (*ibid.* p. 25). Kleege feels that using words like “impairment” and “partial” is detrimental to persons who are not sighted, to whatever degree. Bolt, conversely, “favour[s] terminology that recognises a continuum of visual impairment” because the taxonomy incorporates “vision that is both unimpaired and absent” (2005, p. 550). Bolt goes so far as to say that “blindness” is comparable to terms of abuse.

Given the ongoing debates about terminology and typology, I decided to use what I hope to be a more neutral coupling, i.e., blind/VI and blindness/VI. By including ‘blind’, I hope to satisfy those who feel that ‘visual impairment’ does not do justice to their experience. Also, as noted above (p. 13), it is historically accurate to use the term blind. Likewise, the inclusion of the term VI is designed to appease those who feel that VI is a more accurate description of individuals who have a certain degree of sight.

To conclude this note on terminology, I also spell braille with a lower-case b when discussing the written language and I spell it with an upper-case B when referring to its inventor, Louis Braille (d. 1809-52). The reason being that I wish to clearly distinguish between the language and its inventor.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The practice-based element of the thesis is *The Knotweed Factor*, a documentary about a poet named James Turner, who currently lives in Exeter, UK. Turner's poetry has been published in books, anthologies, magazines, competitions, and, in the past, as self-published works in poetry collections. My thesis is largely concerned with what motivates the poet. Turner's poetic motivations are investigated through the documentary medium, by videotaping and sound recording Turner's recitations in environments that reflect the atmosphere of his poetry. Recitations are interspersed with interviews, in which Turner discusses his inspirations and philosophical outlooks.

In the documentary, the audio (recitations, dialogue, unprompted descriptions by Turner of the environment, ambient sounds (wildtrack), and music) does not seem to be guided—in most instances—by the visual. Typically in documentary, the sound acts to complement what is produced on screen. In *The Knotweed Factor*, however, it was understood before shooting had commenced that the audio element of the video would have precedence over, or at least be equal to, the visual elements.

Methods of visualising the documentary were considered: the locations, choice of black and white, compositions, the interview scenes, and, crucially, the visual interpretations of Turner's poetry. In brief, the sound/textual elements were informing the visual elements. This contrasted the typical method of production, where sound complements vision. Our question for both the practice-based work and this written component is as follows: In 'poetic documentary', how does sound inform image and vice versa?

This basic research question raises several other questions: 1) How to define 'poetic documentary'. Can documentary itself be poetic, or is such audiovisual poetry contingent

upon making a work specifically about poetry or poets? Are there models to help explore these possibilities? If so, in what way do the models apply to *The Knotweed Factor*? 2) When considering the audio and visual dynamic, is one element necessarily subordinate(d) to the other? In radio, is imagery—and in the case of radio, imagined imagery—of equal or greater importance to the sound? In film/documentary (which tends to the Cartesian primacy of vision philosophy), is sound necessarily subordinate(d) to the visual? There are instances of ‘imageless’ or ‘motionless’ pictures in which the norms are inverted (Chapter 2). 3) Does the primacy of sound disadvantage the visual, and if so in what way? There is an absence of consideration in visual studies/culture about the role of blindness and visual impairment (VI) in art: not necessarily how the blind/visually impaired (also VI) are represented/portrayed, but how the blind/VI experience works of art. This led to other questions. 4) When the blind/VI and sighted alike read poetry or descriptive novels, the ekphrasis stimulates the readers’ imagination. Ekphrasis (Chapter 1) is a broad term which in its most basic meaning describes the art of description.

Classical scholars tend to contextualise ekphrasis as a form of poetics that describes existing art, especially painting, or poetry that describes imagined art (notional ekphrasis). Making a documentary about a poet (and what may aspire to poetic documentary) inevitably includes ekphrastic elements, particularly where the poet describes art and imagined art. The question, then, concerns how the audio and visual are to represent the notional. Is description approximated by sound and video (something close to ‘direct’ representation)? Do we approximate what is being described (as inference)? Do we audiovisualise nothing (absence or ‘imageless’/soundless documentary)? Do we infer what is being described by loose audiovisual association (abstraction)?

In the majority of cases, where Turner recites his poetry, I opted to audiovisualise his sonic/textual work with abstractions. For example, in the title poem, “The Knotweed Factor”, Turner describes the “sperm whale of the present” as being in “continual collision with the great raft of the past”. Rather than trying to represent a whale and a raft, perhaps through animation or modelling, or archival footage (more in Chapter 3 about the use of history in poetic documentary), the documentary suggests a collision of some kind by showing a foot stepping in a puddle. On the soundtrack there is a faint splash, suggesting some kind of watery collision or interaction.

In the case of the line of poetry described above and its audiovisual interpretation in the documentary, both sighted and blind/VI audiences are confronted with the actuality of the poem (i.e., hearing it read on the soundtrack) and the inferred image (i.e., not seeing/hearing a whale colliding with a boat, but seeing/hearing vague associations). The question is to what degree is this level of abstraction poetic? To what degree is it ekphrastic? And how do experiments with ‘imageless’ films as they have been called, such as Derek Jarman’s *Blue* (1993), help to understand the dynamic of audio, visual, imagined, imaginary, sightedness, and blindness/VI? I explore this further in Chapter 3.

The process of making the documentary was an exploration not only of how the visual informs the audio, and vice versa, but how the imagination of the protagonist, including the sonic and visual imagination, informs the poetic process in literature, and how that process translates into poetic documentary. This written critical reflection is a contextual analysis that considers not only how blindness/VI necessitates an approach to film and video, but also how VS/C has denigrated the non-visual elements of film and video—which are so crucial to our documentary—as subordinate to the visual, and in doing so has denied the importance of non-visual elements, such as imagination, sound, and suggestion. These core elements (imagination, sound, suggestion) are crucial to our production of *The Knotweed Factor*.

Blindness/VI studies—or at least the few that consider the aesthetic experiences of the blind/VI—affords the researcher a greater methodology for approaching these concerns than does VS/C.

METHODOLOGIES

My methodology consist of two parts: 1) the methods I used as a documentary-maker and 2) the methods I use in this critical reflection. Point number 2 includes my rationale for using blindness/VI studies. In this subchapter I will demonstrate how both points relate to my practice-based methods.

I have identified five methods that I used when making the documentary. They are intuition, collaboration, minimalism (presence/absence), the use of black and white and slowness. I will now consider them and their relation to ekphrasis and blindness/VI. It should also be noted that there is often some methodological overlap, e.g., between blindness/VI, sound design and intuition.

1) *Intuition*. Intuition, as discussed by Bergson (2012 [1946]) and Maritain (1953), is the overarching theme of my method as a documentary-maker. Martin Kemp provides a history of intuition in science and art. Particularly from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, artists and scientists understood art and inspiration as “God’s creation and those human artefacts which mirrored his created order” (Kemp 2006, p. 14). For scientists, intuition in this period was also “divinely” inspired. With regards to sight and sightlessness, Kemp positions his

thesis in the visual realm, that ‘god’ created “an attuned observer which was for long regarded as the immediate purpose of our visual world” (*ibid.*, pp. 14-15).

Pat Paxson brings intuition and art into the age of psychoanalysis, citing Freud, Lacan and others in an effort to bring science to the role of inspiration in the creative process (Paxson 2011). For Judith Weston, intuition in creativity is not only irrational, it can be *intentionally* irrational. It “may even be contradicted by ordinary reason and evidence” (Weston 2003, eBook). In this context, my intuition as a documentary-maker does not require intellectual or analytical justification. In fact, doing so would contradict the very nature of intuition, according to Weston. Rather, I use blindness/VI studies and its (I argue) close relationship with ekphrasis as an intellectual justification for my theoretical approach.

I will now examine the other methods and the role that intuition played.

2) *Collaboration*. I decided to collaborate with James Turner on the documentary because I met him several years ago at a regular music session called Children of the Drone. At each ‘drone’, improvised music is played by whoever of the invited musicians can attend. Ordinarily, Turner takes a few minutes to read poetry. Usually, it is his own poetry. Sometimes Turner reads other people’s poems or philosophies. The music is often complementary to the recitations. It slows down and retains its ambience or the ambience changes to reflect the poem.

Intuition played a role in that the combination of music and poetry evoked mental images which I felt could be interesting in the documentary format. These included ruins and abandoned places. Turner’s ekphrasis stimulated my imagination. The idea of contextualising the project as a research piece on blindness/VI came when I realised that poetry, written and spoken, is a “non-visual” medium which emphasise visual and other imaginations. It is non-visual in the sense that braille users (including deaf-blind people) can read poetry without

‘seeing’ it on the page. Sighted people can hear poetry being recited without necessarily seeing it written down.

Turner and I share many ideas and philosophies about life, childhood, conditioning, societal problems and the experience of the individual in society. This mutuality lends a sympathy in the documentary to Turner’s poetry and interviews. I wanted the audience to gain some understanding of how Turner came to write particular poems, hence we agreed to conduct interviews. I suggested that Turner choose half a dozen poems to read in the documentary. This way, my direction was not dictatorial. During the production, I chose the locations, sound design and camera angles. There was no other significant collaboration because I was the sole documentary-maker and editor.

3) *Minimalism (presence/absence)*. As noted above, there is methodological overlap. Black and white, for instance, can be cited as an example of minimalism, but as it is such a prominent feature of the documentary, I wish to discuss black and white in greater detail below. The visuals are minimal in the sense that there are few camera movements (pans, tilts, tracks, or glides). There is little ‘action’ in the context of movement within the shots, such as multiple characters and scenes crowded with mobile physical objects. It is also minimal in the sense of the editing. Shots in the documentary last longer than most comparable biographical documentaries. The second half of the opening poem, for instance, is a single, static shot featuring only Turner against a still background (in semi-focus), in semi-close-up reciting his poem. I will now say a few words about minimalism and the soundtrack:

In “Myra is Away”, Turner says: “that’s all we’ll see when the tape runs out | Nothing”. Turner has inferred the presence of something, a tape, a monitor, and an image or series of images on the tape/monitor. But he has also anticipated the conclusion. We will see nothing, says Turner, again eliciting the dynamic of sight and sightlessness. The conclusion of the metaphorical tape running out anticipates an absence: Turner is at times ocularphobic and at

others ocularcentric. He uses the metaphor of the end of a visual image on a tape as the end of life, of the conclusion of entropy (Kermode 1967).

The single take lasts for over four minutes. In contrast to the minimal visuals, the sound becomes more textured or, one might argue, more present. It starts with the final words spoken by Turner in the previous scene. Next, it explores the quietude of the sea waves. Turner begins calmly reciting the poem. After a few verses, an ambient drone (consisting of xylophone, acoustic guitar, saxophone, percussion, and mobile phone interference) swells on the soundtrack. The waltz-like rhythm and minor key implies something mournful. The ‘colour’ of the music replaces the absence of colour in the visuals. The rhythm of the soundtrack compensates for the stasis of the camera and most of the (in)action onscreen.

4) *Black and white*. Intuitively, I felt that the documentary would work better in black and white because the denial of colour forces the audience to invest their own ‘colour’ in the images. By minimizing the colour content to black, white and grey, I felt that the images would be more contrasted and vivid. Theoretically, the use of black and white is a comment on blindness/VI for the following reason:

Turner’s poetry consisted of vivid detail, examples of which are provided throughout this written part of the thesis. Using black and white instead of colour helped to provide a counterpoint, a tension, to the ‘colour’ of Turner’s imagery. (Massumi, for instance, talks about the “chaos of color” (2002, p. 156) in relation to sensory overload experienced by newly sighted former blind patients.) To avoid this kind of sensory overload—in which sighted audiences will see multi-coloured, fast-edited imagery, hear words spoken by Turner describing vivid colours and multiple events, and hear Turner’s voice, ambient sounds, music, and special effects; hence my decision to use black and white.

Reducing the visual (i.e., not using super-High Definition video and using black and white) required the audience to use imagination more than perhaps they would have had I

included colour and shot the documentary in HD 1080i. However, this is contradicted in one sense by the fact that the documentary is full of vivid images, albeit black and white ones.

These include detailed close-ups of the ‘tactile’ detritus in derelict buildings. In this respect, I examine the work of Marks (2008) and the notion of “haptic cinema” (Chapter 4).

5) *Slowness*. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss ‘slow cinema’ in any great length, but I will reference it here because it is theoretically relevant. There is a debate about what slow cinema is (Jaffe 2014). Work on the films of Chantal Akerman, for instance, concludes that “nothing happens” in the conventional understanding of cinematic happenings: fast edits, narrative-relevant dialogue, constant movement. Rather, Akerman’s films are ‘slow’ in the sense that when compared to most other fictional narrative films, the narrative is less hurried, the shots are longer, and the dialogue minimal (Margulies 1996). Others reference the work of Tsai Ming-Liang and point to the length of shots, the absence of dialogue, and a minima of movement (Lim 2014).

Yet more directors whose works are often categorised as slow include Béla Tarr (Rancière 2015) and Andrei Tarkovsky, whose work is considered in Chapter 3 in relation to ‘poetic cinema’. As a fan of Tarkovsky, my documentary was inspired by Tarkovsky’s apparent lack of narrative structure in certain moments of certain films, which audiences can relate to on a level different from that of standard beginning-middle-end narratives. This approach was vital to remaining faithful to Turner’s poems in *The Knotweed Factor* because, as the title poem says, there is “no beginning, no middle, no end”. Making the documentary a work of ‘slow documentary’ enabled me to allow Turner to recite his poems without interruption. The vivid trauma of the past invades the dissociated melancholy of the present (hence the knotweed-as-invader metaphor).

I decided early on in the making of the documentary, not to reduce the length of his poems or show ‘highlights’ because I wanted to create a ‘poetic’ documentary in which the audience can enter Turner’s world, uninterrupted by excessive editing.

HOW THIS THESIS IS STRUCTURED

This thesis is comprised of *The Knotweed Factor* documentary and this written element. *The Knotweed Factor* is approximately 60 minutes in length. It was shot on digital video in black and white and edited in Premiere® and finalised and exported on Avid® in a 16:9 ratio. Most of the video was shot in colour and converted to black and white in post-production. The video was HDR 720p quality and lost resolution during the transfer process, for reasons explained in Chapter 2. Apart from occasional prompting questions by the documentary-maker (who remains off-screen), photographs of his colleagues, footage of the protagonist’s musical group, and occasional shots/sounds of live audiences, the documentary solely features the protagonist, James Turner.

The Knotweed Factor is structured as follows. It is comprised of 21 scenes, all of which feature James Turner, except mini-scenes or linking sequences of, for instance, natural processes (such as bees pollenating flowers or water weeds swaying) designed to give the audience a breather in between interviews and poetry recitations. Five of the 21 scenes are performance pieces (which, as argued in Chapter 3, is a core part of poetic documentary), in

which Turner reads his poems and the documentary interprets them audiovisually. 10 of the 21 scenes are interviews with Turner. The rest of the documentary is comprised of mini-scenes and performances to live audiences (music, philosophical discussion, and poetry readings).

The Knotweed Factor acts as an audiovisual example of how sound and image can interact in documentary, using the poetic medium to explore the question.

This text is structured in the following way.

Chapter 1 is about ekphrasis. It argues that ekphrasis is broad enough to be a useful model for exploring the image-as-emanation theses of image historians, as well as the image as a progression of thought. Here, Henri Bergson is referenced as an authority on the phenomenological aspects of images as composites of imagination, dream, memory, and temporality. Blindness and ekphrasis share a common history in the Homeric tradition. The vividness of expression, which is the professed ideal of ekphrasis, was supposedly more impressive coming from alleged blind writers and orators, such as Homer, because emphasis was placed on imagining the unseen as something seen by the poet. In contrast to this position, the non-visual imaginary, which is comprised of imagined space, taste, touch, sound, and smell is examined. In doing so, instances where audio description—which is an important aspect of blindness/VI and aesthetics studies—corresponds to ekphrasis are referenced.

Chapter 2 considers what researchers have called ‘motionless pictures’ or ‘imageless films’. These include *avant-garde* pieces as well as more commercially-orientated ‘sound films’. In doing so, the importance of sound design, with reference to instances of sound design in *The Knotweed Factor*, is considered. Radio and instances of theatre where the expectation of the

visual is denied by the hegemony of sound are considered. It is argued that where film is concerned, artistic mini- or sub-movements such as tactilism had an important historical influence. Given that *The Knotweed Factor* is a video and adheres to the aesthetic demands of video (as opposed to film) analysing digital ekphrasis and the concept of ‘too much realism’ helps to understand new High Definition standards.

For the purpose of this written part of the thesis, ‘video’ describes medium- to high-resolution digital image and audio capture. By contrast, ‘film’ describes celluloid and includes 8mm, Super8, 16mm, 35mm, 65mm, and 70mm. In terms of resolution quality, High Definition 1080p video and HD 4K are arguably comparable to the high resolution film formats (35mm and above) (Wheeler 2009). Video can be shot in conditions of low light. Film, by contrast, requires certain light strengths in order to capture watchable images. This is just one example of the difference between film and video and how it changes the dynamic of documentary. 16mm cameras, for instance, are lighter in terms of weight and less noisy in terms of their mechanical operations than 35mm cameras.

For that reason, low-budget filmmakers and documentary-makers in particular favoured the lighter, quieter, less expensive 16mm cameras (Rabiger 2014). The much lower quality 8mm and Super8 cameras were marketed to amateurs and families to record holidays, etc. When digital (as opposed to Hi8) video was introduced, documentary-makers especially, whose work could be screened on televisions and small cinema screens, where resolution would not suffer, started working with video. It was even cheaper, quieter, and lighter than 16mm and did not require expensive celluloid strips and the cost of developing the film. The ‘digital revolution’ coincided with the availability of comparatively inexpensive video editing desks and software.

Had I decided to work with film, I would have been disadvantaged for several reasons. 1) I would have had no experience and would have needed to spend time educating myself in

how to use film. 2) The documentary may have been unaffordable because of the costs of hiring a 16mm camera and buying and developing the film. 3) There is less opportunity to edit film than there is video because of the change in the market and the specialisation that film requires. This would have resulted in the film being digitalised anyway for the editing. 4) 35mm film is completely unaffordable for me, and 16mm does not include an audio track, so the sound of the film would have had to have been recorded separately and synchronised, meaning more expense and more time. 5) Most projectors are now digital, so as with point number 3, I might as well have started shooting in digital, as I did.

Having said that, there is an issue of ‘filmic quality’. In terms of resolution, HD video can be excessively sharp. This point is argued in Chapter 2. Film on the other hand can be softer and grainier in visual appearance. I felt that the softer, grainier image is closer to my intention concerning the use of the medium as a representation of memories, ideas, and dreams, which can also be soft in appearance, a point also expanded on in Chapter 2. For that reason, I used lower-quality digital and compression.

Chapter 3 draws on the theories of the ekphrastic and imageless in order to consider the notion of poetic documentary. The Chapter uses existing documentary-theory models (or modes) in order to identify and extrapolate characteristics of *The Knotweed Factor* (especially performance and related techniques such as interview, historicism, and the search for the ideal) which may constitute the poetic. Referencing the work of Andrei Tarkovsky—whose cinema inspired the audiovisual style of *The Knotweed Factor*, the thesis concludes that the imaginary demands of ekphrasis, contextualised as a Bergsonian multiplicity of time, space, memory, and idea, are factors of poetic cinema and documentary identified by theorists. The argument is that the abstracted, internal logic of ‘poetic’ film or documentary

subjectivises the given work in a way that makes sense to audiences through abstraction and association. The idea of the 'poetic' remains too vague to apply to *The Knotweed Factor* and more research is needed.

Chapter 4 argues that from the previous models (ekphrasis, imageless film, and poetic documentary) poetics require imaginative associations from audiences, which are not necessarily demanded by conventional film and video, where the image is present and need not be imagined. However, this is contradicted to some degree by the findings in Chapter 2, that new HD standards look 'too real'. It is as if audiences accept and anticipate a degree of cinematic or video realism (no matter how fantastical plots may be) but also require a degree of somatic separation. In other words, the visual requires some 'dreamlike' quality (a fuzzy concept on which more work is needed), in even the most realistic of productions, in order to allow a comfortable viewing experience. In ekphrastic writings that deal with blindness/VI, the notion of ocularphobia is raised to suggest that in certain cases, the visual can be feared as much as the visionless.

This written part of the thesis concludes with the successes, failures, scope, and limitations of the documentary and this written reflection. The main achievement has been in creating a documentary which appears almost exclusively to take place in the inner universe of the protagonist. This was achieved by eliminating as much as possible the outward signifiers of his life, such as interviews with friends, colleagues, and family. For instance, when Turner plays music in his group, none of the band is seen: either they have their backs to camera, are shown walking away from camera, or are shown at angles that only reveal their instruments. This leaves space for Turner's full presence.

Similarly, when dealing with issues of the past, the montage blends that which may be considered the real with the unreal, the temporal with the somatic. The production demonstrates that in many instances, particularly concerning the textual and literary, the

visual must take great care not to literalise intimation. Rather, a more powerful approach to conveying literary/textual ideas is inference. Poetic documentary (however it may be defined) shares inference with ekphrasis. This is all the more important when contextualising the work as a discourse on imageless film and blindness/VI, because the non-visual elements of art and media must arguably be considered more carefully than the visual.

LIMITATIONS

A number of limitations have been identified in the theoretical basis of the written part of this thesis. The first point that needs addressing here is the definition of blindness and visual impairment. According to the technical literature (specialist associations, cognitive psychology papers, neurology books, etc.), ‘blindness’ means either having no sight at all due to the absence of light perception (LP), or having LP but being unable to discern shapes and, to a large degree colour.¹ Visual impairment, however, is an even broader term which means having any kind of vision at or below 20/70 and up to the ability to discern movement and colour (WHO n.d.). In addition, many blind persons have gone blind due to accident or illness and have visual memories. Others were blinded in infancy and retain no or fuzzy visual memories. As blindness/VI tends to affect older people and poor people (who, in the case of the latter, cannot afford prevention/cure), many assistive technologies are tailored to the needs of the elderly, or even absent in the case of the poor.

¹ Sardegna et al. (2002), for example, distinguish between ocular and neurological blindness/VI.

When VS/C theorists discuss blindness/VI, they tend to use the term ‘blind’ as a catch-all term to include visual impairment. They tend also not to specify to what degree of blindness/VI they are referring. ‘The blind’ are considered a blanket ‘other’ within the even broader field of disability studies. At best, blindness is considered in VS/C as a token gesture to ‘otherness’ and at worst irrelevant to VS/C because of the field’s tendency to place vision at the top of the senses hierarchy. This written thesis attempts to rectify this to some extent by referring to blind/VI, as opposed to ‘blind’ or ‘VI’. There are limits to the discourse, due primarily to lack of space. Blindness/VI studies is an important methodology for understanding the interactions and translations of the visual and the audio, much as it was in the Enlightenment with the Molyneux Question for understanding the relation between eyesight and touch. Unfortunately, while the technical literature has advanced, VS/C remains entrenched in a Cartesian visual primacy paradigm.

In this text, I consider blindness/VI as being, in part, a vehicle for exploring the ekphrastic imagination: remembered or partially constructed visual ideas, sounds, space, smells, and taste. However, exactly what the ‘somatic’ is has been difficult to define. VS/C theorists increasingly consider neurology and cognitive science as a path to understanding their field. This is also true of blindness/VI. What is missing in current theory, however, is a method for translating how we see, hear, feel, and smell a dream or an idea, and how that dream or idea is comparable to sound design, photography, and other artforms. Part of the argument is that there is something not quite real about poetic documentary, just as there is something not quite real about dreams and ideas. What exactly it is that is not real requires further research and is beyond the scope of this study. Unrealness can make a work aspire to the poetic.

CONCLUSION

This Introduction has expanded on the research questions with the aim of giving the reader a clear idea about what the thesis attempts to understand. A chapter-by-chapter content analysis demonstrates the theoretical and methodological tools that are used in order to reach the conclusions. In order to address potential concerns, several limitations of this text, in terms of scope, method, and theory, have been identified.

Chapter 1

Audiovisual Ekphrasis

SUMMARY

This Chapter considers a contextual approach to the ‘poetic’ aspects of documentary. Before defining poetic documentary, or at least approximating it, the Chapter explores one of the principal questions (relations between audio and visual and vice versa) by considering how ekphrasis can help an understanding of image and text, or image and audio. It is argued that this is a relevant starting point for contextualising how blindness/VI is positioned in visual studies/culture (VS/C). In doing so, scenes and sequences in *The Knotweed Factor* are analysed in an effort to understand the ekphrastic and poetic elements of the documentary in relation to audio and visual translation.

The Chapter begins as a disquisition on ekphrasis. It argues that ekphrasis is relevant to VS/C and especially to blind/VI audiences. It draws on the work of Denis Diderot in order to illustrate the point. While scholars have considered ekphrastic radio and ekphrastic cinema, these and other VS/C theorists have neglected to convey ekphrastic ideas in relation to blindness/VI. Whereas these ideas were approached in the Enlightenment as a progression beyond Cartesian visual primacy, VS/C theorists remain, in this respect, entrenched. Work on

painting and cinema and how the former universalises the image by contextualising image(s) and sound(s) as transcendent ideas is considered.

In this Chapter, the ekphrastic audio and visual elements of *The Knotweed Factor* are identified. The Chapter concludes that ekphrasis is a broad topic and that perhaps notional ekphrasis (more in Chapter 2) is more relevant to contextualising the abstractions present in *The Knotweed Factor*. A key to unlocking the ekphrastic qualities of documentary lies in the proposal of some of the researchers presented here, namely that devices such as double-coding and reference add extra dimensions to cinema. Later in the thesis, it is proposed that the immateriality of the image as suggested by ekphrasis is a baseline approach to understanding blindness/VI in VS/C.

EKPHRASIS AND BLINDNESS

Ekphrasis is traditionally defined as the poetics of description. Some scholars argue that ekphrasis in its broadest sense is any verbal or literary description of a work of art. Bartsch and Elsner describe ekphrasis in part as “[w]ords about an image, itself often embedded in a larger text” (2007, pp. i-vi): W.H. Auden’s *The Shield of Achilles* (1952), for example. An ekphrastic voice “disrupts or extends the message of the narrative”. It can “prefigur[e]” a narrative “(whether false or true) in its suggestions”. Further complicating the meaning of ekphrasis, Bartsch and Elsner write that ekphrastic moments are “characterized as gendered, spatial, static, epiphanic, mute” (*ibid.*). Ekphrasis is especially interesting to a contextual analysis of *The Knotweed Factor* as a discourse on how blindness/VI is positioned in VS/C,

but as Bartsch and Elsner conclude, “a vivid presentation of any scene, whether natural or invented (so-called notional ekphrasis), [often includes] the representation in words of a visual representation”. Ekphrasis necessitates “a degree of immersion into the imagined visual” (*ibid.*).

As a result of its broad characterisation by researchers, ekphrasis is a generic term. Gisbert Kranz, for example, identifies 5,764 authors of ekphrastic poetry (cited in Bruhn 2008, p. 7). In his poem, “History Is”, *The Knotweed Factor*’s protagonist, James Turner, describes the sky as “a real Altdorfer”, referring to the Germanic painter, Albrecht Altdorfer (d. 1408-1538). Turner’s poem describes a sky with “cloud piled white”, as well as “dove-grey” and “rose”. In terms of his ekphrasis, Turner could be describing any number of Altdorfer’s paintings. Many Altdorfer paintings feature prominent, dramatic skies. In the documentary, Turner not only describes his mindscape—a psychological cleansing after trauma—but does so with the metaphor of vision. To complement this, a derelict house in a moorland in long-shot is featured. As Turner speaks of Altdorfer’s and his own mental sky’s “shafts of light hinting at a buried sun”, a large sunbeam, like a spotlight, appears on the video behind the house, moving across a field.

Here, a boundary issue is introduced: Is Turner’s ekphrasis also a form of audio description for the action in the video or an ekphrasis of Altdorfer and a notional ekphrasis of his own mental state?

Ekphrasis and blindness/VI share a common ancestry. Scholars often cite Homer as the first example of an ekphrastic writer. Homer’s “legendary blindness serves to emphasize that his project [i.e., his epic poetry] is supremely ekphrastic”, writes Elizabeth B. Bearden (2012, eBook). Homer authored his epics before the invention of braille and required an active

memory and visual imagination in order to recite them to his audiences. In Ancient Greece, mnemosynes were employed by orators, poets, and playwrights and oration was considered a great skill (Yates 2011, pp. 42-62. Indeed, Mnemosyne was the Titan goddess of memory). For Mitchell, Homer's ekphrasis "recreates a world by bringing it before the mind's eye of the reader" (Mitchell 1995, p. 176). Ekphrasis as a descriptive discipline provides a historic and aesthetic subtext to the placing of blindness/VI studies within the visual culture discipline:

Abigail Lauren Salerno, for example, authored a thesis on depictions of blind, onscreen heroines. She writes that "ancient education ... valued and encouraged [ekphrasis] ... as part of a larger attitude to literature as a force able to penetrate and shape the individual". For the blind/VI, the values are inverted: ekphrasis enables the blind/VI to experience the visual without visualisation and experience in place of the visual haptic and sonic sensations (Salerno 2007, p. 25). It is worth remembering that the experience of some blind/VI persons will be shaped by visual memories, assuming that some blind/VI audiences lost sight later in life. Gisela Schmidt writes that the blind/VI, "who, having been given a description of the picture by a *theoros* ['seer'] may have memories, anticipations and impressions of what can be seen" (Schmidt 2005, p. 152).

According to Salerno, "The ability of words to affect the imagination is allied to the idea that they can enter and dwell in the soul" (2007, p. 25). For Salerno, words signify an image or images. The signification of image is realised in the creative imagination of audiences. The imaginative realisation transforms ethereal potential into reality. For Susan Felleman, ekphrastic cinema affords the filmmaker an opportunity to interrogate her/his influences. "When a film undertakes the representation of 'art' as a theme or engages an artwork as motif, it is", argues Felleman, "whatever else it is doing, also more or less openly and more or less knowingly entering into a contemplation of its own nature" (quoted in Sager Eidt

2006, p. 227). Below, audiovisual rhythms in relation to *The Knotweed Factor* are examined in an effort to understand how the ekphrastic potential of the documentary is informed by Turner's poetry.

In addition to the early relationship between blindness and ekphrasis and the more contemporary work of Salerno (2007) and others, inferences to visual impairment and ekphrasis in *The Knotweed Factor* can be identified. According to Turner, "History is" a complex interrelation of internalised hopes and traumas and externalised projections of those hopes and traumas, which can and do affect others. Turner's recitation is not limited to visual descriptions. As part of what Laura U. Marks describes as "haptic cinema" (2008, pp. 400-02), Turner describes the "brittle spines" of books (tactile), as well as their "smell" (olfactory). But history, according to Turner, is "an eye test", enabling the historian (be it a personal reflection of one's own history or a scholarly inquiry into world history) to gaze through the "spec[tacles]" of time, distance, and books. Our "burning nostalgia for the future" is described by Turner as an "astigmatic blur".

For Vievee Francis, ekphrasis is "rich in potential for the poet" because it "utilize[s] the poetic imagination to imbue with further possibilities what the previous artist has already imagined" (Francis 2011, pp. 708-10). As Salerno (2007) infers, it realises the potential. In the examples from *The Knotweed Factor* given above, we may ask how a researcher can distinguish between the experiences of the congenitally blind, who may have no or limited light perception and no visual memory, and the visually impaired who can either see or have

visual memories. We may also ask what is the relevance of sight and vision as compared with the *idea* of an image?

For example: The blind, multi-instrumentalist African-American jazz musician, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, is quoted in Kun's book about sound design as saying, "[s]ound is to me ... what sight is to you". Kirk inhabited a world that he described as "pure sound", giving second-place to tactility. His idea of the colour of the sun, for instance, was expressed musically (suggesting a non-visual synaesthesia): "The sun sets off a whole lot of vibrations that if people close their eyes enough, they can hear the sun". For Kirk, the sun was a sonic experience (an audible frequency), not merely a tactile one (e.g., hot in summer, cold in winter.) "Sometimes on the tenor [saxophone] I try to get a sun sound" (Kirk quoted in Kun 2005, pp. 137-38).

Just as Kirk and other blind/VI (and sighted) musicians use sound to convey emotions, Turner's poetry uses images (not only images). Before sighted and non-sighted audiences alike know what the documentary is about (and that it is a documentary), who is speaking, or what they are talking about, Turner's voiceover recites the title poem and conveys an emotion of awe with verbal reference to "bright circuses". He then betrays the mood, adding: "of multi-coloured insignificance". For the sighted and many blind/VI persons alike, certain colours denote and suggest warmth (Kirk with his "sun sound" (quoted in Kun *ibid.*), for instance). The "insignificance" of the awe inferred by Turner is visualised by the choice of monochrome throughout the entire documentary, as well as by the ominous droning music of the opening scene.

Gisela Schmidt (2005) authored a curious paper on the contemporary relationship between blindness and ekphrasis, referring to the "blind man", not woman, and not visually impaired woman or man, but "blind man". Elizabeth Gitter (2001) and Georgina Kleege (2005) have criticised the utilisation of the "Hypothetical Blind Man" by various philosophers. Despite

these flaws in Schmidt's work, she nevertheless provides an interesting analysis of the relationship between visual data, sound transfer, and interpretation. "[T]he blind man can indeed see in the sense of 'understanding'", writes Schmidt (2005, p. 151), but this understanding of visual media is predicated upon the availability of some form of description (braille, assuming that the individual can read braille, audio assistive reading technology, assuming the individual is not deaf-blind, and personal descriptions from associates). The blind and the sighted share *Anschauung* ("intuition" for understanding), says Schmidt. Traditionally, "the seeing man gives an ekphrasis to the blind man" (Schmidt 2005, pp. 152-61). The opposite question could be asked: how do the blind/VI inform the sighted by describing their non-visual experiences.

Lia Nicole Brozgal (2010) offers an account of attempts made by Tunisian writer, Albert Memmi, to convey the experience of blind/VI characters by ekphrastic techniques. Crucially, Memmi proposed adding colour font to the text of his novels. In some novels, argues Brozgal, "Memmi does not submit to an ekphrastic impulse ... [d]espite a profusion of visual material" (2010, p. 317). Brozgal approaches this complexity with an analysis of Memmi's essay, *L'écriture colorée, ou Je vous aime en rouge* (1986).

According to Brozgal, the essay proposes a colour key with which to navigate the thesis. The essay "probe[d] the stability of certain binaries (blindness and sight, and ocularcentrism and ocularphobia)" (Brozgal 2010, p. 318). The causal relation is explored in this written part of the thesis below, namely with Blassnigg's (2010) interrogation of Bergson, which, I argue, undoes the limitation of binarisms and advances a multiplicity. Brozgal notes Memmi's "interest in the intersection of verbal and visual representation" (Brozgal 2010, pp. 317-24). This is central to my thesis, both the documentary and this analysis: The first question posed

when considering the production of *The Knotweed Factor* was how to visualise the verbal. In addition, I ask in this written part of the thesis how to frame and complement the audio of Turner's readings (both ekphrastic and non-ekphrastic). As the documentary production progressed, the thesis considered (theoretically) the aesthetic experiences of blind/VI audiences.

Memmi put “the visual into the service of the verbal ... reversing generally accepted definitions of ekphrasis” (Brozgal 2010, pp. 317-28). It is fitting that Memmi's novels often concern the blind/VI, as the inversion of ekphrasis—the visual enhancing or at least complementing the verbal—was one of the principle challenges and rationales of *The Knotweed Factor*. What were the best approaches to audiovisualising recited poems? This, says, Brozgal hints at an “ambiguous attitude towards the binary of ocularphobia and ocularcentrism” (*ibid.*). Cartesian ocularcentrism is considered in Chapter 4. *The Knotweed Factor* cannot be said to be ocularphobic because it warmly embraces a strong, though paradoxically minimal, visual content as part of its poetic content (see Chapter 3): rich *mise-en-scènes*, carefully considered compositions, and explicit lighting and framing choices. The question concerns how the audio informs the visual, vice versa, and, in this written analysis, how blindness/VI is positioned in VS/C. Memmi's ocularphobia portrays blindness as “a means of moving beyond the constraints of the visual world to a space where the mind's eye is liberated” (*ibid.*).

Above, the necessity of verbal ekphrasis in Ancient Greece as a core method of communicating poetry to large audiences is discussed. Before the introduction and standardisation of assistive reading technologies for the blind/VI, particularly braille, little was available—at least as far as current research demonstrates—to communicate visual ideas

in literature or painting to the blind/VI. In the 17th century, the Enlightenment philosopher Denis Diderot authored his famous *Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who See* (2011 [1749]. More on which in later chapters). After his *Letter*, Diderot met Melanie de Salignac, the daughter of a wealthy family.

At a time when blind/VI persons in Europe were pitied and often sent out to beg for their families (Weygand 2009), and long before the invention of braille, de Salignac's parents were determined to provide for her as high a standard of education as her sighted peers. De Salignac's parents acquired for her assistive technologies, including writing machines and tactile maps. De Salignac objected to numerous characterisations of the blind/VI in Diderot's *Letter*, principally that aesthetic comprehension is contingent on vision. When Diderot posed a thought experiment to de Salignac, he was surprised to find that she could anticipate the answer correctly, that a particular shape Diderot had in mind consists of six equal pyramids. "Where do you see it?", asked Diderot. De Salignac replied, "In my head, as do you" (quoted in Kleege 2011, p. 1245). Kleege notes that following his conversations with de Salignac, Diderot's art criticisms became more ekphrastic, as if Diderot learned that the blind are as capable of enjoying paintings as the sighted (cited in *ibid.*).

VS/C theorist Mitchell appears to challenge this assumption, writing that in ekphrasis, "language [is] at the service of vision" (1995, pp. 151). This is problematic because it follows the Cartesian primacy of vision idea, where sight is given primacy. For Mitchell, formal ekphrastic temporal linguistic patterns become "a spatial, formal array". For critics of ekphrasis, "[n]o amount of description ... adds up to a depiction" (*ibid.*, p. 152). However, for those who have never had sight, the question of visual depiction is irrelevant. What is relevant is how the information is conveyed, as Kirk pointed out with his solar vibrations example. Mitchell says that "[w]ords can 'cite' but never 'sight' their objects" (*ibid.*, p. 153). This assertion is challenged by the poetics of documentary, explored in Chapter 2, as well as

by current neurological evidence, contextualised below as a comment on ekphrastic cinema. More recent scholarship, says Mitchell, argues that ekphrasis enables writers to “make us see” (*ibid.*, p. 154).

Above, the relationship between the verbal (or audio) and the visual is contextualised. The sighted, according to Schmidt and others, act as a kind of assistive technology to the blind/VI, enabling audiences to understand and experience visual information in art. Many, cited by Jan Eric Olsén, argue that the blind/VI can only experience the visual vicariously, that is via some interface (such as ekphrasis and audio description). Olsén explores “the relation between blindness, sense substitution, and mechanical-sensorial aid” (2013, p. 71). The *Sinnesvikariat*, or vicariate of the senses, is contingent on the blind/VI having an “incomplete” external sensory experience. Were highly-developed haptic/sonic abilities in the blind/VI habitually acquired or sensory “energies” “transferred from the [mal- or] non-functioning eye to the vicarious organs?”. The Cartesian mechanism, criticised here in later Chapters, was founded upon the latter theory. The development of “vicarious technologies”, notably brailers, coincided with industrial capitalism (Olsén 2013, pp. 71-78).

For the first time, large numbers of blind/VI individuals could read books themselves, and interpret the visual information conveyed in novels and poetry their own ways (recall Kirk and “hearing the sun” (quoted in Kun 2005, pp. 137-38)). Mitchell discusses the “image/text division”, proposing a merge as “imagetext” (Mitchell 1995, p. 152), akin to Memmi’s colour key. According to Mitchell, primacy of vision (in the Cartesian model) turns the secondary (a literature or audio interpretation) into the ‘other’. In *The Knotweed Factor*, the primacy is the written and the recited (literature and audio), as Turner’s poems not only predate the documentary, but were written without being intended to be visualised through the ‘vicariate’

of video. (Video only becomes a ‘vicariate’ of the poetic when contextualised in the model proposed by Mitchell (1995), Olsén (2013), and other proponents of the *Sinnesvikariat*). Ekphrasis challenges the hegemony of primacy, be it textual or visual, depending on the given subject. “Even ‘description’ itself, the most general form of ekphrasis, has ... only a kind of phantom existence at the level of the signifier”, says Mitchell (1995, 152-58).

But can such a definition apply to blind or severally VI audiences when they have never experienced or at least cannot remember having experienced images, except, perhaps, light? The deaf-blind activist and author, Helen Keller (1908), who used braille to read poetry (including ekphrastic poetry) and art reviews, wrote that “[c]ritics ... declare that the very sensations we have from the sense of touch are ‘vicarious,’ as though our friends felt the sun for us!” (Keller 1908, p. 39). Keller adds that critics “deny *a priori* what they have not seen and I have felt”. Keller then goes on to articulate her direct experiences of what sighted critics describe as vicariates (1908, pp. 40-41).

EKPHRASTIC SOUND & IMAGE

Discussing the aesthetics of film, television, and documentary design is problematic because “[c]lassical sound theory was built on the premise that cinema was essentially a visual medium” (Le Fèvre-Berthelot 2013, online).

Mitchell (1995, p. 153) gives as an example of ekphrasis a radio programme in which the protagonists describe a series of photographs to one another for the benefit of the audience. To some extent, radio equalised aesthetic experiences of the blind/VI and the sighted by

forcing the sighted to imagine (be it with visual, tactile, sonic or other senses) a particular scene, person, or object. The photographs in the play described by Mitchell can be visualised by the sighted as square or rectangular card-like images in monochrome or sepia. One of my central questions in this text is precisely how visual information is transferred to audio and vice versa, and what that implies for VS/C. For audiences who have never had sight, perhaps the tactility of the photographs (in Mitchell's example) are imagined, or perhaps the content of the photographs is imagined in a tactile way (e.g., the clothing, height, facial features, etc., of the characters being described).

For Bruhn (2008), ekphrasis is an 'interartistic mode of transfer'. Giving the example of Schoenberg's string sextet, *Verklärte Nacht* (1899), based on a Richard Dehmel poem, Bruhn challenges the ocularcentric vs. ocularphobic binarism proposed by Memmi and the text vs. image paradigm of Mitchell, writing: "musical ekphras[es are] unmixed transmedializations" (Bruhn 2008, pp. 8-9). In *The Knotweed Factor*, the poetic ideal is mediated through sound (Turner's recitations), sound design (ambient noise, choice of location for wildtrack (e.g., echoing buildings), etc.), and music. Ekphrastic music "reflects or comments on aspects of the source text without including the primary medium, i.e., the words" (*ibid.*). This raises interesting questions about the validity of text, sound, and image. If an intention (such as atmosphere or emotion) is conveyed, does the medium through which it is conveyed become arbitrary?

When, for instance, Turner discusses his "longest love", classical music, the documentary shows an old vinyl player spinning a Mozart LP. We hear the scratch of the needle, but we hear no music. The suggestion of music is conveyed using three devices: the sound of Turner talking about music, the sound of the needle scratching, and the image of the record and record player. Any music present in the scene is created solely in the imaginations of the audience. This follows the same principle as Bruhn's work as a "comment" on the given

source-text, “without the primary medium” (*ibid.*)—only, with the values inversed. In *The Knotweed Factor*, the poem, not the music, is heard. However, in Bruhn’s example (*ibid.*), Schoenberg’s music is heard, but not Dehmel’s poem.

In a book about sound design, Kun (2005, p. 137) discusses the essay *In Praise of Blindness* (1936), by Rudolf Arnheim. Arnheim “celebrated the advent of wireless radio for the way it purified the listening process by eliminating the distractions of the visual and erasing reference to the materiality of the sound source”. Sound can be experienced as something ethereal, whereas the image is solid. This is in contrast to pre-Socratic thought, where the image was fluid (Lechte 2012). When radio dramas became popular, audiences were requested to close their eyes and turn out the lights, as if their visual environs would interfere with the audio (and thus visual or tactile imaginary). It was “somehow believe[d] that this new drama for an audience which had no eyes could only be appreciated by simulating blindness”, writes Ian Rodger (quoted in Crook 1999, pp. 62-63).

The fluidity of sound and sound design (dialogue, ambient noise, wild-track, and music) afforded us the opportunity in *The Knotweed Factor* to use sound as a poetic device (see below) for reflecting Turner’s mindscape. Turner’s eponymous poem, recited at the beginning of the documentary, is rambling, disjointed, and chaotic. It reflects the myriad of thoughts, images, sounds, smells, tastes, memories, nightmares, and ideas that swirl in his head. It is, arguably, the sound (or if read, text,) of a man exploring the darkest corners of his subconscious. The droning soundtrack was constructed in order to communicate this idea to the audience. “For Arnheim, the radio gave us sound as sound, ‘blind music’ to be heard by ‘blind listeners’” (Kun 2005, p. 137).

When it came to cinema, however, Arnheim held the opposite view: that sound was an intrusion into the alleged purity of the image. Arnheim lamented the “impressive decline of artistic excellence” which, he reasoned, had resulted from the presence of sound. He criticised “visually poor scenes full of dialogue” (quoted in Le Fèvre-Berthelot 2013, online).

Following Arnheim’s model, could *The Knotweed Factor* (minus narrative devices constructed on visual cues and actions) be enjoyed as a radio documentary or sound installation? If so, what does this say about its visual content? Contrarily, could *The Knotweed Factor* be enjoyed as a silent documentary? How would one go about describing to a blind/VI audience ‘visual poetry’ (or *An Optical Poem* (1937), to quote the title of an animation by Fischinger)?

Returning to the use of sound as a fluid diegetic device, Kahn (1993) writes that sound need not be “constituted in opposition to the visual image”. Rather, creative sound can be “actually heard or heard in myth, idea, or implication; sounds heard by everyone or imagined by one person alone” (Kuhn 1999, pp. 3-4). In *The Knotweed Factor*, there are sounds which, had the documentary been broadcast on radio or shown un-audio described to a blind/VI audience, may make no immediate sense but could hint at some clue as to the turmoil of Turner’s mind. When Turner recites “The Knotweed Factor” at the beginning of the documentary, a purposefully constructed artifice is shown, namely a physical manifestation of Turner as a young man. This is not explained in the documentary, leaving sighted and blind/VI audiences (who have description) to ask who the young man is. Sonically, the only clue to the young man’s presence is one footstep in a puddle, the crackle of fire, and the sound of dripping water. As the young man is imagined or remembered (or both), his physical presence is arbitrary. These are the ‘phantom signifiers’ described by Olsén (2013, *op cit.*) in his description of ekphrasis as *Sinnesvikariat*.

In his book on radio plays, Crook² (1999) argues that sound is not a ‘blind’ (or one-dimensional) medium because it is multi-layered. Crook writes that some scholars argue that humans “first hear before they see”, dethroning Cartesian visual primacy. “What is the philosophical difference”, asks Crook, “between seeing physically with the eye and seeing with the mind?”. Crook discusses sound communication as “based on the fictional dimension of the image as seen in the mind’s eye”. Crook writes that if radio listeners are visually familiar with the face of an actor, their visual imaginations may be more vivid as they can clearly picture the actor in their imaginations (Crook 1999, pp. 51-52).

If the face of an actor has previously been described to a blind/VI audience, they may imagine (while listening to the performance) those given physical traits. This could include a tactile imagination (e.g., the actor was described as having bony cheeks) or associational imagination (e.g., the actor was described as having red hair, so a particular blind/VI audience member may imagine ‘red hair’ as tasting like strawberry. Sighted audiences with particular forms of synaesthesia also associate colour with taste, odour, and so on.³). These visual, tactile, or associational imaginations are, Crook argues, more powerful “than pure fictionalisation of the image from the voice of an unknown person” (*ibid.*, pp. 52-54).

Anaïs Le Fèvre-Berthelot discusses the “disembodied voice” as a common feature of cinematic sound designed (2013, online). This is relevant to both *The Knotweed Factor* and this critical analysis. Without audio description, it could be argued that for blind/VI audiences, all voices in film, television, theatre, animation, and so on, are ‘disembodied’.⁴ In the opening scenes of *The Knotweed Factor*, a male voice is heard, but the man is not seen. It

² Crook is referenced frequently in this Chapter. As Le Fèvre-Berthelot (2013) points out, there is a dearth of scholarship on sound design, hence single-source references are necessary.

³ Assuming that s/he has no visual perception or visual memory. (On synaesthesia, see, for instance, Sacks 2008.)

⁴ Again, assuming footnote 3 applies.

is a deceptive voice, promising the audience a “story” about “rollercoasters” and “disproportioned dog[s]” which quickly morphs into stories about other things. Le Fèvre-Berthelot (2013, online) writes that cinematic voice-over is considered “a threat to the purity of film. Yet, cinema has never been silent”. She cites the example of pianos played to accompany silent films in cinemas, as well as exaggerated gestures, such as images of ringing bells and actors cupping their ears. “[F]rom the medium’s very inception, sound was always supposed to go along with moving images” (*ibid.*).

The Knotweed Factor was produced to audiovisualise the mindscape of the protagonist. Consequently, sound (including music and choice of location for voice recording) is as important to the documentary as the visual aspects. An equalisation of audio and video, triggered by Turner’s moments of unprompted audio description, highlights the relationship between visual arts and blindness/VI.

For Crook, “the degree of signification in radio or sound goes beyond the superficial and subtextual layers of the sound itself and must encompass the interaction with memory, other media and contextualisation” (1999, p. 62). *The Knotweed Factor* attempts to at least convey the memory-associations of the protagonist. For example, when Turner discusses “the great raft of the past” colliding with the “sperm whale of the present”, memory-image associations with water are visualised with a foot stepping into a puddle. The sound design is a minimal splash. The inference is the “collision” of foot and water: a solid and liquid; a solid temporal reality and liquid (or fluid) collection of memories “and think systems”, as Turner describes them in his poem.

For Elissa Guralnik, “[t]he blind must assemble their world, as an ever-emerging unproven hypothesis, from such small information as comes to them piecemeal” (quoted in

Crook 1999, p. 63). Guralnik's hypothesis depends on many factors, such as environmental familiarity and degree of VI. Guralnik's idea can be compared with the limitations of the sighted: the sighted rely on vision and often do not listen carefully, as well as being often subject to optical illusions. Whether Guralnik's thesis is true or not does not alter its symbolic relevance to the *mise-en-abîme*, where the sighted audience has to grope about in the narratological darkness for meaning, until it becomes apparent through the visual signification of Turner's physical presence reading the poem, that they are watching/listening to a poetic documentary. Audience responses (memories, ideas, reactions) are part of what Crook calls the "imaginative spectacle", where the mind is the "camera of the listener which is also a sound recorder and production house and personal movie theatre" (1999, p. 62). The question in this text concerns how VS/C would deal with such a question when considering blind/VI audiences.

Above, Rodger's historical comment on radio producers asking sighted audiences to eliminate their visual environment for the duration of the given play is referenced (cited in Crook 1999, p. 62-63). In the mid-1990s, Crook imposed a temporary blindness on his audience at the BAC Theatre, when he co-designed the sound (with Indira Sengupta) for Samuel Beckett's *All That Fall* (1957) for director Tom Morris. Blindfolded actors rehearsed Beckett's play in preparation for an imposed blindness on the sighted audience. Crook describes it as "the most ambitious virtual reality listening experience in the history of British theatre", with sound operating from seventeen speakers for nearly one hour (1999, p. 67).

Themes of blindness are common in Beckett. Peggy Phelan writes that "[r]eading Samuel Beckett made me want to link literary and visual studies" (Phelan 2004, p. 1280). The link already existed with ekphrasis, but Phelan wanted to explore it. Sound and the written word were keys to an understanding. In Beckett's plays, audiences, sighted or blind/VI, 'see' (be it literarily or imaginatively, visually or audibly,) Beckett's blind characters "and in that insight

we are made aware of what we cannot and do not see in the scene. Seeing the unsighted, we see as well the drama of sight” (*ibid.*, p. 1281). In *The Knotweed Factor*, the values are inverted: Turner is sighted but often unseen in the documentary. There are long passages of time in which Turner inaudibly contemplates his environment or we take a breather from his verse by observing and listening to nature. Beckett’s *Endgame* (1957) “has had a particular optical, political, and psychological force for painters of the postwar period”, writes Phelan. This is a clear example of the audio (or literary) informing the visual (*ibid.*).

EKPHRASTIC CINEMA

In 1913, the cinema journal *Motography* published news on a “[s]tartling” invention by a Franco-Swiss professor, François Dussaud: “a motion-picture apparatus for the blind”. According to the report, blind audiences “may experience the illusion of moving objects as people with full powers of vision do in viewing an illuminated screen”. The invention was an electrical Phénakistiscope designed to produce tactile simulations “representing trees, birds or other objects to pass rapidly under the fingers”. The invention presupposed that ‘direct’ tactile experience was the preferable option for blind audiences, as opposed to an ‘indirect’ or ‘second hand’ experience of description (*Mot.* 1913, p. 2).

Where a traditional circular Phénakistiscope would rotate, conveying the visual illusion of image-movement, Dussaud’s modified version (actually produced in 1898 (Cosandey 1996, online)) would transmit haptic sensations to the user. The technology was contingent on the understanding that the “delicate sense of touch of the blind translates their variations into

apparent movements of the objects which are represented” (*Mot., ibid.*). The *Who’s Who of Victorian Cinema* credits Dussaud with many achievements, including pioneering research into sound/image synchronisation, particularly with the (co-)invention of the microphonograph, which, intended to alleviate forms of deafness, electrically recorded and reproduced sound via mechanical and later acoustic amplifications (Cosandey 1996, online). Modern critics argue that the tactile Phénakistiscope “was more typical of its time than useful” (Olsén 2013, pp. 84-85).

It could be argued that the Phénakistiscope ekphrastically described the poetic images of birds and trees through the agency of tactility, instead of text or sound. The tactile Phénakistiscope was in part a rhythmic device, pulsing haptic sensations to the user. Beckett, argues Phelan, gave the sighted an idea of rhythmic blindness. In *Waiting for Godot* (1953), “Beckett dramatized the rhythm of looking, a rhythm with which many painters are intimate”, writes Phelan. The play moves between blindness and sight, “between figuration and abstraction, between the void at the center of sight and the contour of the slender ridge that brooks it” (Phelan 2004, p. 1281).

In *The Knotweed Factor*, the visual editing is informed by the soundtrack: the sound of Turner’s poetic recitations. The opening shot of the disused railway track, for instance, is held for approximately 20 seconds. The purpose is to visually contrast the frantic and frenetic poetic ‘imagery’ of Turner’s verse (e.g., “loopiest rollercoasters”, “disproportioned dog”, “teapot in the shape of a mobile phone”) with simple, static images. Only when Turner’s poem moves into the second stanza and begins to change from random thoughts to more personalised ones does the visual element of the documentary cut: this time to an interior of what appears to be a derelict signal box.

The rhythm is also informed by the relentlessness of Turner's verse. Take the example of the poem "History Is": After dealing with a myriad of subjects and vivid images (child abuse, victims of religion burned at the stake, air wars), the documentary continues the ominous drone that begins near the end of the poem, but makes a visual transition to a stag standing in a field. On closer visual inspection, the stag is a metallic sculpture, indicating that nothing is what it appears to be. The faux stag raises interesting epistemological questions, some of which were tackled in the Enlightenment by Berkeley and Diderot, concerning the hierarchy of the senses: the touch of the stag would have revealed its true nature, whereas the distant glance is deceptive (Chapter 4). Stylistically, the purpose of the scene is, in part, to impose a slow rhythm on the pace of the documentary, which is informed by (albeit in contrast to) the verse.

"[W]ords can describe or embody static, spatial states of affairs, and achieve all of the effects of ekphrasis without any deformation of their 'natural' vocation", writes Mitchell (1995, pp. 160-61). Mitchell quotes Oliver Sacks on the acquisition of language by the deaf, implying that language is the signifier and interpretation is the result. This is the audio-linguistic equivalent of the Enlightenment debates on whether touch or vision are direct experiences or signals. Drawing from Sacks's remarks, Mitchell posits that like semantics, text and image are undifferentiated. The ekphrastic poet mediates the object and the listener. For Mitchell, the mediation triangulates an otherwise binary relation. It is this relation that we seek in *The Knotweed Factor*: the poem—visual or audio (or both) when translated into documentary—informing the visual *vérité* or imagination (or both) as well as being informed by it.

A century after Dussaud, Lopez and Pauletto (2009, online) attempted to construct a model for alternatives to audio description (AD), which they call Audio Film (AF). Premised on the assumption that AD “leav[es] the consumer [with] ‘less opportunity to independently assign meaning’” to film, the authors propose that AF is contingent on “certain elements of the filmmaking process [which] might be adapted for the conveyance of a story through sound, creating an experience equivalent to the cinematic experience”. Lopez and Pauletto suggest that cinema is inherently visual and that “equivalence” can compensate blind/VI audiences by a design and production process that results in narratological and aesthetic sound within a visual framework (*ibid.*).

It could be argued that Lopez and Pauletto are advocating an ekphrastic cinema that challenges the dynamics of viewer-listener relations, as well as the filmmaker’s relationship to audio and visual. For Hannasofia Hardwick, ekphrasis means the “verbal representation of a visual representation” (2012, p. 1). Hardwick deconstructs Paul Auster’s novel *The Book of Illusions* (2002). The narrative concerns a professor’s search for a missing silent film star. Auster’s literary device necessitates ekphrasis, namely Auster’s description of cinematic scenes to the reader.

A blind/VI person could read the novel via braille, assistive computer technologies, audio book, or via friends/family/assistants. Assuming the blind/VI audience has severely impaired or absent vision, no visual memory (hence the incapacity to imagine visual images), his/her comprehension of the cinema image described in the book is approximate in one sense to the sighted reader’s: neither sighted nor blind/VI readers can see the film(s) described by Auster. This may not be the case for every instant of Auster’s ekphrasis (Hardwick 2012, pp. 3-4).

If Auster or other novelists, describe, for example, a woman standing on rocks by a misty sea, the majority of sighted readers will visualise the woman, the rocks, the mist, the sea, and, where textual information is missing, invent a composition, including the tableau and the

character's clothing, hair, etc. The aforementioned objects will have a relative size (big sea, smaller rocks) and predictable colour schemes (grey rocks and mist, blue sea). For the blind reader who retains a memory of sight, the image may be a visual recall or construction. For blind/VI persons with poor visual memory, the image construction may be fuzzy. For visually impaired readers, the image may be fuzzy but accompanied by distinct, vivid tactile constructions, i.e., haptic imaginary sensations of the sea (its temperature, salinity compared with rivers), rocks, and so on.

The degree of perfection, fuzziness, haptic recall/construction is, naturally, dependent on the individual reader. One of the problems of blindness/VI studies, particularly in relation to audio description, is that blind/VI persons have unique requirements because, with some exceptions, degrees and histories of blindness/VI differ, yet audio description provides a blanket rather than tailored response to requirements. Hardwick writes: "cinematic ekphrasis underlines the inconsistency of the sensation of film" (2012, pp. 1-2). Contrary to Mitchell (1995), Hardwick proposes that "cinematic ekphrasis is less a (re)mediator than a generator of a potentially intense sensation". For Hardwick, the potentiality of cinematic ekphrasis "remind[s] us of the capacity of our mental faculties, the cognitive power of narrative and the paradoxical nature of the filmic experience" (2012, p. 2).

In current thinking, ekphrasis "appropriates the image", becoming dominant (or primary). In this respect, ekphrasis "paraphrases" the image, writes Laura Mareike Sager Eidt (2006, p. 40), in contrast to Hardwick's reading of cinema as inherently paradoxical. Sager Eidt writes about "the hybrid nature" of cinema. She describes ekphrasis as a set of "verbal discourses that directly verbalize one or more visual images". But Sager Eidt challenges this tradition (2006, p. 40). According to critics, including Bazin, film does not faithfully represent painting. Bazin

criticized ekphrastic cinema in *Painting and Cinema* (1958-65) “by claiming that the filmic frame is centrifugal while the picture frame is centripetal” (*ibid.*, p. 231).

Consequently, the “sender/receiver relationships”, as Sager Eidt describes them (2006, p. 10), become a lens through which the given work is distorted. She disputes this position and argues for consideration “beyond the traditional boundaries” of visual and verbal. Here, she shares Mitchell’s position. Ekphrasis is positioned as mimetics: “film as a medium that can transpose painting”. There is a great deal to say about this in regards to poetic cinema (more in Chapter 2). Earlier, the question about how the verbal informs the visual was posed. Sager Eidt argues that “ekphrasis need not be purely verbal ... Filmic ekphrasis allows the viewer to compare the filmic representation or enactment of the art work with the actual work itself”. According to Sager Eidt, this is a synthesis of a dialectic, wherein “two images” are created “in the viewer’s mind” (*ibid.*, pp. 1-2, 14-15).

Positioning *The Knotweed Factor* in the blindness/VI studies field immediately makes the protagonist an ekphrastic poet. For the sighted, the protagonist relies on the work of the documentary-maker to construct or complement the poems visually. The aesthetic responsibility and all that such responsibility implies, lies squarely with the documentary-maker. As soon as the documentary-maker positions the analysis as an inquiry into blindness/VI, the aesthetic and cognitive responsibility is shouldered on the protagonist, specifically because we rely on him for narration.

The singularity of protagonist is intentional linguistic usage as, with the sole exception of a brief moment in a single scene, James Turner is the sole protagonist. The responsibility necessitates an intra-descriptive narrative. When, for instance, Turner is speaking at the fence around a cricket pitch, he informs the audience, linguistically, that he is standing near a cricket pitch. This intra-description is unnecessary for sighted audiences and it is not clear

why Turner chose to explain what can be seen. Inadvertently, such descriptions are perhaps useful for blind/VI audiences.

For Sager Eidt, cinematic ekphrasis is a transmedialization which “adapt[s] the pictorial [i.e., painting] into the cinematographic language”. Ekphrasis, she argues, constitutes little screen-time, making it unsuitable to consider as a genre. Cinematic ekphrasis poses the danger of the artist losing originality when employing ekphrastic techniques because the ekphrasis becomes a paragon: a comparison of one form over another. Visual ekphrasis has the potential to “resemble ... a filmic quotation of an image” (Sager Eidt 2006, pp. 42). In *The Knotweed Factor*, the potential for mere stereotyping is reduced by introducing unique visual interpretations of Turner’s poetry.

In “Brush the Wound”, Turner writes (and in the documentary speaks) about unlocking “the door to the secret room”. Visually, we are inside a room, reflected in a convex mirror. The reflection is distorted by the shape of the mirror. The character in the shot may or may not be Turner. He has his back to us. He slowly climbs into the bed lying on the bare floorboards. The visual has quoted the poem, but has done so (we believe) in a way that only indirectly signifies a ‘secret room’.

Above, it is argued that the blind/VI and sighted alike ‘visualise’ written and audio descriptions in ways unique to the individual. For Sager Eidt, cinema not only evokes or produces “actual images”, it animates and changes them by uniquely interpreting already existing art (*ibid.*). In Tracy Chevalier’s *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1999), after the eponymous character, Griet, asks her master to leave her with the image, she reflects upon what is seen in the *camera obscura*. “The image she contemplates is twice removed from reality”, concludes Sager Eidt: “it is a painted image reflected in mechanical device (‘a

painting that was not a painting’). This ekphrasis has presented the audience with “a mechanical illusion of a pictorial illusion” (2006, pp. 60, 205-6).

The image-within-an image motif, the *mise-en-abîme*, traps what could be the younger Turner within a memory-dream of himself, reflected in a pool in the opening scenes.

According to communications researcher, Brian Massumi, and neuroscientist, Antonio Damasio (both cited in Reber 2010), humans process prerational visual information affectively, meaning that the emotional response registers before the intellectual response. These are known as “affective events”. The affective event encompasses somatic sense and emotion. The dreamlike qualities of *The Knotweed Factor*—both visual and audio—pretend to the prerational and somatic. “The body ‘thinks’ by means of sensation, emotion, and feeling, the hierarchy of homeostasis”, writes Dierdra Reber. For Damasio, the body self-regulates for maximal wellbeing. “Visual culture production will render social metanarrative on the somatic plane as a judgement of the body”, Reber continues. The human body measures its own relationship to the social—the “intensely visual”—where affect is the “predominant form of cognition for the global visual age” (Reber 2010, 65-71).

Having framed the affective qualities of the visual, Reber considers “universal” empirical examples of affective films and paintings. “How does this empathic reception work when the image is written?” Or when one is denied the experience of the visual? “What kind of interpretive apparatus does visual writing, which is epistemologically orientated around the affects rather than reason, engage in its reader?”, asks Reber (*ibid.*). Drawing on recent neurological work, Reber asks whether humans “first emote” when interpreting the image. Analysing Mitchell’s “rejection of the epistemological *mode* of textuality”, Reber argues that writing and visuality can be read as indistinguishable as a result of their affective qualities.

Ekphrasis “should portend a line in the sand between writing and visuality” (*ibid.* Emphasis in original).

One of the most interesting aspects of ekphrastic cinema, argues Emma Kafalenos (2003), is double-coding. Her example is the film *The Truman Show* (1998). It is difficult to distinguish between *mise-en-abîme* and double-coding. *The Truman Show* tells the story of Truman Burbank, a real human being who is an unwitting actor in a film being made secretly about his life. As he matures, Truman begins to think that his life is not quite what it seems. The film is an example of double-coding because 1) we are its audience, 2) the actors are playing roles. The combination of these points is a commonality of fictional narrative cinema: a single code. However, into *The Truman Show*, a third element is introduced: 3) the actors in the film are acting the role of characters and 4) Truman becomes self-aware and stops acting in his own film, ergo a double-coding.

“Unlike other forms of visual representation, moreover, photography and film are indexical; they attest to the materiality of the referent”, writes Kafalenos (2003, p. 5). Film can index, painting, for example. Angela Dalle Vacche (1996) comments on Éric Rohmer’s *The Marquise of O* (1975), where “[t]he confrontation of word and image is so central ... that ... the director inevitably summons a tradition dating back to the eighteenth century and carrying over into the nineteenth”. In the film, “painting is linked to thought”, says Dalle Vacche (1996, pp. 81-82), as it is sometimes in *The Knotweed Factor*.

After Turner’s story about the knotweed re-growing on the cricket pitch where it had been chemically eradicated, we visit—for the first time—Turner’s home. The camera focuses on a particularly menacing illustration of Shani, the Indian god of Saturn, which in the context of the documentary represents darkness. As in *The Knotweed Factor*, painting in Rohmer’s film “refers to the characters’ mental activity”, writes Dalle Vacche (*ibid.*). Connected to thought, painting deepens the “otherwise one-dimensional surface and makes the cinematic image

multifaceted”, Vacche continues. Rohmer’s interpretation of Kleist’s book “thrive[s] on the oscillation between *ut pictura poesis* and *ut poesis pictura*”, overcoming, she argues, the text/image dialectic. Painting becomes “mute poetry ... whereas a speaking picture, poetry absorbs the sense” (Vacche 1996, p. 82).

If the image is multi-dimensionalised by the indexical presence of painting (i.e., thought, as Dalle Vacche (1996) puts it,) then the image ceases to be antifunctional for blind/VI audiences and returns to its pre-Socratic tradition of image as emanation of thought or being—a point to which this discussion returns in relation to nominal ekphrasis—as well as to Blassnigg’s (2010) and Lechte’s (2012) work on the transmateriality and interdimensionality of the image.

Kalafenos (2003, p. 2) writes that “double coding can enable representation of new forms of representation (art forms, genres, media)”, which only double-coding can achieve, like the example of Truman Burbank given above, where Truman can be said to be a character living in an artificial medium (a painting, a play, or in this case a television show). There is an element of double-coding in *The Knotweed Factor*. Turner is reading the title poem, but remains as disembodied voice (as Le Fèvre-Berthelot (2013) describes the device) for a large portion of the opening scene.

In this capacity, Turner is a narrator and/or an ekphrastic poet. However, in the visuals, two men explore an abandoned space, never meeting. When Turner’s embodied voice is seen, it becomes apparent that he has been double-coded into his own narrative mindscape. Film “heightens the customary difference between scene and summary in verbal narratives”, says Kafalenos, “by depicting scenes visually as well as through words”. If we consider *The Knotweed Factor* as an ekphrastic documentary, it is inherently double-coded according to

Kafalenos because the words and images are not only symbiotic but, where Turner is concerned, performative, complementary and illustrative (Kafalenos 2003, p. 2).

For Ágnes Pethő, “ekphrasis requires the perception of intermedial relations”. The voice is the mediating agency between the written and the visualised, or the visualised and the written. Mediality comprises “transformative inscriptions”, says Pethő (2011, p. 260). Above, Dalle Vacche’s (1996) reading of indexation, particularly paintings not only in films but painting as expression and conveyance of thought, is considered. For Vacche, painting multidimensionalises cinema. For Pethő, “multidimensional ekphrastic tendencies ... up the cinematic expression in order to mediate towards the ekphrastic assimilation of another” (2011, p. 260). For Kalafenos (2003), double-coding is the key device of ekphrastic cinema.

In practice, *The Knotweed Factor* is compelled to visualise the poetic so as not to betray or contradict the poetic ideal. Jean-Luc Godard “engage[s] in a multiple or meta-ekphrastic cinematic discourse”, argues Pethő (2011, p. 296). Godard constructs films by multiplying remediating layers, stimulating “the associative imagination of the viewer”. Godard achieves this with, for instance “an active, verbal component (speech) and a passive visual component (image)”. These opposites are forced to confront one another in the frame, but have no “direct ekphrastic connection with each other” (*ibid.*, pp. 300-01). Vacche’s (1996) argument for an indexical interdimensionality of referent cinema is considered above. Pethő seems to suggest that Godard achieves this (particularly within the film *Letter to Jane: an Investigation about a Still* (1972), co-directed by Jean-Pierre Gorin,) with the title photograph, “meant to evoke the film together with the text interpreting ... the whole process”. This interaction produces what she describes as a “new” cinematic discourse: “an ekphrastic-intermedial essay” (Pethő 2011, pp. 296-307).

CONCLUSION

This Chapter has demonstrated that ekphrasis is a complex model predicated upon the interactions and exchanges of ideas, memories, imaginations (visual and non-visual), and existing or imagined art. Within the complexity, this Chapter identifies possibilities for considering ekphrasis as an approach to understanding how visual ideas (e.g., paintings, photographs), are translated into other literary and audio (e.g., spoken word) artforms. It argues that this translation is a helpful model for approaching the aesthetic experiences of the blind/VI and suggests that more research be undertaken into this issue by VS/C theorists.

The ekphrastic qualities and limitations of *The Knotweed Factor* are considered as a complement to the ‘poetic’ aspects of the documentary (which are explored in the next Chapter). Established fields of poetic inquiry, specifically ekphrasis, are most useful to a question concerning how blindness/VI is positioned in VS/C. *The Knotweed Factor* complements the mindscape of the protagonist and does so by employing a variety of techniques, some of which are broadly considered in scholarly models as ‘poetic’. The more interesting element, however, is the notion of the transcendent image.

Chapter 2

Silent Music, Motionless Pictures

SUMMARY

This Chapter follows the thought of ekphrastic sound and cinema by introducing two new elements: notional ekphrasis as transcendent multidimensionality and digital ekphrasis. From this starting point, it is argued that the idea of the digital image, like the chemical or painted image, is transposed into imaginations and memories of audiences, regardless of medium. It does so by presenting historical examples of image as emanation in pre-Socratic thought, where intent is conveyed via the interaction with the image, regardless of medium. In this respect, imagination brought the ‘soul’ of the art to life. For Bergson, imagination was a multidimensional phenomenological experience of consciousness, dream, and memory interacting in a temporal space.

Framing these ideas as a discourse on blindness/VI and VS/C, this Chapter presents examples of silent music and monochromatic paintings in an effort to juxtapose the deprived experience of the sighted with the everyday experience (at least in some cases) of the blind/VI. *The Knotweed Factor* features curious instances of the protagonist describing to the audience that which can be seen on the screen. This may be strange to sighted audiences who

can see what Turner is describing. But it may be helpful to blind/VI audiences. Turner emphasises tactility as he does so.

From this, it is argued that the ‘visual’ cannot be isolated but in any medium depends on subtle, little-understood interactions with modes of exhibition, non-visual elements of the given work, and, most important, audience interactions.

NOTIONAL EKPHRASIS & THE TRANSCENDENT IMAGE

A few years before her tragic and unexpected death, Martha Blassnigg (2009) explored the visual, notional ekphrasis of Aby Warburg, who criticised the categorisation of art, considering art an active rather than static medium. Warburg favoured the “juxtaposition of elements in tension”. Warburg’s gallery could be thought of as an “image-memory, a syncretic mental montage”, writes Blassnigg (2009, p. 1). Warburg was interested in “the dynamics between the still images beyond the visible appearance of form and content”.

Philippe-Alain Michaud describes Warburg’s montages as cinematic arrangements (cited in Blassnigg 2009, p. 2). Blassnigg considers mnemosynes in relation to association, memory, repetition, and other recursive mental functions and finds consistency in this position with Bergson’s approach to movement as experiential transfer, as opposed to externalised object movement. Warburg’s work suggests movement is “an inner principle” rather than “an external force” (Blassnigg 2009, pp. 1-2).

In *The Knotweed Factor*, the audiovisualisations of Turner’s poetry are constructed in ways that suggest that the medium of video documentary is being employed to convey the

inner workings of Turner's mindscape, often at the expense of the rational and logical. Certain sequences in the documentary, for example, may puzzle the audience's sense of narrative expectation, like the unexplained appearance of the younger man in some of the dream/memory/poetry scenes.

Chapter 1 proposes that mnemosynes were an important element of classical ekphrasis. For Blassnigg (2009), Warburg uses a kind of visual ekphrasis to stimulate responses to the implied in-between actions, that is to say that which may or not be happening, following one visualised action and prior to another. Warburg defined his *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1923-29) as a "ghost story for adults" (quoted in Blassnigg 2009, p. 2.). The previous Chapter considered Mitchell's (1995, pp. 152-58) response to ekphrastic images as "phantoms". In terms of blindness/VI studies, Olsén (2013, pp. 71-8) considers the image as *Sinnesvikariat*, whereas Schmidt (2005, pp. 151-61) emphasises the *Anschauung*, or shared intuition among the blind/VI and sighted of the idea or atmosphere of the 'image', be it imagined visually, sonically, haptically, or as all three.

Blassnigg writes about Bergson's suggestion, "that reality can only be grasped through an oscillation between the virtual (past, memory) and the actual (present, action)" (Blassnigg 2009, p. 3). In Chapter 3, I argue that this principle is one of the underlying properties of "poetic" cinema and documentary. Even the opening scene of *The Knotweed Factor*—where Turner reads his long title poem—cannot escape the "oscillation" between "virtual" and "actual".

Chapter 1 speaks of the intentional creation of artifice, referring to the inclusion of an actor playing the role of what appears to be the younger Turner, or his "clone" (to quote from the poem). The character has no function beyond suggesting the possibility that Turner

is represented twice. When the documentary cuts visually—though not sonically—to Turner (not sonically because the sound of Turner reading is continuous), the viewer is presented with the sharp reality of Turner’s ‘actual’ presence. A sighted audience sees for the first time who has been reading the poem. The visual transition to the ‘real’ occurs at an intended moment, when Turner says, “We’re getting to the point now”. It is as if Turner’s poem had been a long, rambling, phenomenological exploration of his inner state of mind before the conscious part of his thought processes were able to make sense of what he was talking about.

In order to contemplate this confusion and artifice prior to what Blassnigg (2009, *passim*) calls the “ruptur[ing]” moment (in our case the point where Turner self-consciously says that everything we’ve previously heard was off-point), the documentary makes a visual transition to something less artificial: a lengthy shot (approximately four minutes of static camera) focused on Turner. The only performative (and thus, as will be argued below, ‘poetic’) aspect of the scene *after* Turner’s revelation about “getting to the point” is Turner, under instruction, reading his poem direct to camera in a single take. This compares favourably in terms of reducing the performative and poetic aspects of the documentary to the earlier scenes, where Turner was instructed to wander through ruins. According to the Bergson-Blassnigg model, the ‘virtual’ has been eliminated in favour of the ‘actual’. However, as Turner continues reciting to camera, the ominous drone (an arguable ‘virtual’) reappears on the soundtrack.

The intellectual response in this written part of the thesis is to contextualise this obvious visual device (i.e., the visual cut on the crucial sonic moment) within blindness/VI studies. Assuming that the blind/VI audience requires audio description, the visual impact of the transition may be lost. The question (addressed in later chapters) is how visual studies/culture

theory can help. Blassnigg's (2010) analysis of Bergson elevates the audio-visual binary to a multifaceted theoretical platform, where ideas, affect, inference, memories, and so on, are introduced into the equation in a manner about which Deleuze (1986), for instance, writes. Further evidence can be elucidated from Justin Remes's work on "motionless" cinema. Remes explores Derek Jarman's 'imageless' film *Blue* (1993), imageless save the unchanging, single-shaded blue screen. Remes quotes Henri Bergson: "Perception is never a mere contact of the mind with the object present; it is impregnated with memory-images which complete it as they interpret it" (2015, 115-16).

Gaston Bachelard makes a clear distinction between the functional and the poetic in art and poetry. He writes that "images would no longer occur simply to compensate the deficiencies of conceptual language" (quoted in Kaplan, pp. 20-21). The literal 'image' in a 'poetic' painting or film requires the addition of audio description so that blind/VI audiences may understand and enjoy that which is conveyed. Bachelard implies that the formalist poet or artist will use 'imagery' (ekphrastic or literal) to stimulate an intellectual response, for instance as a narrative device. The non-formalist, or 'poetic', work excludes logical associations. "Images of life would be an integral part of life itself. One cannot know life better than in the production of its image", he continues (quoted in *ibid.*).

In this respect, Bachelard disagreed with Bergson, who understood the narrative and poetic to be a function of the multi-layered experiences of the audience. Bachelard specialist, Edward K. Kaplan writes: Bachelard "exaggerates the intellectual structure of the metaphor as an equation (or comparison) between sign and signified in order to combat Bergson's intellectual view of the metaphor". Kaplan concludes that the point of commonality between Bergson and Bachelard is their approach to aesthetic experience as phenomenological (Kaplan 1971, pp. 20-21).

As will be discussed in more depth below, the denial of the visual forces the sighted audience to not only experience a temporary form of blindness (Jarman was temporarily blinded with AIDS during the making of the film), but also forces sighted and non- or partially-sighted audiences to ‘impregnate’ their imaginations with new- and also “memory-images”, as Bergson (2012 [1898]) says. Here, Eugene Kwon’s analysis of *Zen for Film* (1965), a soundless, imageless *avant-garde* piece (discussed below) is useful when approaching the current restrictive theoretical models. It is worth quoting at length:

[the film] represents non-representation itself, constructing a new kind of image that requires a new kind of gaze by the viewer. Regardless of which interpretation the viewer finds more compelling in the end, one can be certain about one effect that *Zen for Film* creates: it invites the audience to raise various issues with the problem of visual representation in the arts, namely the question of whether experimentations with visual language have been exhausted in the modern arts, and whether it is necessary for artists to invent a new kind of visual representation altogether. (Kwon 2013, online)

The “new kind of visual” and one might add audio “representation” considered by Kwon as a response to *Zen for Film* actually addresses old concerns: sign descriptions for deaf viewers and audio description for blind/VI audiences. There appears to be little work on description for the deaf-blind (see, for example, Lahtinen *et al.* 2012). The absence of sound, image, and description forces the audience to contemplate the experience of the film, rather than the content of the film, on account of it being a ‘content-less’ production, in the traditional sense. Here, we encounter the idea of image as emanation of idea, memory, dream. It is this idea, memory, dream nexus that *The Knotweed Factor* seeks to encapsulate. (A discussion about this in relation to poetic documentary is presented in Chapter 3.)

For Lechte, the idea of image as material is a post-Socratic experiential development. The Blassnigg-Bergson model also enables us to consider non-positivist philosophies, particularly metaphysics, less as instances of abstractions and more as experiential cognitive processes. A persistent theme in ‘Aborigine’⁵ culture, for example, is the forbiddance of ancestral image-making “for fear ... that the traces might summon up the ghost of the deceased” (Lechte 2012, p. 3).

In contrast to Aborigine (and other) forbiddances, Egyptians and Greeks encouraged effigy as a source of power and immortality (Bermer *et al.* 1994). A question arises: does the inopportunity for blind/VI persons to interact with images, graven or otherwise, limit the blind/VI imagination? Evidence contextualised in the Blassnigg-Bergsonian multiplicity model would suggest not. First however, let us consider the self-blinding characteristics of prolonged periods in caves and the resultant externalisation (art) of mental processes:

Barbara Marie Stafford cites Lewis-Williams, who analysed “geometric zigzags, grids, dots, and superimposed lines” discovered in Upper Palaeolithic caves (circa 50,000-12,000 years BCE). Entoptic phenomena (retinal-visual cortex interactions) interact with the nervous system, ergo “all people have the potential to experience them with eyes open or shut”, comments Stafford (2008, p. 43). This raises the recurrent question: can blind/VI persons experience entoptic phenomena? And more broadly what does the question mean for VS/C?

The answer depends on the visual capacities of the given blind/VI person. At present, it is doubtful that persons born blind with no light perception could experience light in the same way as the sighted, VI, or totally blind persons with some visual memory. What, then, does this mean for Lechte’s (2012) model? Stafford concludes (referring to Lewis-Williams’s research), that contrary to the established Lacanian model (i.e., see a thing and draw it),

⁵ There are some 500 Aborigine peoples around the world, most of whom live in Australia (Survival n.d.).

Upper Palaeolithic art “depends to a great extent on mental imagery, especially in the *inwardly*-directed kind” (Stafford 2008, p. 43. Emphasis in original).

In his pioneering holotropic breathwork, Stan Grof (2012) provides clinics for blind patients whom, together with the sighted, were expected to draw mandalas. The cave (total darkness) is analogised as blindness (‘total’ or partial darkness), serving as a sensory (i.e., vision) deprivation. For Lewis-Williams (cited in Stafford, *op cit.*), the results include aesthetic externalisation. For Grof (2012), the mandala serves as a canvas to formalise visualised experiences during breathwork sessions. It may be that blind patients with visual memories evoked (autonomously or not) personalised memories in addition to imaginative (deliberate or not) abstractions, but how did patients with no light perception or visual memory respond to the breathwork?

According to Grof, the haptic is as valid as the visual in formulating and interpreting manifested sub- and un-conscious experiences. “A possible alternative to mandala drawing is sculpting with clay”, says Grof, who “introduced this method when we had in our group participants who were blind”. Some of Grof’s sighted participants opted to utilise clay “for a combination mandala/three-dimensional figure” (2012, p. 33). The Grof clay individuation is an interactive binarism. When contextualised as a Blassnigg-Bergsonian model, it is also a multiplicity of time, space, temporality, and memory, as the sculpted clay object exists in a moment and was informed by the notion of memory and abstraction.

In pre-Socratic Greece, the *eidôlon* (‘apparition’ in its most reduced translation) was equivalent to “effigy or ghost” (Lechte 2012, p. 11). Lechte cites Jean-Pierre Vernant, who argues that Pre-Socratic Greek thought did not perceive a distinct ‘image’ or distinguish the *eidôlon* from the actual, rather the *eidôlon* manifested “external appearances of everything

visible that exists in the universe” (Vernant quoted in Lechte 2012, p. 12). Lechte considers sight unnecessary for understanding and imagining. “If touch can provide access to the same insights as sight, and if imagination is central here, the implication is that an image is not an object, but it, via the imagination, is a mode of access to the subject” (Lechte 2012, p. 75).

Brian Massumi (2002) explores the relationship between vision, movement, and hallucination. Massumi writes:

The difference between dream, experimentally induced hallucination, and pathological hallucination from each other and from “natural” perception pertains to the kind and complexity of experience’s self-referencing to its own ongoing event. (Massumi 2002, p. 155)

But how does this interaction of movement, sight, and the interactions of dreams and hallucination relate to blindness/VI? Massumi writes that “[t]he first visual sensations of the congenitally blind restored to sight provide what is perhaps the only naturally occurring “pure” field of vision”. Massumi goes on to say that “no object-like appearances immediately arise. The intermodal connections to the unused retina have not yet been made”. Massumi also discusses the idea of a “chaos of color” (*ibid.* p. 156).

Massumi’s phraseology on colour and chaos could be read in reference to oclularphobia, a subject to which I return in Chapter 3 in relation to the confrontation of absence and expectation.

DIGITAL EKPHRASIS I: NON-IMMERSIVE

Pujol and Orero (2007) cite ekphrasis as a “precursor” to audio description. They quote Benecke: Audio description is “as old as sighted people telling visually impaired people about visual events happening in the world around them” (quoted in Pujol and Orero 2007, p. 49). Despite this, scholars tend to date audio description from the 1980s. Instead of adopting new terminologies, Pujol and Orero argue, scholars can “take into consideration the many studies [of ekphrasis and related techniques] and range of experience which already exists” (Pujol and Orero 2007, p. 49).

But how would the ekphrastic poet or audio describer cope with soundless music and imageless art? The previous Chapter notes the symbolic temporary experience of blindness during a production of Beckett’s *All That Fall*. Kyle Gann (2010) examines the history and philosophy of John Cage’s composition of silence, *4’33* (1952). In the same way that Crook’s (1999) interpretation of Beckett may or may not force sighted audiences to experience blindness, Cage’s work forces hearing audiences to experience music as the deaf may experience it.⁶

Early in his life, Gann argued publicly that “Cage considers silence a very integral part of a piece of music, given equal importance with the sounded notes” (2010, p. xv). Cage was seeking the kind of complementary equilibrium of sound and silence for his compositions as I sought to do for *The Knotweed Factor* in terms of sound-vision, pauses-actions, stasis-kinetics. That which is absent affords the audience an opportunity to reflect, imagine, or

⁶ Cachia, for example, writes: “Just as Cage’s revolutionary, experimental music revealed the limitations of how we listen and what we construe as sound, the[... *LOUD*] artists [who exhibited works relating to deafness, show] the limitations to knowing sound solely through the ear or associating silence only through emptiness or quietness. The ear is not the only receptacle for channeling sound, speech, and language” (Cachia 2016, pp. 338-39.)

digest. This theme is revisited with Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film* (1965). For Cage, Gann argues, "there is no such thing as total silence, except in a vacuum; that wherever there are people or any life at all, there is some kind of sound" (2010, p. xv).

Gann notes that 19th century humourist, Alphonse Allais, authored *Funeral March for the Obsequies of a Deaf* (1897), "which consists entirely of blank measures". Allais also painted pictures "entirely in one color", including: a white canvas, entitled: *Anaemic Young Girls Going to Their First Communion through a Blizzard*; a black canvas entitled *Negroes Fighting in a Cave at Night*; and a red canvas, *Apoplectic Cardinals Harvesting Tomatoes on the Shore of the Red Sea (Study of the Aurora Borealis)* (Gann 2010, pp. 118-19). These titles assist my approach to ekphrasis.

In *The Knotweed Factor*, James Turner provides unprompted audio descriptions of his environment. For example, in the derelict cream factory, Turner says, without prompting: "This one was a factory ... [P]artly it is a reminder of the transient nature of all human achievement". Turner then references Shelley's famous poem, "Ozymandias" (1818), about a statue in a desert representing the only surviving fragment of a long-vanished civilisation.

"Part of the interest" in abandoned places "is just sheer visual" Turner tells us: "the perspectives in between beams and ... metal pillars, and bits of twisted metal, and heaps of stuff". The visual subserviently shows what Turner describes. However, the imagery is more subtle, more haptic, as it also shows Turner touching two twisted metal wires. The ocular is also invoked, as the derelict space enables one to "peek at the future", as Turner says, describing his projections of the future of society.

In the Allais paintings described above, the artist must invert the ekphrastic process by describing the painting in its title, rather than describing the painting in a separate work, such

as museum programme or poem. Allais has to employ self-describing titles in order for his jokes to work. However, in doing so, Allais introduces a new dimension: that of the required active imagination of the audience. Both sighted and blind/VI audiences can get the humour via the power of imagining the scenes described. The blind/severely VI individual may have no visual information about the paintings described, but generally have an idea of a blizzard being white, that holy communion takes place in white dress, and that ‘white’ people have the a similar skin-tone which is less visually distinguishable when blended. Similarly, sighted audiences are compelled to imagine white girls dressed in white, walking through white as we see in the reality of the painting, white.

Above, the relationship between suggestion (notional ekphrasis), vision, and tactility is considered, as are self-audio described scenes in *The Knotweed Factor*, where Turner places emphasis on “sheer visual” aspects of an experience while simultaneously touching, as if tactility complementing the cross-modality of sensory aesthetic experience.

Cecilia Lindhé (2013, online) writes that the Italian Futurists’ *Tactilism* (1921) manifesto includes an exhibition of water on the gallery floor, splashing under the feet of dancers. It “accomplish[es] a multisensory engagement”—sight, sound, and touch, at the least. The manifesto’s author, Marinetti, writes that “visual sense is born in the fingertips” (quoted in Lindhé 2013, online), in keeping with the Cartesian notion of blind people “seeing” with their hands (Paterson 2007).

In the 17th and 18th centuries, tactile interactions with objects (including paintings) was common. In this respect, Lindhé agrees with Lecthe (2012), that “in ancient times cult statues and images were not mere representational objects”, where “physical interaction was expected” (Lindhé 2013, online). Lindhé notes that since the 1950s, tactile interactions with

art, including digital art, have become a common feature of the exhibition experience, at least where ‘new’ immersive conceptual art is concerned. She notes that the artist’s tactile intentions amount to a “tactiloclasm” for visual aesthetics theorists (Lindhé, *ibid.*).

Lindhé agrees that “[a] productive way to discuss these issues is through an examination of ekphrasis”. Ekphrasis was intended for a live audience, she continues. The ekphrastic orator would provide “details” to audiences unfamiliar with the given location, person, or things being described (*ibid.*).

The Knotweed Factor captures the ‘live’ performance in two ways: 1) adaption to a poetic principle (more below) and 2) by recording Turner reciting poetry to live audiences. In the first case, each recitation was given by Turner and recorded in a single take, in real-time. Turner’s performance was live to the documentary-maker and remains so on the soundtrack because it was uninterrupted by editing. It was, however, ruptured—in Blassnigg’s sense—in that sound was added (music, effects).

It is also worth noting the contrived, performative aspects of the ‘live’ recitations: The locations and atmospheres, including acoustics, were carefully chosen (the incessant rain during “History Is”, the birds chirping during “Brush the Wound”, the sound of the sea during “Myra is Away”). Regarding point two, there are scenes in which Turner performs live to an audience. The first is at the Phoenix, Exeter, where the engaged audience listens to “Ten Things About Me”. The second is Turner’s talk about Jiddu Krishnamurti to a seemingly less engaged live audience. The documentary is not faithful to the real-time live aspects of either performance. In the first case, for instance, it employs the ‘poetic’ technique utilised to complement previous poems, namely the use of abstracted sounds and images.

Returning to Lindhé's notion of ekphrastic tactility, Yvonne Eriksson (2013, pp. 192-96) writes that "[p]ictures for visually impaired people have been controversial over time". She explains that on occasion, "[b]oth sighted and blind people themselves have been critical". This is because the sighted often find "provocative" the idea "that pictures can be read by touch". In contrast, the blind/VI can interpret "the offer of tactile pictures as an abuse by the sighted since they recognize them as visual phenomena" (*ibid.*).

Like Olsén (2013) in the previous Chapter, Eriksson offers an archaeology of assistive tactile-pictorial technologies, starting with Valentin Haüy's embossed lettering (1786), Louis Braille's eponymous method (1824), Dr. William Moon's self-named type (1845), and Martin Kunz's embossed or tactile maps and pictures (d. 1847-1923).

The purpose of these designs (including maps and pictures) was to convey educational information to blind/VI children. One of the tasks of the VS/C theorist concerned with blindness/VI is how the visual information of the given painting, photograph, etc., is conveyed to and experienced by blind/VI audiences. Eriksson (2013) quotes Dervin's definition of "information" as "something that describes an ordered reality and has some knowable, or at least idealized, isomorphic relation to that reality" (quoted in Eriksson 2013, p. 195). Eriksson's major critique of the pedagogy of blindness/VI is that maps and pictures produced as tactile aids "follow more or less the same rules of representation as those that apply to visual pictures and maps" (Eriksson 2013, p. 196).

But what if the roles were reversed? What if the sighted were forced to enter the world of the blind/VI, in part, by being denied the visual experience with interactive art? The previous Chapter gives the example of Tim Crook's (1999) co-production of a Beckett play, in which all of the visual aspects of the stage were removed and the actors rehearsed blindfolded. There are films which force the sighted audience to experience them without the visual cues. These are different from the Audio Films proposed by Lopez and Pauletto (2008, discussed in

the previous Chapter). The Lopez-Pauletto model allows sighted audiences to enjoy the visual aspects of the film. In the two films discussed below, the visual track is either removed or monochromatic.

IMAGELESS FILM

The previous Chapter discusses the idea of ocularphobia. *Zen for Film*, a sound-less and image-less concept, is discussed here, as is the auto-ekphrasis of Allais's humorous paintings, which are monochromes. Justin Remes in his book *Motion(less) Pictures* (2015, p. 127) refers to Walter Ruttmann's *Wochehende* (1930) as "the first static film ... ever made". *Wochehende* is eleven minutes twenty seconds (approx.) of black (i.e., 'colourless') screen comprised of (some have argued) a proto-*musique concrète* soundtrack. "Ruttmann presents the audience with an audio montage composed of dozens of carefully arranged sounds, including clocks, whistles, dogs, and human voices", writes Remes (*ibid.*).

"While *Weekend* is sometimes referred to as a piece for radio, it was in fact designed to be experienced in a movie theatre". Here, Remes notes the uncomfortable juxtaposition of placing an imageless film within the context of an audiovisual environment. In this respect, Ruttmann forces the sighted audience to experience, at least in a crude, representational way, the partial experience of the totally blind, at least during the film. *Wochehende* presents the audience "with a static, imageless screen. This is why Ruttmann referred to *Weekend* as 'cinema for the ears' and a 'blind film'" (*ibid.*).

In the poem “Myra is Away”, James Turner references the catastrophic imagination as erased by the fallibility of memory and inevitable decay of the human. As Turner is reciting, he appears onscreen as a tiny figure with his back to camera, gazing at the sea. The shot is static, save the continuous movements of the tide, occasional bird, and wind blowing through Turner’s clothes. The shot continues for nearly four minutes, during which Turner reads: “that’s all we’ll see when the tape runs out | Nothing”. The image is composed of land, sea, sky, and the poet. The voice is disembodied, indicating that these are Turner’s thoughts being directed to the audience via the magic of the medium. The music and waves continue to play and pulse in the absence of Turner’s voice and after the image has faded to black. The documentary can hardly be said to be a motionless picture, but it does contain many such instances of stasis.

The next known ‘motionless picture’ was Guy Debord’s *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* (1952). Debord was a member of Isidore Isou’s radical *Lettrist* collective, before forming his own *Lettrist International* (or *Letterist Internationale*). *Hurlements* is 1 hour 4 minutes in length. The film opens with six minutes twelve seconds (approx.) of disembodied dialogue and a white screen. The remaining 58 minutes is comprised of a black screen.

Remes writes that “the renunciation of imagery ... becomes a means of evoking blindness—both metaphorically and literally” (2015, pp. 126-27). He explains that, “[n]ot only does Debord’s film refuse to give the audience anything to see, but the sound track foregrounds this visual void”. Remes notes that we hear Debord saying, “Totally dark, eyes closed to the enormity of the disaster” (*ibid.*). Here, blindness/VI is again used as a symbol of catastrophe, in keeping with the prejudices and limitations outlined in the Conclusion of this written part of the thesis (which explores the disability studies model). Remes points out that

another disembodied voice says, “I don’t think we’ll ever see each other again”. Remes writes: “the recurring darkness of the screen is complemented by language that reinforces visual absence ... The language spoken in *Hurlements*, however, is often silenced”. Remes concludes that in the film, “whenever the screen turns black, all sounds cease. These moments of silence occur momentarily throughout the film”. He says that “the film concludes with a silence that lasts an agonizing twenty-four minutes” (*ibid.*).

The film throws the audience, sighted and non- or partially-sighted, into as much confusion as the opening scenes of *The Knotweed Factor*, until that is we realise, partly because of visual cues but also partly because of the unravelling length of the poem, that we are listening to a poet.

According to Kaira M. Cabañas (2015), *Hurlements*, in part, achieves the *Lettrists*’ objective of “foregrounding sound ... [They] worked to counter the dominance of vision and the reality effect produced with the advent of sound synchronization in 1927”. Certainly, sound is foregrounded in the opening scenes of *The Knotweed Factor*, where the images of decay and dereliction bear little resemblance to the imagery of the poem. In this sense, the soundtrack and visuals are asynchronous. The *Lettrists* did so, argues Cabañas by employing “dissociative strategies”, such as film without image (in the case discussed here) and asynchronous sound. They expressed a “desire to move from the space of representation to the event itself”. Cabañas paraphrases Thomas Levin’s reading, that Debord reduces cinema to its apparatus: “the filmstrip, projector, light, and screen, upon which the actual mechanics of a screening depend” (2015, pp. 2-3, 160n18).

Ordinarily, the empty screen is not considered part of the cinematic experience by audiences, except perhaps in anticipation of the film, where emptiness is a form of agitation.

However, for the blind/VI, the apparatus of film (including the screen, projector, and filmstrips) present a tactile reality from which the sighted viewer is purposefully disengaged (i.e., the projector is hidden away at the back of the cinema in a box. The filmstrip is protected in the mechanics of the projector and film cans, etc.).

Allyson Field (1999) draws on Isou's idea of *cinéma discrèpant* and argues that it "attacks the conventions of cinematic narrative coherence". Isou proposed a theory of "chiselling", in which the film is removed from all social or cultural context. Subjects external to the medium are removed. In contrast to Isou's thesis, Debord "employs these 'external' subjects out of context, upsetting classical narrative continuity ... to reveal the fundamental spectacularity of each separate element" (Field 1999, pp. 58-59). Debord's aim, says Field, was challenging his audience's "accustomed reliance on the visual". Narrative meaning is "undermine[d]" by "long periods of silence". Following Isou's apparent rejection of cinema, "Debord makes his film *difficult* to watch, to hear, and to sit through, thereby making a film that aims to revolutionize the relation of spectator to film" (*ibid.*, pp. 65-69. Emphasis in original).

In my thesis, the "dissociative strategies" (as Cabañas (2015) calls them) relate to understanding of how blindness/VI is positioned in VS/C. Without audio description, film is a partially dissociated experience for many blind/VI audiences. In some of the films discussed here, the typical experience is inverted.

Cabañas argues that *Hurlements* "reject[s]" the conventions of *cinéma vérité* and that where the "visual and verbal images are negated", sighted and hearing audiences "answer the darkness in different ways". *Hurlements* disavows us the opportunity to "legislate what and how one must see, ... alter[ing] the relations between seeing, speaking, and doing in cinema" (2015, pp. 106, 122).

According to *The Grove Encyclopedia of Materials and Techniques in Art*, "Lettrist work was introduced to the USA in 1962 by the Fluxus movement, which created its own 'anti-

films” (Ward 2008, p. 214). One of which was Nam June Paik’s fourteen-minute, looped 16mm work, *Zen for Film* (1965). Eugene Kwon writes: “No visual figurations appear on the screen except for the flickering presence of almost invisible shades, produced by tiny specks of dust and scratches on the film strip”. Kwon also points out that “[n]o soundtrack accompanies this blank film strip”, except for “the quietly reeling sound of the projector” (Kwon 2013, online).

Nearly three decades after the release of Nam’s film, Derek Jarman, blinded by AIDS, made *Blue* (1993), a 90 minute narration consisting, visually, of a single shade of blue. In addition to inferred tranquillity, the blue screen “engenders impatience and frustration”, writes Remes (2015, p. 121), inferring that the absence of visual stimuli induces discomfort in the audience. This ocularcentrism presupposes that the audience has the capacity for visual stimulation. Above, Anaïs Le Fèvre-Berthelot’s (2013, online) notion of the “disembodied voice” is mentioned. Jarman’s ekphrasis embodies what has been disembodied, as does Turner in certain scenes of *The Knotweed Factor*.

In “Brush the Wound”, we see what appears to be a painting of apples in a bowl draped in curtain next to a cracked mirror. After a series of images, finally of one including Turner walking into an empty, dark room, the sound synchronises with the image of him reading the poem: the disembodied voice is bodied. Patrizia Lombardo describes *Blue* as “the most bodyless film ever produced ... project[ing] the human body in its most cruel and unspeakable presence” (Lombardo quoted in Remes 2015, p. 121). This is an inversion of Le Fèvre-Berthelot’s notion (2013) of voiceover as disembodiment.

For Jarman and critics like Lombardo, blindness is/was something to hate, fear, and signify as decay, in sharp contrast to Crook’s (1999) adaptation of Beckett, Nam’s *Zen for*

Film, and Debord's *Hurléments*, in which the sightless is encouraged, as is the soundless in some instances. Recall the Tunisian writer Albert Memmi's ocularphobia. Critic Steven Dillon (2004) compares *Blue* to radio, including, interestingly, Beckett and Pinter. When *Blue* was screened on Channel 4, it was simultaneously screened on Radio 3. Listeners could apply for a blue card to stare at during the broadcast. This reminds us of the earlier days of radio (Chapter 1), when sighted audiences were advised to listen in darkness, as if sight were a distraction. "Jarman's blue screen is apprehended visually, and his sound track elicits mental imagery", says Remes, who refers, ocularcentrically, to *Blue* as "sensory deprivation" (2015, pp. 123-27).

"TOO MUCH REALISM": A NOTE ON VIDEO QUALITY

Like VS/C (see Chapter 4), digital theory is also ocularcentric. Digital ekphrasis is, however, providing methodologies to overcome that limitation. Before examining digital ekphrasis, let us consider some current theories concerning digital aesthetics, which are relevant to *The Knotweed Factor* because the documentary is a video. It therefore required a set of aesthetic criteria different from film. High definition (HD) has left audiences with too much reality: many consumers prefer softer images (Arundale and Trieu 2015).

Stuart Jeffrey writes that digitalisation has "divorced" the image "from the physical". Material formats including "oil on canvas, text on paper, silver nitrite film" has been digitalised "into an intricately coded collection of binary data" (Jeffrey 2010, p. 45). Jeffrey's thesis implies that a computer, HD television, LCD screen, iPhone, and other formats on

which digital media are experienced are not part of the digitisation process. According to Karen Cham (2009), “technical principles have always underpinned fine art production”, including techniques for including perspective and proportion. According to Cham, film, photography, television, and video remain “marginalised in art-historical dialogues”. Citing Nam’s 1960s’ video installations as an example of the historical precedent set for video art, Cham laments that video aesthetics remain “neglected in art theory”. The fuzziness of video aesthetics translates into digital archiving, access, and reproduction. According to Cham, “[a] digital artefact, by conventional standards, is even less authentic and original than a mechanically-production one” (Cham 2009, pp. 15-16).

On the issue of authenticity raised by Cham, two aesthetic issues of video production which affect the visual more than the audio (because the visual usually requires more information than the audio hence more data) are pixel content and compression degradation. The more pixels onscreen, the higher the quality of the image. Compression reduces the number of pixels to save memory space on digital systems. Analogue television was 720 pixels wide by 570. An HD 720i is 1280x720 pixels. *The Knotweed Factor* was shot in 2011, using a Sony A1E 720p. The video was edited with then-standard Avid® compression, having been transferred from MiniDV tape. Midway through production, the shooting standard shifted to HD 1080p (1920x1080), with many iPhones, HD 1080p video cameras, and HDTVs hitting the market. In addition, compression qualities improved.

This left *The Knotweed Factor* looking low-quality by comparison. (A filmic analogy could be a comparison between 16mm and 35mm or 70mm, and in terms of transfer, comparable to 70mm film transferred to analogue video.) This is not, however, necessarily a negative outcome and it did not require a reshoot because, as many have argued, HD 1080p and the even higher resolution HD 1080i can be ‘too good’, allowing audiences to see details that are otherwise unattractive. There is a dearth of scholarship on the issue of HD being ‘too

realistic', but plenty of information in technical magazines, consumer advocacy forums, and opinion websites, from which information is drawn.

The single scholarly study identified at the time of writing this part of the thesis was Arundale and Trieu's *Modern Post*. The authors write that visual technologies, including 120Hz overdrive, also known as motion interpolation, are sold to domestic consumers as unique to cinema. Consumers are sold "life-like" images, say the authors. The technology is achieved by the in-built display hardware providing real-time video frame analyses which "intelligently" predict the average in-between frame. The aim is to show less motion blur and less judder (or "lag") between the frames showing rapid movements, such as pans or quick-motion (Arundale and Trieu 2015, p. 31).

Theoretically positive, the technology "ultimately undermine[s] the look and feel of cinema that was carefully crafted by the filmmakers". This is known as "the soap opera effect", where low-quality productions and high-end blockbusters are equalised. The technology disturbingly gives a "hyper-real appearance ... [M]otion interpolation represents a step backwards". The authors cite Peter Jackson's blockbuster *The Hobbit* (2012) as an example of a film shot and released at double the frame rate: 48 frames per second (fps). Humans require between 18 and 24 fps to get a realistic impression of onscreen motion. Jackson's film resulted in "very smooth motion, but with uncanny life-like qualities that undercut traditional qualities" (*ibid.*).

Peter Scietta writes that audiences found *The Hobbit* "uncompromisingly real—so much so that it looked fake ... the make-up, the sets, the costumes" (quoted in Bustillos 2015, online). Alexander D'Aloia says: "What 48fps has done is make a prop look like a prop ... Gandalf's staff resembles a hunk of brown plastic, not a length of wood" (quoted in Bustillos

2015, online). Bustillos recalls her own “disorientat[ion with] the first HDTV images”, including the “close-ups of football players that took an alarmingly intimate inventory of every pore, hair and bead of sweat”. Above, I discuss ocularphobia. The HDTV standard has given audiences what many experience as an uncomfortable, aesthetically unpleasing confrontation with the unpleasant side of visual reality. Bustillos compares this with “old-fashioned analog film”, whose soft-edges and slightly blurred images, “mimics vision more realistically than the most technically accurate high-definition projections” (2015, online).

In real-life, the eye does not focus on dirt under a sofa, yet HDTV forces the viewer to do so by making incidental and uninteresting background detail as foregrounded and sharp as important, aesthetically pleasing details. Prop master David Marais laments: “now [the audience is] going to see the dust on the floor underneath the couch” (quoted in Bustillos, online).

Car tyres come with vent spews (small hairs) to expel excess air. The prop master would waste his/her time putting this painstaking detail into prop car tyres in HD films because “they wouldn’t match what we think we see when we look [at tyres]”, writes Bustillos. “What we *think* we see would have a completely sleek, smooth surface” (emphasis in original). The new HD standard has led to the curious situation of real-life objects looking too real on film and needing to be digitally degraded. With some fruits and vegetables, “[t]he real carrot has to model for the [computer generated] carrot” (*ibid.*).

Bustillos also makes an interesting comment on the power of imagination. The camera gradually revealed hitherto impossible images: children developing *in utero*, glimpses of the surfaces of distant planets and their moons, microbes, and strange sea creatures. “Those former mysteries, once seen, could be re-imagined through other new technologies to create ‘special effects’”, writes Bustillos, who concludes that with a 120Hz quality, HDTV repeats

each frame five times every 24th of a second. The 4K standard “puts over eight million pixels on screen, four times that HDTV” (*ibid.*).

Above, film and video (as well as sculpture and painting) as indeterminate mediums are discussed, as was Bergson’s theory of multiplicity, where it is suggested that the aesthetics of *The Knotweed Factor* are intended to convey the interplay of dreams, memories, and temporal cognition. The favoured model is the pre-Socratic notion of image as emanation. Ekphrasis and the indeterminate nature of imaginative visualisations are also considered, giving the hypothetical example of an author describing a woman standing on rocks by the sea, and how the blind/VI may imagine such a scene in contrast to the imaginations of sighted readers. The general argument is that past, present, and future (ideas) merge into an often indistinguishable temporality and that *The Knotweed Factor* conveys this feeling by making unclear distinctions between spheres of reality.

It is also argued that lower-resolution photographs, films, and video can convey this effect by virtue of their technological limitations.

In an essay on the aesthetics of fuzziness (that is, unsharpness), Bernd Huppauf (2009, pp. 232-33) writes that soft-focus images “dissolve[...] the relationship between the image and concrete ‘here and now’ into an underdetermined visual variety”. This is art’s answer to Bergson’s central tenet of the multiplicity model: one that Blassnigg (2009) transposed to a study of Warburg’s notional ekphrasis; that the imagined in-between space is equal to or more important than the physical pictures on display. The imagined in-between creates a kinetic dynamism hitherto lacking in the isolated pictures. One of the reasons for the public reaction against the ‘hyper-realism’ of HDTV is precisely that it destroys the quasi-real experience of temporal multiplicity by forcing the viewer to confront the ‘real’.

Huppauf continues: “By opening the image, fuzziness offers the perception of the general in the specific”. The fuzzy aesthetic (such as the imagined object conveyed via ekphrastic poetry) “invests the image with the dimension of the general resulting from a degree of abstraction” (2009, pp. 232-33). Abstraction is one of the inevitable and necessary elements of ekphrasis, hence its centrality to the aesthetics of *The Knotweed Factor*.

For example, in one scene, Turner is talking to an audience about the power of Krishnamurti’s philosophy of observation. Like a video camera switched on but not recording, the individual may observe nature without interference, thought, or intention because the moment is affected by intention. Turner tells his audience about how, having read Krishnamurti, he would have “a really good look” at flowers. Visually, however, the scene moves into an abandoned space, where the socioeconomic activity of a mill or factory has ceased and the ‘natural’ world has returned.

Turner then addresses the audience of the documentary (no longer the audience of his lecture about Krishnamurti) by describing to us—again, in a kind of unprompted auto-audio description—what he is observing: “buddleia, thistle, nettle, and some heart’s tongue fern there!”. Distant flute music is heard on the soundtrack. The wildtrack (Turner’s voice, footsteps, and the hiss of the environment), is absorbed in the music. Visually, the narrative of Turner’s observations is replaced with a montage of the location, followed by a close-up of a bee regenerating its energy on a sweet substance as Turner discusses insect decline. The scene then cuts to the source of the music: Turner and co. improvising music in a dimly-lit church.

It is suggested that the pixelated quality of compressed, 720p HDV adds to the indeterminacy of *The Knotweed Factor*’s conveyance of Bergsonian multiplicity. The fuzzy aesthetic,

argues Huppaufl, “is equally distant from absolute painting and abstraction’s pure construction of the general or the spiritual”. Huppaufl goes on to suggest that “if we stop identifying the fuzzy image with a failed sharp image”, i.e., if we reject comparison, “[we will] be able to see the fuzzy image as genuinely different”. It is ironic that the new HD standard has imposed a new, hyper-reality that is ‘too real’ for many consumers. “Looking for the sharp image hidden in the failed fuzzy image”, says Huppaufl, “prevents the viewer from understanding a simulation of reality that does not create identity” (2009, p. 233).

For Huppaufl, the “absolute” image in terms of sharpness constituted “an abstract ideal” in contrast to the reality of “all images ... constituted by a certain degree of visual indeterminacy”, which, together with “vagueness”, argues Huppaufl, are elements of the imagination and the image itself. This, he continues, is a familiarity inherent in even the casual observation. As Bergson argues that spheres of time, space, memory, ideas, and dreams are indefinite, Huppaufl suggests that “the difference between sharp and fuzzy images is not fluid, and demonstrably fuzzy images must be understood in terms of a specific genre” (*ibid.*).

But where does this leave blindness/VI and VS/C?

While sighted audiences found that HDTV “actually makes everything look worse ... [or at least u]naturally smooth [sic]” (Moynihan 2014, online), some visually impaired audiences have benefited from higher pixel and fps rates.

Fullerton and Peli write that televisual assistive technologies for the blind/VI include home entertainment enhancements, such as the DigitalVision DV1000. The device was tested on a group of VI and sighted volunteers. The researchers found that “[v]iewers with impaired vision preferred the enhancement effects more than normally sighted viewers”. Fullerton and

Peli demonstrate that, among VI audiences with impaired contrast sensitivity and visual acuity, “[p]reference increased with increased enhancement settings (designed for those with normal vision) in the [test] group” (2008, pp. 493-500).

VI audiences were asked by the researchers what they missed from televisual pictures. The majority state that detail and facial expressions are missing, often resulting in failure to identify characters (thus narrative development) and text. Specifically, the spectrum of VI examined by the researchers is impaired central vision (due to age-related glaucoma, macular degeneration, and other impairments). VI audiences with impaired central vision often use magnification tools, which shift high-frequency detail to low-frequency, creating “greater contrast sensitivity”. Fullerton and Peli conclude that, utilising image processing in place of magnification, the image contrast is increased (*ibid.*).

The preference among many VI television users for HDTV systems raises interesting questions about the nature of digital production, reproduction, duplication, storage, and aesthetics.

Mike Pringle writes: “In the visual arts, practice, education and research are ... based on, led by and/or executed through a dominantly visual approach”. The HDTV enhancements which the sighted generally consider too real are helpful for VI users. This equates to perhaps the only instance of visual culture becoming too visual for the sighted; and to the benefit of the VI. Pringle suggests that digitalisation may have overcome the primacy of vision paradigm, which remains a problem in VS/C. “Yet [in] the digital age, and particularly on the internet, facilities and approaches for sharing or finding visual information are ... unsatisfactory”, he says. Pringle provides a number of justifications, including an inherent “visual abstraction” and text. He presents images of Paris with the implicit question: what do the images tell us

about Paris? “The words themselves, without the diagram, do not tell us much about Paris, and the same goes for the image”. Pringle’s is a binary deconstruction of physical composites (Pringle 2010, pp. 11, 15).

His assumption of the necessity of ‘direct’ experience (i.e., with the image or text) is contradicted by the self-reported experiences of, for instance, Helen Keller, for whom description was direct experience, not a vicariate (Keller 1908).

Pringle’s thesis is based on the “hyperbolic tree”. Assuming that an individual is using an interactive device, s/he selects “town” on the image of Paris, which presents a new word grouping relating to “town”, including “townspeople” and “municipality”, the latter giving further word groupings: “urban area”, “administrative district”, “gathering”. Pringle writes: “From *gathering* we move to *gather* and then to *search*. A straightforward chain of logical connections”. However, we must consider the semantic distance between “search” and “Paris”, says Pringle, and “how, from the list of words relating to *search*, a user might navigate to the picture of Paris”. The “answer” says Pringle, is to understand human-image interaction (Pringle 2010, pp. 20-28. Emphases in original).

The interaction of digital, text, and image has relevance to what Lindhé (2013) calls “digital ekphrasis” (more below). This is partly because authors like Jeffrey (2010) and Pringle deny the actuality of the digital. Such authors consider the digital as existing in a netherworld, rather like the ekphrastic image. For Pringle, language “is inadequate for describing the meaning of an image where it is the image itself that is key, not the associated information”. When contextualising the alleged necessity of visual information within blindness/VI discourse, the primacy of vision paradigm is translated into digital discourse. For Pringle, “Visual symbols”, including “[p]ictograms ... are commonplace in ancient ‘texts’ such as hieroglyphics, as are ideograms – images that have been developed to represent a concept, such as the ankh symbol for life” (2010, pp. 15-18). Pringle

acknowledges that the idea, via the physical creative act of writing/drawing, is what creates the image (be it a photograph of Paris or a hieroglyph). The imagination is the universal of the blind/VI and sighted alike. Pringle's digital discourse tacitly acknowledges this but formally denies it.

DIGITAL EKPHRASIS II: IMMERSIVE

Daniela Sirbu considers digital representations of architecture, really existing, historical, and imagined. This raises the question of disembodied space. For the blind/VI, the curation space is exclusionary for the simple reason that museums prohibit audiences from touching, thus denying the blind/VI and the sighted alike a tactile experience of art (Candlin 2003 and Kleege 2005). For Sirbu, virtual reality (VR) is a useful VS/C model because "we understand through mental processing more than is seen and sensed" (2010, pp. 81-82). What, then, is the significance of faculty *x* (e.g., vision) over faculty *y* (e.g., or hearing), or *z* within the context of the "mental processing" considered by Sirbu?

Sirbu writes: "This imaginative, cognitive dimension works in an integrated manner with the interactivity and immersive dimensions to create the specific nature of the VR environments". Where, then, are the blind/VI positioned in VR studies? Sirbu concludes "that digital explorations of architecture are still mainly informative, allowing us to navigate the virtual environment as observers". Simultaneously, the viewer's "experience is mediated by an artificial medium", namely that of digital binarism. "The key element is the ability to mentally infer much more information than the digital experience provides" (*ibid.*). For

Sirbu, the mental inference is the experience, not the visual, potential tactile, or sonic experience. In this regard, Sirbu is closer to Keller's denial of vicariates (and to Bergson-Blassnigg and Lechte) than to contemporary VS/C theorists.

The word 'potentially' is used here because theorists like Pringle deny the physical realities of the digitalisation process, whereas it is argued here that the digital is represented via tangible implements (such as computers) that require tactile interactions.

As an example of translating visual to audio in digital visual aesthetics, Elaine Shemilt notes that the Scottish Crop Research Institute produced "the first inter-bacterial plant pathogen to be sequenced worldwide". Shemilt asked whether "science-art fusion could move the boundaries of visual and audio interpretation". Disease origins known as "tipping points" in both the visualisation of biological data and in the biology itself can be related to the artistic event" via the aesthetics of representative design and creation. For Shemilt, "the DNA image resembled a score of music ... By using a series of mathematical notations [Leighton Pritchard] translated the different amino acid letters into sequences of musical notes" (Shemilt 2009, pp. 23, 28-30).

The project raises all sorts of questions: can any visual data be transcribed into musical notes? If so, what would be the point? Would the given notes be tabulated into music conventions (keys, naturals/flats/sharps, etc.)? Would the given project be informative, artistic, or entertaining (or all three)? Does an aestheticised medical/scientific programme necessitate a single modality (e.g., sound) or could it synchronised with others (e.g., braille)?⁷

⁷ For hi-tech solutions, consider: "Sensory substitution devices work by converting one type of sensory input into another – examples would be systems such as CASBLIP and EYE 21, which allow the blind to 'see' by assigning sounds to images. Now, a team of researchers at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem have created a similar wearable device, known as EyeMusic. It 'employs pleasant musical scales to convey visual information,' and could one day help the visually impaired more easily perform tasks that the rest of us take for granted" (Coxworth 2012).

Ann-Sophie Lehmann (2009, pp. 33-35) considers digital and VR environments to be interspatial, “dislocat[ing] ... the materiality of the traditional working space”. In *The Knotweed Factor*, the work itself (i.e., the documentary projected on a screen/through speakers or experienced as computer pixels and sound algorithms) is not phenomenally fragmented, like Lehmann’s examples, but rather narratologically fragmented (the Bergson-Blassnigg model) via a portrayed interdimensionality of the temporal, imagined, remembered, etc.

“Dislocation” has created new problems for aesthetics, says Lehmann, who provides as an example Daniel Rozin’s *Wooden Mirror* (1999), an installation of a mirror made of polished wooden blocks and uses “cameras, motion sensors, software and wooden blocks” to track the movements of observers, instantaneously “reflecting” them in the mirror. The mirror is arguably not a mirror because the equipment used to gather light and pixilate it in forms recognisable to the human brain as one’s face operates antithetically to a traditional mirror, which reflects photons “directly”. The work’s realisation is particularly contingent on the agency of human interaction (arguably, as is all work). Lehmann (2009) notes that “the very process of *making* is rendered invisible by the medium itself” (p. 35. Emphasis in original).

Lindhé discusses “multimodal patterns of performativity”, which oral ekphrasis, or performative ekphrasis necessitates, and how the digital aesthetic may or may not capture that. Lindhé describes this as the “space-body-word-image-nexus”. For Lindhé, digital ekphrasis concerns the visualisation process. One of the aims of ekphrasis, argues Lindhé, is *enargeia*, or vividness—the more vivid the description, the greater the audience’s imagination (Lindhé 2013, online). Here, we must distinguish between the kind of realism

Such devices are, however, nothing new. For scholarly context, see Borchi *et al.* 2012.

betrayed by the imagination (as Huppaurt's "aesthetics of fuzziness" (2009), Lechte's pre-Socratic image as emanation (2012), and Bergson-Blassnigg's multiplicity content (2010)) and the *enargeia* of the poetry or literature itself.

In *The Knotweed Factor*, Turner gives the vivid detail of "infidel flesh roasting in the name of sweet, reasonable Jesus". In contrast to the vividness of the silent screams of the imagined victim, and perhaps the smell of the "roasting ... flesh", the visual is pixelated, monochromatic, and, in Huppaurt's sense, fuzzy (2009). The purpose of this aesthetic is to convey the notion of image as emanation and to provide an unobtrusive visual complement to Turner's vivid verse. Lindhé (2013, online) proposes a phantasmic model for understanding the effect of ekphrasis on memory and imagination. Lindhé cites Aristotle's notion of the *phantasia*: where "images presented to the mind ... were imprinted on the soul" (*phantasmata*) (*ibid.*).

To summarise: performative elements of ekphrasis have poetic potential. The visual arts (particularly painting, photography, film, and video) have a phantasmatic effect in part because of their indeterminate nature. Indeterminacy is compromised by the hyper-reality of new HD standards. The paradox is that HD can enhance the visual experience of VI audiences while degrading it for the sighted. Contrarily, "motionless pictures" (to use Remes's phrase (2015)) are often uncomfortable for sighted audiences because the image is absent. Ruth Webb says that "enargeia ... sidesteps the problem of how to represent the visual through the non-visual medium of language". This is because a link between language and mental images is assumed. For Webb, language is not "directly" representative of subject, rather it is more a signifier of the imaginary (quoted in Lindhé 2013, online).

The Knotweed Factor is a poetic documentary about a poet. The poetry of the audiovisual is designed to create an atmosphere representative of the often blurred states of mind that inform the work of the author and protagonist, James Turner. The issue of digital ekphrasis is thus an important one, as, being a video, the documentary does not share the exact features of cinema. Lindhé (*ibid.*) cites the example of Aya Karpinska's "Ek-Stasis", a 3D poem. Ekstasis means "put out of its place". In Karpinska's poem, the literary is transposed into the collective space of virtual reality. It is as disembodied as the narrative voice in conventional fiction or documentary, or as the poetry recited at the beginning of *The Knotweed Factor*.

In the same way that the sighted cannot see the words recited by Turner in *The Knotweed Factor*, blind audiences cannot see Karpinska's 3D poem. (VI audiences, depending on the given degree of impairment, might be able to see the text) (Lindhé, *ibid.*). Crucially, Karpinska's poem places the literary beyond the realm of tangibility. The hardware that enables the poem is tangible: the computer, gallery space, projector, etc. However, the projected poem itself is comprised of photons. Whereas the audience can touch the cinema screen, but not the photons, the audience can touch neither the poem nor the screen of Karpinska's poem.

Pringle (2010), Jeffrey (2010), and others infer that the digital only exists in a virtual reality, when in fact is projected onto tangible objects (screens, phones, etc.). In the case of Karpinska's poem, however (or indeed any holographic work), the image has returned to its pre-Socratic roots: it exists as an intangible, 'living' emanation. In the case of Karpinska's poem, "[t]he reading takes place in an oscillation between presence and absence and in the midst of bodily interaction and decoding" (Lindhé 2013, online). Lindhé's discussion is

limited by the reduction of the “digital ekphrasis” to immersive and interactive virtual reality environments, such as Karpinska’s poem. What about ‘non-immersive’ digital video?

Robert P. Fletcher (2014, p. 220) contextualises Lindhé’s work on the digital ekphrasis as augmented reality (AR) for approaching “digital storytelling and posthuman subjectivity”. Fletcher quotes Virginia Kuhn, who writes: “the new Foucauldian gaze is no longer visual but biometric, computational, algorithmic and, as individual systems are linked”. For Kuhn, the new “gaze” is spatial and “environmental” (quoted in Fletcher 2014, p. 220). Lev Manovich describes the Deleuzean “binary logic” being replaced by Claude Shannon’s pure logic of signal, noise, and the in-between. He gives the example of a cell phone call punctuated by a poor connection, “or struggling to make out the figures in the blurry image on our friend’s Facebook” (quoted in Fletcher, *ibid.*). Fletcher considers digital environments as an opportunity “to unite two different representational realities—visible and conceptual—through the rhetorical trope of ekphrasis” (Fletcher, *ibid.*).

It is unclear how one might go about this. In ekphrasis—digital or non-digital—representation is a reality, otherwise ekphrastic poets would become painters. AR offers a “digital ekphrasis that can engage the ambivalence that has characterized the relationship between visual and textual media and digital narratives”, says Fletcher (2014, p. 222). In the work *Between Page and Screen* (2012), animated text is displayed on a computer screen. In order to read/see the book in question, users are required to open the given page to their webcam so that the software can decode the text to display it onscreen in a 3-dimensional space “between the page and screen” (*ibid.*).

Current work on digital ekphrasis reveals little about the non-visual aspects of non-immersive digital art forms, such as video installations.

CONCLUSION

This Chapter has grounded the discussion as a comment on the image as emanation and has considered how an emanation can be experienced non-visually. Ekphrasis is a useful tool because it requires the sighted and non-sighted alike to use the power of imagination, be it visual, auditory, haptic, or other. This Chapter suggests that imagination is not a singular product, but a result of an interplay between memory, dream, the subconscious, and other factors (the Blassnigg-Bergsonian multiplicity model). Because of its ‘poetic’ qualities (to be explored further in the next chapter), *The Knotweed Factor* is closer to this model than, for instance, to the Deleuzean binary formula.

When contextualising these ideas as a discourse on blindness/VI, ‘motionless pictures’, particularly the work of Ruttmann, Debord, Nam, and Jarman is instructive. The ‘imageless film’ forces the sighted audience to experience a degree of temporary blindness/VI and equalises the cinematic experience for blind/VI and sighted audiences in ways that audio described films originally designed for sighted audiences do not. Lopez and Pauletto’s (2009) Audio Film idea remains dependent on the visual aspects of film, beginning with the premise that film is visual and the sound must be built around it, whereas the films of Ruttmann *et al.* invert this convention.

Digital ekphrasis studies is of limited use to this study because although it makes important contributions to the work of ekphrastic writers working with new mediums, it expresses a primacy of vision common to VS/C and unhelpful to blindness/VI studies. Although *The Knotweed Factor* is a digital production comprised, to some degree, of ekphrastic elements, digital ekphrasis theory tells us nothing about how to approach the

documentary non-visually. This Chapter has considered some preliminary ideas for what might constitute performative, abstract, and indeterminate aspects of documentary. These can be transposed into poetic cinema and poetic documentary discourse, to which we now turn.

Chapter 3

Poetic Documentary?

SUMMARY

Previous Chapters refer to *The Knotweed Factor* as a ‘poetic documentary’. But what is poetic cinema and poetic documentary? This Chapter discusses the elements of ekphrasis that appear to connect with poetic cinema and documentary. It argues that poetic visual mediums include many of the properties identified earlier in this text, with some poetic cinema theorists even directly referencing Bergson’s multi-layered approach to the theory of mental (including creative and imaginative) processes.

First, the ‘phantasmic’ aspects of certain non-cinematic/documentary artworks are identified in an effort to follow the ekphrastic thought at the centre of this text. Next, criteria for visual works to count as poetic are considered. Relevant themes in *The Knotweed Factor* are suggested. As poetic cinema/documentary often references conventional poetry (i.e., literature through audio, e.g., as recitation), blindness/VI is contextualised. Jarman’s *Blue* (1993) connects many of the themes discussed in this written part of the thesis: ekphrasis, notionality, *enargeia*, blindness/VI, and performance. The influence of Tarkovsky on *The Knotweed Factor* is considered and elements that connect the poetic (including Jarman’s work) with the video (and ultimately themes of blindness/VI) are addressed.

This, and previous Chapters, have built on themes of blindness/VI in the context of the poetic and the ekphrastic: as I set out to do in this text. In the next Chapters, this information is contextualised as a discourse on where these themes (especially blindness/VI) are positioned in contemporary VS/C theory.

POETIC ORIGINS

In a book on Soviet filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, Robert Bird cautions against poetic cinema's "inherent vagueness", where it is "common to see poetic cinema as a distinct genre, which displays a stable structure and performs a specific social function (i.e., that of elite cinema)". Far from being elitist, however, advocates of poetic cinema continue to define it as the "essence of the cinematic medium". For its "poets", cinema echoes Plato's notion of time as "moving image of eternity". A core aesthetic of poetic cinema is the "mystical aspiration against the representational limits of the medium", writes Bird (2008, p. 14). The imaginative aspects of ekphrasis are necessary for overcoming the material limitations of film; when HDTV caused a rupture in this dynamic with its hyper-realism, many sighted audiences rejected the new standard because it disrupted the indeterminate, imaginary aspects of the viewing experience which are so crucial to the somatic nature of cinema.

It is suggested above that the ambiguous narrative devices in *The Knotweed Factor* are closer to Bergson's theory of multiplicity (where past, present, future, and imagination exist simultaneously in the temporal) than to Deleuze's (1986) binary theory of opsigns, sonsigns, movement-image, and time-image, for instance. Bird writes poetic cinema theory references

Bergson's "philosophy of time, though Bergson himself rejected cinema because of its inherent need to convert the seamless flow of lived time into a sequence of frozen instants" (*ibid.*, p. 15). However, as Blassnigg (2009 and 2010) has argued (Chapters 1 and 2), it is the "in-between" space that is relevant to a Bergsonian interpretation. The "in-between" is precisely that to which cinema is limited, and thus poetic. Bird concludes that cinema is "at once continuity and discontinuity, simultaneous presence and a layering of memory". That which can be considered to be 'poetic cinema' "is that which addresses this dilemma in the most direct and elemental manner" (Bird 2014, p. 15).

Immersive late-18th-century and 19th century installations, including panoramas and phantasmagorias, include many ekphrastic and poetic elements. In the first instance, there is the interactive and immersive quality of, for instance, dioramas. Secondly, the phantasmagoria, for example, presents 'emanations' that exist somewhere between the temporal and somatic. Many scholars of poetic cinema and poetic documentary cite this Bergsonian interplay as evidence of the poetic. Certainly *The Knotweed Factor* presents numerous instances of the *phantasmic*: the ambiguous montage blurring past, present, future, real, and imagined.

19th century visual culture sought, in part, to "recast the nature of memory and experience" with immersive installations, writes Anne Friedberg. These works, in part, dethroned Cartesian ocularcentrism by demonstrating optical illusions. These works caused "a crisis of confidence in the eye". One such installation was a 360° cylindrical painting, the panorama, patented by Robert Baker, which opened in Leicester Square, London, in 1792. In the panorama, "all sense of time and space was lost". The phantasmagorias of Athanasius Kirchner and Johannes Zahn were other examples as was Philip James de Loutherbourg's

proto-cinema, the *eidophusikon* (1781), a screen on which backlighting projected sunsets, dawns, and fogs, accompanied by sounds and music. Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, famed for the photographic daguerreotype, started as an assistant to panorama painter, Pierre Prévost. These inventions, like modern digital ekphrasis, resulted in an kind of technological hegemony in which audiences were instructed by the inventions. In traditional ekphrasis, however, the audience has some degree of imaginative freedom (Friedberg 1998, pp. 253-61, 261n).

As art became on the one hand more *phantasmic*, somatic, and ethereal as the technologies developed, yet on the other, more immersive and interactive, literature became more visual, absorbing the aesthetics of photography and eventually cinema. Poetic film and poetic documentary was an inevitable crossover.

Christophe Wall-Romana writes that “cinemoetry” became a platform to interrogate a “shift” in literary forms, which, Wall-Romana proposes, was inspired by cinema and photography. This inverts the tradition of the literature-inspired film, such as the screen adaptation (Wall-Romana 2013, eBook). Wall-Romana quotes Baudelaire’s assertion: ‘Images, my one, my great passion!’ (quoted in Wall-Romana 2013, eBook) and writes of Baudelaire’s “sensory multiplication and condensation, as well as visual decomposition and recomposition”, which, he argues, is distinctly cinematic. Baudelaire emphasised fragmentation as part of the existential realities that contrast “with the holistic fantasy of the romantic fragment” (Wall-Romana 2013, eBook).

The post-1850s era in general “is replete with such photo-poetics”, says Wall-Romana, citing Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *L’Eve future* (1886) as “the most oft-cited literary precursor of cinema” (*ibid.*). Previous Chapters consider the relationship between the visual

and the haptic in art and performance, with particular interest in ekphrastic poetry. Current theories are inadequate for addressing these dynamics, largely because the theories are constructed on a visual premise. But what of audiences denied full or partial visual experience? Films such as Jarman's *Blue* contradict the inherent visual bias in current VS/C theory. By virtue of its intangibility, ekphrasis tends to equalise the imagined experiences of blind/VI and sighted audiences.

Wall-Romana cites Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette's (1873-1954) highly "visual", tactile poetic realism as an example of a writer inspired by cinema. Colette "focuses on the senses of taste ('salty,' 'biting,' 'olive,') and touch ('to touch the down,' 'the wet and half-frozen velvet')". This, argues Wall-Romana, stimulates the "imaginary sensory experience of hypermediacy corresponding to the images she saw [on film]". The poet Jules Romains (1885-1972) wrote about the silent short, *La Poule aux oeufs d'or* (1905), a conjuring film. "[O]ur mind's eye as readers has no problem invoking our mind's eye as movie viewers to experience virtually this animation of text", writes Wall-Romana. "Historians of early cinema will recognize the haptic protrusion characteristic of early reception of the moving image": the Lumière Brothers' *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895) and the audience's jumping out of their seats, thinking that the train would come out of the screen, is one (in)famous (largely debunked) example (Wall-Romana 2013, eBook).

Sartre's theory of mental intention, in contrast to formed mental objects linked by consciousness, "sides with Bergson's condemnation of cinema as a false synthesis of consciousness", writes Wall-Romana. "But he defines consciousness through the very processes that cinema best instantiates" (*ibid.*). This suggests a contradiction hinted at by Blassnigg (2009 and 2010) in her work on Bergson. Cinema, says Wall-Romana is an "agency of the visual sense of motion (retinal persistence and the phi-effect)". The previous Chapters consider some current neurological work on film and human imagination, which

seems to provide empirical data to support the theory. Editing constitutes the “imaginary visual contents (dreams), even the trickster of stroboscopic illusions”, says Wall-Romana (*ibid.*). The indeterminacy of the cinematic and photographic image as a parallel to mental processes (Huppaurt 2009) is also considered. These poetics present “a purely immaterial camera” stemming from the “new visuality [that] arose in the late 1800s” (Wall-Romana 2013, eBook).

Marsha Bryant (2014) notes that the American poet, Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931), published the first book of American film criticism, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915). Filmmaker and theorist Adrian Piotrovsky (1898-1937) analogises poetic metre and rhythmic film editing, including caesuras. The latter is especially relevant to our research because *The Knotweed Factor* contains numerous ‘pregnant pauses’ as Tarkovsky theorists describe moments that mark the passage of time in cinema (more below). Piotrovsky “does not limit ‘lyricism’ to style or device”, writes Karla Oeler (2015, pp. 366-67).

Piotrovsky “suggests that certain film sequences capture a specifically poetic subjectivity. (He does not specify whether this belongs to the narrator, character, or spectator)”. The lack of specific definition is a problem to which we shall return. One of the earliest ‘poetic cinema’ specialists was another filmmaker and critic, Jean Epstein, who wrote in 1924: “poetry, which one might have thought but verbal artifice, a figure of style, a play of antithesis and metaphor ... achieves a dazzling incarnation” (both quoted in Oeler 2015, p. 367).

Historically, France is important in the development of “cinepoetry”, argues Wall-Romana. The artists in question were often considered ‘others’ in terms of their nationalities, ethnicities, and sexualities. (Remes (2015) notes “otherness” as a theme of Jarman’s poetics.)

These included Romanians (Isidore Isou and Benjamin Fondane) and Argentinians (Nelly Kaplan), as well as homosexuals/ 'queers' (including Jean Cocteau, Jean Epstein, Irene Hillel-Erlanger), and Jews (Goll, Isou, Epstein, Hillel-Erlanger, Kaplan, Maurice Lemaitre, Gabriel Pomerand, Christian Rodanski). By virtue of their "otherness", argues Wall-Romana, these artists "question[ed] norms of citizenship, cultural capital, social emplacement, and sexual identity". Their work in the visual arts demonstrated that poetry and other literary forms did not hold a "purity and disciplinary priority". For French poets and filmmakers, including Antonin Artaud and Jean Cocteau, poetry can be understood as "impressed with and imprinted by cinema" (Wall-Romana 2013, eBook).

Stéphane Mallarmé writes that the poetic confronts "the relationship between 'images and text'" (quoted in Wall-Romana 2013, eBook), which is one of the central questions addressed in our production of *The Knotweed Factor*: how to apply these principles to a production. Jean Epstein's bibliographical works on poetic theory also reference cinema. Post-WWI poetry, argues Epstein, was inspired by "subliterature" and "serial movies".

Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein are said to have coined the term "poetic cinema" in the 1920s. They considered "poetic or 'pure' cinema as that which captured the flow of life, as if the bobbins of film partook of an eternally continuous flow of images" (Bird 2008, p. 14).

Marsha Bryant (2014) identifies contemporary poetry's crossover with film, specifically the works of T.S. Eliot in Britain and in the US, Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta* (sic) 1921). These silent films were punctuated with cards that, in 'non-poetic' narrative fiction and documentary would include dialogue and plot developments which could not be visualised, such as (in the case of the latter): "When million-footed Manhattan unpent, descends to its pavements". Man Ray's *Emak Bakia* (1926) is self-consciously described by the *auteur* as a cinépoème, containing shaking and rotating titles, animations, and anthropomorphisms. In contrast to the previous films mentioned here, Man Ray's work

features no poetry on the soundtrack (it was released a year before sound came in) or titled cards of poetry. Rather, the film is consciously a visual poem (Bryant 2014, p. 77).

Bill Nichols notes the “growing dissatisfaction with the previous mode[s]” of formal narrative among ‘poetic’ filmmakers. Nichols analyses a scene from Joris Ivens’s poetic montage, *Rain* (1929), which “convey[s] a feeling or impression of what a rain shower is like rather than convey[ing] information or an argument” (2001, pp. 100-04). In ekphrastic poetry, the image is absent. The image is created in the imaginations of the audience. With some obvious exceptions (such as prolonged shots of rainfall) Ivens’s film gives the impression of rain, more than rain itself.

In separate works, Bryant (2014) and Susan McCabe (2005) note the vital and largely ignored contribution of women to the theory and practice of poetic cinema. McCabe notes “[t]he meshing of film and poetry into an embodied medium” from the 1910s. Germaine Dulac’s *L’Invitation Au Voyage* (1927) “recreates the atmosphere and images from Baudelaire’s poem of the same title”. The poet Hilda Doolittle (known widely as H.D.) had a “passion for cinema”, writes McCabe, writing and editing *Borderline* (1930), which possessed a “revolutionary ability to represent somatic movements and gestures”. H.D. was also a co-founder of one of the first film journals, *Close Up* (1927-33). Other poets, including Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, and Marianne Moore ‘were drawn to European avant-garde films’, including French Dada and Surrealism, as well as German Expressionism (McCabe 2005, pp. 1-2).

Returning to the themes of indeterminacy, suggestion, and notion discussed throughout this text, McCabe identifies as one poetic element films’ “desire to include bodily experience and sensation along with an overpowering sense of unavailability”. The body is only available

when “mediated through mechanical production”, where editing and camerawork “exposed the body’s malleability”. With poetic cinema, “the temporal present could be endlessly repeated”. In contrast to Cartesian dualism, says McCabe, poetic cinema sparked a “cultural debate in modernity over the unstable conjunctions between the mind and the sensate body” (2005, pp. 2-3).

Chapter 1 considers Oskar Fischinger’s synaesthetic *Optical Poem* (1937), an animation set to the music of Liszt, within the context of how sound can be not only imagined but visualised, in contrast to classic description for the blind/VI, where the visual is described audibly or textually. William Moritz notes that “[i]n his written scenarios for *R-1* and *R-2*, Oskar describes them with pantheistic terms, as if the universe were alive, and sun, wind, and water, were actors in his films”. Pantheism as suggestive of the spiritual and intangible is a recurrent theme in the poetics of Tarkovsky’s poetic cinema. In Fischinger’s *Seelische Konstruktionen* (1927), “two men get drunk in a bar, fight, and stumble home to bed”. This standard plot is transformed, with animation techniques, “into an epic expressionistic metamorphosis: when one man kicks, his leg becomes longer and thicker, when he is choked he sinks into a thin line and wilts” (Moritz 2008, pp. 14-17). From this we learn that poetic cinema is hard to distinguish from Surrealism and Impressionism.

Merleau-Ponty discusses the body as “not in space like things [but] inhabits or haunts space” (quoted in McCabe 2005, p. 7). Previous Chapters consider the idea of vicariate as a haunted space, drawing reference to the younger emanation of Turner in *The Knotweed Factor*. For McCabe, “[c]inematic bodies haunt, permeate, fragment and are fragmented by representation” (2005, p. 7). Fragmentary representation is augmented by the poetic aesthetic,

which is Bergsonian in its denial of the linear, rational, and objective. There are plenty of instance of such devices in *The Knotweed Factor*.

Consider, for instance, the scene in which Turner describes some 78” records, including “Popular Song” by William Walton. The music accompanied recitations of original poems (*Façade* (1923)) by Edith Sitwell. Turner makes no reference to the intended but absent poetic accompaniment. Instead, the documentary focuses on Turner’s mixed emotional recall before flashing forward to an empty shot of an abandoned building. The jolly music continues to play over the image. In conventional documentary, the evocative music may have been accompanied by visual nostalgia (of family photographs and footage, for instance). Here, following the fragmentation principle, where the body haunts the space, Turner is neither fully in the present of the building because the music signifies that he is in the past of the previous scene and also in the imagined/remembered past of his youth, nor fully in the past because his physical body traverses the building.

On the subject of the film-poetry-music nexus, McCabe reminds us that the writer and co-founder of Surrealism, Philippe Soupault (1897-1990) created “cinematographic poems” filmed by Walter Ruttmann, whose imageless film, *Wochenende* (1930), is examined in previous Chapters. The films present “a kaleidoscopic sensory experience not circumscribed by Cartesian perspective” (McCabe 2005, p. 9). They defy that which William Carlos Williams described as “the paralyzing vulgarity of logic” (quoted in McCabe 2005, p. 9). Parallel to the development of cinematic poetry, modernists altered literary poetry with unique asymmetry, line-breaks, and synapses, often referencing technologies which were metaphorically fragmenting the human body. McCabe denies the “Cartesian perspective” of single time and space and references hysteria and epilepsy caught on camera as instances of inadvertent “poetic” performance, specifically on account of patients’ exaggerated gestures (*ibid.*, 18).

Earlier, I discussed Man Ray's animations as part of his poetic cinema. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's *Play of Light: Black, White, Grey* (1930), presents "views of one of his own kinetic sculptures to emphasize the gradations of light passing across the film frame", writes Nichols. This marks a significant change in the stylistics of representation because the film is less interested in "document[ing] the material shape of the sculpture itself". For the audience, the effect of light becomes arguably more significant than the object itself. These and other early "poetic" films fragment time and space into several perspectives, "denying coherence to personalities vulnerable to eruptions from the unconscious" (Nichols 2001, pp. 100-03).

For Catherine Gander, poetry can be, and in her examples inherently is, a documentary format. Gander references Muriel Rukeyser's 1930s' "documentary poetry", concerned with experience and empiricism. "Rukeyser's utilisation of filmic editing and imaging methods in her poetry stemmed from her appreciation of the structure of film", says Gander. Rukeyser was "deeply involved in documentary methods of pictorial/textual collaboration", Gander continues: "admiring those documentarians who were pioneering visual and verbal modes of representing social realities" (Gander 2010, p. 10). Bryant notes that "W.H. Auden participated in the British documentary film movement". Rukeyser was influenced by the movement, as demonstrated in her *The Life of Poetry* (1949) (Bryant 2014).

Sitney (2015, pp. 4-9) traces the history of poetic cinema to the *avant-garde* and psychoanalysis in the 1930s and 1940s. Sitney notes that author, poet, and critic Parker Tyler (1904-1974) writes of the "cine-poem", equating it with Surrealist cinema. Quoting Tyler:

Modern poetry is especially complex and “irregular”; its basic order, like that of dreams, is the psychic order of association and suggestibility ... [P]oetic creators in all media have perennially “dreamt strange dreams” as did Psyche of Greek legend ... and enriched vision with eternal ambiguity ... we must learn to interpret the symbols in Experimental films not as psychoanalytic but as poetic material. (Quoted in Sitney 2015, pp. 4-5)

Previously, a link between ekphrasis and the image as emanation in pre-Socratic thought was suggested in this written part of the thesis. Tyler suggests that the poetic film is somewhere between conventional narrative and a dream-state. The form can be presented as poetic, that is, illogical and evocative, by numerous devices, including the rhythm of its montage. Commenting on Tyler’s work, Sitney cites “ellipses in the cinematic narrative and the ‘dreamlike associations’ that poetic films suggest” (2015, pp. 7-9).

There are intimations of madness in *The Knotweed Factor*, not reaching the level of hysteria, but threatening to. Turner recites a poem about “detailing demons”, including “the green, metallic sheen of their wings”. He also refers to improvising on a piano before he could play it and “quickly driving everybody mad”, except himself: “I was probably mad already”.

Intimations of the poetic have close associations with madness. In a thesis on Iranian poetic cinema, for instance, Proshot Kalmi framed the discussion as political discourse, but uses poetic cinema to address “the broader theoretical question—how to represent and negotiate the reality of those who have been victimised and traumatized”. The examples he studies, including Daryush Mehrjui’s *The Cow* (1969) and Forough Farrokhzad’s *The House is Black* (1962) deal with “poets [who] learnt how to thrive under oppressive regimes and took refuge in the layered language of metaphor” (Kalmi 2007, pp. 10, 16).

In his classic essay on poetic cinema, political filmmaker Pasolini writes:

If we see [the steam engine] in the real world, “it says something to us.” Its apparition in a barren wasteland, for example, tells us how touching mankind’s industriousness is, and how enormous is the capacity of industrialized society, and, therefore, of capitalists to annex the territories of new consumers. At the same time, it tells some of us that the train engineer is an exploited man who nevertheless performs his job with dignity for a society which is what it is, even if it is his exploiters who are identified with it. As object the steam engine can tell us all these things as a possible cinematographic symbol in direct communication with us; and, indirectly, with others, as a part of the common visual patrimony. (Pasolini 1976, pp. 543-58)

For Pasolini, inference and absence can be more powerful than pedagogy and presence. The Tarkovskyan approach assumes that reducing image-content to a critique of a particular socioeconomic system is limiting. There is plenty of absence and dereliction in *The Knotweed Factor*, and some of it is referred to by the protagonist as symptomatic of the culture. However, the derelict spaces seem to imply more about the state of mind of the protagonist, acting as restrained complements to the vivid poetry more than as comments on the current socioeconomic system.

So far, this Chapter has mostly discussed *avant-garde* filmmakers and poets who sought to explore connections between the two crafts. Pierre Perrault is cited by researcher David Clandfield as a pioneering poetic documentary-maker. A French-Canadian, Perrault was a Quebec-based sociologist and ethnographer who started as a scriptwriter for the French language station, Radio-Canada. In the start of this text, I state that the aim is to explore (via

the production and the writing) the relationship between audio and visual in the context of poetry, hence the decision to make a documentary about a poet. Perrault was “fascinated by the verbal as much as he was by the visual” (Cranfield 2004, p, xvi).

The verbal is crucial to *The Knotweed Factor* because, unlike a film such as *Manhatta* ((sic) 1921), where the poetry is recited on cards, it was vital that the protagonist gives his own rendering of the poems. However, the visual is crucial, too, because part of the research questions relate to translation and transposition. “[O]nly when [Perrault] married the two”, audio and visual, did he become a poet, argues Cranfield. Perrault “condemned fictional filmmaking emphatically”, yet that did not stop him from employing performative aspects in his work, which some argue is an essential element of poetic cinema and/or documentary. In addition, Perrault worked with cinematographer Michel Brault, known by his contemporaries as the “poet of images”. In Perrault’s films, there is “a natural poetry from [the locals’] own lived experience” (Cranfield 2004, pp. 14, 19).

But how is the articulation of their reality any more or less poetic than a fictional rendering? What measures exist to gauge this criteria? Is Perrault’s realism more or less poetic than ‘non-poetic’ documentary? In lieu of basic criteria, it is problematic to discuss ‘poetic documentary’. However, an integral part of *The Knotweed Factor* is the audiovisual response to Turner’s poetics. Is the response audiovisual poetry or is it merely a response? The original idea was to use the medium of documentary video to explore the creative, poetic process, which is achieved with respect to James Turner. For Cranfield, this amounts to a ‘poetry of experience in the cinematographic memory’ (*ibid.*, p. 22).

CURRENT MODELS

Carl Plantinga (2005, p. 105) notes that distinguishing documentary from fiction “continues to fascinate and baffle philosophers and film theorists”. If an actor uses emotions from her/his private life to inform their performance, is this not a document of their emotion? If a fictional film includes shots of members of the public, is this not documentary realism? In documentary, at what point does the performative element of the protagonist’s actions become fictionalised, and to what extent? Filmmaker and theorist John Grierson referred to documentary as the “creative treatment of actuality” (quoted in *ibid.*). Plantinga notes: “the poetic mode is itself far less central to the documentary genre than the expository or observational modes” (*ibid.*).

For Karla Oeler, formal definitions of film poetry are contingent on qualifications and quantifications. “Formal patterns occur in all narrative films”, says Oeler, “but may not distract attention from plot”. A true autonomy requires a degree of compositional patterning “before a film tips into the category of poetry”. These criteria enable critics to define and distinguish that which is poetic and identify the poets of cinema (2015, pp. 366-67).

Citing Aristotle’s philosophy of the *phantasmic*, Michael Renov argues that “[t]he notion of poetics has been a contested one from the beginning” of philosophy and literature. For Renov, the difficulty of defining and thus approaching poetic documentary lies in the inherent indeterminacy of poetry itself. Modern understanding of poetics comes from the logical, morphological, and semiotic, says Renov, drawing on the Aristotelian works of theorist Lubomír Doležel. Renov identifies “[f]our fundamental tendencies of documentary”, meaning the non-poetic documentary. The first is “to record, reveal or preserve”, which most documentary theorists agree is the core principle of documentary. The second is “to persuade

or promote”, which others would refute on account of the propagandist connotations of the assumption (Renov 1992, pp. 19-21).

The third is “to analyze or interrogate”—like point 1., this is a common assumption and the intention of most documentary filmmakers. The fourth is “to express”: a mode vague enough to make every documentary indistinguishable from “poetic” documentary. Renov acknowledges the overlapping tendencies of these modes. “[T]he ‘analyze or interrogate’ mode is a response to cognitive requirements, an extension of the psychological activities”. However, as the work of cognitive philosophers has demonstrated, the illogical in film can be understood by most audiences as intentional abstraction (see Chapter 1). Constructivist psychologists propose that the analytical mode of documentary allows the brain “to organize sensory data, make inferences, and construct schemata”. Renov concludes by suggesting that the poetic documentary shatters the four modes (*ibid.*, pp. 22-24).

The above four points are too vague and generic to be helpful for understanding the poetics of *The Knotweed Factor*.

In his classic study, Bill Nichols proposes that poetic cinema and documentary are multifaceted. In terms of historical documentaries, the poetic film “emphasize[s] the ways in which the filmmaker’s voice gives fragments to the historical world” (2001, p. 99). It is, however, hard to distinguish what Nichols is proposing here from *auteur* theory: both the *auteur* and the ‘poetic’ filmmaker will, in theory, produce works that are distinctly theirs. What aspects of the film separate one from the other?

Nichols expands upon this observation with “six modes of representation”, which he suggests, act as subgenres of documentary film and video: “poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive, performative”. The ‘poetic’ mode of documentary will contradict the

conventions of montage continuity, as well as space and time. This, says Nichols, will free the filmmaker “to explore associations and patterns that involve temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions”. There is commonality with the Bergsonian theory of temporality, where within a single period and space, the past, present, and future exist in the mental processes of the individual. Efforts to reflect this interaction of time and space on film disrupt the formal (*ibid.*, pp. 99-102).

For Nichols, this device enables the poetic filmmaker to explore alternative routes to otherwise simple transfers of knowledge from filmmaker to audience, giving the audience a more subjective, self-exploratory experience. It would thus appear that the rupture of convention necessitated by poetic documentary induces a form of ambiguity and illogicality which necessitates a response from audiences less uniform and predictable than conventional narrative film.

One aspect of Nichols’s (2001) six modes is critical to *The Knotweed Factor*, that of performance. The concept of “performance” in documentary raises ontological questions about how to delineate between the unobtrusive observations which do not compromise the “normal” behaviour of documentary subjects and the intrusive presence of the camera/recording equipment which can cause subjects to exaggerate (or perform) their language and gestures (‘playing up to the camera’). To avoid this deep issue which would require another thesis, let us stick to one specific aspect: the literal, performative aspects of Turner’s recitations of poetry.

In *The Knotweed Factor*, Turner performs his poems to the documentary audience as well as to live audiences within the documentary. Several researchers have tested the viability of Nichols’s model, particularly in relation to how documentaries considered ‘poetic’ have enough overlap with those that are not considered ‘poetic’. The results appear to contradict Nichols and make the ‘poetic’ even more difficult to define.

John Arthur Little regards “performative documentary” as new only in its being referenced by Nichols and incorporated into his six modes. Little also considers the mode as rather undefined. In its most general sense, performance in documentary has been extant since the 1920s, argues Little: Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *Moana* (1926), John Grierson’s *Drifters* (1929), Dziga Vertov’s *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), and Joris Ivens’s *Rain* (1929). These films are “performative documentary films, or documentary films with performative elements”. The performative documentary has poetic elements because it is more “suggestion than argument”. Suggestion enables the audiences to construct personalised meaning via the interacting “evocations, icons, impressions, intimations and implications contained within the film” (Little 2007, pp. 24-25).

For Little, performance is an inherent paradox because the documentary, in standard theory and practice, is supposed to be ‘real’ (or a closer approximation to reality than overt fiction), yet it inevitably contains unreal or exaggerated (i.e., performative) elements. The paradox troubles “traditionalists”, says Little, because “[o]ne draws attention to itself, the other to what it represents”. For Little, a distinguishing feature of the poetic is suggestion: the non-poetic is evidential and referential, while the poetic is suggestive and abstractive (*ibid.*, p. 54).

Natusch and Hawkins provide an empirical analysis of Nichols’s six modes of poetic documentary. For them, Nichols’s modes exhibit “Modernist” tendencies, including the fragmented, emotional, expressive, and ambiguous. This mode contrasts with the expository modes, the purpose of which is to persuade. The researchers scrutinise Nichols’s taxonomy by comparing two documentaries: Alison Klayman’s *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* (2012) and Gary Hustwit’s *Helvetica* (2007), which the researchers describe as a “literary, almost poetic narrative” (Natusch and Hawkins 2014, p. 2).

Natusch and Hawkins conclude that, when analysed at the “micro-level”, Nichols’s six modes in combination constitute “an effective means of reading and dissecting contemporary ‘hybridized’ documentaries”, but tell us little about what makes them “poetic”. The authors find that, “[e]ven though the poetic mode was observed in both films, the number of scenes illustrating th[e performative] mode was higher in Helvetica (21.7%) than in Ai Weiwei (13.5%)”. This suggests that “[i]f a particular film sequence illustrates any of the qualities of discontinuous fragmentation, ambiguity or surrealism”, the authors conclude, “then perhaps it may well fall under the category of the poetic mode” (Natusch and Hawkins 2014, pp. 2-7).

It would appear that designating a documentary, or scenes in a documentary, as ‘poetic’ or ‘non-poetic’ is an arbitrary, fuzzy concept.

Poetics, whatever it may be, has a “central place in the documentary”, says Leger Grindon, who argues that the “formal devices” of documentary film require greater scrutiny. For Grindon, “[p]oetics can demonstrate how cinematic form shapes the interview into more than a simple question-and-answer exchange”. This proposition is important to the initial research question: how sound and vision inform the creative processes, and how to explore the dynamics of the two. “Such a method allows analysts to examine the interplay between sound and image and enriches our understanding of the screen documentary”, writes Grindon (2007, pp. 1-2).

What Grindon describes as “the crucial operations of form” is disturbed by this interplay. “A poetics of the interview” forces filmmakers to confront these hitherto unconsidered aspects of documentary. The poetical design of the interview environment will enable audiences to understand their response, says Grindon. Grindon concludes by citing John Grierson’s essay, *The Creative Use of Sound* (1934), which considers sound montage,

asynchronous sound, and sonic imagery. The essay does, however, include the interview as poetic (Grindon 2007, pp. 3-12).

In order to define the poetic, Grindon proposes five characteristics, which he says contribute to “the poetics of the interview”. These are “presence, perspective, pictorial context, performance, and polyvalence”. Presence asks if the interviewer is present or not? Visually or audibly? Is the perspective emotive? Does the pictorial content use archival materials? Are the performative elements fictionalised? To what extent is the interview polyvalent? Grindon argues that the poetic elements of his five characteristics suggest that “complex sound and image relationship[s]” are essential for poetic interviews. “These poetic categories provide a theoretical framework that highlights the documentary filmmaker’s vital options in designing a cinematic interview” (*ibid*, pp. 13-14).

A model of poetic documentary suggested by Desmond Bell is that of the historical document. In shaping his argument, Bell references the theoretical work of Jacques Rancière. Bell writes that Rancière proposes a “poetics of history”. In that capacity, Rancière assesses literature in the context of image-production, including film history. For Bell, this is a good model because documentary film combines “the archival image, the voiceover, the reconstructed sequence”. These are “subject[s] of experimentation and critical discussion”. For Bell, documentary itself can constitute a “creative” act, where performance “is plotting new ways to narrate the past”. Bell gives the example of “found footage film”, where the contrast between each *auteur*’s work reveals their unique handling of archival sources (Bell 2011, pp. 10, 23).

Returning to Pasolini’s thoughts on poetic cinema, Sitney cites the “dominance of free indirect point of view”. Pasolini initially considered cinema to be a visual medium. Later, he

referred to it as “audio-visual technology”, equalising the two composites. For Pasolini, “the function of memory in [poetic] films plays a role ... The irrational, premorphological, almost prehuman language of cinema”, says Sitney, was for Pasolini “a modern re-emergence of the irrational “poetic wisdom” of primitive humanity” (Sitney 2015, pp. 3, 18-20). In ‘poetic cinema’, memory and the metaphysical (or ‘spiritual’) are vehicles for exploring the longing and detachment from the ideal experienced by the subject.

Bird, for instance, writes: “The tension between the intimation of metaphysical presence and consciousness of its mechanical representation is what Delluc and Epstein termed *photogenie*” (Bird 2008, p. 14). In a book on the poetic cinema of fictional narrative director Terrence Malick, Hannah Patterson concedes the difficulty in defining ‘poetics’. For Patterson, the typical Malick protagonist is “driven by a search”. The protagonist is, quoting Heidegger, a “poet in destitute times” (quoted in Patterson 2012, pp. 1-2). In the collection, Ron Mottram describes Malick’s characters as distaining of the “fleeting value of glamour and fame”. They are in a “search for redemption” in spaces “Edenic” in their “yearning to recapture a lost wholeness” (Mottram 2012, pp. 12-15).

THE TARKOVSKY FACTOR

The work of the late Soviet filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky is important to my thesis for two reasons: 1. Tarkovsky’s work informed the style of *The Knotweed Factor* and 2. Tarkovsky’s films feature poetry, often recited by his father and the author of many of the poems, Arseny Tarkovsky. Several scholars analyse Tarkovsky’s film *Mirror* (1974) as a poetic film, citing

directly or indirectly many of the models considered above (i.e., performance within (Bell's) historicism, (Grindon's) interviews, and (Patterson's) search for the ideal).

Prior to Tarkovsky, many theorists and practitioners reasoned that film is a composite medium: pictures (derived from photography), sound (radio), acting (theatre), editing (literature), etc. However, for Tarkovsky film was unique. It had “the potential to be ‘the most truthful and poetic of art forms’” (Johnson and Petrie 1994, p. 34). Tarkovsky's poetics associatively connect images, whereas traditional ‘poetic cinema’ attempts the deliberate creation of ‘beautiful’ images. Contrarily, Tarkovsky said that dreams as represented in film must consist of realistic moments, complemented by abstracted combinations, such as calm and conflict (fire and water, for instance). Film can be silent, says Tarkovsky. Yet Tarkovsky's films are frequently punctuated by recited poetry. Tarkovsky's “unmediated reality is filtered through the subjectivity of the artist”, write Johnson and Petrie. The “moral integrity” of the subjective is tested against grandiosity and pretention (1994, pp. 34-36).

A large percentage of this thesis—both this text and the documentary—explores ways in which time is considered on video and film. *The Knotweed Factor* begins with no titles and ends without credits, as if the documentary is suspended in some anonymous reality. In the opening poem, the protagonist goes to great lengths to remind us that we are not actually listening to a poem.

Turner tells us that his “story” has “no beginning, no middle and no end”. It is Bergsonian in its multiple considerations of memory, present, virtual reality, and so on. Imageless film relies on its soundtrack and also forces sighted audiences to confront the reality of blindness/VI. The imagelessness of a film, we have argued, can extend the sense of time passing because the expected content is absence, hence a tension is created. In *The Knotweed Factor*, numerous shots (such as the second half of the title poem and the final scene) are

static. The passing of time is marked by, for instance, the sound and image of the waves of the sea: the sea being an erosive element.

For Tarkovsky, cinema enables humans to experience time in another reality (the reality of watching a film, as distinct from the ‘reality’ of film). Johnson and Petrie comment that “[t]he specific quality of film ... which distinguishes it from all other arts, is defined by Tarkovsky as its treatment of time”. Analysing *Mirror* (1974), the authors note the opening scene in which the protagonist’s mother awaits her husband’s return and instead encounters the village doctor. The adult narrator recalls his childhood, but the scene “cannot be a direct memory” because as a child, he slept. Ergo, the film is constructed as a tapestry of multi-layered elements: “what the narrator knew firsthand, what he was told, what he dreamed or imagined, and what happened around him as part of a historical process that he shared with millions of people”. When the village doctor departs, the dialogue and narration is replaced by Arseny Tarkovsky reciting one of his poems. The authors note that “[m]irrors and glossy reflecting surfaces ... abound ... [T]he whole world, the physical objects and human relationships, [are] always somehow distorted ... [yet] seen in a new, more truthful way”. The authors describe the film as a “visual dialogue” and cite instances of Tarkovsky’s use of painting and books (Johnson and Petrie 1994, pp. 37, 116-18).

The Knotweed Factor also creates a ‘visual dialogue’ with existing art. After Turner’s auto-audio description of the cricket pitch covered in knotweed, the documentary transitions to Turner’s house, where an etching of someone (his wife, partner, mother, sister?) is displayed on a bookshelf. Turner frequently references literature in his interviews and poems, including his “favourite novelist”, Dostoyevsky.

In the previous Chapter, Jarman's *Blue* (1993) is considered as an 'imageless film', where the blindness of the filmmaker forced the sighted audience to confront what Jarman regarded as the disaster of losing one's vision. Steven Dillon argues that Jarman was inspired by Tarkovsky and, also analysing *Mirror* (1974), compares the directors. For Dillon, Jarman was earthly, earthy, carnal, and political. Tarkovsky was syncretic, celibate, and ethereal. For both directors, "the mirror is a central image"—as it is in *The Knotweed Factor*. In the latter, Turner speaks of being unable to see into "Krishnamurti's mirror" because we "keep misting it up with our own breath" (Dillon 2004, p. 18).

Visually, the reflections and mirror references are complemented by reflections in water, of the younger Turner (?), as well as fire and footsteps. Later, the imagined Turner is distorted in a convex mirror as he lies on a mattress during the reading of "History Is". These are examples of the performative aspects documented above. For Tarkovsky and Jarman, "poetic cinema is not just poetry, not lineated, metrical writing, so we should not limit our ideas of lyric cinema to conventional, literary forms of poetry" (*ibid.*, p. 19).

Above Bell's history model is considered. In *Mirror*, Tarkovsky includes a reading of "Life, Life" by Arseny. "The poem captures a happy memory with a brutal, sudden closure", says Dillon. Tarkovsky uses archival footage to contrast the poem. In its visualisation, the poem is transformed to life as "palpably absent, pathetic, estranged. This effect, which emphasizes the razor more than the mint, is also reproduced when the next poem is read". The documentary visualises Turner's poetry as minimal abstractions. For instance, instead of filming or using an existing film of a religious persecution, where "infidel flesh" is "roast[ed] in the name of sweet, reasonable Jesus", the documentary instead shows a clock half-buried in mud and the melted plastic of a doll's face. For Jarman, "*Blue* is nothing other than a final ocean mirror",

where the tides bring and carry memories (Dillon 2004, p. 203). *Blue* not only signifies the director's blindness, says Dillon, but the choice of blue (instead of black or grey) perhaps sees past life and death: "The blue screen is itself not only an alternative form of film, but an alternative visual world" (*ibid.*, p. 228).

Using Tarkovsky and Jarman as a theoretical base, Dillon goes on to cite what he calls "poetry video", as something akin to what I considered earlier in this text, with, for instance Fischinger's *Optical Poem* (1937). Recent examples of narrative poetic documentary include Mark Pellington's *The United States of Poetry* (1996) and, as fiction, Marc Levin's *Slam* (1998). These films attempted to "popularize poetry", writes Dillon. Like Tarkovsky, and to a large extent *The Knotweed Factor*, the visual itself can be considered "poetic" in lieu of the audio. "Artists such as Bill Viola, Mary Lucier, and Woody and Steina Vasulka all self-consciously explore the lyrical in their work", Dillon continues. These artists use the poetic visual as a vehicle to explore "time, memory, and mystical consciousness" (*ibid.*, pp. 203, 227-28). *The Knotweed Factor* is, however, more concerned with how the audio and visual interact to explore these themes.

Sitney considers Tarkovsky's poetic as "complementary systems of linkages on the visual and auditory levels". These systems, according to Sitney, include "[a]ssociations of color, shape, movement, noise, music, and gesture". Quite aside from narrative development, Tarkovsky's poetics "evoke nuances and touch on profundities" (Sitney 2015, p. 67).

Tarkovsky says: "poetic reasoning is closer to the laws by which thought develops, and thus to life itself, than is the logical of traditional drama" (quoted in Sitney 2015, p. 68).

Analysing the same scene as Johnson and Petrie (1994), Sitney writes that Tarkovksy embeds the visual poem as memory/dream, where boundaries between "actual memories, screen memories and dreams are fluid". Sitney breaks Tarkovsky's film into distinctions and signals. In support of his argument, Sitney notes that the opening 20 minutes of *Mirror* (1974) "can

be seen retroactively as the very dream to which the narrator refers in a telephone call to his mother". This momentary narrative "stability" is disturbed by Tarkovsky's "oneiric penetration of the past, irrational occurrences take place" (Sitney 2015, p. 74).

Finally, Robert Bird writes Tarkovsky's poetry is language manifesting. The visual is "displaced" by Tarkovsky, who places the literary into a "somatic experience". Poetic cinema ruptures the nexus of logic by placing the camera, sound, and montage inside the "soul" of the protagonist. The reality of inner experience contradicts the logic of the outward, observable reality (Bird 2008, pp. 16, 113).

CONCLUSION

This Chapter demonstrates the difficulty of defining 'poetic' documentary and poetic cinema. Certain modes may constitute documentary poetics, which are relevant to *The Knotweed Factor*. The overarching mode is performance. Sub-modes include 1) the interview, 2) history, and 3) the search for the ideal. In *The Knotweed Factor*, typically produced interviews are used to punctuate poetry recitations and abstracted visual accompaniments. In the case of history, the use of artefacts from the poet's past, including books by Henry Miller, 78" records, and a photograph of the protagonist as a boy are elements of the poetic composition that exist on the one hand in narrative logic (i.e., Turner talks about his childhood, we see a photo of him as a boy) and on the other as sublimations of the real (i.e., the inference of Mozart music as Turner talks about Mozart but the LP merely crackles). Finally, the quest for the ideal is a recurrent theme in the documentary: be it the collapse of

modern society or the inward search, via the medium of poetry, for salvific heroes (Krishnamurti), kindred spirits (Dostoyevsky), life-saving music (Mozart), buried trauma (catharsis), and redemptive memories (to quote Turner: “The single memory of bluebells that almost redeems the whole, long, bloody nightmare of childhood”).

Tarkovsky’s form—particularly in relation to the interplay of memories and dreams—is close to our own in the practice-based piece of the thesis. Bird (2008) describes this as “tension” which itself portends to the performative. It remains, however, difficult to confirm the poetic in *The Knotweed Factor* on account of the current fuzziness surrounding poetic cinema/documentary theory. In conclusion, *The Knotweed Factor*, in contrast to the Cartesian primacy of vision, is informed by the textual and sonic, be it written or recited verse. Where blindness/VI studies is marginalised in current VS/C theory by its denigration by Cartesian visualists, the necessity of imagination in regards to the poetic is reaffirmed.

Chapter 4

The Sound-Vision Dialectic

SUMMARY

This final Chapter is a culmination and synthesis of ideas and arguments posed and developed in the previous chapters. The non-visual aspects of *The Knotweed Factor* cannot be adequately explored using current models and methodologies from visual studies/culture (VS/C). The reason being that most VS/C models are contingent on a Cartesian primacy of vision from which non-visual elements follow. In this written part of the thesis, I suggest an equality of sound and vision in regards to *The Knotweed Factor*. In the documentary, the sound (i.e., of Turner's poetry) informed the visual. A challenge to this assertion is the imaginative (or 'visual') aspects of poetry, most notably, ekphrasis.

In earlier chapters, I argued that in art and media, the relationship between sound and vision is best understood as a multiplicity of suggestion, inference, causality, and subjectivity. The reduction of documentary—or any audiovisual media—to 'audio' and 'visual' (the Deleuzian (1986) binary principle) is an impossibility, because each atomised element remains contingent on its opposite. For example, when Laura U. Marks (2008) discusses "haptic cinema" as an example of the non-visual in art and media, the discussion is limited by its assumption that the audience or artwork has a capacity for visualisation. This immediately

has potential to exclude blind/VI audiences as well as the non-visual in art. For example, when Marks discusses visceral reactions to horror films, her examples are visual examples which provoke a haptic response in audiences.

This primacy of vision paradigm has its roots in Cartesian philosophy. Where Diderot's inquiries into blindness and mental and aesthetic capacities helped to set a cross- or inter-modal standard among cognitive philosophers concerned with the epistemology of experience (Tunstall 2011), current VS/C remains, to a large extent, stuck in a reductionist, Cartesian paradigm.

ATOMISING SOUND AND IMAGE

The visual elements of *The Knotweed Factor* are almost entirely informed by the sound: of Turner's poetry, dialogue in interviews, and imagined thoughts and memories. Even scenes and sequences which feature no dialogue—such as the pause after Turner reads the title poem—has been informed by the poem. To be specific: when Turner steps out of the derelict building at the end of the long opening scene, he contemplates a pond before we transition to a tree blowing in the wind. The choice of simple, naturalistic visuals was informed by the need to give the audience a breather from the frenetic imagery (visually imagined or otherwise) of the title poem, of which the first scene is comprised.

It is impossible to 'see' inside another person's head, yet the aim of *The Knotweed Factor* was to not only explore that which informs Turner's poetry, but also to somehow extract that which is in his head and interpret it and audiovisualise it. This could only be done in words:

the words of his poetry or spoken explanations; and only then visualised as image-elements in the documentary.

When Turner, or anybody, explains internal mental imagery, an audience or interlocutor, blind/VI or sighted, is forced to imagine what is being described. Technology is not yet sufficient to let us 'see' another's thoughts. In this sense, the ekphrastic is of utmost importance because the imagined is the only possible insight into the mind of the other. More than this, the imagined is a creative act. It is not a mere metaphor, as scholars of VS/C tend to think when they discuss blindness/VI. The poetic documentary is a tertiary imagination which seeks to explore the primary. The primary imagination is that of the protagonist (in this case, Turner). The secondary imagination takes place in the mind of the artist or audience, who seek(s) to interpret that which is in the protagonist's head. The documentary is a manifestation of the artist's response to the primacy of the protagonist.

Imageless films bring this dynamic to the fore in ways that imaged films do not. They do so by making the imaginative responses of the audience more vivid than films where the visual is present. Imageless film emphasises the importance of the imagination in ways that previous chapters suggest are Bergsonian in their multidimensionality. The limits of VS/C place unnecessary boundaries on this issue by implying that without the faculty of vision, film cannot be enjoyed. VS/C also suggests that without the visual presented onscreen (as in the case of Jarman's *Blue* (1993) and others), the film is somehow lessened and is more akin to radio. However, as I have argued in this text, the expectation of the visual and its absence can in fact make the imaginary more vivid.

In the Chapter about ekphrasis, it was suggested that immersive and interactive artworks enable the audience to have richer experiences by making artworks subjectively relevant to the audience and responsive to the audience's needs and instigations in ways that 'non-immersive' and 'non-interactive' works (however they may be defined) do not. The

importance of the imaginary is thus highlighted. What I am concerned with in this text is how the 'immersive' may constitute the poetic. Unfortunately, what is 'poetic' in documentary remains uncertain.

The ekphrastic philosophy has its roots in Ancient Greek emanation theory, as previous chapters have argued. The previous chapters have tacitly suggested that sound design and radio are modern forms of an emanatory continuum, which is contingent on the internal, creative responses of audiences.

In the 1980s, Martin Jay published an important essay on the dialectics of Enlightenment. Jay quotes Voltaire's understanding of idea as image. *The Knotweed Factor* and its contextualisation as a discourse on blindness/VI suggests the opposite: image as idea; be it visual image, spatial image, tactile image, or other. Jay does not interrogate this assumption. Does his reading of Voltaire mean image as visual image, or image as combination of modalities (language, sound, space, etc.)? If one modality is absent or impaired, does the impairment render imagination or ideas any more or any less effective? This written part of the thesis has argued to the contrary. Jay considers 'the Enlightenment's debt to Descartes's ocularcentric theory and its distance from it', as encapsulated in Voltaire's statement. Jay assumes that Voltaire is using image as metaphor (2006, pp. 65-72).

Jay also claims that Voltaire, like Bacon, Locke, and Newton, was a sensationalist, i.e., he reasoned that ideas derive from observations of/interactions with objects outside the mind. "The Enlightenment and the Revolution it helped spawn may thus be justly said to have expressed that privileging of sight so often taken to characterize the modern era in general". Condillac criticised Locke's belief, that intellectual response follows observation, by posing a simultaneity of sensory experience. "For a materialist like Diderot, the dethroning of vision

was especially appealing”. The assumption is that the visual is not real. The unrealness of the visual is rooted in the Greek image-as-emanation philosophy. In *The Knotweed Factor*, the imagery is ‘real’ in the Bergsonian sense, in that much of it is taking place in the mind of the protagonist. The locations, environments, and visions are real to the protagonist, but could not be objectively verified by an external observer because of their highly subjective, illogical character (or ‘poetic’ nature, as is argued in Chapter 3). For Jay, Diderot’s theory of sensory interdependence is brought into the modern era by Merleau-Ponty’s “imbrication of the senses” (*ibid.*, pp. 73-75).

R. Bruce Elder puts language at the centre of his thesis on the poetic, experimental cinema of Stan Brakhage and the latter’s debt to Pound, Stein, and other poets. For Elder, experience is reduced to a singularity. Linguistic narrative structures “enfold” experience as language. Elder’s thesis stands in contrast to current VS/C theory. In its most distilled form, *The Knotweed Factor* is an experience framed as a language-narrative. However, the “language” of documentary (or the modes, discussed in Chapter 3,) is betrayed by the documentary’s aspirant-poetic non-linearity. The visual is complementary to the language. For Elder, narrative is an imposition of order on chaotic reality. The so-called “secret” narratives reveal “patterns of unconsciousness”, hence their non-linearity and poetics (Elder 1998, p. 1).

Elder discusses Merleau-Ponty, whom, as Jay (2006) suggests, challenged the Cartesian paradigm. Merleau-Ponty suggests a corporeal awareness as primary to intersensory experience. There is no need to interpret or translate one experience (e.g., touch) into another (i.e., hearing) because of the body’s automaticity. Merleau-Ponty considered this to be a primordial awareness. “Each sense, including touch ...[,] contributes to a single, highly textured experience of the world” (Elder 1998, p. 318). Part of the problem with VS/C is its denial of the multi-layered experience of human existence, as encapsulated in art and media. Because art and media make use of the visual in their construction, the visual is placed at the

top of the sensory hierarchy. “Like Bergson, Merleau-Ponty argued that the experience of the lived body brought one into closer contact with reality than does spectatorial reasoning” (*ibid.*, p. 319).

For Elder, it is this close contact, as portrayed on film via visual and audio means, which makes the work of Brakhage poetic. It is the directness of Stein, Pound, and other poets that makes their literature experiential, whereas non-poetic filmmakers and by suggestion even poets, use imagery to reduce their works to a non-immersive, distanced spectator-gaze, much in the way that museums distance audiences from paintings by geographical proximities and censorship. Merleau-Ponty rejected Sartre’s distinction between the belief in incorporeal consciousness (*pour-soi*) and phenomenology (*en-soi*). Merleau-Ponty objected to Sartre’s un-nuanced distinction between existence and non-existence, such as the latter’s assertion that touching and being touched are different (*ibid.*, pp. 318-20).

Merleau-Ponty read Sartre’s philosophy as an either/or dialectical reduction.

VS/C scholar, Barbara Maria Stafford offers a critique of current cognitive science’s reductionism, which has “synthesize[d] the computational view of the mind as software that turns information into manipulable symbols with the view that mental abilities, akin to organisms, arose through natural selection”. On the scientific atomization of behaviour, “[t]here is a long and dubious history of trying to coordinate absolutely internal or mentalized phenomena with externalized anatomy” (2001, pp. 48-50). Stafford also suggests that the Cartesian relegation of imagination was, in part, an effort to “pierce the tricks of the mind” with logic (1999, p. 292). A theory of language was developed to counter imagery, one which Elder (1998) considers vital to the experiential directness of poetry and poetic cinema.

What if a scene in *The Knotweed Factor* is reduced to a single element? Would the ekphrastic element be challenged? Above, Marks's "haptic cinema" (2008) is discussed. Without some form of description (or ekphrasis), a blind/VI audience is denied the possibility of Marks's haptic cinema. (However, in reality, there exists 'haptic' responses to the soundtrack and tangible elements of film, which Marks hardly discusses.) Marks traces the term "haptic cinema" to Noël Burch's 1986 essay, "Primitivism and the *Avant-Gardes*: A Dialectical Approach". Taking a topographical approach to filmic spatialisation, Antonia Lant referred to a "haptical cinema" in her eponymous essay (1995). For Deleuze, writes Marks, haptics is cinematic when touch is isolated from a narrative function. One might cite the instance of Turner—or a facsimile of Turner—in *The Knotweed Factor* laying a rose on a stone circle as an example of non-narrative haptics. In these cases, haptics appears onscreen (Marks 2008, p. 400).

Analysing the work of Atom Egoyan, Jacinto Lejeira writes that Egoyan's "techniques function in such a way that the overall image ... seems to obey an instrument capable of bringing the spectator's opticality or tactility to a vibratory pitch" (quoted in Marks 2008, p. 400. Marks's ellipsis). Marks cites cinematic devices, such as soft-focus and lowlight, which encourage/force the audience to engage with the screen. But in the absence of description, how can blind/VI audiences respond to visual devices, such as soft-focus? Marks also considers film and video decay and aesthetic scratches, solarisation, and optical printing as an invocation of hapticality. "Graininess certainly produces a tactile quality" (Marks 2008, p. 400). Marks gives multiple examples of almost visceral scenes in popular films in an effort to define them as haptic. But again: if one cannot see, or if one's vision is impaired, how are such images haptic?

On the theme of Marks's scratches on film, Jan Thoben refers to *Arnaulf Rainer* (1960) by Peter Kubelka as a "sound film". This is similar to 'imageless films' explored in Chapter 2 of

this text. Thoben writes that Kubelka used four material strips: blank film, a perforated magnetic tape containing a white noise sound recording, a blank perforated tape, and black film. As the film is screened, its uncoated material causes a physical—or haptic, as Marks describes it—scratching, which becomes more apparent with each screening. The absence of the physical protective coating causes the projector to inflict increasing violence upon the filmstrip. Thoben explains that white noise and white light are within an even spectrum frequency. The constant black-white flicker of the film creates a “stroboscopic alternation substitute for the representational function of the film” (Thoben n.d., online).

Just as Nam’s soundless, imageless, Zen film (discussed in Chapter 2) reduces film to its barest minimum (the sound and physical (i.e., haptic) presence of the projector and screen), *Arnaulf Rainer* produces a consistent hum of white noise and an epileptic succession of black-white flicker. Nam’s film is an interactive, immersive event in that it forces sighted and non-sighted audiences alike to confront absence. In the case of the latter, Nam’s film eliminates the soundtrack and blind/VI audiences rely on the given soundtrack of a film arguably more than sighted audiences. Kubelka’s film uses the phenomenology of physical entropy, as well as absence (of expected image and sound) to “transform it into an event”. Beyond the (haptic) decay of the film in Kubelka’s *Arnaulf Rainer*, “the illusion of cinematographic motion is made visible: the interpolation of the eye between the flashing frames as a condition for the fusion of the individual images into a continuous movement” (*ibid.*).

These examples, contextualised as ‘haptic’ (or non-visual) cinema, demonstrate that elements of audiovisual media cannot be atomised and expected to continue to function *in vacuo*. Even in the most extreme case (Nam’s soundless and imageless film), the suggestion of presence and the importance of performance-as-event (in this case the performance of the film screening) and its immersive potential is aesthetically functional. In *The Knotweed*

Factor, the performance of poetry, to camera or to audience (which happens to be caught on camera and sound recording), not only aspires to the poetic but, using a partly visual medium (video documentary), seeks to engage sighted and non-sighted audiences. In the case of *Arnaulf Rainer*, the reduction of image to black and white scratches and negatives is an interplay which conveys an idea of motion (or kinaesthetics) to audiences.

BLINDNESS AS METAPHOR

One of the underlying arguments of this written part of my thesis is that blindness and visual impairment should not be considered as some kind of absence or lack of experience in ‘visual’ art and media, but rather, that visual art and media consist of multiple non-visual elements (the Bergson-Blassnigg model). Paradoxically, these elements (as Tarkovsky argued (Chapter 3)) cannot be atomised because they work synchronously.

At best, VS/C attempts to engage with the issue of the non-visual elements of art and media in a minimal way by considering blind/VI audiences. At worst, VS/C uses blindness as a metaphor for something inadequate and lacking. I have avoided using blindness/VI as a metaphor in this textual evaluation of *The Knotweed Factor*, despite the fact that Turner cites “astigmatic blur” as a metaphor for emerging from mental fog. The metaphor of blindness is less interesting to this research question than understanding the dynamics of sound and image.

Naomi Schor does not consider blindness/VI an illness, though the condition(s) can result from illness. However, she notes that others consider blindness/VI to be an illness and use it

as a metaphor to promote ocularcentric ideas or, to a lesser extent, ocularphobic ideas. Schor notes “a casual cruelty, an offhanded thoughtlessness, about metaphors of illness”. The use of illness as metaphor exists because of a fundamental flaw in language, says Schor, who gives the examples of the leg of a chair and the arm of a windmill (metaphorical catachresis) (1999, p. 77). Pierre Fontanier’s “recasting” of Dumarsais’s eighteenth-century work, *Les Figures du Discours* (1821–30) is quoted by Schor:

Blindness must have at first referred only to the deprivation of the sense of sight; but he who does not clearly distinguish ideas and their relationships; he whose reason is disturbed, obscured, does he not slightly resemble the blind man who does not perceive physical objects? The word *blindness* came naturally to hand to also express this deprivation of moral sight. And how without these obligatory metaphors, without these *catachreses*, would one have succeeded in retracing these ideas. (Quoted in Schor 1999, pp. 77-78. Italics in original)

With this methodological premise, Schor analyses the film, *At First Sight* (1999), based on a true story related by neuroscientist, Oliver Sacks. The protagonist, Virgil, is cured of his blindness, but contrary to the audience’s expectations rejects the visual world. In Chapter 2, ocularphobia is discussed as an element of the poetic and the ekphrastic. Schor writes that in French melodrama and Hollywood film, restoration leads audiences to consider eyesight as “Cartesian” in its miraculousness (Schor 1999, p. 98).

Sacks traces the philosophical history of ocularphobia from the Molyneux Question as a testimony to “the veritable catastrophe that suddenly restored vision can bring”. Schor may have pointed out that some visually impaired persons enjoy restored vision, whereas congenitally blind persons, for instance, may find adapting to eyesight a struggle. This

requires what was proposed earlier in this text: the need for greater care and nuance when discussing blindness/VI. Balancing the argument, Schor discusses the congenitally deaf, who she describes as “vision persons”. Schor says that the congenitally deaf “militantly resisted the hegemony of hearing represented by cochlear implants and the abolition of Sign”. Where the Enlightenment interrogated epistemological questions raised by blindness, the mid-eighteenth century demonstrated a revolution “in the history of deafness in which France played a leading role: the invention of Sign by the Abbé de l’Epée (1776)” (Schor 1999, pp. 98-100).

Nicholas Mirzoeff writes that “[b]oth painting and sign language are conceived of as silent languages” by Enlightenment-era philosophers, artists, and critics. My question concerns where this leaves the blind/VI, many of whom rely on the non-visual elements of art and media: elements that current VS/C tends to deny. For Mirzoeff, the body is represented “as a sign”. Mirzoeff traces the history of body-as-sign in French republican political discourse. According to Mirzoeff, “Enlightenment artists, critics, and philosophers” used the sign-language of deaf persons in a way that has been neglected by modern theorists (1992, pp. 561-585).

Antoine Coypel advised students to paint orators using deaf models, because even though the deaf could not orate using typical sounds, “[t]he orator’s gesture was a supplement to the arbitrary spoken word”. The so-called arbitrariness of the spoken word implies a reversion to Cartesian visual primacy in the work of the period. Coypel’s son, Charles-Antoine, “attempted ... to define painting as if it were oratory and found pictorial equivalents for a wide range of rhetorical terms and devices” (*ibid.*).

Mirzoeff also notes the long-tradition by French playwrights of representing the deaf for a number of narrative functions, including deceptive love stories. There is some suggestion that through the faculty of vision, the sighted-hearing can watch exaggerated gesticulations

associated with the deaf or hearing impaired and understand them. The sonic equivalent is the ability to visualise when the image is missing or impaired. These counterparts measure in part the imaginative capacities of humans. Citing Derrida, Mirzoeff writes: “Representation is thus an operation of memory rather than one of vision. Paradoxically, however, this ‘blindness’ of the artist was interpreted by the ‘deafness’ of the critics’ silent gaze” (*ibid.*).

VS/C theorist, James Elkins, notes that Derrida curated an exhibition at the Louvre, Paris, in 1989, titled, “Memories of the Blind” (or “Memoirs of the Blind”). Elkins found that most featured works were self-portraits, even though Derrida’s theme was blindness. Elkins (2003) calls this a paradox: the inference being that the blind (literal or metaphorical) haven’t the capacity for self-reflection in visual media. There are crude similarities to *The Knotweed Factor*, such as Turner’s line about “misting up” mirrors “with our own breath”, as well as how reflections are distorted in the documentary’s visuals. However, these reductionist metaphors are not helpful to approaching the dynamic of sound and image in documentary. In addition to writing about Adami, Goya, Van Gogh, Magritte, and Titus-Carmel, Derrida writes about “architecture in relation to Bernard Tschumi and the Parisian Parc de la Villette project”. Elkins offers a critique of deconstructionism: “[the] works of art tend to be used in order to serve Derrida’s critical and literary ends rather than treated as intentional, meaningful and historical artefacts in their own right” (Elkins 2003, p. 141).

To examine Derrida’s work on blindness: blindness is used a metaphor for distinguishing between what one believes and what one sees. For Derrida (1993), blindness acts as a delay to the moment of conclusion. It is also a dialectic (one eye as thesis, the second eye as antithesis). Invoking the stereotype of the blind as visionary, the eye places a gaze “onto the other: a drawing of the blind is a drawing *of* the blind. Double genitive”. Where the visual is

minimised and responsive to the text/audio in *The Knotweed Factor*, where the ekphrastic makes demands of the imagination, and where imageless film forces the audience to confront absence and engage with it, the artist who paints the blind—says Derrida—is projecting her/his “dreams” and “hallucinations”. Derrida seems to imply that blindness infers an absence, a potential, whereas I have argued for a continuity of imagination (visual or otherwise). Above, Mirzoeff is quoted as analysing the use of the deaf by “visual” artists. Derrida writes: “Look at Coypel’s blind men. They all hold their hands out in front of them, their gesture oscillating in the void between prehending, apprehending, praying, and imploring” (Derrida 1993, pp. 1-5. Italics in original).

Derrida cites Jorge Luis Borges, a “rival” of Milton, who cherishes blindness as the gift of uniqueness. The gift is a paradox: on the one hand making the individual unique, on the other it is a “wound” (*ibid.*, p. 33). This written part of my thesis has considered the themes of blindness in the work of Tunisian author Albert Memmi, arguing that the portrayal of blindness/VI strikes a balance between the ocularcentric and ocularphobic. Derrida appears to be less nuanced, swinging from perceptions of blindness as divine inspiration (quoting Borges on Homer’s mythical blindness and consequent genius of ekphrastic poetry) and ruin: the metaphor of decay. Derrida writes that “[r]uin is the self-portrait, this face looked at in the face as the memory of itself, what remains or returns as a specter from the moment one first looks at oneself and a figuration is eclipsed” (*ibid.*, pp. 33-34).

Above, it was stated that using blindness as a metaphor is not helpful to understanding the relationship between sound and image in *The Knotweed Factor*. Where Derrida discusses ruin, one may have offered a glib interpretation of Turner’s frequent placement in derelict buildings as a visual signifier of entropy. However, when we consider the textuality of the derelict environment (its echoing acoustics, damp, moss, rust, patina, geographical solitude, potential for restoration), the location becomes an extension of the character. As argued

above, it cannot be atomised as ‘visual’ signifier, or metaphorical ‘blindness’, because doing so betrays the non-visual: the dialogue, the interviews/recited poems, the suggestion of personalised space by the absence of urbanisation (i.e., the absence of traffic, background conversation), etc.

Where Derrida is helpful, however, is in his discussion of the “narcissistic melancholy” that comes from “the love of ruins”. Derrida concludes that “[r]uin is ... memory open like an eye, or like the role in a bone socket that lets you see without showing you anything *at all*” (*ibid.* 1993, pp. 69-70. Emphases in original).

Derrida is not the only VS/C theorist to exploit blindness/VI as a metaphor to serve visual ends. Just as I argued in this text against the Cartesian, dualistic reduction of scenes to sound or image (Deleuzean binarism) by citing Stafford’s modern critique of cognitive science, Chris Jenks comments on the flawed reductionist tendencies in positivism. However, Jenks uses the metaphor of blindness (and even visual impairment, which is rarely used as metaphor). Jenks notes the “positivist instructions for ‘good seeing’” as instruction for “‘partial sight’, which never recognises itself as being the ‘impaired vision’ that it really is, because positivism is, after all, legitimated by the ideology of ‘pure perception’” (Jenks 2002, p. 6).

One of the recurring themes of *The Knotweed Factor* is the powerlessness of the individual to escape external and internalised destruction, be it the symbol of knotweed creating a monoculture or the history of abuse which distorts and disrupts the pleasure of the present. In conclusion, it would appear that the friction between the self (Turner) and the other (the external) is what stimulates a crisis and thus a poem. Jenks discusses the philosophical work of Michel de Certeau, whose “poetics of routine” are achieved by placing the “powerless” in a relative proximity to the “powerful”. In this dichotomy, “a series of autonomous spaces” are generated, “within which ... they may facilitate the realisation of

their unique intent". For Jenks, this is a kind of "subversion" which is "blind" and indicative of the "unconscious" (2002, p. 156).

For Paul Virilio, the closest that VS/C theories come to approaching, categorising, or placing blindness/VI is as metaphor. Writing a history of seventeenth century Parisian lamplighting as a means of crime prevention/detection, Virilio notes that "this constant straining after 'more light' was already leading to a sort of precocious disability, a blindness; [an] eye literally popped out of its socket" (1998, p. 115). Similarly, Fiske argues that pervasive video had a dialectical efficiency for controllers (surveillance) and controlled (justice, i.e., video evidence of racially-motivated police brutality). Fiske (1998) writes that middle-class liberals are able to visualise oppression through the medium of video, "but may "also be 'blind" to racial indifference when it was in their interests to be so" (p. 156). VS/C cannot, it seems, decolonise the culture of sensory hierarchy or prejudice against blindness/VI serving as a metaphor for deficiency.

THE CRARY MODEL

Breaking from the metaphorical, Jonathan Crary (1990, p. 1) presents a "historical construction of vision", which is useful to this thesis because it helps to contextualise how observation and the philosophy of observation changed over time. Where Diderot advanced the Cartesian debate on the importance of vision to "reciprocal assistance" (an early theory of crossmodality), the mechanical and technological advancements of the 19th century tended to place visual information ahead of other information. Crary demonstrates that between

Descartes and 19th century visual techniques, a small window of opportunity existed where elements other than visual were central to created works.

Crary delineates what he calls the “modernization and revaluation of vision”. Crary argues that tactility was central to classical visual theory in the 17th and 18th centuries. The medicalisation of scientific observation systems, including microscopy, ophthalmology, and photography, shifted perceptions of the visual, giving it a Cartesian primacy. Crary calls this a “separation of the senses”, where the visual appeared to be divorced from non-visual elements. The 19th century introduced a “remapping of the body”. Where reality and imagination could be experienced as taking place in the phenomenal world, acquired information about the eye, lenses, and light helped to structure an intellectual understanding of the world which became contingent on visual apparatus (*ibid.*, pp. 19, 26).

The gap between Cartesian visual primacy and 19th century hi-tech observational techniques allowed for a brief perceptual reversion to pre-Socratic image-as-emanation among artists and audiences. It is the contextual mode that aspires to the poetic and challenges the formal. *The Knotweed Factor* uses the medium of audiovisual documentary to explore the inner dynamics of the poet. The thesis concerns the relation between sound and image and how one is informed by and translated into the other. It would be difficult to read the documentary as a visual work because the imaginative and aspirant-poetic elements rely crucially on text, sound, inference, and imagination.

Ian Heywood writes that, for some scholars, “the Cartesian way of seeing” experienced a revival with the detail given in paintings by Renaissance artists, who may or may not have used optical aids (such as *camera obscura* (the Falco and Hockney thesis)). Heywood argues that “northern European” art differs from “the southern” in its concern with still-life and genre. This contrasts Italian narrative and perspectival painting. Others propose that Descartes inhibits a transmaterial approach to analysing the tangible. Martin Jay, for instance,

suggests that the Cartesian tradition is comprised of competing methodologies. According to Heywood, Jay rejects the “descriptive”, which is so crucial not only to blindness/VI audiences concerning “visual” art, but also to the power of the ekphrastic and notional (as argued in Chapter 1). Because “[f]ew want to reject Western scientific rationalism’ they cling, one-dimensionally, to Cartesian visual methodologies. Providing no evidence, Heywood says that Dadaism, Pop Art, Conceptualism, and ‘postmodern’ Neo-Conceptualism ‘rejected the primacy of the visual” by emphasising the spatial and tactile (1999, p. 201).

Whitney Davis discusses the effects of 19th century ocularcentric scientific-medical reductionism on art and the theories of art, noting that the 20th century—including Heywood’s examples—ushered in “a highly formalist ideology of art”, grounding the creative process in intellectual anthropocentrism. For Davis, things close to humans and experienced visually are dependent on “successions and recursions of vision”. This can be “disjunctive” and incomplete, creating uncertainty and indeterminacy. Here, we have come full circle: indeterminacy in “visual” art demonstrates the importance of the imagination for generating meaning and conveying haptic, audio, and other non-visual elements. Davis concludes that the haptic presents objects as “self-contained” because they exist without the “denaturing effects” of the visual. The visual cannot see all sides of the given object (Davis 2011, pp. 4, 338, 347n17).

CONCLUSION

This final Chapter has presented a theoretical closure to some of the questions considered throughout the thesis. It has done so by sketching a brief history of the philosophy of blindness and vision, beginning with Descartes and the Molyneux Question, and how Diderot demonstrated that sense does not function in isolation. However, even with the absence or impairment of one sense, the mind/body adapts and compensates. Art and media cannot, in contrast to current VS/C thinking, be reduced to such formalism. Crary argues that the scientific-medical model was advanced by technologies of observation which placed greater importance on the image than on non-visual factors. In 19th century philosophy, the use of image as idea and the manifestation of image as absolute became confused, reducing the philosophy of inquiry to Cartesian dualism.

If my thesis—text and documentary—could be summarised in one sentence, it would be as follows: A creative inquiry into poetics has demonstrated that the most important factor in art is the given work's capacity to engage the audience by stimulating the imagination. The form—text, sound, tactility, imagery, or a combination of techniques—is irrelevant to the objective of creative, imaginative engagement. A central theme of this Chapter has been the dialectical relationship between sound and image and how VS/C theorists have attempted, quite unintentionally, to separate the two. The separation serves as a kind of rupture, rendering the visual one-dimensional and antifunctional. In *The Knotweed Factor*, the visual serves little purpose in isolation. The interaction of sound and image, be they onscreen images or images in the mind of the audience (not necessarily visual images), is what is relevant to this inquiry.

Conclusion

Successes and Failures

SUMMARY

This Conclusion reflects on the successes and failures of the thesis, both the practice-based element and this written component. *The Knotweed Factor* is an exploration of the creative processes that inform the poetry of the protagonist, James Turner. There are some scenes or sequences which might have worked better in terms of helping our understanding of the dynamics of sound and how they inform and translate into the visual (and vice versa). The scenes in question are considered below.

With regards to this text, my Conclusion suggests that although the research has made progress in bridging the theoretical gap between the imaginary and the visual in visual studies/culture (VS/C), more research is needed. In particular, sound and haptics remain undervalued and under-theorised fields of study in VS/C.

Sound is especially important in blindness/VI studies because, the current thinking goes, in the absence or with the impairment of the visual, sound must not only complement the visual, but often replace it or at least become superior to it. However, the research presented here suggests that sound can inform the visual, in contrast to current thinking, and exist as a discrete work. This is especially so in the ekphrastic tradition, which has translated into

‘imageless’ film, such as Jarman’s *Blue* (1993). Haptics is also important in blindness/VI studies but has translated poorly into VS/C, with Marks’s notion of “haptic cinema” (2008) marred, for example, by its being grounded in the visual tradition. I suggest in this text that immersive installations, including digital ekphrasis, have the potential to make haptic the hitherto visual. Again, more research is needed.

SUCSESSES

The aim of *The Knotweed Factor* was to consider the dynamics of sound and image by taking the audience on a journey into the mindscape of the protagonist. It aimed to do so by using techniques such as audiovisual ambiguity, nonlinearity, abstraction, and Bergsonian multiplicity. These are ‘poetic’ techniques used in greater or lesser degrees by other filmmakers and video artists, notably Andrei Tarkovsky. However, this written element of the thesis has argued that ‘poetics’ remains a fuzzy concept in film documentary theory.

In the case of Tarkovsky, the poetic serves the personal. The director’s father was a published poet and is featured on the soundtrack of several Tarkovsky films. For Tarkovsky, the personalisation of cinema is an essential facet of communication. In the case of *The Knotweed Factor*, communication is considered through the imaginative processes of the ekphrastic. In blindness/visual impairment (VI) studies, the ‘imageless’ possesses elements of the ekphrastic. But how is sound translated into vision and vice versa?

To a large extent, *The Knotweed Factor* is a monymous documentary. Although it is beyond the scope of this text (and would have required a separate discussion), the monymous

technique is used in *The Knotweed Factor* as a vehicle to enable the documentary-maker to enter the mindscape of the protagonist in a more thorough way than, for instance, by including interviews with his peers. The language of the poetic documentary has enabled us to reflect elements of the protagonist's mental processes by interpreting the nonlinearity, or as Bergson refers to it multidimensionality, of thought, idea, memory, and dream. Doing so has given the documentary (notionally) ekphrastic—or imaginary/imaginative—qualities. The visual minimisation of Turner's spoken poetry reflects elements in blindness/VI studies which compel audiences to rely more heavily on the imagined more than on what is shown. It is the imaginary that takes the audience closer to the poetic ideal than the explanatory.

In terms of this text:

In Chapter 1, I have argued that the imaginary aspects of ekphrastic poetry are not contingent on the visual and that 'visualisation' can be sonic, spatial, haptic, and so on. In *The Knotweed Factor*, the ekphrastic imaginary is suggested by loose visual associations to the poetry on the soundtrack. Chapter 2, gave examples of 'imageless' films, which demonstrate the functionality and survivability of cinema and *avant-garde* pieces in the absence or relegation of the visual, quite in contrast to VS/C theory, which places primacy on the visual. The basis of *The Knotweed Factor* can be read as 'imageless' in the sense that the images were informed by the poetry (i.e., the literary and oratory existed prior to the visual), the imaginative aspects of which can be produced in any format: picture, sound, sculpture, kinetic art, interactive installation (etc.). In contrast, Chapter 3 justified the use of the visual in *The Knotweed Factor* by suggesting that the relationship between the visual and the somatic is important for that which can be called 'poetic cinema'. Chapter 4 contextualised

these findings as a discourse on VS/C and found that many of the non-visual elements of ekphrasis, sound, and poetics have translated poorly into VS/C.

I argue that video documentary is a suitable format with which to explore the relationship between sound and image. In making *The Knotweed Factor*, the audio element of the production is emphasised. The poet, James Turner, not only reads his poetry, but the poetry is visualised in two ways: 1) by abstracted visual interpretation and 2), to a marginal extent, the printed works (in books) sometimes appear onscreen in close-up. My thesis is concerned with how the audio informs the visual and how the visual informs the audio. How does sound translate into image? What are the characteristics of the image?

The way in which this written part of the thesis contextualised these questions as a discourse on blindness/visual impairment (VI) studies is helpful in two ways: 1) the primacy of sound in spoken poetry necessarily subordinates the visual to the imaginary and the imaginary is realised as visualisation in the production of a documentary. 2) This reverses current thinking in the field of VS/C.

In this text, I have challenged the Cartesian primacy of vision paradigm in three ways: 1) by exploring the imaginary aspects of ekphrastic poetry, which is central to *The Knotweed Factor*; both in its literal existence in the work of James Turner and in its translated existence into video. The ekphrastic ‘image’ is not necessarily a visual image, but rather a spatial, temporal, sonic, and haptic image. The impairment/absence of sight often necessitates the non-visualisation of the ekphrastic image but, in contrast to Cartesian and current VS/C theory, in no way diminishes the value of non-visual imagery. 2) By exploring the possibility of ‘imageless’ film, which often comments on blindness/VI, film and video’s extra-dimensionality beyond the visual is asserted.

Imagery beyond the visual places the image in the realm of the imagination, and often the ‘imageless’ film or video can be read as akin to the pre-Socratic (ekphrastic) notion of image

as emanation. 3) Certain techniques in documentary film and video transfer these themes and approaches to the realm of the ‘poetic’, which, despite being distinct from the ‘non-poetic’ remains a poorly understood concept.

With these core tenets, contemporary VS/C theory was scrutinised. Although scholars have approached the non-visual as a subtext in VS/C, these approaches are limited to the broad and vaguely defined field of ‘disability studies’ (in which blindness/VI is marginally placed) and to the equally broad fields of anthropology and ethnography. An effort to understand how blindness/VI is positioned in VS/C is best undertaken by examining the work on Cartesian and Enlightenment philosophers present in VS/C. In this text, I have contributed original knowledge to VS/C by exploring hitherto unconsidered areas of the imaginary, imageless, and poetic. It has done so by analysing its practice-based counterpart: an exploration of the issue as a case-study into blindness/VI and VS/C.

FAILURES

The Knotweed Factor might have worked better in terms of conveying ideas about how sound and literature inform visuality by opening with a different poem. Turner has written one poem which begins, “Want to be born?”. A second, disembodied voice replies: “Who? Me?”. The disembodied, unnamed voices have a Socratic dialogue about manifesting in the physical realm as human beings. The unborn spirit asks the almighty character what chances there are in life for happiness. The almighty spirit answers that there is “a chance”. The unborn spirit agrees to be born, but raises one final question. The almighty spirit replies: “Too late”.

This poem would have served well as an introductory poem, not only because it suggests some kind of beginning, i.e., the spirit beginning its incarnation as a human, but is also heavily reliant on non-visual or at least limited visual imagery. *In utero*, the human foetus apparently has no light perception, and develops hearing and linguistic skills before visual skills. Opening the documentary with darkness, or at least a single colour, could have reflected this state of development. Traditionally, the higher dimensions are often portrayed in art, religion, and literature as consisting of a ‘white light’. The documentary could have started with this poem as an audio piece, displaying onscreen only a white light. Doing so would have forced the issue of sound-vision relations, which was the core research question. Theoretically, this practice could have been contextualised as ‘imageless’ or ‘motionless’ cinema, as well as a notional ekphrasis.

However, had the documentary opened with such a scene, a definite narrative starting point would have been identified: the birth of the poet. Rather, the aim of the documentary was to take the audience into the realm of the poet and do so in a ‘poetic’ way. As earlier Chapters have argued, part of the poetic nature of cinema and documentary—at least that which can be identified as ‘poetic’—includes non-linearity. In place of the poem about being born, the documentary opens with a long, rambling poem, “The Knotweed Factor”, which, like the documentary itself, has ‘no beginning, no middle, and no end’.

The documentary purposefully opens without giving the audience—sighted and non-sighted—a clue as to who is speaking. It does so by excluding opening titles and end credits. The documentary fades in, takes the audience on a journey into the disjointed mind of the protagonist, and fades away.

In terms of this text:

An underlying theoretical shortcoming, and in blindness/VI studies in general, is the lack of engagement with what exactly is meant by ‘blindness’ and ‘VI’. Blindness and visual impairment is a discrete field. Its journals include the American Foundation for the Blind’s *The Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness* and the UK’s *The British Journal of Visual Impairment*. Both journals include research into a number of fields relating to blindness/VI, including assistive technologies, economics, ophthalmology, meditation and mindfulness, neurology, psychology and cognition, sociology, and spectrum autism. There are numerous books on different aspects of blindness/VI, including some which provide fairly detailed definitions of the conditions. It could be argued that these fall into a medical model of blindness/VI, which has not translated into disability studies.⁸

The failure of this written part of my thesis to adequately explore what is meant by ‘blindness’ and ‘VI’ is not a fatal error because: 1) visual studies/culture also discusses blindness/VI and fails to define it (as demonstrated in Chapter 4) and 2) current disability studies makes the same methodological error. This broad failure does, however, suggest that researchers could take greater care when exploring these themes.

In current disability studies (where blindness/VI is haphazardly placed as a subgenre), issues of representation are explored (Barasch 2001, Bolt 2014), as are creativity and participation in the arts (Ellcessor 2016, Linton 1998). Typically, however, blindness/VI in disability studies is a subject of anthropology (Sentumbwe 1995), especially cultural studies (Devlieger 2007, Foster 2007, Michalko and Titchkosky 2009, Mirzoeff 2006), to a lesser extent politics (Goodley 2011), and, increasingly, European history (Stiker 1999 and Weygand 2009).

⁸ These include Cattaneo and Vecchi (2011), Farrell (1956), Koestler (2004), and Marr (2010).

CONCLUSION

I have produced a documentary which explores the relationship between sound and image by portraying the creative inspirations of a poet. Numerous themes are considered in the documentary, including eschatology, poetry, history, philosophy, mental illness, religion, and domestic abuse. The issue of how poetry informs visuality (and vice versa) allowed for a critical reflection that not only found a unique context to address the question (blindness/VI), but provided a model for exploring areas that are under-theorised in current scholarship. These include the non-visual aspects of (notional) ekphrasis, imageless/motionless cinema, and poetic documentary. How and where these themes are positioned in visual studies/culture was a prime concern for me in this text, because doing so highlights areas of VS/C that need further work.

In this way, the thesis has provided an original contribution to knowledge and, despite its shortcomings, has addressed the research questions by employing the following practical and theoretical methodologies:

1) *Intuition*. I have demonstrated that the role of intuition (see ‘Methodologies’ section in the Introduction) is important to the process of creating what is known as ‘poetic’ cinema and ‘poetic’ documentary, particularly where narrative flow is concerned (Chapter 3). This is relevant to *The Knotweed Factor* because it is not only a documentary about a poet, but a documentary which interprets the author’s poems audiovisually and, in this sense, aspires to the ‘poetic’. I conclude, however, that ‘poetic’ cinema and documentary remains a fuzzy concept and more work is needed.

2) *Collaboration*. I have learned that allowing a creative partner (in this case James Turner) the freedom to put their own thoughts and ideas into a work is important because Turner's choices of poetry and spontaneous answers to questions that I posed proved fruitful, particularly with his frequent references to sight and sightlessness. This is central to one of my arguments, that ekphrasis emphasises the importance of imagination over modality, be it sight, sound, touch, or smell (Chapter 1).

3) *Minimalism (presence and absence)*. I have used the idea of soundless music, imageless film, and motionless pictures (Chapter 3) to expand on my documentary style of using absence (the absence of colour, fast editing, camera movements, multiple characters/subjects, and narrative conventions) in an effort to emphasise presence. The imagined or anticipated presence is closely connected, theoretically, to ekphrasis, which I have argued equalises the experiences of blind/VI and sighted audiences because it, too, highlights the importance of imagination.

4) *Black and white*. In order to contrast the vivid ekphrasis of Turner's poetry, I finalised the documentary in black and white. In the sense described in 'Methodologies' (in the Introduction), this method impaired the visual element of the documentary, but in another sense provided a kind of 'poetic' documentary ekphrasis in that it compelled the audience to add their own 'colour'. In the context of ekphrasis, the use of black and white implies that an absence (i.e., of colour) can evoke a presence (i.e., imagination).

5) *Slowness*. My method of editing including the use of long shots and scenes. This was a purposeful attempt to remain true to the nature of the poems recited by Turner and also to creative a sense of presence interrupted by memories, dreams, and ideas. Stylistically, I was inspired by 'slow cinema' (Introduction). With regards to the asynchronous use of sound and image in a particular scene in which musicians' faces are not onscreen, I reference

experimental cinema and the deliberate elimination of image to emphasise the audio (Chapter 3).

The overarching methodological context is blindness/VI. I conclude the thesis with a reflection on visual studies/culture in order to highlight a lacuna of research into the ideas raised by my documentary and written critical reflection, particularly with regards to blindness/VI. This includes ekphrasis and its importance in equalising the experience of audiences by forcing them to rely on the imagination. The ekphrastic also highlights that which is absent by inspiring an imagined presence. Imageless films challenge audience expectations by denying that which is traditionally thought of as key to cinema: the visual track. *The Knotweed Factor* challenges expectations by denying colour, rapidity, narrative convention, and word-to-image synchronisation to the audience (e.g., poetic verses are not necessarily mimicked by the visual content).

It has done so in order to create a poetic work which references eyesight and sightlessness in ways which have provided interesting opportunities to explore these areas in blindness/VI studies.

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