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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sound design for a *found future*: Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men*

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Through a close analysis of Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006), this paper considers the intersection of science fiction genre studies and contemporary sound theory, specifically addressing the nature of 'hearing' as related to the lead character's 'point of audition' and subjectivity. The paper unpacks the key aspects of the sound design from sound effects planning and creation to music orchestration and placement. The line of argument concludes that while the initial sound design reveals a pattern of sonic dissolution to establish a sense of 'apocalyptic dread', 'the future' is recuperated through the deployment of transformative sounds, in particular the defining sound effect – the cries of a newborn child, which represent a sense of hope and renewal in this *found future*.

Keywords: sound design; science fiction; found future; apocalyptic dread; point of audition; subjectivity

When cars no longer run and children no longer laugh or cry, what will be the last sound heard by the last man on earth? Director Alfonso Cuarón proffers this question in his 2006 film *Children of Men*, loosely adapted from the science fiction novel by author P.D. James. Set in the year 2027, the film presents a dystopic future in which two decades of infertility have signaled the prelude to the extinction of humanity. War, prejudice and paranoia dominate the social and political landscape as illegal immigrants cross the borders into the UK as a result of the global chaos. The narrative centers on Theo Faron (played by Clive Owen), a former educator and grass roots political activist, who at the request of his ex-lover, Julian Taylor (Julianne Moore), is charged with transporting a pregnant African refugee ('Fugee') named Kee (Claire-Hope Ashitey) to the 'Human Project', a group of scientists devoted to curing the worldwide infertility epidemic.

The audiovisual style of the film establishes a *found future* by appropriating familiar landscapes and distorting the *mise-en-scène* to evoke a sense of temporal disjunction.¹ This future is extrapolated from present-day political and social

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anxieties and situated within available (though digitally re-dressed) locales. The stylistic originated in low-budget science fiction films such as *Alphaville* (1965), *Planet of the Apes* (1968) and *The Lathe of Heaven* (1979), and it has been taken up more recently in higher budget films such as *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990), *Gattaca* (1997) and *28 Days Later* (2003).² These films are not necessarily about science, but rather society. Like their literary counterparts, they engage in narrative 'thought' experiments and scenarios of 'what if?' (Roberts 2000, 10). They are often highly symbolic, yet they adopt a 'realistic mode' of storytelling, which is dependent on the anchoring effects of an 'accumulation of details' borrowed from our own historical moment (Roberts 2000, 18). *Children of Men* not only incorporates the familiar landscapes of contemporary England within its critical framework, but also, explores the consequences of post-9/11 political trends toward militarism and nationalism. The film weaves a future in which xenophobia and abuses of power have led to a constant state of siege, wherein personal freedoms are relinquished, and illegal immigrants are routinely detained and tortured.³

In an interview, Cuarón noted that the writing of the film was akin to an 'essay workshop' that was focused on 'referencing reality' and commenting on the political and social 'state of things' (Voynar 2006, 6). As a result, the film presents a tight weave of intertextual references to current political photography (recreating images from the scandal at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq), masterworks of art (sculptures by Michelangelo and Picasso's *Guernica*), and various audio and musical trends. Concurrently, the film offers a unique variation of the 'last man on earth' narrative; but rather than leave a sole survivor or Robinson Crusoe archetype to close the door on the existence of humanity, the film leaves in place an infertile population that measures its end by the birth date of the last child born on earth. It is important to note that like Crusoe, the dwindling population of the planet ponders questions of familial connections, states of being, faith and purpose, and they ultimately find hope, not in a footprint on the beach, but in the cries of a child.

The aim of this paper is to address the critical imperatives of the film in relation to sound design and subjectivity, specifically focusing on the character of Theo Faron (one of the film's 'last men on earth') and the emotional consequences of his journey. I am particularly interested in the ways in which this character hears specific sounds such as ringing, the creak of trees in the wind, the explosion of armaments and the cries of a child, and how the filmmakers take up these same sounds in the planning and pattern of the overall sound design to support three sets of interrelated themes: alienation and loss, despair and dread, and transcendence and hope. What makes *Children of Men* unique within the science fiction genre is that it is not interested in what Vivian Sobchack identifies as the 'terror of man confronting the universe and the void – out there' (2001, 110), but rather the terror and despair of one man confronting the void within. When first introduced, the character of Theo is presented as a shell of a man, alienated from the people and environment around him as he copes with grief

from the loss of his only child, a loss that has suddenly manifested itself on a global scale for unknown reasons. As a result, the initial design of the soundtrack reveals a pattern of structured absences (the lack of children's voices as well as a traditional orchestral film score) and concurrently, a pattern of sonic dissolution emerges, emphasizing frequency loss, which is articulated in the film by a ringing in Theo's ears. These sonic strategies as well as the gloomy *mise-en-scène* (and narrative predicament) establish a sense of 'apocalyptic dread', which is tempered only by a wry engagement of gallows humor that is evoked through the ironic and often playful application of popular music from the late 1960s (Thompson 2007, 1).⁴ As the narrative proceeds, however, the sound design recuperates Theo's sense of loss and despair through the introduction of a musical score that connects with various spiritual traditions from around the world, including Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. The orchestrations, placement and emotive impact of the compositions by John Tavener evoke a sense of transformation and transcendence within the character. The sound design further supports this goal through the use of a blend of Zen-like sound effects that are primarily related to motifs from nature, which underscore Theo's new awareness and sense of purpose. In the end, the defining audio element that ultimately shatters the fog of dread is the voice of a newborn child, which rings through a cacophonous battle sequence at Bexhill between government forces and the resistance. The audio effect (a variation of the 'found sound') reintroduces a long absent voice that fosters a sense of unity, renewal and hope for both Theo and humanity. As I explore the sound design of the film, my method of analysis draws from critical writing related to psychoacoustics ('point of audition' as related to subjectivity and spatial orientation), the themes of science fiction genre, and production studies, particularly related to editing and mixing practices.

Ringling in death and loss⁵

One of the central structuring mechanisms that director Alfonso Cuarón employs in the sound design of *Children of Men* is a high-pitched ringing, which takes on evolving significance as Theo Faron confronts death and loss. The initial use of the sound effect follows a bomb attack on a café, which is choreographed in an uninterrupted long take to provide a sense of documentary verisimilitude. This visual strategy, which recurs throughout the film, supports the overall project of 'realistically' depicting this 'found future', but still provides the filmmaker with the opportunity to expressively manipulate the sound design, directing the filmgoers' attention not with visual close-ups, but rather, a variety of audio cues. In the opening scene, Theo narrowly escapes death by stepping outside to mix alcohol with his coffee. The explosion activates the ringing, and the handheld camera moves past Theo in documentary fashion to focus on a traumatized woman carrying her severed arm from the wreckage. The horrific image is followed by the film's title card against black, and then a medium shot of Theo, impassive and disheveled, trudging through a security checkpoint at the building

where he works. The ringing is accentuated by a muting of the overall soundtrack through the use of high-pass audio filters, which dampen the fidelity of the ambient sounds as if we are hearing them through a pane of thick glass. As a result, the audiovisual field takes on a detached and dreamlike quality, which supports Theo's despondent demeanor and establishes the theme of alienation, mapping it as both an external and internal condition.

The incident also has long-term implications for the character and the film. The concussion of the blast damages Theo's hearing, causing tinnitus. The resultant ringing is transferred to the sound design as a symbol of decay related to Theo's physical and mental state as well as the overall political situation within the country. Medically, this type of ringing results from the brain attempting to rewrite the pathways around the damage and the hyper activation of sensory nerves to compensate for the loss. It is the result of the auditory system attempting to heal itself. Within the narrative, it is implied that the bombing itself is connected to a conspiracy to discredit the actions of anti-government groups (equally a process of trauma and realignment within the political body of the nation-state). The effect becomes part of Theo's '*point of audition*' as well as an analogy to his own political and personal disillusionment stemming from personal loss (Altman 1992, 60). Sound theorist Rick Altman notes that this type of audio perspective 'locates us in a very specific place – the body of the character who hears for us' (1992, 60). Interconnected to Theo's physical location, the ringing is also emanating from inside of him, reverberating within the void. For the filmgoer, this sound strategy draws attention to the notion of subjectivity, paradoxically fostering a sense of loss and emptiness through the addition of a sound effect.

It is Theo's ex-lover Julian who points out the connection between the ringing and Theo's state of being. On his way to work, Theo is kidnapped off the street by members of an anti-government group ('The Fishes'), who take him to a remote warehouse where Julian (one of the group's leaders) waits. She exploits his need for money in return for securing transit papers for a refugee, who is important to the political agenda of 'The Fishes'. When Theo refuses, she reminds him that he was once a political activist. Theo's refusal to help becomes a critique of the social and political apathy in this future (and by extension our present). The population is so overwhelmed by extreme rhetoric, media bombardment on ubiquitous digital screens, and politically motivated violence that it is beaten down by both extremes into a state of ambivalence and resignation, rather than engagement and action. Later in the film, when Theo asks his cousin (a government official who hordes masterworks of art) how he manages navigating the inevitability of the future, his response is disheartening: 'I just don't think about it, Theo.'

As they part, Julian offers an apt audio analogy to describe Theo's existential predicament, 'You know that ringing in your ears? That eeeee ... that's the sound of the ear cells dying like a swan song. Once it's gone, you'll never hear that frequency again. Enjoy it while it lasts.' As the camera pulls back into a long

shot on the figure of Julian, isolated in a vast empty space (symbolic of an emptying world), her voice is heavily processed with reverberation to further emphasize the temporary nature of all things from cells to civilizations. In her article 'Sound Effects – Strategies for Sound Effects in Film', Barbara Flueckiger notes that 'reverberation' often functions as a 'means of subjective transformation', in order to 'express the mental state of the characters' in a film as well as to punctuate a recurrent theme or understanding (2009, 174). The moment resonates within Theo on both the personal and political levels. Later, we discover that Theo's decline and waning connection to Julian can be traced to the death of their son, Dylan, who was a victim of a previous global pandemic. This loss shifted Theo's capacity for hope, bringing to the character level, what the entire population is feeling in a world without children. Julian is offering him a choice, a means of reclaiming a lost piece of himself and his past.

Variations of the ringing and the accompanying signal processing recur at subsequent moments in the narrative in order to foster an evolving connection between Theo and Julian. After Theo secures the transit papers, he and Julian weave their way through the city, arguing about the grief associated with their loss. The leitmotif of ringing suggests a possible rekindling of their romantic relationship, though this is destabilized somewhat by the origin of the ringing, which as previously noted finds its roots in explosive violence. On the stairs leading to an overpass, Julian calls down to Theo, directing him upward. The visual design and blocking become important as she beacons him upward, out of the despair associated with the past in order to renew his sense of purpose. As he ascends the stairs, the ringing begins and ascends in pitch, and abates after they kiss.⁶ Within this diegetic context, the metal-on-metal sound effects imply train and traffic movements below, but this 'found sound' also resonates thematically. The fundamental task for Theo in the narrative is to insure safe transportation. It is important to note that in terms of genre categorization, this film is also a road movie, a genre in which the journey (a process of education or enlightenment, which in this case is specifically related to Theo's own transformation) is typically as important as the outcome or the arrival at the final destination. As this scene proceeds, the transportation sounds transform from coarse ringing and scraping to pleasing tones through subtle sound filtering in order to suggest a transcendent musicality. We must crane our ears slightly to hear the ringing as a kind of divine choir, which is later picked up as a motif in the music score by John Tavener. This sound design strategy suggests that Theo will not simply undergo a change in geographic location, but also in his spiritual and ideological sense of purpose. Again, there is a duality in motivation of the sound design within this generic context.⁷

Ringling and peril: from the personal to the political

The resolution to the ringing between Julian and Theo, however, ends in tragedy. As Luke (Chiwetel Ejiofor), Julian, Miriam (Pam Ferris), Kee and Theo drive

toward the coast to their meeting with 'The Human Project' scientists, they are ambushed. The car's warning alarm (a variant of the ringing leitmotif) and a blinking digital graphic on the windshield serve to activate the sense of peril. Barbara Flueckiger notes that 'alarm signals' are often 'an indispensable means of raising the emotional stakes' in a contemporary film, referencing a long history of 'warnings of danger' (gongs, bells, sirens and horns) meant to relay messages of peril over long distances (2009, 158). *Children of Men* is replete with the sound of bells. For example, the various media broadcasts (many with dire pronouncement) begin with the tolling of Big Ben, and the sound is layered with low frequency effects, which serves to underscore a sense of dread like an approaching thunderstorm.⁸

When a bullet is fired into the car, Julian is critically wounded. The sound of the gunshot and the impact of the blast mute the soundtrack and reactivate the ringing. The circular camera movements and long take complicate the notion of point of audition by conjoining the act of listening between Theo and Julian. The dialogue, sound effects of the car engine and the shattering windshield are all dampened beneath the ringing as the camera whips from between the characters. Michel Chion defines 'co-audition' in cinema as an act of listening, which is 'shared (whether consciously or not) by two characters' (2009, 472). But within this science fiction context, the strategy is complicated by the use of audio filters, which remove the high-end frequencies and foster meanings that are more complex and thematic in their intents. For Theo, the ringing effect reactivates his trauma through yet another loss. For Julian, it represents the final decay of frequencies and the loss of the ability to hear as she is dying. In this instance, the sound dampening becomes a kind of sonic shock absorber for the filmgoer. The withholding of the fully detailed sound effects serves to distance the listener from the chaos of the scene, while paradoxically tethering them to characters that are providing the 'point of audition'. This sound strategy activates an emotive effect of claustrophobia as well as a kind of subjective containment, which is filled with Theo's shock and despair and equally Julian's fears of death. This visual style supports this approach through the circular camera movement, actor blocking and set design, the confined setting of the interior of a moving vehicle.

The murder of Julian is shocking, not only within the narrative, but in terms of the conventions of contemporary science fiction film. Much like the death of Marion Crane, Janet Leigh's character in *Psycho* (1960), the demise of Julianne Moore's character in this film destabilizes the narrative unity, particularly in regard to the potential for a romantic subplot, and instead evokes a deepening sense of dread for both Theo and the filmgoers. In defining dread in apocalyptic cinema, Kirsten Moana Thompson notes that existential dread is a unification of 'anxiety' and 'anguish', stemming from a fear of the 'future' and a fear of 'freedom' of choice, particularly related to the idea of absolute choice (2007, 18). With the death of Julian, Theo seems lost in this type of dread – uncertain of his current predicament, disconnected from his past and fearful of what he must do to survive. In addition, his emotional state is layered with paranoia when it is later revealed that

the ambush was orchestrated by Luke to prevent the meeting with the 'Human Project' and to use Kee's child as the catalyst for 'The Uprising' against the government. Luke intended to murder Theo as well. Within the science fiction genre, the dynamic between dystopia and utopia often emerges around ideological or political points of view within a specific personal context or conflict such as the one presented here. Despite the government efforts to shield and even 'gate' in its population from outsiders ('aliens and others'), society breaks down into chaos, which Theo finds himself trapped in. Equally, the anti-government group (presumably working toward its own version of utopia) fares no better, as its leaders are not free from the corrupting influences of power as exemplified by Luke's duplicity. Both extremes lead to disillusionment, violence and ultimately, death. So this leaves Theo in an existential quandary. He is forced to ask: what next?

The evocation of spirits through 'liturgic dialogue' and music

While death shifts the trajectory of the narrative, it does not end the connection shared between Theo and Julian emotionally or sonically; rather, Julian's visual presence in the film is transferred to the newly emergent music track, infusing a spiritual component into the overall sound design.⁹ As Miriam and Kee chant a Hindu prayer 'Shantih, shantih, shantih' (translated as 'peace, peace, peace') over Julian's body, Theo shambles forward into the frame collapsing by a tree. The character blocking creates a deep staged shot, which positions Julian's death both visually and temporally behind him. Theo is overwhelmed by grief, listening to the prayer and last rites.

Vivian Sobchack notes that science fiction films (such as *Planet of the Apes*, *THX 1138* and *Alien*³) are replete with variations of 'liturgic dialogue', which engage 'verbal instances of public worship: invocation, litany, prayer, chant and sacred song', but significantly, this dialogue is 'treated almost as music; its cadences and rhythms are extremely important in creating a sense of the alien' (2001, 197). Cuarón brings the idea 'down to earth' by displacing current liturgical traditions of the world into new and unexpected contexts to create a sense of the 'alien'. Through the use of lyrical and rhythmic 'chanting' in this scene, he passes the sentiments of an Eastern spiritual tradition from the dialogue track to the music track. The influences of Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity are all embodied in the narrative and stylistic design of this *found future*, yet the soundtrack is perhaps most influenced by the Eastern traditions. The character of Miriam (who is situated as a counterculture throwback interested in Eastern mysticism and practice) and the visual design of the film from the very first shot, which featured a motorized rickshaw, have established the context for the sonic mash up of various traditions. Britain's history of colonialism in relation to India also serves to situate the incorporation of Eastern mysticism into the overall fabric of this future.

As Theo struggles to contain his tears, the composition 'Fragments of a Prayer' by John Tavener rises from the bed of the soundtrack to take Julian's

place and carry the travelers on their way. Musically, Tavener is distinguished as a composer for his works that draw upon his background and interests in Orthodox Christianity and later, Eastern religions. According to Cuarón, Tavener's work formulated the temporary tracks utilized during the writing of the film, so the director commissioned a new work for the original score to establish a continuity of tone (*Children of Men film score* 2006). The music reinforces the *found future* aesthetic by combining an accumulation of instrumentations from different spiritual traditions and folding in themes related to loss and the contemporary search for spiritual meaning. In this instance, 'Fragments' is orchestrated with strings and the hum of Tibetan prayer bowls and features the mezzo-soprano voice of Sarah Connolly.¹⁰ The pacing is slow, meditative and sacred. The intent is to create a trancelike immersion to activate a mode of meditation or prayer. For filmgoers, the dislocation punctuates the importance of the mission to restore humanity, and for Theo, the music reflects his grief over losing Julian, but equally points toward the potential for transcendence and hope.

If Julian's presence on the soundtrack is evoked through the music score, the countercultural spirit of Theo's friend Jasper (Michael Cane) resides fully in the British pop songs on the soundtrack. During the development stage of the film, Cuarón wrote the character of Jasper for Michael Cane, who played the part as 'an older John Lennon', matching 'the body language and the nasal voice and cadence' of the former Beatle to create the character (Voynar 2006). The character's presence and Lennon's music offers an additional intertextual connection to the counterculture ideals of the late 1960s. The most important music placement is perhaps Lennon's 'Lucie (Freda Peeple)', which plays just after Theo redirects their journey to a safe haven and introduces Kee and Miriam to his friend Jasper. The original appearance of the song in 1973 on the *Mind Games* album called attention to the protest politics of the Vietnam era, particularly, the lack of control that people seemed to have over government policies related to war and civil liberties, and those sentiments are transferred somewhat into the film with a bit of irony. In a medium shot, Kee reveals her pregnancy to Jasper who is awestruck, and the image jump cuts satirically to an overhead shot of Theo with his sore feet in a ceramic basin of water as he eats food from a bowl with the same graphic pattern on it. The vocals 'Do it, do it, do it, do it, do it, do it now' play over the shot. The lyrics function as a call to political action, but the image of the sore feet presents an ironic take on Theo as an unlikely hero. This scene typifies the way in which the sound designers utilize popular music from the late 1960s throughout the film to engage in 'gallows humor' to represent Theo's wry attitude toward the world in the face of the apocalypse.¹¹

From meditation to mayhem – sounding 'the siege on Bexhill'

Prior to the journey to Bexhill where they are to rendezvous with the 'Human Project', Theo and the women regroup in the seclusion of Jasper's home. The sound design further explores Theo's internal transformation in a seemingly

transitional scene. As Theo hides the getaway car beneath a bed of cut branches, the sound of leaves scratching in the breeze draws Theo's attention and sends the camera tilting upward into the trees. Theo listens to the trunks of the trees creak as they sway in the wind. The camera moves back downward to pick up his footfalls in the undergrowth, mixed with the obedient panting of Jasper's dog. Theo pauses and chuckles to himself recalling the name that Kee proposed for her newborn ('Froley'). The sound of wind and creaking are what Barbara Flueckiger defines as 'territory sounds', which function to locate a character within a geographic space through familiar effects; however, in mainstream films in the sound design era, these sounds have also come to be 'interpreted as elements of a latent subjective transformation, which represent the environment as seen from the perspective of a sensitive character' (2009, 171). For Theo, these sounds foster a kind of Zen-like meditation or awakening to what is truly important in that moment. Unlike the previous forest scene of Julian's burial, the sounds of nature cleanse his soul of grief, and a new prayer is presented – simply the name of the child. The absurdity of the name, spoken into the wind, suggests a delight in the potential for restoration of humanity and a means by which the voices of children can return.

By contrast, the final siege on Bexhill presents a radical shift in the sound design of *Children of Men* by engaging multichannel sound strategies to create a framework of chaos and mortal peril, but at the center of the mayhem, a long absent voice rings out to finally fill the void within Theo. The overall design of the battle brings back all of the previous elements from the ringing to the musical score by John Tavener, and unifies these elements through long camera takes and choreography of the dramatic action in real time.

In the final attempt to reach the boat that will take them to the rendezvous, Kee, Theo and their guide pass through a long tunnel, which functions symbolically and literally as a passage into the darkness of violence and war, which characterizes this dystopic future. The music score bristles with violin quavers, which are punctuated with tonal strikes and plucks. These sonic 'stingers' serve as an 'assault on the audience' to 'unnerve' and offer entry into a state of psychological disorientation, which draws from the conventions of the horror film genre (Hutchings 2009, 223). On the other side of the tunnel, the multichannel sound placement of gunshots and armaments creates a claustrophobic battlefield in which the characters and filmgoers find themselves trapped. The sound design depends heavily on the directional use of sound effects of bullets hitting the ground, buildings and bodies both on- and off-screen as 'The Fishes' are driven back and forth by the government forces. The surround sound devastation presents a sense of chaos through an apocalypse of immersion.

A tank blast into the second floor of the apartment building, where Kee and the baby are being held, causes Theo's ears to ring again. This concussion of violence brings us full circle from the opening explosion of the film, as we once again identify with his *point of audition* amidst the visual chaos.¹² But he is no longer a bystander, having reclaimed his purpose. As Theo searches the building,

despite the ringing, the cries of the child serve as the singular focus of Theo's mission. He locates Kee, as the government forces and Luke exchange gunfire. 'We need him. We need the baby', Luke demands. Theo replies with a new awareness, 'It's a girl, Luke.' The political rhetoric dissipates in light of this understanding, giving Luke pause. However, when Theo attempts to leave with Kee, he is shot, and a substantial explosion wraps them in dust. The fog of dread, however, is dissipated by a *found sound*. The voice of the crying baby rises from the sound design, and a refugee woman sings a lullaby for the baby. This gesture is like a siren's song amidst the gun blasts and breaking of glass and bullet hits. As Kee and Theo descend the stairs, a call goes down the chain of soldiers for a cease in the firing. The single voice of the child provides the apex of the narrative and the sound design. Encoded in the cries of the child are all of the hopes and anxieties of a parent for their child's future, and by extension, for the future for humanity. Within this context, the *found sound* is a spectacle as resonant as any explosion in this heavily layered multichannel sequence.

A sonic flash-forward at the end of the world

Despite a resumption of the battle, Theo, Kee and the baby make their final escape out to sea in a boat. Maritime bells on buoys ring at a distance – reinforcing the connection to funereal rites as they foreshadow Theo's demise from his wound. The music score again revives 'Fragments', and thus Julian's presence is evoked. The family of Julian, Theo and child are brought together in death, as Kee vows to name her child Dylan just as the rescue ship, *Tomorrow*, arrives. The image cuts to black before revealing the title card. While the final images and narrative resolution seem bleak, the sound design offers a counterpoint to this reading. The sound of children's voices over the end credits can be read as a flash-forward, and perhaps the *point of audition* of Theo Faron from the afterlife. Nonetheless, hope can be heard in celebratory voices of children, as they play in this revitalized *found future*.

Notes

1. The concept of the 'found future' is borrowed in part from Vivian Sobchack's *Screening Space*, in which she identifies a trend within low-budget science fiction films to embrace both 'found' sounds (for example, Geiger counter clicks) and 'familiar' landscapes (empty and desolate cities) in order to support science fiction themes such as alienation and isolation (2001, 216).
2. The visual field of these science fiction films is often stylized through technologies used behind the camera, rather than presented in front of it. Specifically, these films employ the use of colored lens filters, rigid framing techniques, limited color palettes, low-cost digital cameras, and special effects hardware and software to create subtle abstractions (such as sepia landscapes or digital artifacts and distortions within the frame) that evoke a *future tense* or a 'near future'.
3. These themes recall the concerns of science fiction films of the 1950s, which were characterized by narratives dealing with paranoia about 'the other' and fears of

colonization and imperialism. But the 'found future' brings them 'down-to-earth' (Sobchack 2001, 301).

4. In regard to the soundtrack, 'apocalyptic dread' is not a sickening surprise of realization through dialogue, like the final revelation in *Planet of the Apes* (1968); rather, in recent films that employ multichannel sound formats, a sustained state of anxiety is often linked to sound strategies such as the use of low frequency effects and unresolved musical progressions like those found in horror films and thrillers such as *The Grudge* (2004) and *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) (Whittington 2010, 13).
5. An evocation of John Donne's poem 'Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation 17' is merited to understand the long-standing symbolism of the ringing associated with funereal bells and mortality in literature and film: 'Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.'
6. The dialogue reverberation also reemerges in this scene to once again give us access to Theo's state of mind, when Theo asks Julian: 'What happens about us?' Julian's response echoes in a way that mocks Theo's own cynicism: 'Theo, come on. You came for the money.' The audio effect and understanding banter further support the recalibration of their relationship.
7. Oscar winner Richard Beggs served as the sound designer and supervising sound editor on this film, as well as *Apocalypse Now* (1980), *Strange Days* (1995) and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), which was directed by Cuarón. The alliance between Cuarón and Beggs has in many respects revitalized sound design in current filmmaking, bridging the gap between the origins of the sound design movement (with its innovations in multitracking, which Beggs helped implement on Francis Ford Coppola's early films) and the new digital sound era (which emphasizes immersive sound techniques) (Pasquariello 1997, 128). In this film, it is the symbolic use of audio effects like ringing that remind us that artistry is in the isolation and attentiveness to sonic details.
8. These low frequency effects utilize the multichannel sound format of Dolby Digital, which allows for the clear separation of sound channels and signals, and they also serve as a foreshadowing of the Bexhill battle, which presents a stylized cacophony of immersive effects that span the dynamic range of the digital format.
9. Up until this point, a traditional orchestral score has been largely absent from the film much like the voices of children. The implication of this omission has been to evoke a future in which a crucial piece of humanity is missing, calling into question the hope for any kind of future. Stylistically, the absence also forces a greater reliance on realism through 'found sounds', a strategy that presents a stark contrast to the religious music that follows.
10. A Tibetan prayer bowl (or singing bowl) creates multi-harmonic frequencies in the form of ringing through the movement of a wooden dowel around the outer edges of the instrument, and is used in ritual Buddhist practice to foster awareness and transformation.
11. In an earlier scene, 'The Court of the Crimson King', the 1969 progressive rock song by King Crimson evokes a sense of courtly grandeur, which is undercut by alternate images of London squalor on an average street vs. the extreme opulence of the 'gated section' of the city where Theo's cousin lives. The audiovisual contrast reveals in a jester-like fashion that class issues still play a role in England even to the very end.
12. This same audio technique is used in *Saving Private Ryan*, during the opening beach attack. Despite the 'shaky camerawork' and disjunctive editing within the sequence, the film utilizes subjective sound (as heard by the Tom Hank's character) to provide a 'consistent frame of reference' to cue the filmgoer to the design of 'filmic space' as well as to provide insights into the character's psychological state (Kerins 2006, 52).

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