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 The Elephant Man's Sound, Tracked

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'*The Elephant Man*'s Sound, Tracked' sets out to investigate the clean-up of a line of dialogue, "I am not an animal, I am a human being, a man, a man", in David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (1980), and explores the possibility of an alternate soundtrack or even picture edit being cut for the film. Through archival research, interviews, close textual analysis, and videographic criticism, I propose that *The Elephant Man* offers a significant case study in critical post-production studies. This Audiovisual Essay concludes with a reflection on a moment in 1980 when the role and term sound designer was just coming in to use - prior to *The Elephant Man* it had been used on *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) - and posits that there were significant tensions during post-production on *The Elephant Man* due to the workflow encompassing both unionised and non-unionised personnel.

The genesis of this audiovisual essay began in 2004/2005 during a period of archival research into *Sound Mountain*, a library that houses Alan Splet and Ann Kroeber's sound effects. [1] As part of my PhD research I visited the *Sound Mountain* archive in Berkeley, California and on my second visit Kroeber gifted me with a 4TB drive of sound effects digitised from the library. In one catalogue for *The Elephant Man*, I discovered location/production sound that was atypical for a sound effects library. This led me to consider what it was doing there and prompted me to pursue a line of enquiry that revealed an unexplored post-production history. For a number of reasons (which are explored in the audiovisual essay) I was unable to track this alternate cut of the film and in 2008 when I was writing up my PhD thesis, it meant that I had to drop this line of investigation.

I began thinking about these issues again in 2015, when I attended the Scholarship in Sound and Moving Image: Workshop in Videographic Criticism at Middlebury College. [2] There, I worked with two films, *The Elephant Man* and *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986). In the first week of this two-week workshop we were set homework exercises, and for the voiceover exercise, I told the story I had learned about *The Elephant Man*. [3] What emerged from this short exercise prompted me to reconsider my earlier research and I began to slowly investigate this abandoned story, whilst getting on with other research projects.

As my ideas for a critical post-production study of *The Elephant Man* germinated, I began to teach and write about *The Elephant Man*. In 2016, I published 'The Labour of Breath: Performing and Designing Breath in Cinema' in a special issue of *Music, Sound and the Moving Image* (*MSMI*) entitled *Breath and the Body of the Voice in Cinema* (which I co-edited with Ian Garwood). [4] Here, alongside an analysis of Philip Kaufman's *Rising Sun* (1993) I considered the breathing performance of John Hurt as John Merrick in *The Elephant Man*. In my article I touch upon the clean-up of the line of dialogue, "I am not an animal…" but I do not go into detail about the absence of a gasp for breath from that line of dialogue, which subsequently became the starting point for this audiovisual essay. The absence of a discussion of this gasp for breath is a consequence of the limitations of writing about sound, it is particularly difficult to write about the absence of a sound when there is no point of comparison. The inherent strength of the audiovisual essay is to be able to focus on a singular object of study and, through repetition, draw attention to that detail or absence.

Following on from my *MSMI* article, I wrote a short pedagogical article, "(Not) Teaching *The Elephant Man*" which was published in *The Cine-Files* in 2017. This article was based on a class I taught in 2015/16 where I asked postgraduate students to replace the soundtrack for a scene from *The Elephant Man* with two new soundtracks, a traditional period soundtrack and one that would represent the sonic style of an auteur. [5] I was interested in teaching production history through practice, but I was also seeking out a hypothetical alternate cut of the soundtrack that I could not access. This teaching exercise nudged me to pursue this post-production story and to see what components of *The Elephant Man* soundtrack I could track down.

Further prompts came when I was invited by Eric Dienstfrey and Katherine Quanz to join them and Julie Hubbert at the 2019 Society for Cinema and Media Studies annual conference on a panel entitled "Disquieting Labor: The Battles of New Hollywood Audio Workers". There I presented a paper "(Re)placing Sound: Postproduction tensions during the making of *The Elephant Man*". The panel's focus on labour issues and the transition to New Hollywood workflows helped me to further formulate some of the issues I was working through within this project. My research raised questions about the nature of studio structures in England, Hollywood and the Bay Area and the tensions that were present when the (new) sound designer credit was introduced within a unionised post-production workflow. In early 2020, I presented a revised version of that paper at the University of St Andrews, and I realised, through the process of putting audiovisual materials together for that presentation, that this research should be presented as a lengthier audiovisual essay.

I took my research back to the classroom and began to make this audiovisual essay whilst teaching an undergraduate class in 2020. I received feedback on a weekly basis from the class as we presented our audiovisual essay homework to each other. Whilst considering a structure for this audiovisual essay I was influenced by the seven-chapter podcast series, *S-Town*. I wanted to present my research in a similar vein, one where the narration weaves between different times to tell a story, this structure reflected my research journey. [6] After I completed a rough draft of the audiovisual essay for my class, I reached out to a number of people to get their feedback. This feedback process has been the most extensive I have received to date and I am indebted to them all for their careful audioviewing of the work, as they each helped to shape and inform further drafts of the audiovisual essay (they are all named and thanked in the closing credits).

I am detailing this 'slow' research process here not to suggest that my audiovisual essay is a translation of the sum of research undertaken and written about in these aforementioned fora, but rather to suggest it is a working through of these ideas afresh or, as Eric Faden posits, to 'suggest possibilities' with the research presented. In 'A manifesto for Critical Media', Faden argues,

The traditional essay is argumentative—thesis, evidence, conclusion. Traditional scholarship aspires to exhaustion, to be the definitive, end-all-be-all, last word on a particular subject. The media stylo, by contrast, suggests possibilities—it is not the end of scholarly inquiry; it is the beginning. It explores and experiments and is designed just as much to inspire as to convince. [7]

This audiovisual essay in many ways feels close to what Faden labelled the media stylo, in that it lays bare gaps in audiovisual evidence, gaps in archival documentation, and gaps in the

memory and/or disclosure of film personnel in order to construct a post-production history that challenges traditional truth claims. It presents the research in the spirit of a beginning, and not just a beginning to this research but as beginning into what John T. Caldwell describes as the "slippery territory" of critical production studies. [8]

Bio
Liz Greene is a Reader in Film and Sonic Arts at Liverpool John Moores University. Her research interests are in film sound, the audiovisual essay, and documentary film. She has published articles and audiovisual essays in a number of journals and edited collections and is the co-editor of *The Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design and Music in Screen Media: Integrated Soundtracks* (2016).

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[1] http://www.soundmountain.com/ (accessed on 29 September 2020).
[2] https://sites.middlebury.edu/videoworkshop/ (accessed on 29 September 2020).
[3] Greene 2015, np. (accessed on 29 September 2020).
[4] Greene 2016, pp.109-134.
[5] Greene 2017, np. (accessed on 29 September 2020).
[6] *S-Town*, https://stownpodcast.org/ (accessed on 29 September 2020).
[7] Faden 2008, np. (accessed on 29 September 2020).
[8] Caldwell 2009, p.172.