

## Silence, Sound, and Music in Anri Sala's Cinematic Works

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**Abstract:** This essay examines the sonic dimension of Anri Sala's cinematic works by drawing on the theoretical framework outlined by Jean-Luc Nancy in his texts on music and image, as well as on Jacques Derrida's texts on Nancy. Based on the case study exploring the cinematic practices of Anri Sala conducted within a research project on the border phenomena between cinematic visual arts and the cinema, this essay argues that Sala's works draw attention to the simultaneous expansion of both – the global sonorous space and the global visual space. To characterize Sala's use of the global sonorous space, specific works are discussed in more detail – "Intervista" (1998), "Dammi i colori" (2003), "Lāk-kat" (2004), "Long Sorrow" (2005), "After Three Minutes" (2007) and "Le Clash" (2010) – where the sonorous materials extend from languages such as Albanian, Wolof, American English, British English, French and German, to different kinds of music such as British punk-rock, jazz improvisations by an American saxophonist and an aria from Giacomo Puccini's opera "Tosca". By analyzing Sala's innovative practices of using silence, sound and music, this essay aims to create an improved theoretical framework for understanding current global artistic practices where the sonorous and the visual influence and shape each other.

**Keywords:** Anri Sala; cinematic works; the global sonorous space; the global visual space; the sonic

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### 1. Introduction

In a survey on Anri Sala covering the years from 1997 till 2005, Mark Godfrey (2006, p. 84) lists alphabetically the countries in which Sala produced his works: Albania, Belgium, Brazil, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Senegal, Serbia, Spain, and the United States (this list does not include countries to which Sala traveled to show his works; both lists of countries only partially overlap in Sala's case). Now, more than six years later, if such lists were prepared, they would include not only more countries but also different places within the countries. At first sight, one might assume that Sala belongs to those artists who make site-specific works; however, the lists of countries to which Sala traveled to show his works and to produce his works differ. Sala's nomadic itineraries do not mark "one place after another," to use the title of Miwon Kwon's book (2002); rather, as Hans Ulrich Obrist puts it, Sala creates "the global out of the local or the local out of the global" (Obrist & Sala, 2006a, p. 129). For example, he shot blank screens in Tirana and Vlora (both in Albania) for *Blindfold* (2002, two video retro projections on suspended Plexiglas), premiered the same year in São Paulo (Brazil), where they were perceived as somewhere to be found in Brazil (Sala in Obrist & Sala, 2006a, p. 129); or he inserted the saxophonist Jemeel Moondoc physically in a Berlin landscape and soundscape by arranging Moondoc's flight from New York to Berlin in order to make *Long Sorrow* (2005), a 16mm film transferred to video.<sup>1</sup>

Kwon proposes three paradigms of site specificity – "phenomenological or experiential; social/institutional; and discursive – in a somewhat chronological manner, [though] there are no discrete separations or neat periodizing breaks between them" (2002, pp. 3-4). She outlines these paradigms "as competing definitions that operate in overlapping ways in past and current site-oriented art" (p. 4). One might assume that the phenomenological or a phenomenological (and both remaining) framework/s is already rather well developed; however, further in her text it is made clear that Kwon uses these paradigms interchangeably with the art-in-public-places model, the art-as-public-spaces approach or model, and the art-in-the-public-interest model (p. 60, and subsequent pages throughout the book) in order to characterize "the roughly 35-year history of the modern public art movement [mainly] in the United States" (p. 60) starting with late 1960s and early 1970s, and her main concern is "the siting of art as a spatio-political problematic" (p. 2). Then it is not surprising that she neither pays attention to the components of the phenomenological paradigm as she names it, nor discusses the main authors of and contributors to this paradigm, mentioning, for example, "Martin Heidegger's phenomenological philosophy on dwelling and place" (p. 158) only in passing, as an author discussed by another author – Lucy Lippard. Kwon's phenomenological paradigm or art-in-public-places model curiously lacks examination of sound or listening phenomena of the siting of art, nor does she analyze specific visual phenomena or experiences of seeing in the siting of

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<sup>1</sup> On making Sala's *Long Sorrow*, see Godfrey, 2006, pp. 95-101.

art. If there is an analysis of some forms of experience, then it concerns social, collective, and political interaction and conditions of experience, whereas Sala's works stand out with their attention to details, be it sound and visual details, and though his works do not lack concern with social, collective, and political interaction and conditions of experience, they lay out quite a specific agenda – that of the crab, as Jacques Rancière (2004) aptly calls it.

If we put aside Kwon's naming of the first trio of paradigms and use only the second naming of the trio as working concepts created in order to describe certain trends and shifts within the given period of time and place and with a specific spatio-political problematic in mind, then her rather influential study shows that first, there is a need for such paradigms or conceptual frameworks, and second, that in order to analyze the present site-oriented art practices these frameworks have to be comparatively complex, since, as she writes in conclusion, "it is not a matter of choosing sides – between models of nomadism and sedentariness, between space and place, between digital interfaces and the handshake" (2002, p. 166). As Sala, who does not choose, but, as Obrist remarks in the passage cited before, creates the global out of the local and vice versa. What this creation means for someone like Sala, who was born and raised in Tirana, Albania, started his art education there, completed it in France – Paris and Tourcoing, now lives and works in Berlin, Germany; who, when writing for himself, "begin[s] in Albanian, continue[s] in English and end[s] up in French" (Sala in Obrist & Sala, 2006a, p. 127)?

In this essay I will examine the ways Sala uses the global sonorous and visual spaces to create his artworks and particularly his cinematic – audiovisual – works. Selected works ranging from Sala's celebrated documentary *Intervista* (1998), shot in Tirana, to *Le Clash* (2010), shot in Bordeaux, will be analyzed. While the geographical location of places chosen for shooting inevitably form the visual fundament for Sala's works, this essay will focus on the sonorous dimensions of the place and the ways the sonorous and the visual influence and shape each other. This essay is based on the case study exploring the cinematic practices of Anri Sala conducted within a research project on the border phenomena between cinematic visual arts and the cinema, and it aims to create an improved theoretical framework for understanding current global artistic practices. This framework will be neither a phenomenological nor the phenomenological framework, be it that of the Husserlian or the first phenomenology, as Don Ihde (2007) names it, or that of the Heideggerian or the second phenomenology (Ihde, 2007), or that of a phenomenology that includes both named; this framework will be situated somewhere between phenomenology and deconstruction however problematic this *and* is, as Christopher Watkin has shown (2009), this framework one might characterize as that outlined by Jean-Luc Nancy and in a constant dialogue with Jacques Derrida.

## 2. Building a Preliminary Framework

In this section the main Nancean concepts used in this essay are discussed. First of all, the fundamental distinction is drawn between *globalization* and *world-forming*. Then, building on this distinction, the notions of the sonorous, the musical, and the creation of a global (world-forming) sonorous space are introduced while juxtaposing the notions of the visual, the pictorial, and the global dissipation of the images.

### 2.1 Globalization vs. World-Forming

The words *global* and *globalization* have steadily entered everyday vocabulary. However, if used as theoretical concepts, what meanings could they entail? In the preface to the English translation of his book *La création du monde ou la mondialisation* translated as *The creation of the world or globalization* (2002/2007a) Nancy (2007) points to the fact that in French there are two different terms *globalisation* and *mondialisation* used, but, translated in English, they lose their differences; even worse, since the term *mondialisation* is untranslatable, the whole field of meaning marked by this term evaporates leaving only that field of meaning marked by the term *globalisation*, both becoming one term translated as *globalization*. Nancy explains:

[T]he connotation of the term *mondialisation* gives it a more concrete tonality than that of *globalisation*, which designates, in French, a more abstract process leading to a more compact result: the 'global' evokes the notion of a totality as a whole, in an indistinct integrality. Thus, there has been in the English *globalization* the idea of an integrated totality . . . while *mondialisation* would rather evoke an expanding process throughout the expanse of the *world* of human beings, cultures, and nations. (2007, pp. 27-28)

Nancy emphasizes that the term *mondialisation* comes imbued with "a real theoretical interest" (2007, p. 28) because of the word's root *world* (French *monde*, Latin *mundus*), thus "keeping the horizon of a *world* as a space of possible

meaning for the whole of human relations (or as a space of possible significance)" (2007, p. 28), whereas the French term *globalisation*, as well as the English term *globalization*, refers to its Latin root *globus* (globe, spherical object) or even *glomus* (ball, – as in *agglomeration*),<sup>2</sup> thus giving an "indication . . . of an enclosure in the undifferentiated sphere of a unitotality" (2007, p. 28). He concludes:

In reality, each of the terms carries with it an interpretation of the process, or a wager on its meaning and future. This also means that it is understandable that *mondialisation* preserves something untranslatable while *globalization* has already translated everything in a global idiom. (2007, p. 28)

Raffoul & Pettigrew (2007), the translators of this Nancy text, suggest rendering the French terms *globalisation* and *mondialisation* as *globalization* and *world-forming* respectively, even if it is not possible always and everywhere, as, for example, their translation of the title shows. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish these two terms and two different fields of meaning they outline. Thus, one has to be careful when referring to "the creation of a global sonorous space or scene," as Charlotte Mandell translates Nancy's "la création d'un espace ou d'une scène sonore mondiale" (see Nancy, 2002/2007b, p. 12, and Nancy, 2002, p. 29 respectively), otherwise the whole distinction between the terms *globalisation* and *mondialisation* becomes senseless, and Nancy's thinking of the latter as *world-creating* or *world-forming* loses its ground swept away by a global tide or idiom, as, for example, in Brian Hulse's abstract for the paper "Of Genre, System, and Process: Music Theory in a 'Global Sonorous Space'": "In an age of instantaneous, world-wide communication, musical systems – from venerable traditions to one-time constructions – coexist in virtual and cyber environments (a 'global sonorous space,' as Jean-Luc Nancy says) accessible anytime and anywhere" (2008, p. 27).<sup>3</sup>

## 2.2 *The Sonorous, the Musical, and the Creation of a Global (World-Forming) Sonorous Space*

Let us look more closely at the passage where Nancy introduces the creation of a global (world-forming) sonorous space or scene. It is comprised of only four sentences (I am omitting the first sentence of the paragraph, which starts as a remark to the previous paragraph on studying the senses and of perceptible qualities), though the third sentence, where the phrase *the creation of a global (world-forming) sonorous space or scene* occurs, is of an extraordinary length.

The difference between cultures, the difference between the arts, and the difference between the senses are the conditions, and not the limitations, of the experience in general, just as the mutual intricacy of these differences is, as well. Even more generally, one could say that *the difference in sense* (in the "perceived" [sensé] sense of the world) *is its condition, that is, the condition of its resonance*. But nothing is more remarkable, in this order of consideration and experience, than the history of music, more than any other artistic technique, in the course of the twentieth century: the internal transformations following Wagner, the increasing importations of references outside of music labeled "classical," the arrival of jazz and its transformations, then that of rock and all its variations up to their present hybridizations with "scholarly" music, and throughout all these phenomena the major transformation of instrumentation, down to the electronic and computer production of sounds and the remodeling of schemes of sonority (timbres, rhythms, notations) which itself is contemporaneous with the creation of a global sonorous space or scene whose extraordinarily mixed nature – popular and refined, religious and profane, old and recent, coming from all continents at once – all that has no real equivalent in other domains. A musical-becoming of sensibility and a global becoming of musicality have occurred, whose historicity remains to be thought about, all the more so since it is contemporaneous with an expansion of the image whose extent does not correspond to equivalent transformations in the perceptible realm. (2002/2007b, pp. 11-12)

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<sup>2</sup> In the following passage Nancy makes the connection between *globus* and *glomus* explicit: "This [urban] network cast upon the planet and already around it, in the orbital band of satellites along with their debris--deforms the *orbis* as much as the *urbs*. The agglomeration invades and erodes what used to be thought of as *globe* and which is nothing more now than its double, *glomus*. In such a *glomus*, we see the conjunction of an indefinite growth of techno-science, of a correlative exponential growth of populations, of a worsening of inequalities of all sorts within these populations – economic, biological and cultural – and of a dissipation of the certainties, images and identities of what the world was with its parts and humanity with its characteristics" (2002/2007a, pp. 33-34).

<sup>3</sup> Hulse also refers to the "global sonorous space" and Nancy in his essay "Thinking Musical Difference: Music Theory as Minor Science" (2010, p.46).

In this passage of closely connected four neighboring sentences Nancy joins together a number of themes important for his thinking, elaborated separately throughout his works. First, in the first two sentences, there is a theme of differences: the difference between the arts, the difference between the cultures, and the difference between the senses. Let us start with the difference between the senses. First, as Watkin summarizes, “the difference between the senses is not totalisable” (2009, p. 186), and secondly, “touch for Nancy is both, one of the senses and also that in terms of which the senses are thought to cohere” (Watkin, 2009, p. 186), but this coherence is “not of inclusion but of spacing and separation, the list and the catalogue” (Watkin, 2009, pp. 186-87). Thus, touch is not only one sense among the others, but first and foremost, “it is or it gives but the general extension and particular extraposition of sensing” (Nancy, 1994/1996, p. 17). Nancy stresses: “Touch *forms one body* with sensing, or it makes of the sensing faculties a body – it is but the *corpus* of the senses” (1994/1996, p. 17). Nancy’s thinking on touch inspired Jacques Derrida to write his own text *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* (2000/2005) and allowed to call Nancy “the greatest thinker about touching of all time” (2000/2005, p. 4), or in order “to avoid sounding pathetic and excessive, even when speaking the truth – precisely for want of tact: not of all time, perhaps, but ever since Aristotle suddenly hit on the manifold aporia of touch” (Derrida, 2000/2005, p. 4).

So, there is the plurality of senses, and difference proliferates. The senses are spaced, and this spacing, this interval is touch. As Nancy puts it:

Difference proliferates not only among the major sensorial registers, but across each of them: color, nuance, paste, brilliance, shadow, surface, mass, perspective, contour, gesture, movement, shock, grain, timbre, rhythm, flavor, odor, dispersion, resonance, trait, duction, diction, articulation, play, cut, length, depth, instant, duration, speed, hardness, thickness, vapor, vibration, cast, emanation, penetration, grazing touch, tension, theme and variation, *et cetera*, that is, multiplied touches *ad infinitum*. (1994/1996, p. 22)

The plurality of the arts, as the plurality of the senses, is based on “the plural itself as principle,” not on “a principle of plurality” (Nancy, 1994/1996, p. 2). Nancy explains that exactly “[t]his plurality breaks down the living unity of perception or action, but it does so in a way opposite to the abstract breakdown into sensations” (1994/1996, p. 21). While there is no simple correlation between the arts and the senses, they are related in meaningful ways. First, the plurality of the arts “isolates what we call *sense*, or a part or a feature of this sense,” and it “forces a sense to touch itself, to be this sense that it is” (Nancy, 1994/1996, p. 21). Secondly, while both the arts and the senses are incommensurable, only the arts “though not themselves languages, are related to each other as languages in that they are both translatable and untranslatable, where the thin thread of translatability is . . . situated . . . between them” (Watkin, 2009, p. 188).<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, Nancy singles out listening, the sonorous and the musical, since “[t]o be listening is always to be on the edge of meaning, . . . as if the sound were precisely nothing else than this edge, this fringe, this margin – at least the sound that is musically listened to” (2002/2007b, p. 7). He continues, explaining that “the sound that is musically listened to” is scrutinized not merely “as an acoustic phenomenon . . . but as a resonant meaning, a meaning whose *sense* is supposed to be found in resonance, and only in resonance (2002/2007b, p. 7). While, as he remarks, the same is true, at least formally, for the visual; thus “to understand a piece of music or a painting is to admit or recognize the uniquely pictorial or uniquely musical meaning;” nevertheless, “[t]he difference is still there, and it is not merely an extrinsic difference of *media*: it is a difference of meaning and in meaning (and we should deploy it for all perceptible registers)” (2002/2007b, p. 70). So, now approaching the last two sentences of the initial quotation in question, it becomes clearer, why Nancy distinguishes the sonorous and the musical, first by outlining the trajectory of the music history of the twentieth century set against the creation of a global (world-forming) sonorous space or scene, and then, in the last sentence, arguing that a musical-becoming of sensibility, “un devenir-musique de la sensibilité” (Nancy, 2002, p. 29), and a global (world-forming) becoming of musicality, “un devenir- mondial de la musicalité” (Nancy, 2002, p. 29), have occurred. However, the same processes have not occurred in the visual realm. Nancy draws attention to “a discrepancy between the sonorous and the visual” (2002/2007b, p. 82), and when we are speaking about a global visual space, about a global expansion of the image, then we are thinking about the processes of globalization, of “dissipation of the certainties, images, and identities” as in a quotation on agglomeration. While “the [technological] mutation of images preserves a general characteristic that I [Nancy] would call, to exaggerate a little, a *picture*, . . . sonorous mutation opens up and hollows out in us and around us

<sup>4</sup> Watkin here makes a reference to the revised and expanded edition of Nancy’s *Les muses* (2001b, p. 166).

new caves where the *musical* loses its “face” (2002/2007b, p. 82), thus, speaking only on the latter, we can say that the dramatic changes in the history of music and sound correspond to “equivalent transformations in the perceptible realm.”

### 3. Analysis of Selected Sala’s Cinematic Works

In an endnote to his essay “How Music Listens to Itself” included in *Listening* (2002/2007b) Nancy emphasizes that “a special exploration would be necessary of the sonorous world of the cinema and of video, in the way that the acoustic and the optical mutually affect each other” (p. 82). While such an exploration or explorations still are awaited, let us examine “the sonorous world” of selected films and videos by Anri Sala, building on the notions and concepts discussed previously. But, before doing this, the issue of specificities, in this case – cinema and video, needs to be addressed. Nancy is careful to separate cinema from video, and the author of this essay keeps this and other separations such as *artists* and *filmmakers*, *artists’ film and video* and *filmmakers’ film and video* at the heart of her research project.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Anri Sala regarding the films and videos selected the term *cinematic works* seemed to be the most appropriate for a number of reasons. First, Sala has made films shot on video such as well-known early works *Intervista* (1998)<sup>6</sup> and *Dammi i colori* (2003),<sup>7</sup> but his most recent film *1395 Days without Red* (2011) is also shot on video. Then, he has made videos shot on films, for example, *Long Sorrow* (2005) is a Super 16mm film transferred to video. Thirdly, Sala seems to be interested in what might be called “a fundamental kinematic theme” (Nancy, 2001a, p. 26): moving through the city in *Intervista* and *Dammi i colori*, moving through the city and music in *Le Clash* (2010) and, more dramatically, “moving through the city [of Sarajevo during the siege 1992-1995] and moving through the music in Maribel’s head” (Sala in Ràdio web MACBA, 2011, of a musician, played by Maribel Verdú) in *1395 Days without Red*.<sup>8</sup> And finally, *Làk–kat* (2004), though the most conforming to the definitions of the term *artists’ video*, centers around what might be called ontological movements caught in languages recognized by Anri Sala himself when traveling.

I move (in matter or mind) when I am not – ontologically – where I am – locally. Motion carries me elsewhere but the *elsewhere* is not given beforehand: my coming will make of it the *there* where I will have to come from *here*. (Nancy, 2001a, p. 28)

Only *After Three Minutes* (2007), a double projection of two videos alongside, stands out of the selected cinematic works as a video or video installation proper, since it not only uses video as a medium but first of all explores the active meaning of the word *video*, “I see” (this active meaning of the word *video* is stressed by Nancy (2001a, p. 42). The analysis of this work is included because of its specific treatment of sound, therefore necessary, as it will be shown, for building a valid conceptual framework.

#### 3.1 The Sonorous Images of Sala’s “*Intervista*,” “*Dammi i colori*,” and “*Làk–kat*”

It was the essay written by Svetlana Boym on Anri Sala (2008) and specifically the part on Sala’s *Intervista* that prompted the author of this essay to look at the conceptual framework closer. She makes references to Derrida’s *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* (2000/2005) twice (p. 46); however, without a single reference to Nancy’s own texts, but instead, when discussing the notion of syncope she turns to the autobiography of Vladimir Nabokov and refers to her own discussion of

<sup>5</sup> On terms *artists’ film* and *artists’ video*; as well as plain *artists*, *film-artists*, *video-artists*, *film-makers*, see Curtis (2007). His research has informed and shaped many research choices made by the author of this essay. Another source that informed and shaped this research is that by Leighton (2008), where the mutual fascination between art and cinema is brought into the focus and the cinematic turn in contemporary art is discussed.

<sup>6</sup> *Intervista* means *interviews* in Albanian.

<sup>7</sup> *Dammi i colori* (in English *Give me the colors* or *Give me the paints!*) is the phrase Mario Cavaradossi, the painter, addresses to the Sacristan in the first act of Puccini’s *Tosca*; this phrase is uttered directly before Cavaradossi’s first aria – *Recondita armonia* (“Hidden Harmony,” or “The Mysterious Similarities of Different Beauties,” as it is translated in the libretto, see Fisher, 2005, p. 48.

<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, it was too late to incorporate the analysis of Sala’s latest film *1395 Days without Red* in this essay; however, where possible, references to this film are made, especially because of its exquisite treatment of silence, sound, and music. This film centers on the Sarajevo Philharmonic Orchestra rehearsing the first movement of Tchaikovsky’s 6th symphony, and a musician who walks through the city and runs through the dangerous crossings on her way to the rehearsal, while humming and rehearsing the music in her head.

this particular text in an earlier book (pp. 48-49);<sup>9</sup> and when discussing “exploration of the sensible” and “interplay of the senses” she refers solely to Jacques Rancière: his *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2000/2004) and his essay on Sala “The political agenda of the crab” (2004) (Boym, 2008, p. 52). While the references to Rancière’s essay on Sala and those essays, where Sala’s works are discussed like in “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community” (2008/2009), are not out of place, particularly valuable because of sharp observations and questions staged; the reference to Rancière’s politics of aesthetics in close proximity to the reference to Derrida or Derrida in dialogue with Nancy without any translation work seems at least problematic if not completely incompatible.

Thus, when Rancière observes that in *Intervista* not only the words read from the lips of Sala’s mother from the 1977 documentary, whose soundtrack is lost, by “the deaf-mutes from an institution . . . are themselves deaf-mute” (2004, p. 75), but also that “the artist-mayor’s lecture” heard “either directly or off-camera” (2004, p. 78) in *Dammi i colori* belongs to “the domain of mute languages” (2004, p. 75), since Rancière defines political artists as those “who are able to stage this tension between the collective feeling anticipated in the forms and the mute apolitical nature of these forms” (2004, p. 80), and points to the fact the “the sound of history always makes itself known through a certain deficiency, a certain sensory gap” (2004, p. 76), can we analyze these gaps using not even Derrida-Nancy’s notions of syncope and touch but merely an 18-word-long quotation from Derrida’s text on Nancy, as Svetlana Boym does (2008, p. 46).

When the soundtrack is missing, do we deal with silent images? Of course, not. As Nancy writes on the spoken text:

[It] calls up, as though from out of itself, the face of its voice, the movement of its lips, the passing glimpse of the inside of the mouth, of the tongue and the teeth, and of the whole articulatory cinema, not to mention of the overall expression of the face. The voice draws the eye. It is always a drawing and pulling: a division of space, an incision, but also a shot taken [*un trait lancé*], a drawing back and letting fly toward the other. (2003/2005, pp. 64-65)

Or on “silent” cinema:

One spoke by way of a text written on panels inserted between the images, after or before the filmed faces pronounced the words. Often one saw these words twice: once as text, in images of writing; once in the movement of the lips, the eyes, the hands, which the actors deliberately drew out in their poses and gestures. (2003/2005, p. 65)

Yes, that particular soundtrack in Sala’s *Intervista* is missing, though the sonorous image is still there – to be seen if not heard. What is missing in both films – in *Intervista* as well as in *Dammi i colori* – and Sala is searching for by moving through the city of Tirana, is not the sonorous or visual images but breath, that ethereal element of film as its medium through which the film “passes, travels, and comes across refracted, realizing itself” (Nancy, 2001a, p. 50). What is missing is exactly that silence “understood as an arrangement of resonance . . . as when in a perfect condition of silence you hear you own body resonate, your own breath, your heart and all its resounding cave” (Nancy, 2002/2007b, p. 21). What Sala finds in both films is rather threatening – not “an opening cut in the world onto this very world” (Nancy, 2001a, pp. 44; 46), but an *imago*, “designated the effigy of the absent, the dead, and, more precisely, the ancestors: the dead from whom we come, the links of the lineage in which each of us is a stitch” (Nancy, 2003/2005, p. 67). At the end of *Intervista*, as Valdet Sala’s last words in this film are spoken, Anri Sala cuts from the close-up of her face to a painting, her portrait, presumably made by him during his art studies in Tirana. While “portraits are the image of the image in general,” as Nancy argues, “[a] portrait touches, or else it is only an identification photo, a descriptive record, not an image” (2003/2005, p. 4). Valdet Sala’s portrait is not an image; it is an *imago*, the effigy of the dead. Or, in *Dammi i colori*, when the title words suddenly in Italian are recited, Sala stops the image of a brightly painted façade in a sequence of a kind of freeze frames. It is not an opening cut in the world onto the world “towards a collectively chosen future through the anticipation of the fields of color” (Rancière, 2004, p. 78) imagined by an artist turned politician, Edi Rama, Sala’s mentor back in the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s and friend, ten years his senior; it is an opening to an operatic set and stage, and to that of a specific opera – Puccini’s *Tosca* (1900), perceived by many of the latter’s contemporaries as “an opera that lacked both a heroic style of music and a heroic plot (or, rather, whose characters

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<sup>9</sup> On the problematic turn from Derrida and Derrida-Nancy to Nabokov and Nabokov-Boym and the implications of such a turn to the analysis of Sala’s works, see Zivitere (2011).

merely feigned heroics)" (Wilson, 2007, p. 82). While the link between Sala and Puccini needs to be explored in more detail, especially because Sala also refers to Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* (1904) in his *Five Flutterbyes* (2007/2011), *Dammi i colori* and its *imago* focuses on another link of the lineage in which Sala is "a stitch."<sup>10</sup>

*Làk-kat* (2004), the nine-and-a-half-minute-long video, explores movements of people and the ways these movements reflect in languages, what is translatable and what is untranslatable, the sonorous images of words spoken and words written as subtitles in Wolof, American English in Homi Bhabha's linguistic adaptation, British English in Hywel William's adaptation, and French in Nimrod and Liria Begeja's adaptation (see in Sala, 2005, pp. 136-139). While the word *làk-kat* itself in American English means *gibberish*, and in British English – *outlandish* (Sala, 2006, p.138), Sala in an interview explains that it denotes a person "whose native tongue is different from the language of the place where he is" (Sala in Obrist & Sala, 2006a, p. 135), in this case Sala himself in Senegal, where the video was made, but it also denotes Sala in Paris, Berlin, and in all other places outside Albania, where he lives and works. Even if the main processes behind the language transformations explored in *Làk-kat* were those of colonialism and globalization resulting in irretrievable loss, like the words in Wolof for colors "like green, blue or yellow that all have gone missing and are based on French now" (Sala in Obrist & Sala, 2006a, p. 135), it is possible to try to make sense of what is still there by maintaining a reference to the world's horizon, "the world of the destination," as Sala says (Obrist & Sala, 2006a, p. 135), a space of significations or of possible significance, for example, when Sala chooses to pay attention to "a rich vocabulary [in Wolof] for the shades between white and black in terms of skin, but also in terms of light or context" (Sala in Obrist & Sala, 2006a, p. 135).

### 3.2 Music and the Musical in Sala's "Long Sorrow," "After Three Minutes," and "Le Clash"

*Long Sorrow* (2005) is a film proper: it was shot in Super 16mm film, as Michael Fried estimates, "perhaps five hours of film in ten-minute reels over five days," with the sound "recorded separately but in real time" (2011, p. 43). Nancy speaks of "a luminous materiality" of the film in general, calling it *ethereal*, because it "brings to mind the ether believed to be, until the end of the nineteenth century, the medium of light or the element carrying it" (2001a, p. 48). Sala's *Long Sorrow* seems to be *ethereal* par excellence: in the few opening minutes "a movie camera located in a bare room of an apartment [high above the ground – later we learn that it is situated on the eighteenth floor] advances slowly toward a window" (Fried, 2011, p. 32), partly opened horizontally, where an object just outside the window is seen, "until we realize . . . that it is the head seen behind, of a musician playing a saxophone, and that musician has somehow been suspended outside the window" (Fried, 2011, p. 33).<sup>11</sup> While we hear the saxophone playing from the outset of the film, only when the scene shifts from interior to exterior at about six minutes do we first see, at the bottom of the frame, the head of the musician – Jemeel Moondoc – in profile. But not only was Moondoc improvising in this "extreme vertigo situation" (Sala in Obrist & Sala, 2006b, p. 27), literally suspended in the air, but also the shooting team worked suspended in the air. Even more, the whole idea of making this film is about the air becoming sounds becoming music. Sala explains:

I'm interested in sounds as they become music. . . . It's never music as a final product, finished and available, that interests me, but music while it becomes, captured on the fly. . . . What interests me is this matter of air that becomes music. (In Obrist & Sala, 2006b, p. 21)

This excerpt shows also why Sala needed Moondoc, who was "required to improvise on the saxophone in response to his surroundings" (Fried, 2011, p. 43) and who was able to do this. Moondoc not only plays his instrument, he uses his voice as another instrument for improvisation as well shifting back and forth between saxophone and voice, listening to music played while listening and responding to sounds and noises around: traffic noises, children's voices, church bells ringing – "at once confirming and filling out our sense of his relation to his situation" (Fried, 2011, p. 34).

Nancy argues that "the ethereal element of film is four-dimensional: the equilibrium of light happens at the heart of a space to which the time of this equilibrium also belongs" (2001a, p. 48). In Sala's *Long Sorrow* we literally see how light, air, breath become the film's media, the ways that fragile equilibrium is established at the heart of a space.

<sup>10</sup> Sala's *Dammi i colori*, as well as a discussion with participation of Anri Sala and Edi Rama on their collaboration on this and other projects, can be seen at the Tate Channel (2009).

<sup>11</sup> See close description and discussion of Sala's *Long Sorrow* in Fried (2011, pp. 32-49) as well as the work itself on the DVD accompanying the book.

While *Long Sorrow* is a film on sounds as they become music or as air becomes music, *Le Clash* (2010) is a video about memories of music once played in a building – once an important venue for punk and rock music in Bordeaux, France, now abandoned because of the presence of asbestos; about memories of a British punk-rock band *The Clash* – once popular but now non-existent; and about memories of their song *Should I Stay or Should I Go*. Since *The Clash* had been playing in Bordeaux Sala decided to produce two versions of the song mentioned – one for a barrel organ and another for a music box hidden inside a shoebox – and use the abandoned building not only as an architectural decoration but also as an amplifier for music playing outside the building by installing a microphone and antenna inside it, the building itself thus becoming a sound instrument or “a musical instrument,” as Obrist names it (in Obrist, Deleu, Kaijima, Sala, & Willats, 2011).

And yet, two pieces could not be more different than *Long Sorrow* and *Le Clash* are: the former with its light, air, breath, a musician suspended listening to music playing and the world around him, the latter with its bricked-up building, a barrel organ and a music box with their preset tunes available any time and any place simply by turning a handle, “absorption in vision” (Nancy, 2003/2005, p. 74); the former – the film, the latter – the video.

While the last work to be discussed is also a video, *After Three Minutes* (2007), it is an unusual one. In 2004, in Paris,

Sala made a silent video of a cymbal . . . being struck continually from beneath . . . while being lit up by strobe lights firing at rate of approximately 90 flashes per second. Because camera filmed at twenty-five frames per second, what the viewer sees is a markedly discontinuous sequence of images. . . . One’s first impression is that the video is black-and-white but then one becomes aware of brief bursts of color. . . . All this goes for exactly three minutes, [hence] its title, *Three Minutes*. . . . The video ends with an extremely brief “still” . . . of the cymbal at rest. (Fried, 2008, p. 75)<sup>12</sup>

In 2007, being invited to participate in a group exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin, Sala, “before the exhibition opened, projected *Three Minutes* on a gallery wall and then re-filmed it using two security cameras that took two photographs per second instead of original twenty-five” (Fried, 2008, p. 77). He also inserted in a few stills “a large floppy doll . . . propped up in a sitting position against the opposite wall” (Fried, 2008, p. 77). The final work, *After Three Minutes*, “consists in the double projection of the two videos alongside and synchronized with one another, the original at the left and the new, slightly larger one on the right” (Fried, 2008, p. 77). *After Three Minutes* is “completely silent, a fact that one registers with special force because of what one is aware must be the noise made by the struck cymbal” (Fried, 2008, p. 86).

Entering the exhibition room, where Sala’s *After Three Minutes* is showcased, what is it that the viewer sees? Michael Fried describes his experience of viewing as follows: “I haven’t the least impulse to tear my eyes away from it even for a second.” And then asks: “But what exactly does “it” refer to in this statement?” (2008, p. 85).

Fried explains this “it” by evoking the notion of Lessing’s *pregnant moment*, the notion of *strikingness* found in the works of Manet, Barthes’s *pose* in photography, and his own notion of *presentness* in art. However, as Fried in the end of his essay acknowledges, these notions only partly explains this “it” since none of them pays attention to the issue of the sound. To suggest that in Sala’s *After Three Minutes* what we are seeing is sound itself is, of course, exaggeration, but it seems that that place in Nancy’s *Listening*, where he discusses the image of Titian’s painting of Venus listening to an organ-player, and as a reply to this painting, then cuts to Wagner’s Tristan in the instant when “he cries out: *What, am I hearing light?* – before he dies” (2002/2007b, p. 46), as the starting point in searching for an answer is more promising. Or, at least, to those places in Nancy’s *Listening*, where he discusses the *sonorous presence*.

#### 4. A Few Concluding Remarks

On silence: First, as the analysis has shown, it is not enough simply to stress “that another dimension of his [Sala’s] project in these works [from *Intervista* until the very recent] has been to motivate a silence that amounts far more than simply the absence of noise,” as Fried does (2011, p. 66). During this essay we have encountered at least three qualitatively different meanings of the word *silence*, which do not add up to one dimension: “silent” images, when the soundtrack is missing, as in *Intervista*; silence as an arrangement of resonance, that condition of silence, when Moondoc,

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Fried’s 2008 essay on Sala’s *After Three Minutes* is in effect subsumed in the first chapter of his book *Four Honest Outlaws* (2011, pp. 50-66).



suspended in the air, hears his own body resonate, his own breath, in those fleeting moments before it becomes sounds becoming music; and a double projection of two videos alongside in *After Three Minutes*, with no sound, i.e., literally, silent.

While the absence of soundtrack prompted to question the sonorous images of spoken words in *Intervista* and *Dammi i colori*, it was in *Làk-kat*, where the sounds and meanings of words spoken in four languages are explored as both: the sonorous images uttered, i.e., heard and seen in movements of lips; and the visual images of meanings translated and untranslatable seen as written subtitles on the screen. But only in *Long Sorrow*, with its sounds caught in the air between silence and music, is it revealed what Nancean *to be listening as to be on the edge of meaning* could mean; the sound as the edge, the fringe, the margin; the sound that is *musically* listened to. It is here, where we witness Moondoc musically listening to not only the sounds he produces, but the sounds – acoustic phenomena – and endowing them with meaning, a resonant meaning, whose sense is found in the resonance of his whole body – not in responses of his saxophone, or his voice improvisations. While at first glance, the situations of *Long Sorrow* and *Le Clash* seem to be at least partially similar – the outside of a building, a musical idea to be explored – a closer analysis reveals not only the difference caused by the media used but how incompatible they both are. While the differences between *Intervista*, *Dammi i colori*, *Làk-kat*, and *Long Sorrow* could be partially explained with Nancean internal multiplicities of cinematic works – the ways Sala resorts to painting in *Intervista*, architecture in *Dammi i colori*, words in *Làk-kat*, and music or even a *musical-becoming of sensibility* and a *global (world-forming) becoming of musicality* in *Long Sorrow*; the differences between these works and *Le Clash* draw the line where the differences between the arts and inside the arts become untranslatable. However, in order to explore the theme of this essay – silence, sound, and music in Anri Sala's cinematic works – the analysis of *Le Clash* as well as *After Three Minutes* cannot be left outside.

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