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**Abstract:** This article discusses *Avondale Dogs* as a three-dimensional body of resonance. Through an analysis of the soundtrack, the article illustrates how images and sounds resonate with the subjective experience of the boy and an emotional remembrance of a lost but filmic very present childhood.

**Keywords:** Sound, music, vibration, resonance, emotions

**Vibrations and Resonance in *Avondale Dogs***

When asked by Richard Raskin about the limited dialogue in *Avondale Dogs*, the director, Gregor Nicholas, answered as follows:

> I was wanting to tell a story that was dealing with very universal archetypes. And I tried to work with simplicity and clarity. And I did consciously try to let the images speak for themselves and resonate against each other (Raskin 1996).

When I first read this quote after having seen the film a couple of times, it reminded me very strongly of my own experience – particularly the point about how the images resonate against each other. Nicholas uses a metaphor from the acoustic field to describe how the images have a voice of their own, and how they interact. But although this metaphor poetically illustrates the experience of *Avondale Dogs*, it should not be limited to the visual experience of images. Because *Avondale Dogs* does not only generate resonance between the images in what could be referred to as a horizontal or two-dimensional space. It also resonates in a vertical or three-dimensional space when the *soundtrack* is included – voices, music, ambient sound, and sound effects. In this article, I will analyze and discuss *Avondale Dogs* as a three-dimensional body of resonance focusing on the dimension of sound. I will first account for the acoustic terms of “resonance” and “vibration”, and then use them methodologically in an analysis of dominant parts of the soundtrack. Finally, I will discuss vibration and resonance in relation to the emotional experience of the film.
Acoustic resonance and vibration

As a physical phenomenon, resonance refers to the production of a sound as a result of the vibration of another object. It also refers to a more general understanding of the quality of being loud and clear (Cambridge Dictionary). To turn vibration into resonance, you need a body of resonance, for instance the hollow form of a violin or a grand piano. The physical shape of a musical instrument ensures that the vibration of the tones gains a certain volume, so they can spread into the surroundings. The human voice resonates as well. It arises from within the body of someone speaking or singing, and is related to the shape of the human body and its internal resonances (Walraven 2013). This means that the form and material of a specific body of resonance – humans, musical instruments – are crucial with regard to the characteristic sound of an instrument or a voice. This is why a violin and a cello sound different, why a wooden flute sounds different from a flute made of metal, and why some voices are deep and others high pitched.

Inspired by the words of Nicholas quoted above, I will argue that a film like *Avondale Dogs* can be seen as a body of resonance, with both images and sound vibrating against each other both synchronically and diachronically.

The vibrating soundtrack of *Avondale Dogs*

Vibration is a key term for the dominant elements of the *Avondale Dogs* soundtrack, and in this article I will focus on the music of Debussy, the chanting car radio, the sound of the cicadas, and the mourning Maori song at the end.

The soundtrack begins with the hissing sound of cicadas during the initial credits. Before the visuals begin, a piano piece is used as a bridge between the outdoor scene and the inside of the house (Shots 2a to 2b). At the same time the music changes to a more distant, fragile and filtered sound, which we later recognize is coming from a portable gramophone in the living room (Shots 3 to 6). The visualization of the sound source changes the experience of the music from being non-diegetic to being diegetic.

As the credits tell us, the piano piece is a prelude by the impressionist composer Claude Debussy (1862-1918) entitled *Danseuses de Delphes*. Impressionistic music is characterized by its dreamy and emotional, minimalistic expression, and by its tendency to make “multiple resonances vibrate” – vibrations with direct access to the listener’s nervous system, as pointed out by Dukas and Pasler in the following quote:
In much of Debussy’s music, as in impressionistic pieces by Ravel and others, the composer arrests movement on ninth and other added-note chords not to produce dissonant tension but, as Dukas puts it, to “make multiple resonances vibrate” [...] using a wide range of dynamic and registral sounds – a complete scale of nuances – such music can bring about subtle vibrations in the listener’s nervous system (Pasler, 2008, p. 85, referring to Paul Dukas, *Ecrits sur la musique*, 1948).

Immediately after the piano piece stops, another profound sound element in the film takes over. It is the monotonous radio sound coming from the taxi which Paul’s father is washing outside their house. There is a continuous stream of monotonous chanting, which sounds like a commentator of a horse or a dog race. This shift between piano music and sports radio also marks a shift between the indoor feminine space of the mother and Glenys (Shots 2 to 6), and the outdoor masculine space with the father and the two boys with their toy guns (Shots 7 to 12). When Paul returns to the house, we also return to the sound of a piano, now played by Glenys.

In the scene where the boys are shooting at the pigeons from the cornfield, the intense trembling sound of cicadas from the opening of the film returns. When the air rifle is handed to Paul he glances at his father, and the sound of the car radio is added to the soundtrack (Shots 26 and 27). And while Paul is aiming at the pigeons on the roof, the monotonous voice of the commentator is intensified in both pitch and speed, as if it were heading towards the climax of a race. The car radio fades out and only the sound of cicadas and pigeons is left. Just before Paul pulls the trigger there is total silence, but after the shot is fired the sound of the cicadas is intensified, creating a tense, vibrating expression, and amplifying the suspense and emotional agitation. The shot accentuates what could be called an aural point of no return in the narrative.

The last vibrating element in the soundtrack that I will present here is the *waiata* sung by the two Maori women at Paul’s mother's funeral. A *waiata* is a Maori song used at memorial ceremonies. The two women sing in unison in a deep register. Their voices tremble as if they are about to cry, and the grainy, powerful singing resonates in their bodies as well as in the listeners. The *waiata* also includes the scene where Paul, attentive of the singing, gives the ring to Glenys (Shot 173-174) This signals a new beginning for Paul, with an intimate
relationship with the girl providing a substitute for his lost mother. The familiar sounds of piano music and radio from the first part of the film do not return, but are instead replaced by the new sounds of the waiata, which intense expressiveness might be unfamiliar to Paul. So the soundtrack also resonates with a narrative of a lost childhood, as well as with the optimistic sign of a new loving powerful relationship.

**Emotional resonance**

The unique flow of vibrant expression created in the interplay between sound and images also has a narrative function in the emotional portrayal and the overall mood in the film. As pointed out by the director in the interview with Raskin:

> One of the things I wanted to do in fact throughout the whole film was try and capture vividly the subjective experience of the boy and try and identify the audience’s emotions with the child and the boy's view of the world. (Raskin, 1996)

I argue that the vibrations and resonance described in the analysis above – however abstract and subjective they are – are the means by which Nicholas achieves the aim described in this quote. And the soundtrack is essential in creating the dense experience of Paul’s view of the world and of his being in it. As the quote from Pasler above also indicates, the vibrations of music (and musical sounds) have an ability to communicate directly with our bodies and emotions (I have theorized elsewhere on the close relationship between music and emotions, see Have 2005 and 2008). The interplay between images and sounds resonates with the subjective experience of the boy and the emotional remembrance of a lost childhood and an intense period of life. And the audiovisual composition of *Avondale Dogs* makes this mental and emotional condition very present for the audiences.

In a short article about *Avondale Dogs* from 1996, B.M. Thomsen concludes that the nerve of the film lies in the mastering of the images. But to me that nerve is only vibrant due to the soundtrack. Referring to the initial quote by Nicholas, the images do not only resonate against each other in *Avondale Dogs*, they also resonate against the elements in the soundtrack, which makes the film a three-dimensional body of emotional resonance.
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