



Tuneless Soloists in Salman Rushdie: Cinema, Sound and Sense

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Abstract

The argument of the paper is that soundscapes in Salman Rushdie invoke an auditory literalism borrowed from cinema. In naming the ambassador in *Shalimar the Clown* after the filmmaker Maximilian Ophuls, Rushdie implicitly acknowledges both ethical as well as aesthetic links between sound and sense. The essay moves away from the usual reading of Rushdie's use of Bollywood film songs as an instance of a post-colonial cosmopolitanism to their use as material signifiers of the corporeal. There is an ethics of sound (captured even in Rushdie's use of a well-known Faiz poem) that challenges the hierarchy of image over sound in literature.

Keywords: Salman Rushdie, cinema, soundscapes, auditory literalism

Gibreel, the tuneless soloist, had been cavorting in moonlight as he sang his impromptu gazal:
The Satanic Verses

In the Salman Rushdie archives in Emory University, ten great films are mentioned on a single typed sheet (dating quite possibly from the time Rushdie had finished a first draft of *The Satanic Verses*, that is in February-March 1988).¹ The list, which includes Fellini's *8½* (1963) and Godard's *Alphaville* (1965), is primarily avant-garde and about cities. The cities in many of the films on the list have a symphonic architecture as music mediates between the mechanical sounds of the city (cars, trains, planes) and the organic sounds of the human world. The films were made in a short period between 1954 and 1965, a period marked by a modernist aesthetic that pushed the European avant-garde (with its surrealist foundations) to the limit. Of these only two films, Akira Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai* (1954) and Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (1955) are non-European/American with only *The Seven Samurai* (and *The Seventh Seal*) located in the distant past. Reference to Rushdie's interest in

¹ Salman Rushdie Papers, Box 22, folder 7, 'The Satanic Verses, Notes, MS and TS [1 of 2],' Subseries 2.1, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library [MARBL], Emory University (hereafter MARBL). The ten films are: *Pather Panchali* (about which Rushdie said in a recent interview [*Emory Quadrangle* (Fall 2010): 13] '*Pather Panchali* [Satyajit Ray, *Song of the Little Road* 1955] is the film that I would choose when asked for the greatest film ever made ... *Citizen Kane* would probably come second'), *The Seven Samurai* (Kurosawa 1954), *The Seventh Seal* (Bergman 1957), *Ashes and Diamonds* (Andrej Wajda 1958), *8½* (Fellini 1963), *L'Avventura* (Antonioni 1960), *Alphaville* (Godard 1965), *Marienbad* (Alain Resnais 1961), *Jules et Jim* (Truffaut 1962), *The Exterminating Angel* (Buñuel 1962). *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles 1941) is not mentioned in this list; its inclusion in the *Emory Quadrangle* interview seems like an afterthought and, effectively, expands Rushdie's list to 11.

modernity's most powerful and pervasive art form, and in cities too,² takes me to the central crux of this paper, which is the persistence of cinematic effects—the moving image as well as the sound track—in Rushdie's novels.

My point of entry is the name Max Ophuls (Maximilian Ophuls, the 'u' without the umlaut) in Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005, hereafter *SC*). Max Ophuls, an ex-American ambassador to India, is dead before the second page of the novel is finished: "the ambassador was slaughtered on her (India, her daughter's) doorstep like a halal chicken dinner, bleeding to death from a deep neck wound caused by a single slash of the assassin's blade" (*SC*: 4). What follows in the next 40 odd pages of the section titled "India" is a long tracking shot that recounts his life during the two days prior to his brutal killing. Why have I used the language of cinema to explain the manner in which the narrative towards his death is recounted? The reason, already foreshadowed, lies in Rushdie's passion for cinema—that great art form of modernity which is narrative created through the moving image as well as sound, both diegetic (human or animal voices and sounds, including music and singing) and non-diegetic (background music and sound, voice over and the like). As already noted, to Rushdie, cinematic techniques are essentially novelistic since for him the camera functions as the character or narrator's point of view ("pee oh vee," as we read in *The Satanic Verses*: 108, hereafter *TSV*) and where the shot (tracking, dolly, crane, shot-reverse, the axial cut and so on) offers the possibility of ironic self-correction.³ So in the case of the first section of *Shalimar the Clown* (note that the novel does not carry a 'Contents' page) the narrative is tracked with an implicit homage to a great director who made films in German, French and in English and after whom the character in the novel is named.

Maximilian Ophüls ('u' with an umlaut), originally Maximilian Oppenheimer, of Jewish heritage, was born in Germany in 1902 and died in Germany in 1957 while working on his French film *The Lovers of Montparnasse*. In America, between 1941 and 1950 (having escaped from Nazi-occupied France) he made four films: *The Exile* (1947), *Letters from an Unknown Woman* (1948), *Caught* (1949) and *The Reckless Moment* (1949). I mention these films so as to 'locate' the name of Rushdie's character, and then move on to a poetics of Salman Rushdie which, for the purposes of this short and theoretically tentative essay, takes me to the links between his novels and sound, including the cinema sound track. And the question we ask once again is, "Why the far too obvious choice of Max Ophuls as a name in a Rushdie novel?"

I turn to a fascinating essay by Daniel Morgan on the aesthetics and ethics of camera movement in Max Ophüls' films. Morgan's argument—using Ophüls as his proof text—is that "camera movements are in some way deeply, perhaps inextricably, interwoven with concerns with ethics ... tracking shots (after Godard) are matters of morality" (Morgan 2011: 128). Aesthetics and ethics in this argument are closely connected. My point, however, is not that Rushdie's novelistic tracking is like Ophüls' extensive use of tracking shots and is primarily a matter "of ethics" (Morgan 2011: 132) but that soundscapes in Rushdie invoke an auditory literalism borrowed from cinema. Naming ambassador Ophuls is both a homage to that form and an acknowledgment of the aesthetic as well as ethical links between form and content. Take sound away from Rushdie, take tracking shots away from his narrative design, and like Ophuls (the character as well as the historical director) he is in agony. There is the oft-quoted doggerel written by the actor James Mason on the set of *Caught* (1949) about Maximilian Ophüls:

² MARBL also carries an interview in which when asked what he would like to come back as, Rushdie replies, "a city."

³ For the relationship between Salman Rushdie and cinema see Mishra (2007 and 2012).

I think I know the reason why
Producers tend to make him cry.
Inevitably they demand
Some stationary set-ups, and
A shot that does not call for tracks
Is agony for poor dear Max
Who, separated from his dolly,
Is wrapped in deepest melancholy.
Once, when they took away his crane,
I thought he'd never smile again (Morgan 2011: 132)

Rushdie requires a similar freedom, the freedom of Ophüls, the use of the crane, the dolly, the track shots to bring image and sound together. Let's turn to the first five lines of *The Satanic Verses* which begins with a crane shot of Gibreel Farishta, 'the tuneless soloist,' singing a 'ghazal.' What is less obvious to a reader is the sense of the sound-track and its sonic visualization. To underline this point let us offer the song in verse:

To be born again
first you have to die.
Ho ji! Ho ji!
To land upon the bosomy earth,
first one needs to fly.
Tat-taa! Taka-thun!
How to ever smile again,
if first you won't cry?
How to win the darling's love, mister,
Without a sigh?
Baba, if you want to get born again ... (TSV: 3)

As a ghazal, that great Indo-Persian lyrical genre with a very precise prosody and restricted subject matter, this is inconsolably mundane, but that is not the aesthetic point. We can, through a little effort, locate enough real Bollywood filmi ghazals which carry the sentiments echoed in the verse: *marnā terī galī mem, jīnā terī galī mem* (to die in your neighbourhood, to live in it), *cal udjā re paṃcī ki ab ye deś huā begānā* (fly away O bird, for this land is now alien), *hain sab se madhur vo gīt jinhe ham dard ke sur mem gātem haim* (our sweetest songs are those that tell/of saddest thought [this straight from Shelley]), *āh lekin kaun samjhe kaun jāne dil kā hāl* (who understands a sigh, who understands the pain of the heart?). What we get is the presence of sounds, of notes that recall any number of songs that Gibreel "only mimed to playback singers" (TSV: 3) in Bollywood movies. It is the sound-track of films, here intradiegetic, that becomes a foundational reference. For Farishta is the delusionary actor too who only mimes songs and voices of others, including those of Angel Gabriel (Gibreel). The song is, however, not disconnected from noise, no Foley art is required for post-production insertion of sonic effects to create a fall to the ground or the voice of the chorus. Gibreel himself breaks the song, first with 'ho ji' (you there, I say, but also the opening strains of the well-known rāga bhairavī in *Baiju Bawra* (1952): *ho jī ho ... tū gaṅgā kī mauj mem*) and then with 'Tat-taa! Taka-thun', a common opening tāl on the tabla, the Indian percussion. And this ends in the onomatopoeic sound of someone falling in Hindi, 'Dharraaamm!' the word itself given in italics.⁴

⁴ A quick look at *Grimus*, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses* throws up many similar sounds: abracadabra (MC: 434; TSV: 353), Abyssinia (G: 28; 'I'll be seein' ya'), acha (MC: 374, TSV: 34), ai (S: 228), ai-a-ai-oo (MC: 104), allakazoo, allakazam (TSV: 334), arré baap (MC: 46), arré baba (MC: 375, 440), baap re (MC: 46), baap re baap (MC: 125, 238; TSV 21), bee-tee-ems (TSV: 139), bustees (TSV: 55),

Struck by their tonality, the sounds function as an earlier bow-wow theory of language when before Saussure the origin of language was in onomatopoeia; dogs barked because ‘bark’ is the sound they made, and so on. The sounds here capture, in some sense, the materiality of the signifier, without the triad of the signifier/signified/concept. As footnote 4 indicates, there is a vast repertoire in Rushdie of onomatopoeic sounds which reinforce the corporeal, the material and the body. Here I wish to highlight only one: ‘abracadabra.’ In *Midnight’s Children* this sound is not an occult Kabbalah sound but captures the motion of trains, becoming its sonic equivalent. Saleem recalls: “and then we were in a third-class railway carriage heading south south south, and in the quinesyllabic monotony of the wheels I heard the secret word: abracadabra abracadabra abracadabra sang the wheels as they bore us back-to-bom” (*MC*: 434). One can hear the symphony of the motion of the train’s wheels, which in cinematic tracking would fuse the ‘real’ sounds of the wheels with their orchestral equivalents.

I began with Farishta’s song; let me proceed with the tracking of another song. One that has been commented upon by almost everyone is Farishta’s ‘O, my shoes are Japanese’, a song which is Farishta’s translation of the “old song into English in semi-conscious deference to the uprushing host-nation” (*TSV*: 5). The translation, re-written as verse, is:

O, my shoes are Japanese,
 These trousers English, if you please.
 On my head, red Russian hat;
 My heart’s Indian for all that.

A post-colonial critical reading would thematize this song along the cosmopolitan lines (or after the narrator’s directive) given in the sententia “deference to the uprushing host-nation”. Farishta, the deracinated Indian, is comfortable with his hybrid self, and symbolically presages a new age of multiple identity formation. What is less often written about is the invocation of another form of narrative assemblage where the sound track is divorced from meaning. In the film from which the song is borrowed—Raj Kapoor’s *Shree 420* (1955)—the song, *merā jūtā hai jāpānī*, is sung by the picaro figure who, en route to Bombay, reads on a road sign ‘Bombay 420’ meaning that the city is 420 miles away. This is an in-house joke—and again commented on by many—but the song itself has nothing to do with either the Indian Penal Code 420 or the traditional account of a picaro figure on the road, a figure going back to the Spanish picaresque novels, although in the verses which follow, verses cast in a comic-parodic mode, the hero’s estrangement from the world is evident enough. So in a sense it is not so much the principle of cultural hybridity, so enthusiastically celebrated in post-colonial criticism, which is addressed here; rather it is a homage to the structural principle of ‘assemblage’, the disjunction between sound and meaning, that informs the Bollywood film.

Further—and if we want to stage the song differently, moving from auditory literalism to instrumental literalism—the rāga in which the original song is composed is rāga bhairavī, the film director and actor Raj Kapoor’s signature rāga in all his films from *Aag* (1948) to *Sangam* (1964). Restated as a rāga, a musical composition, the ideal reader then hears what is called the *pārśva* music, the musical prologue to the song, which in Indian musical notation may be given as *pā, mā, gā* (komal), *mā, pā, mā, gā* (komal), *pā, mā, gā* (komal), *re, mā, gā* (komal), *re, gā* (komal), *mā, gā* (komal), *re, gā* (komal), *mā, gā* (komal), *re, sā*. This analysis, of course, takes us away from both literary and cultural criticism to the function of soundscapes and their tracking in Rushdie and, in this instance, to the use of a quite culture-specific dual invocation which at one level may be thought of as the post-

chamcha (*TSV*), chhi-chhi (*MC*: 309), cho chweet (*MC*: 70), chutter-mutter (*MC*: 436), dugduggee (*MC*: 69, 171), funtoosh (*MC*: 81, *TSV*: 344), gai-wallah (*MC*: 49), teen batti (*MC*: 53) and hundreds more.

colonial genesis of secrecy where the native informant as a writer plays games known only to his or her cultural constituency. Farishta's song has an aesthetic valency that transcends the outwardly political, a deference to the "uprushing host-nation" that necessitates a declaration of cultural cosmopolitanism. In this respect the symphony of sounds articulates not so much self-confidence as a cultural anxiety and unease. The tracking shot in the opening pages of *The Satanic Verses* also involves Saladin Chamcha who, in response to Gibreel Farishta's tuneless song, offers, in a shot-reverse-shot mode, "an old song, too, lyrics by Mr James Thompson, seventeen-hundred to seventeen—forty-eight" (*TSV*: 6). Here, of course, the 'old song' invokes a militaristic temper, the colonized celebrating (without one suspects any ironic intent) a hymn to imperialism. The old song is by James Thompson, Scottish by birth but known best as an English poet and dramatist (1700–48) who wrote *The Seasons* (1726–30). In 1740 he co-wrote (with Daniel Mallet) a masque called *Alfred* which carried a poem celebrating British naval successes by invoking Britain's great Saxon king, Alfred. The lines sung by Saladin Chamcha, "... at Heaven's command, aroooooose from out the aaaazure main ... And guardian aaaaangels sung the strain" are from the poem from the masque now commonly known as '*Rule Britannia!*' The first verse of *Rule Britannia!* reads:

When Britain first, at Heaven's command,
Arose from out the azure main;
This was the charter of the land,
And guardian angels sang this strain:
'Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
Britons never will be slaves.'

The verse soon began to lead a life of its own, separate from the masque and became the jingoistic song of imperial power with changes made to the last two lines to read, "Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves/ Britons never, never, never shall be slaves." The verse has also had a wide provenance in music history with the likes of Handel, Beethoven, Wagner, Johann Strauss and Arthur Sullivan including it in their musical compositions. At this point in the novel, Saladin's "wild recital" of heavy, quasi-militaristic notes competes with Bollywood folk style of 'O, my shoes are Japanese.' Horrified by Saladin's colonial homage to Pax Britannica (that wonderful age of peace for a V. S. Naipaul), Gibreel Farishta "sang louder and louder of Japanese shoes, Russian hats, inviolately subcontinental hearts" (*TSV*: 6). There are no intonational or suprasegmental marks accompanying Farishta's Indian song (the original sung by the master playback singer of sentimental songs, Mukesh). Saladin's vowels, on the other hand, are over extended with a long 'o' and 'a.' Andrew Teverson's observation is to the point here: "Rushdie exploits the plasticity of his language in order to shape and reshape the way we hear it." (2012: 13) The unruly world of sounds, so central to the discourse of poetry and Shakespeare's dramatic verse, received first sonically and only then visually, in the case of the Hindi ghazal (which in fact *merā jūtā hai jāpānī* is not) and the English poem, brings another hermeneutical principle to our understanding of Rushdie. Whereas an ideological reading, quite correctly, would place the two songs in structural opposition to each other—a monological imperialist dogma against post-colonial cosmopolitan dialogism—a turn to tonality captures what may be called a corporeal disconnectedness where the body utters sounds without immediately connecting them to their thematic referents, where one displays, with Jumpy Joshi (borrowing from W. B. Yeats' *The Second Coming*) such "*passionate intensity*" (*TSV*: 277). ("The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity").

It should not surprise us that the central problematic of the novel—demonic sacralisation in Islam, or at least the Prophet's momentary attraction to it—first surfaces as a barely discernible sound: Rekha Merchant (she on the flying Bokhara carpet) cursing in a language Gibreel could not understand, a language of all "harshnesses and sibilance" which

carried the unnerving sound/word “*Al-Lat*” (*TSV*: 8). *Al-Lat*, literally ‘The Goddess’ (cf ‘Allah’ meaning the God), is the great pre-Islamic Arabian mother goddess (whom the Greeks called Lato) representing the Sun. This Arab pagan goddess, a key figure in the censored satanic verses in the *sūra* called ‘The Star’ (*Al-Najm*), surfaces as no more than onomatopoeia, and for the common reader is therefore no different from other unruly sounds, including the songs of Farishta and Saladin. The sound and image are broken apart is how Colin MacCabe (1996) would have read it. Rushdie, taking a page out of Indian music, would see this as variations on a theme/sound, the model for which is the Indian *rāga*, where there is no complete chromatic scale but note positions, each a semitone apart. A *rāga* therefore has a very limited chromatic movement, and never more than three, except in *rāga miyā kī malhār* (the great song *garjat būṃdana barase* in that *rāga* is performed by Ustad Waheed Khan one stormy night in Satyajit Ray’s memorable *Jalsaghar* [*The Music Room* 1958]).

In this short synopsis of a much larger argument about soundscapes and cinematic tracking in Rushdie, let me finish off with two further citations. The first is from Rushdie’s unpublished novel *Madame Rama* (1975; revised 1976).⁵ The novel is a retrospective narrative which ends with the mental disintegration of the eponymous character in a widows’ hostel. Constructing her own recollections in the discourse of exile we hear her pitiful refrain, “So farewell, Kemp’s Corner, goodbye, Flora Fountain,” as she remembers other exiles like Shah Jehan confined to the Red Fort in Agra (222). And then before the end, in a clear homage to Satyajit Ray’s *Pather Panchali* (1955) and also to Raj Kapoor’s *Mera Naam Joker* (‘My name is Joker,’ 1970) both of which have a Peepshow Man, we read passages which need to be quoted in full because they establish intertextual connections with Rushdie’s knowledge of cinema as well as prefigure Lifafa Das’s “dugdugee drum and his voice, ‘Duniya dekho’, see the whole world!” in *Midnight’s Children* (1981, hereafter *MC*): When I was a child, a gypsy-type would come to the gate with a wonderful magic machine. He would set the machine up outside the villa and begin to drum his little *dugdugi* drum. He would chant, very fast, to the rhythm of the *dugdugi*.

Dilli dekho, Dilli dekho, Dilli dekho!

Come see Delhi, come see Delhi, come see Delhi!

Come see come see come see come see come see!

Come see the Taj of Agra,

Come see the Port of Bombay,

Come see Delhi!

Come see come see come see come see come see!

See the whole world, see the whole world, come see Delhi!

Come see the Tower of London,

Come see the Liberty Statue,

Come see Delhi!

Come see come see come see come see come see!

Come see Delhi! Come see!

And sometimes, when I had a bright four-anna *chavanni*, I’d rush out and glue my eyes to the great machine and see ... (227–28)

In *Midnight’s Children* (*MC*: 74–75) Saleem looks down on his parents’ neighbourhood to see children swarming around Lifafa Das with his rattle, his dugdugee drum and his voice, “Dunya dekho,” see the whole world. What follows is the distribution of the song as descriptions of the peepshow, the Taj, Agra and Bombay inside. As in the

⁵ Salman Rushdie Papers, subseries 2.1, box 44, folders 12–14. Folder 12: ‘Madame Rama [Duplicate copy, typescript, August 1975].’ Folders 13–14: ‘Madame Rama, typescript, February 1976,’ MARBL.

earlier *Madame Rama* prototype, sounds are not lost, but are in fact underlined: the lisping midget girl who wants to be the “firht” to see the show, the vernacular words, lifafa, gullies, muhalla, arré, badmaash, and the accusing finger at the lone Hindu peepshow man in a Muslim neighbourhood with the chant “Ra-pist! Ra-pist! Ray-ray-ray-pist!” flung at him. In the latter chant one is at a loss as to which native word for ‘rape/rapist’ they were uttering as in Hindi the word for it, balātkār, is far too Sanskritized. The colloquial word escapes me. The second song cited is a real ghazal (a nazm to be precise) sung by Rekha Merchant (*TSV*: 334–35) and it is a ghazal composed by the great Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911–1984), fondly remembered in Rushdie’s memoir, *Joseph Anton* (2012). The song sung by Rekha Merchant, ‘Do not ask of me, my love ...,’ is one of Faiz’s best-known lyrics which appeared in his first volume of poems *Naqsh-e-faryadi* (‘A Lover’s Complaint,’ 1941). The poem has 20 lines of which the first and last are the same. Rushdie translates lines 1 and 17–20 which, in the original, are:

mujh se pahalī sī mohabbat merī mahbūb na māng ...
ab bhī dilkaś haī terā husn magar kyā kīje
aur bhī du:kh haī zamāne mẽ mohabbat ke sivā
rāhteaur bhī haī vasl kī rāhat ke sivā
mujh se pahalī sī mohabbat merī mahbūb na māng

Rushdie’s translation:

Do not ask of me, my love,
That love I once had for you ...
How lovely you are still, my love,
But I am helpless too;
For the world has other sorrows than love,
And other pleasures too.
Do not ask of me, my love,
That love I once had for you.

On Rushdie’s translation, which is a variant of Mahmood Jamal’s translation,⁶ writes Professor Harish Trivedi (personal correspondence): “It’s a lame and perfunctory translation, I think; no spark in it, no feeling, and those two rhyming ‘too’s are just too bad.” Line 19 is reduced, in translation, to “And other pleasures too” when the full force of the line lies in its reference to the power of love-in-separation, a not uncommon motif in Urdu poetry generally. The poem achieved a wider audience through Noor Jehan’s ‘play-back’ rendition of it (with some variation) in the Pakistani film *Qaidi* (1962).

But what of the frame of reference of Rekha Merchant’s song? Gibreel sits on a bench in a small London park. The memory of Rekha Merchant, his former lover who had thrown herself and her children from a Bombay high rise building, the same Rekha he had seen on the Bokhara carpet as he fell from the exploding plane, uttering the satanic “Al-Lat”, the same Rekha, returns. He walks through the city streets and Rekha’s vision follows him. She is no tuneless soloist as she sings accompanied by a harmonium not only Faiz Ahmed Faiz but also great Bollywood songs. Saladin Chamcha had sung from Raj Kapoor’s social realist *Shree 420* in translation; Rekha sings a song, in the vernacular, from the K. Asif epic *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), the story of Akbar’s son Salim’s (later Jehangir’s) passion for the court dancer-courtesan Anarkali, a much loved and filmed story. Rushdie gives the reader the opening line of the song—“*Pyaar kiya to dar na kya?*”—and its translation too: “why be afraid of love?” Our mental tracking though takes us back to Madhubala’s dance, the only part of the original film shot in colour, where she throws the gauntlet of love at the great

⁶ See acknowledgments to *The Satanic Verses*.

Mughal Emperor Akbar himself. It is a dramatic challenge, a courtesan defying her king as her song reaches the point where it challenges his power: if god alone knows all, why fear his servant even if a king? Any Bollywood buff would know the scene and would be aware of the cinematic tracking at work here. With Gibreel he (for the spectator as voyeur is male) too would understand the power of love: she had asked for “such a little thing, after all” (*TSV*: 334). Rekha sings this “defiant air [aria]” but we are only given the first line of the song. With the Faiz song we get a full verse.

The Faiz song has an important thematic function as well as it leads to the invocation of the name of a poet at the genesis of Islam. The poet’s name is Baal. He is the “precocious polemicist” (*TSV*: 98) we encountered earlier in the novel; he is the troublesome satirist that Mahound fears. He asks the foundational question, “What kind of an idea are you?” (*TSV*: 335), because Rushdie had defined the poet’s role as the person who is asked to “name the unnameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep” (*TSV*: 97). And, continues Rushdie, “if rivers of blood flow from the cuts his verses inflict, then they will nourish him.” The unruly poet also voices, he is heard, he works through an auditory literalism, and it is sound that is feared. Like numbers which for Rushdie are prior to cognition (numbers read us), sounds too need tracking and given felt presence in art.

Poetry, the genre that has to be voiced, sounded, heard, ‘*uvāca*,’ uttered and not just written—poetry informs the tracking that takes place in Rushdie. And this tracking, after Maximilian Ophüls, uses the sound-track of life-worlds extensively. Fiction thus becomes, like cinema, both representation and sound. The image transforms itself into descriptive prose, sound into interference through noise, abracadabra into the motion of a locomotive. For Rushdie, to capture writing as corporeal expression, Saussure has to be transgressed, a bow-wow theory of language, however dated and wrong, foregrounded and through the multiplicity of sounds of people and their cinema, including pre-eminently Bollywood, an aesthetic regime endorsed which would also return us to debates about the ethics of formal experimentation. As Morgan has argued with reference to Ophüls, there may well be an ethics of the sound, of onomatopoeia, of the utterance which requires investigating in the context of the Salman Rushdie corpus. In this argument, the sonic in art (music for instance) not only mediates the organic and the mechanical (the human/animal and the sound of machines) but introduces, after Jacques Rancière (2009:11), a *dissensus*, the placing of different logics on the same stage, “the commensurability of incommensurables,” that cuts across the hierarchy of representation—image over sound—precisely the challenge posed by Max Ophüls’ tracking shots and Rushdie’s visualization of the sonic.

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