EMPAC

BLACKMAIL
Alfred
Hitchcock

ON SCREEN/SOUND
<u>NO.</u> 09

**PICTURE AND
SOUND RUSHES**
Morgan Fisher

THU / FEB 04, 7:00 PM

Rensselaer

ON SCREEN/SOUND

This year-long film series takes a close look at—and listen to—the way film-makers have employed the sonic dimension of their form to complement, challenge, and reconsider our experience of the moving image.

Presenting cinematic performance, artists' moving image, and Hollywood feature films, each *On Screen/Sound* program delves into the relationship between movie sound and image tracks, highlighting some radical examples of the aesthetic power and technical potential of sound in cinema. From musical theater to the music video, experimental shorts to industrially produced features, the series explores the affective and technical relationship between sound and image through the art of Foley, experimental music, found footage, soundtrack imaging, synched, multi-channel, and non-diegetic sound.

ON SCREEN/SOUND IS CO-CURATED BY EMPAC'S VICTORIA BROOKS, CURATOR OF TIME BASED VISUAL ART, AND ARGEO ASCANI, CURATOR OF MUSIC.

ON SCREEN/SOUND: № 09
FEB 04, 7:00 PM

Picture and Sound Rushes (1973)
Morgan Fisher

Blackmail (1929)
Alfred Hitchcock

Approximate runtime: 100 minutes

ON SCREEN/SOUND: № 09

Returning for Spring 2016, the *On Screen/Sound* film series resumes with a pair of films that consider the way that dialogue is dubbed into a film's soundtrack.

Presented as a filmed lecture about sound and image, *Picture and Sound Rushes* by Morgan Fisher disassembles the fixed relationship between spoken word and image to expose new relationships that intrigue, discomfort, and amuse. One of the earliest British "talkie" films, Alfred Hitchcock's *Blackmail* was originally planned as a silent film. After the production studio jumped at the opportunity to include new sound technologies, the thick-accented lead actress needed her lines "dubbed" in real-time by an offstage speaker. Creating a woozy audio effect that complements the film's German-expressionist visual influence, *Blackmail* relentlessly confronts complex issues around assault, murder, and obsession.

BLACKMAIL, ALFRED HITCHCOCK (1929)

FILM NOTES:

Picture and Sound Rushes (1973)
Morgan Fisher
11mins, 16mm, sound
Courtesy of Filmmakers Coop, New York

Morgan Fisher's 1973 short film *Picture and Sound Rushes* looks to the material and technical processes of filmmaking to show how image is usually privileged over sound in commercial cinema. Working in Hollywood in the early part of his career, Fisher closely observed the means of production and hierarchical structures of industrial image making. To attend to what he saw as the privileging of image over sound by film directors—who he observed reviewing the rushes (all the footage shot the previous day) with all their attention to the images rather than listening to the sound recordings— he shot *Picture and Sound Rushes* as a single take lecture-to-camera in order to draw attention to this deficit.

The film is structured in four equal parts to represent four cases of how image and sound can relate to one another in cinema: "synch" (where lips move in synchronization with speech), "MOS" (footage is shot silent and sound is added in post-production), "wild sound" (sound without picture), and finally "null" (a term Fisher used to stand for the case of no picture and no sound in order to complete the categorization). While his lecture continues for the full 11 minutes, he is not the only performer. The sound recordist and camera operator each also perform their work "live" by turning their respective equipment on and off at scheduled moments. The intermittent quality of both image and sound recordings insert their own material character into the film: the chirp of the tape recorder as it is turned on, or a frame or two of film that was overexposed in the shot whilst the camera slowed to stop.

When talking about film history, Fisher makes the claim that "movies in principal were always in sync," even before synchronized sound was technically possible in early cinema. He points toward Edison's conception of movies, which strove to allow for people to be "registered cinematographically with sync sound so that after they died they would appear before us in life."

"Morgan Fisher is based in Los Angeles and Santa Monica, and has been making films since the late 1960s. Fisher studied at Harvard University and UCLA, and started his career as an editor for the commercial film industry before he joined the ranks of the visual avant-garde. Fisher examines and deconstructs his experiences with the narrative of film and the industry, and creates an entirely unique and intimate view of cinema and its physical presentation. Since the late '60s, Morgan Fisher has made films which foreground the industrial basis of all filmmaking, ironically combining narrative and non-narrative forms and underscoring the common ground between the oft-unreconciled poles of the independently produced 'experimental' film and industrially produced commercial product."

— STEVE POLTA, SF CINEMATHEQUE
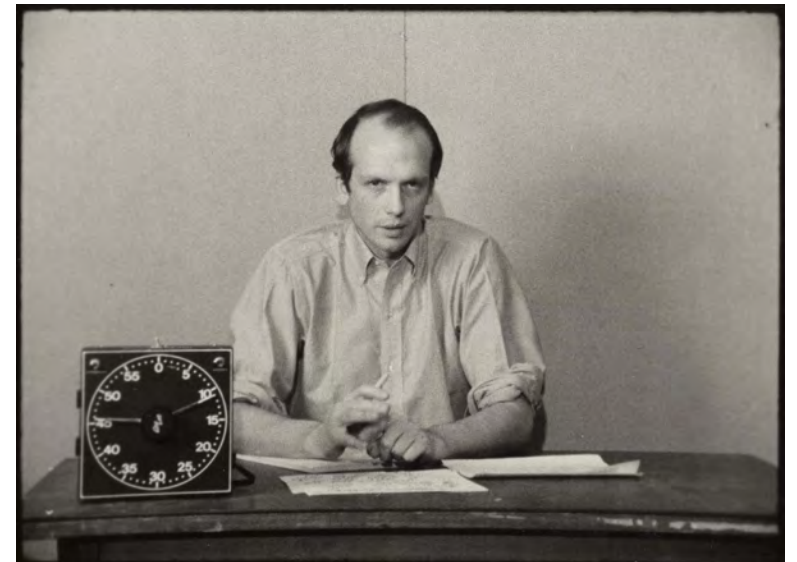
PICTURE AND SOUND RUSHES, MORGAN FISHER (1973) FILM STILL: COURTESY OF FILM-MAKERS' COOP, NEW YORK

Blackmail (1929)
Alfred Hitchcock
85mins, digital projection, sound
Courtesy of Rialto Pictures, New York

"Talkie films," or motion pictures with synchronized sound, were first intro-
duced at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, but it wasn't until almost
25 years later that reliable technology became commercially available.
The Jazz Singer from 1927 is widely credited as the first talkie feature film.

Initially, the European film industry was skeptical of this new-fangled tech-
nology and was hesitant to put any substantial resources behind production.
However, when *The Jazz Singer* debuted in London in September 1928, the
ensuing ticket frenzy quickly changed opinions, and talkie films were
green-lit on a wide scale. This decision by the studio impacted the 29-year-
old Alfred Hitchcock's film *Blackmail* in an historic way.

Filming for *Blackmail* was already underway—about halfway through pro-
duction—when the decision to use sound was handed down from the studio.
This move presented a massive problem in the form of the lead actress,
Anny Ondra. A popular actress in the silent era, Ondra's heavily Czech-
accented English proved to be unintelligible in sound tests. The decision
to overdub her voice with a native English speaker was made. However, as
the sound technology was still in its infancy, it proved impossible to do the
dubbing in post-production. All of it would have to be done in real time.

Imagine the scene: British actress Joan Barry standing just off screen
speaking all the lines as Anny Ondra, the star, attempted to mouth the
words in sync while still physically acting on camera. This explains why the
veteran actress looks so awkward and stiff on screen. Under this perspective,
and in the context of one of the earliest talkie films, Hitchcock's direction—
especially during the "knife" scene—is some of his most brilliant.

In the end, two versions were made—one silent and one with sound—
since not every theater had yet integrated the new technology. Some scenes
were restaged for the talkie version with different actors. The silent version
proved to be a critical and commercial hit, running longer in theaters than
the version with sound.

BLACKMAIL, ALFRED HITCHOCK (1929)

ON SCREEN/SOUND

THU / FEB 04, 7:00 ON SCREEN/SOUND #9

Picture and Sound Rushes / Morgan Fisher

Blackmail / Alfred Hitchcock

THU / FEB 18, 7:00 ON SCREEN/SOUND #10

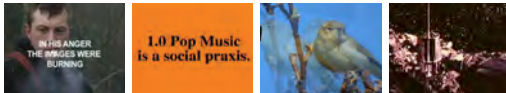*Pierre Vallières* / Joyce Wieland

The Arbor / Clio Barnard

THU / FEB 25, 7:00 ON SCREEN/SOUND #11

It Heat Hit / Laure Prouvost

3# Manifesto A Track #1 / Tony Cokes

Slow Zoom Long Pause / Sara Magenheimer

Der Grosse Verhau (The Big Mess) / Alexander Kluge

THU / MAR 03, 7:00 ON SCREEN/SOUND #12

Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance
  Godfrey Reggio / Music: Philip Glass

What does unstable time even mean?
  Charles Atlas / Music: Eric Holm

Many Thousands Gone / Ephraim Asili / Music: Joe McPhee
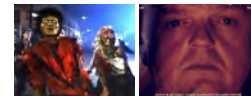
The Deccan Trap / Lucy Raven / Music: Paul Corley

Fade to Slide / Christian Marclay / Music: Bang on a Can All-Stars

THU / MAR 24, 7:00 ON SCREEN/SOUND #13

Thriller / John Landis and Michael Jackson

Berberian Sound Studio / Peter Strickland / Music: Will Slater

THU / APR 08, 7:00 ON SCREEN/SOUND #14

Ornament Sound Experiments / Oskar Fischinger

Study No. 7
  Oskar Fischinger / Music: *Brahms' Hungarian Dance No. 5*

Polka Graph
  Mary Ellen Bute / Music: Shostakovich's Polka
  from *The Age of Gold*

Tarantella
  Mary Ellen Bute / Music: Edwin Gerschefski

Sirens / Ryoichi Kurokawa / Music: Novi_sad

THU / MAY 12, 7:00 ON SCREEN/SOUND #15

Untitled (The Ghost of Modernity)
  Miguel Angel Rios

La Région Centrale / Michael Snow

STAFF

Geoff Abbas / Director for Stage Technologies
Eric Ameres / Senior Research Engineer
Argeo Ascani / Curator, Music
Eileen Baumgartner / Graphic Designer
David Bebb / Senior Systems Administrator
Peter Bellamy / Senior Systems Programmer
Michael Bello / Video Engineer
Victoria Brooks / Curator, Time-Based Visual Arts
Eric Brucker / Lead Video Engineer
Michele Cassaro / Guest Services Coordinator
John Cook / Box Office Manager
David DeLaRosa / Production Technician
Zhenelle Falk / Artist Services Administrator
William Fritz / Master Carpenter
Kimberly Gardner / Manager, Administrative Operations
Johannes Goebel / Director
Ian Hamelin / Project Manager
Katie Hammon / Administrative Specialist
Ryan Jenkins / Senior Event Technician
Shannon Johnson / Design Director
Carl Lewandowski / Production Technician
Eric Chi-Yeh Lin / Lead Stage Technician
Stephen McLaughlin / Senior Event Technician
Josh Potter / Marketing and Communications Manager
Alena Samoray / Event Technician
Candice Sherman / Business Coordinator
Avery Stempel / Front of House Manager
Kim Strosahl / Production Coordinator
Jeffrey Svatek / Audio Engineer
Dan Swalec / Master Electrician
Todd Vos / Lead Audio Engineer
Michael Wells / Production Technician