

From: Chris Toovey <ct2v@hotmail.com>
To: <legart@ozemail.com.au>, <m.leggett@unsw.edu.au>
Date: Tuesday, 10 September 2002 1:29 PM
Subject: Questions about Vistasound

Hello Mike.

I am not sure if you have already received a message from me about your film Vistasound (I just set up my new Optus account and there have been problems with sending you e-mail so I am trying my hotmail).

My name is Chris Toovey, I am a second year student studying 'Material Avant-Garde Cinema' at UWA in Perth. My lecturer is Peter Mudie. I am doing a paper on Vistasound and have had problems finding literature on the film. However I found your e-mail address so I hope you don't mind if I ask you some questions about it. Any info on Vistasound would be good, even if you ignore my questions.

So here are some questions.

One of the ideas I think the film explores is the need for people to transform memories into material objects (such as the Vistasound card and the photos). Am I off the track here or is that valid?

When was the soundtrack made? Before/During/After filming? Any info about the sound would be good as a major part of my paper is about the sound as foundation.

What is the name of the little calculator thingy that makes the tones between the segments?

Could you explain the Cowboys? Are they just there to complement the song?

Is the second version of 'Stairway of Love' (that segues into 'O What a Beautiful Morning') also from a Vistasound?

What are the names of the locations? Do these places have any significance to you?

I have more questions but I don't want to annoy you too much. I will understand if you don't want to discuss a film you made twenty-odd years ago, but any information you could give me, no matter how small or broad, would be greatly appreciated.

My paper is due next Tuesday so any feedback before then (even an e-mail telling me to get lost) would be good.

Thanks for your time,

Chris Toovey

Send and receive Hotmail on your mobile device: Click Here
<<http://g.msn.com/1HM1ENAU/c152??PI=44314>>

From: Mike Leggett <legart@ozemail.com.au>
To: Chris Toovey <ct2v@hotmail.com>
Date: Friday, 13 September 2002 11:32 AM
Subject: Re: Questions about Vistasound

on 10/9/02 1:29 PM, Chris Toovey at ct2v@hotmail.com wrote:

I am not sure if you have already received a message from me about you film Vistasound (I just set up my new Optus account and there have been problems with sending you e-mail so I am trying my Hotmail).

Hi Chris, nope - this is the first I've recieved.....

My name is Chris Toovey, I am a second year student studying 'Material Avant-Garde Cinema' at UWA in Perth. My lecturer is Peter Mudie. I am doing a paper on Vistasound and have had problems finding literature on the film.

That's no surprise! Peter might have written something about it!

However I found your e-mail address so I hope you don't mind if I ask you some questions about it. Any info on Vistasound would be good, even if you ignore my questions.

So here are some questions.

One of the ideas I think the film explores is the need for people to transform memories into material objects (such as the Vistasound card and the photos). Am I off the track here or is that valid?

No, but that's your conclusion..... Making the film came at the end of a period of film-making for me which had interrogated filmic representation and systems of representation quite extensively, in certain instances, to the exclusion of the kinds of associations that we tend to make when encountering visual and sound images, the 'connote'

that so much was written about in 70s theory - have you read your Barthes and Wollen?

I was originally trained as a photographer and I continued to work with it alongside film and video, so the 'static' image came into my work quite a lot, in fact the current interactive multimedia project continues that fascination/obsession.

As for 'memories', that's a very personal and subjective area and I certainly didn't set out to 'invent stories' of a fantastic nature unrelated to the experience of watching the film and attempting to keep abreast of what is occurring in my mind as sound and image changes from moment to moment. The repeated use of an image for instance helps encourage that process of interrogation - what was the circumstance where I saw this image before? How is it different this time? Can I anticipate its return? Etc.

I used to do a lecture presentation Image Con Text (which is now in a video format), before Vistasound was completed, which presented a set of 10 photos, most of which were clearly made at about the end of the 19th Century, four times over. Each time they were seen with a different soundtrack; the first, the ambient sound of the space and any associations the audience wished to make of these 'arbitrary images. The subsequent three different voices 'read into' each image a different circumstance for its making, as each speaker described the circumstances of 'their' connection to each image and the complete set. So it dealt with memory from the four different positions, positing the fifth position, the viewer's.

When was the soundtrack made? Before/During/After filming? Any info about the sound would be good as a major part of my paper is about the sound as foundation.

This was not a film that was clearly conceptualised before I started work on it, (like Shepherd's Bush or the sister film, Friday Fried). It was one of those that clarified itself over several years. The first footage was shot in about 1976 very much in response to the central object, the Vistasound card, which Chris Garratt, a film-maker neighbour of mine in

Devon, England, showed me. The connection between the image and image-of-sound on the card and the image and image-of-sound on the filmstrip was too good an opportunity to pass up! And I think we shot the first few rolls, in the location which was about an hours drive north of where we lived, one Sunday afternoon, with borrowed portable record player!

The sequence with Chris Garratt at the piano, and Paul singing, was shot some time later, probably the following year, probably after looking at the footage we'd shot in Ilfracombe. That was how we got onto 'Oh what a Beautiful Morning, (of course). So that was two bits of sound in the can...

The following year (!) I was invited to run a summer school in, guess where, Oklahoma, USA. (By an American lecturer friend, John Knecht, who happened to be visiting and who who helped shoot the first roll). So of course there had to be a re-run of 'B... Morning!' So that's three bits in the can....

The following year was spent (!) looking at this material and - (here I really should go and find notes and records that are....somewhere around...) - began to devise a way of putting it together.... So in 1979 I then shot what is the opening sequence, (with Jenny Okun, another film-maker, driving the car and watching the clock) this was done more or less as a continuous take with careful choreography of players. In the finished film it's the first time you hear the soundtrack all the way through..... but when we shot it, I had still not come up with a script for the voices.

I think it was the following year that I then wrote the words that would 'play with' the various elements and be delivered by actors who would appear in a variety of settings, which together, (the settings, props and actors), would inhabit a commentary about the activities of looking and hearing.... Of course for this to work for the audience, memory was not only one of the subjects but also the object of activity. (You could say watching the recent feature film, Memento, was a similar experience - except that the subject of the film was a

series of killings, the stuff of melodrama, rather than the self-referential acts of seeing, cognition and placing the film/sound material in (conceptual) relationship.

So the final stage in 1981 of post-production was quite complex, and in fact the chart I used was part of a later exhibition of film-makers work on paper (I think it was called....), but challenging to do because there were countless temptations to make the soundtrack more and more dense with connotations able to affect the three layers of picture track etc etc. The dubbing session (with Aard Wirtz, who does real big features now!) was hilarious because of course, he had to mix according to my audio memory and judgement, and then we'd load up one of the other picture tracks to see if 'the balance' was still true.....

That's putting it very briefly! I guess the short answer to your foundation comment is that it was more like a shale slope with contact mikes hidden in various places!

What is the name of the little calculator thingy that makes the tones between the segments?

That was a birthday present from my sister and cost a small fortune as it was one of the first mass release calculators c. 1974 - it was made by Sinclair I think, the company founded by Oxford dons! I chose that one BECAUSE it could make musical tones, each number on the keyboard being mapped to a tone. The cadenza that emerges in the film starts by reducing the mushy tune Stairway of Love to its numerical (equivalent) values, saving it in the calculator's little memory, and then applying the square root calculation to the series of calculations made each time the button is pressed.

Could you explain the Cowboys? Are they just there to complement the song?

Yup. See above.

Is the second version of 'Stairway of Love' (that segues into 'O What a Beautiful Morning') also from a Vistasound?

No - I can't remember how we ended up including the song from Oklahoma - maybe I DID know that I was going there before shooting the sequence.

What are the names of the locations? Do these places have any significance to you?

See above plus the opening 400 foot roll was shot on the farm where I lived in Devon at that time, the final 400 ft with the actors around Bristol where, by that time, I had moved to...

I have more questions but I don't want to annoy you too much. I will understand if you don't want to discuss a film you made twenty-odd years ago, but any information you could give me, no matter how small or broad, would be greatly appreciated.

That's okay, ask some more and I'll get back to you when I can. This process does encourage me to write down the kind of questions that people want to pursue, and means that I can add them into the database I'm accumulating on past work.

Regards to Peter.

Bests
Mike

From: Chris Toovey <ct2v@hotmail.com>
To: <legart@ozemail.com.au>
Date: Tuesday, 17 September 2002 12:01 PM
Subject: Thanks for info on Vistasound

Hey Mike,

Thankyou for your information on *VISTASOUND*. It was very helpful in that it help me clarify a few things in my mind and provided a context and history to the film. Your response was more than I expected to receive.

VISTASOUND is (for me) one of the more interesting films in this unit. Next week Peter is screening *VISTASOUND* (along with some Sherwin films) so I will be interested to hear what he says about it.

Thanks once again for all your help!

Chris Toovey

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From: Chris Toovey <ct2v@hotmail.com>
To: <legart@ozemail.com.au>
Date: Sunday, 22 September 2002 8:22 PM
Subject: Vistasound Paper

Hey Mike,
Here is a copy of my paper on Vistasound. I turned it in last Tuesday. Hopefully Peter doesn't hate it!

I feel a little embarrassed sending it to you (because its about your film and I used a lot of quotations from our e-mail correspondence) but what the hey, you really did help me a LOT with it. Any feedback would be welcomed (positive or negative).

Thanks for everything,

Chris Toovey

>From: Mike Leggett
>To: Chris Toovey
>Subject: Re: Thanks for info on Vistasound
>Date: Tue, 17 Sep 2002 16:32:12 +1000
>
>on 17/9/02 12:01 PM, Chris Toovey at ct2v@hotmail.com wrote:
>
>
>Thanks once again for all your help!
>
>
>No worries Chris - let me have a copy of the paper when you have completed
>it.
>
>Bests'
>Mike

Send and receive Hotmail on your mobile device: [Click Here](#)