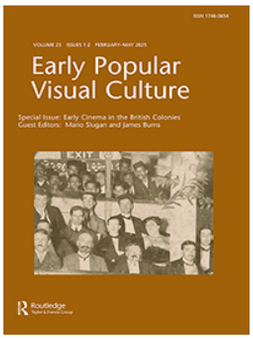

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Killing Kruger with your mouth: sounding images in the South African War

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ABSTRACT

The South African War (1899–1902) was an intensively mediatized confrontation in which the familiar instruments of news and propaganda were joined by a new form of mass media: film. Aided by the rapid technological advancement and a leisure industry of variety and magic lantern shows, contemporary audiences in Britain, South Africa, and elsewhere viewed the war in new and dramatic ways. However, while this explosion in representation is thought of as primarily visual, these experiences were synthesized within larger soundscapes comprising not only 'soundtracks' of both music and sound effects, but (re)mediations of war into popular musico-dramatic performances and concerts designed to have spectacular trans-media effects. This essay traces the sonic representation of the South African War through accounts of film, film sound, and music hall song in Britain and its empire during the period from 1899 to 1902, looking at how the combined use of media created particular effects on audiences half-way across the world. I argue that these practices of hearing war-as-entertainment position the South African War as a key transitional moment in nineteenth- and twentieth-century media. This does not only contribute to the histories of media and of staged performance, but also asks how audiovisual representations of the South African War have shaped the imaging and imagining of war today?

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At the corner of the churchyard just off the market square in my small English town stands a monument in bronze and Portland stone. On its plinth is carved the Horatian motto 'dulce et decorum est pro patria mori' together with the names of thirty-eight men whose deaths are commended to passersby as sweet and fitting. The monument was erected in 1903 in remembrance of local residents who died during the South African War (1899–1902).[1] In its design and sentiment, it is a familiar sight in the United Kingdom: more than 900 memorials related to the South African War were erected in the early part of the twentieth century. Yet despite the lingering physical evidence of this outpouring of commemorative activity, the South African War has been overshadowed in British public memory and in scholarly attention by the conflagration of the world wars that followed it: indeed, the memorial is literally overshadowed by the larger First and Second World Wars memorial occupying the center of the market square.[2] This lack

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of interest stands in sharp contrast, not only to the post-war commemorative activity during the Edwardian period, but also to the responses of the British, South African, and global publics to the war as it was being waged.

The South African War pitted the British Empire against two small independent republics in the interior of what is now South Africa. The Orange Free State, centred on Bloemfontein, and the South African Republic, centred on Pretoria, had been colonized by Dutch-speaking settlers known as Boers, many of whom had trekked into the interior to escape British control after the British annexation of the Cape in 1806. Tensions between the Boers and the British were heightened by the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand area of the South African Republic in 1886 and increasing attempts by the British to exert control over internal affairs of the two republics. On 9 October 1899, the Boer republics issued an ultimatum that British troops be removed from their borders: the war began when the time allotted elapsed without change. What followed was two and half years of struggle, during which 450,000 soldiers from across the British Empire were sent to South Africa to combat forces which numbered less than twenty percent of their total before the Peace of Vereeniging in 1902 formalized the annexation of the two Boer Republics as British colonies.

How then did spectators both back home and around the world engage with the South African War? I have argued previously that the audile techniques evident in first-hand accounts suggest that the South African War can rightly be considered the first sonically modern war (Phillips-Hutton 2025), but here I am primarily interested in how the advent of film in concert with sound shaped broader ideas of war. In this, the South African War has the advantage over its contemporaries the Spanish-American War and the Boxer Rebellion in the sheer quantity of audio and visual material devoted to it. This was an intensely mediatized confrontation, one in which the familiar instruments of news and propaganda (newspaper editorials and reportage, comics, drawings, photographs) were joined by a new form of mass media: film.[3] Events of the war were occasionally captured or (more often) recreated for film and then distributed widely across the globe. With the rapid technological advancement of (semi)portable cameras capable of shooting short moving pictures and the infrastructure necessary to support their showing in locations across the world, audiences were able to view the war in new and dramatic ways.

While this explosion in mass media is normally thought of as being primarily visual, moving pictures were already audiovisual from their inception. They incorporated novel sounds into their presentation and existed in relation to a wider asynchronous soundscape of live music and both mechanical and human noise. The audiovisual nature of war spectatorship is emphasized by the co-presence of older forms, including the widespread translation of news headlines into popular musico-dramatic performances and the promotion of these and other war-related musical events and materials to a wide public in South Africa, the British Empire, and elsewhere. These examples of mass multimedia provide an important and diverse, if often fragmentary, counterpoint of public experience and sentiment to the sombre monumental remains in town squares and churchyards, which make the war seem as remote to our modern mass-media public imagination as those of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries.

Despite this audiovisual richness, comparatively little scholarship has considered the relationship of films and sound from the South African War.[4] This is particularly significant because early films appeared intermingled with other, more apparently

audio formats such as illustrated lectures and music hall acts. Early films from this era do feature in a growing body of writing within the history of cinema, but even within the limited context of media representation, it is as though the allure and durability of images – moving or not – have drowned out their aural counterparts. Key works by Kenneth Morgan (2002), Parsons (2018), Popple (2010), and Toulmin (2006) provide crucial insight into the production and reception of the South African War's visual culture, but they are cursory in their treatment of sound. Conversely, within histories of silent film sound, narratives by Altman (1996), Wierzbicki (2009), and Deaville (2015) focus on periods after the South African War. This is not to say that no one has explored this timeframe. Although limited in scope, Ian Christie's survey of accompaniment practice for early film screenings in London reveals a tantalising glimpse of orchestral accompaniment to films as early as 1896, leading him to suggest that 'rather than ask *if* films were accompanied, it may make more historical sense to ask: why would they *not* be?' (2007, 100)

Whether films had musical 'accompaniment' or not, scholars searching out early filmic soundscapes must attempt to bridge the gaps in the archival record. Yet this is not merely an exercise in recovery: exploring traces of the aural components of the war's mediation alongside the more familiar visual and written components can reveal new facets of historical perception and experience. In this article, I draw on written accounts of audio and visual practices to illuminate how the South African War was represented as an audiovisual phenomenon. I focus on the constellation of war's representations in film, film sound, and music hall song in Britain, and to a lesser extent the British empire, during the period from 1899 to 1902 and argue that practices of hearing war-as-entertainment position the South African War as a key transitional moment in nineteenth- and twentieth-century media. This does not only contribute to the histories of film and of staged performance, but poses a historical question: how have audiovisual performances of the South African War shaped the imaging and imagining of war today?

Media and materials of the South African War

From its beginning, the war in South Africa was the subject of a wide range of commemorative efforts. As Ward Muir humorously put it in the trade paper *The Photogram* of July 1900:

> We've songs about Pretoria (which rhymes with Queen Victoria):
> We've patriotic photo-frames and soap and statuettes;
> For war we are all gluttons e'en to wearing portrait buttons,
> And decking out with tri-colours our harmless household pets;
> But the khaki-covered camera is the latest thing . . . (Muir 1900)

Beyond the weird and wonderful world of 'soap and statuettes' pressed into service for the war, the mediascape of the South African War comprises many different types of media objects. First is the very diverse extant written record from the period. Foremost amongst these records are the newspapers. War reportage was not itself new, but in turn-of-the-century Britain, the recent advent of mass education and literacy generated extraordinary interest in written news from the frontlines which arrived quickly via telegraph and somewhat more slowly via written dispatches from the front. As evidence

of this level of interest, in the summer of 1900, there were fifty-eight newspaper reporters in South Africa: famous names who spent time there during the conflict included Rudyard Kipling, Edgar Wallace, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Leopold Amery, Lady Sarah Wilson, J.A. Hobson, and – of course – Winston Churchill, whose daring escape from Boer capture and trek back to British lines turned him into a celebrity and launched his political career (Jackson 1999, 80–1). That same year, the British tabloid *The Daily Mail*, founded in 1896 and a significant source of war reporting, reached a daily circulation of one million copies. Though both news reports and personal correspondence from the frontlines were heavily censored, back on the British home front, the press provided information and stoked patriotic fervour through written copy (both editorials and reportage), hand-drawn illustrations, and occasional reprints of photographs. When placed alongside published diaries, memoirs, and even novels from the war, these writings provided further information to a keenly interested public in Britain and the Empire, as well as further afield in Europe and North America.[5]

The South African War also saw the advent of a new visual documentation of warfare. For the twenty-first century scholar, the war's visual record is striking and eclectic: in addition to the newspaper illustrations there are comics, hand-coloured slides, and copious photographic records, the latter of which are often the result of amateur photographers wielding folding cameras or the brand-new Kodak Brownie (Morgan 2002, 9). Alongside still photographs, short films taken by professional cameramen on the front lines in South Africa were packaged up and sent to the United Kingdom, across the British Empire, and across the globe as part of an attempt to inform and involve the public (whether pro-Boer or pro-British) in a far-off war in a dusty corner of the world. This makes the South African War one of the earliest wars documented through moving images, and as we shall see, the resulting films served to extend cinematic performance into the territory of both propaganda and news. This offers an opportunity to understand not only how film was used to document the conflict, but how films were then performed and interpreted within a textured mediascape of overlapping, and often complementary, multimedia.

This visual and textual richness continues to provide scholars with a wealth of opportunities for discovery, yet the very abundance of these types of material can obscure our understanding of the ways in which the South African War was experienced through other sensory modes by privileging visual and linguistic engagement. For example, British audiences were treated to large numbers of carnival processions and military tattoos in support of soldiers and war widows during the war years. Yet it is striking that the thoroughly researched article on London carnival processions by Georgiou (2018) makes little mention of sound, though it does mention the processions' visual spectacle as a key part of their appeal. This lacuna is made more evident by examining first-hand accounts in which both soldiers and civilians described their experiences during the war in terms that encompass a wide range of sensory information.[6] When it comes to hearing the South African War, there are the expected discussions of the tumultuous sounds of mechanized warfare, but there are also the multiple ways in which media that modern scholars consume as visual and literary artefacts also had sonic components: for example, telegraph lines hummed and telephones buzzed as news items crossed the African continent and beyond. Moreover, while the advent of mass literacy in Britain and elsewhere mentioned above did encourage a large reading public, that does not suggest

silence. In fact, Pretorius (2017) has revealed that literacy among combatants on both sides of the war was often rather shallow and Brandt's (1913) account shows that in South Africa silent reading had not displaced traditions of reading news and letters aloud in families and communities: something echoed among working-class British soldiers and home spectators. Hints of still other sonic features also can be found in newspapers, which alongside their reportage feature advertisements for lectures, concerts, and other exhibitions about South Africa that promise a deeper knowledge and understanding of the country, its people, and the conflict. Put simply, the written word was also the spoken, and thus heard, word.

Filling in our understanding of how contemporaries experienced the sonic elements of South African War media representations is a form of what Altman has called 'crisis historiography' (2004, 16), but it is more than simply an enrichment of historical understanding. Although aural representations of war varied by time and place, and even though much of the evidence for these aural experiences has been lost, enough remains to suggest that in its audiovisual representation, the South African War offers a key transition point between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If the South African War provided a trial run for the First World War in many of its military strategies, it also allowed the development and perfection of audio and visual technologies: from frontline telephones calling down artillery batteries, allowing generals to coordinate units across fronts hundreds of miles apart, to overcoming the battlefield limitations of new recording technology. Moreover, the deployment of new technologies means that the audio and visual strategies of the war's films and their accompanying 'soundtracks' provide an early example of how later twentieth-century wars would come to be recorded and presented.

Filming the South African War

In the years before the war, South Africa also provided a proving ground for nascent film technology. Writing in 1946, the film scholar Gutsche (1946, 11–13) notes that by April 1895, one of Thomas Edison's Kinetoscopes was exhibiting films in Johannesburg of 'Buffalo Bill' Cody and the Spanish dancer Carmencita to audiences that included President Paul Kruger. A short while later, the town of Durban in Natal cemented its place in audiovisual history as one of the few places to exhibit one of Edison's other inventions, the Kinetophone, which combined moving pictures with a 'score' played on a phonograph – to which the reaction (according to *The Natal Mercury*) consisted in 'only looks of astonishment and brief exclamations of wonder [that] sufficed to convey the pleasure enjoyed' (*The Natal Mercury* 1895, 15). Both the Kinetoscope and Kinetophone were 'peep-show'-type apparatuses, but in May of the next year Carl Hertz oversaw the first projection of moving pictures on a screen in Africa at the Empire Palace of Varieties in Johannesburg – as Parsons (2018, 1) notes, this was just eighteen days after New York City screened its premiere projection. Throughout the 1890s, itinerant showmen (and women, such as the vaudeville actress and dancer Ada Delroy) carried moving pictures to the far corners of the British Cape and Natal colonies and into the South African Republic and Orange Free State.

Once war broke out, film production shifted from civilian entertainment to military matters as independent contractors and journalists were sent by their parent

companies to accompany troops and report from the front lines. From a British perspective, the most important of these operators were R.W. Paul's Animatograph Works, who recruited two members of the British armed forces (Sidney[?] Melsom, C.I.V. and Walter Calverley Beevor, R.A.M.C.)[7] to serve as cameramen; Edgar Hyman, John Benett-Stanford, and Joseph Rosenthal, all employed by the Warwick Trading Company; and William Kennedy-Laurie Dickson of the British Mutoscope and Biograph Company. Prior to the war, Hyman was the only one of these men to be in South Africa, as he was the manager of Johannesburg's Empire Palace of Varieties.[8] He spent the first few months of the war in Cape Town (having left Johannesburg with his company when it became evident war was imminent) but eventually followed the troops to Pretoria in June 1900. Benett-Stanford was possibly the first person to take a successful film during an actual battle in 1898 at Omdurman in Sudan, where he captured the Grenadier Guards fixing bayonets. He arrived in South Africa within weeks of the war's beginning and his earliest known film, *The Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers Digging Entrenchments – The Passing of the Armoured Train*, was filmed on 12 November 1899 (Barnes 1992, 52). In January 1900, Benett-Stanford was replaced by Rosenthal, who filmed the advance of Lord Roberts to Pretoria. Dickson, for his part, arrived in South Africa alongside General Buller in late October 1899; he witnessed the aftermath of the disastrous British loss at Spion Kop in January 1900 and finally left South Africa after the British forces seized Pretoria in June 1900.

Public expectations of the new medium were high. When Dickson set off for South Africa the London magazine *Today* declared that 'The biograph will reveal bravery as no dispatch may do, and will tell the truth in all things, owing neither loyalty to chief nor submission to esprit de corps' (Today 1899, 403). However, most of the war's events are absent from the filmic record. The cameras' simultaneous bulk and delicacy made capturing spontaneous action nearly impossible, while dusty conditions meant that the telephoto lenses that were to have allowed for battle shots taken from a safe distance were inoperable (Dickson [1901] 1995, 75). Throughout the conflict, would-be cinematographers faced difficult travel across large distances in their attempts to document a war that lacked any definitive 'front', a situation that intensified in the two years of guerrilla fighting after the fall of Pretoria. Beyond these specific challenges, films were lost through environmental degradation, deliberate destruction and accident; the contents of any film that was successfully shot and preserved are the combination of the cinematographer's luck, skill, and good relationships with military commanders.[9]

To satisfy public interest in the war, companies such as Edison (USA), Norden/Mitchell & Kenyon, and R. W. Paul (both UK) remedied the lack of dramatic action filmed on location by producing fake footage using actors to recreate imagined South African battlefields in the countryside of New Jersey, Lancashire, and London's environs. These films are more clearly narrative, rather than documentary, and often depict false, but plausible events (such as a Boer soldier throwing a bomb at a Red Cross tent) designed to stir patriotic feeling. Years later in 1936, R. W. Paul would recall:

> Nobody secured pictures of actual fighting, though several operators secured interesting scenes [...] To meet the demand for something more exciting, representations of such

> scenes as the bombardment of Mafeking and the work of nurses on the battlefield were enacted on neighbouring golf links, under the supervision of Sir Robert Ashe, an ex-officer of Rhodes's force. (Paul 1936, 5, repr. Fielding 1967, 46)

Muswell Hill makes an incongruous site for the admixture of calculated fabrication and the concern for military-strategic accuracy indicated by Ashe's guidance, but these films both responded to and drove audience engagement with the war.[10]

Surveying the surviving films, Toulmin (2006) has identified several genres, including soldiers going to and from the front, troop manoeuvres, set pieces showing army life, and images of famous commanders. The historian Elizabeth Strebel has suggested that such films played an important role in projecting an image of the Empire at war for the British on the various home fronts, saying:

> The succession of the various colonial regiments underscored the solidarity of the Empire. The uniforms, generals, the very physical bearing of the men served as an expression of Imperial confidence. Often the camera was positioned close enough to the troops to achieve true portraits, and the Victorian public flocked to the theatres hoping to catch a glimpse of a friend or loved one who had just left for South Africa. (Strebel 1983, 267)

Beyond Britain, films of the war (both actual and staged) featured heavily in British-controlled areas of South Africa and other British possessions as well as being shown widely in the United States and Europe, with some reaching even further into Asia. And while the films themselves were frequently partisan, so too were audiences. Although the Boer forces did not feature cameramen in the same way as the British, they too benefitted from the filmic portrayals. As Bottomore (2007) has shown, reactions to the films – and even the accuracy of their titles and descriptions – was predicated on the attitude of the local audience towards the combatants, with 'Boer fever' evident in the Low Countries, Germany, Russia, and Scandinavia, while opinions in the United States, Canada, and Ireland were more evenly divided.[11] Condon (2011, 96–97) notes Ireland's divided loyalties in that large numbers of the population supported the Boers even as more than 30,000 Irish served in the British military in South Africa.

The image that emerges from films of the South African War is one in which screenings were hosted in a variety of venues including both civic institutions such as town halls (see Toulmin 2010) and entertainment venues such as music halls, theatres, and at fairgrounds (there were as yet no purpose-built cinemas). They showed brief fragments of both fabricated narratives and depictions of real events for months, or even years after the event in question. In some cases, films were presented as news, at others entertainment, and often some combination of the two. Exhibitions were part of a rich tapestry of performance, and both the actualities brought from the front and the reproductions were enormously popular, comprising forty percent of UK film production in 1900 (Maltby 1997, xxxi) and possibly an even higher percentage of all staged entertainment that year. Toulmin (2006, 240–41) notes that between 1900 and 1902 every exhibition in the 120 British towns and cities she surveys listed at least one film related to the South African War. The ideological power and malleability of film combined with its pervasiveness means that film was immediately caught up in a wider discourse about its potential to be a truthful witness to events that took place out of public

sight, if not out of mind. This renders the South African War an early example of a 'media war' in which new technologies were pressed into service of wartime goals.

Sonic cultures

Many of these films can now be viewed via the Library of Congress, the British Film Institute, or streaming sites such as YouTube, while other film reels exist in museum collections. These are largely silent, though at least one compilation of British Pathé footage on YouTube provides the images with a rather tinny-sounding accompaniment of military marches (War Archives 2012). In comparison with these easily accessible visual archives of film clips, there is a paucity of information about the sounds that were present during the recording or may have accompanied the films in their original showings. One reason for this is due to the lack of contemporaneous sound recordings to fill those archives. At the turn of the century, sound recording technology, then usually in the form of the phonograph or gramophone, was not capable of accommodating the movement and disorder of being in the field with the military and so there are no audio recordings of battle or even of troop movements that are analogous to the filmic actualities. Even for reproductions and reenactments where the physical environment was more controlled, capturing ambient sound and linking it to the visual material was not practical.

When viewed in the modern day, the results can be rather uncanny. Take as an example Dickson's silent film 'Battle of Spion Kop: Ambulance Corps crossing the Tugela River' (Dickson 1900). The footage, which lasts just thirty seconds, shows troops on horseback and the ox-drawn wagons of the Ambulance Corps navigating steep slopes to cross the river on an improvised pontoon bridge as the hill of Spion Kop looms in the background. The camera captures the striking landscape in some detail and although it is positioned far enough away from the troops that individuals are not identifiable, it otherwise bears a strong resemblance to Dickson's other films of troop movements. Hence, viewers might fill in the sonic context with the sounds of horses and oxen, the creak of wood, the shouts of men and the tramp of feet.

Yet not all is as it seems, and the film's neutral title and visual content obscure the fact that it was shot in the aftermath of a terrible loss for the British Army. This crossing of the Tugela is a retreat, and the Ambulance Corps are carrying the wounded, dead, and dying – though, like most of the films shot in South Africa, wounded troops are largely absent or hidden within the wagons. One might say that the groans of wounded soldiers hover just out of frame. This sonic discretion generated by technological constraints renders the film open to various interpretations, and indeed propagandistic use (both at the time and now). Dickson's written description of his own experience gives a sense for what is missing from his film: 'On the next rise were cortèges of stretcher-bearers extending over a distance of three or four miles'. He continues, 'It was indescribably ghastly and heart-rending, and made me faint and sick at heart. I witnessed the passing away of two brave souls under fearful agony' (Dickson [1901] 1995, 132). Unlike the films that show troop movements as a projection of imperial military power, then, this records another side of military conflict. Dickson's skilful use of the new media of film preserves

for us a fleeting moment of war that may be perceived as silent yet remains inescapably haunted by the battle's disorienting sonic melee.

The immense popularity and emotional resonance of these films with vast audiences across Britain and the Empire seems incongruent with the short, grainy, and often clearly staged scenes available to the researcher. Approaching silent films solely as moving visual images can obscure contemporary experience, which was mediated through other sensory forms. Even though successful deployment of fully synchronous sound was still decades away, the written evidence from the turn of the century suggests that these silent films were far from silent. As with their contemporaries the magic lantern show (not to mention the related forms of plays, operas, and vaudeville), many films shown in the medium's early days were punctuated by sound effects, accompanied by live and recorded music, recitation or illustrated lectures, or interspersed with other visual material such as still images or slides.[12] A typical example can be found in the programme from the Alhambra Theatre in Brighton in late November 1899, which featured a reading of 'The Absent-Minded Beggar' immediately followed by the singing of 'Rule Britannia', a tableau of images related to the British soldier, and a selection of war pictures that showed elements such as the embarkation of troops and famous figures such as General Buller *(Brighton and Hove Guardian* 1899, 5). Similar shows continued to appear in Brighton throughout 1900 and beyond (Gray et al. 2008). As this suggests, films were an integral part of a larger ecosystem of performance.

But what did these showings actually sound like? Christie (2012, 97–99) has suggested that musical entertainment, comprising well-known songs and suitable descriptive works that function as a kind of source music, was present from the earliest Lumière shows in Paris and London. It became a widely adopted practice in Britain for the most elaborate entertainments from the mid-1890s onwards, and was a significant selling point for cinematic entrepreneurs. One of the most revealing descriptions from the United Kingdom of early film 'soundtracking' comes from 1901, when the magic lanternist T. C. Hepworth (father of early cinematographer Cecil Hepworth) wrote an article for *The Showman* outlining what was appropriate and inappropriate as sonic accompaniment in the theatre. As he writes, films such as 'Boers blowing up a railway' or 'Siege of Ladysmith' are

> Sanguinary and thunderous subjects, and you must not run them through the machine to the strains of 'Where the bee sucks' or 'Auld Robin Gray'. You must have music of a horribly expectant nature, with plenty of bass in it, and you must have the bang of long guns, the pop of the rifle, and the rattle of the Maxim. (Hepworth [1901] 2000, 575)

At times, live music also provided the opportunity for the audience to engage in emotional displays such as singing and other forms of participation. From contemporary accounts, verbal interjection was a regular occurrence throughout. For example, Bottomore (2007, ch. 11, 19) quotes from the German newspaper *Neues Münchener Tagblatt* of 8 December 1899 about the accompaniment to a pro-Boer film: 'Above all it was these freedom fighters, courageous unto death, who elicited really enthusiastic applause, while at the same time the orchestra brought the vivid Transvaal hymn to the performance'. As we have already noted, in Britain, popular songs such as 'Rule Britannia', 'Tommy Atkins', or 'The Soldiers of the Queen' were frequently presented as sing-alongs which reduced the sonic and dramaturgical distance between the audience and subjects.

Moreover, the inclusion of music alongside films was not a strictly metropolitan innovation: one South African touring show known as Perkin's Biograph played alongside the Bijou Orchestra, who provided the sounds of trains and horses, while the rival Wolfram's Bioscope was accompanied by the pianist Charles Hoby (Gutsche 1946, 72–73). In his treatment of early South African film, *Black and White Biograph*, Neil Parsons recounts the story of a performance in early 1899 of a series of films at the home of Paul Kruger, President of the South African Republic, in which Kruger demanded that the 'godless' piano which had been brought in for the music director Dave Foote be removed and replaced by a more 'seemly' organ (2018, 3). Reporting on the same event, Gutsche includes a transcript of the evening's programme, which indicates that the entire evening began with a rhapsody composed by Foote on the Russian romance 'Ochi Chornia' (Очи чёрные [Dark Eyes]) (1946, 48–49). Although no other music is specified on the programme, it is possible – and perhaps even likely – that Foote's organ was required to do double duty for the filmic part of the evening. Evidence such as this suggests that the ideal (if not necessarily the universal practice) was for live music as a descriptive partner and musical frame to moving pictures.

For many elaborate amusements it was not just music that was being coordinated with the visual scenes. Back in Britain, one article-slash-advertisement from November 1899 proclaims of the well-known entertainment *Our Navy*:

> Some of the best subjects are physical exercises (with band accompaniment), cutlass exercises (with audible hits) gun firing, yacht races, etc. All the fakes possible, such as the boom of the guns, the swish of the water, and so on, are realistically manoeuvered behind the scenes. (*Optical Magic Lantern Journal* 1899, 143)

Likewise, in January 1901, the London-based trade paper *The Showman* advocated for 'the banging of a drum to represent the firing of a big gun, or stamping of feet to represent soldiers marching' (*The Showman* 1901, 14). These sound effects would likely have been provided by a 'prop' man (the predecessor of the foley artist) or by musicians, though it is not always clear from these accounts whether the more 'musical' elements played by musicians were positioned alongside or in-between film showings (as Altman [2004] has suggested of the slightly later nickelodeon period in the United States). Nonetheless, it seems clear that there was a significant need for music and sound effects as part of an evening's entertainment. This already well-established craft of sound-effects would continue and be refined over subsequent decades when war was presented over radio and talking pictures.

Even the sounds produced ostensibly in concert with the images were not always welcome, of course. In the same article in which he recommended instrumental accompaniment Hepworth takes the time to warn his readers against following the example of the showman who fired off a dozen blank cartridges in the theatre, thereby 'carrying realism to an absurd pitch' (Hepworth [1901] 2000, 575). Although the unnamed enthusiast defends himself with reference to the effect of 'the smell of powder and the natural haze that ensued' (Hepworth [1901] 2000, 575) from the volley, it seems reasonable to imagine that the sound of the shots would have provided an additional sensorial thrill to his audience.

Moreover, music occasionally had its own role to play in relation to the mechanical components, as noted by Erno Rapee. In his 1925 *Encyclopedia of Music for Pictures*, he suggests that

> Should there be a fire in the booth, which may necessitate a wait of several minutes, I advise bringing up the house lights and having the men play any popular hit of the day, which they may know by heart. [. . .] The main object is to prevent the audience from getting nervous and to keep them entertained. (In Hubbert 2011, 90)

Although there is no indication that such advice was ever put into practice by necessity, accounts of mechanical failure pepper the record. Witness one pre-war report from the *Natal Mercury*, which commented acidly that

> The instrument (the Concert Phonograph) had a wide range of possibilities in the region of sound, producing the exhilarating music of the thrashing machine when it was supposed to give forth the 'Washington Post' and transforming the coster tunefulness of the 'Old Kent Road' into a representation of the pitiful sighing of the east wind . . . . Eventually the perspiring proprietor gave up trying, excusing himself with the already well-worn 'something's wrong with the needle'. (*The Natal Mercury* 1897, 6)

Finally, although relatively little information exists about these now-lost soundtracks (both intentional and spontaneous), it is amply evident that the cinema was a place of sociable – and antisocial – noise in addition to cinematic noise. In particular, audiences could react noisily to scenes and images on screen. In December of 1899, the theatrical journal *The Era* notes that during a recent series of films appertaining to the South African war, audiences had applauded images of British political and military figures, but an image of the President of the South African Republic Paul Kruger triggered 'loud hisses and other uncomplimentary sounds' (*The Era* 1899b, 19). In Ireland, film showings and other acts, such as the comic singer Harriet Vernon, that were perceived as pro-British were often met with disruption as, in one newspaper report, people 'objected, showed that they did so in the usual way', namely, by hissing and shouting (*Irish Daily Independent*, 15 May 1900; quoted in Condon 2011, 103). It seems, as McKernan (2007, 9–10) comments of a near-contemporary London, that we should think of a film showing as a space in which 'people met friends, commented on films, munched on peanuts, sang along with favourite melodies, chastised children, and laughed and cried along with the action on the screen. The projector rattled and the piano crashed loudly. People read out the titles . . . Only the screen was silent'.

Music in the halls

When it came to films of the war, musicians could provide both abstract accompaniment that possessed an affective character linked to the dynamics of the images as well as a kind of spectacular realism lent to films via sound effects. Yet despite their popularity, films never stood as the sole (or even most popular) audiovisual representatives of war. They were regularly alternated with spoken word and songs (illustrated or otherwise) in a practice familiar to contemporary audiences from the magic lantern and vaudeville traditions. For an example of the sonic variety of such presentations, consider one of the early British exhibitions associated with the South African War which took place in December 1899. The evening featured an illustrated lecture, featuring both slides and

films on South Africa as well as two songs sung by the lecturer, a Mr Salmond (for more, see Christie 2007). Likewise, R. W. Paul's 1901 catalogue entry for the film 'How Soldiers are Made', actively exhorts potential buyers that the accompaniment of 'suitable music' might be further enhanced by a lecturer to explain the images (Christie 2012, 102). Tresize (2019, 6) summarises the situation by writing: 'For the first part of the history of film, presentation of film was a live event at which the audience would be in constant reception of spoken, musical, and sung performances, possibly during screenings, preceding them, or as part of non-cinematic acts that were interpolated between films'. Given this, what notes do these other audiovisual forms add to our understanding of the wartime soundscape?

One thing that is clear is that the remediation of breaking news into musical narratives happened from the very earliest moments of the war. Witness the case of John Shurlock, a fourteen-year-old bugler with the 5th Royal Irish Lancers, who became one of the war's first celebrities. On the 21st of October 1899, he joined in the Lancers' counterattack at Elandslaagte and shot three Boer soldiers at close range. Just two days later, his story appeared in Middlesbrough's *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*; by early November, the renowned music hall performer Kate Carney was performing the song 'Only a Bugler Boy'. An anonymous review of Carney's performance from *The Era*, published on 18 November 1899, notes that the 'thrilling verse' is 'set to a striking tune' – though unfortunately no further information on the specifics of the tune is given. Nonetheless, the thrills of this performance were further emphasized by a sonic reenactment when 'at the end of the song pistol shots are heard, and a lad in Khaki Uniform is led on by the singer to the sound of ringing applause' (*The Era* 1899a, 21).

Music hall ditties were composed to celebrate any number of occasions and individuals: just a month after the appearance of 'Only a Bugler Boy', the story of another bugler, John Francis Dunne, captured the British imagination. At the Battle of Tugela River in December 1899 Dunne was wounded in the arm yet kept sounding the charge. Although the battle itself was a disaster for the British troops, Dunne became a hero. After being sent back to Britain to recover from his wounds, he was even given a new bugle by Queen Victoria to replace the one he had lost in the river during the melee. The story of Bugler Dunne was commemorated in ditties such as the one found in the below lyrics. As these two stories suggest, stories from war were rapidly adapted from news headlines to furnish material re-presented and re-performed in musical formats.

Bugler Dunne, Bugler Dunne, you are missing all the fun,
And another chap is bugling where the battle's being won.
Don't you hear the ringing cheers of the Dublin Fusiliers,
Bugler Dunne?

Yet you sing, yet you sing, though your arm is in a sling,
And your little bone is broken where the bullet left a sting,
And you show a bloody scar. Guess you dunno' where you are,
Bugler Dunne.

Yes I do, yes I do, for I've got a bugle new,
And it's shining all with silver, and its sound is good and true.
Left the old one in the river, and I'll go back there, no never –
Least not for you.

> But I'll go back for the Queen, the finest lady that I've seen –
> Yes, I've seen her, she's a nailer – and I say just what I mean.
> She's a heart that's warm and true for the lads in red and blue.
> God save the Queen!

In the early period of the war, Britain was awash in musical sounds as concerts in support of British forces proliferated. Many of these were tied to the *Daily Mail*'s publication of a new poem by Rudyard Kipling, entitled 'The Absent-Minded Beggar'. Kipling wrote the poem in the first week of the war and sent it to Alfred Harmsworth, the newspaper's proprietor, with the stipulation that it should be used to raise money to aid the families of the troops (many of whom were poorly paid Reservists). The *Mail* published the poem on 31 October, and almost instantly it became a staple of theatrical performances. The poem is often thought to marry jingoist rhetoric with (perhaps vulgar) calls for domestic charity, but a closer look at the text also reveals how Kipling incorporates contemporary audible culture into the poem. The first stanza opens:

> When you've shouted 'Rule Britannia!',
> When you've sung 'God Save the Queen',
> When you've finished killing Kruger with your mouth,
> Will you kindly drop a shilling in my little tambourine
> For the gentlemen in khaki ordered South?

Here the poet-musician and predecessor of the charity busker (note the tambourine) exhorts the listener to put their money where their mouth is: audible displays of patriotism through singing and shouting are all well and good, but funds are required to do the Empire's work. Only 'when you've finished killing Kruger with your mouth' will the British Empire see victory.

The irony is that sound and music were crucial to disseminating this message far and wide. The poem was recited every night at London's Palace Theatre for a full fourteen months after its publication; once set to music (notably by Arthur Sullivan) it filled patriotic concerts and music halls across Britain and beyond. As evidence of its reach, a remarkable wax cylinder recording of the Australian John J. Virgo singing the song to Sullivan's tune in Adelaide in 1900 is accessible via the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (Virgo 1900). The war fund to which 'The Absent-Minded Beggar' was linked eventually raised over £250,000 (equivalent to between £20 and £30 million in 2021), which made it the first charity campaign directly linked to a war conducted via mass media: a sort of 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' *avant la lettre*.[13]

'The Absent-Minded Beggar' may not have opened hearts, minds, and pocket-books in equal measure, but it was nonetheless an effective piece. A report on a concert in Inverness on the 23rd of November 1899 borrowed the song's repeated plea for its title 'Music and Money – Pay! Pay! Pay!' but admitted that the music was 'stirring', and an encore had been duly demanded (*The Highland News* 1899, 3, col. 2–3). The *Daily Telegraph* of 27 November that same year lists four separate opportunities in London to hear the Kipling in both recited and sung formats (*Daily Telegraph* 1899, 1, col. 2). A month later, a concert in Croydon featured

> The much-talked of 'Absent-Minded Beggar', the words and catchy music eminently fitting the occasion. We extend the heartiest praise for the manner in which the Kipling ballad was

> rendered. The stage was fusilladed with showers of coins, and a tambourine collection was made by the ladies, the amount collected being £22 10s. (*Croydon Chronicle* 1899, 2)

These concerts also included other patriotic songs (some of which encouraged audience sing-alongs), operatic excerpts, military marches, etc. These performances were advertised widely and often featured sales of sheet music for participants to play at home, further cementing sounds associated with the South African War in the ears of a wide audience.

As the war wore on, the concerts continued and some took on a commemorative tone, as exemplified by memorial concerts held at St Paul's Cathedral in London where, in December 1900, a 'solemn' and 'impressive' service was preceded by the performance of three funeral marches by Chopin, Beethoven, and Wagner (*The Standard* 1900, 6, col. 1). To this we must add other combinations of audio and visual material, such as the afternoon of entertainment held at Madame Tussaud's which enticed audiences with promises of 'Imposing and Realistic' scenes from the war accompanied by 'delightful music all day' and featuring 'increased orchestra' or accompanied by string trio and quartet (*Daily Telegraph* 1900, 1, col. 2). From this selection, we might imagine that the soundscape of the South African War as experienced in the UK was deeply heterogenous, encompassing soothing choral sounds, simulated cannon fire, and military marches overlaid with the recitation of Kipling's poem and other songs, whether patriotic, humorous, or lamenting. This ecosystem of performance in which elements of war were staged or re-staged through juxtapositions of film, song, and illustrated lecture (to name just a few of the relevant media forms) serves as a model for how information about war would be re-mediated throughout the twentieth century.

Conclusion

In the case of Britain, the conjunction of new technology for visual recording and reproduction and a leisure industry of variety and magic lantern shows means that the experience of the South African War by the British public was mediated not only by the telegraphs, journalistic dispatches, and artistic sketches or photographs that characterized previous wars of the nineteenth century, but by films, both actualities and staged. These were almost always accompanied by significant 'soundtracks' of both music and sound effects to heighten their emotional and propagandist impact. Moreover, events of the war were further (re)mediated into musical acts and concerts which appeared alongside these films in variety shows of multiple overlapping and combining media. From this evidence it is clear that – despite their apparent silence and technological limitations when encountered today – these early film reels together with the ways in which they were presented, experienced, and discussed are an important site for our understanding of the historical soundscape of the South African War.

The significance of music and sound to the success of these war pictures was well-recognised at the time by proponents and critics alike. The contemporary observer (and South African correspondent for *The Manchester Guardian*) J.A. Hobson was among the first to worry that it was the intoxications of the music, rather than the stimulation of visual images, that drove the intense imperialist and jingoist attitudes among the British public. He claimed:

> The glorification of brute force and an ignorant contempt for foreigners are ever-present factors which at great political crises make the music-hall a very serviceable engine for generating military passion [. . .] its words and melodies pass by quick magic from the Empire or the Alhambra over the length and breadth of the land. (Hobson 1901, 3)

Kipling's blunt image of 'Killing Kruger with your mouth' – or presumably any sonic instrument which came to hand – anticipated an easily manipulated population in which new forms of mass media had the potential to become weapons at the hands of the state.

Whether by 'quick magic' or another force, the sights and sounds of the South African War remained in popular memory more than previous conflicts. These experiences laid the foundations for the public experience via visual media through the years of conflict and total war of the twentieth century. For a generation of impressionable adolescents and young men who viewed the conflict from afar, the often romantic and patriotically stirring images and sounds of the South African War on stage and screen fuelled the mass enthusiasm to enlist in the first years of the First World War. What is striking from the vantage point of 125 years later is how the confluence of film and sound confirm war as an audiovisual spectacle packaged for audiences who experienced it from the relative safety of a darkened theatre. Whether an audience was pro-Boer or pro-British, distant conflict became a thrilling multisensorial entertainment that was seen, heard, and even smelt or felt via the music-hall stage. Although we may not revive those experiences in the twenty-first century, we can still view them from a computer or television screen. It is this that buttresses the South African War's claim to be the first media war of the twentieth century.

Notes

1. The name for this conflict has been a matter of ambivalence, with arguments for and against titles such as the Boer War, the Transvaal War, the *Tweede Vryheidsoorlog* (Second Freedom War) or the *Engelse oorlog* (English War). No name is perfect, and while I use 'Boer' to describe the forces arrayed against the 'British' (thereby collapsing the wide varieties of people who fought under two reductive labels), I refer to the conflict here as the South African War.
2. An exception is Donaldson (2013).
3. As noted later in this article, audiovisual entertainments of the era also included other combinations of images and sound such as magic lantern shows and illustrated lectures.
4. For example, the Imperial War Museum's collection contains a limited number of oral histories relating to the South African War, mostly interviews with former soldiers or recollections from later military members of hearing about it as children. The British Library's collections contain similar material, though as of this writing their sound collections remain unavailable following a cyber-attack in October 2023.
5. See, for example, Harding Davis (1900); Wilson (1900); Wilkinson (1900); Hillegas (1901); Dickson ([1901] 1995); Brandt (1913); Reitz ([1929] 2008). For more on the war in the media, see Morgan (2002); for the impact of media narratives outside Britain and the Empire, see Ch. 11 in Bottomore (2007).
6. For a striking example of this multisensory approach in a different wartime context, see Mark Smith (2014).
7. Gutsche (1946, 63) identifies Paul's cameraman as Sydney Melsom, but McKernan (1999) notes that there is no one of this name in the lists of the C.I.V., though there is an F.A. Melsom.

8. Hyman had been involved with moving pictures since 1896; he worked with his London-based brother Sydney to provide rotating entertainments. Note that while those cameramen who reported from the front were men, the cinematic industry in South Africa as a whole included well-known female vaudevillians and entrepreneurs. The Halifax-born Ada Delroy is credited with procuring 'Britannia's Bulwarks', which Gutsche describes as 'the first propaganda film shown in South Africa', and which shows the march-past of naval soldiers in Portsmouth (Gutsche 1946, 50–51)
9. Strebel (1983, 264) notes that the Boer general Christian De Wet had exposed some 5000 feet of film after capturing it at Roodewal, while at least one ship carrying film to Britain sank off the Cape. Dickson's ([1901] 1995) account notes that the relationships he cultivated with General Buller and others resulted in his being allowed to stay with the troops in the field and his subsequent professional good fortune.
10. I have been able to discover little about Ashe, but he served under Cecil Rhodes in Africa, likely as part of the paramilitary British South Africa Police (BSAP). The BSAP originated in Rhodes's military annexation of Mashonaland in 1890 and served pivotal roles in the Matebele Wars of 1893 and 1896/1897.
11. For another perspective on the rise of 'newspaper dramatics' as contributing to nationalism (and pro-Boer feeling) in the Netherlands, see Dibbets (2014). I am grateful to the reviewer for bringing this to my attention.
12. For an analysis of sound within magic lantern shows and lectures in the Netherlands, see Zwaan (2022).
13. In a manner analogous to the critique and parodies that grew up around Band Aid's charity single, the ubiquity of 'The Absent-Minded Beggar' provided an additional opportunity for enterprising performers such as Kate Carney, who began to perform 'The Absent-Minded Bounder', which includes the chorus 'Oh! The beggar, the absent-minded beggar/It's true what Mr Kipling has to say/For there's not the slightest doubt/Whenever he took me out/ The absent-minded beggar let me pay'.

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