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‘HELLO DARKNESS, MY OLD FRIEND’: THE COMPANY OF MUSIC IN A CINEMA OF (SHARED) LONELINESS

Carlo Cenciarelli

It is one of the most iconic openings in the history of American cinema. A long take of a lone young man on a moving walkway inside an airport terminal, the slow tracking shot paralleling exactly the movement of the traveler. The character looks dejected, casting his gaze downward, with occasional, surreptitious glances at people walking past (Figure 1). On the non-diegetic soundtrack, through ‘The Sound of Silence’, Simon and Garfunkel sing of social alienation.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE]

[CAPTION] *The Graduate* (1967), opening sequence; the traveler shot as the symbolic beginning of a cinema of loneliness.

The Graduate (1967) was a watershed in film culture. It marked a turning point in the crisis of relevance that had characterised Hollywood throughout the post-war period. With television taking cinema's role as the primary family entertainment medium and radio

effectively targeting distinct demographics, the industry grappled with redefining its identity. Mike Nichols' *The Graduate* shone as a successful example. It showed the industry that a new production model that allowed filmmakers to take greater creative risks and explore more daring topics could attract a much sought-after younger generation of film viewers. Based on a little-known book, working within a small production budget, and featuring a young new actor (Dustin Hoffman) in the role of aimless graduate Benjamin Braddock, within a few weeks of its release the film became the third highest grossing movie in history. Six months later, it was deemed an inescapable 'cultural phenomenon' and a 'mandatory movie experience'.¹ In a much quoted, twenty-two-page summative critique of '*The Graduate* phenomenon', *The New Yorker* called the film the 'prototypical youth-cult movie'; 'the first American motion picture to deal authentically with [the] much discussed generation gap', a film going 'to the very heart of what youth is about' (*Onward and Upward*).

The film was credited with ushering in a decade of experimentation that would take many names – New Hollywood, Hollywood Renaissance, Auteur Renaissance – in a proliferation of labels that shows that decade's complex placement in the historiography of commercial American cinema. Robert Kolker called this new wave of American films 'a cinema of loneliness', 'a cinema made in isolation and, with few exceptions, about isolation'.² Kolker used the term 'loneliness' evocatively, to point at new trends in the production, plots, and exhibition of American cinema in the late 1960s, a time of profound social changes when – as Fay Bound Alberti observes – loneliness was propelled 'to the forefront of popular and political consciousness' both in the US and in the UK.³ He noticed directors who operated in isolation as a result of the collapse of the old Hollywood studio system, film narratives that increasingly revolved around outsiders and drifters, and cinematic audiences that seemed to become more fragmented into smaller taste cultures due to generational tensions and the

competition of rival media. For Kolker, these films critiqued but ultimately ‘perpetuate[d] the passivity and aloneness that [had] become their central image’ (*A Cinema of Loneliness*, p9); they exposed the implications of American individualism but left viewers ‘bereft of hope for change or community’.⁴ Indeed, while the ‘cinema of loneliness’ came to being in a cultural climate marked by political activism, its plots tended to revolve around the implications of America’s existing (internal and foreign) politics, rather than to articulate or endorse any particular blueprint for social betterment.

The Graduate posed a relatively mild and benign critique of middle-class suburban America compared to some of the more radical and raucous films that would soon follow, such as *Midnight Cowboy* (1968) and *Easy Rider* (1969). Kolker deemed it a ‘hymn to the passive side of the rebellion of the 1960s’. A famous punchline about Benjamin’s dreaded future in ‘plastics’ quickly became a symbol of the film’s countercultural credentials, capturing the film’s critique of American consumerism and giving the word plastics a ‘new life in the vernacular as a symbol for phony commercialism’.⁵ And yet, for a film that was heralded as a turning point in American cinema’s return to cultural relevance, *The Graduate* seemed peculiarly unconcerned with some of the most pressing political debates of the time. While a promotional tour of American colleges was intended to ‘help build a word-of-mouth audience’ and forge a link with the student movement, it also ended up highlighting how the filmmakers were distinctly uninterested in sending a message. ‘In college after college,’ Nichols would complain, there was one question: why isn’t the movie about Vietnam? You had to be outraged about Vietnam or it was shit. No matter what you were doing—if you ran a laundry, your shirts had to be outraged about Vietnam’ (*The Graduate*, p187). Tellingly, when Benjamin finds himself in Berkeley in the middle of the student protest, politics remain at the margins; his obsessive fixation on his love interest keeps centre stage while another

track by Simon and Garfunkel – ‘Scarborough Fair’, a folk arrangement of a traditional English ballad – replaces the demonstrators’ rallying chants. Like *The Graduate*, Simon and Garfunkel’s music was out of kilter with the rebellious core of the counterculture, a disconnect that was highlighted by the duo’s largely unremarked appearance at the Monterey Music Festival during the summer of 1967, just a few months before film was released. The music’s cultural placement thus perfectly matched Benjamin’s double-disaffection from his parents’ generation and from the more politically active side of his generation.

I want to suggest that *The Graduate*’s generic and partial engagement with countercultural values, and – more precisely – its ability to address a younger generation while refusing to talk politics, rather than limiting the film’s significance, makes it a particularly rich example of what is at stake in a ‘cinema of loneliness’. It draws attention to some of the medium-specific ways in which cinema can intervene in a discourse on loneliness by foregrounding it as an aesthetic experience, rather than by concerning itself with a debate on its deeper causes or solutions. More specifically, *The Graduate* forces us to examine a particularly consequential gap in Kolker’s account of film aesthetics. In *A Cinema of Loneliness*, the film critic deliberately (and explicitly) avoids dealing with one of the most distinctive and influential aspects of the cinema of those years, one that was associated with *The Graduate*’s success and that was much debated at the time: the use of pre-existing popular music and the emergence of powerful synergies between the film and music industries. Not a small part of the successful formula that *The Graduate* helped put forward involved the use of pre-existing songs to assist a major film’s concerns with narrating the difficulties of being young. The film’s success led the way for a range of low-budget, youth oriented, music driven films such as *Head* (1968), *Easy Rider*, *Midnight Cowboy*, *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), *Drive, He Said* (1971), *A Safe Place* (1971), and *The Last Picture Show* (1971). The significance of *The*

Graduate in the history and aesthetics of film music has rightly received much film-musicological attention, with comprehensive work carried out on the commercial synergies, narrative functions, and production history of the soundtrack.⁶ But what implications does a thorough acknowledgement of the soundtrack have on theorising how *The Graduate* represents and remediates loneliness? What can ‘The Sound of Silence’ tell us about the experience of listening to ‘a cinema of loneliness’? What kind of accompaniment did these soundtracks provide? And – more broadly – what does the opening of *The Graduate* say about loneliness in 1960s America, and about the role of music in its technological mediation? In keeping with recent thinking on cinematic listening, the article will address these questions by grounding film analysis and film music theory in histories of listening and cinemagoing.⁷ Using the opening of *The Graduate* to explore broader changes in narrative functions, cinema-going and listening cultures, I will suggest that ‘The Sound of Silence’ is not just central to how the film conveys loneliness but also to how it provides a provisional and non-political way out of it.

INTERNAL FOCALISATION AND THE INTERSUBJECTIVITY OF CINEMATIC LISTENING

*Paul Simon is not a ‘man with a message’. It’s simpler than that. He wants to talk to you.*⁸

When interpreting the role of music in the opening of *The Graduate*, the emphasis has been on a function of internal focalisation. Contemporary critics expressed pretty unanimously the idea that ‘The Sound of Silence’ offered an internal perspective on Benjamin’s thoughts and feelings.⁹ While ‘internal focalisation’ had always been a primary function of film scores,

The Graduate was pioneering in assigning this role to pre-existing popular music. Scholars have noted that *The Graduate* began ‘a trend of using pop lyrics to suggest a character’s otherwise unvoiced preoccupations’.¹⁰ To Nichols, ‘The Sound of Silence’ literally sounded ‘like the voice of Benjamin’, ‘full of feeling and not very articulate’.

In an influential reading, Todd Berliner and Philip Furia propose that the opening of *The Graduate* marked a shift from the ‘spontaneous’, ‘outward’ songs of earlier musicals to the ‘internal’, musical ‘monologues’ of post-classical musicals.¹¹ Nichols’ film, they argue, fostered ‘a new convention of song as musical soliloquy’ (*The Sounds of Silence*, p24) that would soon characterise other canonic films of the era, such as *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968), where the lyrics of Michel Legrand’s soundtrack come ‘close to making McQueen’s character sing’ as he circles in the sky with his glider, or *Easy Rider*, where Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper ‘in effect, sing Steppenwolf’s “Born to be Wild” as they drive their motorcycles across America’s highways’, or *Midnight Cowboy*, where John Voight’s character expresses ‘himself inwardly, as he cannot do outwardly’ with ‘Everybody’s talkin’’ (*The Sounds of Silence*, p26).

The confessional, introspective style of ‘The Sound of Silence’, typical of Simon and Garfunkel and of a ‘singer-songwriter’ tradition then still in emergence, would make the song ideal for such a shift in the functions of pre-existing popular music. As the song’s first (now historic) review put it, this was not ““protest” music’ ‘with a message’, its value and significance deriving from Simon’s ability to write sung ‘poems’ that ‘are universal’ and are written ‘as one must, from what he sees and feels’ (*Simon and Garfunkel*). Indeed, ‘The Sound of Silence’s lyrics dwell on sensory metaphors, conveying loneliness as more than just a state of ‘oneliness’, as Bound Alberti might put it, and also more than simply a

psychological state. Loneliness is rendered as an ‘embodied’ ‘cluster’ characterised by coldness, darkness, dampness, restlessness, and a feeling of detachment from proximal others – ‘people talking without speaking’ and ‘hearing without listening’.¹² The evocation of ‘whispering’ and quietness is matched by a musical utterance that is characterised by consonant harmonies and a soft enunciation, drooping melodic phrases and lulling end-rhymes. Thanks to its style, genre, and poetic content, ‘The Sound of Silence’ perfectly lent itself to the representation of a highly private and embodied feeling of disconnection from meaningful context and contact.

Yet ‘The Sound of Silence’ is also emblematic of how music can transform utterances about loneliness and incommunicability into a communicative act shared with a public of listeners. The oxymoronic title encapsulates the transformative qualities of any music that laments the impossibility of communication. That is to say: to sing *of* silence is to (performatively) break that silence. The sense in which the song is designed to convey *and* transcend loneliness is also inscribed into its vocal harmonies. Paul Simon famously talks of the song’s inspiration coming from the habit of sitting in the dark with his guitar using the bathroom tiles as an echo chamber.¹³ In the song’s final arrangement, however, it is the voice itself that splits. Art Garfunkel carries the top line, with Simon providing a lower voice, in what music theorist would call a note-against-note, ‘homophonic counterpoint’. In other words, while the song is a personal, private statement of a folk troubadour singing about urban alienation, the song’s persona sings in harmonies. The distinctive vocal blend of Simon and Garfunkel’s music gives a sound to the song’s mode of self-reflection; it is a vertical echo that makes the singer both performer and listener. It introduces an otherness that transcends the loneliness on which that utterance was predicated, an imaginative depth that is written into the complex identity of Simon and Garfunkel as a solo singer-songwriter *and* a folk duo.

The performative nature of this musical utterance about loneliness becomes particularly significant when reframed by the film. A cinema that places loneliness at the core of its plots and aesthetics also routinely places spectators in experiential situations where they act as vicarious companions for the lonely characters on screen.¹⁴ While this fundamental mechanism is not necessarily dependent on the use of music, the opening of *The Graduate* and the historical reception of Simon and Garfunkel's song as Benjamin's 'voice' shows how effectively popular music could be used to achieve a careful balance between incommunicability and communication, allowing spectators to attend to representations of loneliness both from within (as silent interlocutors) and from without (as invisible observers). The experiential significance of this split in the positionality of spectatorial engagement is acknowledged by film theorists of all persuasions. We might understand it in the strong sense of Christian Metz's structuralist (and Lacanian) formulation of primary and secondary identification,¹⁵ or in a poststructuralist understanding of cinema's ability to *unbind* the subject,¹⁶ or in the terms of empathy and sympathy that are favoured by cognitivist approaches.¹⁷ All these theoretical articulations describe how, when we attend to a film, we are encouraged to move between a number of perceptual and ideological positions and develop a diverse range of (potentially conflicting and contradictory) real-time engagements with the action unfolding on screen. More specifically, what concerns us here is that these theorisations recognise that engaging with on-screen characters involves complex fictional experiences where we alternate between an embodied 'closeness' with characters, where we 'imaginatively assume their epistemic, perceptual or imaginative perspective,'¹⁸ and a more distanced type of engagement, where we form an 'allegiance' with characters, developing a 'pro-attitude' towards them.¹⁹

Both types of engagement are activated and facilitated by the start of *The Graduate*. Through the synchronisation of walkway and camera movement, and the use of music for internal focalisation, the scene encourages us to *imaginatively* assume the character's lonely perspective while also encouraging us to stand for an imagined friend, transforming his loneliness through the very act of listening in with empathy. Indeed, the first line of Simon and Garfunkel's lyrics provides an explicit invitation for spectators to listen in and join the character en-route. 'Hello darkness, my old friend' posits an ideal auditor and implied confidant – a fictional placeholder whose role I am encouraged to take up through the act of cinematic listenership. The musical incipit gives a name to the role that I was always going to assume in the moment I subscribed to the cinematic contract. Furthermore, to the extent that the anthropomorphised 'darkness' in 'The Sound of Silence' is an externalised projection of the self, it can encompass the viewer's fluid positionality: the song opens up a reflexive space where I (as listener and spectator) can *both* assume the character's perspective *and* form an allegiance with him. In the suitable darkness of the cinematic auditorium, privy to the solitary utterance of a musical persona that is ventriloquising the character on screen, I stand, alone, with many others, as the song's anthropomorphised 'Darkness'.

In this sense, using 'The Sound of Silence' serves to negotiate the meaning of loneliness vis-à-vis the situational nature of film spectatorship. While film theory has long emphasised the orientation towards privatisation created by processes of standardisation and narrative suturing, more recent developments in film phenomenology have started to account for important ways in which an awareness of the physical presence of others – and mental images concerning the relative agreement and alignment with others spectators' judgements of and participation in the on-screen narrative – can shape our own experience of film, even in the complete absence of explicit interaction. Julian Hanich's work, in particular, has shown

ways in which cinema-going can engender forms of ‘silent intersubjectivity’ that don’t rely on verbal interaction and that are mediated by other ways of sensing and conveying ‘joint attention’ and can forge powerful feelings of belonging to a quiet collectivity.²⁰ In *The Graduate*, not only is the musical utterance of loneliness shared at metalevel between on-screen protagonists and individual spectators. It is also shared, in the darkness of the auditorium, with a broader public taking part in the collective act of cinema-going. Crucially, these abstract pathways of affiliation and engagement were mediated and facilitated by concrete material practices, both inside and outside the cinema.

THE (NON)PLACE OF CINEMA AND THE RITUALS OF CINEMA-GOING

*A curious event of the late sixties was the popularity of the film, The Graduate, the viewing of which became almost a ritual for a wide spectrum of middle-class youth, who went to see it over and over.*²¹

The rendering of loneliness at the start of *The Graduate* hinges on the changing nature of the cinema as a place. The film doesn’t quite start inside the airport terminal. After a short logo of Embassy Pictures (a struggling distributor saved by *The Graduate*’s unexpected commercial success), and before the travelator shot, we are presented with an asymmetric extreme close-up of the protagonist set against a blank background and the disembodied sounds of an in-flight audio system. The close-up is the first of a series of claustrophobic shots that Nichols and director of photography Robert Surtees use for humorous and dramatic purposes throughout the film. After noise of transmission static, a voice announces: ‘Ladies and Gentlemen, we are about to begin our descent into Los Angeles’. The camera now zooms back to reveal rows of passengers, none seemingly engaging with each other, some staring

ahead, others asleep, many with in-flight earphones. This moment is more than representational. The shot does not just forge a metaphorical link between social and sensory disconnect. It uses the technology of film – the narrow framing, white noise, and disembodied, close-up sound of the inflight audio system – to *render* an experience of social isolation *as* sensory isolation.²² Crucially, it does so while presenting spectators with an image that evokes the very conditions of spectatorship (Figure 2).

[INSERT FIGURE 2 AROUND HERE]

[CAPTION] *The Graduate (1967), opening sequence; establishing shot of passengers on airplane as a mirror of spectatorial conditions.*

The initial, acousmatic ‘Ladies and Gentlemen’ can be heard as a double address to passengers and to spectators who are similarly static and encouraged not to leave their seats, and similarly on a journey. Neatly, the cinematic journey starts just as the fictional flight is coming to an end. ‘Looking forward to seeing you again in the near future,’ the voice adds, in a meta-fictional and tongue-in-cheek reminder of the status of cinematic audiences as increasingly sought-after consumers. *The Graduate* starts by raising in front of the audience a mirror of themselves as streamlined, separated, mildly bored set of geometrically arranged consumers occupying their own individual media bubbles. In this playful, self-reflexive image of cinematic spectatorship as a potentially alienating social experience, earplugs materialise the boundaries between individuals.

This imagined counterpoint between two types of consumers, two types of situations, and two listening conditions would have been made all the more concrete by the fact that – by the time of *The Graduate* – the experiences of flying and of film-viewing could coincide. The 1960s saw the introduction of in-flight cinema, which relied on plastic earplugs to protect

viewers from the noise of engine and passengers, and – as Stephen Groening puts it – essentially ‘heralded the advent of the separated spectator’.²³ While in-flight cinema was a relatively marginal phenomenon, it presented – in extreme and literal form – disciplinary aspects and techniques of individualisation that were built into more familiar cinema spaces of the time. By the 1960s, American cinemas were paying much attention to protecting the experience of individual spectators, shielding them as much as possible from the presence of others. The style of American theatres adopted multiple ways of achieving this, including ‘directional lighting, lack of ornament, comfortable yet structured seats, perfected sightlines’.²⁴ Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece shows that this streamlining was epitomised by the industry’s move towards smaller and cheaper suburban theatres, many of which were proliferating inside shopping malls, which additionally strengthened the link between cinema-going and ‘conspicuous consumption’ (*The Optical Vacuum*, p102).²⁵

The streamlining was designed to guarantee an ideal, unencumbered, and undistracted view of the film conducive to better (personal) media experiences, but for some prominent cultural commentators it also contributed to turning cinemas into technologies of loneliness. In a 1965 article for *Sight and Sound*, using words that seem to pre-echo Marc Augé’s famous theorisation of the (non) places of supermodernity and the ‘solitary contractuality’ generated by processes of globalisation,²⁶ Ernest Callenbach protested against the ‘empty chill’ of cinema theatres. ‘Like too many of today’s airports and banks and schools’, he thought, cinemas ‘might be anywhere, and hence give a curious impression of being nowhere’.²⁷ For Callenbach, the neutral, black box aesthetics made the modern cinema theatre a non-place *avant la lettre*, separating spectators from each other and from meaningful surroundings, and depleting cinemagoing of its social significance (*Temples of the Seventh Art*, p12).

‘Presumably’, he lamented, ‘the spectator enters, sits down, and glues his eyes to the movie; as he leaves he glues them to the aisle’ (*Temples of the Seventh Art*, p14).

While the opening of *The Graduate* uses the sensory isolation and separated spectatorship promoted by modern, ‘neutralised’ cinemas to render the character’s loneliness on screen, however, this self-reflexive gesture would have also implied an act of cultural distinction. In the very moment that the ‘Ladies and Gentlemen’ in the audience are invited to reflect on their own status as unaware passivised consumers, they are assumed to be a knowing, discerning audience that is significantly different from what they are seeing on screen.

What’s more, while many spectators saw *The Graduate* in suburban theatres, the film’s target audience was expected to watch it in more comfortable and much trendier settings. *The Graduate* had its invitation-only premiere at the Walter Reade Coronet in New York and then its world premiere at the Coronet and the Lincoln Art Theatre, two renowned, first-run Art House cinemas in Upper Manhattan that would end up housing *The Graduate* for an extraordinary fifty-one and forty-five weeks respectively, two of the film’s longest theatrical runs. While the film success surpassed everyone’s expectations, the choice of these Art House cinemas was in keeping with the producers’ intention to market *The Graduate* to a growing young, cinephile audience interested in European art cinema. The collapse of Hollywood as mass entertainment meant that cinema-going’s rituals of belonging revolved around more marked acts of social distinction.

Szczepaniak-Gillece notices that 1960s Art House cinemas aimed to combine the new ‘neutral’ aesthetics of functionalism with the comfort and cultural capital of the old movie palaces (*The Optical Vacuum*, p152). They used state-of-the-art technology to guarantee a private, undisturbed cinematic experience while also creating spaces and opportunities for

spectators to see themselves (quite literally) as part of an ‘audience identified and marked by its excellent taste’ (*The Optical Vacuum*, p148). As evidenced by technical and promotional materials, the Coronet and the Lincoln epitomised the combination of these opposing tendencies and architectural paradigms. The Coronet showcased a ‘convex ceiling that provides greater acoustic clarity’²⁸ and a fully carpeted auditorium for the benefit both of ‘patrons’ comfort and acoustical improvement’.²⁹ The Lincoln presented itself as the ideal mixture of ‘old world magnificence’ and ‘contemporary world’, showcasing both period décor (‘antique furniture and charming decorative pieces’) and ‘ultra modern’ technologies, including ‘the latest in high-fidelity sound’ and ‘diamond sharp projection’. It promised to show ‘the finest film fare from at home and abroad, selected for the tastes of the discriminating moviegoer’ in ‘the most intimate and unique theatre in the country,’ and one that could draw upon the ‘great cultural community of Lincoln Center’.³⁰

The 1960s Art House thus presented a particular incarnation of the public privacy of cinema-going. With its dual emphasis on optimal viewing conditions and on belonging to a community of discerning individuals, it structured the cinematic experience in ways that productively intersected with *The Graduate*’s cultural positioning and with its audiovisual aesthetics. As a low-budget, independently produced film for the youth market, *The Graduate* targeted interpretative communities that were engaged in complex debates about individuality and conformity, distinction and alienation. In Art House cinemas, it found exhibitors that addressed a discerning spectator whose experience would be personal (as technologically transparent as possible and undisrupted by others), significantly different (i.e. singular in its avoidance of the mass-marketed Hollywood fare) and consumed in the company of similarly different individuals. It also found privileged locations for sharing in the character’s aesthetic of loneliness – meaningful surroundings that were designed to promote ideal visual and aural

absorption while simultaneously contributing to the sense of a discerning community of individuals. In repeated screenings of *The Graduate*, a musically-mediated communion with the protagonist's loneliness could thus engender a broader ritual of belonging. In the process of doing so, the soundtrack also seemed to draw on and re-imagine some of the new ways in which music was being used in everyday life.

A 'CONSTANT COMPANION': INVISIBLE TRANSISTORS AND THE RADIO SOUND OF SILENCE

*This was, truly, a new generation – the first in America raised with music constantly in its ear, weaned on a transistor radio, involved with songs from its earliest moment of memory.*³¹

In December 1967, a couple of weeks before *The Graduate* was released, an article in *Billboard* reported that over 23.5 million portable radios had been bought in the US in the last twelve months, with California emerging as a primary 'portable radio market'.³² The trend had been observed for over a decade. By 1961, a special report for *Life* magazine signed by David Scherman (best known for his iconic photograph of Lee Miller in Hitler's bathtub) was speaking of the 'explosive development of tiny transistor radios', painting a picturesque image of 'little electronic companions' that provided solace and musical commentary in the strangest of places.³³ Transistor technology extended music's power to provide a serendipitous accompaniment to everyday life, and Scherman wrote on the back of a massive 300-station radio contest that asked 'listeners to report on the oddest place they had ever heard their local station' (*The Transistors Craze*, p23).³⁴ With a journalistic eye for the peculiar, he noticed some of the ironic coincidences produced by the portable technology's

radical recontextualisation of music listening. Musical serendipity was a function of radiophonic ubiquity.

The Graduate performed a comparable re-contextualisation. While ‘The Sound of Silence’ could provide a suitable musical soliloquy, the significance of using music that pre-existed the film should not be downplayed. There remains a meaningful distance between the song’s lyrics and their cinematic repurposing. Several poetic details (lampposts, cobblestone and neon lights) do not fit the airport terminal and alert us to the complex nature of this scene’s audio-visual aesthetics. In other words, *The Graduate* presents us with music and context that share a generic tone and mood and a few specific points of more literal convergence. For a long time prior to *The Graduate*, this imperfect (if serendipitous) adherence between song and narrative had been seen as a major downside to the use of pre-existing popular music as underscore. Now, this change in soundtrack practice went hand in hand with changing orientations in music listening taking place outside the cinema. Julie Hubbert has linked the 1960s emergence of the compilation score to changes in tape splicing and radio programming, showing the importance of situating the authorial control, stylistic eclecticism and montage practices of New Hollywood soundtracks in a broader history of audio technology and music production.³⁵ Here, I want to suggest that the particular coming together of music, place and character at the start of *The Graduate* reflects changes in the musical mediation of loneliness and – more specifically – in the ways listening on the move was emerging as both symptom and cure of generational tensions.

While seemingly ‘ubiquitous’, the popularity of transistor radios had expanded along well-established generational lines. The 1967 *Billboard* article pinned down the phenomenon on teenagers who wanted ‘to make sure they had music on the move’ (*Behind the Radio Sales*

Revival, p91). More specifically, portables had long been marketed as attractive gifts to students going off to college. As Michael Schiffer puts it, ‘the portable radio entered the necessity category for the post-war college set’.³⁶ While it took a while for the new radios – particularly of the smaller, shirt-pocket variety – to become part of the lifestyle of the ordinary American adult, the characteristic mobility of graduates had always offered a natural consumer target. By the late 1960s, there was a long history of selling radios to graduates as a ‘traveling companion’ (*The Portable Radio in American Life*, p139).³⁷ Pre-war manufacturers had promoted the radio as a traveling item by concealing the technology inside bulky designs that recalled small suitcases and film cameras. By the 1960s, the radio’s identity as a loyal companion was firmly established and developed through a variety of designs that used the new polymers – plastic – to make devices more durable and more portable. Using words that emphasised the critical (if invisible) social labour carried by these increasingly inconspicuous technological devices, and which foreshadow later descriptions of the ‘accompanied solitude’ and intersubjective aura of personal stereo use,³⁸ Scherman would write of young people ‘hooked on sound’ and ‘wander[ing] abroad with little plastic objects like first-aid kits looped in their belts to keep them from getting out of touch’ (*The Transistors Craze*, p23).

The link between portable radios and the younger generation was cemented by rock and roll and the rise of customised, special-interest radio stations that reflected divisions in lifestyles and world views (*The Portable Radio in American Life*, p184). While listening to radios on the move had been possible since the 1940s, it was later changes in media consumption that generated a demand for ‘portables’. Indeed, the broader forces that underpinned the Hollywood crisis and were reshaping the American film industry also made the portable radio an essential piece of the 1960s media puzzle. As television symbolically displaced cinema as the focus of family entertainment and (both literally and metaphorically) replaced the radio

from the centre of the house, radios became more personal and mobile, and radio stations – like the ‘new wave’ of Hollywood productions – tried to differentiate their offering, some deliberately targeting the younger generation. As this younger and more mobile generation acquired greater purchasing power and the house split into multiple areas of media consumption, the portable radio became both an index of and response to emergent generational frictions. The transistors craze went hand in hand with significant changes in radio programming and in how audiences were being addressed. As Nick Webber and Tim Wall notice, ‘Group identity’ became ‘the basis for organising programs and then whole stations around niche, rather than general audiences’.³⁹ In Susan Douglas’s words, radio listening became ‘a more individualised activity’ but was also characterised by a stronger ‘impression’ of who your ‘co-listeners’ were. This was not in small part thanks to the presence of DJs and of their choice of music, which served to constitute ‘listeners as in on things together, as sharing a common experience on the air, while it acknowledged that the audience was not monolithic, not some “mass” the way TV often treated it, but made up of individuals with their own particular autobiographies’.⁴⁰

Soon enough, the possibility to take music with you became symbol not just of a generalised demographics but of an increasingly well-defined and self-aware generation. As Schiffer puts it, ‘the shirt-pocket portable, or, simply, *the transistor* (as it was called then) became a metaphor for freedom and independence; the right to express, in music and in things, the style and tastes of youth’ (*The Portable Radio in American Life*, p181). While the generational and acoustic tensions that first propelled the transistor to fame were epitomised by the early wave of rock and roll, by the mid 1960s the new generation on the move was being associated with more reflexive and probing musical anthems. In ‘Like a Rolling Stone’, a 1967 article by Ralph Gleason published just a few weeks before he edited the first, historical issue of

Rolling Stone, the prominent American critic traced wide-ranging links between urban folk and a new culture that rejected ‘the assumptions of the adult world’, highlighting the transistor radio as an important mediator connecting the two (*Like a Rolling Stone*, p560). The transistor seemed to give music the portability and specificity it needed to become a force in the younger generation’s search for new values. For Gleason, the music written by the likes of Bob Dylan and bands that followed in the folk and folk rock variants could ‘speak to us in our condition’ not just because of a new-found lyrical eloquence, but also thanks to a persuasiveness derived from its newly acquired radiophonic ubiquity. When arguing that ‘The New Youth is finding its prophets in strange places ...’ and that ‘now the radio is the church and Everyman carries his own walkie-talkie to God in his transistor’, Gleason is making a point about both the message and the medium, linking the introspective, confessional style of new singer-songwriters to the intimacy of portable music.⁴¹

Gleason specifically singled out ‘The Sound of Silence’ as an example of the reflexive, self-critical popular music talking to (and speaking for) a new generation. The first review of Simon and Garfunkel’s sleeper hit had emphasised links between the song and an urban dialectics of distance and proximity, calling ‘The Sound of Silence’ ‘a powerful, evocative portrait of today’s city-world, of people who as they are pushed together more and more withdraw more and more into their own worlds, wrap themselves in the silence, in the protection, of “not getting involved”’ (*Simon and Garfunkel*). For Gleason, who had written liner notes for Simon and Garfunkel’s *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme*, the song was not just a good example of the intelligent, ambitious lyricism of the late folk revival (‘The New Youth of the Rock Generation’); it was a song that explicitly tried to communicate alienation as a generational ‘condition’ (*Like a Rolling Stone*, p563).

What's more, 'The Sound of Silence' was a musical message that carried traces of its medium, a track whose sound and fortunes were inextricably tied to radio exposure. The song was first released as part of Simon and Garfunkel's 1964 debut album with Columbia – *Wednesday Morning 3am* – yet it took a while for it to find receptive ears. When 'The Sound of Silence' started rising through *Billboard* charts in 1966, it was the result of it gaining unexpected radio traction. After a late-night DJ on Boston's WBZ gave the song some airtime, 'The Sound of Silence' started to receive more and more requests from college students in the area – those youths 'weaned on a transistor radio' that featured in Gleason's piece.⁴² The song's success thus draws attention to the rise of local stations and the intensification of a virtual dialogue between DJs and listeners, infrastructural changes that contributed to making portable radios private technologies linked to a strong sense of in-group identity. When word of the song's unexpected growth in airwave popularity arrived to Simon and Garfunkel's producer, Tom Wilson, the producer – who was famous for his work with Bob Dylan – decided to rework the arrangement with two electric guitars, bass and drums, in keeping with Dylan's own, recent and notorious version of 'Like a Rolling Stone' (*Paul Simon*, p75). Soon 'The Sound of Silence' started climbing the *Billboard* 100, prompting Columbia to pressure Simon and Garfunkel to conjure up a second album – *The Sounds of Silence* – that would fully capitalise on the song's reworked version. By the time Nichols decided to incorporate this 'electrified' version in *The Graduate* (adding yet one more revenue stream to the song's commercial potential), 'The Sound of Silence' was a song that through its lyrics, confessional style, and re-arrangement carried the mediating presence of the radio and the tensions and intimacy epitomised by the new technologies of music portability.

Thus, while Benjamin did not carry a transistor radio in his pocket on his way back from college, he was entangled in the listening cultures that revolved around the portables. He represented the marketing target of the little transistors, his presence at the centre of *The Graduate* and the film's own commercial success were part and parcel of the structural changes that had made small portable radios ubiquitous, and the pre-existing song's cinematic meanings and ability to speak for him was an example of the fortuitous and productive encounters between music, places, and listening subjects that were facilitated by music's increasing portability. The very fact that audiences could hear 'The Sound of Silence' as Benjamin's song was consistent with the processes of de- and re-contextualisation brought about by portable music technologies, and also with the introspection of emergent singer-songwriter acts and the ubiquitous intimacy of 'transistors music'.

In this sense, 'The Sound of Silence' wasn't just a great 'fit' for *The Graduate* because it could ventriloquise Benjamin's loneliness, but because this very act of musical ventriloquism conveyed something about the broader musical culture Benjamin belonged to. The notion of portable music as a loyal companion normalised cinema's novel use of pre-existing music as a material able to provide an ongoing commentary and a 'voice' to a young and increasingly mobile generation of listeners.

Not only was the use of pre-existing popular music in the cinema of loneliness pre-mediated by the experience of music portability, but the fact that this mediation would remain invisible in *The Graduate* is significant. The relationship with media and technology was, after all, one of the great unresolved tensions of the countercultural critique. As Hubbert notices, countercultural youths 'increasingly embraced technologically mediated music and technology, from albums, stereos, and FM radios, in their quest for authentic musical experiences,' (*Countercultural Listening*, pp273-276) but they also saw technology 'as a tool

for establishing corporate and cultural hegemony [and] for promoting inauthenticity and alienation'. In *The Pursuit of Loneliness* – 1970 social studies blockbuster and canonical text of the emerging 'new culture' – technology would feature as a main target of Philip Slater's passionate critique of American individualism. The little transistors were central to the new generation's strategies of self-representation, but – to the extent that they were little plastic objects sold on the premise of providing intimacy and companionship – they were also an example of how technology, in Slater's opinion, could play a central role in an individualistic attempt to 'deny the reality and importance of human interdependence'. In the process of freeing us 'from the necessity of relating to, submitting to, depending upon, or controlling other people', Slater admonished his readers, 'technology', in its broadest possible sense, was progressively taking on the role of substituting for human companionship (*The Pursuit of Loneliness*, p26).

The Graduate, a film that parodied American consumerism while gaining extreme commercial success and providing a model for future commercial synergies between music and film industries, was steeped in these contradictions. As we have seen, right from the start, the film expounded what Thomas Frank calls 'the common countercultural disdain for such tasteless travesties of the mass society as white bread, suburbs, tailfins, and plastic'.⁴³ Buck Henry – one of *The Graduate*'s leading scriptwriters – remembers audiences at repeated screenings of *The Graduate* 'yell[ing] out the line "Plastics," as if it were the lyrics to a song'.⁴⁴ But plastic – the new flexible polymers – was also the material that allowed the portable radio to become a cheaper, lighter and more reliable 'companion', facilitating its entry into the 1960s lifestyle. The fact that no visible link is forged between non-diegetic song and portable technologies means that the song can accompany Benjamin's loneliness while bypassing the complex, real-life entanglement between music, technology and isolation

that the presence of transistor radios would have evoked. Through a transparent, non-diegetic mediation of the character's loneliness, 'The Sound of Silence' could have it both ways, accompanying Benjamin while remaining plastics free.

'... I'VE COME TO TALK TO YOU AGAIN': SHARING IN THE AESTHETICS OF LONELINESS

While the primary aim of Robert Kolker's *A Cinema of Loneliness* was to promote an auteur theory of American cinema, his designation raises far-reaching and unexplored questions about the relationship between the history of cinema and the history of loneliness. If, as Bound Alberti writes, 'loneliness is a bodily and embodied experience' with a long untold history,⁴⁵ what can cinema – as a mutable and highly refined instrument for storytelling and for the manipulation of our senses and of our sense of self – tell us about how such experience has been rendered and made sense of? The question is particularly important because of cinema's dual nature as archive and technological apparatus. We should ask not just 'how has cinema represented loneliness?' but how have cinema's representations of loneliness changed over time, in keeping with the changing technological mediation of loneliness? And, crucially, how has cinema's own technicity remediated loneliness in the process of representing it?

I have used *The Graduate* to start exploring some of these complexities. When embedded in its discursive and sensory horizon, the opening of *The Graduate* encapsulates how the novel kind of cinema that Hollywood was producing in the late 1960s was using music in a manner consistent with new ways of listening 'alone together' that were developing both within and without the cinema theatre. The film draws on music that sung of social disconnect and on an understanding of portable music as an anthropomorphic companion that could potentially

compensate for but also feed into that very sense of disconnect. That is to say, in *The Graduate*, music is called upon to represent the character's loneliness on the move because portable music played an increasingly substantial role in how the boundaries between self and others and the tension between distance and intimacy were being negotiated in daily life. In this sense, the film's use of 'The Sound of Silence' situates the character in a wider cultural commentary about social disconnect while also connecting him to a community of listeners, a 'new generation' that used mobile music as part of its practices of self-representation. Or, to put it differently, the appropriation of a pre-existing song from the *Billboard* charts is part of how the film re-contextualises loneliness as a shared feeling.

As the film then provided opportunities for a collective 're-hearing' of the song, these imagined musical connections would become concrete within the walls of specific cinemas, with far-reaching implications on the cinematic experience of loneliness. We have seen that the representation of loneliness at the start of *The Graduate* not only draws on the situational nature of cinematic spectatorship, but also uses the phenomenology of cinematic listening and the communal sharing of an internal musical soliloquy to turn on-screen loneliness into an intersubjective experience that combined techniques of privatisation with highly socialised forms of cinemagoing. *The Graduate*'s appropriation of 'The Sound of Silence' is a rich example of how the cinema of loneliness used pre-existing songs to create moments that rhetorically insisted on a character's alienation and on people's inability to 'listen' while simultaneously addressing a public of devoted listeners and vicarious confidants both within the cinema theatre and beyond.

Attending to the soundtracks of a 'cinema of loneliness' thus means paying attention to an important distinction between a film's content and the qualities and significance of the

cinematic experience it vehiculates. It also means recognising that – at the level of phenomenology, trends in cinema-going, and engagement with broader listening cultures – soundtracks can play a central role in how a film may bypass a political analysis of disaffection and provide a provisional (i.e. experience-driven) solution to loneliness that does not imply or involve a structural change or blueprint for action. Herein lies the continuing relevance of a film such as *The Graduate*. While the specific circumstances and issues at stake have transformed, the sense in which *The Graduate* uses music to provide a temporary and non-political way out of loneliness resonates beyond the film's specific time frame. Not only have technologies of musical mobility become more and more common since *The Graduate*, but the very debate on how listening on the move can engender forms of 'accompanied solitude' and provide attractive experiences of intersubjectivity has become central to popular and critical discourse.⁴⁶ In this sense, *The Graduate* offers an important window into a particular socio-historical moment when technologies, techniques, industry concerns and social conditions placed the audio-visual aesthetics of loneliness at the core of American cinema, and a broader example of the politically underdetermined and quasi-paradoxical ways in which cinema can mobilise music to remediate loneliness in the process of representing it.

1. Jacob Brackman, 'Onward and Upward with the Arts: *The Graduate*', *The New Yorker*, 44, 27 July 1968, pp34-66. (Hereafter *Onward and Upward*.)
2. Robert Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Kubrick, Coppola, Scorsese, Altman*, Oxford University Press, 1980 [First Edition], p90. (Hereafter *A Cinema of Loneliness*.)
3. Fay Bound Alberti, *A Biography of Loneliness: The History of an Emotion*, Oxford University Press, 2018, p3. (Hereafter *Biography of Loneliness*.)

4. Robert Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness*, Oxford University Press, 2011 [Fourth Edition], xi.
5. Sam Kashner, 'The Graduate: Here's to You, Mr. Nichols', in G. Carter (ed.), *Vanity Fair's Tales of Hollywood: Rebels, Reds and Graduates and the Wild Stories Behind the Making of 13 Iconic Films*, Penguin Books, 2008, pp167-191, p173. (Hereafter *The Graduate*.)
6. See Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music*, Columbia University Press, 1998.
7. See Carlo Cenciarelli (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cinematic Listening*, Oxford University Press, 2021. (Hereafter *Oxford Handbook of Cinematic Listening*.)
8. Paul Williams, 'Simon and Garfunkel – Sounds of Silence', *Crawdaddy*, 30 January 1966. (Hereafter *Simon and Garfunkel*.)
9. For one of several examples, see Richard Corliss, 'Film Chronicle: *The Graduate*', *National Review*, 7 May 1968.
10. Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p409.
11. Todd Berliner and Philip Furia, 'The Sounds of Silence: Songs in Hollywood Films Since the 1960s', *Style*, 36:1, 2002, pp19-35. (Hereafter *The Sounds of Silence*.) Pauline Reay and Sam Kashner similarly write about Simon and Garfunkel's music acting as 'an interior monologue' for Benjamin. See Pauline Reay *Music in Film: Soundtracks and Synergy*, Wallflower Paperback, 2004, p57; and *The Graduate*, p185.
12. On the difference between 'oneliness' and 'loneliness', and the notion of loneliness as an emotion cluster, see Chapter 1 of *A Biography of Loneliness*.
13. Tony Schwartz, 'Paul Simon Interview', *Playboy*, February 1984, 31:2, pp49-51; pp162-176.

14. For a discussion of this process in the context of contemporary romantic comedies, see Carlo Cenciarelli, 'iPod Listening as an I-Voice: Solitary Listeners and Imagined Interlocutors across Cinema and Personal Stereos', in *Oxford Handbook of Cinematic Listening*, pp269-289.
15. See Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, Indiana University Press, 1986.
16. See Elizabeth Reich and Scott R. Richmond, 'Introduction: Cinematic Identifications', *Film Criticism*, 39:2, 2014, pp3-24.
17. See Daniel Jerónimo Tobón, 'Empathy and Sympathy: Two Contemporary Models of Character Engagement', in N. Carroll, S. Loht, and L. Di Summa-Knopp (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of the Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp865-891. (Hereafter *Empathy and Sympathy*.)
18. Berys Gaut's argument in 'Empathy and Identification in Cinema', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 34:1, 2010, pp136-157, as summarised by Tobon, (*Empathy and Sympathy*, p869). Tobon calls this type of spectatorial engagement 'empathy-as-simulation'. It is a mode of engagement where we experience 'as if' we were in their shoes. (*Empathy and Sympathy*, p876).
19. Murray Smith, 'Engaging Characters: Further Reflections', in J. Eder, F. Jannidis, and R. Schneider (eds), *Characters in Fictional Worlds, Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film and Other Media*, De Gruyter, 2010, pp232-58.
20. Julian Hanich, *The Audience Effect: On the Collective Cinema Experience*, Edinburgh University Press, 2018.
21. Philip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point*, University of Chicago Press, 1970, p53. (Hereafter *The Pursuit of Loneliness*.)

22. Throughout the film, *The Graduate*'s most distinctive sonic solutions revolve around the experience of sensory isolation. As Jeff Smith notices, '*The Graduate* used radical disjunctions of image and sound to underline the main character's sense of cultural dislocation'. See Jeff Smith, 'The Auteur Renaissance', in K. Kalinak (ed.), *Sound: Dialogue, Music, and Effects*, Rutgers University Press, 2015, pp83-206.
23. Stephen Groening, "'No One Likes to Be a Captive Audience": Headphones and In-Flight Cinema', *Film History: An International Journal*, 28:3, 2016, pp114-138: p114.
24. Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece, *The Optical Vacuum: Spectatorship and Modernized American Theater Architecture*, Oxford University Press, 2018, p143. (Hereafter *The Optical Vacuum*.)
25. On the convergence between spectatorship and consumerism, see also Elaine Bapis, *Camera and Action: American Film as Agent of Social Change, 1965-1975*, McFarland, 2008, p19.
26. See Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, Verso, 2008 [1995], p76.
27. Ernest Callenbach, 'Temples of the Seventh Art: Notes on Cinema Design', *Sight and Sound*, 35:1, 1965, pp12-17. (Hereafter *Temples of the Seventh Art*.)
28. 'Reade Circuit to "Piggy-back" New Coronet Atop Old Baronet', *International Projectionist*, 36:9, September 1961, p12.
29. 'Coronet Luxury Twin Theatre Above the Baronet, Opens this Month', *International Projectionist*, 37, no. 12, December 1962, p13.
30. 'This Tuesday, the Most Intimate and Unique Theatre in the Country Opens its Doors to New Yorkers', promotional material for the Lincoln Art Theatre inauguration on Tuesday 21 July 1964. The cinema opened with *Cartouche* (1964), a French film distributed in the US by Embassy Pictures, *The Graduate*'s own distributor.

31. Ralph Gleason, 'Like a Rolling Stone', *The American Scholar*, 36:4, 1967, pp555-563: p556. (Hereafter *Like a Rolling Stone*.)
32. 'Behind the Radio Sales Revival is Teen Craving for "Instant Music"', *Billboard*, 9 December 1967, p91. (Hereafter *Behind the Radio Sales Revival*.)
33. David E. Scherman, 'The Transistors Craze: There's No Escape', *LIFE*, 24 November 1961, p23. (Hereafter *The Transistors Craze*.)
34. The idea that the radio could provide companionship has a longer history. For the emergence of this debate at the time of the popularisation of wireless technology in the 1920s, see Tim Taylor, Mark Katz, and Tony Grajeda, *Music, Sound, and Technology in America: A Documentary History of Early Phonography, Cinema, and Radio*, Duke University Press, 2012.
35. Julie Hubbert, 'The Compilation Soundtrack from the 1960s to the Present', in D. Neumeyer (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp291-318; Julie Hubbert, 'FM Radio and the New Hollywood Soundtrack', in J. Buhler and H. Lewis (eds), *Voicing the Cinema: Film Music and the Integrated Soundtrack*, University of Illinois Press, 2020, pp54-72; and Julie Hubbert, 'Countercultural Listening in Malick's *Badlands* (1973)', in *Oxford Handbook of Cinematic Listening*, pp271-292. (Hereafter *Countercultural Listening*.)
36. Michael Brian Schiffer, *The Portable Radio in American Life*, The University of Arizona Press, 1991. (Hereafter *The Portable Radio in American Life*.)
37. For an emblematic document of the idea of the portable radio as a 'constant companion', see also 'Radio: The State of the Radio', *TIME*, 9 May 1955, 65:19.
38. See for example Michael Bull, 'No Dead Air! The iPod and the Culture of Mobile Listening', *Leisure Studies*, 24:4, 2005, pp343-355.

39. Tim Wall and Nick Webber, 'Changing Cultural Coordinates: The Transistor Radio and Space, Time, and Identity', Sumanth Gopinath and Jason Stanyek (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Mobile Music Studies (Volume 1)*, 2014 pp118-132: p126.
40. Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination*, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, pp225-231. (Hereafter *Listening In.*)
41. On the 1960s emergence of this confessional mode, see David Shumway, 'The Emergence of the Singer-Songwriter', J.A. Williams and K. Williams (eds) *The Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter*, Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp11-20.
42. Robert Hillburn, *Paul Simon: The Life*, Simon and Schuster, 2018, p73. (Hereafter *Paul Simon.*)
43. Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, University of Chicago Press, 1997, p13.
44. Henry cited by Kashner, 'The Graduate', p173.
45. Fay Bound Alberti, 'This "Modern Epidemic": Loneliness as an Emotion Cluster and a Neglected Subject in the History of Emotions', *Emotion Review*, 10:3, 2018, pp242-254: p242.
46. For an exploration of these contemporary debates in the context of sound studies and film, respectively, see the above-mentioned works by Bull, 'No Dead Air!' and Cenciarelli, 'iPod Listening as an I-Voice'.