

Sound Design for Movies in the Modern Sense

- An integrated part of the communication design
- Not just sound effects added after filming is done
- This is a somewhat recent phenomenon, but essential for the success of movies like *Starwars*

Diegetic Sounds (“die-ih-jet-ic”)

- Diegetic means “telling” as opposed to “showing”
 - **A sound that occurs in the action** of a film or multimedia presentation, such as...
 - The dialog voices of characters, object sounds such as music played by musicians on screen, doorbell, or bat on ball where you see ball & bat
- Non Diegetic
 - Narrator’s commentary
 - Mood music created for thematic effect as the film’s or presentation’s plot progresses

The Human Voice Track

- Dialog track is critical
 - 1) It usually tells the story.
 - 2) It authenticates the speaker as *real person*.

Film requires a *voice sound that matches the persona*, such as [Sam Spade](#), Eastwood’s Harry, [Nemo’s Dory](#), [Darth Vader](#), etc.

Film Sound Tracks Have Three Kinds of Recordings

- **Human Voice** - dialog, narration
- **Sound Effects**
 - object sounds, action/Foley sounds, environment/ambient sounds
- **Music** - “bed” sounds, emotional sounds

Bending Logic

- Sound designer can manipulate **diegetic** and **non-diegetic conventions** to...
 - **Create ambiguity** (horror: the narrator is actually there!) or to...
 - **Create surprise** (comedy: that bagpipe music we’ve been hearing in the background is actually coming from one of the characters!)

The Human Voice Track

- Dialog **recorded during filming** is usually unbalanced, noisy, and uneven - so it is often re-recorded later...
- Sometimes called **dubbing** or **looping** - although these terms commonly refer to voices recorded that do not belong to the original actors. Also means changing the language.
- **ADR - Automatic Dialog Replacement**
 - Common term for re-recording dialog with the original actor while the actor is watching the edited film.
 - We can do this in our sound booth if a monitor is set up for the actor.

Synchronous Sound Effects

- Matched with what is viewed
 - Piano being played
 - Door creak
- Footsteps with the image of a person walking
- Sometimes a better communicator than the visual
- Diegetic
- **Loudness indicates importance**
(Using: level, contrast, compression, EQ)

False Synchronization

Expected sound is replaced with a similar sound that is unexpected (Cable cutting in Cable Hog commercial becomes a “twip” sound of a computer losing its connection)

Asynchronous Sound Effects

- No visible screen source
- Adds ambience, sets the context
- Adds emotional nuance
 - (siren during argument)
 - (church bells tolling and gravely injured character)

Sounds Establish Physical Relationships

- Distance, direction, speed, etc.
- Thundering herd approaching: volume increase
- Speed: time it takes for sound to pan across and fade back out
- Character far away: echo of far-away canyon, or reverb at other end of long hall
- Someone is very close: breathing is audible, treble is boosted

Sound Can Show What It Is *Like to be There*.

More than just simple ambience,

Sounds can indicate *qualities* of a location

Sonically beautiful or ugly?

Clanking steam pipes or song birds?

Creaky door hinges or solid click of well-built latch.

Sound Can Create Intellectual Connections Between Characters and Places, Objects, Experiences, and Ideas.

Sound often shows the *point of view of the character*, that is how the setting affects the character.

Does it seem oppressive, boring, inspiring, safe, relentless, etc?

Permeate all aspects of the character’s life?

Is it always on her/his mind?

So the sound designer makes it seem that way to the audience. Viewer hears sounds as the character hears them.

Hero is having a bad day in a steel mill: sounds are relentless, squealing like fingernails on the chalkboard, clanking, harsh, midrange boost at 1 and 3KHz, etc.

Good day in a steel mill: humming motors, smooth EQ with a little dip at 1-3KHz

Sound Can Create a Question Mark in the Viewer's Mind.

• **Sounds that creep in to mix**

- Not immediately clear. What is that?
- Not loud at first. Not quite recognizable?
- The twig snap in the woods.
- The water trickle before the flood in Oh Brother.
- The ticking clock (indicating the presence of the alligator) in Peter Pan

Sound Can Create a Question Mark in the Viewer's Mind.

• **Out of context, or unexpected sounds**

- Stephen King films often use this
 - Carnival sounds at moment of danger
 - Dangerous doll sounds
 - Phone rings at moment you expect door to burst open!
(example of "*false synchronization*")

"Defeated Expectation"

- Listener expects to hear a sound
 - Tire squeal usually leads to a crash
 - But no crash, just eerie silence!
- Creates tension and interest
 - Especially the next time we hear tires squeal

16

"Acousmatic" Sounds

- Sounds for which the source is not revealed, and it is hard to imagine.
 - The Great OZ still behind the curtain
- Opposite: "Visualized" Sounds

Music

Music

- Most of the time designed to be “unnoticed”
- Supplies **emotion and rhythm**
manipulate key, speed, rhythm, time
- **Foreshadows**
Something is wrong
Something is coming
- **Introduces** scenes
 - We hear a change of tension/pace before we see the scene
- **Links** scenes
Leitmotifs, larger themes tie one scene to another

Musical Note Pairs as Communicators

Perfect octave	Completeness, openness, unity
Major seventh	Spooky, eerie, off-center, strange
Minor seventh	Expectant, suspenseful, full but unbalanced
Major sixth	Peaceful, balanced
Minor sixth	A bit sad, soothing
Perfect fifth	Power, centering, strength, victory
Tritone	Horror, terrifying, scary
Perfect fourth	Ethereal, lightness, transparent, clarity
Major third	Neutral, hopeful, resolved, nonabrasive
Minor third	Blue, a little less hopeful
Major second	Unresolved, unsettled, unpredictability
Minor second	Unclear, tense, anxious, uneasiness
Perfect unison	Peace, strength, calmness, security

The First Music Heard in a Film

- Sets the mood
- Introduces the pace, and/or the character, and/or place
- Beat can set the rhythm for whole production

Beat-Centered Music

- Music can cause the viewer’s heart rate to speed up, temperature to rise, circulation up.
- Works with soft tranquil or loud music

Leitmotif - Assigning a Specific Bit of Music to a Character or Place “light-mo-teeef”

- After the first time, music can **introduce the character** without having to be on-screen
- Can be used for **person, place, or idea**
 - Rocky the hero
 - Jaws
 - Starwars bad/good guys
 - Rings theme
- Romanticizes, **causes empathy** (*Star Trek*, *Shire theme in Ring trilogy*, *Laura’s theme*)
- Sometimes referred to as “*narrative ambience*”
- (**Can be a sound too, like chains rattling.**)

Summary of Sound’s Possibilities

- * suggest a mood, evoke a feeling
- set a pace
- indicate a geographical locale
- indicate a historical period
- clarify the plot
- define a character
- connect otherwise unconnected ideas, characters, places, images, moments
- heighten realism or diminish it
- heighten ambiguity or diminish it
- draw attention to a detail, or away from it
- indicate changes in time
- smooth otherwise abrupt changes between shots or scenes
- emphasize a transition for dramatic effect
- describe an acoustic space
- startle or soothe
- exaggerate action or mediate it