

Appreciating **Sound Effects and
Music in Films**
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“Sound is caused by a physical phenomenon producing vibrations which propagate as an acoustic wave which is transmitted through mediums such as the air, but also liquids or solids.”

Sound waves travel at differing speeds through various mediums and at different temperatures.

For example; approx. 343 metres/second via air at 20°C.
(Light travels at 300 million metres/second)

In human physiology and psychology sound waves are received through the ear and perceived by the brain.

When heard, sounds convey specified impressions.

Sounds therefore carry meaning – and this is the aspect of sound typically used in the design and creation of sounds in screen production.

And so, the aspect that we are focusing upon today, so far, is how the perception of sound effects and music can be used creatively in screen production.

We hope you agree with us that sound is important in the interpretation of moving image texts?

Video example:

See with your Ears:

*a video tutorial based upon a scene from the film Munich
directed by Steven Spielberg*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kavxsXhzD48>

There are several ways to deconstruct and analyse creative screen productions.

Sound is just one of these – an important one in my opinion – but still just one approach, one component.

How can you teach students to be more aware of the use of sounds and sound design in screen productions?

3 CHALLENGES facing teachers

1. Introducing and identifying types of sound
2. Analysing how these sounds have been designed and used
3. Comparing how these sounds are designed and used differently in various films

Basic Teaching Technique:

Identifying sounds and analysing how and why they are used

Examples of *in classroom* teaching exercises to support the 1 (identify sounds) and 2 (analyse sounds) challenges when teaching the use of sound and music:

Methodology:

- Cover the video screen and ask pupils to listen carefully to the sound track of a short moving image sequence and describe exactly what they hear in this sequence.
- Pupils should identify the type of text they think it is and identify and describe all the sounds they can hear.
- They should then guess at the content and style of the images in the sequence.
- Finally show the complete sequence and invite discussion about how sounds and images affect each other.

Once Upon a Time in the West - The Massacre of McBain Family

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqTfBysL0wE>

A tip:

- This could be selected by the teacher or developed as a an in-class activity where each student is asked to prepare and bring an example to share with the class – this might provide diversity of content and/or engage students in discussion.

Possible follow-ups / variations:

- Try out any or all of: different music, different sound effects, a different voice reading the same words, or different words; or eliminate any of these elements.
- Discuss how this affects the ways the images can be interpreted.

Key Questions

About music:

- What kind of music is this? What feelings does the music suggest to you?

About sound effects:

- What exactly can you hear and what might it represent?

About words:

- What is said and what can you tell about the speaker(s) from their voice(s)?

About silence:

- Why do you think the sequence is silent at this point?
What might be going on?

About the final viewing:

- What difference does the sound make to the sequence?
What difference would it make if some elements were missing?

ARRIVAL

- Dialogue, silence, music (music as dialogue, dialogue as music), quiet ambience, effects, loud ambience
 - Organic sound effect and ambience recording
 - Emotional and thematic core of the film, language and time are constructs
 - Language: written, spoken, human or alien - but also film language
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- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wK4HQIO6aQ0>

Learning Objectives

Pupils should learn that:

- Moving image soundtracks can have four fundamental elements: *music, sound effects, voice and silence*
- Each element works in the overall sonic design of the film
- Each element contributes to meaning

At HKAPA School of Film and Television we teach a slightly expanded version of the Elements of a Soundtrack:

1. Dialogue (voice),
2. Sound Effects (various types),
3. Atmospheres/Ambiences,
4. Music,
5. Silence

NOMADLAND

- Dialogue, ambience, non-diegetic music
- uncluttered sound design,
- designed to be realistic,
- designed to be uncluttered
- close shots on faces with close perspective dialogue recording
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJve_9xQjA8

There are different types of Dialogue (voices) Music, Sound Effects and Atmospheres and each of these elements contains sub-sets depending upon how a sound element functions or is used within the overall sound design of the film.

All these elements of the soundtrack contribute to meaning.

The first task for learning to appreciate how Music and Sound is used in a film is to be able to identify and hear the various types of sound – the elements of a soundtrack – clearly.

This takes practice and concentration and is different to how we normally receive screen content as typical audience members.

It is a skill that needs to be actively learned and practiced.

THE TRUMAN SHOW

- Dialogue – interior to exterior, whispers to frantic
- Music – diegetic to non-diegetic or all non-diegetic, tracking emotional development through the scene
- Silences and Quiet ambience – extends to loud effects
- Mix – scene next to waves mixed to emphasise the dialogue
- Sync Dialogue and ADR or Post sync dialogue (at beach)
- Foley footsteps
- Sound Effects – quiet interior sync fx to exterior spot fx engine roar (note low level wave effects)
- Ambiences - interior and exterior wind and surf
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwfPin4GJ-0>

Basic Teaching Techniques:

introducing Sound + Picture Editing

- Screen a short sample of a screen text with students in F2F or online delivery mode.
- After their first viewing of the short screen sequence, pupils guess at the number of shots used and the number of sounds they can identify.
- On second viewing, students (or the teacher) use the stop, pause and start controls mark each change in shot, scene location and sound (use pause button if necessary). Note that frequently the place where the images change is different to where the sounds change.

- On third viewing students identify how the shot transitions are created (eg cuts, mixes, fades, wipes etc) and whether the sound transitions happen at the same places and note how the sounds transition.
- They should also time each shot.
- Students should note where various sounds and particularly where music starts and stops
- Become aware of the relationships between images and sounds

THE GRADUATE

- Effects, dialogue, false perspective, ambience, character and story building dialogue, pic editing, cut, - reverse on dialogue, non-diegetic/diegetic music,
- emotional core of the film
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjuPkYiDTzw>

LION

- Dialogue, effects, music, silences,
- emotion, memory, picture editing, transitions
- emotional core of the film

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFfXdXTxduw>

Learning outcomes: students should learn that

- The number, sequence and duration of shots in a moving image sequence all contribute to its meaning and are created in the editing process.
- Screen time and ‘story time’ are usually different: the editing process ‘manages’ the story time for us.
- Each new shot should provide new information or impressions: shot changes are not merely ‘to retain viewer interest’.

- The pace and rhythm of editing and the types of transition used also contribute to meaning.
- Sound transitions may not match shot transitions: in drama especially they may anticipate them and this can function to maintain or develop moods such as suspense.

BLADE RUNNER

- Music, ambience, dialogue (reverberant), footsteps, ambience, music, dialogue
- bringing it all together: ambience as music, music as ambience, dialogue as music and ambience
- all sound elements working together within a dense mix
- combining and supporting, “humanizing” the visuals within an unusual world
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSOzdFoZsho>

LISTENING TO BLADE RUNNER

Bringing it all together

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4T_sSSka9pA

Basic Teaching Techniques: Comparing how sounds are used in various film texts and considering differences

- Comparative Analysis – part four
- Handout