

## The 4 Steps

1. **Explain** the story or production element

Eg. The highly effective use of **sound** in Falling Down

Or

1. The creative use of sound can be found in

2. Give examples - **from a sequence/s** in the film

are evident in the Opening sequence of Falling Down which effectively communicates the central characters imploding tension as he is gridlocked on a Santa Monica freeway

3. Use **film language** to explain how the element has been used

As the film opens the audience hears Diegetic Heavy breathing which immediately introduces the audience to the characters state of mind

4. Explain the information it provides – the effect it has - or the mood it creates to engage the audience

and reveals the anxiety and tension which he is experiencing

Unless means to write about a sequence in the film and give examples of the sound/s used and how the sound/s create mood- (atmosphere or feeling) to engage (Interest) the audience

Sound means – music , sound effects or dialogue (what words characters use) **Diegetic sound** – sound effects that exist in the film – eg. Police sirens  
**Non-diegetic sound** (Music put into the film during post production editing to create a mood-or emotion such as excitement- suspense –tension- - fear – joy)

Example:

In the **opening sequence** of Falling Down (1993 Director Joel Schumacher), the audience observe an extreme close up revealing sweat on the top lip of a character and hear **diegetic heavy breathing** suggesting the character is stressed or anxious.

Work through the sequence explaining the visual and the accompanying use of sound/s or type of music that slowly build throughout the scene look to the

Read through the notes on sound on the next page to help with the appropriate language to use when writing about sound

Diegetic sound are all the sounds that exist in the film world

Non Diegetic sounds- comes from outside the world of the story

As usual, both extensive viewing and intensive scrutiny will sharpen your capacity to notice the functioning of film sound. You can get comfortable with the analytical tools we have suggested by asking several questions about a film's sound: You may discuss other story or production elements in context of the use of sound in the scene, e.g.- A subjective/ tilt up shot shows Foster anxiously nervously glancing at his potential -accompanying this shot is music that contains.....

Remember in your response avoid terms such as "We can see", instead use "It is evident to the audience" or "The audience is engaged by

Remember sound: engages a distinct sense mode: sound can actively shape how the audience perceive and interprets the image: A sound cue for some visual element may anticipate that element and relay our attention to it. Sound can cue us to form expectations: Sound brings with it a new sense of the value of silence

Acoustic Properties, Loudness, manipulation of sound volume - changes in dynamics:

Pitch -highness or lowness of the sound

Timbre, Color or tone quality, emphasises the texture or feel of a sound

Rhythm, a beat or pulse, a pace or tempo, or a pattern of accents or stronger or weaker beats

Fidelity, the extent to which sound is faithful to the source as we conceive it

Space, the Diegetic sound- source of sound is a character or object in the story space of the film Non diegetic sound- comes from a source outside the story space

Time Synchronous sound, when sound is synchronised with the image

Asynchronous sound- when sound is out of sync with the image

These should provide you with descriptive language in which to use to describe sound and its effect on the audience

However For more and comprehensive detailed notes on sound – read the following pages

## FUNDAMENTALS OF FILM SOUND

### ACOUSTIC PROPERTIES

We should, isolate certain qualities of sound as we perceive it. These qualities are familiar to us from everyday experience.

**Loudness.** The sound we hear results from vibrations in the air. The amplitude, or breadth, of the vibrations produces our sense of loudness, or volume. **Film sound constantly manipulates sound volume.** For example, in many films a long shot of a busy street is accompanied by loud traffic noises, but when two people meet and start to speak, the loudness of the noise drops. For a dialogue between a soft-spoken character and a blustery one is characterized as much by the difference in volume as by the substance of the talk.

**Loudness is also related to perceived distance; often the louder sound, the closer we take it to be.** This sort of assumption seems to work in the street-traffic example already mentioned: The couple's dialogue being louder, is sensed as in the acoustic "foreground," while the noise sinks to the background. In addition, a film may startle the viewer by exploiting abrupt and extreme shifts in volume (usually called changes in dynamics), as when a quiet scene is interrupted by a very loud noise.

**Pitch.** The frequency of sound vibrations governs pitch, or the perceived "Highness" or "lowness" of the sound. Certain instruments, such as a tuning fork, can produce pure tones, but most sounds, in life and on film are "complex tones," batches of different frequencies. Nevertheless pitch plays a useful role in picking out distinct sounds in a film sound track. It helps us distinguish music and speech from other sounds. Pitch also helps us to distinguish among objects. Low-pitched sounds, such as thumps, evoke hollow objects, while higher-pitched sounds (like that of a fingernail scratching a blackboard) suggest smoother or harder surfaces and more dense objects.

Pitch can also serve more specific purposes in a film. When a young boy tries to speak in a man's deep voice and fails (as in *How Green My Valley*), the joke is based primarily on pitch. Marlene Dietrich's voice delivery often depends upon a long upward-gliding intonation which makes a statement sound like a question. In the coronation scene of *Ivan the Terrible, Part I*, a court singer with a deep bass voice begins a song to praise to Ivan, and each phrase rises dramatically in pitch—which Eisenstein emphasizes in the editing, with successively closer shots of the singing coinciding with each

vocal change. When Bernard Herrmann obtained the effects of shrill, birdlike shrieking in Hitchcock's *Psycho*, even many musicians could not recognize the source: violins played at extraordinarily high pitch.

**Timbre.** The harmonic components of a sound give it a certain "color or tone quality"—what musicians call timbre. Timbre is actually a fundamental acoustic parameter other than amplitude or frequency, but it is indispensable in describing the texture or "feel" of a sound. When we hear someone's voice nasal or a certain musical tone mellow, we are referring to timbre. In everyday life, the recognition of a familiar sound is largely a matter of various aspects of timbre.

Filmmakers manipulate timbre continually. Timbre can help articulate portions of the sound track, as when it differentiates musical instruments from one another. Timbre also "comes forward" on certain occasions, as in the clichéd use of oleaginous saxophone tones behind seduction scenes

As fundamental components of film sound, loudness, pitch, and timbre interact to define the overall sonic texture of a film. At the most elementary level, these three acoustic factors enable us to distinguish the various sounds in a film. For example, these qualities enable us to recognize different characters' voices. Mainstream filmmakers have been so concerned to make a film's sound track as rich and engaging as its visual images.

## DIMENSIONS OF FILM SOUND

The way in which the sounds relate to other film elements gives them several other dimensions. First, because sound occupies duration, it has a **rhythm**. Second, sound can relate to its perceived source with greater or lesser **fidelity**. Third, sound conveys a sense of the spatial conditions in which it occurs. And fourth, the sound relates to visual events that take place in a specific time, and this relationship gives sound a temporal dimension. These categories reveal that sound in film offers a great many creative possibilities to the filmmaker.

### • RHYTHM

Rhythm is one of the most complex features of sound. Rhythm involves, minimally, a beat or pulse, a pace or tempo, and a pattern of accents, or stronger and weaker beats. In the realm of sound, all of these features are naturally most recognizable in film music, since there beat, tempo, and accent are basic compositional features. In fictional films, speech rhythm is a matter for the performer's control, but the sound editor can also manipulate it at the dubbing phase. Sound effects have distinct rhythmic qualities as well. The plodding hooves of a farm horse differ from a cavalry company riding at full speed. The reverberating tone of a gong may offer a slowly decaying accent, while a sudden sneeze provides a brief one. In a gangster film, a

machine gun's fire creates a regular, rapid beat, while the sporadic reports of pistols may come at irregular intervals.

Any consideration of the rhythmic uses of sound is complicated by the fact that the movements in the images themselves have a rhythm as well, distinguished by the same principles of **beat, speed, and accent**. In addition, the editing has a rhythm. As we have seen, a succession of short shots helps create a rapid tempo, whereas shots held longer tend to slow down the rhythm.

In most cases the rhythms of editing, of movement within the image, and of sound all cooperate.

The filmmaker may also choose to create a disparity among the rhythms of sound, editing, and image. One of the most common options is to edit dialogue scenes in ways that "cut against" natural speech rhythms.

The filmmaker may contrast the rhythm of sound and picture in more noticeable ways. For instance, if the source of sound is primarily off-screen, the filmmaker can utilize the behaviour of onscreen figures to create an expressive counter-rhythm.

A change of rhythm may function to shift our expectations. In the famous battle on the ice in *Alexander Nevsky*, Sergei Eisenstein develops the sound from slow tempos to fast and back to slow. The first twelve shots of the scene show the Russian army prepared for the attack of the German knights. The shots are of moderate length, and they have very little movement. The music is comparably slow, consisting of short, distinctly separated chords. Then, as the German army rides into sight over the horizon, both the visual movement and the tempo of the music increase quickly, and the battle begins. At the end of the battle Eisenstein creates another contrast with a long passage of slow, lamenting music, majestic 1 rack in shots, and little figure movement.

#### • **FIDELITY**

Fidelity refers to the extent to which the sound is faithful to the source as we conceive it. If a film shows us a barking dog and we hear a barking noise, that sound is faithful to its source; the sound maintains fidelity. But if the picture of the barking dog is accompanied by the sound of a cat meowing, there enters a disparity between sound and image—a lack of fidelity.

From our standpoint, fidelity has nothing to do with what originally made the sound in production. As we have seen, the filmmaker may manipulate sound independently of image. Accompanying the image of a dog with the meow is no more dutiful than accompanying the image with a bark. If the viewer takes the sound to be coming from its source in the diegetic world of the film, then it is faithful, regardless of its actual source in production.

Fidelity is thus purely a matter of expectation. Even if our dog emits a bark on screen, perhaps in production the bark came from a different dog or was electronically synthesized. We do not know what a laser gun "really" sounds like, but we accept the whang they make in Return of the Jedi as plausible. (In production, (heir sound was made by hammering guy wires that anchored a radio tower.)

When we do become aware that a sound is unfaithful to its source, that awareness is usually used for comic effect. In Jacques Tati's Mr. Hulot's Holiday much humour arises from the opening and closing of a dining-room door. Instead of simply recording a real door, Tati inserts a twanging sound like a plucked cello string each time the door swings. Aside from being amusing in itself, this sound functions to emphasize the rhythmic patterns created by waiters and diners passing through the door. Because many of the jokes in Mr. Hulot's Holiday and other Tati films are based on quirkily unfaithful noises, his films are good specimens of the study of sound.

Another master of comically unfaithful sound is Rene Clair. In several scenes of Le Million sound effects occur that are not faithful to their sources. When the hero's friend drops a plate, we hear not shattering crockery but the clash of cymbals. Later, during a chase scene, when characters collide, the impact is portrayed by a heavy bass drum beat. Similar manipulations of fidelity commonly occur in animated cartoons.

But as with low- or high-angle framings, we have no recipe that will allow us to interpret every manipulation of fidelity as comic. Some nonfaithful sounds have serious functions. In Hitchcock's The Thirty Nine Steps a landlady discovers a corpse in an apartment. A shot of her screaming face is accompanied by a train whistle; then the scene shifts to an actual train. Though the whistle is not a faithful sound for an image of a screaming person, it provides a striking transition.

In some cases fidelity may be manipulated by a change in volume.

A sound may seem unreasonably loud or soft in relation to other sounds in the film. Curtis Bernhardt's Possessed alters volume in ways that are not faithful to the sources. The central character is gradually falling deeper into mental illness. In one scene she is alone, very distraught, in her room on a rainy night, and the narration restricts us to her range of knowledge. But sound devices enable the narration to achieve subjective depth as well. We begin to hear things as she does; the ticking of the clock and dripping of raindrops gradually magnify in volume. Here the shift in fidelity functions to suggest a psychological state, a movement from the character's heightened perception into sheer hallucination.

- SPACE

Sound has a spatial dimension because it comes from a source. Our beliefs about that source have a powerful effect on how we understand the sound.

If the source of a sound is a character or object in the story space of the film, we call the sound diegetic. The voices of the characters, sounds made by objects in the story, or music represented as coming from instruments in the story space are all diegetic sound.

Diegetic sound is often hard to notice as such. It may seem to come naturally from the world of the film, as when characters speak lines of dialogue. But as we saw in the sequence of the Ping-Pong game in *Mr. Hulot's Holiday*, the filmmaker may manipulate diegetic sound in ways that are not at all realistic. On the other hand there is nondiegetic sound, which is represented as coming from a source outside the story space. Familiar examples of such sound are easy to find. Music added to enhance the film's action is the most common type of nondiegetic sound. When a character is climbing a sheer cliff and tense music comes up, we do not expect to see an orchestra perched on the side of the mountain. Viewers understand that the "movie music" is a convention and does not issue from the space of the story. The same holds true for the so-called omniscient narrator, the disembodied voice that gives us information but does not belong to any of the characters in the film. An example is *The Magnificent Amber-sons*, in which the director Orson Welles speaks the nondiegetic narration.

As with fidelity, the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic sound does not depend on the real source of the sound in the filmmaking process. Rather, it depends on our understanding of the conventions of film viewing. We know that certain sounds are represented as coming from the story world, while others are represented as coming from outside the space of the story events. Such viewing conventions are so common that we usually do not have to think about which type of sound we are hearing at any moment

Let us survey some possibilities of diegetic sound. We know that the space of the narrative action is not limited to what we can see on the screen at a given moment. If we already know that several people are present in a room, we can see a shot that shows only one person without assuming that the other people have left. We simply have a sense that those people are off-screen. And if one of those off-screen people speaks, we still assume that the sound is coming from part of the story space. Thus diegetic sound can be either onscreen or off-screen, depending on whether its source is within the frame or outside the frame.

Simple examples will illustrate this. A shot shows a character talking, and we hear the sound of his or her voice. Another shot shows a door closing, and we hear a slam. A person plays a fiddle, and we hear its notes. In each case the source of the sound is in the story—diegetic—and visible within the frame—onscreen. But the shot may show only a person listening to a voice, without the speaker being seen; another shot might show a character running down a corridor and the sound of an unseen door slamming; lastly, an audience is shown listening while the sound of a fiddle is heard. In all of

these instances, the sounds come from within the story— again diegetic—but are now in a space outside the frame—off-screen.

At first this may seem a trivial distinction, Off-screen sound can suggest space extending beyond the visible action. In *American Graffiti*, a film that plays heavily on the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic music, off-screen sounds of car radios often suggest that all of the cars on a street are tuned to the same radio station.

Off-screen sound may also control our expectations about off-screen space. In *His Girl Friday* Hildy goes into the press room to write her final story. As she chats with the other reporters, a loud clunk comes from an unseen source. Hildy glances offscreen left, and immediately a new space comes to our attention. She walks to the window and sees a gallows being prepared for an execution. Here offscreen sound initiates the discovery of fresh space.

## TIME

Sound also permits [he filmmaker to represent time in various ways. This is because the time represented on the sound track may or may not be the same as that represented in the image.

The process is most evident in the ease of synchronization between sound and image. The matching of sound with image in projection creates synchronism sound. When a sound is synchronized with the image, we hear it at the same time as we see (the source produce the sound. Dialogue between characters is normally synchronized so that the lips of the actors move at the same time that we hear the appropriate words.

When the sound does go out of synchronization during a viewing (often through an error in projection or lab work), the result is quite distracting. But some (filmmakers have obtained imaginative effects by putting out-of-sync, or asynchronous, sound into the film itself. One such effect occurs in a scene in the musical by Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, *Singin in the Rain*.

A lengthier play with our expectations about synchronization comes in Woody Allen's film *What's Up Tiger Lily?* Allen has taken an Oriental spy film and dubbed a new sound track on, but the English-language dialogue is not a translation of the original. Instead, it creates a new story in comic juxtaposition with the original images. Much of the humor results from our constant awareness that the words are not perfectly synchronized with the actors' lips. Allen has turned the usual problems of the dubbing of foreign films into the basis of his comedy.

Synchronization relates to screen duration, or viewing time. and can also present plot and story time. To recall the distinction:

Story time consists of the order, duration, and frequency of all the events pertinent to the narrative, whether they are shown to us or not.



Plot time consists of these temporal qualities (order, duration, and frequency) of the events actually represented in the film. Plot time shows us selected story events but only refers to others. Thus it usually covers a shorter span than the complete story does.

Story and plot time can be manipulated by sound in two principal ways. If the sound takes place at the same time as the image in terms of the story events, it is simultaneous sound. This is by far the most common usage. When characters speak onscreen, the words we hear are occurring at the same moment in the plot's action as in story time.

But it is possible for the sound we hear to occur earlier or later in the story than the events which we see in the image. In this manipulation of story order, the sound becomes nonsimultaneous. The most common example of this is the sonic flashback. For instance, we might see a character onscreen in the present but hear another character's voice from an earlier scene. By means of nonsimultaneous sound, the film can give us information about story events without, showing them to us. And nonsimultaneous sound may, like simultaneous sound, have either an external or an internal source—that is, a source in the "objective" world of the film or the "subjective" realms of the character's mind.

As these categories suggest, temporal relationships in the cinema are complex. To help distinguish them, Table 8.2 sums up the possible temporal and spatial relationships that can exist between image and sound.

## Overview

This worksheet requires students to use their notes and knowledge of sound in cinema -to analyse 2 specific scenes. Your responses should work systematically through the scene: You should endeavor to use as many filmic terms as possible-use your glossary of film terms and other notes

## **SUMMARY**

### TASK

Complete the following questions relating to sound in the two films you have viewed in class

Q1. Sound is an important element in its interaction with visual images. From the scene presented , discuss the impact, style, qualities and use of sound used to complement and heighten the visual imagery presented

Q2 Sound has many properties which can stimulate moods, feelings and emotions from the audience. With reference to the scene presented discuss the nature of music and sounds used to create drama, tension and suspense

## Further analytical questions

1. What sounds are present—music, speech, noise? How are loudness, pitch, and timbre used? Is the mixture sparse or dense? Modulated or abruptly changing?
2. Is the sound related rhythmically to the image? If so, how?
3. Is the sound faithful or unfaithful to its perceived source?
4. Where is the sound coming from? In the story's space or outside it? Onscreen or offscreen?
5. When is the sound occurring? Simultaneously with the story action? Before? After?
6. How are the various sorts of sounds organized across a sequence or the entire film? What patterns re-formed, and how do they reinforce aspects of the film's overall formal system (narrative or nonnarrative)?
7. For each of questions 1—6, what purposes are fulfilled and what effects are achieved by the sonic manipulations?