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# LISTENING

March 17th 2020

# Sound / listening

- How to focus on sound?
  - It works subconsciously, it intensifies / amplifies watching without viewer becoming aware of it: easily 'overlooked' (sic)
- How to talk about sound in film?
  - Within audiovisual image, listening and viewing can evoke two different worlds
  - Often simplification made of sound being *diegetic* (part of story-world) and music being *non-diegetic*
- How do we perceive sound?
  - No frame: we can't discern a clear unit

# Problems with analyzing film sound

- A film shot is a clear unit, with start and end.
- There is no audio equivalent of a 'shot': Unlike visual cuts, sound splices neither jump to our ears nor permit us to demarcate identifiable units of sound montage. Also, film mix are sounds superimposed, where as images superimposed doesn't work:
  - *"Imagine a film resulting from mixing three layers of images in superimposition: only with great difficulty could one locate cuts"* (Chion *Audio-Vision*, 1994 p.41)
- Perceptual breakdown of noises:
  - Dialogue: we analyze vocal flow into words, sentences (linguistic units)
  - Music: melodies, themes, rhythmic patterns (to extent of musical training)

# “Soundtrack”

“Take away the image, and the offscreen sounds that were perceived apart from other sounds, purely by virtue of the visual exclusion of their source, become just like the others. The audiovisual structure collapses, and the sounds make a completely new one together.

A film deprived of its image and transformed into an audio track proves altogether strange—provided you *listen* and refrain from imposing the images from your memory onto the sounds you hear.“

(Chion *Audio-Vision* 1994, p.40)

# example #1

*Persona*

Ingmar Bergman (1966)

- Watch with sound
- Watch without sound: anything remarkable?

All examples can be found at:  
[www.tomashendriks.com/inmics2](http://www.tomashendriks.com/inmics2) (password = inmics)

# Musique concrète

- Pierre Schaeffer (1910 – 1995)
- Trained as a radio engineer instead of a composer, he saw in the invention of radio, tape recorders and phonographs the potential for a new experience of sound, separated from its source allowing sounds to have their own existence.
- Sonic object (or sound object – *objet sonore*)
  - Intentional representation of a sound
- Acousmatic listening
  - Hear the sound without seeing its cause
- Reduced listening
  - achieved by repeated listening, which enables the listener to focus on the intrinsic features of a sound, disconnected from its context.
  - a tool for investigation and for shifting listening attention intentionally, from the contextual to the inherent features of sound.

# 3 modes of listening

Michel Chion

- **Causal** listening: listening to a sound in order to gather information about its cause (or source). Sound refers to its cause, even if the source isn't known. Sources can be suggested.
- **Semantic** listening: refers to a code, or language to decipher. Fritz Lang M motif. Viewer hears the motif, but doesn't necessarily listens to it consciously (ie Tarkovsky Nostalgia buzz saw)
- **Reduced** listening: listening to qualities of a sound, free from its meaning and source. Reduced listening gives the possibility to interpret sound musically.
  - (Could there be a 'reduced viewing'?)

# Eye vs. ear

Michel Chion

- Perception of motion and speed different in visual or auditory perception
  - Sound presupposes movement / implies a displacement or agitation. Frozen sound/stasis can only be suggested: no variations to be heard, like hum of speaker, dial tone. But even the almost-white noise of a waterfall has variations in it.
  - The ear analyzes, processes and synthesizes faster than the eye.
    - *“in first contact with an audiovisual message, the eye is more spatially adept, and the ear more temporally adept.” (Audio-vision p.11)*
  - The ear listens in brief slices (3-4 secs) (=Gestalt)

# The audiovisual contract

Michel Chion

- The audiovisual contract
  - Is like “willing [suspension of disbelief](#)” (=Coleridge’s theory of poetic faith):
    - “ *the audio-spectator agrees to forget that sound is coming from loudspeakers and picture from the screen. The audio-spectator considers the elements of sound and image to be participating in one ... world.*”
  - Belief that music/sound/image are all unified in the film world. By blurring the lines between music and sound within a film the audience is immersed further into the film world, and as a product of this increased sense of immersion

# Added value

Michel Chion

- The most important relation between sound and image: **Added value**

“the expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image so as to create the definite impression, in the immediate or remembered experience one has of it, that this information or expression "naturally" comes from what is seen, and is already contained in the image itself.

Added value is what gives the (eminently incorrect) impression that sound is unnecessary, that sound merely duplicates a meaning which in reality it brings about, either all on its own or by discrepancies between it and the image.”

(Chion, *Audio-Vision* p. 5)

# The audiovisual contract

Michel Chion

- Sound temporalizes the image in 3 ways:
    - Temporal animation of the image
    - Synchronous sound imposes sense of succession
    - Sound vectorizes or dramatizes shots, orienting toward goal/future/forward, creating feeling of expectation. Oriented in time.
  - Conditions for sound to temporalize image
    - Image has no temporal animation or vectorization in itself
- Or:
- Image has temporal animations (so a combination of movements arise)

# Interaction of sound and image

Martine Huvenne

- Problem with Chion:
  - *“as long as one takes the viewing as ‘dominant perceptive attitude’ as point of departure, the sound can be rendered the status of accessory to the image, as was elaborated by Michel Chion (1990, 2003). Due to this, however, sound remains subordinate to the image.” (<http://www.martinehuvenne.eu/site/summary-phd/>)*
  
- An ‘audiovisual chord’ can be constituted as the result of various viewing and listening perspectives.
  
- Interaction depends on how the filmmaker intends to draw his audience into the film:
  - Viewer watches film ‘from a distance’, remains outside of it: the story is followed, the dots are connected. In this engagement, sound will be mostly diegetic and raise the least amount of empathy.
  - Viewer is immersed in the story and identifies with characters. He’ll connect his subjective context to it.
  - Viewer experiences the film with the senses. Sound intensifies or supports these sensory processes.

# First step: 'taking stock'

- Breaking down the building blocks of audiovisual composition
- No interpretation! Only mapping out the construction

	Image	Sound	Music	Comments
00:30	Title + first shot of desert			
00:52	Inside the pit			

# First analysis

There Will Be Blood – first 15 minutes



- Watch fragments
- Write down for yourself what you see and hear (very short, in simple terms)
- Back in chat, tell us what you've seen/heard

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