

Design Research Seminar

Sounding
THE SCENE
THE UNSEEN &

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Introduction:

There was a time when when there was no sound in films. Moving ahead with time, after several inventions, their failures and their iterations, sound was successfully introduced to films. Today it has reached to a stage where a visuals without sound will itch one's ears and the film will 'sound' incomplete. Rather, today, the sound has become so crucial in today's films that it has overcome visuals. Earlier, sound was added to visuals in a film, but today visuals add to a film.

The research I did is how important the sound is in a film and how the sound is used by film makers to show the maximum out of a scene.

What can be seen and what to be shown

Imagine you are sitting in a crowded restaurant, at the time of dinner with your friend. What all sounds are audible. There are people talking, footsteps of people walking, sound of cutlery, sound of gate opening and closing, music, coughing, sneezing, chair dragging and innumerable other sounds other than you and your friend talking. In a film, if all of the sound are included, then it will be foolish as there will be too much of mess that the important conversation of you two will not be audible. Hence, only the important sounds are kept and then some of the other sounds (minimalized) are included which is just required to create an ambience of the place.

On the other hand, imagine a scene where there is a close-up middle shot of a woman sitting is shown. In the background is the sound of a train. The moment one listen to train sound in the background, it is clear that she is sitting at a railway station. Hence, without even showing a train, it becomes clear.

Hence, not necessarily what is visible is to be sounded and on the other hand, only sound without the visuals is enough to create a mental picture of a scene in a film. This is sounding the scene and the unseen!

Visuals + Sound

Only sound, if used will leave the audience to imagine any imagery while only images will make a scene sometimes really complicated to create or to understand. Sound and visuals when combined creates an impact anytime greater than only image or only sound. It gives a feeling of completeness and they enhances each others' presence without letting anyone get a sense of their presence in the film.

Sound in a film creates an environment around the main scene, where the main focus is. For example, the scenes I described earlier – the restaurant and the railway station. Then there are dialogues. The voice of an actor adds more character to his/her appearance.

Background and foreground sounds defines the depth of the scene. The background sounds like music, foley, environment, when there is a conversation going on and dialogues are being spoken, which are the foreground sounds, then the dialogues are mostly louder than the background sound. But sometimes, the foley becomes the foreground to enhance the impact. Like for example in an explosion, it becomes the foreground sound.

Selection of sound: A challenge for a film maker

It is a critical task to select what all sounds to be put in with a particular set of visuals. If more sounds (over-developed sound framework) are put than what was required, then it becomes messy and then hard to understand. If something is missing and the audience smells it, it becomes a distraction and all you convey through your film is nothing but people analysing your film's sound sitting in the theatre.

Foley is used really wisely and is sometimes really important to show certain things. For example, imagine a person walking. The sound that comes while walking determines the physical property of the material of the shoes, as well as the ground on which he/she is walking.

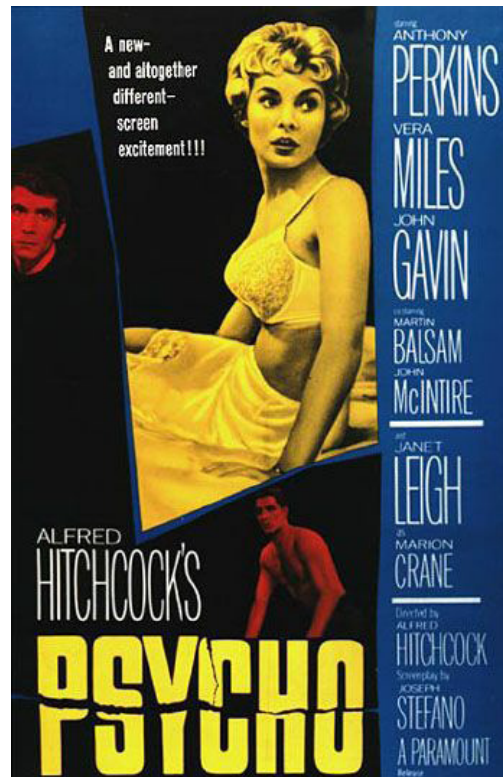
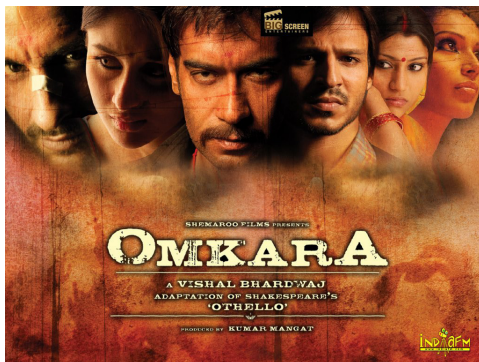
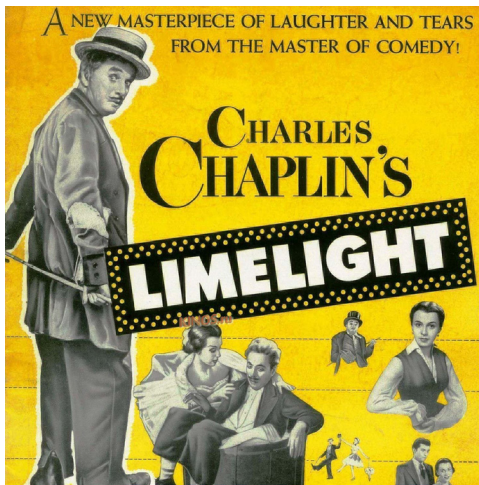
Sometimes, unreal sounds are used as foley. For example in animated cartoon films, like Mickey Mouse or Bugs Bunny, where the actual sound is replaced by some other sound to make it funny or to give it an animated feel. But it is hardly noticeable but it adds to fun in watching that film. In the animated film 'The Adventures of Tintin', there was no foley. But it never bugged the audience and hence no one hardly noticed it!

Mostly the things which are seen in the film are sounded and this sound is called 'diegetic sound'. Then there are some sounds that are sometimes added which do not belong to the world in the film. They are called 'non-diegetic' sounds.

One of the best examples of this kind of sounds is the music being played in the film in the background whose source does not exist. Some other examples are extra action sounds, which can be easily found in cartoon films, like 'swoosh'(when somebody/something goes too fast from the vision), or a typical sound when someone is falling.

While some sounds are used just for making the mood-set, some sounds are used metaphorically (which could be non-diegetic), hence explaining things and adding more weight to the visuals. For example, imagine a scene where a group of people are walking through a dark street in the night behind a girl walking alone. The closeness increases as they start to walk faster. And then there is a noise of a murder of crows in the atmosphere. Certainly, at the back of the brain there comes a feeling that somebody is about to die!

Analyzing sound of a few films



For better understanding of sound in a film, I analysed three films which are as follows:

1) **Limelight** by *Charles Chaplin* (1952)

"A fading comedian and a suicidally despondent ballet dancer must look to each other to find meaning and hope in their lives."- IMDB

2) **Psycho** by *Alfred Hitchcock* (1960)

"A Phoenix secretary steals \$40,000 from her employer's client, goes on the run and checks into a remote motel run by a young man under the domination of his mother."-IMDB

3) **Omkara** by *Vishal Bharadwaj* (2006)

"Shakespeare's masterpiece "Othello" set in modern India. A politically-minded enforcer's misguided trust in his lieutenant leads him to suspect his wife of infidelity."- IMDB

All the three films have fantastic background scores and sound in the film, and have been nominated or won awards for 'best music category'. Limelight has won oscar for its music. The most important thing to be noticed here is that all three of these films have their film directors as their music directors.

<http://themindreels.com/>

Background music:

Talking about the sound track, *Limelight* has a very dramatic sound track which gives the feeling of every particular scene. It always talk about the things going to happen, and helps extensively in swinging the moods. One thing which can be noticed is that the background sound is mostly diegetic.

The source of the music is mostly determined in the scene itself. For example, in the opening shot of the film, the music is coming from a box theatre on the road side. Then most of the time the three musicians are playing the background music which indeed becomes the foreground sound of the scene in some time. Interestingly many a times, in fact most of the times music has been put whenever there is a dream sequence or someone is telling the story or someone is lost in his/her thoughts.

The music in *limelight* starts ahead of the visuals and is beautifully used to predetermine what's going to happen now.

On the other hand, background track in *Omkara* has been very intelligently created keeping in mind that it is an adaption of 'Othello'. The music is Indian drama with a serious Roman essence of politics in it. The music is mostly non-diegetic.

The background music in *Psycho* always tells, from the very starting credits, that something wrong is going to happen. It is so tense that it creates nervousness in the mind of the spectator. The music is mostly non-diegetic.



image source: static.guim.co.uk/

Unreal sounds and metaphors



Image Source : <http://1428elm.com/>

There has been examples of unrealistic sounds been artistically put in these films which then becomes a metaphor. For example, in Omkara, at the time before the marriage of Omkara(Ajay Devgn) and Dolly(Kareena Kapoor) when Dolly is been given a turmeric treatment ('haldi lepa' a ritual in north Indian weddings) an eagle comes and drops a snake into turmeric. According to rituals this is a mis-happening. The pre-stand to this happening is done using exaggerated eagle's voice instead of using an eagle's natural voice while showing an eagle in the sky.

In psycho, in the very famous shower scene when the girl in the motel's bathroom is being stabbed/murdered by the psychotic owner of the motel, the scream of the girl is kept at the background and a cinematic high pitch sound of a violin, which is much higher in pitch than that of the girl's scream is put in the foreground. This takes the impact of a murder at another level of thrill!

In Limelight, in the very last sequence, when Calvero (Charles Chaplin) the stage actor and star comedian falls down into a drum while performing a stupid funny act of playing a funny and happy tune on a string instrument on stage, and is about to die, he still continues the act of playing the same music. The contrast between the music and the visuals creates the dilemma of the life of a comedian or a joker which is no different than the life of any other human being! In the end he dies while Thereza (Clarie Bloom), her partner is performing her dance on the stage with a happy-mood music.



Image source : <http://reel3.com/>



pakistan.files.wordpress.com

In Psycho, there is this sequence where the girl is running away with the \$40,000 she has stolen, and at a traffic signal where she is waiting the lights to get green, her boss (to whom the money belongs) crosses the road. While crossing the he looks at the girl twice, and when he looks for the second time, there is a sudden loud music which adds to the thrill and shows the fear in the girl who is running away with the stolen money.

In Omkara, when the bahubali (the right hand of the most powerful one) is to be selected, there is a bell sound and a big bell is shown. The bell is not been rung! Still the sound comes. This act of ringing the wrong bell creates a feel of misjudgment. The visuals are succeeded by the same!

In Limelight, when Theresa is unable to walk on her legs and Calaveras has been in depression once again after his show, Theresa is shouting on him. While shouting she unconsciously stands up and suddenly she realizes that she can walk. Theresa shouts for three times 'look Calavera I can walk' in a pitch every other higher than the previous one and when the fourth time she shouts, there is a sudden loud piece of music which again takes it to another level of drama which neither visuals could have taken to, nor the dialogues!

Sounding my own film

About the film: I am currently making an animated film as my degree project. Topic and cause behind the film is “blind faith”. The plot of the film in short is there are two babas and they have their respective followers. One group worships crows and the other group worships peacocks. The feel to be created is sarcastic humour and dirtiness.

Incorporation of music:

Dialogues: the dialogues of the two baba’s (the heads) are very local-ish in language and funny accents have been used. Rest all the people will sound drunk as they all are supposedly made addicted to alcohol and cigarettes. There is a satire here that every follower in the religion has been addicted to it and cannot see beyond it.

Sound track:

There is disturbance and noise in the environment and everybody seems to be confused. Every followers are a hurdle of sheep who blindly follows the same wrong meaningless path shown to them. They just don’t have their own individual thinking! The followers of crow are always doing “kayein-kayein”, like how a murder of crows sound like. Hence I’ve created a sound track for the film which incorporate a very raw, off-beat soundtrack still rythmical, having a single narrative - “Kayein-kayein”. Off-beat because everything is always shaken and is a narrative of something missing and unbalanced. Raw because things have not ripen for sure till now and there is still a boundary between the two group of followers.

Since there are followers of peacock also and involvement of a rooster which then becomes a new religion, I’m planning to create a new track with same music and having a narrative of the voice of a peacock and a rooster.



Conclusion

Sound is not just an important element of a film, it can be used to show more than what is visible. Also the sound is like a wine or whiskey which if taken to a certain quantity is good for health. Over-drinking might spoil your health!

END

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4) **Google**