

the hit series, sometimes the screen is simply black, while at other times the words on the soundtrack.

Sound

While the fact of the image is a disadvantage of a film in terms of view in film narrative, the fact of sound—its ever-presence—its advantage (Christian Metz identifies five channels of information: (1) the visual image; (2) print and other graphics; (3) spatial sound; and (4) noise (sound effects). Interestingly, the majority of these are auditory rather than visual. Examining these channels which are auditory rather than visual, we discover that the manner in which they communicate, we discover that they are continuous—the first and the fifth. The other three are intermittent—they are switched on and off—and it is easy to see a film without either print, speech, or music.

The two continuous channels themselves can run in quite different separate ways. We "read" images by directing our attention, we hear sound, at least not in the same conscious way. Sound is always omnipresent but also omnidirectional. Because it is so pervasive, we tend to discount it. Images can be manipulated in many different ways to discount it. Images can be relatively obvious; with sound, even the manipulation is relatively obvious; with sound, even the manipulation that does occur is vague and tends to be ignored.

It is the pervasiveness of sound that is its most attractive quality. It acts to realize both space and time. It is essential to the definition of the "room tone," based on the reverberation time, which is so forth of a particular location, is its signature. A still image on a screen when a soundtrack is added that can create a sense of the past. In a titillarian sense, sound shows its value by creating a gradual continuity to support the images, which usually receive more than attention. Speech and music naturally receive attention because of specific meaning. But the "noise" of the soundtrack—"sound effect" is paramount. This is where the real construction of the environment takes place.

But "noise" and "effects" are poor labels indeed for a word. Possibly we could term this aspect of the soundtrack "environmental sound." The influence of environmental sound has been noticed—in contemporary music, especially in that movement

THE LANGUAGE OF THE SILENT AND SPEAKING



Figure 2.69. Gregory Peck, silent and speaking in *The Glass Menagerie*. The top panel shows the actor silent, the bottom panel shows him speaking. From *The Language of the Silent and Speaking* by James Monroe.

of "musique concrete." Even recorded speech has been affected by this new ability. In the great days of radio, "sound effects" were limited to those that could be produced physically. The advent of synthesizers, multi-track recording, and now computer-manipulated digital sound has made it possible for the sound effects technicians, or " Foley artists," as they are now called, to recreate an infinite range of both natural and synthetic new artificial sounds. Much of the best modern sound drama which has appeared usually on records, and public interest in radio stations, has recognized the extraordinary potential of what used to be known simply as sound effects. Contemporary music also utilizes this form of postmodern art.

Film, too, has recognized sound's new maturity. In the early days of the sound film, musicals, for instance, were extraordinarily elaborate theatrical. Busby Berkeley conceived intricate visual representations of musical ideas to hold an audience's interest. Now, however, the most powerful film musicals are the simple comic. The soundtrack carries the film; the images are dominated by it.

We can conceive of nonmusical cinema in this vein as well. In England, where radio drama lasted longer than in the U.S., a tradition of musical drama was maintained from the Coon Shows of the 1940s through *Monty Python's Tying Circus* of the 1970s.

In the U.S. much of the best comedy has been almost exclusively musical since the days of vaudeville. Beginning with the masters Jack Benny, George Burns, and Fred Allen, this continues if unsung tradition has given us Nichols and May, Mel Brooks, and Bill Cosby; the complex

"sentimental constructions of the Erosign Theatre and Albert Brecht's 'new commentary' of Billy Crystal, Whoopi Goldberg, Jerry Seinfeld, and Steven Wright. Much of this recent comedy extends beyond the boundaries of the old studio-style. Erosign artists have turned into new masters of the old studio-style."

In general, Francis Ford Coppola's functioning *The Conversation* (1975) did for the aural image what *Blow-Up* (1966) had done for the pictorial image eight years earlier. While the soundtrack in *Blow-Up* supports greater emphasis than it has been given, it cannot be divorced from images. Much of the language we employ to describe *Blow-Up* diverges from images with the relationship between the two. The codes of soundtracks suggests the differentiation between the image, Siegfried Kracauer connects with the image, and "synchronous sound," which does not. Dialogue of people in the scene is actual dialogue of people not in the scene is commentative. (A Flanagan suggests that to sound, such as Richard Lester, when used commentatively, it is not people who were in the shot, but not part of the action of the scene.)

Director and theorist Karel Reisz used slightly different terminology. Re Reisz, who wrote a standard text on editing, all sound is divided into "synchronous" and "asynchronous." Synchronous sound lies in the frame (the editor must work to synchronize it). Asynchronous sound comes from outside the frame.

Combining these two continuums, we get a third, whose poles are "parallel" sound and "contrapuntal" sound. Parallel sound is synchronous, and connected with the image. Contrapuntal sound is asynchronous, asynchronous, and opposed to or in counterpoint with the image. It makes no difference whether we are dealing with speech music, or environmental sound; all three are at times variously parallel or contrapuntal, actual or commentative, synchronous or asynchronous. The differentiation between parallel and contrapuntal sounds perhaps the controlling factor. This conception of the soundtrack, working logically either with or against the image provides the basic aesthetic dialectic of sound. The Hollywood sound style is strongly parallel. The programmatic music of thirties movies nudged, undid, and

* I am indebted to Wes Sharpley Jr., "The Aesthetics of Film Sound," *Film Studies* 15, 85, for this synthesis.



Figure 2.70. The title frame from *Touch of Evil*, which could be more profitably read as the beginning of each of our 1950s to 1960s movies. We know all that we need in terms of genre assignment.

emphasized, characterized, and qualified even the simplest scenes so that the duller images as well as the most striking were thoroughly perceived by the audience assigned by the composers of the nearly continuous music track. Erich Wolfgang Korngold and Max Steiner were the two best-known composers of these emotionally demanding scores.

In the experimental 1960s and 1970s, contrapuntal sound gave an ironic edge to the style of film music. Often the soundtrack was seen as equal, but different from, the image. Marguerite Ferras, for example, experimented with commentative soundtracks completely separate from the image, as in *India Song* (1975). In the 1980s, Hollywood returned to programmatic music. John Williams, composer of the soundtracks for many of the blockbusters of the late 1970s and 1980s from *Jaws* (1975) and *Star Wars* (1977) to *Home Alone* (1990) and *Jurassic Park* (1993), has defined the musical themes of a generation, just as his notable predecessors had done. But music is still used commentatively as well. Keck, for example, offers filmmakers a repertoire of instant keys to modern ideas and feelings, as George Lucas's *American Graffiti* (1973), Lawrence Kasdan's *The Big Chill* (1983), or any of the films of John Hughes demonstrated clearly.

Ironically, music—which used to be the most powerfully