

20 Style

There is no 'correct method' of presenting any subject. Directors have tried most approaches over the years. Some of these have become regular practice; others just passing whims. Techniques that have been used adroitly by some (e.g. background music) have been crudely overdone by others, and become distractingly intrusive. Certainly, if you choose an *inappropriate* technique you are likely to find your audience becoming confused, distracted, resentful . . . or simply losing interest!

Production approaches

Appropriateness

So what is *appropriate*? Well, in practice, it is largely a matter of custom, fashion, and convention.

- *Informal presentations* usually take the form of 'natural' situations. We chat with the craftsman in his workshop, or at the fireside, or while on a country walk.
- *Formal presentations* often follow a very stylized artificial format. We see people in carefully positioned chairs, sitting on a raised area in front of a cyc. They are often behind desks. There may be a chair-person, and 'rules of procedure'.
- *Display* is an unrealistic, decorative way of presenting your subject. Emphasis is on effect. We meet it in game shows, open-area treatment (e.g. choirs, music groups, dance), in children's programs.
- *Simulated environments* aim to create a completely realistic illusion. Anything breaking that illusion, such as a camera coming into shot in a period drama, would destroy the effect.
- *Actuality* is a revelatory style. We make it quite clear to the audience that we are in a studio by deliberately revealing the mechanics. On location, the unsteady hand-held camera and microphone dipping into shot supposedly give an 'authenticity' or 'veracity' to the occasion. We meet this approach in '*vox pop*' street interviews.

Routines

Some production techniques have become so familiar through convention or suitability that it could seem strangely unorthodox if

we presented them in any other way – e.g. a newscaster sitting in a lounge.

Certain approaches have become so stereotyped that they enter the realms of cliché; routine methods for routine situations. The sheer extent and repetition of TV productions has thrown up a number of such formats: newscasts, studio interviews, game shows, chat shows, etc. If we analyze such productions we usually find that styles have evolved as the most effective, economic, and reliable ways of handling their particular subjects.

If we regard such a packaging as ‘a container for the goods’, then these routine treatments can free the audience to concentrate on the event. If, however, we consider the presentation treatment as an opportunity to encourage interest and heighten enjoyment, then any ‘routine’ becomes unacceptable.

Clearly, any dramatic or emphatic treatment would be quite gratuitous for many types of TV production. Instead, it is best to aim for pictorial variety, coupled with clear, unambiguous visual statements that direct and concentrate attention, rather than introduce any imposed ‘style’.

Many non-dramatic subjects are *inherently* limited in their potential treatment. How many sensible meaningful shot variations can you take of people speaking to each other, or driving an automobile, or playing an instrument, or demonstrating an article? The range is small.

For certain subjects the picture is virtually irrelevant. What a person has to *say* may be extremely important; while what he *looks* like is immaterial to the message. It may even prove a distraction or create prejudicial bias. ‘Talking heads’ appear in most TV shows, but unless the speaker is particularly animated, the viewers’ visual interest is seldom sustained. Changing viewpoint helps – but can appear fidgety.

Motion pictures inform us through continual illustration and commentary. Television’s more economic but less enticing approach is for people to tell us about matters instead. They sit in the studio with graphics or film clips, or stand at the scene of activities and talk directly to us, instead of using the camera itself to demonstrate. Here the difference in approach is not inherent in the medium but the way it is being used.

Ambience

From the moment a show begins, we are influencing our audience’s attitude to the production itself. Introductory music and titling style can immediately convey a serious or a jokey feeling towards what is to come.

We have only to recall how the hushed voice, quiet organ notes, slow visual pace, impart a reverential air to proceedings, or the difference between a regal and a ‘show-biz’ opening fanfare, to realize how our expectancy changes.

Surroundings can also directly affect how convincingly we convey information. Certain environments, for example, impart authority or scholarship: classroom, laboratory, museum, study. A plow shown at work on the farm will not only be more readily understood but will carry a conviction that is lacking in the studio demonstration.

The illusion of truth

As you've seen, even when we are trying to present events '*exactly as they are*', the camera viewpoints, lens angles, picture composition, the choice and sequence of shots, etc. will all influence how our audience interprets what they are seeing. But the way we set about making a program can also have an important bearing on the end product. Where we lay emphasis, what we leave out, even the weather conditions (gloomy, stormy, harsh or sparkling sunlight, heavy rain) will all modify its impact.

Let us consider for a moment, the initiation of a documentary program. The audience invariably *assumes* that they are seeing a fair and informative account. But that can depend on how the program maker tackles the subject:

- 1 There is the hopeful approach; a 'voyage of discovery' in which the director points the camera around with extemporized comments, giving a 'tourist's-eye' view' of events. This invariably results in a rag-bag of disjointed and unrelated shots. Sometimes, by adding commentary over, graphics, music and effects, it is possible to develop a coherent program theme, but such an empirical approach is uncertain, to say the least.
- 2 More often, the director begins by having the subject researched and making a plan of campaign. There are great advantages in anticipating and organizing beforehand. However, having found out about potential locations and local experts, the director develops a schedule, arranges transport and accommodation, obtains permits . . . and so on. There is the danger that preconceived ideas will dominate, so that you develop a thesis even before you arrive, and reject whatever does not seem to fit in with it when you actually get there!
- 3 Occasionally we encounter the *contrived* approach, in which the director has really *staged* what we are seeing – arranged the action, edited selectively. Dressed in their best, the participants put on a show for the camera – and the television audience assumes that this is a peep into reality!

Leaving aside *ethics*, even these brief (but real) examples are a reminder of the power of the camera, and the director's responsibilities in the way it is used.

Productional rhetoric

Rhetoric is the art of persuasive or impressive speech and writing. Unlike everyday conversation, it stimulates our imagination through style and technique, by inference and allusion, instead of direct pronouncement, by appealing to our inward ear and eye. The rhetoric of the screen has similar roots that film makers such as Alfred Hitchcock have explored over the years to great effect.

The analysis that follows is more than a concise list of facts. It is a distillation of production techniques with exciting persuasive potentials, techniques that have moved audiences to tears, of laughter and of pity; that have held them in tense expectation. Translate these principles into living illustrations and we see how the camera can, without a word of dialogue, convey the whole gamut of human responses.

An example, A veteran performer ends his brave but pathetic vaudeville act amid gibes and cat-calls. He bows, defeated . . . we hear hands clapping . . . the camera turns from the sad lone figure . . . past derisive faces . . . to where his aged wife sits applauding.

Summary of devices used

Regard this analysis as a series of fingerposts, pointing the opportunities to build up original situations of your own. The summary outlines the principles involved. The examples that follow show those principles in action.

- 1 Making a *direct visual contrast*.
 - (a) Of the picture quality – brightness, clarity, tonal contrasts.
 - (b) By editing, contrasting the shot duration, transitions used, cutting rhythm.
 - (c) Contrasting camera treatment – shot sizes, viewpoint height, camera movement, composition.
 - (d) Through the subject itself. Creating a change that reveals new information, altering the picture's significance, e.g. by introducing a subject movement (the blonde turns . . . to reveal it is a man in drag); by cutting to a new viewpoint (the formally dressed butler . . . is wearing sneakers); by lighting. Contrasting the movement of one subject with another (contrasting energy with langor). Contrasting subject associations, i.e. the mood, qualities, properties, state of one subject with another (new with old). Contrasting subject form (building construction with its subsequent demolition).
- 2 Making a *direct audio contrast*. Contrasting the sounds' relative volume, pitch, quality, reverberation, speed, rhythm, duration, methods of transition, composition, sound movement, association.
- 3 We can *directly contrast the picture and its sound*. By comparing any aspect of (1) with another in (2) (e.g. a picture of starving children singing *Pennies from Heaven*).
- 4 Similarly, we can make a *direct comparison* between two ideas, situations, etc. for visual comparison, audio comparison, picture and sound compared.
- 5 Showing identical subjects with *different associations*.
 - (a) Identical or similar subjects having different purposes, values, significances, etc.
 - (b) The original purpose (or associations, etc.) of a subject has become changed.

- 6 Linking a variety of subjects, through *common association*.
- 7 *Juxtaposing apparent incongruities*.
- 8 *Implication*. Hinting at a situation without actually demonstrating it. Examples range from filmic time to censorable innuendo.
- 9 *Unexpected outcome*.
 - (a) Climatic build-up to an unexpected outcome.
 - (b) Anticlimax, following a build-up.
- 10 *Bathos*. A fall in significance; from the sublime to the ridiculous.
- 11 *Deliberate falsification or distortion*. 'Accidentally' causing the audience to misinterpret.
- 12 *Imitative interpretation*.
 - (a) Between subjects.
 - (b) Between mechanics and subjects;
- 13 *Associative selection*.
 - (a) Direct, using part of a subject to represent the whole.
 - (b) Recalling a subject by referring to something closely associated with it.
 - (c) Symbolism – using a symbol to represent a subject.
- 14 *Deliberate overstatement*. Excessive emphasis on size, effort, etc. for dramatic strength.
- 15 *Deliberate understatement*. Preliminary underemphasis, to strengthen the eventual impact of size, effort, etc.
- 16 An *unreal effect* seeming to evolve naturally.
- 17 A *natural effect* introduced through *obviously contrived* means.
- 18 *Repetition*.
 - (a) Of sound.
 - (b) Of picture.
- 19 *Sequential repetition*.
 - (a) A series of sequences, all beginning with the same shot, associations, etc.
 - (b) A succession of similar circumstances.
- 20 *Successive comparison*.
 - (a) Showing the same subject in different circumstances.
 - (b) Showing the same subject in different manifestations.
- 21 *Pun*. Play on a subject's dual significance.
- 22 *Irony*. A comment with an inner sardonic meaning, often by stating the opposite.
- 23 *Modified irony*. An ironic modification of the real significance of a subject, situation, etc.
- 24 *Dramatic irony*. The audience's perceiving a fact that the character involved is unaware of.
- 25 *Personification*. Representing an inanimate object as having human characteristics.
- 26 *Metaphorical transfer*. Transferring the properties of one subject to another.
- 27 *Flashback*. Jumping back in time, to a point earlier than the narration has reached.
- 28 Referring to *future events* as if *already past or present*.
- 29 Referring to *the absent* as if *present*. Usually relating concurrent events by montage.
- 30 Referring to *the past* as if *still present*.
- 31 *Cutaway*. Deliberately interrupting events to show concurrent action elsewhere.
- 32 *Fade-out on climax*. Fading at the crucial moment in action:
 - (a) To leave the audience in suspense.
 - (b) To prevent the climactic peak being modified by subsequent action.
- 33 *Double take*. Passing by a subject casually . . . then returning to it quickly, having suddenly realized its significance.
- 34 *Sudden revelation*. Suddenly revealing new information that we were not previously aware of . . . immediately making the situation meaningful.
- 35 *Incongruity*. Where a character:
 - (a) Accepts an incongruous situation as normal.
 - (b) Exerts disproportionate effort to achieve something.
 - (c) Displays disproportionate facility (i.e. exaggerated speed, etc.).
 - (d) Is unable to perform a simple act.
 - (e) Imitates unsuccessfully.
 - (f) Does the right thing – wrongly.
 - (g) Caricature.

These are, of course, only the bare bones of opportunity. You can take any of the devices listed and apply them in many quite different ways. For example, let us take (10) *Bathos*. Here is the basis of the 'banana-skin' and 'custard-pie' jokes, and our reactions when the tattered hobo dusts off the park bench before sitting. In the following examples you will see how readily these ideas can be introduced.

Examples of productional rhetoric

- 1 (a) A sudden mood change, by switching from bright gaiety . . . to macabre gloom.
 Contrasting a soft-focused dream-like atmosphere . . . with the hard clear-cut state of harsh reality.
 Contrasting the airiness of a high-key scene . . . with the restrictiveness of heavy chiaroscuro treatment.
- (b) Contrasting the leisurely pace of prolonged shots . . . with fast-moving short-duration shots.
 Contrasting the peaceful effect of a series of fades . . . with the sudden shock of a cut.
 Contrasting the jerky staccato of rapid cutting . . . with the deliberation of a slower cutting rhythm.
- (c) Contrasting the size of a giant aircraft . . . with its diminutive pilot.
 Contrasting an individual's dominance in close-up . . . with his relative insignificance within his surroundings.
 Contrasting the subject strength from a low-angle shot . . . with its inferiority from a high-angle viewpoint.
 Contrasting a forward aggressive move . . . with a backward recessive move.
 Contrasting the restriction of limited depth of field . . . with a spacious deep-focus shot.
 Contrasting the normality of a straight-on shot . . . with the instability of a canted shot.
- (d) The only refuge on a storm-swept moorland is revealed by a lightning flash . . . as a prison.
- 2 Contrasting the busy crowds' noise by day . . . with the hush of the empty street at night.
 Contrasting realistic . . . with unreal sounds.
- 3 A hippopotamus lumbers along, in step with delicate ballet music.
- 4 A pair of lovers embrace . . . and the camera tilts up to show a pair of lovebirds.
 A soprano's high C . . . merges into the scream of a factory siren.
 A helicopter hovers . . . to the sound of a bee buzzing.
- 5 A favorite record which has been played at a party is later used to cover the sounds of a murder.
- 6 Shots of sandcastles, rock pools, beach ball; sounds of children's laughter, sea-wash, suggest the seaside.
- 7 Shots of a massive French locomotive . . . end with the shrill, effeminate toot of its whistle.
- 8 Suspecting that he is followed, a fugitive leaves a café . . . the sound of feet joins his own in the empty street.
- 9 A thief grabs a valuable necklace . . . it breaks . . . the pearls scatter. It is spring: Migrant ducks arrive and land on a lake . . . but skid on its still-frozen surface.
- 10 After ceremonial orders, a massive gun is fired . . . producing a wisp of smoke and a pop.
- 11 South American music, a striped blanket on sun-drenched stone, a bright straw hat, cactus . . . but only a sunbather in a suburban garden, listening to the radio.
- 12 Someone is speaking to a deaf person . . . we see his lips in close-up, but without sound.
 An upward movement . . . accompanied by rising-pitch sounds.

- 13 (a) The name on a ship's life-belt identifies the vessel – *Titanic*.
(b) The guillotine used to epitomize the French Revolution.
(c) A shot of the Golden Gate bridge to represent San Francisco.
- 14 A close shot of an auctioneer's gavel descending.
- 15 A smoker casually throws aside a cigar-butt. A fire starts . . . which develops into a devastating forest blaze.
- 16 As we watch a moving picture . . . a large hand appears and turns it over like the page of a book.
- 17 Watching a street fight as a distorted reflection in the chromium wheel-trim of a nearby automobile.
- 18 A searcher shouts the lost person's name . . . it echoes and re-echoes. An angry crowd closes round a central figure. Close shots cut alternately between the accused and individuals in the crowd.
- 19 A successful concert tour is symbolized by the artist taking a series of similar curtain calls.
- 20 A succession of shots show the same policeman in a variety of situations; directing traffic, guiding a sightseer, rescuing a would-be suicide, making an arrest. . .
- 21 A parrot at an open window whistles for food . . . a passing girl turns at the 'wolf whistle'.
- 22 It is a power blackout. The lost traveler strikes a match . . . and sees a poster – 'Save Energy'.
- 23 A newspaper advertisement shows extraordinary bargains . . . then we see it is an old copy, used to line a drawer.
- 24 A mountaineer climbs . . . unaware that his rope is fraying.
- 25 An animated coffee-pot describes the great coffee it makes.
- 26 An elephant that flies ('Dumbo').
- 27 An old woman tells of her childhood . . . brief shots showing her life as a girl.
- 28 Looking at the projected plans of a ship . . . we hear the launching festivities.
- 29 A superimposed montage showing a missing man surrounded by headlines; radio announcers telling of his disappearance.
- 30 A derelict ballroom echoing to the sounds of bygone dances.
- 31 The fugitive escapes down a side alley. But just as we see that his way is blocked the shot changes to show his pursuers.
- 32 A little man arrogantly challenges a person sitting nearby . . . who stands and towers over the challenger. The picture cuts to another scene.
- 33 Walking past a poster of a wanted robber, a man suddenly stops, reacts, and returns to it. He realizes that its picture looks like himself.
- 34 Entering a room, we see someone reading . . . a close viewpoint reveals the dagger-hilt protruding from his back.
- 35 A man takes off his hat . . . and eats it.

Imaginative sound

Although the aural memory is less retentive it is generally more imaginative than the eye. We are more perceptive and discriminating towards what we see. Consequently, our ears accept the unfamiliar and unrealistic more readily than our eyes, and are more tolerant of repetition. A sound-effects recording can be re-used many times, but a costume or drapes design may become familiar after a couple of viewings.

In many TV shows the audio is taken for granted, while attention is concentrated on the visual treatment. Yet without audio the presentations can become meaningless (talks, discussions, interviews, newscasts, music, game shows, etc.): whereas without video the production would still communicate.

Audio can explain or augment the picture, enriching its impact or appeal. Music or effects can suggest locale (seashore sounds), or a situation (pursuing police heard), or conjure a mood (gaiety, foreboding, comedy, horror).

A non-specific picture can be given a definite significance through associated sound. Depending on accompanying music, a display of flowers may suggest springtime, a funeral, a wedding, or a ballroom.

Sound elements

■ **Voice** The most obvious sound element, the *human voice*, can be introduced into the presentation in several different ways:

- 1 A single person addressing the camera, formally or informally.
- 2 An off-screen commentator (voice-over) providing a formalized narrative (e.g. travelogues); or the spontaneous commentary for a sports event.
- 3 We may 'hear the thoughts' of a character (reminiscent or explanatory narration) while watching his silent face, or the subject of his thoughts.
- 4 Dialogue – the informal natural talk between people (actual or simulated), with all its hesitance, interruptions, breaking off, overlapping; and the more regulated exchanges of formal discussion.

■ **Effects** The characteristic sound picture that conjures a particular place or atmosphere comes from a blend of stimuli: from action sounds (e.g. footsteps, gunfire), from environmental noises (e.g. wind, crowd, traffic), and from the subtle ways in which sound quality is modified by its surroundings (reverberation, coloration, distortion).

■ **Music** Background music has become near-obligatory for many programs. It can range from purely melodic accompaniment to music that imitates, or gives evocative or abstract support. You can even use musical instruments to create audio effects (creaks, clicks, whines, etc.).

■ **Silence** The powerful dramatic value of *silence* should never be underestimated. However, silence must be used with care, for it may too easily seem to be just a loss of audio.

Continued silence can suggest such diverse concepts as: death, desolation, despair, stillness, hope, peace, extreme tension (we listen intently to hear if the marauders are still around).

Sudden silence after noise can be almost unbearable: A festival in an Alpine village . . . happy laughter and music . . . the tumultuous

noise of an unexpected avalanche engulfing the holiday makers . . . then silence.

Sudden noise during silence creates an immediate peak of tension:

The silently escaping prisoner knocks over a chair and awakens the guards (or did they hear him after all?)

Silent streets at night . . . then a sudden scream.

Dead silence when the audience has been following action that would logically lead to a tremendous noise can give a scene a taut unreal quality: To a crescendo of sound, intercut shots of two locomotives traveling towards each other at speed on the same track . . . they crash in silent slow-motion.

The explosive charge has been set . . . the detonator is switched . . . nothing happens . . . silence.

Sound emphasis

You can manipulate the relative volumes of sounds for dramatic effect; emphasizing particular sources, cheating loudness to suit the situation. A whisper may be amplified to make it clearly audible, a loud sound held in check.

You may establish the background noise of a vehicle and then gradually reduce it, taking it under to improve audibility of conversation. Or you could deliberately increase its loudness so that the noise drowns the voices. Occasionally you may take out all environmental sounds to provide a silent background – for a thoughts sequence, perhaps.

You can modify the aesthetic appeal and significance of sound in a number of ways.

For *factual sound* you can use:

- 1 *Random* natural pick-up (e.g. overheard street conversations).
- 2 *Selective pick-up* of particular sources.

For *atmospheric sound*:

- 1 By choosing certain natural associated sounds you can develop a *realistic illusion*. (Cockcrow suggests it is dawn.)
- 2 By deliberately distorting reality you create *fantasy* to stimulate the imagination. (A Swanee whistle's note suggests flight through the air.)
- 3 By *abstraction* the pitch and rhythm of sounds can evoke ideas and emotions without direct reference to naturalistic phenomena. (Film music, cartoon soundtracks, musique concrète.)

Sound applications

As we saw relative to pictures, sound can be used for a number of different purposes:

- *To convey information directly* – Normal conversation.
- *To establish a location* – e.g. traffic noises, that imply a busy street scene nearby.
- *To interpret a situation* – Conveying abstract concepts (ideas, thoughts, feelings) through associative sounds; a slurred trombone note as a derisive comment.
- *To symbolize* – Sounds that we associate with particular places, events, moods, etc. (e.g. an air-raid siren denoting an attack).
- *To imitate* – Sounds that appear to resemble, mimic, parody or mock; e.g. music copying a cuckoo's call.
- *To identify* – Sounds associated with particular people or events; signature tunes, leitmotif.
- *To recapitulate* – Sounds recalling others heard earlier.
- *To couple ideas* – Using music or sound effects to link events, themes, etc; e.g. a musical bridge between scenes; aircraft noise carried over between a series of shots showing its stops *en route*.
- *To create a sound montage* – A succession or mixture of sounds arranged for comic or dramatic effect; e.g. a bassoon and piccolo duet; combined sound effects that build up an overall impression (e.g. separate sound effects of explosions, gunfire, aircraft, sirens, whistles . . . create the illusion of a battle scene).

Off-screen sound

When someone speaks or something makes a sound it might seem logical to show the source as a matter of course. But it can be singularly dull if we do this repeatedly: she starts talking, so we cut and watch her.

You can use *off-screen* sound in many ways, to enhance program impact:

- 1 Having established a shot of someone talking, you might cut to see the person they are speaking to and watch their reactions, or cut to show what they are talking about. The original dialogue continues, but we no longer see the speaker. So you can establish relationships, even where the two subjects have not been seen together in the same shot.
- 2 Background sounds can help to establish location. Although a mid-shot of two people occupies the screen, the audience interprets that they are near the seashore, a highway, a sawmill.

- 3 Off-screen sounds may be chosen to intrigue us, or arouse our curiosity.
- 4 A background sound may introduce us to a subject before we actually see it, informing us about what is going on nearby or is going to appear (e.g. the wheezy spluttering of an approaching jalopy).
- 5 Tension can build as a character recognizes and reacts to a sound that the audience cannot interpret. Again, tension grows when a character hears a sound (that we also hear) but cannot understand its significance. Alternatively, we may realize the significance of a sound that the character has not heard or understood.
- 6 Off-screen sounds can exaggerate or emphasize our impressions of a scene (a crowd, traffic); perhaps indicating them even where none exists.
- 7 By deliberately *overlapping* sound you can create a linkage between scenes; introducing the next scene's audio before you cut to it. For example, an old man reminiscing at dinner: 'In those days, Vienna was a city of wonderful music.' While watching him, we hear a waltz in the background . . . the picture dissolves to show a soirée.
- 8 The background sound may create audio continuity, although the shots switch rapidly. Two people walk through buildings, down a street . . . their voices are heard clearly throughout at a constant level.
- 9 An audio montage of several different sources, may be used to suggest thoughts, dreams, etc.

Substituted sound

Surprisingly often, instead of reproducing the *original* sound we shall deliberately devise a substitute to accompany the picture. There are several reasons for this approach:

No sound exists. As with sculpture, painting, architecture, inaudible insects, prehistoric monsters.

Sometimes the actual sounds are *not available*, *not recorded* (mute shooting), or *not suitable*. For example: absence of birdsong when shooting a country scene; location sounds were obtrusive, unimpressive, or inappropriate to use; a location camera may obtain a close shot of a subject (using a narrow-angle lens) that is too distant for effective sound pick-up.

The sounds you introduce may be just *replacements* (using another lion's voice instead of the missing roar), or *artificial substitutes* in the form of effects, music, synthesized or treated audio.

Background music and effects should be added cautiously. They are easily:

- 1 Disproportionate (too loud or soft).
- 2 Hackneyed (too familiar).
- 3 Over-obvious (imitating every action – ‘Mickey Mousing’).
- 4 Obtrusive (surging into slight gaps of silence).
- 5 Out of scale (overscored music).
- 6 Inappropriate (have wrong or misleading associations).

Controlling sound treatment

Various working principles are generally accepted in sound treatment:

- 1 The scale and quality of audio should match the picture (appropriate volumes, balance, audio perspective, acoustics, etc.).
- 2 Where audio directly relates to picture action it should be synchronized (like movements, footsteps, hammering, other transient sounds).
- 3 Video and audio should normally be switched together. No audio advance or hangover on a cut.
- 4 Video cutting should be on the beat of the music, rather than against it; preferably at the end of a phrase. Continual cutting in time with music becomes tedious.
- 5 Video and audio should usually begin together at the start of a show; finishing together at its conclusion, fading out as a musical phrase ends.

Audio analysis

We all recognize that some sounds seem exciting, martial, happy . . . while others are melancholy, soporific, wistful. Is this entirely fortuitous, or are there working principles to guide our audio selection? Experience suggests that there are.

If you analyze a series of sounds creating a particular emotional impact you will find they have many common features. Table 20.1 shows some 42 sound characteristics and typical associated responses. These effects can, of course, combine in various complex ways. For example, from Table 20.1, it is obvious that a sound containing the features 1, 4, 9, 10, 13, 15, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26, 27, 31, 33a, 35, 39, 42 must necessarily produce an exciting, vigorous impact. On the other hand, one containing features 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22, 28, 32, 34b, 36, 41 must be a sad, peaceful, sound.

Table 20.1 Analysis of sounds and their effect

<i>Volume</i>	<i>Sound characteristics</i>	Associated with
	1 Loud sounds	Big, strong, assertive, powerful, energetic, rousing, earnest.
	2 Soft sounds Against a quiet background	Small, soothing, peaceful, gentle, subdued, delicate, little energy. Alerting, persuasive.
<i>Pitch</i>	3 Pitch	Often suggests physical height.
	4 High-pitched sounds	Exciting, light, brittle, stirring, invigorating, elating, attractive, distinct, sprightly, weak.
	5 Low-pitched sounds	Powerful, heavy, deep, solemn, sinister, undercurrent, depression.
<i>Key</i>	6 Major	Vigor, brightness.
	7 Minor	Melancholy, wistful, apprehensive.
<i>Tonal quality</i>	8 Pure, thin (e.g. flutes, pure string-tone)	Purity, weakness, simplicity, sweetness, ethereal, daintiness, forthright, persuasiveness.
	9 Rich (possessing strong overtones, harmonics)	Richness, grandeur, fullness, complexity, Confusion, boisterous, worldly, vitality, strength.
	10 Edgy, brassy, metallic	Cold, chill, bitter, snarling, vicious, forceful, hard, martial.
	11 Full, round tone (e.g. horn, saxophone bowed basses)	Warm, rich, mellow.
	12 Reedy (e.g. oboe, clarinet)	Sweetness, nostalgic, delicate, melancholy, wistful.
	13 Sharp transients	
	(a) High-pitched (e.g. xylophone, breaking glass) (b) Low-pitched (e.g. timpani, thunder)	Thrilling, exciting, horrifying. Dramatic, powerful, significant.
<i>Speed and rhythm</i>	14 Slow	Serious, important, dignified, deliberate, ponderous, stately, somber, mournful.
	15 Fast	Exciting, hopeful, fierce, trivial, agile.
	16 Simple	Uncomplicated, deliberate, regulation, dignity.
	17 Complex	Complication, excitement, elaboration.
	18 Constant	Uniformity, forceful, monotonous, depressing.
	19 Changing	Vigorous, erratic, uncertainty, elation, wild.
	20 Increasing (accelerando)	Increasing vigor, excitement, energy or force, progressive development
	21 Decreasing (rallentando)	Decreasing vigor, excitement, energy or force; concluding development.

Table 20.1 (cont.)

<i>Phrasing</i>	Repetition of sets of sounds:	
	22 Regular repetition	Pleasurable recognition, insistence, monotony, regulation, coordination.
	23 Irregular repetition	Distinctiveness, personality, disorder.
	24 Strongly marked accents	Strong, forceful, emphatic, rhythmical.
	25 Unaccentuated sounds	Continuity, lack of vitality.
	26 Interrupted rhythm (syncopation)	Character, vigor, uncertainty, unexpectedness.
<i>Duration</i>	27 Brief, fragmentary	Awakening interest, excitement, forceful, dissatisfaction.
	28 Sustained	Persistence, monotony, stability, tiredness.
	29 Staccato	Nervous vitality, excitement.
<i>Movement</i>	30 Movement pattern	Movement pattern of sound suggests corresponding physical movement, e.g. upward – downward – upward – glissando pitch changes suggesting swinging movement.
	31 Upwards	Elation, rising importance, expectation, awakening interest, anticipation, doubt, forceful, powerful.
	32 Downwards	Decline, falling interest, decision, conclusion, imminence, climatic movement.
<i>Pitch changes</i>	33 Sudden changes	Increasing interest, excitement, uplift. Force, strength, decision, momentary unbalance.
	(a) Rise	
	(b) Fall	
	34 Slow changes	Increasing tension, aspiration, rising motion.
	(a) Rise	
	(b) Fall	Saddening, depression, falling motion, reduced tension.
35 Well-defined pitch changes	Decision, effort, brightness, vitality.	
36 Indefinite pitch changes (e.g. slurs, glissando)	Lack of energy, indecision, sadness.	
37 Vibrato	Instability, unsteadiness, ornamentation.	
<i>Volume changes</i>	38 Tremolo	Uncertainty, timidity, imminent action.
	39 Crescendo	Increasing force, power, nearness, etc.
	40 Diminuendo	Decreasing force, power, nearness, etc.
<i>Reverberation</i>	41 Dead acoustics	Restriction, intimacy, closeness, confinement, compression.
	42 Live acoustics	Openness, liveliness, spacious, magnitude, distance, uncertainty, the infinite.

The effect of combining sounds

When we hear two or more sounds together we shall often find that they *interrelate* to provide an emotional effect that changes according to their relative loudness, speed, complexity, etc.

Overall *harmony* – conveys completeness, beauty, accord, organization.

Overall *discord* – conveys imbalance, uncertainty, incompleteness, unrest, ugliness, irritation.

Marked *differences* in relative volume, rhythm, etc. – create variety, complication, breadth of effect, individual emphasis.

Marked *similarities* – result is sameness, homogeneity, mass, strength of effect.

Focusing attention

Audience attention is seldom divided equally between picture and sound. One aspect usually dominates. However, you can transfer concentration between ear and eye. For example, a movement will emphasize a remark made immediately afterwards. Dialogue before a move gives it emphasis.

The ear is particularly drawn to certain types of sound:

- 1 Loud sounds, increasing volume.
- 2 High-pitched sounds (around 1000 to 4000 Hz).
- 3 Sounds rich in overtones (harmonics); edgy, metallic sounds; transients.
- 4 Fast sounds, increasing speed or rhythm.
- 5 Complex rhythms.
- 6 Briefly repeated phrases, syncopation, strong accents.
- 7 Short-duration or staccato sounds.
- 8 Aural movement.
 - (a) Especially increases in volume, pitch, etc.
 - (b) Clear-cut, unexpected, violent, changes.
 - (c) Interruption, vibrato, tremolo.
- 9 Reverberant acoustics.
- 10 Marked contrast.
 - (a) Between the principal and background sounds.
 - (b) Between the sound and the picture (i.e. their associations, composition, etc.).
- 11 Marked similarity.
 - (a) Between sounds (e.g. one source echoing another).
 - (b) Between sounds and picture (e.g. simultaneous upward movements in both).

We can transfer aural attention to another subject by:

- 1 Giving the original subject's sound pattern (rhythm, movement, etc.) to the new source.
- 2 Weakening the original subject's attraction and strengthening the new source.

- 3 Linking action, e.g. having the pattern of the original sound change to that of the new subject, before stopping it.
- 4 Transferring aural movement through, e.g. by carrying over a solo sound while changing its background.
- 5 Cutting to a shot of the new source alone.
- 6 Changing the original composition lines, e.g. whereas upward sounds lead attention towards high notes, downward sounds lead attention towards lower notes.
- 7 Dialogue attracting attention either to its source or to its subject.

Selective sound

In recreating the atmosphere of a particular environment the trick is to use sound *selectively* if you want the scene to carry conviction, rather than try to include all typical background noises. You may deliberately emphasize, reduce, modify, or omit sounds that would normally be present; or introduce others to convey a convincing sense of location.

The selection and blend of environmental sounds can strongly influence the interpretation of a scene. Imagine, for example:

The slow, even toll of a cathedral bell accompanied by the rapid footsteps of approaching churchgoers.

In developing this scene, you could reproduce random typical sounds. Or, more persuasively, you might deliberately use audio emphasis:

- 1 Loud busy footsteps with a quiet insignificant bell in the background.
- 2 The bell's slow dignity contrasted with restless footsteps.
- 3 The bell's echoing notes contrasted with the staccato impatience of footsteps.
- 4 The booming bell overwhelming all other sounds.

So you can use the same sounds either *environmentally* or *atmospherically*; to suggest hope, dignity, community, domination . . . simply through selection, balance, and quality adjustment.

As you saw earlier (*substituted sound*), instead of modifying a scene's natural sounds you might augment them or replace them by entirely fresh ones.

Fig. 20.1 Interaction between sounds

- 1 Towards a common focal point – suggesting conflict, concentration.
- 2 Away from a common focal point – suggesting divergence, broadening.
- 3 Contrasting sound movement – suggesting diversity, variety, interdependence.
- 4 Parallel sound movement – suggesting similarity, unanimity.

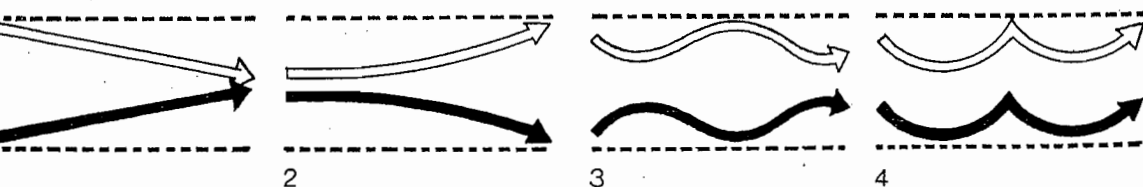


Table 20.2 Selective sound treatment

<i>Sound selection</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Scene: After a long hopeless day seeking work, a cripple returns through emptying streets.	
All sounds audible – of subject and background.	His footsteps sound amidst traffic and crowd noise.
The subject alone is heard.	His stumbling footsteps echo through quiet streets.
The subject plus selected background sounds.	His slow tread contrasts with the brisk steps of passers-by.
General background sounds alone.	Traffic noises. Passers-by.
Significant background sounds alone.	The laughter and gaiety from groups he passes; contrasting with his abject misery.
Interpretative sounds, not directly originating from the scene.	His echoing footsteps become increasingly louder and distorted. By progressively filtering out the higher audiofrequencies his labored tread becomes emphasized.
Significant selected sounds from another scene (providing explanation or comment).	Voices of people refusing him work echo in his brain.

Audiovisual relationships

The picture and its audio can interrelate in several distinct ways:

- 1 *The picture's impact may be due to its accompanying audio.* A close shot of a man crossing a busy highway . . .
 - (a) Cheerful music – suggests that he is in lighthearted mood.
 - (b) But automobile horns and squealing tires – suggest that he is jaywalking dangerously.
- 2 *The audio impact may be due to the picture.*
 - (a) A long shot of a wagon bumping over a rough road . . . and the accompanying sound is accepted as a natural audio effect.
 - (b) But take continuous close-ups of a wheel . . . and every jolt suggests impending breakdown!
- 3 *The effect of picture and audio may be cumulative.*
A wave crashes against rocks . . . to a loud crescendo in the music.
- 4 *Sound and picture together may imply a further idea.*
Wind-blown daffodils . . . birdsong, lambs bleating . . . can suggest spring.