

**The Contemporary Hollywood Film Soundtrack: Professional Practices and Sonic Styles Since the 1970s**

Submitted by Amy Charlotte McGill to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, November 2008.

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## Abstract

Since the 1970s, the soundtrack in Hollywood has come of age as a complex and sophisticated site of cinematic art. Greater combinations of sounds expressing a wider spectrum of tones, textures and volumes can be heard at the movies more than ever before, while behind the scenes, the number of personnel producing them has grown considerably. Moreover, this era has witnessed a proliferation of different artistic and professional approaches to sound. This thesis provides a detailed and wide-ranging picture of these developments and how they were ultimately affected by changes within the American film industry. Drawing on a range of accounts by contemporary sound practitioners and critics, the thesis explores sound production practices, focusing on the sound designer and composer, their creative choices, collaborative relationships - or “sound relations” - and the technologies they employ. The soundtrack is also examined in terms of “sonic style”: the ways in which sound effects, music and the voice function variously in the service of contemporary film narration and genre. It is argued that Hollywood sound production practices and styles have diversified to a high degree, particularly during the last three decades. Industrial realignments on the “New Hollywood” landscape in the 1970s and the integration of the independent and major sectors throughout the 1990s have introduced greater flexibility to mainstream filmmaking norms. These events have played key roles in the expansion of its different sonic styles and working practices in contemporary Hollywood. I take George Lucas and David Lynch, their respective sound design partners Ben Burtt and Alan Splet and composers John Williams and Angelo Badalamenti, and identify distinctions between their professional *modus operandi* and sonic styles to illustrate the growing diversification within the industry. Most importantly, these examples are used to demonstrate both the intricacy and variety that characterises the styles and crafts of the contemporary Hollywood soundtrack.

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## Introduction

There is something about the liquidity and all-encompassing embrace of sound that might make it more accurate to speak of her as a queen rather than a king. But was she then perhaps a queen for whom the crown was a burden, and preferred to slip on a handmaiden's bonnet and scurry incognito through the backways of the palace, accomplishing her tasks anonymously? (Walter Murch "Stretching Sound to Help the Mind See")

*No ay banda*: there is no band [...] It is all a tape recording (Mulholland Dr. David Lynch)

The anonymous "queen", the nonexistent "band". These take on much symbolic weight when we consider the soundtrack in the cinema, as they imply something elusive, unknown and hidden. Critics have often noted that film studies lean heavily towards analysis of the image, thus leaving the soundtrack shrouded in mystery (Rick Altman 1980 3; Gianluca Sergi 2004 3). The words of sound designer Walter Murch quoted above express dismay at the lesser role that sound has played in the cinema, both in the process of film production and in the theatre. But is the film soundtrack really an under recognised and neglected phenomenon? The recent upsurge of film scholars bringing sound to the forefront of their debates would certainly suggest otherwise. Indeed, some have commented on the redundancy of the view that sound is a neglected domain in the study of film and other media (Helen Hanson 2007 28; Randolph Jordan 2007 1). In the last three decades, a number of eminent directors in the American film industry have demonstrated an increasing appreciation of sound in films and the filmmaking process, from Robert Altman, Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas to David Lynch and Joel and Ethan Coen. The budding prominence of the soundtrack in the filmmaking and scholarly communities is concurrent with recent developments in the aesthetics and professional roles of film sound. In recent years, the personnel dedicated to sound production have increased in number while the soundtrack's artistic and technical possibilities have grown. Many of these developments are traceable to Hollywood cinema since the 1970s, a decade that marks the beginning of Hollywood's

“contemporary” era. A new generation of sound experts including the aforementioned Walter Murch exploited new technological developments like Dolby stereo to realign the professional workplace for sound production while intensifying the intricacy of the sounds on the soundtrack. Wider industrial changes in this period of Hollywood have also made an impact. The increasing overlap between the independent sector and the major studios diversified conventions for cinematic storytelling, style and production practices, expanding both the stylistic and professional possibilities in the area of sound. It is these many developments that interest me. This thesis will provide a history of the contemporary soundtrack in Hollywood from the mainstream to the independent margins, tracing the developments in its stylistic features and functions and the professional practices behind its construction. My project is to reveal the ways in which sonic styles and production practices are more complex and diverse in Hollywood films and filmmaking than ever before. It is perhaps for these reasons that the soundtrack has become more enticing to critics and filmmakers alike.

Contemporary Hollywood provides a rich and exciting area for the study of the film soundtrack. There are a growing number of scholars committed to discussing the soundtrack and its development as a key component in mainstream cinema (Marc Mancini 1985; Charles Schreger 1985; Elisabeth Weis 1995; Sergi 2004 and 2005b). But why the recent interest in this period of Hollywood, and why choose this as the focus of my own study? More fundamentally, what do we mean when we discuss sound in Hollywood, given the complexities involved in defining this cinema? In answering the first question, let us briefly examine the key points of interest in the recent history of the film soundtrack, some of which I have flagged above. The major American film industry has long been at the forefront of technological change for film sound, ushering in the industry standardisation of systems like Dolby stereo since it debuted in theatres in the mid 1970s. These systems aimed to heighten sound quality, permitting greater

numbers of sounds to be combined on the soundtrack. In turn this has both commanded and cultivated the creative talents of an increasing professional body, thus inaugurating new roles such as the sound designer. Walter Murch and his work on Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now (1979), and Ben Burt who has since 1977 collaborated with George Lucas on the Star Wars movies, innovated and arguably revolutionised the soundtrack under these developments (Mancini 1985), thus foregrounding the audio experience in theatres while raising the professional profile of sound personnel to the public and critical consciousness (Sergi 2004). With this period of development in mind, it would be reasonable to say that the soundtrack has come of age as a complex artistic phenomenon, reaching maturation in a climate of technological change and intense creativity from a key group of sound professionals. These changes are significant for any understanding of the contemporary soundtrack. However, it is not my intention to focus exclusively on the soundtrack's mainstream milieu as this has been well charted in the studies of others. It is time to explore the margins of Hollywood too. In doing so, I will provide an account of Hollywood that extends beyond the already considerable range of aesthetics and production practices associated with the major studios and top-grossing films and filmmakers. In order to explore its full territory, it is crucial that I outline just what I mean by the Hollywood cinema.

Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson have argued that since 1917, Hollywood cinema has constituted a distinct "mode of film practice" (1985 xiv). This mode "consists of a set of widely held stylistic norms sustained by and sustaining an integral mode of film production [...] Through time, both the norms and mode of production will change, as will the technology they employ, but certain fundamental aspects will remain constant" (1985a xiv). According to Bordwell et al, Hollywood is a site of both historical fixity and flux, from its storytelling, aesthetics and filmmaking techniques to working divisions of labour, commercial practices and industrial infrastructure. At its

most basic, Hollywood has always been an industry centred around a handful of large corporations, which fund teams of craft specialists to create coherent cinematic stories more or less adhering to “classical” conventions (more will be said on “classical” in later chapters). However, Hollywood may also be defined as an industry, a style and a mode of production that permits a considerable degree of departure from existing norms and structures, and this is no more apparent than during its past forty years. As I discuss later, a number of filmmakers working with the major studios during the 1960s and 1970s including Altman, Arthur Penn, Martin Scorsese and Mike Nichols, made films that challenged classical storytelling technique. Others, such as Lucas and Coppola, worked outside of Hollywood’s geographical borders, making films under less specialist divisions of labour than were demanded by Hollywood unions. Hollywood has also witnessed change at the level of industry as well as filmmaking practice. One significant development has been the rising prominence of the independent cinema since the 1980s, which reached a definitive turning point in 1993 when the independent distributors Miramax joined forces with major Disney and New Line with Time Warner. Since then, Hollywood’s remaining majors either bought independents or developed arms that operated like them to diversify their market. These smaller Hollywood subsidiaries resulted in a growing number of films being made under modes of production distinct from those hitherto typical of Hollywood, at the same time as they incorporated an increasing number of stylistic elements associated with other national cinemas, especially those found in Europe. Such industrial, professional and aesthetic hybridity within Hollywood since the 1990s is what I refer to as the “indie” cinema. I employ the term to distinguish this division of Hollywood from the area of complete independence from the majors in terms of production, distribution and finance. Although one must bear in mind that “indie” has been used by others to designate the activity within the entirely independent cinema (Geoff King 2005 3). By exploring Hollywood’s full



landscape over the last forty years, from the films and filmmakers of major studios to those of its indie subsidiaries, from big-budget to modest projects and from the classical to the offbeat, my thesis provides an inclusive history behind the contemporary Hollywood soundtrack and thereby allows me to identify a wide range of fascinating developments that have led to the variety and complexity in its sonic styles and practices.

Having sketched out the historical parameters of my research, it is now vital that I outline what I mean when I discuss the “soundtrack”. The soundtrack is conceptualised in terms of its three main components: dialogue, music and sound effects. No one component is assigned priority in my analysis; rather, I aim to examine the relationships that hold between them. Thus I analyse the soundtrack as a complex, multifaceted whole, and am thereby able to paint a picture of the soundtrack which not only captures more fully its character as a single artistic product but which allows for the capturing of the complex relationships between the various professional roles involved in the creation of that product. The multi-component/multi-craft analysis I employ has some overlap with Sergi, who argues that:

By singling out particular elements of a soundtrack, critics have been able to praise individual achievers rather than focus on the much more complex issue of what actually becomes of these ‘individual’ achievements once they are recorded, mixed and reproduced not as single independent units, but as part of the complex structure that is a soundtrack (2004 6).

Only if we are aware of the relationships between dialogue, music and sound effects can we properly understand, for example, the relationship of the composer to the sound designer, or the sorts of technical and artistic decisions typically faced by the sound editor. Furthermore, the multi-component concept provides a point of departure for an examination of the ways in which the soundtrack has served formal narrative strategies in Hollywood cinema from the 1970s to the present. This examination is theoretically and methodologically distinct from my discussion of sound production and

personnel and their recent historical development, although it serves to throw light on some of the more formal artistic aspects of sound production, as well as their relationship to the wider artistic motivations of filmmakers.

The methodological terrain of my thesis is as follows. My discussion of sound practice and personnel is the result of extensive data-gathering, largely from writings and interviews by sound practitioners themselves, but also from critical works that have explored sound practice. It attempts to provide a full and detailed account of the ways in which the personnel involved in film sound production carry out their work, including the technologies and techniques they employ, the length of time they are allotted for a particular project, the creative freedoms that they enjoy, and their “sound relations” (by which I mean who they collaborate with and how often). Changes in sound practice are traced from the 1970s to the present, and are situated within wider historical and industrial contexts, such as shifts in Hollywood’s industrial infrastructure, its modes of production and the emergence of new technologies.

My analysis of sound style adopts a different approach. This consists of reading the various sounds on the soundtrack and their intercomponent relations, or “*mise-en-bande*” (Altman et al 2000 341), and their contribution to the process of cinematic narration. Narrative strategies are of course crucial to any understanding of Hollywood cinema and have been theorised extensively, although these theories tend to focus primarily on visual stylistic conventions (e.g. Bordwell 1985b, 2006, 2007; Kristin Thompson 1999). Drawing on the work of David Bordwell, I will attempt to contribute to film theory by offering a study of narrative strategies recast in terms of auditory stylistic conventions. Let us briefly examine a few basic examples of how the components of the film soundtrack can help to fulfil the requirements of narrative. Perhaps most conspicuously, spoken language is often a highly effective tool in triggering key plot developments and providing commentary on the states of minds of

characters, while the audience's comprehension is facilitated by delicate volume fluctuations that maximise verbal intelligibility. The instrumentation, mood and style of musical compositions provide commentary on events past, present and future, quicken or subdue pace and arouse emotions. There are innumerable sound effects in a typical Hollywood film, from the quotidian (a slamming door, birdsong, the click of heels on a pavement) to the extraordinary (huge explosions, whizzing spacecraft), all recorded, manipulated, mixed and synchronised with the cinematic image with the aim to thrill and impart information about location, space or characterisation. Each sound component has a vast range of qualities and functions within cinematic narration and they each interrelate to produce meaningful effects. This thesis will identify some of these qualities, interrelations and effects while examining how they are configured according to different narrational frameworks or "modes" (Bordwell 1985b) within contemporary Hollywood films.

To help carry out the dual purpose of this thesis – exploring sound practice and examining how auditory stylistic conventions serve narrative strategies in contemporary Hollywood – I employ two case studies, each focusing on a "sound team" active in Hollywood from the 1970s to the present day. Each study serves to substantiate and illustrate findings from both areas of investigation. Director David Lynch, sound designer Alan Splet and composer Angelo Badalamenti constitute the first team; director George Lucas, sound designer Ben Burtt and composer John Williams constitute the second. These case studies will be supplemented by (less detailed) studies of numerous other sound professionals. I take the Lynch-Splet-Badalamenti team and the Lucas-Burtt-Williams team as representatives of divergent approaches to professional sound practice and sonic style. Firstly I will explore the differences between their professional *modus operandi* including their collaborative sound relations and the skills and working techniques that they employ. Secondly I will employ "textual

analysis”, that is, multi-component readings of the film soundtracks created by the two sound teams respectively. These will include such diverse works as THX-1138, Star Wars (directed by George Lucas 1970, 1977), Dune and Lost Highway (directed by David Lynch 1984, 1997). These films together display a wide variety of narrational strategies and therefore provide rich material for stylistic analysis. These case studies show just how complex and diverse the contemporary Hollywood soundtrack has become since the 1970s and are examined as the result of the wider changes occurring throughout contemporary Hollywood discussed above, including its industrial realignments, its new technologies and trends in narration.

This study begins with three chapters that lay the methodological, conceptual and historical groundwork for my account of the contemporary Hollywood soundtrack. Chapter 1 sets out by providing a detailed definition of the film soundtrack. In reflecting on a wide body of writing on the subject, I examine the soundtrack in its multi-component structure and argue that it warrants an interdisciplinary study of its stylistic, textual qualities and its contexts of production. In chapter 2 I explore the wider contextual and historical boundaries of the soundtrack by focusing on Hollywood in the post-studio era. I examine industrial shifts and concurrent changes in modes of production, narration and genre, with special attention to the “Hollywood Renaissance” at the end of the 1960s, the modern blockbuster since 1975 and indie filmmaking since the 1990s. Chapter 3 tackles the methodological issues surrounding sound authorship in contemporary Hollywood, and calls for an emphasis on multiple, collaborative considerations of authorship in the study of the soundtrack. Hence the case studies in the following chapters emphasise the equal importance of the sound designer, composer and director, as well as taking account of other professional roles.

Chapters 4-7 provide an account of sound practices in contemporary Hollywood. In chapters 4 and 5 I detail the role of the sound designer and composer since the 1970s

and trace their professional antecedents to the studio era. Drawing on the work of critics and a range of accounts from industry professionals, I chart a history of their creative and collaborative roles in light of Hollywood's industrial and technological developments. I argue that contemporary sound practice is more diverse and fluid across productions due to decreasing standardisation across the industry following the end of Hollywood's studio system. Chapters 6 and 7 illustrate these claims by focusing on the two "sound teams" of Lynch, Badalamenti and Splet, and Lucas, Williams and Ben Burt. I discuss their careers in different areas of the film industry, which become backdrops against which I explore their differing group professional approaches and collaborative sound relations.

In chapters 8-12 I offer a comprehensive study of sound's function in contemporary cinematic narration. I begin by suggesting approaches to detailed sound analysis, from looking at its inter-component relations between dialogue, music and sound effects, to the specific qualities of individual sounds. I then explore David Bordwell's theory of the narrational "modes" associated with "classical" Hollywood cinema and European "art" cinema (1985b, 2007), outlining a number of ways in which sounds function in the service of each mode. This leads the way to a proposed "contemporary" mode of narration, which incorporates norms from each of the others and thus enables the emergence of more shifting, hybrid sonic styles. This is illustrated in chapters 9-12 through close sound analyses of a range of films by the two "sound teams". Each sound team is shown to be representative of the contemporary mode of narration, and together they illustrate the breadth of its range, as their distinct approaches to sound reveal. Each analysis is organised chronologically and represents a decade from the 1970s to the present. This spans an era during which the new blockbuster film and indie cinema emerged, which helped to consolidate contemporary narration and its diverse sound style.

Through these chapters, I will substantiate my overarching claim that since the 1970s the soundtrack in Hollywood can be distinguished by its complexity and variety as a style and a mode of practice, and that this complexity and variety is the product of important shifts in Hollywood's industry, mode of production, technologies and narrational conventions.

## **Chapter One**

### **Methodological and Conceptual Issues in the Study of the Film Soundtrack**

The question “What is the film soundtrack?” is more complex than it first appears, as it can be interpreted from a variety of perspectives drawn from professional film practices to cinema studies. This chapter sets out to explore some possible answers to the question by means of a survey of the current literature emerging from critical and practical discourses on the soundtrack. This survey covers a broad range of perspectives to provide theoretical background for the chapters to follow. As a result the soundtrack will be considered multifariously. It will be defined as the site of various filmmaking practices, where professional relationships, technical faculties, creative decisions and industrial demands intersect. It will also be understood as the end product of these practices, that is, as a key element of the cinema’s audiovisual experience that serves dramatic functions within a film. In addition this chapter will consider the soundtrack in terms of its key “anatomical” elements, i.e., its sound effects, music and dialogue, each of which are to be studied together with equal attention throughout this project. All of these facets confer upon the soundtrack a complex identity that lies at the centre of this study.

The heterogeneity of the film soundtrack is reflected in a diverse and ever growing body of writing on the subject. Current literature ranges from musicological studies, textual analyses and technological historiographies to interviews with creators of film sound and instructive manuals for practitioners. These literatures do not necessarily form discrete categories, however. For instance, as Elisabeth Weis points out: “One of the joys of working in sound studies is that there is much cross-fertilization between the practitioners and the academics” (1999 96). There is indeed an increasing dialogue between those interested in the critical study of the soundtrack and the people involved in its actual production: two groups that until recent years would seem by and

large unconnected. To critics and theorists like Weis (1999), Gianluca Sergi (2004), Rick Altman (2007) and others, this dialogue is indicative of a larger - and important - interdisciplinary exchange, something that can enrich our understanding of the soundtrack on numerous levels. This exchange can illuminate how the various components of film sound are created and coordinated, and the nature of the technical and artistic considerations involved in this process. It may offer insights into the working dynamics between sound professionals and the mode of labour in a given film industry, while leading to a more developed understanding as to why a particular film soundtrack sounds as it does.

Ultimately, a comprehensive critical study of the soundtrack demands an approach that can draw on multiple perspectives and conceptualisations. As Weis and John Belton state in their preface to Film Sound Theory and Practice (1985): “To set forth a single, distinctive analytical methodology at this point in sound studies seems a bit restrictive” (xi). This is as true today as it was over twenty years ago, and has since been illustrated by the substantial and varied body of writings and discussions in circulation. In particular, there are several key texts that exemplify the various methodological approaches to the study of film sound, and are worth examining.

### **Trends in Literature on the Film Soundtrack**

As a starting point, it is important to identify some major tendencies in recent literature on the film soundtrack. Each places a varying degree of emphasis on its identity as a critical object or as a site of production practices. Firstly there is scholarly work that approaches the soundtrack from theoretical perspectives - from gender studies and psychoanalysis (e.g. Kaja Silverman 1988; Amy Lawrence 1991; Caryl Flinn 1992), to formal analyses (e.g. Michel Chion 1999) and musicology (e.g. Royal S. Brown 1994). Secondly there is writing by film sound scholars that focuses on the soundtrack's



contexts of production, from the art and technique of professional sound men and women to the technologies employed in the creative process (e.g. Altman 1992; James Lastra 2000; Sergi 2004; William Whittington 2007). A third trend can be identified in works written by the creators of film sound themselves, which have frequently been sourced by scholars. They combine the registers of professionalism - providing first hand accounts of creation and production practices - with theoretical reflections on the aesthetics of film sound (a number articles by sound designers Walter Murch and Randy Thom are exemplary). Finally, there are writings by practitioners that are aimed at other practitioners, and are on the whole intended for the purposes of technical and artistic instruction (compiled in professional journals such as Mix and Post). Of course, there may be some overlap between these categories as some works on film sound may occupy more than one. Nevertheless, considering key instances of literature with these trends in mind usefully highlights the soundtrack's intersecting discourses of critical and practical production.

### **Soundtracks and Scholars: Terminologies and Critical Concepts**

The anatomy of the soundtrack consists of multiple components, which most simply break down into dialogue, music and sound effects. This has had a lasting impact on the ways in which the soundtrack understood by critics. As Robynn Stilwell notes, “The tripartite division of the soundscape is replicated academically, as the methodologies are quite divergent [...] the scholarly division of labour has tended to perpetuate the segregation of the various sound components” (169). Indeed, there is a large corpus of scholarly texts that focus on the individual components of the soundtrack.

Film music has received significant critical attention, and these studies encompass a wide range theoretical perspectives. For example, the work of Claudia Gorbman (1987) and Flinn (1992) employ theories of film music informed by semiotics and psychoanalysis, while Kathryn Kalinak (1992) and Annette Davison (2004b)

employ textual analyses while providing historical accounts of compositional practices in Hollywood. Royal S. Brown (1994) bridges the “gap” between musical connoisseurs or musicologists and primarily film-oriented readers (Gorbman 1995 74), addressing their disciplinary and terminological differences that still loom large in film music studies. Recent anthologies edited by Jim Buhler, Flinn and David Neumeyer (2000), K.J. Donnelly (2001), Kay Dickinson (2002) and Peter Franklin and Robynn Stilwell (forthcoming) demonstrate a continuing interest in this area of film sound, while providing a compendium of different methodological approaches in the essays on offer.

The growth of writing dedicated to non-musical sounds has continued apace in recent years, as Altman points out:

Increasingly, studies have been devoted to filmic uses of language: dialogue, dubbing intertitles, subtitles, the voice, voice-over. Even sound effects have received separate attention, particularly since digitally massaged tracks created by a new generation of sound designers began to complement traditional studio work (2000 339).

Dialogue has received considerable critical attention. Silverman (1988) and Lawrence (1991) employ psychoanalysis and gender criticism to their studies of the voice. Michel Chion (Le Voix au Cinéma, translated The Voice in the Cinema 1999) combines textual analyses with a comprehensive and wide-ranging terminology, while Sarah Kozloff (1988, 2000) discusses the centrality of voice to narrative. Scholarly works dedicated to sound effects have also begun to emerge in the past few years. While, as Sergi (2005a) notes, there has been a relative lack of critical attention to sound effects compared with music and dialogue, a number of significant contributions have nevertheless been made, which tend to incorporate accounts of sound practices and technologies into scholarly discussions of sound style (Marc Mancini 1985; Helen Hanson 2007; Whittington 2007).

While single component studies of the soundtrack are diverse and many, they are not the only critical approach to be found. Another body of writing considers music,

dialogue, and effects within the same study, and thus provides yet another range of conceptualisations and terminologies to the study of film sound. They have also produced some illuminating approaches to aesthetic analysis.

In Film Art: An Introduction (2004), David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson dedicate a brief chapter to the study of the art of the soundtrack as a whole. They outline the fundamental formal properties and functions of music, dialogue and sound effects, and offer a basic analytical terminology applicable to each, including the terms “loudness”, “pitch” and “timbre”. This provides a useful starting point for understanding the soundtrack as a sonically multifaceted entity, whose different components each carry a variety of distinct qualities. However, as critics like Altman (1992) and Sergi (2004) suggest, the type of vocabulary adopted by Bordwell and Thompson is not entirely adequate for describing the soundtrack’s complex of distinct sounds. As Sergi himself points out:

[...] the main critical vocabulary employed to analyse soundtracks would seem to have begged, borrowed and stolen from its music counterpart. This is particularly evident in the insistence in terms such as timbre, pitch, tone, which though evidently relevant are not flexible enough to articulate the complexity of contemporary soundtracks (2004 6).

Of course, a mode of analysis that adopts musical terms can be useful: music is itself a key component of the soundtrack, and several of its qualities are transferable to descriptions of other sounds. However, alternative disciplinary approaches - and corresponding vocabularies - have been proposed by key critics when discussing the soundtrack (Chion 1994a; Altman 2000; Buhler et al 2003; Sergi 2004).

Michel Chion and Rick Altman are among the most prolific contemporary writers on the soundtrack. Both critics offer different, but equally useful, tools for the aesthetic analysis of sound. Chion has written single component studies Le Voix au Cinéma (trans. 1999), Le Son au Cinéma (1994b) and La Musique au Cinéma (1995b), but his project Audio Vision: Sound on Screen (1994a) considers all components of the

soundtrack within one study. Taking the notion of “added value” (5) as his starting point, he observes that, when added to moving images, speech, music, and other sounds play a vital role in the creation of meaning. From this point, he continues to offer one of the most extensive vocabularies for the analysis of audiovisual media to date, writing, for example, about the ways in which sound contributes to the experience of dramatic action and sensation (112), and time and space (66-94).

Altman (2000) claims that film sound analysts could consider how individual sound components relate to one another *within* the soundtrack, rather than how they relate to the image alone. In collaboration with McGraw Jones and Sonia Tatroe, Altman proposes a model for analysing the elements of the soundtrack using the concept of the *mise-en-bande*. This refers to the ways in which the dialogue, sound effects and music tracks interweave and function together as a whole. Their method involves graphically plotting the soundtrack elements according to their relative volumes at points in time during a film sequence, which provides a precise tool for analysing sound components and their interrelationships. In addition the study offers a useful descriptive vocabulary which accounts for the soundtrack’s multiple component structure, including the terms “inter-relational” and the aforementioned *mise-en-bande*. Finally, Altman et al. position their analyses in the context of sound work and technology in studio era Hollywood, thus providing an historical and empirical foundation for the study. Ultimately, the authors suggest that we cannot understand the history of film sound without understanding the importance of “intercomponent, intrasoundtrack relationships” (2000 341).

More recently, critics have joined Chion and Altman et al. in analysing the soundtrack’s multiple structure. To Jim Buhler this can raise detailed questions of textuality, as he points out in an interview:

[...] taking the whole sound track as the basic unit of analysis allows us to think about the musicality of the sound track as a whole [. . .] It also

allows us to think of the individual components in functional terms: Is this bit of speech functioning as dialogue or sound effect? Is this sound effect symbolic (that is, musical) or merely diegetic? Is this music delivering narratively important information or functioning symbolically? (Kyle Barnett et al. 2003 87)

Buhler's questions are important to understanding the meaningful and dramatic role of sounds in the cinema and its system of storytelling or narration. It would seem that a holistic conception of the soundtrack best accommodates such a discussion.

Sergi also acknowledges the interrelationships between sounds, music and dialogue in study of the soundtrack, while offering a methodology that recognises the technologies and production contexts involved in its creation. He begins by stating that: "We have not looked hard enough into key issues such as relationships between music, sound effects and dialogue" (2004 85). This forms the basis of a model of textual and contextual analysis under the banner of an "organic approach" (2004 140-156). It considers sound dynamics, i.e. how each individual sound element works in terms of "orchestration" (the layering and mixing of key sound components), "contrast" (dynamic or textural shifts), "focus" (degrees of manipulation of audience attention to sounds) and "definition" (repetition or emphasis on significant sounds). It also examines broader contextual issues, such as filmmakers, technology, creativity, budgets and audiences. Ultimately, Sergi proposes a mode of textual analysis that considers the relationships between individual sounds, while offering a developed and nuanced vocabulary for discussing and measuring these relationships. Sergi's approach also suggests various conceptual and disciplinary routes of investigation, some of which are related to practice, which is a growing area of critical discussion in sound studies.

The discussions led by Chion, Altman, Buhler and Sergi together offer suggestions for analysis and provide terminological bases for studying the soundtrack. Their approaches are particularly useful to this project, which adopts elements of each to closely analyse the soundtrack in terms of style and its contribution to cinematic

narration. By addressing the soundtrack's historical context, from production practices during specific eras to technological developments and industrial milieus, these critics also go some way in contributing to a broad and interdisciplinary field of study. Sergi (2004) in particular focuses on the professional and technological practices behind the soundtrack in contemporary Hollywood, and exemplifies an increasing scholarly trend towards addressing the soundtrack's mode of practice.

### **Soundtracks, Scholars, and Discourses of Practice**

Commenting on the critical discourses of film sound, Sergi writes that: "we have not yet put enough questions to practitioners about the creative, technological, and personal relationships that dictate the creation of film soundtracks" (2004 86). However, there are a growing number of scholars who acknowledge the process of work on the soundtrack - and who often provide insights into specific creative professions, their practices and the attendant technologies they employ. The journal Music, Sound, and the Moving Image 1.1 (2007), and notable sound and music specials in Cineaste (1995) and Film Comment (1978) have been particularly illuminating. Such a trend in writing may also include case studies of filmmakers who are innovative or prominent in their field (William Darby and Jack DuBois 1990). This sometimes incorporates interview material that voices the filmmakers' personal and professional attitudes and expert reports on the production of the soundtrack, from the books of Vincent LoBrutto (1994) and Nicholas Pasquariello (1996), to the content of specialist film music magazines like Soundtrack! and Film Score Monthly. This literature also includes scholars' books on how film soundtracks are constructed, with insights into the complex network of artistic, technical and cooperative processes involved (Altman 1992; Lastra 2000; Sergi 2004).

One of the earliest and noteworthy accounts of filmmaking practices in the study of the soundtrack is Elisabeth Weis and John Belton's Film Sound Theory and Practice (1985). The anthology covers considerable methodological ground, from history and aesthetics to technology, economics and politics. Key essays include Marc Mancini's exposition of the sound design profession and Mary Anne Doane's ideological study of classical Hollywood's postproduction work to Charles Schreger's account of the rise of Dolby stereo and Stephen Handzo's glossary of sound technology. Taken together, they are representative of the scholarly interest in the history of film sound production.

Editor Elisabeth Weis has extended her own critical interest in film sound production to numerous other works. They include her book The Silent Scream: Alfred Hitchcock's Sound Track (1982) and "Sync Tanks: The Art and Technique of Post-Production Sound", the latter of which is an article that features prominently in Cineaste's supplement on sound (1995). Her discussion of post-production sound includes details on the professional roles, their cooperative relationships, and the complex of creative and technical processes that go into coordinating music, dialogue and effects. The writing on practical subject matter is shot through with the register of scholarly journalism, and thus exemplifies a significant exchange between two distinct discourses.

Weis is also important because she belongs to a group of critics that aim to incorporate first hand accounts of sound practice into the study of film sound. Her article includes interview material with sound professionals, from dialogue editors to mixers, facilitating scholarly access to the voices of creators of the soundtrack. Sergi (2004) has also undertaken a number of in-depth interviews with a host of leading contemporary sound figures from Hollywood. Three volumes of dedicated interview material with sound practitioners also provide invaluable resources for researchers of film sound. These include Vincent LoBrutto's Sound-on-Film: Interviews with Creators

of Film Sound (1994), Nicholas Pasquariello's Sounds of Movies: Interviews with Creators of Feature Soundtracks (1996) and David Morgan's Knowing the Score: Film Composers Talk about the Art, Craft, Blood, Sweat and Tears of Writing for Cinema (2000). These collections are interesting as their authors signal a growing critical appreciation of the professional practices and perspectives surrounding the soundtrack.

### **Practice on Paper: Professionals Writing about the Soundtrack**

A growing body of literature by sound professionals is further representative of significant interchange between researchers and creators of the film soundtrack. For example, the newly published journal Music, Sound and The Moving Image has reprinted an article by composer Ennio Morricone. The School of Sound (2003) has published lectures by both sound professionals and critics, offering an invaluable forum of conceptual exchange. Two key contributors are Hollywood sound designers Walter Murch (Apocalypse Now Francis Ford Coppola 1979) and Randy Thom (Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom Steven Spielberg 1984; Wild at Heart David Lynch 1990). For over a decade they have proved to be prolific writers, their work addressing the technical, aesthetic, conceptual and professional issues associated with the film soundtrack.

Essentially, Murch and Thom offer an exceptional mode of writing. While they primarily offer a register of technical expertise, they also articulate certain theoretical perspectives, which could appeal to a wider critical readership (Weis 1999; Sergi 2004). For example, (1995 and 2000 respectively) they approach the conceptual issues involved in defining the "sound designer", a slippery professional title that has, in the past twenty years, entered the scholarly lexicon of the soundtrack (Mancini 1985; Weis 1995; Sergi 2004). With these articles they also offer informed histories of sound in the cinema, along with in-depth discussions of the affective and dramatic uses of sound.



Thom's writing gains a polemic register when focusing on the working relations between sound specialists and other filmmakers. For example, in "Confessions of an Occasional Sound Designer", he calls for greater collaboration between the practitioners of various filmmaking crafts. He also voices the concern that sound and its creators are relegated to a status below that of the image and its attendant personnel. Undoubtedly invaluable for fellow film sound practitioners, this writing is also becoming recognised in the arena of film sound scholarship. It offers an important first hand account of both the aesthetic and expressive functions of sound, and the working practices of sound creation in Hollywood, its labour and its politics.

The majority of articles written by Murch and Thom can be found online. One of the richest single resources for these writings is the website Filmsound ([www.filmsound.org](http://www.filmsound.org)). This is exemplary of a considerable and growing exchange between scholars and practice occurring on the Internet. The ever-expanding site contains pieces on all aspects of film sound, from theoretical discussions of the aesthetics of sound to technical processes occurring during postproduction sound creation, and so is a fertile space of learning and debate for both critics and sound professionals. This is encapsulated in the site's recent publication of an edition of the online journal Offscreen (2007), which contains essays and forum discussions with contributions made by scholars and film sound practitioners. Overall, the online domain provides considerable space for the discussion of the soundtrack, and while key sites ranging from the scholarly to the professional are too numerous to list, many of these have been compiled within an article by Jay Beck and Frank Le Gac in the pages of the film journal Iris (1999), thus providing a useful starting point for finding such resources.

### **Practical Literature for the Professional Domain**

The writings by sound professionals for sound professionals have been published widely. Professional film journals American Cinematographer and Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers (JSMPE) published articles on sound production since the early years of the talkies. Today such writing spans a range of media. This includes recent books such as Sonnenschein's Sound Design: The Expressive Power of music, Voice, and Sound Effects in The Cinema (2000), and numerous filmmaking journals in print - some of which have an online presence - including Mix and its comprehensive anthology Sound for Picture: An Inside Look at Audio Production for Film and Television (2001). Others include Post, The Association for Motion Picture Sound (AMPS), and The Hollywood Reporter. Of course this literature is primarily aimed at other practitioners interested in learning the filmmaking craft, although it may prove a valuable resource for the scholar willing to explore the technical, industrial and technological context of the film soundtrack.

Today, the wealth of literature on film sound embodies a variety of different discourses, registers, concepts and methodologies across a considerable body of writing. Moreover, it spans a wide range of written media which includes critical works and anthologies dedicated to sound, professional and academic websites, manuals and books on film sound production, and collections of interviews with sound professionals. There are also magazines and journals dedicated to sound and music, technical journals on all aspects of cinema including sound, special editions and features on sound in film and arts journals and magazines including Film Comment (1978), Yale French Studies (1980), Sight and Sound (1987), Hollywood Reporter (1991), Cinéaste (1995) and Iris (1999), and critical books or anthologies on film, which include substantial sections on sound (Neale 1985; Cook 2002).

The material on offer is surely indicative that the film soundtrack is a heterogeneous phenomenon, a fact that need not be overlooked. As an object of critical study, it may therefore be analysed formally in its multiple components of music, sound effect and dialogue; textually as a bearer of dramatic meaning and narrative and contextually in its professional, industrial and technological practices during a given historical moment. The study of the soundtrack is best supplemented by differing the registers of intellectual and professional knowledge. While traditional theoretical accounts of sound are worthy, so too is the practitioner's "view from the trenches" (Sergi 2004 73). A methodology that encompasses multiple perspectives, vocabularies and conceptualisations is key to a wide-ranging and comprehensive study of the soundtrack. Indeed Altman writes that: "Only by imagining broadly – by defining our corpus in the broadest possible manner – can we possibly succeed in revolutionizing the way in which moving images will be heard and seen by future generations" (2007 7).

### **The Soundtrack: From Concepts to Contexts**

The current body of research on film sound is broad indeed, and while it continues to fruitfully explore numerous areas of the soundtrack per se, it also covers many cinematic contexts around the world. From Europe (Noel Carroll 1985; Douglas Gomery 1985; Miguel Mera and David Bernand 2006) to Asia (Shoma Chatterji 2003) and a combination of national cinemas including French, German and American (Chion 1994a and 1999; Charles O' Brian 2006), it would seem that critical considerations of the soundtrack are now truly global. However, Hollywood cinema represents an area of sound studies that has particularly flourished, from its transition to the talkies (Donald Crafton 1997; Gomery 2005), to contemporary sound styles and practices (Donnelly 2000; Sergi 2004). This is most likely because Hollywood has led most of the key innovations in cinema sound in terms of technology, art and technique. As Sergi (2004)

writes, “Since the coming of sound in the late 1920s, the history of film sound has been firmly located within the American industry” (5). In recent years there has been increasing attention paid to the Hollywood soundtrack from the late 1970s to the present. Contemporary scores (Davison 2004b), sound production technologies and techniques (Mancini 1985; Weis 1995; Sergi 1998 and 2004) and specific creative personnel (LoBrutto 1994) have provided diverse and far-reaching avenues of enquiry, all contributing to a burgeoning critical field.

Why should this thirty-year period in Hollywood’s history be of vital interest? As I pointed out in the introduction of this thesis, developments in the areas of sound technology and filmmaking practice, such as the industry-wide deployment of Dolby stereo and the increasing finesse of multi-track recording and manipulation techniques certainly deserve recognition in drawing attention to this era of Hollywood. These factors correspond to some key sound professionals, including Walter Murch (Apocalypse Now Francis Ford Coppola 1979) and Ben Burtt (Star Wars George Lucas 1977). These two soundmen became expressive of new and innovative approaches to creative sound production. Star Wars became the benchmark of high quality cinema sound, and is said to have contributed to a proliferation of Dolby systems in theatrical exhibition (Cook 2002 386). Walter Murch introduced the term “sound design” while working on Apocalypse Now, which has become a widely used professional title in the film industry since. Finally, this period may be recognised as fostering an interest in film sound among filmmakers. Weis and Belton write that: “There have always been isolated directors with good ears, but now there is a whole generation more aware of sound. This is particularly true in the United States among a number of filmmakers who became major figures in the seventies” (9). Lucas, Coppola, Robert Altman (Nashville 1975), Martin Scorsese (Taxi Driver 1976; Raging Bull 1980), Michael Cimino (The Deer Hunter 1978) and Steven Spielberg (Jaws 1975; Close Encounters of the Third

Kind 1977; ET: The Extra Terrestrial 1982) and others began to pay significant attention to sound as a central creative component in the cinema. Ultimately these factors may be viewed as key constituents in a contemporary paradigm of film sound.

This paradigm is perhaps enticing as it resounds with the notion of change: an expansion of creative ideas and modifications in professional and technological practices in Hollywood. However, this expansion is the result of wider adjustments in Hollywood's industrial, technological and aesthetic history. Therefore a broader contextual examination will be necessary if we are to fully conceptualise a contemporary paradigm for the soundtrack. Changes in Hollywood's industrial infrastructure and its patterns of production, down to its generic forms and modes of narration, impacted on how the soundtrack was produced, by whom, and what it sounds like today. More specifically, these changes will be able to provide a foundation on which illustrative examples of sound style and practice - from the work of filmmakers David Lynch, Alan Splet and Angelo Badalamenti to George Lucas, Ben Burtt and John Williams and others - can be fully comprehended. Ultimately, we have to start at the beginning and ask: what is contemporary Hollywood cinema?

## Chapter Two

### Increased Diversity and Paradigms of Hollywood in the Post Studio Era

Although it has been frequently invoked in critical debates for almost four decades, the notion of contemporary Hollywood, with its various designations (“new”, “postclassical” or “postmodern”) continues to elude straightforward definition. Because its history can be analysed through a range of approaches from style, industry, working practice and technology to socio-economics, scholarship on the subject has developed into a complex discourse. The breadth and depth of this discourse offers a number of questions that need to be disentangled. For example, how can Hollywood be periodised as new? What are the criteria for change? If significant changes have taken place, what are they and where can they be located? While it is not easy to produce hard and fast answers, I would like to focus on some defining developments and changes in industry, cinematic style and production practice that together show that Hollywood has become increasingly heterogeneous, developing a number of different “strands”. These changes can be traced back to 1948 when the studio system came to an end, loosening Hollywood’s industrial infrastructure. Production practices became decentralised and unchained from the studios, leading to an increasing diversification of working *modus operandi* and stylistic approaches in filmmaking. This diversification intensified after the 1970s thereby forming what I understand to be “contemporary” Hollywood.

Most historiographies of the “new”, “postclassical”, “postmodern” or “contemporary” Hollywood anchor it in epochal terms to the 1948 Paramount Decrees (Hillier 1992; Schatz 1993; Tasker 1996; Neale and Smith 1998; Bordwell 2006). Government legislation ruled that major studios RKO, Warner, Fox, Paramount, and Loew’s/MGM would divorce their production and distribution operations from theatrical exhibition, thus loosening their oligopolistic control over the whole American movie industry. This break in the studio system has been understood to spark not only a

reconfiguration in Hollywood's industrial infrastructure but also modifications in production practices and film styles, thus marking the end or decline of the pre-1948 classical era which had been ostensibly marked by a degree of stability (Schatz 1993; Tasker 1996). However one gauges the significance of this event, it has become the starting point for varied and lively discussions on change or otherwise within Hollywood.

Some critics have identified periods of aesthetic innovation and experimentation in filmmaking, particularly since the 1960s, citing examples like Bonnie and Clyde (Arthur Penn 1967) and Easy Rider (Dennis Hopper 1969) and the various contributions of the so-called "movie brats", who include Coppola, Spielberg, Lucas and Scorsese (Jacobs 1977; Pye and Myles 1979; Biskind 1998; Smith 1998). Others trace a process resulting in economic stability, characterised by the style, marketing strategies and broad audience appeal of the blockbuster movie from the mid 1970s (Hillier 1992; Schatz 1993). Others still, situate Hollywood within discussions of the "postmodern", noting the contemporary cinema's frequent textual references to past styles or themes (Carroll 1998; Elsaesser and Buckland 2002), or its interaction with various elements within our multimedia culture (Tasker 1996). Each of the above have been variously designated by the terms "Hollywood Renaissance", "New Hollywood", "postclassical", "postmodern", or simply "contemporary Hollywood", and clearly they are not periodised in the same way, nor are they understood according to the same set of criteria.

In opposition to the arguments that changes taking place - whether stylistic, technological, institutional, industrial or economic - warrant the ascription of "newness", some may claim that nothing has happened to Hollywood that is so significant that it constitutes fundamental transformation (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson 1985a; Thompson 1999; Bordwell 2006). Others speak of departure from,

and eventual return to, a mode of storytelling that resembles films made in the pre-1948 studio era, as the blockbusters by Lucas and Spielberg exemplify (Pye and Myles 1979; Schatz 1993). Furthermore there are claims that the classical paradigm of economic, industrial and narrative stability never truly existed, and that the Hollywood system has “maintained essentially the same character from the teens to the present day – with the additional proviso that we should *not* think of this enduring system as in any sense ‘classical’” (Smith 1998 15). According to this position, Hollywood’s history has been consistently fraught with disruptions and modifications on all levels, and so debating the existence of new or different phases throughout could be regarded as futile.

So how does one begin to navigate a discussion through such a seemingly rich and complex history? We cannot speak of, at any point, the sudden introduction of an entirely “new” Hollywood. Nor can we postulate on a purely “postclassical” cinema, if we are to take it for granted that a “classical” cinema exists, because as Peter Krämer rightly points out: “Post-classicism does not refer to a complete break in American film history” (289). Within Hollywood’s institutional, industrial, aesthetic and economic history are its fibres - its modes of production, narrational and stylistic approaches, genres, marketing strategies and so on. Together they reveal a complex and interwoven landscape of stasis, transformation, departure and return, and where shifts occur, at differing rates and degrees. Today’s Hollywood is a cinema marked by breaks, evolutions and continuities on numerous levels, although the significance of these levels and degrees of difference are variables that critics continue to debate. Conceptualising a contemporary paradigm of Hollywood is thus a matter of emphasis and scope.

With that in mind I wish to draw attention to some key changes that took place in Hollywood since the 1970s that warrant my ascription of “contemporary” and which distinguish it from past eras of Hollywood. Focusing on the industrial modifications and consequent emergence of new production strands - including the “Hollywood



Renaissance” in the late 1960s and early 1970s; the movie brats, who by the mid 1970s had formulated the contemporary blockbuster; the growing prominence of the American independent sector in the 1980s, and its partial assimilation into Hollywood in the 1990s - I will discuss the proliferation of different narrational strategies, new generic trends and individualistic modes of production in this stretch of history.

Theorising contemporary Hollywood as essentially diverse does not automatically postulate a homogenous, rigidly uniform cinema of past eras. Variety, it is claimed, has always characterised the Hollywood cinema. For instance, Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson cite affectionate terms for the novelties of scriptwriting celebrated during the studio era: “gimmick, twist, boff, yak, weenie, old switcheroo” (1985a 70). Steve Neale discusses the considerable diversity and hybridity of generic production in Hollywood during the 1930s (2000 234). At the same time, contemporary Hollywood does not involve wholesale departure from practices and conventions of the studio or classical era. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson suggest that critics should remain sensitive to the continuing principles that have governed Hollywood filmmaking since 1917. They argue that: “Just as the Hollywood mode of production continues, the classical style remains the dominant model for feature filmmaking” (370). This view of Hollywood’s history constructs a cinematic paradigm that has in some senses endured: it is sufficiently rigid so as to uphold some basic standards of style and practice while allowing for a degree of differentiation and deviation from those standards.

Nevertheless, I wish to highlight the ways in which Hollywood has demonstrated increasing variations across its industrial infrastructure, production practices and narrational conventions, intensifying in the 1970s and beyond.

### **After 1948: Industry, Mode of Production and Style**

I will begin my account of contemporary Hollywood by focusing on some key events that preceded, and to an extent, paved the way for this era. From the late 1940s to the mid 1950s, the major studios witnessed considerable changes to their production policies. As Bordwell et al. write: “instead of the mass production of many films by a few manufacturing firms, now there was the specialized production of a few films by many independents” (1985a 331). More specifically there was the transition from the “producer-unit” system to “package production”. For the producer-unit system, studios contracted a small group of producers who were each required to make six to eight films a year with a relatively identifiable staff. Package production saw a move away from long-term in-house staff employment towards a more freelance project-by-project arrangement (Bordwell et al. 1985a 330). This period of Hollywood is therefore significant because its mode of production became a more flexible affair while product differentiation and specialisation increased.

The exact conditions for the change in production policy and product specialisation in post-war Hollywood are manifold, and to provide a comprehensive account of these changes would require considerably more space. However, one event that played a significant role in these realignments was the 1948 divorcement, or Paramount decrees, which led the studios to divest their ownership of exhibition outlets. Before this happened, the major studios’ ties with exhibition generated the need for a steady flow of production and income, as Maltby observes:

The exhibitor’s concern was to promote the habit of moviegoing, and it was the maintenance of that habit, rather than the profitability of any individual movie, that was economically most important to the industry. Under these circumstances it made little economic sense for any of the parties in production, distribution or exhibition to buy or sell each movie as an individual item (1995 74).

The stability that this business relationship required was reflected in studio system production. Neale describes a structure in which the labour force and its working practices were fairly standardised:

[The studios] were secure in the knowledge that there was a built-in long-term demand for their product and that all the films they released would be shown. They were therefore able to employ in-house staff on long-term contracts and to invest in in-house facilities. And they were therefore able to develop routinized production plans and practices along lines similar to those used in other industries engaged in the mass production of goods – to develop what has sometimes been called a ‘factory system’ (2002 232-3).

As Thomas Schatz points out, the 1948 Paramount decrees caused a reorganisation of the industry’s infrastructure, thereby ushering in some significant alterations to the mode of production:

It was obvious [that] what the Justice department and the federal courts had in mind [...] was an industry in which movies were produced and sold on a picture-by-picture and theatre-by-theatre basis. This would undermine the entire studio system, which relied on a stable and consistent market for its standardized products, which in turn generated the cash flow that enabled the studios to pay their operating (overhead) costs and maintain their contract personnel (1983 412).

With the studios no longer bound to exhibition, their activities changed. Maltby notes that: “the producers and distributors were no longer guaranteed a market for their products but had instead to sell each movie on its individual merits” (1995 72).

Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s the major studios focused on far fewer and more specialised productions at the same time as they threw their energies into distribution working alongside an increasing number of producers from the independent sector. As Bordwell et al. also recognise, the studios also became increasingly astute in their role as distributors: “Recognizing changing consumption patterns and targeting parts of the population as its most likely and desired audiences, the industry concentrated even more on a highly differentiated film” (1985a 332). The self-contained and standardised “mass” producing studio system therefore came to an end.

These changes had important implications for film production practices and for the fates of the end products themselves. Having by and large ceased to produce movies themselves, the major studios now hired out their resources and facilities to independent producers. “Rather than an individual company containing the source of labour and the materials, the entire industry became a pool for these” (Bordwell et al. 1985a 330). Production thus became “package” oriented. A producer or talent agent organised production, assembling the key components of a movie, which had now become openly available to many companies compared with the previously self-sufficient studio system. Instead of contracted in-house personnel as was once standard for the studios, a team could now be amassed for a one-off project, and so the mode of production and the working practices shift from the standardised group operations of a studio to a more flexible, individualised arrangement.

Package production also impacted on the films themselves, leading to a process of market specialisation. As Bordwell et al. point out:

The package-unit system further intensified the need to differentiate the product on the basis of its innovations, its story, its stars, and its director. With the major firms supplying financing and other benefits that were not visible to the consumer, the use of a studio brand name became only another (if slightly larger) line on the poster. Instead, the names and the individuals and the unique package were marketed, particularly to certain audiences. When *Gidget*, starring James Darren and Sandra Dee, was released in 1959, advertising and promotion aimed the film at the teen market [...] The goal of aiming a film at a heterogeneous audience was no longer standard (1985a 332).

The exact effects of package production and product differentiation on film style during this era remain to be examined thoroughly. However, the transition from studio-oriented mass production to a project-by-project arrangement in principle permits more individualised styles across Hollywood’s output, compared with the identifiable group studio styles that characterised the previous system.

Throughout its history Hollywood has adapted to changes in its industrial infrastructure and to the market around it, and by the 1950s, the result was a strategic

increase in product specialisation and diversified methods of production. From the 1970s to the present day, Hollywood has witnessed an intensification of this process. It is possible to identify a number of different strands of production and an expansion of stylistic conventions during this era. The films and filmmakers of three particularly prominent strands - the “Hollywood Renaissance”, the contemporary blockbuster and the indie cinema - emerged out of the conditions of the post studio era, with its decentralised production and studios’ increased willingness to diversify their product to suit changing market climates. Therefore since the 1970s Hollywood has developed into a site of different industrial formations, commercial strategies, production patterns and narrational and generic approaches.

### **International Art Cinema and the “Hollywood Renaissance”**

Steve Neale notes that: “As is well documented, there are at least two New Hollywoods in recent accounts of Hollywood’s history” (2006 91). Chronologically speaking, the first of these is also known as the “Hollywood Renaissance” (Jacobs 1977), while the second is associated with the movie brats of the 1970s, which I will come to later. The “Hollywood Renaissance” or “American New Wave” refers to a generation of filmmakers of the late 1960s who made a series of relatively low-budget and stylistically experimental films to some commercial success. It includes Arthur Penn (Bonnie and Clyde 1967); Mike Nichols (The Graduate 1967); Dennis Hopper (Easy Rider 1969); Robert Altman (M.A.S.H 1969); Bob Rafelson (Five Easy Pieces 1970) and George Roy Hill (Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid 1969). These films and filmmakers represented a new set of artistic and commercial practices in Hollywood. It is possible to trace the “Hollywood Renaissance” back to the end of the studio system and the post war establishment of the European “art” cinema in the international market.

The latter of these was born out of a slump in trade for the post-war, post-studio industry, as Schatz recalls:

Declining attendance at home was complemented by a decline in international trade in 1947-1948, notably in the newly reopened European markets where “protectionist” policies were initiated to foster domestic production and to restrict the revenues that could be taken out of the country. This encouraged the studios to enter in co-financing and co-production deals overseas, which complemented the changing strategy at home and fuelled the general postwar rise in motion picture imports (1993 12).

Over the next ten years, the European cinema, which included celebrated filmmakers Jean-Luc Godard (À Bout de Souffle (1960); Federico Fellini (8½ 1963); Ingmar Bergman (The Seventh Seal 1957, Persona 1966); Michelangelo Antonioni (L'Avventura 1960, Blow Up 1966) and François Truffaut (Jules et Jim 1962), gained a cult profile in the U.S., garnering interest primarily among young arthouse audiences and students, concurrent with the rise of film courses in universities (Schatz 1993 14). By the mid 1960s however, its popularity would grow, thanks to its partial aesthetic overlap with the classical Hollywood cinema. As Bordwell writes: “the art film acknowledges the classical cinema in many ways, ranging from Antonioni’s use of the detective story to explicit citations in New Wave films” (2007 157). Indeed, Antonioni’s Blow Up contains elements of the detective film, while Godard’s defining “French New Wave” film À Bout de Souffle cites the *films noirs* of the classical Hollywood. These films and filmmakers, along with many others, helped to raise the prominence of the art cinema in the U.S. market. Schatz notes their developing relations:

There was also a growing contingent of international auteurs – Bergman, Fellini, Truffaut, Bertolucci, Polanski, Kubrick – who, in the wake of the 1966 success of Antonioni’s *Blow Up* and Claude Lelouch’s *A Man and A Woman*, developed a quasi-independent rapport with Hollywood, making films for the Euro-American market and bringing art cinema into the mainstream (1993 14).

The commercial merger between Hollywood with Europe, and the art and classical styles was a symbiotic process. American filmmakers were themselves assimilating art conventions into their work, and this would for a short time prove to be a comparatively successful formula for Hollywood, which had been experiencing a drop in profits. With younger audiences also on the rise, the conditions were set for the emergence of a group of American “maverick” filmmakers including the aforementioned Penn, Nichols, Hopper, Altman, Hill and Rafelson. Their films offered a degree of departure from many of the classically coded genre films of this decade, with melancholy narratives of young male alienation (The Graduate, Five Easy Pieces), tales of outlaws and anti-establishment, counter-cultural rebellion (Easy Rider, Bonnie and Clyde, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid).

These inexpensive but relatively commercially successful films bore hallmarks of their European contemporaries. For example, each displayed at least partial departures from narrative strategies associated with the classical Hollywood cinema. As Smith points out:

The causal dynamics and key features of this phase of American filmmaking are well known: incorporating elements from the European Art cinema, these films depicted uncertain, counter-cultural and marginal protagonists, whose goals were often relatively ill-defined and ultimately unattained, in contrast to the heroic and typically successful figures around which classical films revolved (1998 10).

These films also reconfigured traditional genre elements, injecting them with dark and often politically bleak perspectives. For example, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Bonnie and Clyde and Easy Rider draw on elements of the Western, their protagonists traversing an endless American landscape. However, freedom is only fleeting and a bloody end inevitably awaits. Shiel comments on these films:

[...] their reworking of American cultural mythology was only the most high-profile and shocking process of a large process of generic revision, a characteristic of much post-Second World War American cinema, but one that moved into high gear in the late 1960s (25).

Driven by a briefly flourishing European-American market, Hollywood incorporated production from low-budget independent American filmmakers, at the same time as they fostered relations with European talents themselves. This marriage would ripple throughout the resulting films, which revised storytelling and genre from the classical cinema and combined them with a distinctive art style. However, Shiel reminds us that Hollywood was still very much alive with activity from more traditional, classically-oriented and genre-based forms of filmmaking.

[...] any history of the American cinema of the period must recognize that despite the thematic and formal innovation that grabbed most of the headlines [...] formal and thematically conservative films continued to produce successful and well-received melodramas such as *Hotel* (1966) and *Love Story* (1970), romantic comedies such as *Do Not Disturb* (1965), historical extravaganzas such as *Doctor Zhivago* (1965) and *Ryan's Daughter* (1970), and literary adaptations such as *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1969), *Goodbye Mr Chips* (1969) and *Hello Dolly!* (1969) (26).

As this discussion reveals, a distinctly diverse Hollywood was taking shape on the cusp of the 1970s.

### **The Blockbuster**

The success of the “Hollywood Renaissance” was short-lived. Its moment came when attendance ratings were at an all time low which, according to Bordwell, dipped in 1969 at 912 million in the U.S. (2006 203). By the 1970s the industry was ready for another major realignment, which would pave the way for a second chapter for the New Hollywood.

The influence of the international art cinema would, in places at least, inform the work of the movie brats during the early 1970s. Writing in 1979, Steve Neale noted that:

Art films are produced for international distribution and exhibition as well as for local consumption. Art cinema is a niche within the international film market, a sector that is not yet completely dominated by Hollywood (though it is one that Hollywood has begun to take



seriously, as its European co-productions and as films by Altman, Coppola and others perhaps start to illustrate) (1979 35).

The movie brats began life as film-school trained directors with a penchant for art-oriented experimentation, as the slow, meandering narrational structures and troubled characters of Martin Scorsese's Mean Streets (1973) and Taxi Driver (1976), George Lucas's THX-1138 (1970) and Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now (1979) demonstrate. However, by the mid 1970s, with Lucas and Steven Spielberg as key players, the movie brats would also spawn a different breed of movie, departing from European-influenced experimental forms and returning to classical narration and genre-driven filmmaking in blockbusting form. The contemporary blockbuster was, moreover, symptomatic of a seismic shift in the industry's commercial practices and economic fortunes. Films like Spielberg's Jaws (1975) and Lucas's Star Wars (1977) played a defining role in the contemporary Hollywood landscape, introducing a powerful and profitable strand of production while standing as testament to the increasing diversity and rapid adjustment within Hollywood's industrial practices and production output in the 1970s.

Of course, expensive films with high production values, big stars and aggressive marketing tactics were part of Hollywood's output long before the 1970s. Schatz notes that after the studio era came to an end, which had "relied primarily on routine A-class features to generate revenues" (1993 9), Hollywood became increasingly hit-driven - a strategy he refers to as the "blockbuster syndrome" (1993 9). In 1950s and 1960s, the majors turned to producing a high proportion of big-budget, spectacular blockbusters such as The Ten Commandments (Cecil B. DeMille 1956), Ben Hur (William Wyler 1959) and The Sound of Music (Robert Wise 1965). However, the majors' conviction that "big, expensive movies could make big profits" (Hillier 1992 10) was not quite correct. Blockbusters were also capable of huge losses. Dr. Dolittle (Richard Fleischer 1967) and Hello Dolly! (Gene Kelly 1969) lost \$11 million and \$16 million respectively

(Schatz 1993 14). These films were symbolic of a sharp economic downturn for Hollywood from the mid 1960s. As Schatz writes: “studio profits fell from an average of \$64 million the five-year span from 1964 to 1968, to \$13 million from 1969 to 1973” (1993 15). This economic crisis was instrumental in a gradual reshaping of Hollywood’s industrial infrastructure as well as its reorientation in the entertainments industry at large.

As a means of easing their financial woes, the majors became available for sale to larger corporations. In 1966 Paramount was bought by the conglomerate Gulf + Western, which would eventually prove to be its saving grace. This developed into something of a trend. As Maltby observes, the majors still exist today but “The names [...] are only half the same: Time Warner-Turner; Disney-ABC; News Corporation/Fox; Viacom/Paramount; Sony Columbia” (1998 24). These mergers did not revive the film industry overnight, but they would help to intensify Hollywood’s diversification into other markets including television, publishing, music, and emerging technologies such as cable TV and home video. For a major movie release, this diversification meant that a movie no longer relied on theatrical returns alone to make money. Considerable profits could be achieved through ancillary markets. As Schatz notes: “Jaws became a veritable sub-industry unto itself via commercial tie-ins and merchandising ploys” (1993 18). Therefore, Hollywood’s blockbusters were ensured greater success thanks to the synergy between the movie business and other entertainment markets.

Schatz also points out that the intense diversification of the majors “[*laid*] the foundation for films and filmmaking practices of the New Hollywood” (1993 10). The blockbuster is a fascinating phenomenon that has been at the centre of key debates about Hollywood’s narrative and stylistic patterns alongside its contexts of production and consumption. Geoff King positions the blockbuster and its spectacular elements within

the post studio landscape, accounting for its character in terms of the key changes in the industry:

The spectacular qualities of the audio-visual experience have become increasingly important to Hollywood in recent decades. [...] in an age in which the big Hollywood studios have become absorbed into giant conglomerates, the prevalence of spectacle and special effects has been boosted by a growing demand for products that can be further exploited in multimedia forms such as computer games and theme-park rides – secondary outlets that sometimes generate more profits than the films on which they are based. Spectacular display might also be driven by the increased importance of the overseas market in Hollywood's economic calculations, as it tends to translate more easily than other dimensions across cultural and language boundaries. These and other developments have led some to announce the imminent demise of narrative as a central or defining component of Hollywood cinema (2000 2).

Critics like Schatz (1993) and Wyatt (1994) have focused on these changes, and argue that narration in the blockbuster film has become a fragmentary, visceral affair.

Sensation has usurped story, while a multi-market “high concept” aesthetic typified by the slick, episodic music video and television advertisement has seeped into the narrational process. Consider the long tracking shot across the branded goods of the gift shop in Steven Spielberg's 1993 film Jurassic Park (Maltby 1995 75), or the self-conscious foregrounding of Prince's pop number in Tim Burton's Batman (1989), “performed” by The Joker (Donnelly 1998 145).

In more recent years however, King (2000) and others (including Kristin Thompson 1999; Murray Smith 1998; and David Bordwell 2006) have taken the view that the claims of narrative fragmentation and a reduction in character complexity have been greatly exaggerated. Fundamentally, the contemporary blockbuster follows the same classical principles as similar films made in Hollywood in past eras, relying on continuity, clear-cut characterisation, causal motivation, coherence, goal-orientation and resolution (Bordwell 1985b). The historical continuity between “old” and “new” Hollywood is particularly evident in the contemporary blockbuster's “happy endings”, as is the fact that spectacular films have always existed in Hollywood. The man-eating

shark is destroyed (Jaws Spielberg 1975), as is the giant gorilla in the 1933 spectacular King Kong (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack 1933); Luke Skywalker eventually restores peace to the galaxy (Return of the Jedi Richard Marquand 1983) while the world is saved from annihilation at the hands of aliens in War of the Worlds (Byron Haskin 1953). With the exception of Jaws, these films also involve a subplot based on romantic union: a feature that can be identified in a vast number of classically coded narratives. It is true that contemporary spectacle - now more technologically advanced, sensual and sophisticated - has been replicated across a greater number of major films since the 1970s (Sheldon Hall 2006 180), but this does not eclipse the narrational process, as some critics would lead us to believe. As Bordwell suggests, narrative and spectacle need not be mutually exclusive (2006 35), while Smith notes that narrative may quite easily advance through spectacle (1998 13). For example, the moment at which the shark is blown up in Jaws would certainly elicit a thrill, but it also provides the most important narrative event: the triumph of the human over the terrifying monster, and therefore the film's all-important resolution.

The contemporary spectacular narratives are not the same as their classical, studio-era ancestors in every respect. It is possible to suggest that narration has modified without postulating on its demise altogether. Smith suggests that the contemporary blockbuster's narrational process displays new cultural and stylistic influences, while noting that: "narrative has not disappeared, but the new technologies and new markets have encouraged certain kinds of narrative, traceable to serials, B-adventures and episodic melodramas" (1998 13).

The kinds of narratives listed by Smith are inextricable from the issue of genre. Star Wars drew on the science fiction, a genre that had hitherto occupied B-movie production as well as heroic comics like Batman, Superman, Spiderman and televised serials like Buck Rogers (Babette Henry 1950). Neale points out that science fiction

movies were “rare in studio era Hollywood” (2000 250) but since Lucas’s 1977 opus, the genre has skyrocketed to prominence in major moviemaking. Close Encounters of the Third Kind (Steven Spielberg 1977), The Abyss (James Cameron 1992), Armageddon (Michael Bay 1998), and a remake of War of the Worlds (Spielberg 2005) signal an important shift across Hollywood’s generic dimension. The production of horror movies with big budgets began to proliferate after the success of Jaws. Alien (Ridley Scott 1979), The Silence of the Lambs (Jonathan Demme 1991), Jurassic Park (Spielberg 1993) and Independence Day (Ronald Emerich 1996) are a few of the hits that followed. So alongside Star Wars, Jaws played an important role in the realignment of Hollywood’s mainstream generic trends. Bordwell views post studio genres as symptomatic of the creative choices faced by new filmmakers of the 1970s:

It’s commonly said that the rise of the horror, fantasy and science fiction reflects the tastes of a generation raised on books and television. Surely these media did influence Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, John Carpenter and others. But looked at from the viewpoint of a hungry creator, certain genres gave the young filmmaker the chance to excel on his or her own terms (2006 23).

It would therefore seem that the filmmakers of this era were turning to genres that were not well worn by their predecessors in order to find a creative as well as marketable niche style. In doing so they set long-lasting generic trends that would continue in major blockbuster productions to the present.

The New Hollywood blockbusters introduced novel ways in which movies were seen and marketed, while popularising a new take on genre-led, classically coded narrative filmmaking. However, it is important to remember that they did not simply wipe the slate clean for Hollywood. Filmmakers of the “Hollywood Renaissance” and the more art-leaning movie brats including Scorsese, Coppola, Altman, and Cimino had not disappeared. They may have been dwarfed by the Lucas-Spielberg empire, but their continued presence is testament to the persisting variety of Hollywood’s industrial practices, styles and modes of production from the 1970s to the present.

I would argue that the diversity displayed by Hollywood in the contemporary era results from the intensification of production, distribution and marketing trends that developed out of the post-studio era. For example, the increasing number of independent producers continually stratified filmmaking, giving way to a proliferation of individualised producer/director-led production strategies as opposed to the more standardised studio-led approach. In addition, Schatz draws attention to “the studios’ eventual coming-to-terms with an increasingly fragmented entertainment industry – with its demographics and target audiences, its diversified “multi-media” conglomerates, its global(ized) markets and new delivery systems” (1993 9). These factors have no doubt contributed to the variety of kinds of movies made in the contemporary era. Bordwell accounts for the many different types of films produced from the 1970s to the current decade, which are often overlooked because of the narrow critical focus on the blockbuster:

Too often, writers discussing postclassical cinema concentrate on the tentpole films – typically action pictures and heroic fantasy – or on the acknowledged classics (*Chinatown*, *The Godfather*). These are peaks, no doubt. But Hollywood also dwells in the valleys. Perhaps our orthodox account of the industry’s recent history, focusing on the rise of the megapicture, lets all other films slip too far to the periphery. Beyond a few blockbusters or high-concept breakouts, there are hundreds of other types of films. There are the A-pictures in well-established genres like horror, suspense, comedy, historical drama and romantic drama. There is Oscar bait, the prestige picture [...] There is edgy fare from Spike Lee, Oliver Stone, or Paul Thomas Anderson. There is the indie drama (*In the Bedroom*, 2001) or comedy (*The Tao of Steve*, 2000) (2006 10).

Seen in this way, today’s Hollywood is multifaceted and various. One important example of this variety is the presence of an indie cinema in Hollywood. Since the 1970s, the independent sector had developed its own distinctive institutional and industrial structure but by the 1990s had begun a process of industrial incorporation into Hollywood, thus shaping the majors’ infrastructural frameworks, modes of production, and aesthetic products forever.

## **The Indie Cinema in Hollywood**

The American independent cinema has become an increasingly knotty subject. “Independence” is a term that can be used variously to describe a cinema whose industrial practices take place entirely away from the Hollywood studios in terms of production, distribution and finance; but it can also mean an industrial sector that is no longer separable from Hollywood. In my introduction to this thesis, I pointed out that formerly independent distributors like Miramax and New Line forged close ties with the majors, and in 1993 were bought up by Disney and Time Warner respectively (King 2005 41). At the same time, the rest of the “big six” developed their own “semi-independent” divisions. Sony/Columbia created Sony Pictures Classics, Fox created Fox Searchlight, Paramount created Paramount Classics and more recently Paramount Vantage, while Universal made Focus. For the previously independent companies, studio affiliation meant greater access to funding and institutional resources. For the studios, a semi-independent division created a pathway into wider markets, especially those that tend not to buy into larger blockbuster releases (King 2005 41).

With this in mind, “independence” also becomes an issue of style as well as industry, often associated with providing alternatives to classical narration and genre-driven filmmaking. As King points out:

Associations with ‘quality’, arty, edgy or ‘cool’/alternative features is good for the image; that of individual executives with pretensions to other than noisy blockbuster productions and that of branches of large corporations often subject to criticism for their business practices and much of their not-so-creative output (2005 46).

However, it soon becomes clear that there is no single identifiable independent style, because, just like its industrial operations, its intersection with Hollywood has blurred any boundaries of distinction. It therefore occupies a broad spectrum of stylistic possibilities:

Independent cinema exists in the overlapping territory between Hollywood and a number of alternatives: the experimental “avant-

garde”, the more accessible ‘art’ or ‘quality’ cinema, the politically engaged, the low-budget exploitation film and more generally the offbeat or eccentric (King 2005 2).

With the notion of overlap in mind, I wish to use the term “indie” to describe, in industrial terms, the semi-independent major subsidiaries (as opposed to completely independent) and in aesthetic terms, the films that straddle classical norms and a range of departures from those norms. My employment of the term “indie” is important because it designates an expansion in the boundaries of Hollywood’s range, which opens a space for alternative production and commercial practices, as well as new filmmaking styles.

In the 1980s the megapicture continued to draw the majority of Hollywood’s biggest box office earnings. The Empire Strikes Back (Irvin Kershner 1980), Raiders of the Lost Ark, ET: The Extra Terrestrial, (Steven Spielberg 1981, 1982), Return of the Jedi (Richard Marquand 1983), Back to the Future (Robert Zemeckis 1985) and Top Gun (Tony Scott 1986) were the greatest financial successes of their respective years. Aesthetically the tried and tested formula popularised by the 1970s blockbuster, which combined classical storytelling and new generic trends such as science fiction, was still proving lucrative for Hollywood. So too was the intensified commodification of its movies, which became inextricable from merchandising, advertising and ancillary marketing. Moreover, by the end of the decade, the introduction of home video boosted studio revenue, making films accessible to a wider audience with greater frequency than theatrical exhibition. The development of home video would also help effectuate a market climate in which independent film companies could bring their often alternative style products to wide audiences. As Bordwell points out: “Cable and video had an omnivorous appetite, so independent production flourished, from the down-market Troma and its gross-out horror to this high-end Orion, purveyor of Woody Allen dramas” (3). He adds that: “a radically low-budget independent sector created its own



hits, like *Stranger than Paradise* [Jim Jarmusch 1984] and *She's Gotta Have It* [Spike Lee 1986]. The upscale consumers led studios to buy the libraries of indie companies" (2006 3). Thanks to its intensifying multimedia world, Hollywood would eventually become a space of heterogeneous commercial and institutional activity, diverse production practice and stylistic experimentation.

Beginning with the rise in the home video market, the independent cinema flourished from the 1980s. However, the increasing income and financial stability for some of its key distributors in the 1990s led them to expand their horizons and either compete or join in with Hollywood's mainstream activity. New Line - which had in the 1960s and 1970s produced low-budget and exploitation movies like The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Tobe Hooper 1974) - moved into higher budget, more conventional narrational films including Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (Steve Barron 1990), thus successfully tapping into mainstream audiences. Another defining event was the success of Steven Soderbergh's 1989 film Sex Lies and Videotape, a film that launched Miramax - who began life as an art and alternative film distributor - into Hollywood's industrial atmosphere. The film won the audience award at the Sundance Festival and the Palm d'or at the Cannes Film Festival, thus raising its profile among international audiences and becoming a critical, and ultimately commercial, success. In 1994, the year following the acquisition of Miramax by Disney, Quentin Tarantino's Reservoir Dogs became a hit, thus proving emblematic of the successful emergence of indie cinema; the cross-pollination of the independent cinema with the mainstream.

Sex, Lies and Videotape and Reservoir Dogs combined both basic classical storytelling premises with some notable departures (such as the Reservoir Dogs' episodic, non-linear structure) as well as employing adult thematic material such as sex and violence; features more commonly reserved for the cult or art circuit. Not only did these films symbolise the successful merging of independent distribution with the major

studios; they demonstrated that the dominant aesthetic mode of classical Hollywood had considerable room for accommodating outside norms.

In accounting for the contemporary Hollywood cinema, we may see how its output over the last three decades displays great aesthetic diversity, from the spectacular blockbusters of George Lucas to the more offbeat suspense films of David Lynch (Blue Velvet 1986, Lost Highway 1997). However, it is possible to see variety *within* particular films too – especially those from the indie sector since the 1990s. Once more, David Lynch springs to mind, as does Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction (1994); Paul Thomas Anderson's Magnolia (1999); David Fincher's Fight Club (1999); Spike Jonze's Being John Malkovich (1999) and his Adaptation (2004); Michel Gondry's Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004), and many others. These films rejuvenate classical filmmaking, injecting it with stylistic innovations, narrational twists, daring thematic material and generic revisionism, creating a varied cinema in its interactions of aesthetic conventions.

Since the end of the 1990s, Hollywood has experienced the power and proliferation of what is described as the indie cinema: the blurring of the boundaries between the mainstream and the margins, major and independent. The opposition is no longer as rigid as when the industry was dominated by a small number of studios, and what has resulted is an expansion in Hollywood's industrial infrastructure, its target audience, and the budgets and the styles of the films made. No doubt the possibilities for production practice have expanded too. Filmmakers can move between the middle and the fringes of Hollywood more than ever before. For example, Lynch's career has involved work with the major studios, its indie subsidiaries and with the purely independent sector. Indeed, Lynch's career has turned full circle, from complete independence from Hollywood (Eraserhead 1977) to distribution deals with majors Paramount (The Elephant Man 1980) and Universal (Dune 1984) to indie subsidiaries

New Line, October and Focus (Twin Peaks Fire Walk With Me 1992; Lost Highway 1997; Mulholland Dr. 2002) and back to independence with 518 Media (Inland Empire 2006). Similarly, Steven Soderbergh's career has also woven itself in and out of Hollywood. Since Sex, Lies and Videotape, he worked with Miramax in making Kafka (1991), then turned to Universal with King of the Hill (1993), to the indie subsidiary ABC with Traffic (2000) and Warner for Ocean's Eleven (2002).

This chapter has traced the contours of a contemporary paradigm of Hollywood in light of key historical changes in the post-studio era, focusing on the emergence of the American art cinema, the contemporary blockbuster and the more recent emergence of an indie division in Hollywood. It has explored the industrial underpinnings of these cinematic modes, from a European-oriented market in the face of declining profits to a rich and profitable industry that ranges from mega-budget production to smaller, offbeat projects and everything in between. Ultimately, contemporary Hollywood is a cinema of increased aesthetic and corporate heterogeneity.

This chapter introduces two major arguments which are central to my later analyses of sound. The first is that the post-studio era - from its shift to package production to the rise of the indie cinema - has led to the proliferation of production practices in Hollywood, meaning that sound departments, their professional roles and working relationships vary greatly from project to project. This contrasts with Hollywood's more standardised mode of production before the 1950s. Sound designers, composers and other sound professionals are subject to varying levels of collaboration, creative control and scheduling, depending on the individual production and its relationship with the studios or companies financing it. The second is that in the last four decades Hollywood's storytelling conventions have expanded. The "Renaissance" of the late 1960s and the indie cinema from the early 1990s have introduced a range of norms often associated with the art cinema into classical Hollywood narration, thus

leading to more diverse possibilities for cinematic storytelling in Hollywood. As an important narrational tool, the film soundtrack audibly bears the impact of these diverse possibilities. Ultimately, the increasing aesthetic and industrial diversity of Hollywood since the 1970s has contributed to the complex, sophisticated and various phenomena that are contemporary film sound style and practice.

The soundtracks and working contexts of directors David Lynch and George Lucas, respective sound designers Alan Splet and Ben Burtt and composers Angelo Badalamenti and John Williams exemplify the variety that characterises sound style and practice in contemporary Hollywood. Their contrasting positions in the film industry, from the independent sector to the Hollywood majors, and their different approaches to cinematic narration, make these two sound “teams” ideal case studies for comparison.

However, before I explore these case studies and the core issues above, one methodological issue requires examination. This thesis focuses on three film professions - the director, sound designer and composer - to answer key questions about the contemporary Hollywood soundtrack, and yet film sound is the result of many more skilled contributions. The following chapter sets out to explain the reasons for my choices, and more generally, outlines how one discusses the soundtrack in terms of its authors.

## Chapter Three

### Sound Authorship and Contemporary Hollywood

From discussions in fan forums to scholarly texts, the director in Hollywood has often formed the axis around which cinematic authorship is construed. One only has to cast an eye over the endless publications on individual directors (recently condensed in various series, from the Roundhouse Conversations With Filmmakers, to Faber's Directors on Directors) to see the continued pervasiveness of what has come to be termed "Auteurism". Of course, this perspective is easily rendered problematic in the case of the film soundtrack. Its multi-component structure and collaborative conditions of production are heavily emblematic of the cinema as a multiple-authored art. But while it would seem that the director-centred position could be so easily undermined, why does it still organise our ways of thinking about films and filmmaking? This tension signals different conceptions of film authorship that require examination. Firstly, the history of the auteur can be traced from its roots as a critical construct dating from the 1950s. Secondly, the auteur can be understood as an agent in the commercial practices of contemporary Hollywood, for example, functioning like a brand-name or star. Thirdly, the notion of authorship in contemporary Hollywood may be reformulated away from a traditional auteurist approach by considering the soundtrack, the production of which requires skills and expertise often beyond those of the director. In this thesis my emphasis is on multiple authors, meaning that I will be able to examine the working practices and stylistic features of the Hollywood soundtrack in their inter-relational and multi-component reality.

The issue of authorship in film sound is particularly urgent because it is a complex, collaborative craft and requires the recognition of a number of skilled personnel, especially when discussing specific case studies. The case studies of this thesis are by and large organised around films directed by David Lynch and George

Lucas because they can usefully highlight and contrast specific sonic practices and styles within focused contexts. However, this cannot and should not entail an examination of directors and “their” soundtracks. Rather, one needs to consider teams of personnel that have worked on the sound across a shared body of films. Therefore long-term collaborators with Lynch and Lucas including sound designers Alan Splet and Ben Burt, and composers Angelo Badalamenti and John Williams, are key to distinguishing an authorial presence in film sound. In turn, this is not a case of consistently crediting their individual inputs, but rather recognising a collective mode of authorship. The sound elements on the final soundtrack (or what we might understand as its *mise-en-bande*) are so inextricably bound and inter-relational that the creative process should also be viewed as collective. But before I account for this in more detail, I want to consider the limitations of the director-as-auteur models, which can pave the way to more fruitful accounts of film sound creation and collaboration.

The auteur has never been a unified entity, and as a critical category it has been repeatedly debated, problematised and redefined throughout its long history. In her introduction to *Film and Authorship* (2003), Virginia Wright Wexman intelligently signals the multiple identities of the director as auteur:

Are directors to be thought of as social agents, psychic scribes, or spectator-induced fictions? Are they conscious craftspeople, bundles of libidinous energies, or cultural conduits? Do they express their preoccupations through stylistic motifs, narrational strategies, idiosyncratic character types, self-reflexive cameos, or structural oppositions? (7)

The theories and conceptualisations surrounding the auteur are indeed many, and while there is not sufficient space to account for these in great detail, a brief history may serve to highlight the complexity of auteurist theory.

The concept of the auteur found critical fruition in France during the 1950s and was most famously expressed in Francois Truffaut’s 1954 article “*Une Certain Tendance du Cinema Francais*” (“A Certain Tendency in the French Cinema”). This

was among the most prominent articles published in the journal Cahiers du Cinema, the intellectual hub for auteur critics and filmmakers, including Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Jean-Luc Godard, and for a limited time, Andre Bazin (1953). Truffaut's influential approach - dubbed *la politique des auteurs* - aimed to understand a given film as a product of a specific author. The Cahiers critics' notion of director-as-author was based on the criteria of visual distinctiveness, stylistic and thematic consistency, and the expression of a personal vision. This perspective positioned directors as "geniuses" whose films were to be taken as artistic achievements, rather than products of popular entertainment. Key directors of Hollywood are among this early auteurist canon, such as Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock (Bazin 1953).

The Cahiers critics' project was partially adopted by American film criticism during the following decade, notably in the writings of Andrew Sarris (1962, 1968). Sarris focused on a pantheon of "great" directors drawn exclusively from Hollywood, who included Charlie Chaplin, John Ford, Orson Welles, Hawks and Hitchcock. Overall, Sarris was explicit about the need for directors to be understood as communicating unique artistry within the production-line conditions of the studio system in which they worked. In this sense the "genius" of the American auteur was particularly potent, as it transcended any perceived economic and technological constraints imposed by the film industry.

Since then, auteurism has been through a number of permutations. Its absorption into British structuralist thought, for instance, saw critics seeking stylistic and thematic motifs and oppositions within an auteur's *oeuvre* (Geoffrey Nowell-Smith 1967; Peter Wollen 1969). This approach highlighted the importance of distinguishing key characteristics of a work from the literal director, thus recasting the author in figurative terms. By the late 1960s the Cahiers du Cinema welcomed a new generation of critics. Stephen Crofts writes of how its editors Jean Louis Commolli and Jean Narboni (1969)

sought a political authorial presence by seeking ideologically challenging structures within seemingly conservative films: “the fauvist lighting of the climax of Some Came Running (Minnelli, 1959), or the insistently obtrusive grilles blinds, and paintings of Imitation of Life (Sirk, 1959)” (317). In the post-structuralist revision of auteurism, the author was reconfigured as a construct produced by the film’s spectator, or a fictional effect of the text (Stephen Heath 1973 91, drawing on Roland Barthes 1967/1977). More recently, the author has been analysed as a subject of wider historical forces. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985a) situate the film author within his or her material conditions of production from John Ford to Francis Ford Coppola, while critics like Laura Mulvey approaches an auteur like Hitchcock as a gendered subject within a feminist framework (1975).

These theories locate the author in a variety of ways, from an empirical figure of transcendent “genius” to a historically informed subject. The author may be a non-human entity, from conflicting textual elements to the projections of a reader’s desires. Yet in spite of these transformations, the director-author is an enduring concept. This is in part thanks to its existence beyond the realm of film theory and critical abstraction.

As Linda Ruth Williams says:

The tension and interplay between presumed auteorial vision and other forces has been the subject of a number of studies. Auteurism’s place as an important influence upon developments in film history in the late 1960s and early 1970s is rather more certain than its sovereignty in film theory today (143).

Many film historians (Joseph Gelmis 1974; Dianne Jacobs 1977; Michael Pye and Linda Myles 1979; Robert Kolker 1980; Peter Biskind 1998) have commented on an auteur cinema as a model of creative agency for the filmmakers of the New Hollywood, from the “Renaissance” filmmakers to the movie brats. Brian de Palma, Roman Polanski, John Cassavettes, Robert Altman, Paul Mazursky, Stanley Kubrick, Arthur Penn, Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, George Lucas and Steven Spielberg were



among those inspired by various forms of auteurism filtering into the changing film industry of the 1960s and 1970s, as Crofts summarises:

European art-film imports to the United States were beginning to present positive evidence to American critical taste of production practices which were overtly supportive of directors; a growing recognition of auteurist critical practices urged more director-centred practices and promotions; and these were more readily accommodated after Hollywood's adoption of the package-unit system and its 1960s production crises (315).

The success of the “Hollywood Renaissance” films at the end of the 1960s (Bonnie and Clyde Penn 1967; The Graduate Mike Nichols 1967; Easy Rider Dennis Hopper 1969) has been interpreted as a significant step towards an auteurist cinema of the modern age (Cook 1998 20; Biskind 1998 15). Moreover the stylistic and thematic idiosyncrasies of these movies were also hallmarks favoured, and perhaps influenced, by French New Wave filmmakers and Cahiers critics of the 1950s and 1960s, including Godard A Bout de Souffle 1960 and Truffaut Jules et Jim 1962. As I noted in chapter 2, this youthful American cinema came during a time of sharp economic decline for Hollywood. It did little to rejuvenate an industry wounded by declining numbers in theatrical attendance and widespread economic inflation (Mark Shiel 124). However it would seem that it was enough to keep the major studios interested in funding fairly autonomous independent production projects (Shiel 127) by young, cheap talent. By the early 1970s the studios would seek a younger crop of filmmakers attuned to a branch of auteurism that valued the older Hollywood “masters” (Hitchcock, Hawks, Preminger, etc). This was “ a new generation of writers, producers and directors from the ranks of film schools like USC, UCLA, and NYU where the auteur theory had become institutionalised as part of the curriculum” (Cook 1998 13). What was primarily a financial manoeuvre for the studios nonetheless offered a certain degree of creative freedom for its new filmmakers:

The so-called “movie brats” were responsible for a renaissance in the formal and thematic creativity of Hollywood cinema that was much

celebrated in the 1970s [...] they benefited from a new degree of autonomy and authority accorded to the film director by the major studios for whom, following the popularisation in the US of auteurist approaches to cinema, the film director now possessed not only a greater degree of intellectual and artistic weight but also important box office drawing power (Shiel 139).

This generation of filmmakers would eventually help to restore Hollywood to a state of economic stability. In terms of box-office sales, the auteurs of the New Hollywood helped take the industry from an “all time low” in 1971 to an increase of \$150 million of box office grosses in 1975, thus “leading the major studios in the 1980s in relative prosperity” (Cook 1998 14).

As we know, this was not down to the youth-oriented and “individual” movie that had characterised the influential “Hollywood Renaissance” filmmakers, or the earlier projects of aspiring movie brats (such as Scorsese’s Mean Streets 1973; Coppola’s The Conversation 1974; Lucas’s THX-1138 1970 or Spielberg’s made-for-TV Duel 1971). It was of course the new blockbuster that took care of Hollywood’s dwindling finances. Spielberg’s Jaws (1975) made \$102.5 million in rentals that year, while Lucas’s Star Wars made \$127 million, far outgrossing Coppola’s 1972 hit The Godfather (\$81 million)<sup>1</sup>. The “Spielberg-Lucas juggernaut” (Cook 2002 xvi) has largely continued production in the blockbuster mode, and their movies have dominated box office returns during each decade to the present day. Their films and the franchises that emerged from them set Lucas and Spielberg on career trajectories “from edgy counter-culture cinema to mainstream assimilation” (Williams 142). More importantly they highlighted what may be perceived as a shift of emphasis from New Hollywood’s “personal” and art-oriented production trend to a newly consolidated industrial-commercial logic.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all box office figures cited were produced by Variety and compiled by Helen Hanson in Contemporary American Cinema (ed. Williams and Hammond). They reflect rentals in the US and Canadian markets during the year of their release.

We are therefore presented with another dimension of auteurism. In addition to the critic or filmmakers' ideal of personal artistry and individualistic creation comes the auteur as a commercial branding exercise. Like past big-name directors - Welles, Hitchcock, Chaplin - George Lucas is one such auteur that combines relative artistic agency, industry clout and star personality. The latter two qualities are particularly potent given the context of an industry that since the 1970s, was developing into a multimedia, mega-corporate structure. As Cook writes:

He redefined the film generation's concept of authorship to become the creative CEO of the largest independent studio in the world – Lucasfilm ltd. and its subsidiary Lucas Arts Entertainment Company – which have today attained the status of a multinational conglomerate (1998 22).

The auteur is not merely artist: he has also become mogul and super celebrity.

With this example in mind, authorship may be understood as increasingly and intimately bound to industrial practices and marketing strategies, not creative aspiration alone. Peter C. Rollins simply states: "In addition to being works of artistic imagination, motion pictures have always been commercial products financed by American capitalism and therefore influenced by corporate, legal and governmental pressures" (5). While the earliest decades of auteurist criticism would commonly attempt to dissociate the author and his/her creative agency from its mode of production (Truffaut 1954; Sarris 1962), this approach has in more recent years become augmented or eclipsed by empirical and industrial contexts. The auteur is a site of artistic and commercial endeavour, a figure whose creative agency is to a significant extent configured by the industry in which s/he works. Likewise Timothy Corrigan writes that:

When auteurs and auteuristic codes for understanding movies spread from France to the United States and elsewhere in the sixties and seventies, these models were hardly the pure incarnations (as critics sometimes urged us to believe) of literary notions of the author as sole creator of the film or of Sartrean demands for "authenticity" in personal expression. Rather, from its inception, auteurism has been bound up with changes in industrial desires, technological opportunities, and marketing strategies. In the United States, for instance, the industrial utility of auteurism from the late 1960s to the early 1970s had much to do with the

waning of the American studio system and the subsequent need to find new ways to mark a movie other than with a studio's signature (2003 96).

As Corrigan suggests, the director-as-auteur is a notion that can be located - and easily understood - within the American film industry's commercial logic, especially in the post-studio era (2003 97). Thus to some extent, the way the movie is received and understood is predetermined by the connotations of its particular brand, i.e. the director's name. Corrigan continues by saying that the director-auteur can be constructed as a celebrity, a presence that usurps the text as site of meaning and value.

He writes that:

An auteur film today seems to aspire more and more to a critical tautology, capable of being understood and consumed without being seen [...] It can communicate a great deal for a large number of audiences who know the maker's reputation but have never seen the films themselves (1998 50).

According to this claim, the notion of a single author can be viewed as a tool of endorsement within the commercial-marketing strategies of contemporary Hollywood.

The auteur as commercial presence is of course essential to ways of thinking about authorship within an industry related artform. However, other conceptions of authorship can coexist and even intermingle with this presence, thus highlighting the film author's multifaceted identity. Hallmarks of authorship are also sought within critical and fan discourses, which correspond to the construct of an auteurist cult identity. David Lynch is one such figure that can offer a consistent form of branding in this context, which may or may not be commercial.

There is a significant body of literature surrounding Lynch that ranges from the critical (Michel Chion 1995a; Martha P. Nochimson 1997; Slavoj Zizeck 2000; Sheen and Davison 2004a) to the popular (Paul Woods 1997; David Hughes 2001) and somewhere in-between (Chris Rodley 1997; Colin Odell and Michelle Le Blanc 2007). Many of its writers take on the traditional auteurist project of seeking thematic and

stylistic consistencies throughout the films he directs. They identify motifs of education and language (Rodley 31), heaven and hell (Nochimson 183), castration (Nochimson 185, Zizeck) and suburban decay (Woods 77) - all enacted on a grotesque stage of parodic forms (Richardson in Sheen and Davison 77) where the players are freaks, perverts or tormented *femmes fatales* (Hughes 81), and time and space lose all coherence as if a dream (Odell and LeBlanc 11). These writings are often supplemented with an apparent interest in the director's personal perspective. For instance, numerous interpretations of Eraserhead (1977) attempt to locate the film in autobiography: the troubled protagonist Henry is an extension of the director's persona and his deformed baby either a visual manifestation of Lynch's own reluctant fatherhood (Hughes 26; Woods 22), or a traumatic childhood experience. Chion writes that:

As the eldest of three children he must have experienced the first-born's drama of being deprived by an intruder of the exclusive love of his parents. The dreadful baby in Eraserhead, whom everybody wants to kill and get rid of, represents what a first-born child can feel as it sees the wrinkled, screaming thing which comes to the family and steals its place (1995a 11).

This cinematic universe has entered the enthusiast's lexicon as "Lynchian" (Emmanuel Levy 65; Geoff King 2005 101), or "Lynchland" (Rodley 125): a brand that coheres and condenses the director's *oeuvre* into something explicable and whole. As Corrigan writes: "While David Lynch can proudly muse about his films [...] "I don't know what a lot of things mean", audiences, faced with the quirky opacities of his films, can both bond and transcend in the name of the auteur Lynch" (1998 41). Of course, it would be unhelpful to deny the presence of stylistic consistencies, or to dismiss outright any autobiographical interpretation of a director's work. Authorship - "a structuring principle of enunciation" (Corrigan 2003 97) - retains great currency as a critical and interpretive concept, and offers a useful stamp to knowing fans and interested scholars. In addition, while Lynch does not make as much revenue as a filmmaker like Lucas, he

is still positioned within an industry that undoubtedly utilises the auteur identity as a logical step towards successful product marketability.

However, the auteurist cult of Lynch and the “Lynchian” brand do have their conceptual limitations. Firstly, they seem suggestive of an almost undifferentiated body of work, any qualities of variety and inconsistency being overlooked in favour of continuity. Sheen and Davison have argued that: “If the intellectual consistency of [*Lynch’s*] vision suggests we might approach him as an auteur, the formal and generic range of his work raises questions about that status” (2004a 2). Secondly, they seem unable to separate films and filmmakers, overlooking any significance films may hold beyond authorial intent. Cook and Bernink very simply point out that: “there are many things we can say about a text before we say ‘who writes it’ or [...] before we are conditioned to look for all the idiosyncratic moments that constitute for some, what a David Lynch film is” (311). Thirdly, and most importantly to this study, does “Lynchian” adequately describe a film that is in reality, lest we forget, the product of a large team of differently skilled personnel?

In contrast to the single-auteur concepts that emerge from discourses of commerce and these cult-oriented of forms criticism and popular reception, the issue of collective authorship emerges when considering a film’s production. Filmmaking is a patently collaborative process that involves the cooperation and coordination of a number of skilled people under certain divisions of labour. When this basic reality is considered, discussing films in terms of individual authors becomes problematic. The creative contributions and the close collaborations of many are of such importance as to avoid being undermined by the director-auteur hall of fame.

To critics like Paisley Livingston, the auteur is still a conceivable notion in the context of film production, however. Livingston argues for a director-centred authorship that is conditional on sufficient jurisdiction over the various crafts of a film, with a

schematic idea of the overall product and how it is shaped. Livingston does remain sensitive to the collaborative and cooperative conditions of the filmmaking process - “An author’s effective decisions are in many ways constrained by other agents’ preferences and actions” (142) - but places importance on “occupying the middle ground” (134) between the “poles” of single and multiple authorship:

Do we want to claim that films never have authors? Then let ‘author’ refer to the unmoved mover who is alone responsible for every property a film has, and it follows that no film has an author. Do we want to claim that films always have authors? Then let ‘author’ refer to anyone who plays any sort of causal role in endowing a film with any of its properties, and the authors of any given film become as numerous as figures in a medieval master’s picture of the Last Judgement (134).

It may at first seem that a director like David Lynch fits into Livingston’s scheme of authorship, as his working account of the sound production process suggests that he has sufficient control:

For me, a director designs everything, because [the film] has to pass through this one person for it to be cohesive and whole [...] That’s not to say you don’t rely on people, and that other people don’t have a great deal of say and talent and do a lot to help shape the film, but it all passes through one person (Kenny 129).

Lynch’s self analysis as organising agent across the filmmaking crafts can be likened in particular to Livingston’s analysis of auteur Ingmar Bergman and the example of Winter Light (1962):

He initiated and guided its making, skilfully engaging in many of the diverse tasks involved, while supervising and exercising control over the activities of his collaborators. It is important to add that although Bergman enjoyed a huge measure of authority while making the film, he worked very hard to solicit a collaborative dialogue with his co-workers (144).

Ultimately, Livingston discusses a multitalented director with sufficient oversight and authority to control the production processes and envisage the film as a creative whole, which is also a concept applicable to Lynch. Collaboration is a key concept to this theory of single authorship. It implies a certain level of control and input across the filmmaking crafts and practices - which can be seen to focus greater attention onto a

single agent - but which nonetheless necessitates the involvement of others. While this position is quite convincing and astute in its acknowledgement of the input of others in the filmmaking process, the focus on the director-auteur still diminishes the importance of these contributions.

Focusing on the empirical conditions of filmmaking as an intricate web of crafts, skills and creative manoeuvres, Berys Gaut proposes the concept of “multiple authorship” (167), meaning that under no circumstances should a film be attributable to any single figure: “Who knows what such a being would be like? [...] what might be gained by speculating on the psychology of a kind of super-intelligent octopus, whose tentacles control the myriad machines of cinema and reach into the very souls of actors?” (161). Gaut concludes by appealing for a move away from the director as auteur, instead considering films in terms of differing crafts. The authorial presence of the film is closer to that of a “jazz group” (167). This is an apt metaphor for the process of film sound production work. Like a jazz ensemble, each sound aesthetician has a unique role to play, he or she contributes something of equal importance, and all working relations and their sonic contributions intersect to produce a rich and complex tapestry.

Of course, the director may be a combination of supervisory figure and artisan - at times for multiple crafts. This individual can also certainly act as a conduit for many artistic actions, combining his/her own and others'. Nevertheless, this can never justify authorship being reduced to a single source. To Gaut, the film remains, in reality, a product of teamwork:

Sufficient control displays itself not just by the artist's direct personal input into his work, but also in the fact that he uses other's talents, absorbing them into his own work [...] However, even in the case of paintings, novels and architecture, if there are others who make a significant artistic difference to the work, then it is only fair to acknowledge them as artistic collaborators (157).



Talking from a sound designer's point of view, Gary Rydstrom (Jurassic Park Spielberg 1993; Titanic John Cameron 1997) rightly signals the problems in positioning the director as sole author:

Film directors are dependent on a fairly large group of creative talents who for a good part of the time are working alone. The auteur theory and that whole concept I think sometimes ignores the fact that movies are too complex for any one person to create everything themselves (Sergi 2004 176).

Indeed, the director could not alone be responsible for the soundtrack. Sound production and postproduction in contemporary Hollywood normally involves many filmmakers, including recordists, editors, mixers, foley (sound effects) artists, sound assistants, composers and musicians working on the components of music, sound effects and dialogue. The ways in which these figures communicate and cooperate, and the nature and level of their input varies from one project to the next. If we take a purely empirical view, then it is quite easy to undermine the director-auteur position, or to credit any single authorship position.

However, while it would be correct to acknowledge the contributions of each of these figures when discussing the soundtrack, the reality of accounting for any film's creative personnel is a huge undertaking. This is coupled with the probability that it may not always be possible to trace the input of every individual involved in the creation of the final product. As sound designer Richard Beggs has commented: "when I hear a movie and am impressed by the soundtrack, I see it as a totality [...] I don't know whose work I'm responding to" (Scott Warren 70). Gianluca Sergi (2004) has noted the problems in recognising specific sound authors due to the intersection of craft processes in a film's production. He focuses on music: "film composers will have to confront a series of 'external' factors that will ultimately determine both how their music is employed and how it is received by audiences" (80). Examples such as sound and image editing, sound mixing and the presence of other sound components alter the composer's

work, modifying its final structure, frequency and volume once it is committed to the film. In addition, the process of music-making is not itself a one-person enterprise. Jim Buhler points out that:

[...] an issue as basic as authorship needs to be carefully worked through, not just because film is a collaborative art but also because the widespread ghosting of cues means that traditional models of authorship are not really adequate for thinking about music for film (Barnett et al 77).

At the same time, processes like orchestration may not be carried out by the composer, and one may go as far as to note that the performance of the score is done by a team of musicians; each contributing something unique to the final product. As Sergi summarises, “The deeper we go, the more obvious it becomes that, although we can place the paternity of the music score in the hands of the composer, the same cannot be said of music in film” (2004 83).

At this juncture, the critic seems to have two choices: go to considerable lengths to discuss the each and every process that really go into a film’s creation, or narrowly define the terms of authorship so as to be (unrealistically) attributed to an easily accountable individual.

It is perhaps worth negotiating between the two. As sound work and filmmaking at large are the products of team work, then allow us to acknowledge a team. We may not be able to trace every single creative input in a soundtrack’s production, but we will be able to identify key representatives. For example, the soundtrack may be simply represented across its crafts by the sound designer on one hand and the composer on the other, and wherever they can be identified, we should recognise the sound mixer, sound editor and so on. Therefore, within reasonable parameters of research, multiple sound authors should be noted.

The notion of an author of sound has been more widely recognised since the 1970s. This is because key sound designers like Walter Murch and Ben Burtt have been

instrumental in raising the profile of the creators of sound to the status of authors, with critics, in the industry and among audiences. Their influential work has won them Academy Awards (Star Wars Lucas 1977 and Apocalypse Now Coppola 1979) while their modes of practice have introduced changes to the ways in which sound professionals produce the soundtrack, in creative and technological terms. While it is inevitable that some sound professionals are more prominent than others, thus garnering greater attention among film sound researchers, this fact should not mean a step back to a single-authorship position. Rick Altman notes that:

If auteur study has dwindled in importance, it is in part because we have gained greater access to studio archives, thus fostering new understanding of the contributions made by personnel at all levels. Rather than lionize the sound designer, making him or her a sound version of the auteur, I would rather see us increase attention to all levels of the sound chain (2003 70).

Sound work in Hollywood cinema remains a process of intense collaboration. Even if filmmakers do not work directly alongside one another, their inputs are still combined, and wherever they can, they should be acknowledged. The levels of “direct” collaboration in contemporary Hollywood varies with different filmmakers and different projects, and it is in the following chapters that I will gauge and categorise these variances by examining a range of accounts of the filmmaking process from the perspective of the sound professional. This approach helps us to understand how the soundtrack is created and the many different practices involved. For example, the work carried out by Lynch, Badalamenti and Splet provides an example of intense, “direct” collaboration. More unusually he collaborates in multiple crafts, in terms of sound design and composition. Perhaps most interestingly however, the contributions of other craftspeople actually partly determine Lynch’s own directorial craft. For instance, Badalamenti’s music has the ability to inspire images in Lynch’s imagination.

During the scoring stage, Lynch has often listened in. As Badalamenti says: He [Lynch] would go into this stare, and I realized he was seeing what he was going to shoot” (Abrahams, [The City of Absurdity.com](http://TheCityofAbsurdity.com)). Such an interactivity of arts testifies to Gaut’s outline of multiple authorship as an improvising jazz band, a creative *mélange* of variously skilled faculties. This example also highlights the importance of focusing on sound relations, i.e., different collaborative relationships between sound professionals. These are the essential variables of the soundtrack and its production practices in contemporary Hollywood.

The simple fact endures: films and their soundtracks are multiply authored. While directors may have a supervisory or collaborative role concerning each film craft, the notion of the *auteur*-filmmaker is not applicable. Of course, in principle, all filmmaking personnel should share in the recognition of being an author. However, the parameters of any research project render impossible the pursuit of the detailed and complex realities that a broad multiple authorship theory entails. Ultimately, we need to address a tension that exists between “authors” within critical interpretations of films and filmmaking and “authors” within the actual conditions of production. What can be done by way of negotiating this tension? Acknowledging teamwork in the form of representative figures may be useful starting point, as exemplified by my comparative case studies of sound professionals, from composers Badalamenti and Williams to sound designers Splet and Burt. In addition, these professionals can be positioned as key case studies for comparison amongst various accounts of other sound professionals working in Hollywood. This process of research provides a contextual backdrop, and importantly, gives voices to the many sonic authors who may otherwise remain silent in the study of film.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Behind the Sonic Effect and Symphonic Score: Sound Practices in Contemporary Hollywood**

The soundtrack has a multifarious identity and so it can be approached in a number of ways. As I have pointed out earlier, a comprehensive understanding of the soundtrack should be supplemented by an examination of the crafts involved in its making as well as its stylistic properties. The soundtrack is comprised of three main components: music, sound effects and dialogue. The construction of what we might understand as the soundtrack's intercomponent structure requires the work of a number of differently skilled professionals, whose crafts and sound relations - their collaborative work - intersect in complex ways. The following chapter aims to uncover some sound craft practices in contemporary Hollywood, looking at different professions and their histories, creative roles, sound relations and the technologies employed. Focusing on the sound designer and the composer, my analysis will draw on various accounts given by practitioners to provide an outline of these crafts in the contemporary era, which will in turn lead towards an understanding of the contemporary soundtrack and its construction.

This outline will provide a framework of sound practice in contemporary Hollywood in which I will examine some illustrative case studies in later chapters. I will focus on the two sound "teams" comprised of David Lynch, sound designer Alan Splet (from 1970 -1986) and composer Angelo Badalamenti (from 1986 -); and George Lucas, sound designer Ben Burtt (from 1977 -) and composer John Williams (also from 1977 -). Each team represents a sufficiently distinctive approach so that we can use them as a rough gauge of Hollywood's working range. Ultimately, these teams symbolise the varying levels of collaboration between personnel as well as the complex creative processes involved in the creation of the soundtrack in contemporary Hollywood.

The last three decades of Hollywood's history reveal great complexity and variety in the practices of soundtrack production. Whilst one can certainly identify trends in this domain, recent accounts of sound work in Hollywood also reveal such practices as markedly heterogeneous, and show that the permutations of these practices can be determined by a plethora of factors. In particular, a thorough examination of the issues of collaboration, creative agency and authorship in sound departments since the 1970s will bring the varieties of practice to light.

The ways in which sound is put onto a film today depend on many different aspects of its particular project. Focusing on major Hollywood feature production, Elisabeth Weis states that that "exact procedures vary tremendously with the budget and shooting schedule of the film" (1995 56). Another significant determinant in the configuration of film sound practice is the role of the director. Many critics and practitioners acknowledge that the director has ultimate creative jurisdiction, and is "the final arbiter of taste" (Todd Coleman S-18) right down to the final mix. However, the level of supervisory and creative control differs from one individual filmmaker to the next, ultimately bearing on the practical and aesthetic choices of sound personnel. More specifically, the director's willingness to collaborate with sound personnel may be informed by their own skills, if any, in sound production, the personal and creative relationships they have with sound professionals, or the extent to which they value sound as a component of their filmmaking. In turn these variables may be informed by the historical, technological and institutional backgrounds unique to each director and the personnel that they work with. Ultimately it is important to emphasise that Hollywood productions do not wholly adhere to a standardised set of practices, and any attempts to theorise a Hollywood "system" in this respect should be done tentatively.

Of course, sound production is a collective effort involving the coordination of many crafts. As Scott Warren points out, "combining the elements of sound effects,

music, and dialogue artfully takes the work of more than just a single sound designer. It takes a whole team of men and women” (70). In a nutshell, the soundtrack begins to be created during shooting, when production dialogue is recorded by the production mixer and boom (microphone) operator. The supervising sound editor is then hired by the director to oversee the process of postproduction sound. The dialogue is later “tidied up” by the dialogue editor. Any sub-quality recorded lines can be replaced in the process of Automated Dialogue Replacement (ADR), in which actors rerecord dialogue in an enclosed studio environment. Sound effects editors, and, depending on the aesthetic importance of sound to a picture, a possible sound designer, will select and process - or sometimes create - the effects for the soundtrack. The distinction between the sound designer and supervising sound editor is not always clear. As sound designer Mark Mangini says:

There are several people in our craft who call themselves the traditional supervising sound editor but perform in the capacity of the sound designer. They’re brought on in either preproduction or production or early into postproduction, depending on the budget, and they have that aural vision of the film. It doesn’t matter what hat you wear or what equipment you use, it’s what your ideas are and how you communicate them (Vincent LoBrutto 275).

Foley artists record specific sounds, such as footsteps, in synch with the image. The music editor is then brought on to “spot” the film soundtrack (making notes of specific cues and emphases that the composer will need to score in accordance with) and then the composer is hired to write the music. Recording sessions for the score are coordinated by the music editor. This is followed by the rerecording process, which in New York sound facilities is referred to as the “mix” and in Los Angeles as the “dub” (Weis 1995 59). This is essentially the mixing stage for the various tracks, overseen by the rerecording mixer and sometimes assisted by the sound editors. It is therefore a complex logistical task to put sound to film, and involves a variety of roles and creative skills working in tandem.

A better understanding of the discourses about these sound practices reveals common concerns amongst sound personnel regarding creative control, collaborative work and schedule allocation. These concerns highlight a number of trends at work in Hollywood sound departments, particularly in the practices of sound design and composition. Such trends may not constitute a rigid model by which contemporary Hollywood sound can be understood, but they provide a sufficient basis for defining its working roles and relationships.

### **Sound Design**

The sound designer has a role that can encompass diverse creative skills, and when hired for a production it is possible that they will act as chief sculptor of the soundtrack.

As Warren writes:

Loosely defined, sound designers are the primary authors of a motion picture soundtrack, which includes every sound you hear in a movie, from a violin to footsteps to a woman screaming or a nuclear explosion. They oversee the creation and manipulation of sounds (sound editing) as well as the blending of dialogue, effects, and music (sound mixing) (52).

Because it entails work across a variety of sound production processes, sound design can, in principle, require considerable collaboration with others:

It implies not only creating individual sound effects, but more importantly it encompasses designing the sound over an entire soundtrack. Ideally, this is done in collaboration with, among others, a composer, foley artist, dialogue editor, production mixer, and the director of a film (Cathryn Hrudicka 62).

In certain cases, sound designers are involved during the preproduction stages of a film, and may plan with the director how to “shape an overall, consistent soundtrack that exploits the expressive possibilities of the sound medium [and] is organically related to the narrative and thematic needs of the film” (Weis 1995 59).

However, in the thirty years since its coining by sound pioneer Walter Murch for his work on Apocalypse Now (Francis Ford-Coppola 1979), the term “sound designer”



has proved to be an imprecise moniker, referring to anything from a soundtrack's principal architect that supervises the recording, mixing and editing of sounds, to someone who deals exclusively with a small number of sound effects (Weis 1995 58). Sound design is not always employed as a professional credit. As sound designer Randy Thom (Apocalypse Now; Return of the Jedi Richard Marquand 1983; Wild at Heart David Lynch 1990) points out: “[...] “Raging Bull”, “Eraserhead”, “The Elephant Man”, “Never Cry Wolf” and “Once Upon a Time in the West” were thoroughly “sound designed”, though no sound designer was credited on most of them.” (“Designing a Movie for Sound” Filmsound.org). In addition, the amount of preparatory time and directorial collaboration that the sound designer experiences can vary considerably, depending on factors ranging from sound budgets to the attitudes of individual filmmakers.

The title of “sound designer” remains synonymous with the work of Murch (Marc Mancini 1985; Vincent LoBrutto 1994; Michael Jarrett 2000), who during the 1970s worked on the soundtracks for films by George Lucas (THX 1138 1971; American Graffiti 1973) and Francis Ford Coppola (The Godfather 1972; The Godfather Part II 1974; The Conversation 1974; Apocalypse Now). As Murch describes it:

The origin of the term sound designer goes back to *Apocalypse Now*, when I was trying to come up with what I had actually done on the film. Because Francis [Ford Coppola] had wanted to do the film in quadraphonic format [four stereo speakers positioned at both the front and the back of film theatres], which had never been done before, that seemed to require from me an analysis of the design of the film in a three-dimensional space of the sound. [...] Later on, people appropriated it, which is their prerogative, but it also has come to mean the person who designs interesting, unique sounds. So if you have a sound that you can't get from a library, that you can't go out and record yourself, but that you have to concoct out of a different number of contributing sounds, that is what the sound designer does (Jarrett 9).

A number of Lucas and Coppola productions worked on by Murch were made under Coppola's own company, American Zoetrope. Murch explains that the ethos of

Zoetrope was to nurture the creative and collaborative potential of the sound design role. As he recalls:

That was the Zoetrope dream at the beginning - the whole concept of what turned into the sound designer in the Zoetrope sense - [was] a director of photography for sound. Somebody who took on the responsibility of “auralizing” the sound for the film and making definitive, creative decisions about it. Someone the director can talk to about the total sound of the film the way he talks to the director of photography about the look of the film (Tom Kenny 9).

The example of Zoetrope highlights some key attitudes towards sound work in Hollywood during the 1970s. Firstly, the idea that sound should include a creative professional counterpart to that found in image production, namely the director of photography. Secondly, that sound design is a role involving considerable creative agency. Thirdly, that a dialogue is firmly established between sound designer and director from the pre to postproduction stages. Gianluca Sergi suggests that the 1970s signalled a change in the professional status and practices of film sound when compared with earlier decades. Sound design, he writes, could perhaps help to “shift the focus from sound people as ‘technicians’ to ‘sound people as ‘creative’ figures” (2004 182) and could “lead to greater collaboration between different sound departments [...] as well as different areas of filmmaking” (2004 183).

During the mid to late 1970s, Hollywood’s interest in sound was indeed intensifying among its biggest, and on the whole, youngest filmmakers. New Hollywood movie brats including George Lucas, Francis Ford Coppola, Robert Altman (Nashville 1975), Martin Scorsese (Taxi Driver 1976; Raging Bull 1980), Michael Cimino (The Deer Hunter 1978), and Steven Spielberg (Close Encounters of the Third Kind 1977; ET: The Extra Terrestrial 1982) directed films that were recognised for their distinct and innovative soundtracks. Yet such cinematic achievements were not possible without Murch and the numerous other figures who would be considered among the most distinguished sound designers in Hollywood to this day. They include Murch, Ben

Burtt (Star Wars; ET: The Extra Terrestrial), Randy Thom, and Frank Warner (Taxi Driver; Close Encounters of the Third Kind; Raging Bull). As Sergi writes: “The aim of the so-called movie brats generation was not to replace existing Hollywood production patterns but to explore their boundaries, often in the light of recent technological developments” (2004 25). Taken together, the work of the movie brats and the sound personnel they worked with helped to define the contemporary Hollywood soundtrack.

The interest in sound among Hollywood’s top directors was bound up in various technological and aesthetic relations, for Charles Schreger asks:

Was it the availability of complex sound equipment that sparked Hollywood’s fascination with high-quality sound on film? Or did a few daring directors have a vision (or hear voices) and then seek out the hardware and soundmen to help them realize it? (349)

Several critics have viewed the introduction of Dolby stereo optical sound as an instance of changing aesthetics and working practices (Schreger 1985; Mancini 1985; Cook 2002; Chion 2003; Sergi 2004; Whittington 2007). Its absorption into Hollywood’s standards of production and exhibition has even been hailed in epochal terms. Schreger sees the coming of Dolby stereo as the “second Sound Revolution” (348) while Sergi refers to “The Dolby Era” (2004). So which changes have taken place that may warrant this perceived break in Hollywood’s sonic history?

Before the late 1970s, mono optical recording, postproduction and playback technology was the norm. A magnetic format was introduced to the industry in the late 1940s, offering stereophonic sound as well as superior quality compared with the optical medium, but its use ultimately turned out to be “more of an in-house shake-up rather than an industry-wide transformation” (Belton 1992 154). The use of stereo magnetic sound peaked briefly during the early 1950s when Cinerama, Cinemascope and Todd-AO introduced magnetic multichannel soundtracks in conjunction with their widescreen visual formats. As Belton writes:

The Opening of *This is Cinerama* in 7-track stereo magnetic sound in the fall of 1952, of *House of Wax* in 3-D and 4-track stereo in the spring of 1953, and of *The Robe* in Cinemascope and 4-track stereo in the fall of 1953 (as well as 32 other stereo releases in 1953) heralded a new, albeit short-lived, era in sound motion pictures. But this attempt to establish a standard, 35mm, magnetic stereo format did not succeed, and it was not until 1975 that a 35mm stereo sound system began to gain acceptance through the efforts of Dolby Labs to market a 4-track optical stereo sound system (1992 155).

The key factors in the industry's failure to standardise magnetic stereo were economic. In order to play magnetic prints, theatres were required to convert their playback equipment, which was a costly process. As Sergi has pointed out, it cost \$25,000 to install Cinemascope's 4-track stereo magnetic system in the 1950s compared with the conversion to Dolby stereo in the 1970s for just \$5,000 (2004 20). Schreger notes that: "Magnetic prints, which can offer the best possible sound quality, also cost about 50 percent more than optical prints (\$1,200 vs \$800)" (353). The majority of exhibitors chose to retain their mono optical equipment, and so, quite simply, "the most backward theatres set the standard for the industry as a whole" (Handzo 422). However, the theatres that did opt for a stereo magnetic system were mostly large, first-run venues, which over the course of the 1950s came to favour the wide 70mm 6-track format over more modest 4-track 35mm prints (Belton 1992 158). Until the 1970s, high quality stereophonic sound therefore became associated with limited prestige presentations and, quite often, spectacle films, as listed by Belton above.

During 1973 however, Dolby Laboratories began to develop what Sergi describes as "the missing link in film sound [...] an economically viable, universally available optical stereophonic system married to conventional 35mm prints" (2004 19). The stereo optical system was indeed economically viable. The prints of a Dolby stereo optical release cost roughly the same as those in mono (Cook 2002 389), while as Schreger pointed out in 1978: "It costs more to dub a film in Dolby stereo than in standard mono - about \$25,000 more - but the addition is almost insignificant, given

that the average cost of a major-studio movie today is about \$5 million” (354). It also offered high quality multichannel stereophonic sound (in 4-tracks: 3 front and 1 rear surround), the likes of which were only previously heard in magnetic-equipped theatres. Quality stereophony would no longer remain a speciality for filmgoers: Dolby would bring it to wider audiences, due in large part to modestly priced production, theatrical installation and print fees.

The first Dolby optical stereo-encoded films were released in 1975, among them being Tommy and Lisztomania (musicals by Ken Russell) and Altman’s Nashville (which is oriented around live music performances). As these examples suggest, there was a tendency to showcase the format’s capabilities using music-dominated soundtracks. But as more of Hollywood’s filmmakers integrated the system into their production practices, an array of aesthetic possibilities would open up, requiring a more and more skills to bring them to full fruition.

In addition to its multichannel stereo format, Dolby stereo optical was designed to offer improved clarity, an increased frequency response involving greater bass and treble range, and broader dynamic range, which allowed for more striking volume contrasts compared with previous systems. Opening up the range and aural discreteness of sounds would allow for a richer and more detailed soundtrack. On the level of production, sound thus became a matter of complex design, its creative and technical intricacy requiring more lengthy planning and treatment throughout the stages of a film production. For example, during his first Dolby-encoded production The Deer Hunter, Michael Cimino “spent six months shooting the film and *five* months mixing the sound track” (Schreger 351). Walter Murch and his “three dimensional” sound design for Apocalypse Now was also a key instance of the potentially epic proportions of sound production planning, while his Special Achievement Academy Award for sound helped

to introduce sound design as a credit in major motion picture production (Cook 2002 392).

Murch was not alone. Hollywood witnessed a proliferation of film craftspeople who realised the creative potential of an improved sound system. These figures worked on increasingly complex and innovative sound productions, many of which, perhaps not coincidentally, became recognised industry-wide. Until 1969, studio sound departments, rather than the individuals, could win Academy Awards for sound. However, a Special Achievement Award was created in 1972, which three years later began to honour individuals for various aspects of sound production, the first of which was awarded to Peter Berkos for his sound effects on The Hindenberg (Robert Wise 1975). This was followed by more sound-based accolades at the Oscars. Ben Burt's sound effects for Star Wars (1977) won a Special Achievement Award, followed by Frank Warner for Close Encounters of the Third Kind (Spielberg 1977) and Alan Splet on The Black Stallion (Carroll Ballard 1979), among many others.

While Dolby did not singly spark Hollywood's intensified interest in sound, it highlighted some important adjustments in its aesthetics and practices. Of course, Murch had already produced a number of notable non-Dolby soundtracks (American Graffiti; THX-1138; The Godfather; The Conversation) while other pre-Dolby productions were celebrated for their sound, including Jaws - especially the score by John Williams - and The Exorcist (1973), which involved a very large sound team, five of whom worked on the effects alone. In addition, figures like Robert Altman and sound recordist Jim Webb had been showing a fascination with innovative sound techniques ten years or more prior to the introduction of Dolby stereo, experimenting with a multi-channel, overlapping dialogue style since Countdown (1968). As Schreger notes: "In his case at least, the idea preceded the technology" (349). However, Dolby's stereophonic technology opened up new technical and artistic complexities at the level of sound

production, and so for many filmmakers demanded longer and more detailed planning and cooperation. This suggests that the director or producer works closer with the craftspeople of film sound than ever before. Such possibilities were exploited by what was to become both the highest grossing movie of 1977, and would represent one of the greatest success stories for Dolby stereo optical sound.

As Cook points out, “the watershed for Dolby was Star Wars, whose epoch-making success was understood to depend at least partially on its high-powered, high-quality sound track” (2002 386). By 1985 (eight years after the film’s release), Dolby stereo had become the release format for the majority of American productions. In 1975, George Lucas and producer Gary Kurtz began consultations with Dolby technicians with the aim of making the most of the sound on their science fiction adventure (Sergi 2004 25). A year later they enlisted Ben Burtt to create the special dialogue and sound effects as well as oversee the editing and mixing of the soundtrack. What resulted was a remarkable synergy of technological and aesthetic practices. On its 35mm 4-channel release in 1977 (a 6-track magnetic version was also available), Star Wars showcased a range of sonic capabilities of Dolby stereo optical, and in turn the technology glorified Burtt’s effects and John Williams’s symphonic score. Moreover, in terms of work, the film illustrated the kind of production plan that had sound as a prime consideration.

Burtt and his work on Star Wars became retrospectively known as “sound design” (For the 1977 release of Star Wars, he was officially credited with “special dialogue and sound effects” but for the re-release 25 years later, his credit changed to “sound design”). The swish of the light sabre and heavy, protracted breathing of Darth Vader are as distinctive as their visual counterparts. Burtt’s account of working with Lucas illustrates his relative creative freedom and ample work schedule, which later became the working mode of other major sound designers of his generation:

When I started out, it was very unusual for someone to be employed to make specific sounds for a film. That may have happened in years past at the studios, but a disinterest had settled in. You found editors and sound people pigeonholed in their little rooms, just cutting in sounds they had in their library – that’s all they were given time and money to do. Then along came George Lucas, who instructed me, “Here, take this microphone and Nagra [tape recorder], take a year and go out and collect all the interesting sounds you can think of. Bring them back and we’ll go through the material and we’ll use it for our film.” His plan was definitely innovative in 1975 (LoBrutto 142).

The sound designer has been a formative figure for other practices of film sound, such as artistic collaboration. The possibilities for close creative exchange between sound design and other film crafts is explained by Gary Rydstrom. Rydstrom began work as a sound designer in the 1980s, and later achieved two Academy Awards for sound with Jurassic Park (Spielberg 1993) and Titanic (John Cameron 1997). He describes how he is able to collaborate on and contribute to other crafts: “Lili Zanuck, who directed Rush [1991], was nice enough to give me the script before they started shooting. They even asked me if there were some suggestions I could give from a sound point of view, that would help give background to a scene” (LoBrutto 228).

By and large the inauguration of the sound designer in Hollywood feature production has encouraged certain professional, creative and collaborative possibilities for film sound practitioners, although Sergi points out that these are still “limited to a relatively small group of established ‘elite’ sound people” (2004 183). In addition, as the sound designer’s roles and responsibilities change from production to production, so can their station within the structure of labour, as suggested by Burt:

Because I was given the responsibility to record, edit, mix and creatively supervise most of the project [Star Wars], I was given a higher status. I find that to have been pretty much unique to my experience, and other sound designers haven’t really been given those opportunities too often (LoBrutto 148).

Sound design therefore has complex implications in terms of professional identity, responsibility and status. The ideal that began with the movie brat filmmakers,



production companies like Zoetrope, and in figures like Walter Murch and Ben Burtt, has proved exceptional rather than paradigmatic. As Thom writes:

[The Sound Designer] would brainstorm with the director and writer in pre-production to integrate sound into the story on the page. [...] In post-production that person would continue the fabrication and collection of sounds begun in pre-production, and would work with other sound professionals (composers, editors, mixers), and the director and editor to give the film's soundtrack a coherent and well coordinated feeling. This dream has been a difficult one to realize, and in fact has made little headway since the early 1970s ("Designing a Movie for Sound" [Filmsound.org](http://Filmsound.org)).

The roles and relationships with which a sound designer is engaged can vary from one project to the next. Bruce Stambler, supervising sound editor on The Fugitive (Andrew Davis 1993) and Batman and Robin (Joel Schumacher 1997) says:

"[Filmmakers] hire people like me and Gary [Rydstrom] and Randy Thom before they start shooting. They used not to do that until after the film was cut" (Sergi 2004 130).

Randy Thom himself describes the more common role of sound design: "Sound editors, designers, and mixers are still the grunts of postproduction. Walter Murch's dream of someone with a "sound mind" guiding the use of audio throughout the project is taken no more seriously now than it was a decade or two ago" ("Designing a Movie for Sound" 1999 10). Indeed, the concern that a relative lack of production time is allotted to sound design echoes throughout Hollywood's sound profession.

The sound designer's inclusion in the later stages of film postproduction is an issue that recurs throughout discourses of sound practice. A shorter schedule can have a restrictive effect on the level of cooperation between sound professionals and other filmmaking personnel, as suggested by sound designer and author David Sonnenschein:

Traditionally the sound designer or supervising sound editor comes on board the production after the film has been shot, and often only after the picture has been edited. This unfortunately does not allow for much interactivity between the processes of editing image and sound. The music composer may not have much communication with the sound designer, and this too creates a gap between the elements, with a huge amount of energy and creativity wasted when it comes to the final mix (215).

Cecelia Hall is a leading supervising sound editor and sound designer, having worked on Top Gun (Tony Scott 1986) and Hunt for Red October (John McTiernan 1990).

Drawing on her own experience, she highlights the difficulties of collaboration and communication when under restricted time:

Initially I'll have a meeting with the director to determine how he or she *sees* and hears the sound. This is an important time because once you get into it, the schedules are now so tight, there won't be a long time to talk about concepts and overall approaches (Brouwer and Wright 455).

Of course, such concerns are not necessarily exclusive to Hollywood filmmaking, but they commonly occur within its discourses, particularly in relatively recent accounts. This would indeed suggest that postproduction sound schedules have decreased since the end of the 1970s. Writing for the Hollywood Reporter in 1991, commentator Todd Coleman pointed out that: "One of the biggest changes to affect the sound industry in the past seven years is the ruthlessly shortened post-production schedules that have now become the norm" (S-4). In 1994 Burttt noted: "The tradition now is to do things much faster than we were doing ten years ago" (LoBrutto 148). In 2005 Bruce Stambler described his typical role as supervising sound editor during postproduction:

Now we seem to be working on an accelerated schedule: we dub on multiple stages at once, we pre-dub the dialogue on one stage, we pre-dub the sound effects on another, we might pre-dub the background and foley on another stage so that we can get it together quicker. It is also a budgetary issue because dubbing is very expensive (Sergi 2004 122).

It is indeed possible to attribute tight schedules to Hollywood's relatively small sound budgets. Hrudicka points out that "In the United States, it is common to allot only 1%-3%, or at the most, 5% of an entire feature film's budget to the soundtrack (this figure may be higher in some European countries, as much as 4%-6%)" (63).

While finances partially dictate the sound designer's work schedule, one of the most significant determinants is the person making key decisions: the director or

producer. Ben Burtt is aware of the ways in which sound work is circumscribed by the attitudes of those with ultimate jurisdiction:

Many producers and directors aren't as close to the sound track [as Lucas and Kurtz]. They want it to be right, but they're not willing to provide the resources and the time for the trial and error necessary for somebody to really come up with the best material. Sound comes in late in the production, when money, patience, and time are used up, so it's hard to get any extra leeway, especially if it costs money. So I have a fear that in many respects the sound designers for commercial feature films have gone not as far as they can. They're up against an economic hurdle. They need to be brought in early enough and given resources, and many producers just can't do it because it's not a tradition to do it (LoBrutto 149).

Some sound designers and other sonic professionals claim that collaboration between themselves and other filmmakers is key to a simpler creative and logistical production process. Sound mixer John Coffey (Red Heat Walter Hill 1988) et al. write: "Many times are we expected to solve all sound problems alone. Instead, this should be a cooperative effort with the assistant directors and other crafts" (Filmsound.org).

Similarly, Thom asks:

When are film makers going to learn, and when will some of them remember, that film making and all of its crafts are really all one thing, one process. Each craft should be encouraged to inform and influence every other craft, and be open to influence from others ("Confessions of an Occasional Sound Designer" Filmsound.org).

According to the numerous working accounts by sound designers today, the level of collaboration between themselves and other filmmakers is a question of schedule, finance, and, above all, the attitude of the director or producer. Collaboration may not always be an essential or a superior mode of work, but it seems to be a logical step towards coherence between different filmmaking professions and their practices, and it also implies a greater appreciation of sound within the filmmaking process. But does this picture of sound relations change when considering other sonic professions? Music is a key component of the soundtrack but the working process behind its production engages very different logistic and creative issues compared with sound design. It

would also seem that collaborations between composers and other filmmaking crafts are somewhat less common.

### **Composition**

Of all the sound crafts, it would seem that scoring in contemporary Hollywood is most frequently guided by various creative and logistical demands that lie beyond the composer's control. The music personnel are a discrete department who are traditionally hired during the final postproduction stages (Weis 1995 59). Music is usually added to a film after it has been shot and edited, and may be viewed as something of a "finishing touch" to the picture (David Morgan 236). There is usually little time between late postproduction and the release date - most often a matter of three to eight weeks (Brouwer and Wright 1990 470) - and so the composer can face considerable pressure to complete. Partly due to scheduling and the labour infrastructure, composition also offers few opportunities for direct dialogue with other filmmaking professionals. The completed score can be changed and processed by others at the end of postproduction, and so the composer's authorial status is quite different to that of a non-film composer:

Rarely will a composer discuss his or her choices with the sound team, and even more rarely will he or she be present at the final dubbing stage to monitor the use that sound designers, directors, film editors and even producers will make of his or her carefully composed music score (Sergi 2004 82).

Moreover, many composers see their creative agenda almost entirely set by the director. When scoring for films, the modern classical composer Philip Glass (Kundun, Martin Scorsese 1997) simply states that: "The director without any question prevails" (Morgan 241). It would therefore seem that a close working relationship between director and composer could be paramount to a successful film score:

[...] the composer will find his musical ideas filtered through the sensibilities of the director, who may or may not have an ear for what works in a given style, and who may or may not understand or appreciate music's dramatic or experimental possibilities. Communication between

the collaborators is therefore essential, no matter what roadblock of musical language exists between a maestro and an auteur (Morgan 47).

However, many composers see their working relationship with a filmmaker as having less to do with collaboration and more with directorial command. Composer John Corigliano (Altered States Ken Russell 1980) says that: “Collaboration implies equality, and I don’t think the situation between composers and directors is one of equality. I think “employee” is more accurate a term” (Morgan 49). Music editor Richard Stone (Platoon Oliver Stone 1986) echoes Corigliano’s views, with a starker tone:

Many people don’t realize that the composer is really a musical slave to what the director or producer is trying to express with the film [...] the director has the power to throw the entire score out eventually or to ask the music editor to change it substantially, which often happens (Brouwer and Wright 474-5).

James Horner (Titanic James Cameron 1997) would agree, noting that: “Ultimately, it’s up to the director [...] Even if what he does is in bad taste. It’s a bit like being a prostitute” (Robert Hershon 11). These concerns may be augmented if the director has little or no knowledge about music but nonetheless does not wish to relinquish creative command over every aspect of the film soundtrack. Hollywood composer and critic Christopher Palmer observes:

The basic problem of communication profoundly affects the relationship between film director and composer. A director may have no *technical* knowledge of music but knows what he wants from it *dramatically*, in which case he can make his wishes known to the composer and all will be well. Frequently, however, directors have a confused idea of what music is and what it can do, and when they have insisted on overruling the composer the results have often been disastrous (9).

As is the case with a large and complex industry like Hollywood, the above trends do not constitute rigid rules. Exceptions do indeed exist, particularly among working relationships in which the director has a strong appreciation or knowledge of sound and music. David Lynch with composer Angelo Badalamenti (Blue Velvet 1986; Lost Highway 1997; Mulholland Dr. 2001), Steven Spielberg with John Williams (Jaws; Close Encounters of the Third Kind), and (in a directorial capacity), Walter

Murch with David Shire (Return to Oz 1985) all provide examples of close composer-director collaborations. For example, Shire recalls his experience working with Murch: “[...] we worked as closely and long as I’ve ever worked with a director. It was satisfying to work on one picture for six months” (Morgan 20).

How might the composer collaborate with other sound personnel? Because music is the final addition to the soundtrack, the scoring process tends to be circumscribed by the presence of other sonic components. As Weis points out:

Film music composers must deal with particular technical requirements. For the sake of clarity, a film composer must orchestrate with instruments that do not overlap much with the frequency of the human voice or any dominant sound effects to be heard at the same time (1995 59).

Although sound technology has generally improved the intelligibility of the soundtrack, it has also introduced fresh complexities. “Sixty years ago”, writes Murch, “it would not be unusual for an entire film to need only fifteen to twenty sound effects. Today that number could be hundreds to thousands time greater” (“Dense Clarity-Clear Density” [ps1.org](http://ps1.org)). He adds that:

The general level of detail, fidelity, and what might be called the “hormonal level” of sound and image has been vastly increased [...] The consequence of this, for sound, is that during the final recording of almost every film throughout moments when the balance of dialogue, music and sound effects will suddenly (and so unpredictably) turn into a logjam so extreme that even the most experienced of directors, editors and mixers can be overwhelmed by the choices they have to make (“Dense Clarity-Clear Density” [ps1.org](http://ps1.org)).

The narrative requirements of the Hollywood film means that the voice is largely dominant. After all, its chief function is to tell a story. Sergi writes that: “Ask any sound professional in the business today what is the most important element in a soundtrack and you will almost invariably receive the same answer: dialogue” (2004 81). In a cinema that is by and large “vococentric” (Chion 1999 5), the music and sound effects are left to compete for the audience’s attention. This can potentially result in a conflict between personnel. Scoring mixer Dan Wallin (Woodstock Michael Wadleigh

1970) writes that: “They’re [Hollywood filmmakers] sound effects crazy. When a door is slammed, it sounds like the whole building’s going to fall down. [...] either the sound or music should give way” (Brouwer and Wright 486). Corigliano offers a composer’s experience of this sonic tension, positioning it within the context of postproduction work:

[...] sound effects are much louder than the music is - the simple turning of a doorknob is a major event! - because in the dubbing chamber the composer is not present. I was not part of any of the dubbings of my films. The sound effects people are present [...] in fact the sound effects people are very active with the director during the dubbing process but the composer is excluded from that (Morgan 49).

Corigliano highlights the concern that non-musical sound practitioners work in closer collaboration with the director than musicians, and that there is even a sense of exclusion of the composer from key creative and collaborative processes such as the mix. Sound designer Rydstrom suggests that closer work between the sound crafts could prove to be the antidote, and may help solve the conflict between effects and music:

I think one of the areas that can most improve in making the sound effects department and the music department to work better together, because that relationship between sound effects and music is such an important one for the mix (Sergi 2004 175-6).

Rydstrom may be proved right. In the article “Film Composers in the Sonic Wars”, Hershon draws on the example of Apollo 13 (Ron Howard and Todd Hallowell 1995), a film on which close collaboration between composer James Horner and sound designer Steve Flick allowed for the coexistence of music and loud sound effects on the soundtrack without any aural conflict, hence neutralising the “sonic wars”.

Although perspectives on contemporary film scoring are various, they largely share the view that a more inclusive role for composers in film sound practice would be beneficial. This may include a closer working relationship with the director or other sound professionals, an expansion of their working schedule, or creative input into processes outside of scoring, such as preproduction planning and dubbing.

Having highlighted some of the core issues surrounding contemporary composers and sound designers including collaboration, creative agency and working schedules and technologies, we may ask about their historical specificity. For instance, did sound personnel share the same professional concerns before the contemporary era? Were their roles any different? How were their modes of labour and their sound relations organised? What was the role of technology in their creative and logistical choices? After all, the industry has undergone some radical realignments in its history, especially since the late 1940s, as we have seen in chapter 2. It is perhaps useful at this point to examine the pre-history of contemporary sound practice, tracing composers and sound effects technicians from the advent of the talkies through to the break up of the studio system. This will provide a picture by which we can better define and understand exactly what has changed for sound professionals in the contemporary era.



## Chapter Five

### Tracking Sound: Professional Practices and Technologies in the Studio Era

“History”, as Richard Maltby notes, “consists of many layers which change at very different rates, and stasis is as much a fact of history as is change” (1998 16). Indeed, many significant changes have occurred in the past nine decades of Hollywood cinema sound, although some continuities from early practices to the present can still be identified. This chapter will explore the professional identities of early sound technicians and composers and their creative and technical duties, comparing them with accounts from the contemporary era. It is argued that while some early accounts of sound work gesture towards considerable similarities between their contemporary counterparts, a fundamental shift differentiates the two eras. The break up of the studio system in 1948, which loosened Hollywood’s industrial infrastructure, paved the way for a less standardised and thus diversified mode of work in the contemporary era compared with the studio period.

Although writing over sixty years apart, studio era sound practitioner and head of sound at RKO Carl Dreher and contemporary film critic Elisabeth Weis offer descriptions of Hollywood’s complex organisation of sound personnel. Their observations highlight that there can be different configurations of this organisation, which clearly depend on a variety of factors. Dreher writes that: “a sound department, like most other enterprises, may be run on different theories” and that “any such scheme is a product of development, personalities, economic factors, and company policy, as much as a logical arrangement of men and functions” (1931b 342). Similarly, while writing an article that attempts to provide as complete an account as possible, Weis speaks of her “rough sketch” (1995 56) of contemporary post-production procedures, such are the differences that arise from project to project. Both Dreher and Weis are drawing attention to the varied organisation of labour that characterises soundtrack

production in Hollywood past and present. However, one is discussing a studio-oriented workplace in the 1930s and the other a project-differentiated process in the 1990s. It is therefore clear that the former would be more standardised than the latter.

The reorganisation of Hollywood's industrial structure post-1948 had significant effects on the ways in which soundtracks were produced. During the studio era the sound department was an integral part of the studio. Ben Burtt summarises thus:

[...] when the studio system was dominant, each of those studios had its own sound department, just like an art department. They were dominated by the same people all of those years, and they had certain technical and aesthetic ideas (Vincent LoBrutto 139).

The shift to package and therefore project-by-project production following the Paramount Decrees had implications for every craft in Hollywood. The end of in-house studio production had considerable effects on sound practice. As Whittington notes:

Sound departments were dismantled or spun off as separate corporate entities. Production shifted to independent production companies, and house-styles at the studios – which had developed because of the shared assets of film libraries and sound personnel – dissipated (30).

The history of sound in Hollywood could therefore be viewed as one that has, with the changes in the studio's infrastructure, radically shifted in its system of labour and mode of production. Style, technique and *modus operandi* were no longer constitutive of the studio identity, but rather of individual projects and filmmakers. In this sense Hollywood bears greater variety in the post-studio era. But while fundamental shifts such as these have occurred throughout Hollywood's long and complex history, some aspects of contemporary sound bear recognisable features dating as far back as the transition to sound.

The professional identity of the sound person is a key instance. It was shortly after the industry's widespread shift to "talkie" production that the cinema's first sound technicians were required by Hollywood to transform their role into sound artists.

However, it is common for scholars to trace the soundman's artistic professional

identity back to the relatively recent 1970s, with the inauguration of the sound designer. Marc Mancini notes that: “Sound designers—a term used familiarly only since the 1970s—are what cinematographers are to lighting and visual composition. [...] they are aural artists” (361). Similarly, Scott Warren writes that: “They are to the ear what the cinematographers and picture editors are, combined, to the eye” (52). The analogues drawn between sound design and cinematography yield some interesting historical implications regarding sound work and art. However, Mancini continues:

Sound designers are rising above some old prejudices [...] creativity has usually been yoked most tightly to seeing: to imagine is to visualize. Terms like motion pictures, cinema, and television trace their etymological roots to visual concepts, not audio ones (361).

Mancini suggests a struggle for the sound practitioner to gain recognition as an artist. As some modern sound professionals like Gary Rydstrom suggest, this may be an ongoing issue: “Every part of filmmaking is artistic and technical and it’s a little insulting when parts of filmmaking, like sound, are considered more technical than artistic, or sometimes all technical” (Sergi 2004 179). In this sense, Hollywood could be understood as virtually having to come to terms with the creative acumen of the sound person relatively recently. But a closer examination of earlier sound work reveals a more complex story.

As far back as the late 1920s and early 1930s, sound personnel in Hollywood were modelled as artistic rather than purely technical professionals. In 1934 Harold Lewis, vice-president of the Society of Sound Engineers, wrote:

[The sound engineer] must know when to depart from the technically perfect recording, in order to build to dramatic effect, and how best to use this new ingredient – sound – to most fully benefit each scene and sequence. Like the Cinematographer, he must build upon technique with an inborn artistic instinct. (65)

Interestingly, like modern critics Mancini and Warren, Lewis evokes the work of the cinematographer as a professional and creative equivalent to the soundman. Indeed, it was during the studio era that Hollywood studios widely encouraged sound

technicians to adopt this working paradigm. As James Lastra adds, “The role of the cinematographer as a model for the sound engineer [...] takes on [...] importance since his prestige in Hollywood was unargued and his standards and practices perfectly suited to the studio’s needs” (178). However, this was something that was initially met with a degree of resistance from the sound professionals themselves. The Hollywood studios’ technological means to create sound films originated from developments by outside industries, such as telephone, radio and phonography. Douglas Gomery writes that:

AT&T [American Telephone and Telegraph Corporation] desired to make better phone equipment; RCA [Radio Corporation of America] sought to improve its radio capabilities. As a secondary effect of such research, each perfected sound recording and reproduction equipment. With the inventions two movie companies, Warner Bros. and Fox, adapted telephone and radio research for practical use. That is, they innovated sound movies. (1985 5)

The innovations of the then minor studios Warner and Fox sowed the seeds for a significant evolutionary phase for film industry. Within three years of the first talkie - Alan Crosland’s The Jazz Singer (released in 1927 by Warner’s Vitaphone company) - silent productions became all but obsolete. This period of technological transformation necessitated change in the Hollywood’s mode of labour, which meant employing a number of skilled sound personnel in the same industries from where the technologies emerged. This process proved problematic however. The sound engineers brought with them the working habits and standards from their experience in the non-cinematic sound industries, which at times stood at odds with the various sound techniques and devices used for the narrative conventions of the film. As Helen Hanson summarises, “The studios found that they were pulled between two competing directions, the recording and reproducing of ‘good’ quality sound (science) and allowing the continuing production of dramatically effective pictures (art)” (2007 32). Lastra explains that the sound engineers resisted the codes of Hollywood sound representation for some time, writing that “Perhaps the sound technicians’ stubborn maintenance of engineering

standards can be better understood as a strategy for protecting the quality of work and thus their professional standing” (168). The studios had to act to ensure the assimilation of the sound workers’ practices into the dramatic techniques of cinema, which would entail their retraining as sound artists equipped with the same awareness of narrative and mood as the cinematographer. Of the more effective manoeuvres to solve this tension, The Academy for Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) set up training programmes and forums to teach engineers the principles of sound production for the specificities of the cinematic medium. This would help lead to the eventual realignment of the sound person’s techniques according to a standardised, narrative model of practice.

The sound practitioner has thus long been an artistic figure in Hollywood sound production, though not always recognised as such. In the studio era, sound artistry ensured a stable way of recording and producing a soundtrack that functioned to the requirements of dramatic representation. Indeed, the role of the modern sound designer works according to similar creative principles. The notion of the creative sound person is not, in its most basic sense, an entirely contemporary invention.

Like those discussing non-musical sound, some commentators on film composition draw attention to the changes in production practices since the studio era.

K.J. Donnelly (1998) writes that:

The mode of production for film music in contemporary cinema is very different from that of classical cinema. There are no longer any full time employees and thus there is no more film music ‘production line’, where there were rosters of composers, arrangers and musicians all under one roof. This has meant that there is undoubtedly less of the standardization that characterized the music of classical cinema (144).

Donnelly rightly draws attention to the changed production landscape on which composers of the post-studio era worked, although contemporary orchestral composition practices can also be seen to bear familiar elements to those of earlier eras.

For instance, both contemporary and classical scorers have been expected to work to a variety of tight time restrictions. William Darby and Jack DuBois write that:

Since music is traditionally the last element added to a film, composers generally operate against severe deadlines, so that musical “solutions” must be thought up quickly [...] such pressures were even more apparent during the heyday of the studios in Hollywood (1920-1950) with their large production schedules (xii).

Many people commenting on the business of making film music note that in recent years, time restrictions for composers have in fact been on the increase:

It is [...] rare for a composer to be on the production from the very beginning, or – given the increasingly shortened postproduction schedules – that he would have an amount of time to contribute to the project roughly comparable to the time devoted by a cinematographer or costume designer (Morgan 237).

The accounts by Darby and DuBois and Morgan suggest that restrictive sound production schedules characterise both the studio and contemporary eras. But exactly how long would it take to score a movie in each respective period? Can the composer from one era typically face more pressure than that from another?

Contemporary composer Bill Conti (Rocky John G. Avildsen 1976) refers to the recurring issue of studios running out of time and money at the final stages of post-production:

In terms of the game, I happen in post-production – scoring. Here we are in the fourth quarter. We’re the last creative element [...] By the time they get to us, the schedule’s shrunk. No one waits in this town for anything. So you do a score in one, two, three weeks. Six weeks is a long time in this town (Brouwer and Wright 470).

Robert Hershon writes of contemporary scoring more generally: “Even though soundtracks generally figure in more frames than a film’s multimillion dollar stars, they are most often composed, conducted, and recorded in three weeks or less [...]” (10).

Composer David Shire (The Conversation Francis Ford-Coppola 1974) offers a more varied picture, setting off his own experience working with Coppola against what he considers a more “typical” time span:

There's time to do it [the score] when you're working with a great director [Coppola] who's very responsive to music and its values, and so you have six months to evolve. But more assignments get handed out at the last minute, [where] you have ten days to do a score (Morgan 237).

These accounts are comparable in their variety with those of the composition schedules during the studio era. Writing on scoring practices in the 1930s, Kathryn Kalinak offers a picture almost as various as that of the contemporary era:

Scoring started after a film was in rough cut, and had to be completed in the time it took to finish a print for distribution. Typically this period would extend from four to six weeks, but a more accurate indicator of the actual time a composer was allotted is a continuum. One end represents the shortest amount of time humanly possible for the completion of a score. Max Steiner claimed that he lived without sleep for the eight days it took him to compose and conduct The Lost Patrol [John Ford] (1934). The other end represents the maximum amount of time over the roughly six-week limit that a composer could negotiate. Erich Wolfgang Korngold's contract for Warner's, for instance, allowed him longer than the usual six weeks to complete a score (75).

The accounts of Hollywood scoring - both classical and contemporary - suggest a variety of schedules in which the composer is expected to work. Both imply an average time of six weeks, but exceptional instances are also cited, from the extended contracts of Korngold (The Adventures of Robin Hood William Keighley and Michael Curtiz 1938) to Shire's ample six-month deadline. Composing time in the studio era seems marginally more restricted. The assembly-line methods of production and studio contracts under which musicians laboured, as opposed to the director/project-based assignments of the post studio era, perhaps explain why a contemporary filmmaker like Shire is more likely to be offered a longer, more collaborative role in the filmmaking process. Nonetheless, both eras essentially share similar trends and also some comparable exceptions.

Pressures on the composer's creative control encountered today also hail back to practices of the studio era. Kay Dickinson writes of postproduction from the mid 1930s: "[...] a scorer's authorial control was enormously compromised. Composers were often not the sole creators of the music, their work might be chopped up and rearranged

without their blessing” (3). This is something observed in sound practice today, and crystallised in John Corigliano’s words: “They can take your music out, they can put it in other places, they can cut it up, they can add sounds to it [...]” (Morgan 50). Of course, the classical studio’s stranglehold over the final creative product may have been tighter than that of the modern director or producer, as is suggested by Kalinak: “The hierarchy which positioned management over labour permeated every facet of a film’s production [...] In the case of the score, the music department often became the intermediary between studio and composer” (75). She adds that: “This structure of accountability affected the composer’s responsibility for the score and gave the studio more direct control over how a score should be fashioned. [...] Some studios even instituted the policy that all title music be written in the major key” (76). Because studio personnel were contracted long term, they could face unemployment if they refused to operate along studio guidelines. Therefore most composers were forced to “play safe” (Dickinson 3). In this sense, the organisation of labour and studio policy is radically different today even if many composers in Hollywood continue to have their work altered by others. Therefore, while some similar working conditions persist, the production context for composers has shifted considerably following the end of studio dominance.

It is claimed that technological developments in recent decades have allowed music a more prominent place on the soundtrack. Kalinak notes the classical convention that requires music’s subordinate position: “[...] the classical score was generated from a set of conventions which insured unobstructed narrative exposition. These included the privileging of dialogue over music [...]” (xv). Of course the dominance of dialogue was, and continues to be, logical due to the intelligible narrative medium it consists in. However, if this is combined with an increasing emphasis on sound effects (Dan Wallin in Brouwer and Wright 486; John Corigliano in Morgan 49; Hershon 10), sounds may



build up to congestion, with music being the first component to be sacrificed at the altar of clarity - or in Hershon's words - "gobbled up by a sonic immune system" (10).

However, he suggests that there are material solutions:

[...] the 'white knights' in this scenario are Dolby Surround, which can re-establish sonic elbow room, and Dolby SR noise reduction, which can expand the limited headroom of the optical format (which is *not* optimal for music), painting the music, sound effects and dialogue in a more flattering light (10).

There is no doubt that the cinema's standardisation of Dolby's stereo optical system by the mid 1980s created an opportunity for introducing finer clarity and reduced background noise, while permitting a finer balance between the components of the soundtrack. Before its introduction into cinema, Dolby Laboratories was the province of the music recording and playback industry, its first project (in the Dolby "A" system) was to remove unwanted hiss from magnetic tape. The manufacturer's later breakthrough, stereo optical, has since been revised in digital formats. Digital Theatre Sound (DTS) premiered with Tim Burton's Batman Returns in 1992 and Dolby EX Surround was showcased in 1999 by George Lucas's The Phantom Menace. Its aim is to continue the production of high-quality sound for audiences while it increases creative scope for sound workers. But what were sound technologies like during the studio era?

Dolby technology shares the aesthetic aims and associated practices of cinema sound technologies that came before it. For example, in the early 1930s, a variety of recording and mixing technologies were developed to improve the clarity and manipulability of the soundtrack. These paved the way for a more sophisticated use of sounds, the advancement of production techniques, and a more detailed division of labour.

From 1927 to the close of the decade, the majority of film sounds were recorded during shooting. This included recording music on set and additional lines being "dubbed live" off-camera. (Bordwell and Thompson 1995 124). Following this initial

production stage, mixing and rerecording seldom occurred due to the loss of quality that generally arose with creating or combining new tracks (Barry Salt 1983 279). Therefore postproduction practice was not a fully formed process and soundtracks contained fewer simultaneous sounds than those produced in the decades that followed. However, the early 1930s witnessed new technological developments that advanced the art and technique of early film sound, as Dolby stereo had done in the 1970s. Salt provides an account:

[...] the really audible advance in the quality of recording began in 1931, and it was largely due to the techniques for the suppression of noise in the soundtrack which were introduced almost simultaneously in the RCA and Western Electric [recording] systems. By 1933 it was possible to mix a separately recorded music track with the synchronous dialogue track recording *after* the editing stage without noticeable loss of sound quality from the extra sound film recording stage [...] Further developments such as RCA's "push-pull" double soundtrack mechanism [which increases the volume range of sound recording] eventually led to the possibility of rerecording and remixing soundtracks several times over without a marked loss of quality. The extensive manipulation of the soundtrack was a reality (1983 280-1).

The 1930s is the decade during which the principles of multitrack rerecording/dubbing emerged, something that of course continues development in contemporary film production (Bordwell and Thompson 1995 124). The creative possibilities of this process were furthered by other technological changes in the 1930s. One machine is described by Bordwell and Thompson:

The mixer could blend the score with other tracks with the help of Western Electric's "automatic balance regulator", which controlled the mixing balance between dialogue and music. Now the music could comment, moment by moment, upon the dramatic action without distracting from it (1995 125).

This example of technology suggests that, in addition to improving in quality and clarity, sound was increasingly assimilated into dramatic technique. Stephen Handzo notes that: "The primary purpose of mixing is usually to strike the right dramatic balance among dialogue, music, and effects and to avoid monotony" (413). These comments also reiterate the notion that sound production and the personnel

involved since the early era have always participated in creative, rather than wholly technical, procedures.

The development of mixing technology also provides an instance of an increasing division of labour in the industry throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and suggests a general correlation between technological advancement and larger work forces:

In the late 1930s, the mixing console was a larger version of the wheeled microphone mixers used on set. There were only four input channels: one for dialogue, one or two for music, one or two for sound effects, as the nature of the film dictated. The final mix required only one rerecording mixer. By the late 1940s, practice had changed so that eight sound inputs were average, with ten or twelve common. In certain reels (films are mixed in 1000 foot, 35mm reels), there might be twenty-five tracks requiring three men on a console (dialogue/music/sound effects) and numerous rehearsals (Handzo 414).

Since the 1970s sound technologies and the aesthetics of sound have increased in sophistication and intricacy, leading to the expansion of labour in the sound department. Mancini writes that: “As the technological underpinnings of film have grown increasingly complex, so too has the number of credits that roll by a movie’s end” (361). Similarly, Elisabeth Weis observes of the growing postproduction process: “With soundtracks much more dense than in the past, the present generation of moviemakers has seen an exponential growth in the number of people who work on the sound after the film has been shot” (1995 56). Ultimately, like the advancements made by Dolby Labs, a variety of technologies in Hollywood’s early sound era have helped to define the crafts, techniques and working agendas of film sound.

Of course, Hollywood’s changes and developments in sound practice are not attributable to technological production alone. The history of professional sound in Hollywood should be viewed also as a complex narrative of interacting economic, social, institutional and aesthetic forces. As Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery write:

The state of technology at any given moment in film history imposes certain limits on film production. It marks out what is possible and

feasible and thus makes more probable certain types of films and less probable or even impossible other types. Robert Altman's *Nashville* presupposes a state of sophistication in the field of sound recording and reproduction that had only been obtained by the 1960s. The difficulties of maintaining synchronous sound via the 1913 Edison Kinetophone system made it highly unlikely that it would be used to produce feature length films on a mass scale. However, the simple availability of technology does not in itself determine filmmaking practice, nor does it necessarily specify a general direction for artistic innovation. For example, lightweight, portable, 16mm filmmaking equipment was "available" to Hollywood in the 1950s and 1960s, but it did not find its way into use in Hollywood (113).

Allen and Gomery's final statement is particularly true of magnetic stereophonic film sound. Although a product of "innovation", i.e. "adopted for practical use" (114) during the 1950s, it did not achieve long-term "diffusion", or, "widespread use within the industry" (115). Allen and Gomery argue that economics instead played a decisive role. Compared with Dolby stereo optical, magnetic stereo was not as cost effective: "diffusion is directly related to the perceived profitability of the new product or process" (115). In the article "In Stereo! The Sound of Money", Michael Arick takes a similar view: "More than any other technological innovation, stereo sound has been dependent on the financial ups and downs of the film industry" (35). Overall, technological invention is just one of many processes that shape the history of Hollywood sound practice. Many other factors - economics included - also play an important part.

Accounts of individual production schedules and collaborative relationships in the studio era sound department are scarce in comparison to those in contemporary Hollywood. However, the few insights available into the roles, practices and professional identities of creators of sound during this period do provide some historical illumination. They show that, not unlike the contemporary era, these professionals did face some of the same issues and practical procedures as their contemporary counterparts. Non-musical sound professionals were embroiled in issues of identity while the working schedules and creative practices of composers were quite heavily

circumscribed by other elements on the film production chain. At the same time, the technologies during this era were geared towards the clarity and manipulability of the sound elements and their developments generally contributed towards a more detailed division of labour. One of the most important changes to take place in the history of sound practice is perhaps broader than the aforementioned issues. In spite of some inevitable diversity, the production context and practices of the studio system were to a degree more standardised than those during the contemporary era. The practices of film sound since the 1970s are fascinating in their diversity and are clearly symptomatic of Hollywood's post-studio stratification, including the studio break up and the shift to package production. In order to illustrate the diversity of contemporary sound practices - from the sound relations between the sound designer and composer to their creative purchase and professional identities - the following chapter will turn its attention to my key case studies, with particular focus on their individual production contexts.

## **Chapter Six**

### **David Lynch, George Lucas and Key Collaborators in Sound**

The working practices of sound professionals in contemporary Hollywood differ considerably from film to film. This contrasts with the more integrated and standardised production operations of the major studios during the classical era. My studies of sound design and composition both past and present have provided insights into the dynamics between sound workers, their creative and technical duties and their professional identities in the film production process, while highlighting the variety of practices that characterise Hollywood sound since the 1970s. However, these insights become more developed and articulated when considering the cases of Lucas, Burt and Williams, and Lynch, Splet and Badalamenti. These sound teams provide good illustrations of the ways in which relationships and roles in this domain have diversified in the contemporary era. Specific case studies offer key instances of the creative activities and the collaborative practices of sound professionals. Essentially, they reveal that the working processes involved in soundtrack production can vary according to a wide array of factors. A good starting point for this investigation is an examination of the professional history of each figure.

#### **The Directors**

David Lynch and George Lucas form an interesting comparative study for two reasons. Firstly, they have in common a patent interest in sound. Secondly, they differ considerably in their individual approaches to sound production. Together they exemplify Hollywood's diverse sound practices, particularly in their distinctive ways of working with long-term sound designers and musicians. However, Lynch remains a slightly more marginal case. His mode of production practice bears little relation to any trends accounted for by critics and practitioners of contemporary Hollywood. He

therefore goes some way in emblematising the range and diversity of sound aesthetics and practices possible.

Both Lucas and Lynch began their careers during the 1970s and yet - in aesthetic, educational, technological, industrial and institutional terms - it is not easy to identify common ground between the two. Of course, contemporary Hollywood is a complex landscape with differing layers of production, each inhabited by various directorial identities. Thomas Schatz (1993) writes that:

[...] we might see the New Hollywood as producing three different classes of movie: the calculated blockbuster designed with the multimedia marketplace and franchise status in mind, the mainstream A-class star vehicle with sleeper-hit potential, and the low-cost independent feature targeted for a specific market and with little chance of anything more than “cult film” status. These three classes of movie have corresponding ranks of auteurs, from the superstar directors at the “high end” like Spielberg and Lucas, whose knack for engineering hits has transformed their names into virtual trademarks, to those filmmakers on the margins like Gus Van Sant, John Sayles, and the Coen Brothers, whose creative control and personal style are considerably less constrained by commercial imperatives. And then there are the established genre auteurs like Jonathan Demme, Martin Scorsese, David Lynch and Woody Allen who, like Ford and Hitchcock and the other top studio directors of old, are the most perplexing and intriguing cases—each of them part visionary cineaste and part commercial hack [...] (35).

Schatz suggests that Lucas and Lynch belong to highly distinct strata of Hollywood. A closer examination of their institutional and professional differences, and how they have developed since their careers began, can provide a more developed picture, thereby illuminating their different production practices.

The career of Lucas undoubtedly articulates some of the most prominent changes of post-studio era Hollywood. He is of course one of the central figures of the New Hollywood (Hillier 1992; Schatz 1993; Tasker 1996; Neale 2006), best associated with the movie brats. As already noted, this period of filmmaking was viewed as symbolising important changes in film style and production practice. As Tasker notes:

[...] with the rapid expansion of independent and exploitation production, and the success of relatively young film-makers within Hollywood – notably Coppola, DePalma, Lucas, Spielberg – there emerges an

exuberant rhetoric around areas of independence, youth and innovation (218).

For these filmmakers, partial autonomy from the studios was combined with a sense of unique artistic identity. This was of course a key contributor to what some might view as an auteurist “golden age” for modern cinema. Peter Biskind writes that:

This was to be a directors’ decade if there ever was one. Directors as a group enjoyed more power, prestige, and wealth than they ever had before. New Hollywood directors [...] were unembarrassed – in many cases rightly so – to assume the mantle of the artist, nor did they shrink from developing personal styles that distinguished their work from other directors (15).

One of the most remarkable aspects of the movie brats and New Hollywood was that they came to symbolise some of the most divergent styles, production practices and marketing strategies happening at any one time in Hollywood’s history. As David A. Cook notes: “That an aesthetically experimental, socially conscious cinema d’auteur could exist simultaneously with a burgeoning and rapacious blockbuster mentality was extraordinary, but it became the defining mark of 1970s cinema” (2002 xvii). Films like Lucas’s THX-1138, Coppola’s The Godfather (1972), Martin Scorsese’s Taxi Driver (1976) and Michael Cimino’s The Deer Hunter (1978) represented a cinema that combined a classically inflected art style and left-leaning politics. These are of course contrasted with the visceral, technically innovative and wide-appealing megapictures of Steven Spielberg (Jaws 1975) and Lucas (Star Wars 1977), the two giant box office successes that would eventually redefine how movies looked and sounded, how they were made, and how they were marketed. Star Wars would not only prove paradigmatic of the modern megapicture; its franchise status would come to define Lucas’s own filmmaking career completely. For instance, in thirty years, Lucas has directed just three films by himself, all sequels to Star Wars (The Phantom Menace 1999, Attack of the Clones 2002 and Revenge of the Sith 2005). In addition, the popularity of Star Wars sparked a long association between Lucas and his production outlet Lucasfilm and



sound technology manufacturer Dolby Labs. Digital surround system Dolby EX was the product of direct collaboration between the two companies. From this synergistic manoeuvre, the latest Star Wars trilogy and the new technology become promotional vehicles for one another.

The 1970s was also decade of vibrant production outside of Hollywood. As Schatz notes: “the critical mass of cinephiles and art cinema theatres was sufficient to sustain a vigorous alternative cinema” (1993 21). A number of noteworthy examples of work beyond Hollywood’s mode of production and classical narrative style included, among others, the “camp” exploits of John Waters (Pink Flamingos 1972) or the violent art-horror of Abel Ferrara (The Driller Killer 1979). During this time Lynch was closely allying himself with early European art cinema, with dream-like, fragmentary films The Alphabet (1968) and The Grandmother (1970) drawing on the surrealist styles of Luis Bunuel (Un Chien Andalou 1928) and John Cocteau (Le Sang d’un Poete 1930). In 1976 - within a year prior to the release of Star Wars - Lynch completed Eraserhead, his debut feature. Independently financed, produced and distributed, the film set him far apart from the skyrocketing fame and fortune of Lucas. Of course the low-tech, \$10,000 film did not bring wealth to Lynch overnight. According to David Hughes exact return figures are not known, although profits have slowly accumulated over the years (30). However Eraserhead was important because it established Lynch’s early reputation as one of America’s “independent-spirited auteurs” (Geoff Andrew 7). Paul Woods remarks on the success of Eraserhead: “[...] there was a gradual wave of recognition that [Eraserhead] was the most remarkable independent film of the 1970s; it was becoming a huge cult among the more cerebral sections of non-conformist youth” (40).

According to these accounts of the American cinema in the late 1970s, Lynch and Lucas could be viewed as belonging to contrasting veins of American film production: the art film and the blockbuster. However, a full account of the directors’

career histories reveals a more complex picture whereby their work also shows a degree of overlap.

As with the majority of the movie brats, Lucas's education was geared towards a career in filmmaking (Michael Pye and Linda Myles 1979; Dale Pollock 1983). Enrolling at the University of Southern California (USC) film school, he quickly garnered acclaim as a student filmmaker, winning an award at the National Student Film Festival for the short film THX-1138: 4EB (Electronic Labyrinth) (1967). This became a full-length feature as THX-1138 in 1971. In 1967 Lucas was invited to observe the production of Coppola's Finian's Rainbow (1968), and would later become the filmmaker's protégé. Together they set up Coppola's company American Zoetrope, which - hand in hand with Lucas's own Lucasfilm Ltd - released American Graffiti (1973). This nostalgic youth movie proved popular and achieved five Academy Award nominations. Two years later, having been granted the support of Twentieth Century Fox, the lengthy planning and production process for Star Wars began. During these stages, Lucas established two more companies. Industrial Light and Magic provided the film's visual effects while Skywalker Sound oversaw the mixing and editing of the soundtrack. The success of the independently produced/studio financed and distributed venture transformed Lucas into the entrepreneurial "star-director" he is known as today (Schatz 1993 20).

Lynch's career provides a more unusual case. Instead of starting out as an aspiring filmmaker, he set out to work in the fine arts. His education began at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington D.C., followed by the Boston Museum School of Fine Arts, and the Pennsylvania academy of Fine Arts (Woods 9-10). It was here that he first became interested in animating and adding audio to his canvas. As he recalls:

I was just a painter, and I was happy painting. And then I was working on a painting and it was a figure in a garden. It was pretty much all black and this figure was emerging out of darkness. And there was some little bit of green, you know, coming out. I heard a wind and I saw the figure

move. And I thought that I wanted to have some movement, some sound in the painting (“Action and Reaction” 49).

Lynch’s earliest film project Six Figures Getting Sick (1967) was completed soon after, which was followed by The Alphabet (1968), The Grandmother (1970) and The Amputee (1974). All four films were shorts, and partially relied on animated sequences or makeshift special effects, combined with a distinct absence of traditional narrative structure. Lynch used arts grants and private income as sources of funding for the films. The more ambitious feature-length Eraserhead (1977) was no exception (Woods 22). Although the film was far from a commercial exercise, it proved to be a turning point, leading to work on the major studio-supported feature The Elephant Man, released by Paramount in 1980. Up to the present, Lynch’s career has encompassed a range of projects of varying styles and production practices. In 1984 he made the \$52 million budget science fiction Dune, which was released by Universal (Hughes 68). Interestingly, prior to Dune Lynch declined offers to direct the 1983 Star Wars sequel Return of the Jedi. Lynch has also directed an array of different projects, from dark, semi-commercial fairytales Blue Velvet (1986) and Wild at Heart (1990) to surreal non-linear plot mysteries Lost Highway (1997) and Mulholland Dr. (2001), to broadly-appealing traditional narrative films like The Straight Story (1999), back to the independent art leanings of Inland Empire (2006). Ultimately, the aesthetic and industrial diversity of his work is key to understanding his distinct approach to filmmaking, and more specifically, sound.

These brief career backgrounds reveal that Lynch and Lucas have both worked at the margins, and at the centre, of Hollywood’s range, but they are currently regarded in two different directorial categories: the “cult” auteur and the blockbuster star-director. For his projects, Lucas has consistently sought the support of a major studio like Twentieth Century Fox for distribution. His large budget, sensational productions and smash-hit films align him with “celebrity” (Timothy Corrigan 2003 99), and

“replac[e] the director-as-author with a director-as-superstar ethos” (Schatz 1993 20).

Lynch has settled into a mode of production that is at once partially commercial yet alternative to the mainstream. “I’m not really a “hot” director”, he claims. “I have faith that I can make the pictures I want to make and have them near the main centre but still be different in ways that are important to me” (John O’Mahoney [Guardian.co.uk](http://Guardian.co.uk)).

While he has worked with various major studios since the 1980s, his initial “cult success” (King 2002 99) in the independent sector has remained a part of his identity and has informed his aesthetic and production practices ever since.

The differing working histories and reputations of Lynch and Lucas can certainly shed some light on how they work with sound, and in particular, how they collaborate with others on the soundtrack. With collaboration in mind, it is worth examining the careers of the sound designers and composers with which the directors have worked.

### **The Sound Designers**

Ben Burtt and (the late) Alan Splet are well known for their long-term collaborations with Lucas and Lynch respectively. Compared with the relatively high-profile figures of the director and composer in Hollywood, the sound practitioner’s biography can be difficult to locate. One may easily name who directed a movie, but is less likely to identify the person who created its sound effects, which is a clear result of the director-auteurist perspective that continues to dominate discourses on film authorship.

Likewise, directors and numerous composers can be associated with celebrity, but it is not usual to discuss soundmen in terms of star status. However, the small body of literature that chronicles the careers of Ben Burtt and Alan Splet can usefully illuminate their practices, revealing the kinds of productions they worked on and the people they

collaborated with, and their professional roles and typical working patterns within a project.

Burt and Splet began working with film sound in the 1970s. As contemporaries they engaged in the same business of producing innovative - and ultimately Oscar-winning - soundtracks in an era when changes in the aesthetics, professional practices and technologies of film sound were on Hollywood's horizon. They have also come to be known as two of the leading sound practitioners of their time. However, like Lucas and Lynch, they are associated with different levels of production: one working almost consistently in the Hollywood mainstream and the other demonstrating a combination of independent and mainstream tendencies. Burt's career has been dominated by work on big-budget blockbusters, while Splet has worked with the majors in Dead Poet's Society (Peter Weir 1989) and Rising Sun (Philip Kaufman 1993) and on smaller projects like J-Men Forever (Richard Patterson 1979) and By the Sword (Jeremy Kagan 1991). While the backgrounds of Splet and Burt differ in major respects, their practices are not diametrically opposed. Comparisons between their respective roles as soundmen can yield notable parallels.

Although Ben Burt has a relatively high-profile career in Hollywood sound design, his name is certainly not as familiar as Lucas or Williams. Nevertheless, his innovative work on large projects with Spielberg and Lucas, best known in the Star Wars and Indiana Jones franchises, means that he has garnered sufficient critical and journalistic attention to provide some insights into his career and working practices. Graduating with a degree in physics from the USC, Ben Burt was not at first intent on a career in film sound production. However, filmmaking had been an interest since childhood, and during college - like his future collaborator Lucas - he won a national student film festival for his project Yankee Squadron (Vincent LoBrutto 138). A further accolade arrived in the form of a scholarship from McGraw-Hill. This enabled him to

embark on postgraduate training at the USC film school, in the same department attended by Lucas and Walter Murch. Burttt began his time at the university with the intention of graduating as a director, but he later turned his attention to sound.

By the mid 1970s, Burttt's relative youth and film school education would allow him to gain a significant foothold in an industry that was changing. "Most of the sound people in Hollywood were an older generation", he recalls. "There was a gap waiting to be filled by younger people" (LoBrutto 139). Burttt's comments signify the demographic adjustments within the New Hollywood in the favour of the movie brat generation, something that has also been acknowledged by critics Pye and Myles (1979), Hillier (1992), and Peter Krämer (1998). The movie brats' close working alliances and cinematic knowledge would eventually allow them to become formidable inheritors of the major motion picture industry. As Peter Krämer points out:

They had become thoroughly familiar with Hollywood's history through television broadcasts of old movies, had learnt about European film movements in art-houses, and had had the opportunity (which many of them took) to learn their profession at film school and gain practical experience [...] often giving support to, and working with each other (303).

As is known, this generation combined their collaborative, cinephile perspective with an experimental approach to filmmaking technologies and industrial practices. This would of course bring some change to the ways in which sound was practiced within Hollywood, as is demonstrated by Burttt, Murch and Randy Thom's innovative and closely cooperative work within their respective films.

On many levels, the enduring symbol of the impact of the movie brats was of course Star Wars. This was Burttt's first major project, and would define his career and working practices to date. Burttt's special effects work on Star Wars - which both exploited, and was exploited by Dolby's stereo optical capabilities - earned him a place among Hollywood's most renowned sound practitioners. His status in the industry was cemented by the Special Academy Award he received in 1977. This led to further

collaborations on the major films of Lucas and Spielberg and ensured a career in high-budget, high-profile movies ever since, with recent projects including Spielberg's Munich (2005) and Lucas's Revenge of the Sith (2005).

In particular, Star Wars was symptomatic of the context in which key filmmakers from the mid 1970s had considerable creative and experimental purchase compared with many studio personnel of earlier eras. It also created the conditions for Burt's ample working time and creative freedom. Stating that "I was in a rare situation to get the creative responsibilities that I had [...] I've been privileged to have more opportunities for time than probably any other person that does the work I do" (LoBrutto 148), Burt provides insights into his *modus operandi* and more specifically his work with Lucas.

While the career of Burt followed a largely consistent path of major blockbuster production, Alan Splet's résumé was moderately scattered with independent, low-budget, low-tech projects. Many of his earliest productions with Lynch in the 1970s are indicative of a tendency to work closer to the independent sector than other reputable sound contemporaries like Burt. In addition, Splet never attended film school, nor did he work within a film "movement" such as the movie brats. Nevertheless, it would appear that some characteristics of his reputation and professional responsibilities resemble those of Burt.

Splet began work as a soundman relatively late on in his career, and received no formal training in the craft, unlike Murch, Burt or Thom. An accountant for the first eight years of his working life, he eventually found employment at the film company Calvin Productions in Philadelphia (Rick Gentry 62). Splet's first collaboration with Lynch came 18 months later on the low-budget film The Grandmother (1970). Lynch was a film student seeking original sound effects for a relatively experimental non-dialogue short. As Splet recounted to Gentry in 1984, both he and Lynch worked

painstakingly on the sounds for the film, creating effects from noises made by household items including pencil sharpeners, plungers and heat piping, rather than using state-of-the-art technologies. Gentry summarises their creative partnership:

They were artistic “primitives”, in the sense that their lack of sophistication led to discoveries that were new and unconventional. The world of sound began with what the ears heard and the mind could imagine, not what standard professional technology implicitly circumscribed and dictated it should be (63).

This account is striking in its contrast to Burt’s work on the big-budget Dolby stereo soundtrack for Star Wars just five years later. However, when offered the means and the money in subsequent years, Splet remained reluctant to engage with the stereo optical format. For Dune he recorded sounds using 70-millimetre magnetic tape, declaring that any prints in optical would sound like a “pale facsimile” (Gentry 70). Generally he continued to eschew technological wizardry long after his low-budget production years: “you don’t need a big budget or thousands of dollars worth of equipment. Sometimes that stuff just gets in the way” (Gentry 72). Interestingly, it appears that both Splet and Burt would be able to achieve comparable repute for their innovations in sound, while participating in radically different modes of technological and creative production.

After completing The Grandmother, Splet began work at the American Film Institute as the director of sound. Numerous film projects followed, including Lynch’s feature Eraserhead. By the end of the 1970s Splet was working with bigger budgets and major features including Carroll Ballard’s The Black Stallion (1979), which was followed by Never Cry Wolf (1983) and Lynch’s larger studio projects The Elephant Man (1980) and Dune (1984). Referring to the latter, Gentry outlines Splet’s working role:

Sound personnel on most productions are quite compartmentalized. There are sound designers, for example, who conjure up sound effects. There are also sound editors. Then there are rerecording mixers and engineers. Splet, no doubt because of his comprehensive concern for the most detailed application of his effects, plus his origins as an all-purpose audio man at a small industrial film company, maintains an influence if



not direct bearing on each of the above mentioned areas. He finds and makes effects, edits them to picture, and often mixes them as well (64).

This account is comparable with Burt's job description, which he traces back to his work on Star Wars. As he points out:

I called myself a sound designer because I wasn't really functioning as a production recordist, or sound editor, or just a sound mixer. I did some of the jobs that all three of those people might do [...] Usually they're pretty strictly categorized [...] one sound recordist may not do any sound editing. The sound editor may not do any sound mixing. That's the traditional division of labour in feature films. But since I was an exception to that traditional division of labour I needed to describe myself in some new terms (Sven E. Carlsson Filmsound.org).

Burt and Splet embody roughly the same professional responsibilities despite their two disparate working contexts. Burt's sound design role was developed in conjunction with a large-budget major Hollywood feature. Splet's similar creative responsibilities are attributed to his background as a jobbing sound person at a small industrial production company rather than work in major films.

Splet's multifaceted job in creating, editing and mixing sounds suggests that his role entailed significant creative control and a range of sound skills. His sound design work is also supplemented by accounts of long working schedules. For instance, he planned sounds in the preproduction stages or was allotted long postproduction schedules for the films Eraserhead, The Elephant Man and Dune (Gentry 63). Once again, his practices are comparable to those of Burt's "privileged" sound design role.

The parallels between Splet and Burt are striking, each existing within different production contexts. This suggests that while the industrial, institutional and technological conditions shape the role of the sound designer, other factors also play a part, such as individual working choices and relationships with other personnel. Indeed, the respective working modes of these key sound designers can be examined further in light of their collaborations with Lynch and Lucas. The relationships between these

craftspeople in turn provide illustrative cases of the diverse practices of the Hollywood soundtrack and its complex array of influential factors.

Understanding the composition work of Angelo Badalamenti and John Williams is also essential to a holistic discussion of the soundtrack and the practices behind its creation. Their work with Lynch, Lucas, Splet and Burt is best examined in terms of their unique contexts.

### **The Composers**

The careers of John Williams and Angelo Badalamenti have marked differences. Williams has largely worked with large-scale productions in Hollywood, while Badalamenti has worked in several different production contexts. This is likely to have informed their various approaches to collaboration and creative work to the present day.

John Williams is among the best known film composers in contemporary Hollywood. He has won five Academy Awards for the films Fiddler on the Roof (Norman Jewinson 1971), Jaws, Star Wars, ET: The Extra Terrestrial and Schindler's List (Spielberg 1993), and has scored a half of the top ten grossing features of all time, including Star Wars, ET, Jurassic Park, The Phantom Menace and Harry Potter and the Sorcerers' Stone (Chris Columbus 2001) (Annette Davison 2004b 54). In addition to his successful and high profile career, perhaps his most striking characteristic is a uniquely studio-era style approach to production practice and aesthetics (William Darby and Jack DuBois 1991; Kathryn Kalinak 1992). This can be partly attributed to the training he received in his craft.

During his studies at UCLA and the Los Angeles City College, Williams received schooling in orchestration under Robert van Eps, a musical associate at major studio MGM (IMDB). In 1956 and at the age of 24, he found work as an arranger at Columbia and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox studios, and orchestrated for Hollywood's "golden era"

composers including Alfred Newman, Dimitri Tiomkin and Franz Waxman. The late 1950s was a decade in which these composers were working under significantly different conditions compared with those of years past. Darby and DuBois write that:

While the decline of the major studios was a gradual process, the working continuities of Hollywood in its heyday were not to return. This alteration essentially meant that every film was a project in which the technical and supporting personnel had to be engaged all over again. As a result, the production line methods of earlier days when Max Steiner [...] might score upwards of ten features in a year could not be duplicated (486).

In spite of these major shifts in industry and mode of production, Williams inherited and would indeed maintain some of the scoring practices characteristic of the studio era.

In addition to orchestrating for Hollywood's notable studio era composers, Williams worked as a pianist for television shows such as Peter Gunn (1958), later composing music for the programmes Gilligan's Island (1964) Lost in Space (1965), and Land of the Giants (1968). Darby and DuBois believe that this work impacted on his later career: "The various kinds of work Williams did in the late 1950s and early 1960s, particularly in the television assignments which he described as "real factory-line work", made him adept enough to be a film composer" (522). It would appear that his early work influences a mode of practice that Williams would later adhere to when scoring for major features.

Williams's first notable feature was William Wyler's How to Steal a Million (1966), which served as a platform for major picture composition. Five years later he won his first Academy Award for arranging the music for Fiddler on the Roof (1971). Throughout the 1970s Williams provided the scores for prominent disaster films including The Poseidon Adventure (Irwin Allen 1972), Earthquake (Mark Robson 1974) and The Towering Inferno (Irwin Allen and John Guillermin 1974). By then, he had caught the attention of Steven Spielberg, and on being enlisted to score the filmmaker's debut feature The Sugarland Express (1974), he struck up a long-term

partnership with the director. The following year, Williams scored Jaws, thus establishing himself as a model composer for the big budget blockbuster. His work has been heard in every major Spielberg blockbuster spanning over forty years, including ET, the Indiana Jones trilogy, Jurassic Park (1993), and - in a reprise of the kind of Disaster movie on which he scored in the 1970s - War of the Worlds (2005).

Following a period of decline in symphonic scoring in favour of jazz or pre-recorded pop song soundtracks (Kalinak 1992), the 1970s and 1980s saw a number of films, especially those directed by Lucas and Spielberg, return to traditional compositional styles. Darby and DuBois write that: “The resurgence of the full-blown orchestral score was aided by the increasing number of science-fiction spectacles. John Williams, Jerry Goldsmith, Henry Mancini, and many newer composers were all busily at work in this vein” (546). Williams’s work on Star Wars (as well as his long-term partnership with Lucas, which involves work on all five sequels to date) was initiated by Spielberg who had recommended the composer to Lucas. Much like Jaws that came before it, Star Wars was carried by rich symphonic music peppered with *leitmotifs*; recurring signature-like melodic phrases which symbolise a key aspect of a movie, such as a character, event or place. These features hark back to the late Romantic styles first adopted in film composition of the “golden age”. As Kalinak notes, “Through Williams’s example, the epic sound established in the thirties once again became a viable choice for composers in Hollywood” (188).

Williams’s traditionalist style was also matched by similarly traditionalist production practices. Perhaps most striking is the composer’s tendency to work with very restricted scoring schedules, and his employment of an elaborate team of musicians and orchestrators:

As an established film composer Williams epitomizes a practice which closely resembles that of Steiner and Korngold in the heyday of the studio system. Like most of the major film composers of that era, Williams works to an extremely constricted time frame (for *The Empire*

*Strikes Back* [Irvin Kershner 1980], Williams had less than eight weeks, from the initial spotting sessions in early November to the recording sessions in late December and early January); he depends upon an orchestrator or, more likely, orchestrators to produce a finished version; his major musical resource is the symphony orchestra (on the *Star Wars* trilogy none other than the London Symphony; and he conducts the scores himself) (Kalinak 190).

Kalinak's account signifies a traditional mode of production that Williams would appear to be at home with. His experience in the television industry, with its factory-like production regime, and his training alongside the musicians of Hollywood's "golden era" may well explain his working tendencies.

Since Jaws, Williams has worked largely with the major Hollywood companies, and is best recognised for his work on films directed by Spielberg and Lucas. He has garnered significant critical interest for the classical scoring approach that he embraces (Darby and DuBois 1990; Kalinak 1995; Davison 2004b). Davison positions Williams's classical methods in the context of blockbuster production in the 1970s, connecting his large expensive orchestras, grandiose musical themes and close sound-narrative relations to the big budgets, high production values and classical storytelling methods typical of the blockbuster (2-4). Ultimately Williams's composing career embraces a past era of major Hollywood studio production at the same time as it defines the composing style for the contemporary blockbuster.

Badalamenti's career is less easy to characterise than Williams's. His work is not represented by a consistent style or identifiable working practice, which is partially due to his work across a variety of productions. He has scored for a number of big-budget and major studio releases, from The Beach (Danny Boyle 1999) to The Wicker Man (Neil LaBute 2006), and has collaborated with many high-profile directors, including Paul Schrader (The Comfort of Strangers 1991; Auto Focus 2002) and Jane Campion (Holy Smoke 1999). He has also composed for more modest projects, from Secretary (Steven Shainberg 2002) to Fahrenheit (David Cage 2005), and is known for

his frequent collaborations with European filmmakers, including cult director Rudolph B. (Indoor Fireworks 2003) and Jean-Pierre Jeunet (The City of Lost Children 1995). Like his collaborators Lynch and Splet, Badalamenti's corpus encompasses many different production contexts. Accounts of Badalamenti's career so far have tended to focus on his collaborations with Lynch (Daniel Schweiger 2005; Bryan Reesman 2006), often citing the cult thriller Blue Velvet as the composer's career-defining film.

It is in films like Blue Velvet - with its combination of jazz, modern classical and synthesized pop ballads - that Badalamenti has demonstrated an interest in working outside of Hollywood's older traditions of symphonic scoring. Embracing a variety of musical genres and orchestrations, Badalamenti's other notable scores include the keyboard accompaniment to A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: The Dream Warriors (Chuck Russell 1987), the rock and hip-hop numbers in Lynch's Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me (1992) and the slick jazz signatures of Auto Focus (2002). Whereas Williams exploits the classical scoring style, Badalamenti employs the stylistic permutations of the film score of the post-studio era. During the 1950s, Hollywood soundtracks saw a marked increase in the use of jazz music (A Streetcar Named Desire Elia Kazan 1951). This was followed by the popular use of guitar pop and rock numbers in the 1960s (The Graduate Mike Nichols 1967), and finally, the synth-generated scores that began usage in the 1970s (Midnight Express Alan Parker 1978) (Kalinak 1992). More specifically, Badalamenti's background in jazz has clearly influenced his scoring choices, whether or not his style is circumscribed by other demands of the film: "Jazz was part of my life, but composers for film really have to do everything" (Reesman Mixonline.com). Badalamenti has himself suggested that his work on Blue Velvet marked the start of his work with electronic, synth-based compositions, some of which have been likened to rock artists Brian Eno or Tangerine Dream (Murray Smith 2003; Reesman

[Mixonline.com](#)). This also illustrates the film's specific impact on Badalamenti's working history.

Like Lynch, Badalamenti has a considerable degree of background education to his craft but did not pave the way to his work with films. He attended the Eastman School of Music and then the Manhattan School of Music where he gained a Masters degree, which was followed by work as a music teacher (Reesman [Mixonline.com](#)). His first film assignment came with a small production company Palomar Pictures when Czech director Ivan Passer employed the composer to work on Law and Disorder (1974). Ultimately this led to the feature Gordon's War (Ossie Davis 1973), thus establishing his scoring career in Hollywood. In 1985 Badalamenti was hired to coach Isabella Rossellini's vocals for the theme of Blue Velvet. His work impressed Lynch, and he was later recruited to score the entire film (Schweiger [Lynchnet.com](#)). Since Blue Velvet, Badalamenti has worked with Lynch on every one of the director's projects in and out of film, with the exception of Inland Empire in 2006. He has likened his collaborative relationship with Lynch to that of marriage or brotherhood. As he maintains:

We like and respect each other as people and creative partners. It's great to work with a successful director over a long period of time because you know, by just a look or a word, where you are going with the work. I have loved working on every one of David's projects (Olia Sileo 39).

It is because of his collaborative work with Lynch - among a variety of other background factors - that Badalamenti represents a production practice that is radically different from that of Williams. The most notable of Badalamenti's practices is his insistence that he establishes early communication with the director of the projects he scores. As Reesman notes

[...] at the heart of his work lies one driving motivation: a passion for improvisation. He does not like to just sit and watch a film and score to a picture; instead he likes to speak with directors about what their stories and characters mean to them. He often sits down with directors before they shoot their movies ([Mixonline.com](#)).

Communication is also important to Badalamenti during postproduction. While working on Holy Smoke with Jane Campion, he asked that a synthesiser would be ready for use at the film's editing facility. He would then be able to compose to the freshly shot images, with Campion offering some verbal direction (Reesman Mixonline.com). He claims that: "It started with David Lynch, composing before movies are shot. He would simply talk to me about his next project verbally and describe what he was thinking about and the characters" (Reesman Mixonline.com).

Whether working with or without Lynch, Badalamenti has constantly maintained a partial relationship with the major American film industry. This is hardly surprising, given post-studio Hollywood's project-by-project output, meaning that film industry employees work on a largely freelance basis. However, he works at a greater distance from traditional studio style practices than Williams, and this distinction is key to accounting for the range of composing methods on the Hollywood soundtrack today.

The career trajectories of Badalamenti and Williams, and those of Lynch, Lucas, Splet and Burt, are all unique. The backgrounds of these key figures have shaped their individual approaches and attitudes towards sound production. However, these approaches and attitudes intersect to forge two very dissimilar collective sound relations for the two sound teams.

The various sound relations between Lynch, Splet and Badalamenti, and Lucas, Burt and Williams may be understood as belonging to three dynamic classes: "collaboration", "cooperation", and "command". In its specific sense (as opposed to the broader application used up to this point), collaboration implies work on the soundtrack involving personnel across different crafts, with each person exercising a "hands-on" approach. This can often mean the application of multiple skills, for example, a director who co-scores his/her own films. Essentially, equal creative input is key to collaboration. Cooperation refers to a working process during which ideas are shared



and close communication is tantamount, but does not necessarily entail shared hands-on contributions from all concerned. Finally, command characterises a relationship in which there may be some creative input from involved parties, but one that includes a leading figure (often the director) “calling the shots”, and thus wielding the greatest artistic control. In the following chapter I will examine these three different classes of relationships and how they occur in the working contexts of the sound teams.

Ultimately, this approach draws us closer to understanding sound practices and their variety in contemporary Hollywood.

## Chapter Seven

### Sound Relations: Studies of Production Practice in Contemporary Hollywood

The “sound teams” of David Lynch, Alan Splet and Angelo Badalamenti, and George Lucas, Ben Burtt and John Williams represent two very different approaches to sound production. As this chapter reveals, the career trajectories of each figure have had a significant bearing on their current collective working contexts, especially their sound relations, which range from collaboration to cooperation to command. Lynch, Splet and Badalamenti have a tendency towards the collaborative end of the spectrum, while Lucas, Burtt and Williams practice cooperation and command. These sound teams represent just how diverse sound work has become in the contemporary era.

#### “I Really Think of Myself as a Soundman”: Lynch, Splet and Badalamenti

David Lynch’s career has involved unusually close collaborations with sound personnel, involving much hands-on involvement with the craft itself. Since The Grandmother (1970), Lynch has collaborated with Splet on the sound effects and design of the films directed by himself until Blue Velvet (1986). By Blue Velvet, Lynch had forged a collaborative relationship with composer Angelo Badalamenti, applying skills in sound design and music. As the following account reveals, Lynch demonstrates an ability to involve himself in various crafts while working closely with others in the sound profession.

Since playing a siren over the vomiting plaster-cast faces of Six Figures Getting Sick (1967), Lynch has demonstrated a distinct fascination with sound effects and design. While many contemporary filmmakers are known for their sensitivity to sound - from Robert Altman, Alan Pakula (Klute 1971) (Vincent LoBrutto 51) to the Coen Brothers (Elisabeth Weis 1995 61) - few, if any, can boast anything similar to the numerous sound credits that Lynch has to his name. He has also paid particular attention

to key sound personnel involved on his productions, his collaboration with Splet proving emblematic. Lynch has suggested that patience, experimentation and like-minded communication were integral to his relationship with Splet, regardless of the practices of his contemporaries:

Directors very rarely meet and talk with other directors. You just don't know what other people do. I know there's a dialogue between the director and the sound designer. There has to be. But how much of a dialogue and how much do you go into that with them? [...] So, it seems to me that the whole thing is to get people on the same track and just keep going and going so that everything that comes through is fitting into this world. Al [Splet] and I had this great way of working together. There are no rules (Chris Rodley 47).

This partnership frequently involved Lynch as co-soundman. This is a departure from the typical role of a director, who traditionally commands or supervises the creative activities of the sound department. As Bruce Stambler says, "The director in my viewpoint has a little bit less of an input. They have more of an overview" (Gianluca Sergi 2004 125). Lynch recounts this exceptional division of labour as it occurred during the production of Eraserhead: "Alan Splet and I worked together in a little garage studio, with a big console and two or three tape recorders, and worked with a couple of different sound libraries for organic effects" (David Hughes 23).

Lynch's approach to sound design derives from his personal evaluation of sound as "[...] 50 per cent of a film, at least" ("Action and Reaction" 52). In addition, his background in both the fine arts and low-budget filmmaking had a clear influence on his application of sound skills. Having already discovered an interest in sound through his painting ("Action and Reaction" 49), Lynch's first true experiment with audiovisual media was the aforementioned Six Figures Getting Sick, which combined sculpture, animation, film and sound effects. As this was a student art project with a budget of just \$200, he produced the siren soundtrack himself (Hughes 6). The Alphabet (1968) was Lynch's next film project, which was produced under a marginally higher budget and a small crew that included an uncredited sound mixer and editor. Nonetheless, Lynch

wrote the film's title song recorded the sound effects. Some of the resulting "wind" sounds are a clear precursor to the ambient rushing that has become a staple of many films directed and sound designed by Lynch, from Eraserhead (1977) to Inland Empire (2006). The soundtrack for The Grandmother was clearly more complex and challenging than those of its predecessors. It involved foley artistry and many other synchronised sounds, and so Lynch sought assistance from Splet in creating the effects (Rick Gentry 62). Lynch's help from Splet and Calvin Productions was instrumental in refining his sound design abilities (Rodley 41). Essentially his experience in many sound skills up to that point was strongly indicative that he would continue with a hands-on approach.

Splet and Lynch dedicated substantial time to the sound of The Grandmother. This set a trend for their working schedules thereafter. Splet recalls: "We worked on The Grandmother for eight weeks solid. Even Sundays, 12 hours a day, building this track out of nothing" (Gentry 62). Eraserhead demanded similar treatment for its soundtrack. Hughes writes that:

Finding just the right sound took many months, and it was only when Lynch decided that the film might have a chance of selection at the 1976 Cannes Film Festival that he and Splet began working around the clock, spending some six weeks on sound editing, before the music and dialogue were added in the final sound mix (24).

As wholly independent productions, it may be noted that films like The Grandmother and Eraserhead are not as closely associated with the tight schedules and restricted postproduction sound budgets relatively common to the riskier "A" pictures today (Sonnenschein 215; Todd Coleman S-4; Hrudicka 63). However, this observation does not imply a simple opposition between independent and mainstream production. Despite the differences in their industrial, financial and technological conditions, the sound work of Lynch and Splet shared some similarities with that of more prominent sound teams Hollywood of the 1970s. The potentially longer sound schedules and the

increasingly “sound-sensitive” (Weis 1995 61) filmmaker was becoming more common in Hollywood during this decade. This was exemplified by the work of directors George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Francis Ford Coppola et al. and sound designers Ben Burt, Walter Murch and Randy Thom. Essentially this decade saw the craft of film sound enjoy heightened attention among numerous filmmakers, both in major and low-budget independent productions.

For Lynch and Splet, the epic science fiction Dune (1984) was an opportunity to produce in a major production context. Sound would remain an important and integral part of their production plans, although the professional roles of, and relations between, Lynch and Splet were different compared with their roles and relations in The Grandmother and Eraserhead. Dune remains Lynch’s largest and highest budget project to date. In terms of its division of labour, the film represented a first in Lynch’s career in the sense that he did not apply any hands-on sound work. Therefore his relationship with Splet could be characterised as collaborative. Indeed Dune was just one of only three films, alongside Blue Velvet and Wild at Heart, that Lynch directed but did not design the sound, and the only feature in which he did not contribute to the soundtrack in any way. Splet suggested that the film’s regimented organisation of labour was due to the practical necessities of working on a big picture rather than his own personal volition: “On The Elephant Man and Eraserhead we worked a little closer than we did on Dune, actually. We were much more separated, because David had so many responsibilities with optical effects and so on” (Gentry 63). Thus in this period of major, big-budget movie production - which would involve a larger financial risk, more personnel, more crafts and thus a more compartmentalised approach to working than on previous projects - Lynch was unable to collaborate on the sound. His sole task was to direct.

It is clear that the industrial conditions of a feature like Dune impacted on the sound relations between Lynch and Splet. However, despite his inability to work directly on the sound design, Lynch's prioritisation of sound found expression in the schedule he allotted to Splet. Splet was hired 19 days prior to principal photography, placing sound design and effects as a key consideration in the preproduction stages (Gentry 63). This would allow Splet the creative space to experiment with sounds in the same way that he was able to on Lynch's earlier features. In this sense, the two filmmakers retained certain sound practices in spite of a fundamental departure from their early independent conditions of production.

During this era, sound effects and design were at the heart of Lynch's sonic world. With the exception of Dune, his sound skills were effects-orientated and his partnership with Splet was frequently spent behind the sound console. Music had not figured prominently in the early film projects. The Grandmother utilised a simple unobtrusive chord sequence by electronic artist Tractor. Eraserhead had no original score at all, and instead used infrequent samples of organ music by "Fats" Waller and just one song, "In Heaven", written by Peter Ivers. The Amputee soundtrack was entirely comprised of foley and voice-over dialogue. Original scores did of course feature in both The Elephant Man and Dune - the former by composer John Norris and the latter by rock artists Toto and Brian Eno - but there is no evidence to suggest that Lynch was involved, or indeed interested, in the musical decision-making, let alone its creative process. For example, for The Elephant Man, Norris had long been the choice of producer Mel Brooks (Hughes 41). However, Blue Velvet (1986) represented a change in the musical content of the films directed by Lynch, and with the introduction of Angelo Badalamenti, Lynch's work with musical sound became significantly more involved.

The music for Blue Velvet was more varied and prominent than the soundtracks of the features previously directed by Lynch. It was marked by Bobby Vinton's 1960s pop ballad and title track "Blue Velvet", a recurring theme notable for its jazz reprisal sung by character Dorothy Valens (Isabella Rossellini). The film also contained an original orchestral score, incidental jazz, and synthesiser pop songs sung by the artist Julee Cruise. Although Badalamenti was not originally chosen to score the entire film, his work with Cruise on the number "Mysteries of Love" moved Lynch to employ him to compose the remaining music (Hughes 78).

"Mysteries of Love" was also a turning point in that it began the long-term collaboration between the composer and filmmaker, albeit with Lynch contributing in an unconventional way. Offering a sheet of self-penned lyrics to Badalamenti, Lynch asked the composer to produce some accompanying music (Hughes 78). From a professional perspective, Badalamenti suggests that the pop format encouraged a more collaborative process compared with other forms of composing:

Songs are generally a collaborative effort, in that you work with someone else, in my case with a lyricist, because songs mean words and music [...] Song writing is more fun because you're working with another person and can share with the joy of creating something that sounds exciting and new (Olia Sileo 38).

Despite Lynch's lack of musical background, he and Badalamenti developed a close working relationship – not only in the field of composition, but most importantly in both sound design and music. Lynch says that:

When we started working together, instantly we had a kind of rapport – me not knowing anything about music, but real interested in sound effects and mood. I realized a lot of things about sound effects and music working with Angelo, how close they are to one another (Chris Willman [Davidlynch.de](http://Davidlynch.de)).

This synergistic relationship between sound design and music has been a key creative characteristic of Lynch and Badalamenti's partnership on their soundtracks since Blue

Velvet. As Lynch tells Andy Klein: “I’m not a musician [but] I’ve been brought into the world of music by Angelo and by sound effects” ([The City of Absurdity.com](#)).

Blue Velvet was also significant in terms of sound design. It would be the last feature on which Splet and Lynch would work together - although it was not a true collaboration, as Lynch was not a credited sound designer. By that time, Splet had won his Academy Award for Black Stallion, and his career would take a slightly more mainstream path of production than that of Lynch. Lynch would direct just one more film - Wild at Heart (1990) - with the hired help of sound designer Randy Thom before taking on the project of sound designing his features on his own. Thom and Lynch’s work can be best described as a cooperation, as Lynch was once again focused fully on his directorial duties. “I did work closely with David Lynch”, writes Thom. “It was the kind of sound designer-director relationship I wish were more common” (email interview). Despite not applying his sound skills directly to this feature, it seems that Lynch continued to work closely with the craft’s key personnel.

After Blue Velvet, Lynch has worked primarily in an indie industrial context releasing films through major subsidiaries, including Wild at Heart (1990), Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me (1992), Lost Highway (1997) and Mulholland Drive (2001). This compares with his mid career films, best exemplified by big-budget productions The Elephant Man and Dune. While working on his indie projects, Lynch enjoyed the option directing and sound designing, with the division of labour being arranged on more flexible terms. This contrasted with his major productions where big budgets, large personnel numbers, and the pressures of release schedules demand more rigidly arranged working roles crafts specialisation.

To an extent, the American film industry has circumscribed the working roles of Lynch, particularly where budgets and working schedules were key issues. However, his later career - in which he considers himself more of a soundman than a director



(Michel Chion 1995a 169) - is perhaps less to do with his break from a creatively/professionally restrictive mainstream industry than with personal choice, especially given his fruitful sound-music partnership with Badalamenti.

The most striking aspects of Lynch and Badalamenti's sound relations are their unorthodox modes of collaboration, including a shared approach to their respective crafts. Particularly evident in more recent films like Lost Highway and Mulholland Dr. is a unique partnership that blurs the lines between composing and sound design, music and effects. This creative process involves a degree of input by Lynch on the score. Of course, many notable directors have contributed to the scores of their films. Coppola co-composed for Apocalypse Now, Woody Allen for Sleeper (1973), Clint Eastwood for Mystic River (2003), and Quentin Tarantino for Kill Bill: Vol.2 (2004). However, Lynch's contribution is distinctive in that, rather than simply writing music, he applies sound design methods (editing, effects, and so on) to pre-recorded pieces written by Badalamenti. This process is comparable to that of a DJ-producer, who samples and rearranges fragments of music by others to create a new track. Badalamenti recalls that:

David would stay in the studio and take what I did and do it half-speed. He would experiment with the engineer and play it backward and sideways. Then he would take one track with one mix and another with one other mix and superimpose these things. All of a sudden, you've got some very unusual sound design going right from there (Bryan Reesman Mixonline.com).

During composition, Badalamenti has himself adopted some distinctive composing methods to suit this process. Typically, composers in Hollywood like John Williams would write continuous, symphonic pieces, which are then later modified by sound mixers and editors. By contrast, Badalamenti's scores are written in a fragmentary way - in a sense pre-edited - in preparation for Lynch's "designing" stage. As Lynch claims: "when Angelo and I work, he doesn't score the picture in the normal way (with rigid stop and start marks). He gives me a lot of material, lots of beautiful music. In the mix I can juggle it around" (Klein The City of Absurdity.com).

The sonic result of this process cannot be easily categorised as either music or sound design, but both. Remarkably, this is free from any “sonic wars” that have been documented by numerous practitioners in contemporary Hollywood. Tom Kenny writes that: “Because he is essentially creating the music track during the mix, Lynch avoids any semblance of the age-old conflict between music and effects fighting to be heard. In fact, he finds the notion of competing on the stage absurd” (133).

The Lynch-Badalamenti relationship represents a departure from the compartmentalised work structures typical of major Hollywood productions. Sound effects and music are normally two separate crafts and processes, involving differently skilled professionals who rarely collaborate with one another. Indeed, Thom draws on first-hand experience in the industry: “There’s almost never any collaboration between the composer and the sound designer” (email interview). Lynch and Badalamenti prove exceptional in their combined creative input, and as a result dispel the boundaries that separate the crafts.

This creative synergy has much at stake in issues of authorship and creative control. Though applying sound design skills Lynch’s role is still primarily directorial, and as such he exercises considerable creative control over the finished soundtrack. This may position his practices within traditional auteurist debates, in which it is argued that the auteur-director shapes the film to his/her creative vision, thus staking a greater authorial claim over the movie. However, in this case the music and sound design are so inextricably bound that the final product is not easily broken down into discrete components and traced to a single creator. This is a particularly striking example of how the soundtrack is engendered by a collective, rather than individual, authorship.

For Badalamenti, creative control is key to his work with Lynch. Indeed his finished music is processed and changed in later stages (as in typical patterns of production practice), and so it results in something not entirely of his own creation.

However, at the final rerecording stages Badalamenti's work is not changed beyond his wishes. This contrasts with the common scenario of a score being manipulated during which time the composer has little opportunity to oversee his or her work. Badalamenti notes that:

David doesn't vary the volume of my scores [...] Most of us composers go in and record this music that sounds great. But if you're not there at the final mix, the sound effects end up covering everything. I always tell a director before he dubs the film, "No one can leave the theatre humming a sound effect". I really believe that David feels that music is the voice of his concepts (Daniel Schweiger [Lynchnet.com](http://Lynchnet.com)).

Traditionally, scoring in Hollywood is circumscribed by the film's key moments of dramatic action and additional auditory information. As a result, the composer may write long passages of music that can change in tempo, mood, key, instrumentation and dynamic according to the agenda set by the "spotting" process. With Lynch, Badalamenti's scores are not produced in this way. His modular, fragmentary compositions are more suggestive of experimentation and creative free-reign:

On both Lost Highway and Mulholland Dr., I gave David multiple music tracks, which we call "firewood". I'd go into the studio and record these long 10- to 12- minute cues with a full orchestra. Sometimes I'd add synthesizers to them. I'd vary the range of the notes, then layer these musical pieces together. All would be at a slow tempo. Then David would take this stuff like it was firewood, and he'd experiment with it. So that's what a lot of the "musical" sound design stuff is that you're hearing (Schweiger [Lynchnet.com](http://Lynchnet.com)).

This "musical sound design" described by Badalamenti may be understood within the context of the filmmaking careers of himself and Lynch. Undoubtedly, Lynch's experience in sound design permeated his particular style of creative input on the score. For Badalamenti, it would appear that his background in jazz, an improvisational, abstract and heavily collaborative type of music, could facilitate this experimental variety of composition. It is also appropriate that Berys Gaut (167) views the jazz band as an apt metaphor for multiple film authorship. Jazz is also contrastable

with the sound and practice of symphonic music, which is of a tight melodic structure and is guided by a process of command, by the composer and the conductor.

Not forgetting the importance of the directorial role in the process of sound production, how does Lynch work with Badalamenti beyond his sound design role? Typically, the director-composer relationship involves a considerable degree of command. The director is expected to set the schedules and creative agenda by which the composer – as the last person to make a contribution – often abides.

Since Blue Velvet, music has always been an early consideration in the films directed by Lynch, which he has often planned during their preproduction stages. Lynch reflects on his days of working with music before Badalamenti:

Before, I was frustrated, and I think a lot of directors must be because you rarely sit down with the composer until late in the game – post-production. You meet him, you tell him what you want, he sees the film, comes back with the score, and there's no more time: you're mixing. And if it doesn't work, you don't have time to fiddle and make it work (Rodley 127).

It is clear that the Lynch-Badalamenti partnership has introduced distinctive scoring practices in which time is an essential component. Rather than placing Badalamenti at the end of the production schedule, Lynch considers the composer a priority: “David calls on me before he starts shooting the film, so I know what I've written before he's edited the picture” (Schweiger [Lynchnet.com](http://Lynchnet.com)).

The early dialogue between Badalamenti and Lynch permits a considerable degree of creative agency for the composer. In common practice, composers are of course expected to write a piece of music to a final “locked” film, whereby the images have been edited together. In this sense the image-track sets the terms for the composer's creativity. Badalamenti points out that:

You need a final cut of the film, perfectly edited, because a soundtrack has to be perfectly timed. If a guy punches someone in the nose, the music has to be in exactly that space. The composer is almost the last person involved in contributing to the final product of the film (Sileo 38).

Much of the time, Badalamenti responds to Lynch's verbal renditions of imagined scenarios during preproduction, rather than tangible, recorded shots. As he recalls:

I've learned to compose music from his vivid descriptions of scenes, moods and tempos. This is what's so different from the traditional way of working with film directors (Schweiger [Lynchnet.com](#)).

Perhaps the most unconventional terrain on which Lynch and Badalamenti find themselves is their creative symbiosis between direction and music, which once more has interesting implications for film authorship. Lynch has claimed that: "The picture for the most part dictates the sound – music or sound effects – but sometimes in the reverse" (Klein [The City of Absurdity.com](#)). Badalamenti once more comments on the creative exchange that results between director and composer, image and sound. "I would just start creating and we would record it. And - boom - he would start seeing pictures" (Reesman [Mixonline.com](#)). The impact of music on Lynch's directorial craft again suggests a sound relation that is wholly collaborative. In terms of film authorship, it shows that one craftsperson - often the director - may not consistently delimit or "lead" the work of other filmmakers.

Curiously, Lynch's latest feature [Inland Empire](#) (2006) is the first project in twenty years that does not feature a full Badalamenti score. As a very recent release, there is little documentation that explains this departure. Small pieces of music have been contributed by the composer (this time uncredited), but there is greater orchestral input from Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki. According to Roger Ebert ([Rogerebert.com](#)), Lynch is himself a significant contributor to the film's music, although it is not clear whether this is expressed in the craft of "musical sound design" or composition alone. Overall, the production of [Inland Empire](#) closely resembles that of Lynch's earlier student filmmaking days, more so than any other feature since [Eraserhead](#). For instance, he made use of relatively cheap technology. This is the first of his features in digital video format, a less expensive choice than celluloid. Odell and Le

Blanc note that: “this wasn’t the multi-million dollar studio set-up used by Lucas, Mann or Cameron but a modified Sony DSR-PD150, a very modestly priced camera by professional standards” (121). The technology facilitated mobile, and thus quicker, shooting techniques, and as a result did not require a large production crew. As a result Lynch frequently operated the cameras himself (Odell and Le Blanc 122) while also editing and sound designing the picture. Such production practices were typical of his earliest films, and it may be argued that his return to smaller independent filmmaking meant a decreased reliance on a large crew, even including previously key players like Badalamenti.

Nonetheless, accounts of Lynch’s work with Splet and Badalamenti reveal a set of sound practices that would appear atypical in contemporary Hollywood. Guided by a director skilled in the art of sound design, their productions, although quite various, involve remarkably close sound relations between the composer, the sound designer and director. The decompartmentalised divisions of labour, the long schedules, and the dissolving of artistic boundaries that separate the crafts of music, effects and direction are also distinctive features of their working contexts. The collaborations between Lynch and Badalamenti also highlight the importance of recognising multiple authorship in Hollywood filmmaking. Ultimately, by straddling the areas of mainstream and independent filmmaking, Lynch, Splet and Badalamenti form a team that ultimately engages a broad spectrum of sound practices in contemporary Hollywood, many of them quite unusual compared with the trends I have identified in earlier chapters.

### **From Light-sabre to *Leitmotif*: Lucas, Burtt and Williams**

In order to provide a fuller picture of sound practices in contemporary Hollywood, let us consider another case study. Lucas, Burtt and Williams and their working relations bear the dynamics of cooperation or command rather than the collaborative work

exemplified by Lynch, Splet and Badalamenti. The former sound team ultimately illustrates a different model of sound practice in Hollywood, demonstrating how diverse sound work in the contemporary era can be.

From the very beginning, it is clear that sound - and effects in particular - have played an important role in the films directed by Lucas. Like Lynch, he believes that: “the sound and music are 50% of the entertainment in the movie” (IMDB). The sonic achievements he shared with Burt on Star Wars have already been well documented (Charles Schreger 1985; LoBrutto 1994; Sergi 2004 and 2005b), as have the developments in sound technology and the institutional shifts during the 1970s that played a key part. However, Lucas’s approach to sound production during this era may be traced to even earlier works.

As far back as 1966 Lucas sound edited the film Marcello, I’m Bored, a non-commercially released animation by John Milius. His application of sound skills within an independent context is comparable to Lynch’s work on his student projects. And much like Lynch’s early collaborations with Splet, Lucas applied hands-on sound production, albeit uncredited, to American Graffiti (1973) in collaboration with Walter Murch. Murch himself recalled their work on the technique of “worldizing”, a process that produces the illusion of sound space, and which interestingly offers a precursor to the effects of Dolby stereo:

George and I took the master track of a radio show and played it back on a Nagra in a real space-a suburban back yard. I was 50-or-so feet away with a microphone recording that sound onto another Nagra, keeping it in sync and moving the microphone kind of at random, back and forth, as George moved the speaker through 180 degrees (Michael Jarrett 4).

Such early experiments are symptomatic of Lucas’s patent interest in the sonic world, which later informed his working relations with Burt throughout their collective career. For instance, during Star Wars Lucas and producer Gary Kurtz carved out a unique creative model for the film’s sound production, in which Burt would be a key

player. The director-producer team did not wish to utilise stock library effects for the soundtrack, and so employed Burt to invent them from scratch. As Marc Mancini writes:

He was given carte blanche to work out of his apartment near the USC campus for a year, in order to collect at a leisurely pace those sounds that might be useful. Burt blended the sounds of his TV set and an old 35mm projector to create the hum of a light saber. He tapped the wires of a radio tower to obtain the snap of laser bolts. And he conjured the whoosh of Luke Skywalker's landspeeder by recording the roar of the Los Angeles Harbor Freeway through a vacuum-cleaner pipe (365).

Burt's experience of working with Lucas clearly informs his personal work ethic. For the soundman, cooperation and communication clearly play an important role in soundtrack production:

You need to get your director, sound editor, and composer together to talk about these things [ . . . ] I think the key difference is a matter of scheduling and communication. The sound designer should get in there early with the director and composer, and experiment (David Sonnenschein 216).

Cooperation, long schedules and creative freedom - keystones of the Lucas-Burt working relationship - are also characteristic of the work of Lynch and Splet. Weis (1995) and Sergi (2004) often note that the director largely determines how the sound production process is carried out. This being the case, Lynch and Lucas, and their early experiences in film sound production have informed these particular sound relations.

Burt's own background also plays a key part in shaping his responsibilities on the films directed by Lucas. His training in multiple filmmaking skills has enabled him to perform various functions across both sound and image. While no doubt permitting an exceptional level of creative control over his projects, these skills also enable him to work against the divisions of labour typical of production in contemporary Hollywood.

As he says:

Filmmaking is the blend of many creative skills and processes. I started out with an interest in writing, directing, music, special effects, sound and editing. All of these tasks overlap and interrelate. The key element in filmmaking is the juxtaposition of sound and picture elements to produce



a desired emotional response in the audience. I am really fortunate with Star Wars to be able to straddle both disciplines. It is not the norm (“Ben Burtt...” [Filmsound.org](http://Filmsound.org)).

Burtt’s background intersects with Lucas’s own work ethos - and by extension the group ethos of his production company Lucasfilm - which encourages multi-skilled personnel:

Typical of Lucasfilm over the years has been a fostering of people who can do many jobs [...] I’m a sound editor, I’m a music editor, I’m a picture editor, I’m a sound designer and a mixer, and I can direct second unit. So to any of the jobs I do for Lucasfilm, I can bring a viewpoint with an understanding of other areas (Erin K. Lauten [Filmsound.org](http://Filmsound.org)).

Burtt provides a detailed account of what his sound responsibilities and relations on Star Wars meant in practical terms:

I was able to follow through from the point of production of a film [...] I was on hand during some of the filming of the motion picture to gather sounds or at least see what was going on so I could run off myself and begin to manufacture and make sounds that I’d know we’d need later on. I was also on hand during the editing of the film to function as sound editor [...] And also I’d be involved in the sound mixing and it’s not often that one person gets to move through all those different jobs on a film (“Ben Burtt...” [Filmsound.org](http://Filmsound.org)).

In spite of the carefully coordinated role that Ben Burtt has clearly experienced on set, or indeed Lucas’s early sound experiments, there is no evidence to suggest that the director has ever worked alongside the sound designer using hands-on methods on the soundtrack. Therefore Lucas’s working mode could be identified with consultation and management, rather than creative partnership. In short, his relationship with Burtt is cooperative, rather than collaborative. This highlights a key departure from the kind of work typical of Lynch and Splet. When compared with Lucas, Lynch has exploited his sound competencies to a greater degree. This is most likely a combination of the conditions of independent production and creative choices that have characterised his career.

Since Star Wars, Lucas has remained rooted in direction, aligning himself with practices typical of this role: namely overseeing creative processes and exercising

ultimate jurisdiction. Sound designer Gary Rydstrom accounts for the common directorial responsibilities in contemporary sound:

Different directors have different amounts of ‘hands-on’ [...] film directors are dependent upon a fairly large group of creative talents who for a good part of the time are working alone. Their job is to make the paradigm that the movie exists in and to be the final ‘say’ about what works (Sergi 2004 176).

Lucas’s decision-making position in sound production is confirmed by Burt. The director indeed has the “final say”, and this is a fact accepted by the personnel he works with:

I learned years ago, when I was doing sound design for George, not to take the rejections of things too deeply. There isn’t an artist or person in this company – an animator or composer or anybody – that doesn’t have to submit to his judgement, because this is his movie. He created it, he’s responsible for it, and he’s very opinionated about it. For me, his management style is mild. He never insists on something, he just gets his way because he’s the boss (Lauten [Filmsound.org](http://Filmsound.org)).

In this mode of practice, the issues of creative agency and authorship take on a different hue when compared with parallel accounts of Lynch, Splet and Badalamenti. While Lucas does not directly work on the sound design of his films as Lynch does, he influences its outcome with directorial decision-making. Nonetheless, he leaves the hands-on sound work almost entirely up to Burt, whereas Lynch personally shapes the process. For both sound partnerships, creative freedom and terms of authorship are defined by the exercising of sound skills on one hand and a chain of command on the other.

In spite of evidence of a hands-on approach to sound in his early filmmaking career, Lucas no longer directly applies sound skills to his work, and thus cannot be strictly understood as a collaborator with Burt. Interestingly, like Lynch, he ceased to produce sound following a shift into major Hollywood production. The generally rigid conditions of time and large labour force typical of major Hollywood production would perhaps ensure that Lucas does not compromise his directorial command by

collaborating in many crafts. Production contexts are therefore important in understanding the practical sound relations between Lucas and Burt.

The craft of composition in contemporary Hollywood is usefully illustrated by the working practices of John Williams and the sound relations that hold between himself, Lucas and Burt. Williams's work with Lucas is contrastable to the collaborations between Lynch and Badalamenti and as such reveals the diversity of the contemporary soundtrack as a mode of practice.

Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of Star Wars was its rich, complex symphonic score, which spans almost every minute of the film's duration. This lengthy piece was composed within just six weeks (William Darby and Jack DuBois 524), and so it would seem that Lucas and Williams worked to the industry tradition of keeping to a short scoring schedule. This practice has continued up to Lucas's most recent Star Wars projects. Although attributable to the working idioms of Lucas and Williams, this may be equally understood within the context of major Hollywood production. Richard Dyer accounts for the composition of The Phantom Menace:

There were 16 three-hour recording sessions to set down 900 pages of score, two full hours of music. The sessions were intense, exhausting, and utterly professional. As in every business, time means money, even though the music represents a modest proportion of the film's \$115 million budget (Dyer 18).

In addition to film schedules, creative agency and authorship are of course significant concerns in discourses about film music in Hollywood. This is largely due to the composer having his or her work shaped by the demands of the image and other sounds on the soundtrack, and their finished product manipulated and transformed during editing and rerecording. However, Williams is an example of a composer who is quite attuned to this process, and at times embraces it. It would appear that he is content to work during the latest possible stages of film postproduction, and moreover, views completed images as setting the terms for what he creates. For instance, he prefers to

see the finished film rather than to read a script early on. Speaking to Craig Byrd he remembers of Star Wars:

I didn't read the script. I don't like to read scripts. When I'm talking about this I always make the analogy that if one reads a book, a novel, and then see someone else's realization of it, there's always a slight sense of disappointment because we've cast it in our minds, and created the scenery and all the ambience in our mind's imagination [...] Having said that I don't even remember if George Lucas offered me a script to read ([Filmscoremonthly.com](http://Filmscoremonthly.com)).

Unlike Badalamenti who works to Lynch's preliminary verbal sketches, Williams's scores are created when other film elements are in their final stages. As Dyer says: "[...] his superiority as a film composer lies not only in his musical ability but in his skill at reading an image and at sensing the rhythmic and emotional relationships created in the movement" (20). Williams himself describes the process: "I'd rather go into a projection room and react to the people and places and events – and particularly the rhythm – of the film itself" (Derek Elley 23). Once more this practice was particularly characteristic of his work on Star Wars:

I think the film was finished when I first saw it, with the exception of some special effects shots that would have been missing. I remember some leader in there where it would say "spaceships collide here", "place explosion here", this kind of thing. But they were measured out in terms of length so that I could time the music to what I hadn't in fact specifically seen (Byrd [Filmscoremonthly.com](http://Filmscoremonthly.com)).

It is clear from these accounts that, in the typical manner of the composer in Hollywood both classical and contemporary, Williams works entirely in the service of the film's fully-fledged vision. However, unlike some of his peers, this is his working preference. His working methods also contrast with Badalamenti, who prefers to talk with directors in preproduction about the music with a view to scoring almost straightaway. Indeed, while both composers are ultimately being directed artistically, it is Williams's mode of work that is more rigidly circumscribed, via tighter time restrictions and finalised images.

Williams's scoring is also heavily determined by the other sounds on the soundtrack. He is acutely aware that his music should not detract from sound effects, or more importantly, a key moment of dialogue. Darby and Dubois write that:

Williams believes that modern life has too much music everywhere in it and that a film score should not contribute yet more clutter. He also believes that a successful film composer needs to think of the dialogue as part of the score on which he is working. The composer's self-effacing temperament accords with his conventional view of what he is trying to achieve with his music (525).

During recording for The Phantom Menace, Williams has put this awareness into practice, warning his orchestra when they are likely to clash with another sonic element: "the sound is too close; it will obscure the dialogue" (Dyer 21). Indeed, the composer's seasoned understanding of postproduction sound informs his creative practice:

I'm very sensitive to the sound effects and the dialogue – all the competition to my music (that comes from experience in the dubbing room, and disappointments there). You do get film-wise after a while and you learn to relate the coloration to the overall aural set-up: you know you've got horse's hooves to deal with, therefore X is better than Y (Elley 24).

Interestingly, Williams's consideration of sound effects could suggest a certain relationship dynamic with Ben Burt, which departs from typical practices as viewed by Annette Davison (2004a):

While most Hollywood blockbusters pride themselves on their sound design and effects, the quality of the music and dialogue recording, and perhaps also the name of the well-known film composer, in many cases there is little interaction or collaboration between the composer and the sound team (127).

Williams and Burt do not work in terms of cross-craft collaboration as Lynch and Badalamenti do, but there is evidence of communication. The sheer complexity of the soundtrack would of course necessitate some dialogue between the sound and music professionals. Marc Mancini writes that: "Thus far, Burt has composed for comic-book films, with sounds necessarily etched out in jagged lines. He coordinates carefully with

the film's composer, placing his sounds between notes and at contrasting pitches (367). Williams and Burt illustrate a cooperative process by which "sonic wars" are being avoided. However, of all sound craftspeople involved in the Star Wars productions, Williams's work is the most manipulable, owing to the various accounts of his "self-effacing" nature, and the external demands that the film composer's craft typically faces.

In spite of his working tendencies with Lucas and Burt, Williams's practices and sound relations that he establishes with others are not entirely consistent across his whole career, and have varied according to the particular director of his project.

Composer John Corigliano comments on his work with Steven Spielberg, for example:

With most directors, if they don't trust the composer, he becomes almost an enemy instead of an ally. And I think part of the success of John Williams in the Steven Spielberg films is that Spielberg trusts him; it's that element of trust that allows the composer to realize that if the director (who is not a musician) doesn't know how to describe what he wants, he'll describe something wrong (David Morgan 48).

When discussing his relationships with the two directors, Williams implies that there is more personal and professional intimacy between himself and Spielberg than with Lucas. His brief comment on the personal exchanges with the latter is indicative of their work together, where evidence of collaboration is very thin: "George Lucas I don't know that well - he's a very quiet man" (Elley 30). This offers a contrasting picture to the ways in which Williams engages with Spielberg. As is the view of the majority of composers, Williams believes that the best directors are musical (Darby and DuBois 524). Unlike Lucas, Spielberg has a musical background as a trained clarinet player, which most likely informs his relationship with the composer. In a comparative account, Dyer writes that "Unlike Spielberg, who enjoys coming into Williams's studio at Amblin productions in California to sit on the piano bench and listen to the music as it emerges, Lucas usually doesn't hear the score until it's being recorded" (21). This insight suggests that for Williams, the type of the director and the skills in sound that

they may possess, can to an extent determine the nature of his working relationships and creative practices.

Williams's artistic ideas remain ever flexible to the needs of the director and the overall picture, regardless of whether he works with Spielberg or Lucas. In Dyer's production report on The Phantom Menace, Lucas is seen to be reediting the film with the assistance of Spielberg. In this scenario, Williams's role is to musically accommodate for any sudden changes on the image track. Dyer writes that:

Spielberg has helped Lucas make these weeks a difficult time for their old friend [John Williams], whom both filmmakers address as "Johnny". Williams had completed his score to an earlier cut of the film. After consultation with Spielberg, though, Lucas had recently reedited the sixth and final reel (18).

In addition to the changes made by the director throughout the scoring process, editing can also impact significantly on Williams's work when committed to film. This contrasts, for instance, with the distinct level of control that Badalamenti retains over his music during the rerecording stages. In a review of the music soundtrack for Attack of the Clones (2002), Takis criticises changes made by Lucas in the final postproduction stages:

For a director to disrespect his film's score is not at all uncommon. But I feel confident in saying that a John Williams score has never been so shabbily treated than in Attack of the Clones. The digital age may have opened up valuable new worlds of visual possibilities, but Lucas's ability -and tendency - to tinker with editing until the 11<sup>th</sup> hour has only increased (18).

The accounts of Lucas and Williams suggest a director-composer dynamic that is, by many musicians' accounts, largely typical of the practices in contemporary Hollywood, with the director having ultimate command over music irrespective of the competencies that s/he may demonstrate or apply in that profession. It follows that, when compared with Lynch's collaboration with Badalamenti, Lucas's chosen dynamic is commanding and creatively "director-centred". Lynch's creative control over sound and music in his productions is considerable, but this control is guided by direct

collaboration and an application of skills in sound work. Lucas conceives of his sound relations and creative practices differently. As he says:

John [Williams] knows the movie has to come first. Each participant in a movie is like a musician in an orchestra. Everybody - the sound people, the photographers, the special effects artists - has to be just as good as a soloist - but no matter how good he is, he can't be a soloist. It's my job to be the conductor (Dyer 21).

This apt musical metaphor describing the filmmaking process, and Williams's position in it, suggests that Lucas places high value on teamwork. But his words also suggest his desire to perform a commanding, supervisory role over all departments, rather than working by means of hands-on collaboration. While it is central to any director's job to "direct" and design the film overall, Lucas's responsibilities within sound production differ fundamentally from the ways that Lynch practices his role.

These instances of sound practice follow a variety of paths in terms of sound relations, technique and time management. Lucas, Burt and Williams partially align themselves with patterns and concerns that recur within discourses around sound practice in contemporary Hollywood, as discussed in chapter 4. Lynch, Badalamenti and Splet demonstrate modes of working that are not so typical.

Lucas frequently offered Burt an unusually long schedule and considerable degree of creative agency for a Hollywood sound professional, although Lucas still exercises a traditional directorial role of cooperation and command over his colleague. Perhaps even more conventional is Williams's role. He was assigned a matter of weeks to create the score for Star Wars, his creativity directed to a large extent by other filmmaking concerns, largely the result of the artistic choices made by his "conductor" Lucas.

The sound schedules in films directed by Lynch were early prioritisations for both sound design and composition, and generally, relations between himself, Splet and Badalamenti were wholly collaborative: a rare occurrence in contemporary Hollywood.



Even rarer is the process by which Badalamenti's creative authority actively informs, and is not merely informed by, the creative choices of the director.

The two sound teams studied above represent different divisions of labour. Lucas remains in a traditional and clearly defined directorial role when working with sound, and by "calling the shots" (to paraphrase Weis 1995 61) he can be identified with the commanding dynamic between filmmakers and sound departments that many contemporary sound professionals describe. While his interest in high quality soundtracks - particularly effects - informs his consultative relationships with the likes of Burt and Dolby specialists, he is not known to have directly collaborated with these personnel in terms of sound skill application. As this demonstrates, Lucas retains a supervisory position in relation to sound professionals and sound work, especially in the case of composition. He determines the final soundtrack product via "telling people what to do", rather than offering collaborative input. The division of labour for Star Wars and its sequels therefore seems relatively clear-cut.

By contrast, Lynch appears to shift from his role as a director to that of a sound designer, and perhaps more rarely, a composer. Unlike Lucas, Lynch's work with the sound crafts and its professional figures is not purely supervisory in nature, it is creatively collaborative.

The preceding four chapters have mapped the working territory of contemporary composition and sound design in Hollywood, revealing some issues common to film sound professionals, including their collaborative relationships, creative freedoms and professional identities. My discussion has also shown that the import of these issues and the ways in which they are dealt with vary from one project to the next. This is a situation that is traceable to Hollywood's post-studio landscape and its individualised package mode of production. In turn, within each project, a combination of interrelating factors, from skills, schedules, budgets, genres, technologies, and individual artistic,

industrial and institutional backgrounds will necessarily impact on sound practice. All things considered, a nuanced and complex picture of the soundtrack in Hollywood begins to materialise.

The working modes of Lynch, Badalamenti and Splet, and Lucas, Burt and Williams have been useful illustrative examples, highlighting just how different sound practices can be, and how these practices are contingent on many factors. However, it is Lynch, Splet and Badalamenti that together provide the most intriguing case. Bearing little relation to the concerns and patterns in practice identified and discussed by the sound experts in chapter 4, their mode of work shows that the contemporary Hollywood soundtrack can encompass many unique filmmaking practices.

So far this thesis has provided insights into the contemporary soundtrack as situated in Hollywood's rich and multifaceted landscape, from its history, industry, technologies and professional and authorial practices. However, my study will now move on to consider questions of "sonic style", or what we might think of as the aesthetic relationships between dialogue, sound effects and music.

Moving to an investigation of sound aesthetics requires a methodological shift. An examination of the practices of sound personnel in Hollywood is for the most part informed by the language of technicians and artists working in film. The following chapters offer careful listening and interpretation of sound sequences. This thesis therefore embraces what appears to be disparate "languages": textual/interpretive, and practical/factual. As such this is the means by which we can understand contemporary Hollywood sound and its multifaceted identity.

Specific questions in this arena should be addressed in order to understand how soundtracks actually sound, their function within a film, and what informs the stylistic choices of the sound teams that create them. For example, how does sound figure within larger questions of cinematic traditions, such as narration? How might production

practices and industrial contexts manifest themselves aurally? How does one analyse the sound style in the first place? To answer these, a selection of soundtracks created by Lynch, Badalamenti and Splet, and Lucas, Burt and Williams will be examined across a range of films spanning 1970 to 2006, which each come out of different cinematic traditions and industrial contexts, from the low-budget independent sector to the major studio blockbuster. This range will provide rich cases for analyses, thereby opening up a broad understanding of the contemporary Hollywood soundtrack and allowing us to appreciate it in all its variety.

## Chapter Eight

### Stylish and Functional: Sound Analysis and Sonic Narration

“I still think there’s a lot to learn about the aesthetics of sound in the context of a motion picture” (George Lucas in interview with Larry Blake)

The words of George Lucas certainly ring true in the study of film sound. The following chapters will offer some insights into the aesthetics of the soundtrack, focusing on “sonic style”; i.e., the interrelations of sound components and their contributions to cinematic storytelling. In my discussion of production practice I have detailed the considerable range in the roles and relationships of film sound craftspeople, involving composers, sound designers, directors and others. The sounds that we hear on the completed soundtrack relate to each other in equally complex ways at the same time as they serve a variety of purposes for their audiences. Moreover, filmmakers in contemporary Hollywood are afforded many more creative possibilities regarding how these sounds are used and organised in comparison with past eras, which, as the following chapters reveal, is an effect of increasing diversity in approaches to cinematic narration.

This chapter is organised into two parts. Firstly, I will consider the soundtrack as a multi-component structure comprising dialogue, music and sound effects. The multi-component soundtrack becomes the basis for three analytical approaches: “micro”, “macro” and “*mise-en-bande*” analysis. These approaches reveal how sound style constitutes an expansive set of meaningful devices within the contemporary cinema’s process of narration (i.e., how it assists in storytelling). Secondly, I will examine different “modes” of cinematic narration: “classical”, “art”, “independent” and “post-classical” as explored by David Bordwell and more recently Geoff King and Eleftheria Thanouli. Drawing on these debates I will propose a “contemporary” mode, which describes an overwhelming variety in the narrational approaches taken by filmmakers

since 1970, and thereby helps to explicate the range and complexity of sound uses during this era.

This chapter lays the theoretical groundwork for the multi-component readings of a selection of films. My intention is to show that sonic style and narration are particularly diverse in Hollywood's contemporary era. I will extend my case studies of David Lynch, Angelo Badalamenti, Alan Splet, and George Lucas, John Williams and Ben Burtt by analysing sequences taken from their films. My analyses will offer detailed descriptions of the numerous sound combinations these filmmakers employ, and how the sounds function according to the demands of a diverse and changing narrational landscape from the 1970s to the present. Consistent with my approach to sound practice I will account for the wider industrial forces in Hollywood, which inaugurated the "Renaissance" to the blockbuster to the indie cinema, ultimately having profound effects on narration and sound style.

Crucially, the two main branches of enquiry outlined in David Bordwell's analysis of the cinema, or "historical poetics" (1989, 2007), will provide a rough blueprint for my approach in the following chapters. They include: "What are the principles according to which films are constructed and through which they achieve particular effects?" and "How and why have these principles arisen and changed in particular empirical circumstances?" (2007 23). I will begin to address his first enquiry by providing a thorough outline of how sound style may be understood and analysed.

### **Micro, Macro and *Mise-en-Bande* Approaches to Sonic Style**

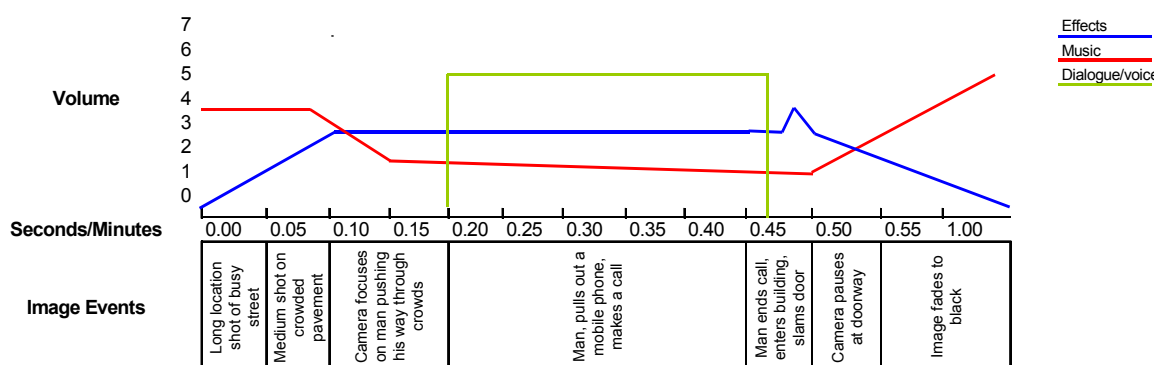
It is useful to understand the soundtrack as a set of interrelating components of dialogue, music and sound effects, although few studies of film sound do. As pointed out from the start of this thesis, this kind of conceptualisation can open up a rich, interdisciplinary study that appreciates the plurality of the soundtrack, privileging

neither one sonic art (composition, sound design, etc) or the other. Moreover, understanding as many different sounds as possible brings the many sophisticated functions of film sound to light in a comprehensive way. Rick Altman, McGraw Jones and Sonia Tatroe (2000) have laid the groundwork for a multi-component analysis of sound, offering a systematic approach to analysing the soundtrack with their concept of the *mise-en-bande*:

Just as image analysis has benefited from introduction of the comparative and relational notion of the *mise-en-scène* or “putting onto the stage”, so the understanding of the soundtrack requires the concept of *mise-en-bande*, or “putting onto the soundtrack” (341).

*Mise-en-bande* analyses are best represented in graph form, as this will enable the reader to visually map the ways in which the different sound components work alongside one other. Altman et al’s model charts individual image-based sequences on a timeline, explained shot-by-shot, and against this, the music, dialogue and effects are measured in volume on a scale of 0-7. All volume measurements are approximations based on careful listening, for as the authors point out, “because individual sound components are not presented on isolated channels, they cannot be analysed with oscilloscopes or computer software. Such automatization would be possible only with single-component tracks” (343).

A graphical representation of the *mise-en-bande* analysis can look something like this:



(not based on actual film sequence)

The *mise-en-bande* concept as developed by Altman et al. also involves a historical as well as analytical methodology for understanding the Hollywood soundtrack, which makes it an appropriate tool in the spirit of Bordwell's historical poetics (1989, 2007). *Mise-en-bande* readings were employed to illustrate how Hollywood's methods of combining dialogue, music and effects had gradually developed and eventually solidified into a set of conventions between 1925 and 1932. Altman et al. explain that by the 1930s, the Hollywood soundtrack developed into the carefully coordinated set of sound channels that avoided collision with one another and had distinct roles in the service of the film's dramatic and narrative ends:

Guaranteeing reality and fidelity through a nearly continuous but background effects track, the new *mise-en-bande* assured intelligibility through a foregrounded but intermittent dialogue track [...] Similarly, variations in volume helped music provide continuous commentary, while making way for narratively important dialogue (358).

The authors trace the trajectory of early film sound from what often resulted in a "clash among separate sound elements" (341) to the fully coordinated soundtrack described above. For example, discussing the *mise-en-bandes* of sequences from Noah's Ark (Michael Curtiz 1928) and The First Auto (Roy del Ruth 1927), they show that sound films of the 1920s displayed an "on/off" approach to music, dialogue and sound effects rather than the more delicate, interweaving gradations in volume we hear today. When "on", these components occupied similar volume ranges, and so if more than one sound were placed simultaneously, they would run the risk of interfering with one another. In addition, each component obeyed its own logic rather than functioning in respect of its counterparts (343). This is partly the result of sound personnel drawing on conventions established by different pre-existing sound traditions, none of which were known for their rich simultaneity of sound components (343). For instance, the music for Noah's Ark follows the printed score of silent film accompaniment, which did not have to share sonic space with other sound elements, and its dialogue is performed and recorded at

levels more appropriate for theatre (343). These analyses are contrasted with the soundtrack heard in the later film Back Street (John M. Stahl 1932), which offers an example of the more coordinated *mise-en-bande*. This film employed innovative practices suited to the specificities of the talking cinema, which would become the standard. The dialogue is at a clear and audible level, the sound effects provide an unobtrusive ambient backdrop, while the music varies in volume in compensation of dips or rises in dialogue. For each sound component, a distinct role was developed to “allow simultaneous communication of multiple information channels” (358) and, overall, to “guarantee comprehensible dialogue and to confect the track with a virtually constant total volume” (353). Therefore the “jurisdictional struggle” exemplified by the styles and practices of Noah’s Ark and First Auto eventually resulted in negotiation (357). Previously, the different components and the people that produced them worked to older techniques and traditions, often at cross-purposes. New technical and artistic standards emerged in the 1930s such as the “psychoacoustic” approach, which altered volume levels of individual components to focus the spectator’s interest, and so Hollywood’s sounds and their creators began to work under “interstitial and multiplanar logic” (358).

This brief account of Altman et al’s work may serve as a reminder of three key points. Firstly, that soundtrack style in Hollywood is a complex unit comprised of interrelating components. Secondly, these components serve various narrative and dramatic purposes at given moments within a film. Thirdly, *mise-en-bande* analyses of films can illustrate key developments in film sound at a given historical moment.

Transported to the contemporary era, the *mise-en-bande* approach to the soundtrack is equally illuminating. It enables precise moment-by-moment descriptions of the sound structure of specific films, which, as I will argue, gesture towards their considerable stylistic differences. For example, Star Wars and its interstellar battles are



characterised by sudden peaks in the sound effects (laser guns, explosions) that follow dips in the music and dialogue tracks, thus heightening their impact. The moody mystery of Lost Highway will tend towards a fine balance between the music and sound effects tracks, building up a dense and atmospheric tension. Moreover, the *mise-en-bande* lends itself to further enquiry about the relationships between sound and narration (how do these relative sound balances provide information and advance the film story?) and sound and genre (how are these relative sound balances constitutive of particular film styles?) Lastly, it is useful to locate *mise-en-bande* analyses within historical changes. Sound sequences may suggest something about patterns of narration and generic production according to different eras.

There are some limitations to the above method of analysis. First of all, by condensing a film's hundreds, possibly thousands, of sound effects, words of dialogue, or musical elements into three tracks, Altman et al's *mise-en-bande* does not leave room for the discussion of specific sounds which may be worth isolating for their significance. When taken alone, a recurring phrase of orchestral music, i.e. a *leitmotif*, or a series of footsteps may alone be equally revealing about a film's sonic style and its function as the relative balance between the two at a given moment. While it is the purpose of the following chapters to study how the soundtrack works as a whole, it is also valuable in places to consider an intra- as well as inter- component analysis of sonic sequences, as this supplements a multi-component reading by offering a meticulous understanding of sound style.

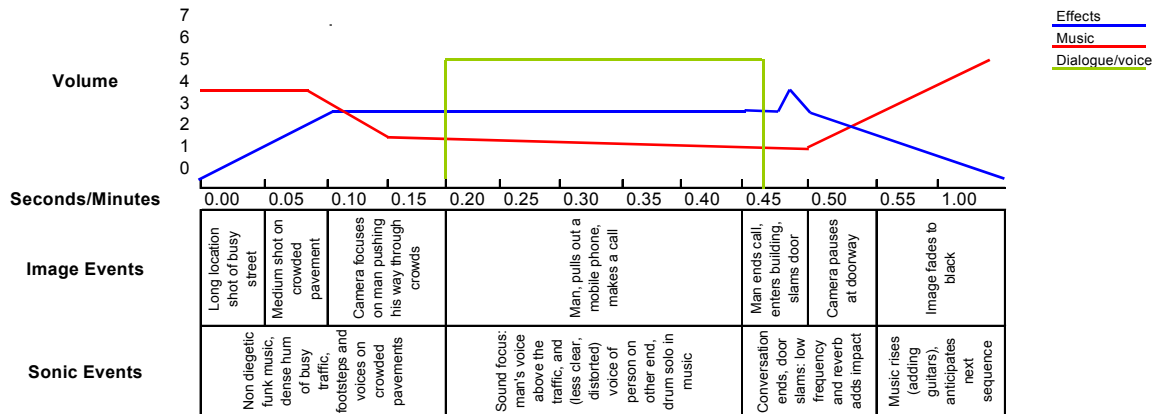
Secondly, dialogue, music and effects - as isolated sounds or grouped together as sound components - can be measured according to a variety of qualities aside from volume. They include effects like reverberation (reverb) and delay (echo) or frequency (from low bass to high treble). Other details may be considered too. Musical style (is it classical? electronic? jazz?), or instrumentation (which instruments can we hear, and

how many?) may be notable. A voice may possess a particular timbre, and certain sound effects may be appreciated for their design, whether created out of several recorded sounds or synthesized electronically. All of these details can work to create any number of effects for the audience, from offering information about a key character to adding a certain mood to a sequence. In this spirit, Michel Chion (1994a, 1999) offers a detailed study of specific sounds and their effects in audiovisual media. For instance, he discusses how the materiality, i.e., the weight and texture of an onscreen figure can be rendered by the use of sound effects, describing the “hollow, lightweight” quality of the animated heroes in Who Framed Roger Rabbit (Robert Zemeckis 1988) (1994a 118). He also notes the importance of specific relations between the voice and the image to the experience of cinema, such as the “magical”, “offscreen” voice of Norman’s mother in Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock 1960) (1994a 83). The specific qualities of sounds and their effects are analysable under this “micro” study of sound style, and are worth noting for their numerous contributions to a particular movie.

I would like to draw attention to a further analytical mode that is helpful in fleshing out a complete understanding of sound style. Sergi suggests that we consider a “‘macro-level’ of sound aesthetics” (2004 137), offering a method of textual analysis that articulates four types of dynamic relations between selected sounds. He places these under the headings of “orchestration”, “contrast”, “focus”, and “definition”. This approach is by no means exclusive of micro or *mise-en-bande* analyses. In fact, orchestration is by and large synonymous with *mise-en-bande*, as it describes the relative volume balance between the main elements of the soundtrack (145). Contrast is a way of considering how sounds change moment by moment (148). This can be understood dynamically; for example, a huge explosion may disrupt a moment of relative auditory calm involving lower volume music and dialogue. There can also be textural contrasts, involving different ambiances. A sequence may cut between a quiet,

minimal homely domestic interior to a chaotic, traffic-riddled street outside. The third heading, focus, involves the selection and combination of sound elements in the mix for the purposes of the film's chosen levels of sound clarity or density (151). For instance, a sequence might limit the number of ambient, or environmental, sound effects so that the audience can hear each individual sound clearly. Conversely, it may involve a densely layered cacophony of sounds so as to create a specific environment. Finally, definition refers to sounds that are chosen and foregrounded for their defining, almost signature characteristics. They often focus the audience's attention, and are usually associated with a "space, a character, a moment in the narrative, or even the whole film" (153). Sergi notes that sound definition can be employed in many complex ways, but an example might include the deep vocals of Darth Vader (Star Wars) as a defining aspect of his character, or the droning mechanical synthesised motif throughout Terminator 2: Judgement Day (James Cameron 1991), which defines the movie's apocalyptic thrust. These dynamic categories are broad, as they can be used to describe any number of combinations and qualities of any type of sound as well as describing their different roles - narrational, thematic, affective - in a movie.

Ultimately, sound style is multifaceted. It can be analysed in terms of its overarching structural dynamics, as Sergi's "macro" approach demonstrates, or its inter-component relations or *mise-en-bande*, or its minutiae, as a more "micro" reading of singular sounds will allow. How can this be presented clearly when reading specific film sequences? I would like to return to Altman et al's graphical method, and suggest a way in which it will accommodate this multifaceted approach. In addition to a volume-oriented *mise-en-bande* graph running alongside a corresponding image track, a moment-by-moment commentary of salient "sonic events" can be added, describing anything from important lines of dialogue and musical instrumentation to combinations in ambient, background effects. An example can be seen below:



(not based on actual film sequence)

This analytical methodology is at once wide-ranging and in-depth, with the potential to probe just about any aspect of a film's sonic style. Of course, it is not possible to identify and discuss each and every one of the thousands of sounds that can be heard on a typical contemporary soundtrack. A measured approach is to identify some key aspects of contemporary sound style as they relate to, and function within, specific cinematic frameworks. While the sonic options available to contemporary filmmakers in Hollywood are many, they are not infinite, and it is worth examining the boundaries of these options and how they are conditioned by the cinema's wider stylistic norms, such as those associated with narration and genre. At the same time this will allow us to develop an understanding of sound style and some of its most important functions in contemporary Hollywood cinema.

### Sound and Narration

Now that I have outlined what sonic style consists of and how it may be analysed, let us focus some attention to what sonic style can actually do. For instance, how may it allow us to comprehend a film's story? This is not yet an area that film sound critics have approached thoroughly, although it would seem a good starting point for understanding key functions of the soundtrack. In the remainder of this chapter I will offer some ways

in which we can consider sound effects, music and the voice as sophisticated devices within cinematic narration. I will then discuss narration in terms of four distinct “modes” as identified by three film critics. David Bordwell (1985b, 2007) outlines “classical” narration - the dominant mode in Hollywood cinema - and “art” narration, which derives from post-war European cinema. Geoff King (2005) considers “independent” narration, associated with American independent and semi-independent (indie) cinema; and Eleftheria Thanouli (2005) proposes a “post-classical” mode, a paradigm in world cinema that incorporates conventions associated with the above, but which is also characterised by its notable departures from classical mode. These modes form the basis for discussing the diversity of what I term “sonic narration” in contemporary Hollywood.

Sonic narration is a potentially large and intricate area that requires, at the very least, a basic understanding of narrative in the cinema. Bordwell has written extensively on film narrative, and offers one of the most authoritative and thorough conceptualisations to date (1985a, 1985b, 2006, 2007). His most recently revised study (2007) provides an analysis of narrative along three dimensions: the *story world* (“its agents, circumstances and surroundings”), the *plot structure* (“the arrangement of the parts of the narrative as we have it”) and *narration* (“the moment-by-moment flow of information about the story world”) (90). Bordwell transposes these dimensions onto the specificities of cinema, writing that: “I’ve found it useful to follow the Russian Formalists in using the concepts of *fabula*, the story’s state of affairs and events, and *syuzhet*, the arrangement in the narrative as we have it” (98). The third dimension, cinematic narration, is viewed as a process that mobilises the relationship between its two counterparts and the audience:

I take narration to be the process by which the film prompts the viewer to construct the ongoing *fabula* on the basis of *syuzhet* organisation and stylistic patterning. This is, we might say, the experiential logic of

understanding a film's narrative, the equivalent of the tourist's guided path through a building (2007 98).

This dimension is perhaps the most important to a study of the soundtrack, as it directly involves "the patterning of the film's surface texture, its audiovisual style" (Bordwell 2007 98). Camera angles, editing, lighting, *mise-en-scène*, colour, and of course, sound, are the basic ingredients of style, and they help the process of narration to mould the film experience for the viewer. In its simplest sense, narration will allow us to comprehend a film story by helping us to make inferences (Bordwell 2007 93) via the use of audiovisual cues.

For instance, characters, their motivations, their moral status and their relationships with one another and the audience may be presented in certain ways: we may identify with one character over others through the consistent use of point-of-view camera angles, or will grasp that a particular character is villainous due to dark, minor key music that seems to accompany them when they appear onscreen. There could be an unfolding of the story events and intimations of future action through the simple use of informational dialogue or more subtle cues made by a shift in lighting or musical mood, suggesting something bad may be afoot. We can be offered information about time duration and order of events via shots that jump from night to day, or a quirky split-screen that shows two events taking place at the same time. In terms of space, we can be shown location shots showing the New York skyline, or echo sounds that accompany large empty, cavernous framings.

This is a very basic outline of some recognisable facets of cinematic narration, and I have suggested just a few ways that it can be mobilised by audiovisual style. We can understand this complex system in a little more detail by looking at different modes of narration in the cinema: classical, art, independent and postclassical. Why examine each of these modes in detail? Because I wish to argue that they each intersect to varying degrees in contemporary Hollywood filmmaking, resulting in a diverse

narrational framework. Crucially, this is where sonic style and its functions can be located and described in their considerable variety.

Firstly, what is meant by a narrational mode? Bordwell defines this as: “a historically specific set of norms of narrational construction and comprehension. The notion of norm is straightforward: any film can be seen as seeking to meet or not meet a coherent standard established by fiat or by previous practice” (1985b 150). However, norms do not constitute solid rules; nor is a widely used, mainstream norm without its alternatives:

[...] *within* the reigning norm there is always a range of differentiation. Moreover, *outside* the reigning norm not all is sheer heterogeneity. A deviation from mainstream practice tends itself to be organized with respect to another extrinsic norm, however much a minority affair it may be (1985b 150).

Bordwell outlines “classical” narration, that is, the dominant in mainstream commercial cinema developed during the studio era, and “art” cinema narration, which came out of the European cinema from the 1950s and 1960s (1985b, 2007). These modes are descriptive of tendencies rather than stringent codes. For instance, not every film need strictly employ every feature associated with the classical mode to be thought of as classical. At the same time, classical and art narration are not diametrically opposed or mutually exclusive; there have long been degrees of overlap. As I pointed out in chapter 2, the art films of Michelangelo Antonioni (Blow Up 1966) contain classical elements. Moreover, it would seem that the potential for overlap has increased in the last four decades. The “Hollywood Renaissance” in the 1960s (e.g. Arthur Penn, Mike Nichols, Dennis Hopper), the movie brats in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas) and the indie cinema from the 1990s (e.g. Stephen Soderbergh, Paul Thomas Anderson, David Lynch) encompass notable films and filmmakers that incorporate norms from both classical and

art modes of narration. However it is still worth flagging up some of the important distinctions between these two modes.

Classical narration has been the leading mode in world filmmaking. Bordwell writes that:

By virtue of its centrality within international film commerce, Hollywood cinema has crucially influenced most other national cinemas [...] As a narrational mode, classicism clearly corresponds to the idea of an “ordinary film” in most cinema-consuming countries in the world (1985b 166).

Crucially, the audience makes sense of the classical film’s story world (*fabula*) on the basis of how it is justified or motivated. This includes: verisimilitude or realism (“is *x* plausible?”), genre (“is *x* characteristic of this sort of film?”) and, primarily, compositional unity (“does *x* advance the story?”) (2007 152).

The most basic compositional features of classical narrative include a psychologically unambiguous character who struggles to solve a definite problem or to attain specific goals; a conflict involving that character; and a resolution which results in the clear achievement or non-achievement of goals (Bordwell 1985b 157). The classical narrative is most likely linear in structure, and advances forward via a scheme of cause-effect logic, by and large governed by the character’s clearly defined, goal-oriented motives and actions.

To Bordwell (1985b), the process of narration is omniscient, communicative, and moderately self-conscious in terms of the information it imparts: “narration knows more than all the characters, conceals relatively little (chiefly “what will happen next”) and seldom acknowledges its own address to the audience” (1985b 160). These norms are subject to modification according to generic demands, however. For example, a detective thriller may not be highly communicative and will tend to withhold information to draw the audience into a mystery, for example, who are we to trust throughout Otto Preminger’s *Laura* (1944)? A musical may include self-conscious



narration, such as a character singing or smiling into the camera, as they do frequently in the numbers by Busby Berkeley (Dames 1934).

Bordwell also notes that narrative time and space are constructed with the primary purpose of representing the cause-and-effect chain (2007 152). Stylistic conventions including shooting and framing, sound mixing, lighting and editing ensure a coherent spatiotemporal framework for the unfolding of events:

Each scene's temporal relation to its predecessor will be signalled early and unequivocally (by intertitles, conventional cues, a line of dialogue). Lighting must pick a figure from the ground; colour must define planes; in each shot, the center of the story interest must be near the center of the frame. Sound recording is perfected so as to allow for maximum clarity of dialogue. Camera movements aim to create an unambiguous, voluminous space (1985b 163).

Continuity editing is a codified system of techniques that also ensures maximum coherence. It includes establishing shots to highlight key places for the story action; match on action (an example being the eye line match: a character is shown looking in one direction, the shot cuts to what the character sees); and axis shooting (shooting takes place on one side of the action at a time, so as to create a coherent and seamless sense of space). Classical narration is also economic, cutting from space to space and condensing or creating ellipses in time. However, this still requires an adherence to coherence and continuity. The camera is “freed from the contingencies of space and time” but it confines itself “to codified patterns of the sake of story intelligibility” (1985b 161).

How does sound style alone contribute to classical narration? We have already seen Altman et al.'s (2000) outline of the basic narrational functions of the classical *mise-en-bande* so there is no need for repetition. Suffice it to say that some of the fundamental principles that maintain the sonic negotiations between dialogue, effects and music still, by and large, continue to dominate the soundtrack in Hollywood. For many contemporary Hollywood productions, as in the classical era since the 1930s, the

components of dialogue, effects and music are often carefully arranged so as not to collide and compete for the listener's attention. It is often the case that, while an important sound happens, such as a moment of dialogue, other sounds, such as music or ambient effects may be lowered in volume or altered in their frequency to make way for its presence and allow it to be heard clearly. Most importantly, this functions in the service of intelligibility, and at the heart of intelligible cinema sound is the ability to understand the film's story information.

Narrative cinema has long been vococentric, or "verbocentric" (Michel Chion 1994a, 1999). This refers to the cinema's tendency to privilege the voice and dialogue over other sounds. Dialogue is a central vehicle of narration in the cinema; its clarity is paramount to our comprehension of the film's very meaning. Chion connects this convention with the positioning of the voice in our everyday perception of sound:

[...] the ear is inevitably carried toward it, picking it out, and structuring the perception of the world around it. The ear attempts to analyze the sound in order to extract meaning from it [...] This is such a natural reflex that everything is mobilized implicitly, in the classical cinema, to favour the voice and the text it carries, and to offer it to the spectator on a silver platter. The level and presence of the voice have to be artificially enhanced over other sounds (1999 5).

Like Chion, Mary Ann Doane (1985) discusses this artificial vocal enhancement in the classical cinema. She accounts for the development of mixing techniques during the studio era, which contributed to the construction of a sonic hierarchy of components that places the voice at the top: "Dialogue is given primary consideration and its level generally determines the levels of sound effects and music [...] Sound effects and music are subservient to dialogue and it is, above all, the intelligibility of dialogue which is at stake" (58).

In addition to narrative intelligibility, Doane claims that the introduction of dialogue to the classical cinema has served particular ideological functions, namely to reduce the "material heterogeneity" of the sound film, and by extension efface the

process of film production (57). Carefully synchronised speech is but one of a set of practices that became standardised during the 1930s, and aimed to produce a seemingly organic marriage between sound and image, body and voice: “in the sound technician’s discourse synchronization and totality are fetishized and the inseparability of sound and image is posited as a goal” (56).

The concealment of production could also be met in techniques like sound bridges over visual cuts. Rarely would sound and image cut simultaneously, as this would have a stilted effect, drawing attention away from the presentation of the *fabula* and to the very technique of cutting itself. It may even disrupt the almost fluid spatiotemporal progression of classical narration. Sound editing, like visual continuity editing, demands smoothness: “the effect desired is that of smoothing over a potential break, of guaranteeing flow” (57). The soundtrack is also omnipresent throughout the classical film. Complete silence is never used: “Since the absence of sound would signal a break in an otherwise continuous flow, it has become a major taboo of soundtrack construction. When there are no sound effects, music, or dialogue, there must be, at the very least, room tone or environmental sound” (57)

Ultimately, Doane’s claims that sound mixing and editing techniques helped to deny the traces of production supported her argument regarding an ideological agenda underpinning classical cinema. Crucially, sound mixing and editing techniques, from vococentrism to smooth sonic editing, contribute to unselfconsciousness, coherence and intelligibility, which are to Bordwell key characteristics of classical narration (1985a).

Sound style may be used to support the classical cinema’s highly communicative, knowledgeable ends. This may involve the use of a *leitmotif*, a vocal timbre or sound effect to comment on the quality of characters, the import of a place or piece of action. The pace or dynamics of the music may mimic the image onscreen - a technique known as “Mickey Mousing”. For example, an orchestral hit may denote a

shock for a character, or a sudden physical movement. Sounds or music may also serve to represent the classical cinema's "clear-cut, often Manichean, oppositions between those established as good or evil" (King 2005 75). A Romantic major-key *leitmotif* may denote the heroism of protagonists with modern examples including numerous compositions by John Williams to accompany the heroes of the Star Wars saga (1977; 1980; 1983; 1999; 2002; 2005) or Spielberg's Indiana Jones trilogy (1981; 1984; 1989). A defining vocal or sound effect may be attached to a villain, from the roars of the giant ape of King Kong (1933) to the dark, husky tones of Darth Vader.

These are just some of ways in which classical narrational norms are mobilised by sonic style. But what happens when we examine other narrational modes? The art cinema has been identified by Bordwell as a "distinct mode" (2007 151), characterised by its own institutional and industrial infrastructure on one hand and its stylistic and thematic functions on the other. He traces its history to national cinemas such as German Expressionism and French Impressionism (2007 151). In the years following World War II, the art cinema developed internationally, with cinemas such as Italian Neo Realism and the French New Wave proving popular overseas. But what are the chief characteristics of art cinema where narration and style are concerned?

Bordwell begins by observing that: "the art cinema defines itself explicitly against the classical narrative mode, and especially the cause-effect linkage of events. These linkages become looser, more tenuous in the art film" (2007 152). He sees this loosening of cause-effect relations as motivated by realism (verisimilitude) of a different order compared with that of classical narration. Realism in the classical sense constitutes character consistency and coherence among events, which ultimately advance towards a defined goal. Realism in art narration foregrounds real places (location shooting), real psychological problems (contemporary "alienation" and "lack of communication"), and "realistic" situations, such as coincidences and chance

encounters, trivial events, and so on (2007 153). Characters are often psychologically complex, demonstrating inconsistent behaviour and lacking clear objectives. For example, in L'Avventura, Anna wanders off forever without explanation and the knight in Ingmar Bergman's The Seventh Seal questions his own pursuits (2007 152-153). To Bordwell, the emphasis on complex character subjectivity means that the art cinema can be intensely expressive and symbolic. This occasionally has the effect of blurring the distinctions between objective and subjective reality: "Dreams, memories, hallucinations, daydreams, fantasies and other mental activities can find embodiment in the image or the soundtrack" (1985b 209). Ultimately we are presented with a more episodic, meandering, open-ended narrative scheme than the tight, linear, forward-moving classical variety. For example, who knows what finally becomes of the poverty stricken father and son of Vittorio de Sica's 1948 film Bicycle Thieves? (2007 152)

To Bordwell, the art film's spatiotemporal dimensions can be affected by its construction of both objective ("gritty") and subjective ("expressive") realism. Shot duration may be longer, with dead time (*temps morts*) left in (1985b 206). In other words, there are times when little is said or done, compared with the economic editing of the classical mode, which leaves out inconsequential moments. We can recall Antonioni's works including L'Avventura and Blow Up as being fraught with lingering moments of reduced speech and action. The representation of "intense psychological subjectivity" (2007 153) also has its effect on space and time. Scenery and temporal flow may be altered according to a character's state of mind. Bordwell observes "the distension of time (slow motion or freeze-frames) and the manipulation of frequency, such as the repetition of images" (1985b 209). One example that springs to mind is Francois Truffaut's Jules et Jim (1962), which involves various freeze frames. According to Bordwell, expressive spatiotemporal effects can also include: "optical

point-of-view shots, flash frames of a glimpsed or recalled event, editing patterns, modulations of light and colour and sound” (1985b 209).

In addition to expressing the meandering, goalless protagonist, the art cinema focuses limitations upon character knowledge (1985b 209). Art cinema’s narrational mode is not as knowledgeable of story information as the classical variety. As Bordwell notes: “the art film is apt to be quite restricted in its range of knowledge. Such restriction may enhance identification (character knowledge matches ours), but it may also make the narration less reliable (we cannot always be sure of the character’s access to the fabula)” (1985b 209). Antonioni’s Blow Up (1966) is an example. The audience is never certain that the corpse seen by the protagonist Thomas (David Hemmings) is actually there.

This leads to Bordwell’s final distinction between classical and art narration. The film that blocks access to knowledge, and ultimately *fabula* information, is symptomatic of self-conscious, or “overt” narration. (1985b 209) Art cinema has a tendency to draw the attention to its own process of narration, because, put very simply, it is not classical. As Geoff King writes, “Departures from dominant conventions are, generally, more visible than the conventions themselves, which often gain invisibility-through-familiarity” (2005 84). Bordwell outlines numerous features of overt narration, which for the most part amount to “deviations from the classical norms” that “can be grasped as commentary on the story action” (1985b 211). They include a lack of conventional story, the aforementioned withholding of information, limited communicativeness, causal gaps, and “more symbolism and connotation than “dialogue hooks”” (1985b 209). Stylistically overt narration can involve: “an unusual angle, a stressed bit of cutting, a striking camera movement, an unrealistic shift in lighting or setting, a disjunction on the soundtrack, or any other breakdown of objective realism which is not motivated as subjectivity” (1985b 209).

How can art cinema narration be expressed specifically through sound? The most obvious answers lie with the treatment of dialogue. Objective, “gritty” realism may include *temps mort* in dialogue, thus gaps in the voice would be long and/or frequent, as would show up on a *mise-en-bande* reading from the aforementioned examples of Antonioni. Chion notes that several European filmmakers challenge the classical primacy and unencumbered intelligibility of dialogue in the sound film through the process of “relativizing speech” (1994a 178). Citing Ingmar Bergman’s 1968 Hour of the Wolf, (182) he notes that this can involve “proliferating” voices so that they cancel each other out. Chion also notes the “decentering” of the voice, where dialogue is understood, but acting and editing “do not emphasise the content of the lines”. He points out that Fellini and Tarkovsky employ this device frequently (183). Sounds may be intensely subjective: inner thoughts may be heard but not spoken as the Nicholas Roeg’s British art-leaning movie Bad Timing (1980) demonstrates. In some contemporary American films, departures from the classical sound mixing and editing techniques as described by Mary Anne Doane can be identified. During The Graduate (Mike Nichols 1967), the silenced shouting of the furious wedding congregation creates a self-conscious disjuncture in the sound-image, body-voice bond. The scrambling of recorded voices in The Conversation (Coppola 1974) restricts audience knowledge to what Harry Caul can only hear, thus departing from the classical cinema’s communicative, knowledgeable norms.

As these American examples illustrate, and as has been discussed in detail in chapter 2, Hollywood has witnessed a growing degree of assimilation between the modes of art and classical narration, especially since the 1960s. Having found its way into the post-war American market, the art cinema began to influence prominent filmmakers in Hollywood, its narrational features absorbing into the classical structures

of the “Hollywood Renaissance” or “American New Wave” and later, into some of the more experimental films of the movie brats.

The integration of art cinema traditions in Hollywood filmmaking gained even greater momentum in the decades that followed. In the 1980s and the 1990s an independent cinema had consolidated itself into Hollywood’s commercial infrastructure.

Bordwell points out that:

American filmmakers have been assimilating art-film conventions for a long time [...] but the process has been given a new force by the rise of the independent film sector. Steven Soderbergh can remake an Andrei Tarkovsky film (*Solaris*, 1972 and 2002), Paul Thomas Anderson can borrow sound devices from Jacques Tati (*Punch-Drunk Love*, 2002), and Hal Hartley can absorb ideas from Jean-Luc Godard and Robert Bresson. The burst of experimentation on display in films like *Memento* (2000), *Adaptation* (2002) and *Primer* (2004) probably owes as much to the European heritage as it does the U.S. traditions of film noir and fantasy (2007 163).

As has been pointed out in chapter 2, independent cinema is a problematic concept for film theory, as its distinctiveness from Hollywood is not clear-cut. The independent cinema is a broad spectrum of industrial, economic and artistic practices, with varying degrees of departure from, and overlap with, Hollywood’s major epicentre. For the most part, this thesis focuses on the area of semi-independence that is not entirely separated from Hollywood cinema. I call this the “indie” cinema, and regard it as a sub-category of Hollywood. Industrially, indie refers to films released by major subsidiaries.

Narratively speaking, the films I tend to focus both employ and depart from classical norms. Others may use the term “indie” differently. For instance, Geoff King (2005) employs a broader application of “indie” to describe complete independence from Hollywood as well as partial independence, in industrial and aesthetic terms. Bordwell (2006, 2007) discusses semi-independent (indie) films like *Memento* (Christopher Nolan 2000) and *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson 1999) simply under the banner of “Hollywood”. With this paradigmatic flexibility and overlap in mind, what, we may



ask, are the key features of independent and indie films, and can we identify a narrational mode in its own right?

Geoff King (2005) has discussed some key principles of narration in the independent and semi-independent (indie) cinemas since the 1980s. He identifies some key departures from classical narration and style as a starting point for conceptualising a distinct narrational mode, although he does remain implicitly sensitive to the classical premises that underlie many independent and indie films including Gummo (Harmony Korine 1997), Slacker (Richard Linklater 1991), Stranger than Paradise (Jim Jarmusch 1984), Memento and Mulholland Dr. (Lynch 2002). He writes that:

Certain aspects of “classical” narrative structure remain central to many independent features even when others are undermined, minimized or complicated. In narrative terms, as in many others, indie cinema tends to occupy a place closer to Hollywood than to the auteur experimental margins, although a range of alternative approaches has been explored, including some quite significant departures (2005 60).

A number of these alternatives bear some resemblance to some of the norms identified in the art cinema by Bordwell (1985b, 2007). For instance, characters are sometimes complex or ambiguous, and defined less in terms of clearly established goals or morality than is usually the case in the classical mode (King 2005 74). Memento's Leonard (Guy Pierce) - an amnesiac seeking vengeance for a death caused by himself - is a case in point.

While classically oriented films are, by and large, motivated compositionally, i.e., building up expectations of what will happen via well defined, goal-orientated cause-effect logic and clear-cut character psychology, the independent and indie film sometimes shifts its motivational emphasis to a more “real-life” mode of verisimilitude. Events and characters may become more arbitrary and unmotivated, the not-so-extraordinary parts of life remain, and so the *syuzhet* has a meandering structure with less forward thrust than the classical film. Jim Jarmusch's Stranger Than Paradise and Richard Linklater's Slacker are notable for their wandering and somewhat uneconomic

narratives. Such films can be left at a loose end. Joel and Ethan Coen's latest offering No Country for Old Men (2007) ends with great uncertainty: Anton the psychotic assassin (Javier Bardem) is never caught, and the film wraps up abruptly and unexpectedly in the middle of the sheriff Ed's (Tommy Lee Jones) lament.

Some independent and indie films depart from the communicativeness of classical narration, which often results in the restriction on audience knowledge. In Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction (1994), the audience never gets to know the sought after contents of Marcello's briefcase. This achieves a specific effect: "In general, independent features are more likely to employ devices designed to deny, block, delay or complicate the anticipated development of narrative, to reduce clarity and in some cases increase narrative self-consciousness" (King 2005 63).

The self-consciousness exhibited by some independent and indie films also manifests itself elsewhere - often in a complex narrative - whether this includes spatiotemporal scrambling, puzzling/enigmatic plots or multiple, interweaving strands (King 2005 96). Because of the complexity of films like Magnolia, Adaptation (Spike Jonze 2002), Memento, and Mulholland Dr., the audience becomes engaged in a game of problem solving, which, as King argues, has the potential to draw the attention to very process of narration itself (2005 84).

Independent and indie films may also demonstrate more self-consciousness than classical cinema through stylistic devices. One is the artistically motivated flourish, "a celebration of the cinematic flair and technique that exists as much for its own enjoyment as to be subordinated to any other motivating structure" (King 2005 98). One example that springs to mind comes from Pulp Fiction in which Mia (Uma Thurman) tells Vincent not to be a "square". She simulates the drawing of the shape and in front of her appears a white outline, as if by magic.

More generally, independent narration, not unlike Bordwell's art mode, can be self-conscious in any display that reveals the constructed nature of the narrative fiction. Most obviously, there is the direct reference to the movie as a movie. In Adaptation, the film's very narrative becomes shaped by the creative influences of its screenwriter protagonist Charlie Kaufman (Nicholas Cage). American Splendor (Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini 2004) splices the factual material on which the film is based into its fictional narrative, including characters receiving commentary by their real-life counterparts. Another method of self-conscious display is stylistic, and works so that "an impression is created less in the way of smoothly orchestrated fabrication" (King 2005 107). This could range from realistic "gritty" film stock or jittery camera movements, to expressive jump cuts or oblique angles. The ending moments of Slacker unexpectedly launch into non-diegetic music for the first time, while the audience is shown the film's remaining moments through the lens of a Super-8 movie camera belonging to one of its many characters, thus foregrounding its material and technological dimension. King also discusses Evil Dead 2 (Sam Raimi 1987) and its hyperbolic camera and sound techniques, complete with distorted point-of-view shots and loud creaking noises, as heavily stylised and "showy" (2005 152).

The independent "mode" of narration outlined by King and the devices that mobilise it are quite distinct from with the classical mode, but it is also important to remember that many independent or indie films are still guided by classical norms. The last three decades of Hollywood filmmaking have particularly demonstrated the potential for incorporating a variety of narrational norms associated with the classical, art and independent modes described above which ushers in new possibilities for sound style. The internationalisation of the post war art cinema and the incorporation of areas of America's independent film industry into Hollywood (Miramax, New Line and the majors' indie production arms) have arguably led to the aesthetic variety that numerous

Hollywood productions exhibit in the contemporary era. This leads me to discuss what Eleftheria Thanouli dubs the “post-classical” mode of narration.

Thanouli’s postclassical mode of narration is indebted to the work of David Bordwell (1985a, 1895b) in that it draws on his models of narration. However, she also distances herself from Bordwell’s overarching view that while many changes have taken place in the cinema’s narrational norms since 1960, classical narration remains the unmovable dominant mode in commercial filmmaking (1985a, 1895b, 2006). Thanouli conversely proclaims a shift towards a “post-classical” mode of narration in the world cinema (2005). She recognises that, to varying degrees, classical principles continue to underpin commercial movies, especially in Hollywood. But new and prominent alternatives to its norms are being made available to filmmakers of the contemporary era, and should not be diminished: “at no point does the post-classical paradigm abolish the classical rules altogether to replace them with some radically new ones. On the other hand, the novelties of this paradigm should not be downplayed nor should they be deemed as a mere evolution that can be assimilated by the classical tradition” (148). But what are the changes that Thanouli highlights?

Thanouli’s writing demonstrates some overlap with the views of Bordwell and King. All three acknowledge changes to narrative composition in Hollywood in recent decades. Bordwell observes that, especially since the 1990s, films regularly boast “paradoxical time schemes, hypothetical futures, dawdling action lines, stories told backward and in loops, and plots stuffed with protagonists” (2006 73). Similarly, Thanouli writes that the novelty of postclassical narration is the “preference for multiple protagonists whose actions diverge and converge in a more episodic narrative structure that often takes the form of forking paths or spliced plots” (144). American Graffiti (1973), Nashville (1975), Dazed and Confused (Richard Linklater 1993), Magnolia, Adaptation, Reservoir Dogs (Quentin Tarantino 1992) and Pulp Fiction (1994) boast

ensemble protagonists, with multiple, repeated, non-chronological and episodic plot compositions. Many of these titles also straddle the writings of the above critics. This is testament to the three critics' shared recognition that a growing number of films depart from the linear cause-effect structure of events and the goal-oriented thrust of the classical paradigm.

Thanouli, Bordwell (2006) and King (2005) also recognise that as a departure from classical tendencies, some contemporary movies include characters with a wider spectrum of traits and emotions. They appear less clear-cut than the typical hero of the classical movie. As is also recognised in the art and independent modes, psychological complexity in the postclassical film can result in a loosening of narrational linearity and causality. Fight Club (David Fincher 1999) and Magnolia are films that partially owe their complex, often unpredictable stories to the flaws or psychological uncertainties of their protagonists, and are discussed at length by all three critics.

To Thanouli, realism in the postclassical film is driven by subjectivity, via "realistic" character psychology. The mental states of characters can take a prominent position in the narrational procedure over the more commonly classical omniscient framing. Memento's backwards, episodic plot structure is shot through with Leonard's experience of anterograde amnesia (acute short-term memory loss). This is stylistically expressed with many abrupt cuts placed in the middle of an action, or reversed film. The events of Fight Club (David Fincher 1999) are played out as its deluded, hallucinating protagonist (Edward Norton) would like to see them. In Lynch's film Mulholland Dr., a significant portion of the narrative entails the incorporation of extended dream sequences of the protagonist Betty/Diane, executed with the use of unnatural bright tones of light, and the use of sinister tones from low frequency music and sound design.

How else are narratives motivated? Certain key features of a film's narrative are generic. A car chase may be motivated aptly within an action movie; a long kiss within

a romance. Thanouli argues that postclassical narration is characterised by generic eclecticism, which she views as a defining aspect of modern films. While genre hybrids existed throughout the studio era (Neale 2000 245), Thanouli notes that they have continued to multiply: “what distinguishes the post-classical paradigm is that it turns the hybrid and the multi-generic films into the norm, while it simultaneously initiates an archaeological dig into the classical generic codes to revive them triumphantly” (144). Apocalypse Now is equal parts war film, epic and psychological drama. In (Kill Bill: Vol.2) Beatrix’s harsh training regime with Pai Mei stylishly cites the 1970s martial arts movie with speedy camera zooms. The film concludes on a car journey, shot in black-and-white with back projection to fabricate a 1940s *noir*-ish sequence. There is more to be said about genre without subsuming it completely in a discussion of narrative, and it will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

The work of Tarantino also proves apt for the discussion of the postclassical film’s considerable levels of artistic motivation, which draw attention to the filmmaking process. Thanouli discusses the frequent use of parody: “In contrast to the classical films that had little space for disrupting techniques that could ‘lay bare the device’, the post-classical cinema has explored the formal strategy of parody with a broad logic that surpasses the limited scope of parody as a comic device” (144). In addition, many films display considerable stylistic dynamism not necessarily rooted in parody - from the hyperbolic, bloody gore in Kill Bill: Vol.1 complete with massive surges of blood and sharp gurgling noises, the Ikea catalogue style tour through the protagonist/Tyler Durden’s apartment (Fight Club), to the more unusual, “unrealistic” sound effects heard in the films of Lynch. Departing from classical verisimilitude, these audiovisual features draw attention to their technique, and thus the production process itself.

Thanouli argues that whereas classical narration privileges compositional motivation, with cause-effect logic and goal orientation becoming the guiding

principles, postclassical narration lays less emphasis on this motivating feature. Hence the increased tendency toward more complex *syuzhet* structures, playful and self-conscious allusions, or the intensely subjective effects of many films seen today (144).

The postclassical narration is highly self-conscious, knowledgeable and communicative (Thanouli 146). As is the case with numerous independent and indie films, narrational construction can be foregrounded. A common stylistic technique is the use of the knowledgeable voice-over narrator. Fight Club and American Beauty (Sam Mendes 1999) involve characters introducing the films retrospectively as their stories (the latter of whom is dead), sometimes giving the end away from the very start. Overt character omniscience, that is, their ability to make their presence known beyond the narrative's spatiotemporal boundaries, has the effect of making the audience highly conscious of the process of narration. Older Hollywood films like Sunset Blvd. (Billy Wilder 1950) may have utilised this technique, but it has since become far more common.

However, while Thanouli argues that: "An intriguing aspect of the post-classical self-consciousness is that it does not work against the knowledgeability or the communicativeness of the narration" (146) a number of modern mystery films including Chinatown and The Big Lebowski (Joel Coen 1998), Memento, Mulholland Dr. and Lost Highway are self-conscious in their very lack of communicativeness and knowledgeability. This can be articulated through sound. For example, Memento involves voice-over narration, but rather than providing exposition, its protagonist Leonard expresses a distinct lack of knowledge by constantly questioning events around him. This draws our attention to his limitations as a reliable narrator. Lost Highway is also overtly uncommunicative in the classical sense because it reduces dialogical information in favour of a dark, murky blanket of atmospheric music and effects. These examples and others will be discussed in more detail in the final chapters, but what they

ultimately reveal is that communicativeness and knowledgeable remain a matter of degree in contemporary Hollywood.

As Bordwell observes, space and time in the classical cinema are geared towards representing the cause and effect chain of narrative events, thereby providing a coherent, uninterrupted framework in which they may unfold (1985b). By contrast, Thanouli describes an “Overt manipulation of time and space” (147) as a characteristic of the postclassical paradigm. For instance, the spatial composition in the postclassical mode may be guided by a flamboyant modification of the continuity style, discussed by Bordwell as “intensified continuity” (2006). He refers to “a fast cutting rate, the bipolar extremes of lens lengths, a reliance on tight singles and a free-ranging camera” (2006 137) as the stylistic hallmarks of the contemporary film, which are distinct from the fewer shots, moderate depth photography, and often static scenes of the classical era. There is now more rhythm and pace in the contemporary film and attention is drawn to the virtuosity of its making (Bordwell 2006 180). Ultimately, intensified continuity is “the visual language of commercial cinema” (2006 189), and its heightened stylisation offers contemporary narration a more self-conscious edge compared with the classical mode. May there be sonic equivalents to the modern extravagances of this style?

Partly due to the artistic and technical possibilities effectuated by new technologies (increasing sound channels, greater frequency and volume ranges) and partly due to the professional developments in Hollywood’s sound departments since the 1970s (the emergence of the sound designer, growing sound personnel), sound mixing, editing and overall *mise-en-bande* construction has become an increasingly complex and detailed affair. Sound montage, sound design and other crafts can combine ever greater numbers of sounds while retaining intelligibility. The elaborate and yet clearly heard battle scenes of Lucas’s Star Wars or Coppola’s 1979 Apocalypse Now, demonstrate what Walter Murch calls “Dense Clarity-Clear Density” ([ps1.org](http://ps1.org)).



Contemporary soundtracks can focus on ambiences and minimal intercomponent volume fluctuations (Lost Highway's dream-like sequences). Either way, these techniques flesh out the story worlds, defining space and setting. Sound edits can be carried out in rapid sequence, which partially parallel decreasing shot duration. Walter Murch's elaborate sound edits in THX-1138 (Lucas 1970) contrast numerous sound ambiences, defining the multiple spaces of the film. Due to a potentially greater number of sounds, detailed mixing techniques may be employed. For example, where a narratively important sound effect, phrase of music or line of dialogue warrants emphasis, the soundtrack may focus that sound, even if it is one of hundreds, like the "chink" of a vital bottle of antidote, which is dropped during a busy dinner dance in Spielberg's 1984 Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom. Technologies like Dolby permit greater sound contrasts, creating heightened moments of auditory suspense and climax (a number of examples from the Star Wars series spring to mind, which are discussed in later chapters). With these few examples in mind, contemporary sound can be described as fibrous, intricate, kinetic and elastic. It is therefore fitting to refer to these collective qualities under the term "sonic sinuousness". While Bordwell (2006) notes developments in visual editing, it is clear to see, and hear, that sound constructional techniques have also intensified, becoming ever more sinewy in response to new technologies and skills.

Let us return to the postclassical "manipulation of time and space" to which Thanouli refers (147). Time can be presented in a non-linear fashion, offering complex chronologies and repetitions of events, sometimes according to multiple character perspectives (150). Postclassical temporality can include events happening in parallel (Sliding Doors by Peter Howitt 1998; Magnolia), backwards (Memento), with fragmented chronologies (David Lynch's Lost Highway 1997; Inland Empire 2006) and repeats (Groundhog Day by Harold Ramis 1993; Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

by Michel Gondry 2004). Once again, sound can be used as a powerful device to express a film's non-linear temporal structure. In Groundhog Day Sonny and Cher's hit "I Got You Babe" blares from an alarm radio multiple times; a frightening auditory reminder that the life of protagonist Phil (Bill Murray) is stuck in a 24 hour loop. As I explore in chapters 11 and 12, Inland Empire and Lost Highway involve time loops, in which their protagonists return to events they have experienced before, viewing their past selves from another point in space. In the first instance, the past self never sees the future self (neither do we), but he or she does hear them. This is effected by a technique Chion identifies as "acousmatic" sound: a sound whose visual source is momentarily withheld (1999 18). Lost Highway demonstrates this through an intercom message whose unseen messenger is later revealed to be the very same man who earlier received that message. In Inland Empire, the mysterious clicking of footsteps behind a film set turn out to be those of the same woman who hears them from the other side of the set.

Thanouli suggests that blockbusters do not participate in the postclassical paradigm of narration that she proposes:

[With a] fundamental observation that the average American blockbuster still relies on classical narrative formulas and that the bulk of films coming out of major Hollywood studios exemplify very little tendency towards experimentation and innovation, we realize that the post-classical narration has not been [...] the favourite option for the high-concept filmmaking in the New Hollywood (158).

Because this thesis does take the "high-concept" blockbuster into account as well as other classes of film including the A-picture and the indie, I instead wish to refer to narration in Hollywood as "contemporary" rather than "postclassical". Many contemporary films do depart from classical norms, thereby sometimes warranting Thanouli's "post" designation, but the degree to which this is done has varied wildly in Hollywood. Indeed, blockbusters normally adhere quite closely to classical narrational norms, and so the "postclassical" is not so fitting a description of narration in such films. Thus "contemporary" narration is a more inclusive concept that describes both

the innovative *and* the traditional storytelling strategies in the modern commercial cinema.

Crucially this thesis highlights the variety of narrational possibilities available to filmmakers in the contemporary era, and more specifically its dimension of sonic style. Contemporary narration is certainly guided by norms, which place certain limitations on creativity. However these norms display more diversity than ever due to the influences of art and independent cinemas on the classical mode in contemporary Hollywood.

The sonic styles of contemporary films are also shaped to a degree by different generic norms. As is the case with other narrational norms, genre delimits the style appropriate to a give movie. Owing to the sheer multiplicity of generic variants in contemporary Hollywood, it is not possible to provide a detailed and wide-ranging account of the relationships between conventions in sound and genre. (However, works by William Whittington (2007 and forthcoming) have begun to make inroads by focusing on the sounds of science fiction and horror respectively.) However there are certainly connections which can throw light on how we begin to think about the contemporary soundtrack in generic terms.

### **Sound and Genre**

Bordwell discusses genre as a function within the process of classical narration (2007 157). As we have seen, genre permits certain stylistic devices within the narrative according to the criterion of verisimilitude, that is, what is expected as plausible and characteristic (Bordwell 2007 152). One might see a man-eating alien in a science fiction adventure, but it's not likely that it would help advance the story in a courtroom drama. Beyond its purely narrational function, genre is discussed in many contexts, and has developed into a large and extremely complex theoretical debate in film criticism. Rick Altman (1999b), Steve Neale (2000), Barry Grant (2007) and others have explored

film genre extensively. It is not my intention to excavate these debates in any detail, nor to provide a definitive account of genre in contemporary Hollywood. Rather I wish to reveal the ways in which sound devices can be identified within some of Hollywood's stylistic frameworks. This will be done with special attention to two distinct strands of production: the blockbuster and the indie cinema. Ultimately, while demonstrating a degree of generic diversity, all blockbuster films share common identifiable characteristics. In sonic terms in particular, they are bound by a quality that I term "sonic plenitude". This is a particularly dense, impactful and complex layering of sounds. Sonic plenitude can lead the way to thinking about blockbusters in stylistic terms. This stands in contrast with many films from the indie sector, as they demonstrate more complex relationships with genre, thereby eliding common sonic characteristics. If we take blockbusters and indie films together, Hollywood filmmakers have more varied relationships with genres in the contemporary era than ever before.

As I have pointed out earlier, the modern blockbuster inaugurated a change in the major studios' generic output. As Bordwell notes: "Promoting minor genres, filling them with visceral action, and picking up the pace are some common innovations made by modern Hollywood" (2006 58). Indeed, the often overlapping categories of science fiction, horror, and action-adventure were pushed to prominence in the 1970s by Star Wars, Jaws, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, and later ET: The Extra Terrestrial and Raiders of the Lost Ark, among others. Later their production would proliferate, creating sequels of out of The Empire Strikes Back (Irvin Kirshner 1980) and Return of the Jedi (Richard Marquand 1983), Jaws 2 (Jeannot Szwarc 1978), Indiana Jones and The Temple of Doom, and Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (Spielberg 1979), and others like Die Hard (John McTiernan 1988), Mission: Impossible (Brian de Palma 1996), Batman (Tim Burton 1989), Jurassic Park (Spielberg 1993) Independence Day (Ronald Emerich 1996), Godzilla (Ronald Emmerich 1998), Spider-Man (Sam Raimi

2002), War of the Worlds (Spielberg 2005), and many others. Of course, these genres were not entirely new to the cinema, but they had hitherto inhabited the peripheries of B-production (Forbidden Planet Fred M. Wilcox 1956, Night of the Living Dead George A. Romero 1968), and low budget serials, such as Buck Rogers (Babette Henry 1950), rather than major moviemaking. Hand in hand with the high budget, glossy production values of the blockbuster, these commercially rejuvenated cycles introduced new stylistic elements to the contemporary Hollywood landscape.

The complexities involved in discussing film genre are brought to light when we consider the contemporary blockbuster hits alone, not least because they may be characterised as multi-generic. Jaws may be a horror, a monster film, a disaster. Star Wars may be a science fiction, a fantasy, a space opera, an action-adventure. With these examples are genres within genres, genres overlapping and genres defined by wildly differing characteristics. In spite of the many stylistic and thematic and wholly idiosyncratic differences that exist between all contemporary blockbuster films (and there are many), they still share some common DNA, which is what makes them the marketable, popular films that they are. We may call this audiovisual plenitude.

Let us focus on sound alone. Whether disaster, action, science fiction, horror or all four, blockbuster genre films demonstrate a distinct complexity, density and scale in their soundtracks, especially since the 1970s. The large-scale, extraordinary frameworks warrant otherworldly, larger-than-life and sometimes futuristic sound effects. Due to the technological sophistication of these films, the sounds that they combine increase in detail and number year by year. At the same time, there is greater emphasis on impact, from chase scenes, spacecraft and battles to explosions and bellowing monsters. Sound designers like Randy Thom (Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom), Ben Burt (Star Wars films), Gary Rydstrom (Jurassic Park) and Frank Warner (Close Encounters) are at the creative forefront of these productions, while composers like John Williams

(Jaws, Star Wars series, Close Encounters, ET, Indiana Jones trilogy), Danny Elfman (Batman, Spider-Man) and David Arnold (Independence Day, Godzilla) construct their often elaborate symphonic scores around these impactful sound events, resulting in sonic plenitude: a quality common to blockbusters.

The prominence of these megapictures means that complex sound designs, impactful effects, rich symphonic scores and spectacular numbers are an important and recognisable attraction to contemporary cinema audiences (Sergi 2005b). In spite of the diversity and difference across contemporary blockbusters, as well as the various generic categories we could assign to individual films, the blockbuster could be considered in collective aesthetic terms due to its tendency towards sonic plenitude.

If we cross over to the indie margins of Hollywood, it becomes clear that we cannot make the same claims about their generic and sonic uses as the major blockbuster. The indie cinema demonstrates an intensely nuanced, shifting and complex relationship with genre, and therefore does not so easily lend itself to classification in stylistic terms. Commenting on the independent and indie cinemas, King notes that:

[Genre] can provide a stable base – in terms of both form/content and economics – within which to offer something different. A regime of difference-within-similarity is also typical of Hollywood genre production, the distinctive feature of the independent sector being the greater potential scope for difference (2005 166).

Some indie films may elude or complicate genre conventions. Others locate themselves squarely within a single or small number of generic traditions, while others capitalise on a mixture of generic elements. An independent film like Inland Empire (David Lynch 2006) is a particularly puzzling case. It may be considered a mystery, although it contains two very sudden, generically unmotivated dance performances. Verisimilitude is not an issue for Lynch, although perhaps for this director, expecting the unexpected is an almost recognisable, generic dimension in itself. Indeed the notion of the “Lynchian” auteur has a quasi-generic appeal to knowing audiences. As noted

above, Quentin Tarantino could be considered hyper-generic. His films knowingly and very stylishly draw on a colourful palette of generic conventions. Jackie Brown (1997) references blaxploitation; Kill Bill: Vols 1 and 2 (2003; 2004) cite Martial arts, *animé*, *film noir*, spaghetti Western and Death Proof (2007) pays tribute to low budget double-bill action. Joel and Ethan Coen tend to “genre-hop”, moving between comedy (The Big Lebowski 1998) and crime thriller (The Man Who Wasn't There 2001; No Country for Old Men 2007) while occasionally incorporating both. (Fargo 1996). Other indie films position themselves in singly identifiable genres. Horror has been a major generic trend in the indie sector, a notable example being the high profile Scream (1996). What is important is that there is no single sonic characteristic that can unify indie films, thus making it more difficult to characterise their sound styles in terms of generic traditions and generalisations. Ultimately however, the indie cinema contrasts with the blockbuster, the latter of which contains a common binding character since the 1970s.

Ultimately I wish to identify, where I can, the ways in which the sonic styles of contemporary filmmakers may be informed by generic traditions. It is clear from this study that films from the blockbuster tradition will yield more insights into sound style and genre due to the aesthetic commonalities across them.

### **Affect**

One final - and nevertheless vital - effect of sonic style should be discussed. The soundtrack has the ability to elicit an emotional response from the viewer, which is a key part of cinematic narration. Bordwell states that:

[...] comprehension must play a role in emotional uptake. It would be odd to say, “That film moved me deeply but I found the story incomprehensible”. However we explain the emotions generated by narrative, a large part of those emotions relies on making basic sense of the story (2007 94).

Emotional and dramatic effects are certainly coupled with the inferential information we extrapolate from sounds. This surely plays an important part in any given filmmaker's sound style. For example, the use of volume contrasts between the components of dialogue, sound effect and music can create suspense and impact. Recall the moment during Steven Spielberg's Jurassic Park (1993) when the roar of the Tyrannosaurus Rex fearsomely thunders over the feeble, panicked breathing of the two young children trapped in their jeep. Dissonances between dialogue, sound effect and music may elicit fear at the same time as they provide key information about character relations or their subjective states. In The Witches of Eastwick (George Miller 1987), the three "witches" Suki, Jane and Alex (Susan Sarandon, Cher and Michelle Pfeiffer) engage in a heated quarrel that precipitates a violent gale. The sound of wind is accompanied by an orchestral track rising to a crescendo, drowning out their screams until the ground beneath them loudly cracks and they are forced to part. Ultimately, the careful analysis of the cinema can reveal almost endless combinations of sounds used by filmmakers for a variety of dramatic effects.

As this chapter has revealed, narration in contemporary Hollywood cinema is complex and heterogeneous, inheriting norms from the classical mode while absorbing other influences largely deriving from, or sharing similarities with, the art mode. At the same time, sound personnel have developed and employed a range of devices that express the various storytelling approaches possible today. This sonic narrational diversity has intensified after a historical trajectory that has seen Hollywood consolidate a variety of strands of production, from the films of "Hollywood Renaissance" and movie brats to blockbusters and the indies. Sound is an increasingly varied storytelling tool, its intercomponent structure conveying a variety of meanings and inspiring complex emotional responses according to the type of film in which it functions. The increasing technological sophistication and skilled labour that meets it has helped to



build up the contemporary “sinew” of the Hollywood soundtrack, a defining characteristic.

Over the last forty years, the two sound teams of Lynch, Badalamenti and Splet, and Lucas, Williams and Burt have exploited many of the developments in contemporary narration in Hollywood. Lynch has moved from independent, experimental narrative filmmaking in the early 1970s to blockbuster production in the 1980s and towards an indie position in present-day Hollywood, and as such has explored the various narrational permutations normally associated with each strand of production. More importantly, the soundtracks made by himself, Alan Splet and Angelo Badalamenti provide vivid auditory markers of these strands and their aesthetic developments. Lucas started working with major studios at the tail end of the art-influenced “Hollywood Renaissance”, at a time when the movie brats began their own experiments with classical filmmaking. Since Star Wars however, he committed to classical storytelling and identifiable genre production. The soundtracks by Burt and Williams express the narrational and generic norms employed by Lucas’s space adventure franchise, while benefiting from developments in sound technology to the present day. Together, these two sound teams represent the breadth and diversity of contemporary sound style and their narrational uses. In order to elaborate on the sonic differences that hold between the two teams, I will draw on a selection of their films to which I will apply *mise-en-bande*, micro and macro sound analyses where appropriate. The films are organised chronologically, so that a coherent and full account of sound style and its developments may be mapped from the 1970s to the present. THX-1138 (Lucas 1970, sound by Walter Murch); The Grandmother (Lynch 1970); Star Wars (Lucas 1977); Eraserhead (Lynch 1977); Star Wars sequel Return of the Jedi (directed by Richard Marquand 1983); Dune (Lynch 1984); The Phantom Menace (Lucas 1999); Lost Highway (Lynch 1997); Attack of the Clones (Lucas 2002) and Mulholland Dr.

(Lynch 2001) represent the diversity of film style and story in contemporary Hollywood at the same time as they throw some light on how this diversity developed since 1970. More importantly, my close analyses of these films reveal that, as a result, the Hollywood soundtrack has come of age as a complex and various craft.

## Chapter Nine

### **The 1970s: Experimental Nightmares and Blockbuster Fantasies**

How did prominent filmmakers of 1970s Hollywood employ sound to narrate their movies? During this decade, sound aestheticians were faced with rapidly changing industrial formations, generic cycles, technologies and storytelling conventions, emblematised by the early movie brat films and later the rise of the blockbuster.

Drawing on close analyses of THX-1138 (George Lucas 1970) and Star Wars (Lucas 1977) among other examples, I argue that the sound experiments developed by Walter Murch and his Hollywood contemporaries, from sound montage to dialogue reduction, were partially eclipsed by more flamboyant forms of sound construction. They included sonic plenitude and classically coded narrational devices such as verbocentrism, as exemplified by the prominence of the blockbuster and the introduction of Dolby stereo in the 1970s. In a detailed discussion of independent films The Grandmother (Lynch 1970) and Eraserhead (Lynch 1977), I will compare and contrast Lynch and Splet's approaches to sound narration with those of their Hollywood contemporaries. Their films display alternative stylistic devices to those found in the works directed by Lucas, although similar devices that would gain more prominence in the films of Hollywood's indie division almost two decades later.

The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed some new ways in which film sound was produced and utilised within American movies. For the young filmmakers of Hollywood, technological developments expanded their horizons for experimentation. Equipment became more lightweight, such as the Nagra tape recorder. As production mixer Jack Solomon says: "The Nagra III revolutionized the business. We used to go out on location with a ten-ton truck full of sound equipment. Now you go out with a station wagon or a van. When the Nagra came in, all of the lighter equipment seemed to come in at the same time" (Vincent LoBrutto 8). Mixing and editing equipment became

cheaper while its quality improved, as Murch recalls when he was hired to create the sound for Francis Ford Coppola's The Rain People (1969):

Technically, the equipment was state of the art, and yet it cost a fourth of what comparable equipment would have cost five years earlier [...] The frontier between professional and consumer electronics began to fade away. In fact, it faded to the extent that it now became economically and technically possible for one person to do what several people had done before, and that other frontier – between sound-effects creation and mixing – also began to disappear (“Stretching Sound...” Filmsound.org).

Sound production and postproduction became a more flexible affair both logistically and creatively, and allowed leading figures like Murch considerable command over the soundtrack, thus opening space for experimentation.

During this time, major filmmakers were seeking innovative ways to tell stories. Partly drawing on the auteur tradition of the classical era and partly inheriting the European art leanings of the “Hollywood Renaissance”, directors like Coppola, Robert Altman, Martin Scorsese and George Lucas would offer adventuresome narratives, from the paranoid, puzzling The Conversation (1974) to the gritty Taxi Driver (1976). These films also employed innovative sonic devices, courtesy of Walter Murch and Frank Warner respectively. Recall the deliberately unintelligible snatches of dialogue from surveillance recordings in The Conversation, or the overpowering fizz of Alka Seltzer in Taxi Driver, marking Travis Bickle's psychic departure from reality. In addition, film genres, including space adventure science fiction and fantasy, began their ascent to prominence in the mainstream cinema, bringing a new set of stylistic possibilities to major moviemaking. Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) marks a major turning point. Therefore, for the creators of sound during this period, there came the opportunity to exploit new technological and creative avenues. A variety of sonic experiments ensued, helping to bring sound to the foreground of the cinematic experience via striking levels of stylistic complexity and occasional self-consciousness.

Two prominent innovators of this era began to pioneer complex multichannel sound techniques. Robert Altman (M.A.S.H and Nashville) experimented with overlapping dialogue by combining a hubbub of multiple, closely recorded “direct” (non reverberant) voices of equal volume and intelligibility, thus allowing the auditor to listen to several dialogues simultaneously. “This freedom of interpretation”, notes Jay Beck, “opened Altman’s films to a new level of narrative complexity that was hitherto unheard in Hollywood filmmaking” (158). Walter Murch began to record, mix and edit multiple sounds with heightened intricacy; a technique that came to be known as sound montage, and was Murch’s film credit from Coppola’s Rain People through to Apocalypse Now. Editing and mixing practices such as these signalled an era of heightened stylistic and narrational complexity in film sound.

At this time Murch began to challenge the primacy of dialogue as chief informational communicator in cinematic narration. In Coppola’s The Conversation, key moments of dialogue are rendered almost inaudible, thus restricting audience knowledge and heightening the film’s core mystery. Secondly, sound effects are foregrounded within the *mise-en-bande*, highlighting both their importance and potential sophistication as storytelling devices. In THX-1138, sound effects are the central signifiers of location, character and audience identification. They would also mark the burgeoning field of science fiction and its move towards a sound effects-heavy *mise-en-bande*. Experiments like these created a more complex, shifting dynamic between sound components in the *mise-en-bande* and their roles within narration. This can be contrasted with Rick Altman et al’s (2000) model of the studio-era soundtrack whereby sounds had a more delimited narrational function and volume “space” in the mix, from the verbocentric dialogue as guarantor of intelligibility, to the low-level sound effects as ambient background.

Finally, Murch's experiments with sound created highly deconstructive effects for the films he worked on. At times, the constructed nature of the soundtrack was made apparent to the audience, and ultimately the sound style displayed a degree of self-consciousness. In THX-1138, the sophistication of Murch's sound montage may be enough to draw attention to the stylishness and technique of the soundtrack itself. Although writing about the modern visual system of editing and shooting, Bordwell's comments on intensified continuity take on fresh significance in terms of these contemporary practices of sound editing and mixing. He writes of "[...] new technical devices, encouraging heavy stylisation and self-conscious virtuosity, have changed our experience of following the story [...] even more ordinary scenes are heightened to compel attention and sharpen emotional resonance" (2006 180).

A close multi-component analysis of THX-1138 reveals Murch's willingness to incorporate sound devices that narrate the film in different ways from the classical mode. This gestures towards a burgeoning experimentalism within sound style in the early 1970s, as well as an increasing complexity in its functions, especially when framed within contemporary narrational paradigms and generic trends.

### **THX-1138**

The most striking feature of THX-1138 is its predominance of sound effects throughout the *mise-en-bande* mix and the intricacy of sound montage. The film's detailed and experimental approach to sound mixing and editing demonstrate that in the 1970s Hollywood soundtracks could wield increasing stylistic and technical vigour. William Whittington accounts for Murch's creativity:

Murch experimented with sound perspective, tape-speed modulations, audio filters, and image-sound metaphors throughout [THX-1138]. He created unique montages of sound, which included dialogue exchanges between robot police officers and controllers, the whine of jet car chases, and ambient cacophonies of overpopulated cityscapes (20).

The sophisticated density yet unencumbered clarity of the films' *mise-en-bande*, and its rapid shifts in ambience are heavy in virtuosity and artistic display, thus exhibiting a degree of self-consciousness. The sound montage of THX-1138 also functions as a complex set of narrational devices, communicating the film's story world largely via its construction of space, from large, echoing halls to dense, claustrophobic corners. Finally, the sound effects heaviness of the montage (figure i) builds up sonic scenery consistent with the burgeoning science fiction in Hollywood cinema.

THX-1138 is a science fiction feature in which an industrial worker (played by Robert Duvall) escapes from an oppressive society whose inhabitants are drugged and placed under constant surveillance. Suited to its austere, factory-like visual setting, the soundtrack is persistently alive with the busy whirring of machines, radio waves, sirens and echoing, automated voices. The film includes an orchestral score to sustain mood and pace, and although infrequent, its dialogue is sufficiently verbocentric and communicative so as to sustain a degree of narrative intelligibility in line with classical expectations. However, the film's intricate mesh of sound effects is the dominant presence in its *mise-en-bande*. From the opening moments, a sequence reveals that a nuclear accident has occurred, and is contained in the wing of a labyrinthine work complex. Stationed in another area of this building is the protagonist, named/numbered THX-1138. A series of cuts back and forth reveal a dark control room in which the incident plays out on monitor screens, and the room in which THX-1138 works, which is a contrasting calm white space with a production line and robotic manufacturing arms. In the first shot of the sequence, a high-pitched alarm wails over a multitude of radio frequencies as the loud, but slightly muffled, nuclear explosion resounds from the monitors of the control room. In the following shot of the protagonist's work room, these combined sounds dip in the *mise-en-bande* as a clearly spoken automated announcement blares overhead to the inhabitants of the room. Meanwhile, in the dark

control room, a second voice can be heard, tuning itself in as if on a radio frequency which occasionally fades in and out. This voice suddenly becomes clearer when the film cuts back to the white factory room, which announces that THX-1138's working shift is over. These shot-to-shot ambient contrasts - by turns dense/chaotic and sparse/intelligible - establish the film's spatial parameters while communicating key story information. The sinister, dark space of surveillance is distinguished from a light, tranquil place in which workers are pacified by soothing voices and relative quiet. The affective dimension is also heightened: the sounds of a nuclear disaster followed by enforced normalcy and reassurance by a machine-made voice produce a chilling, nightmarish dystopia.

The sequence that follows continues to build oppressive spaces through its sounds, particularly voices. THX-1138 is framed in a medium-long shot walking down a corridor as the rush of wind breathes gently in the background. As he approaches the building's exit, another automated announcement echoes above. Up to this point, all voices heard in the film are recordings played out to the masses, serving to denote an Orwellian space of omniscient surveillance, authoritative instruction and corporate promotion. These voices may be analysed using the terminologies and concepts of Michel Chion (1994a). He draws a distinction between the "acousmatic" - a sound we hear without seeing its originating source onscreen - and the "visualised" - a sound whose source is seen (71-2). Acousmatic sounds often arouse the curiosity of the spectator, who wishes to see its source (85). In the case of THX-1138 the audience never sees the source (faces) behind the sounds (voices). Knowledge is concealed from both the audience and the film's protagonist, thus serving as a reminder that something sinister hides behind the immediate diegesis.

In the final moments of this sequence, THX-1138 climbs an escalator into a blinding white doorway while the sudden introduction of a melodic jazz instrumental



starts up, accompanying the protagonist on his way home. Crossing a starkly bright building, his auditory experience is not unlike that of a large shopping centre, which is layered with the light music and a further *mélange* of spoken announcements echoing overhead. Like the factory room in which he works, this audiovisual space creates an entrapping world dressed in deceptively peaceful, wide-open space. The loud, marching footsteps as a line of convict-like workers pass by offers a coded verification of this fact. As is the subsequent arrest of a passer-by, who is met with the words “stay calm” by a faceless robotic policeman. Finally, THX-1138 enters another corridor and the music becomes distant and reverberant, the rushing wind sound rising up once more. This final, almost sonically empty moment spells an end to the trajectory from the workplace to home, and underscores both the expansive repetitiveness of the film space and lonely, dull existence of its chief character.

This sonic sequence contains a bewildering array of sophisticated narrational devices, inviting inferences about the protagonist and his drone-like existence, the sinister powers behind this, the story’s futuristic setting, its entrapping location and their atmospheric spatial dimensions. No dialogue occurs during this time, and only short snippets of spoken language can be heard. This has significance on two levels. Firstly, a lack of dialogue may serve the narrative itself, implying character alienation and stifled communication, not unlike the narrational norms of the art cinema that David Bordwell discusses (2007 153). Secondly this manoeuvre may also demonstrate a distinct departure from the classical mode in that it usurps the dialogue as key storyteller, replacing it with sound effects.

The array of sound effects in this sequence define the film’s spatial contours, its thematic concerns, its eerie environs and its key character. These particular features communicate important information at the same time as they arouse emotion. To Sergi

(2005a), my analysis would depart from a widely held perception that film sound effects function in the service of affect alone. He points out that:

One of the most enduring views of sfx [sound effects] is that it works at an emotional and sensual level rather than an intellectual level. Dialogue, on the other hand, is commonly indicated as the portion of the soundtrack that deals with more directly at an intellectual level [...] In short, sfx are understood as customarily providing ambience, mood, scope and size, but not information, characterisation and plot development, something traditionally understood in the domain of film dialogue ([filmsound.org](http://filmsound.org)).

The sound effects of [THX-1138](#) certainly communicate core information, particularly about the film's key character. This therefore challenges the common assumption that sound effects are primarily sensational or emotional in their function within the film's narrative. Sergi continues by questioning the distinction between the sensation/emotional and the intellectual in the cinema in first place:

Characterisation takes place at many levels: the main protagonist's house décor, the clothes he/she wears, the way he/she speaks, but also the ambient sound of his/her apartment, the sound his/her car makes (or shoes, clothes, watch, whatever comes handy) will all add up in the mind of the audience as a way of learning about character. How can it be possible then to differentiate between the sensual/emotional and the intellectual? ([filmsound.org](http://filmsound.org))

As Sergi proposes, and as [THX-1138](#) illustrates, organising the components of the contemporary *mise-en-bande* according to assumed primary functions - e.g. dialogue as informational; music as emotional; sound effects as sensual - is to deny these components their complex, multiple and shifting roles. Moreover, the functions of narration and affect (information/intellect and emotion/sensation) cannot always be considered as entirely discrete.

Finally, the narrational system of [THX-1138](#) combines well-established classical norms (a core, goal-oriented protagonist, a linear cause-effect structure and a largely vococentric *mise-en-bande*) with more experimental forms (from its occasional reduction of dialogue to its permanently acousmatised voices). Key filmmakers from the 1970s - especially the movie brats - were increasingly assimilating influences not

only from their studio-era Hollywood predecessors, but primarily art and occasionally more obscure, non-commercial cinemas. Lucas states that THX-1138 was heavily influenced by Arthur Lipsett's 21-87 (1964), an avant-garde Canadian government-funded short (Brett Kashmere 2007). In combining stylistic elements outside of the classical mode into a largely classical narrational scheme, the film's storytelling and audiovisual scope broadens.

The soundtrack for THX-1138 also highlights the ways in which its style is motivated by contemporary generic trends. The film is by and large consistent with the science fiction genre. Its prevalence of futuristic sound effects owes something to this convention, with Murch using innovative creative techniques in their production. The sound effects of the science fiction genre were in earlier eras generated by electronic synthesisers and oscillators. According to Marc Mancini, films like Forbidden Planet (Fred M. Wilcox 1956) are abundant in these synthesised sounds (362). Mancini also points out that in a departure from this tradition, Murch collected real and everyday sounds for THX-1138 and manipulated them later, creating both a familiar and yet futuristic sound. This is also a technique employed by contemporaries Frank Serafine, who worked on Tron (Steven Lisberger 1982), and Ben Burtt. The approach to sound effects also hinted at what was to come with Burtt's own Star Wars sound work, and would later become the province of fantasies and adventures thereafter. Contemporary sound designer Randy Thom explains how the manipulation of everyday sound effects can fabricate a believable, verisimilitudinous world for its audiences. Calling the process "amplified reality", he writes that:

Amplified reality is the basic goal in action adventure and sci-fi sequences. How do you produce sounds that have amplified reality? You begin by trying to forget for a while what the Nazi tank in an Indiana Jones film would "really" sound like, and start thinking about what it would FEEL like in a nightmare ("Machinery Aimed at the Ear" Filmsound.org).

The automated voices heard throughout the sequence of THX-1138 may also be viewed as generic vehicles as well as devices of narrational intelligibility. Indeed, the line that divides voices and sound effects is blurred at moments in the film. Mediated by sound technology, many announcements are heard in differing timbres and qualities. Some are entirely unintelligible, and result in an indistinct tone or atmospheric echo, becoming like sound effects rather than voices. This particular use of voices is also rooted in generic convention, for as Chion notes, the science fiction film is “full of technological devices that are constantly transmitting human voices with varying degrees of fidelity” (1994a 190).

The film’s score by Lalo Schifrin is largely orchestral in style, combining modern composition with classical instrumentation. On the whole it remains a background presence within the film’s overall *mise-en-bande*. The music is a far cry from the scores by Lucas collaborator John Williams, who during this part of the decade was best known for scoring Hollywood disaster movies such as John Guillermin and Irwin Allen’s The Towering Inferno (1974). The slow-paced, droning strings of THX-1138 are suited to the film’s largely understated, brooding setting, and also stand in stark contrast to Williams’s grandiose and plenitudinous symphonic accompaniment to Star Wars seven years later, which would represent something of a shift in compositional styles by the end of the 1970s.

The intercomponent structure of THX-1138 is extremely intricate, as can be seen in the gentle peaks and troughs in each element on the *mise-en-bande* graph (figure i). Walter Murch’s detailed and otherworldly sound montage - a key aspect of the soundtrack’s structural intricacy - was a technique encouraged within numerous productions under American Zoetrope. Many Zoetrope films of the 1970s, mostly created by Lucas, Murch and its founder Francis-Ford Coppola, generated sonic environments heavily orientated around sound effects and complex sound montages.

Murch's sonic collaboration with Coppola on The Conversation (1974) is based on the experiences of investigative sound recordist Harry Caul (Gene Hackman), who tapes a conversation between a couple involved in a possible murder plot. Many of the sounds heard by the audience are those recorded and heard by Caul, from the urban ambience behind the couple's dialogue to the noisy digital interference that often obscures the surveillance. Although the film, as its title would suggest, is based on listening to speech, Murch himself notes that: "There really is no dialog in the normal sense past the halfway point of the film. There are exclamations occasionally: "Hey, stop!" or, "We know what you're doing, Mr. Caul".'" (Kenny 7). Most of the sound montage involves an elaborate mix of sound effects, from the distorted frequencies to technologically enhanced and obscured voices, creating a dense and sophisticated weaving of sound. In addition, the film is similar to THX-1138 in that its very lack of dialogical intelligibility challenges classical verbocentrism. However, this very lack also serves the narrative itself by enhancing the mystery of the film and creating ambiguities about future events which both produce and reflect Caul's increasing paranoia. Uncertainty and lack of knowledge are the film's chief effects on the audience, who are invited to share in the confusion and dread experienced by Caul himself.

American Graffiti (Lucas 1973) is another Zoetrope offering that demonstrates the stylistic complexity of Walter Murch's sound montage. The film is dominated by an early 1960s rock 'n' roll soundtrack, with the music assimilated into the sound montage via the process of "worldizing". To achieve this, Murch and Lucas placed the music in the diegesis - often playing from different radios - and produced a variety of sound spaces and perspectives, to create the effect of music coming from a car, in a shop or on the street (Jarrett 4). Apocalypse Now (Coppola 1979) came six years later, and was Murch's first soundtrack in the Dolby stereo optical format. The emphasis on sound effects - from the signature helicopter blades to shattering explosions - went hand in

hand with the technology's creation of sophisticated sound space via surround channels, so that sounds can be heard both left, right and from behind by cinema audiences.

In selecting THX-1138 I wish to highlight changes happening in the Hollywood soundtrack during the early 1970s. From the stylish and moderately self-conscious complexity of its sound montage, to its departures from verbocentric modes of narration, THX-1138 is a symptom of developing trends in genre - namely the rise in science fiction - and a willingness for filmmakers to assimilate distinctive forms into classical narration. Essentially, the experimental ethos of filmmakers like Lucas and Coppola et al. was combined with the technical and artistic skills of sound practitioners like Murch, and these collaborations were in large part responsible for innovative sound films that mark the start of contemporary era of sound in Hollywood. In this sense, THX-1138 stands as a formative project.

### **The Grandmother**

On many levels, The Grandmother sits closer to the margins of American filmmaking than THX-1138. Industrially, the film is entirely independent from Hollywood. In contrast to Lucas's film, which was released by Warner Brothers, The Grandmother was not produced for general commercial release, and was funded by the American Film Institute, costing just \$7500 to produce (Hughes 12). The film is also notable for its significant departures from the classical narrational principles on which a more commercial film like THX-1138 draws. It does have a relatively straightforward cause-effect, character-motivated scheme, yet its structure is episodic rather than smoothly continuous, and several times the *syuzhet* is punctuated by a series of short animated vignettes: a feature almost unheard of in larger scale American productions. The film's almost theatrical appearance - from its extraordinarily inhuman characters, its larger-

than-life props and pronounced colour and lighting schemes - eludes classical expectations of cinematic verisimilitude and genre.

In terms of its soundtrack, The Grandmother also reveals its distance from classicism, particularly in its complete lack of verbal dialogue. Vocal noises and sound effects become the film's chief aural signifiers, challenging the classically verbocentric principle of narration to an even greater extent than THX-1138. The sound effects by Splet and Lynch also constitute a highly deconstructive and self-conscious sonic style that works against classically received audience expectations of auditory verisimilitude. In doing so the sound effects contribute to a narrative world that aligns the audience with the subjective experiences of its young protagonist. In their intense psychological motivation and high self-consciousness, these auditory devices partially ally the film with an art cinema mode of narration as outlined by Bordwell (1985b, 2007).

The Grandmother depicts the daily life of a bed-wetting young boy who, suffering abuse at the hands of his parents, grows a benevolent elderly companion from seed. This surreal premise is one that suggests intense psychological narration: the boy's isolation most likely leads him to fantasise about a family member who loves him. The *mise-en-bande* (figure ii) is sparse compared with THX-1138, and when individual sounds occur, they have a vivid, shocking impact in keeping with the film's theme of brutal parenting and childhood fragility. One sequence begins as the boy wakes to find that he has wet his sheets. His moment of realisation is accompanied by the rush of a fast-running stream high in the sound mix, a hyperbolic auditory signifier for the process of urination, and one that clearly highlights the boy's own shame. As the stream sound trickles off, an ominous, deep-pitched synth drone fades in. This sound forecasts the imminent threat from the father who enters the room to quickly discover the bed stains. This moment is then cut through with high-pitched electronic screeches that underscore both a sense of the boy's panic and his father's escalating, white-hot rage.

The father peels back the sheets to a loud and exaggerated heavy “whoosh”. He lets out a furious, wolf-like shout and drags his son to the bed, pushing his face into the sheets and violently shaking him. The sound of the boy hitting the soaked bedclothes dominates the *mise-en-bande*, mixed to an alarmingly loud level with a “direct” and close-up recorded quality. This would appear at odds with the soft cloth material with which we see him come into contact. Again, the heightened vividness of this sound effect can be construed as intensely subjective, marking the boy’s violent and terrifying ordeal. He then freezes and lets out a slow and heavily reverberant cry, like a wounded animal. This moment offers a prolonged and agonising denouement to the episode.

This sequence is representative of the soundtrack of The Grandmother in two ways. Firstly, its sound style can be viewed as highly self-conscious. In particular, the foley, that is, its synchronised sound effects artistry, does not abide by dominant codes of auditory verisimilitude due to its unnaturally loud and synthetic sounds revealing the artifice of the soundtrack. However, these heightened sound effects could also play an important narrational function in terms of characterisation, as they may be interpreted as representing the boy’s psychological rendering of the world. Secondly, the voice eschews verbocentric techniques that typify the talking classical film.

The Grandmother is a highly distinctive film in its lack of verbal language. Characters communicate via barks, growls, whistling and wailing. Following the advent of the talkies in Hollywood, world cinema has been by and large dominated by dialogical storytelling. By contrast The Grandmother rejects this widespread norm. It would not do to claim that this manoeuvre is a simple revival of the silent cinema, as there is still a soundtrack in the sense that it has a complex and carefully recorded, mixed and edited *mise-en-bande* with its voices, music and sound effects remaining meticulously synchronised with the image. At most, silent cinema offered live musical accompaniment, and on occasion, sound effects. The soundtrack of The Grandmother is



difficult to locate comfortably within any specific cinematic narrative paradigm, pre or post-talkies, and yet its wordless voices are complex narrational devices, contributing towards both a coherent communicative story and clearly delineated characters and relationships. Much like THX-1138, The Grandmother departs from the common view and classical practice that positions verbal dialogue as a vehicle of narrative intelligibility and intellectual communication compared with non-dialogical sounds. The mournful howl of the young boy and cruel snarl of his father, now straddling the line between dialogue and sound effects, define the contours of the characters of bully and victim and their painful paternal relationship, while gesturing towards the film's wider tragic domestic setting. Thus Splet and Lynch employ non-dialogical sounds that express both the "emotional" and "intellectual", which are for Sergi (2005a) inextricably connected. Non-verbal communication also becomes a core thematic thread within the story itself. The boy and his father's inability to speak to one another signifies intense familial breakdown and human alienation. A lack of words may spell the death of communication within the film's story world, but for soundmen Splet and Lynch, non-verbal sounds are celebrated as highly expressive and communicative narrational devices.

The Grandmother also represents a departure from classical sonic narration via sound effects and their remarkable rejection of classical realism or verisimilitude. Conventionally, it is the task of the foley artist to produce sounds that match the action within the diegesis, from a passing car to a creaking floorboard. For mundane effects like these, it is important that they sound plausible, based more or less on how they may sound to the audience in "real life". In The Grandmother however, Splet's sound effects bear an exaggerated ontological connection with the image events and objects they represent. The boy's urination sounds like a river; the sound of his bed sheets, which were created by recording a swinging golf club (Rodley 47) resemble the swishing sails

of a ship; elsewhere, a rainstorm accompanies a pouring watering can and a giant seed produces the sound of birdsong. Each sound seems overblown in its audiovisual context.

In order fully to understand the effects and implications of these exaggerated sounds, it is worth questioning how a cinematic audience is conditioned to understand particular sound-image relations. Also, how is verisimilitude configured within particular historical moments? Rick Altman offers some insight with his discussion of the cinema's "indexicality", that is, its ability to record reality:

One of the most deeply ingrained notions about cinema is that it depends primarily on recording [...] whereas painting is based largely on iconic resemblances, and writing is built around symbolic relationships [...] cinema is thought to depend especially strongly on indexical connections, that is, a close existential relationship between the represented item and its representation (1992 42).

However, Altman stresses that developments in technology have pushed cinema sound past the era of indexicality. Postproduction recording, sound-enhancing machinery and later, digital sound, have "made it possible to produce all the music and effects for a film sound track without recording a single cricket or musical instrument" (1992 44). This lack of indexicality stems from the fact that the cinema's audiovisual relationship is highly fabricated. In order to feature in a given film, many sounds need not rely on the production recording of profilmic reality. Unlike the majority of cinematic images, many sounds are added in postproduction stages. Michel Chion notes that this method is critiqued by spectator-listeners, who claim to detect a disjunction between the cinematic sound and image:

A common perspective [...] that we might call naturalist, postulates that sounds and images start out in "natural harmony". Proponents of this approach seem surprised not to find it working in the cinema; they attribute the lack of this natural audiovisual harmony to technical falsifications in the filmmaking process. If people would only use the sounds recorded during shooting, without trying to improve on them, the argument goes, this unity could be found (1994a 95).

Chion challenges the “naturalist” view, arguing that even in real life, relationships between sound and image may be perceived as non-harmonious. He describes the sense of “mismatch” between the voice and face of an individual when one has had the experience of getting to know one before discovering the other: “We never fail to be surprised, even shocked, when we complete the picture” (1994a 97). In the same argument he notes that the cinema is conversely quite capable of producing a seemingly unified experience of audiovisual reality. Sound reproduction in high definition is now the norm. Ubiquitous, powerful and hyperreal in its presence, this sonic simulacrum is becoming the standard form of listening, and supersedes that of our immediate experience (1994a 103). This has implications for our understanding of a sound-image bond in cinema and the notion of “truth”. As Chion says, “sound that rings true for the spectator and sound that *is* true are two very different things” (1994a 107). He evokes the example of Francois Truffaut’s The Bride Wore Black (1968), in which a woman crosses her legs wearing silk stockings. The sound that accompanied the image is in fact a recording of nylon stockings rubbing together, as the real sound of silk was not quite “right”. This can be understood by ways in which audiences are conditioned to respond to sounds according to cinematic criteria of sensation rather than lived auditory experience:

The codes of theatre, television, and cinema have created very strong conventions, determined by a concern for the *rendering* more than for the literal truth [...] the film spectator recognises sounds to be truthful, effective and fitting not so much of they produce what would be heard in the same situation in reality, but if they render (convey, express) the feelings associated with the situation (1994a 109).

The common practice of sound dubbing (sounds applied onto images that are in reality not their auditory source) is not merely an issue of sound clarity. Sound effects can render images in a way that produce a complex of narrational effects, in both abstract and material terms. Lynch and Splet utilised dubbing techniques to produce sounds that rendered actions and objects with exaggerated and “unrealistic” attributes.

This is a core feature of the narrational scheme of The Grandmother, for it simultaneously constructs atmosphere, character and space. The heightened sounds produce a frighteningly surreal, dream-like setting, while their very strangeness and intensity suggests that psychological motivation is at work. They are most likely a symptom of the boy's damaged, oversensitive perception of his home life. According to Bordwell, character subjectivity finds expression in the art cinema through certain audiovisual cues (1985b 209). Much rarer in the classical cinema, psychological states are at times conveyed explicitly by style. Whether or not it was Lynch and Splet's intention to assimilate the norms of art cinema into The Grandmother, it would seem that their choices of sounds were aimed at rendering the expressing the subjective state of the boy, therefore sharing common ground with the art mode. Lynch says that:

If you were recording a real sound, that would be one thing. But that's just a point of departure to find the next level of sounds that build up the intensity of the experience for this kid. So it's finding those sounds that fit, and yet don't fit. They're just off. They amplify the feeling or amplify the emotion (Rodley 47).

The sense of a sound being "just off" - a partial sound-image mismatch - lends itself to what I term "extra-materiality". When a sound renders its source, it is done so in an offbeat, exaggerated manner, and so the audiovisual effect is semi-unrealistic and not-of-this-world. In this sense, "extra-" resounds with double meaning: both "more" and "beyond".

Extra-materiality also has effects beyond expression and intelligibility within the film's fiction world. These non-verisimilitudinous sounds have a denaturalising effect that reveals Lynch and Splet's own production work. Departing from the classical norm of "realistic" representation, they offer an alternative to its inconspicuous and low-level self-conscious mode of narration and style. As Mary Anne Doane reminds us, sound practitioners in the 1930s developed various mixing and editing techniques to "marry" sound and image (1985 57), ultimately fabricating a believable, intelligible world. This

was not the intent of all filmmakers however, as the stilted and overtly constructed auditory world of an independent film like The Grandmother demonstrates. However, this type of visible or audible sonic artifice is not merely an identifier of contemporary independent cinema. This approach emerged in mainstream experiments of the 1970s, thus marking historical change within Hollywood itself. As Jay Beck has observed, Splet's sound contemporaries in 1970s Hollywood were demonstrating an experimental interest in deconstructing the codes of mainstream filmmaking inherited from the classical Hollywood era (162). He writes that: "The filmmakers of the period often questioned the "transparency" of the prior representational system by revealing its highly constructed nature" (162). A key example is Murch's work on The Conversation:

By using a bugging expert, Harry Caul, as the central character, Coppola, along with sound mixer Walter Murch, deconstructs the ontological myth of recording technology through Harry's act of meticulously re-recording and "sweetening" his surveillance tapes (Beck 158).

In both instances, the experiments of Splet and Murch foreground the method of audiovisual production by deliberately weakening the ontological connection between what is represented by the cinematic image and the postproduction sounds heard. For Splet, this approach is symptomatic of a system of narration that takes root outside of the classical tradition, while gesturing towards the film's non-commercial, non-industrial production context. In the industrial and institutional context of Hollywood, Murch's sound experiments demonstrate a historical development whereby filmmakers - the movie brats in particular - were beginning to explore and expand the boundaries of classical narration by assimilating hitherto uncharted creative possibilities.

The Grandmother and THX-1138 demonstrate some of the experimental possibilities of sonic narration in the 1970s from two distinct production contexts.

Lynch and Splet's refusal to use highly realistic sound effects self-consciously foregrounds their construction of sound and image while contributing to the narrational process by conveying intense character subjectivity. They thereby offer alternatives to

the classical cinema's narrational norms while working within an industrially independent framework. Murch's sound montage offers a dense and intricate combination of sonic signifiers while working in the new generic spirit of Hollywood's science fiction. Both films demonstrate the ways in which sound effects – and not just dialogue – can function as meaningful and highly communicative narrational devices, thereby challenging the verbocentric form of the classical *mise-en-bande*.

My analyses of The Grandmother and THX-1138 gesture towards sound as a complex and expansive narrational tool which began to come of age in the experiments taking place in and out of Hollywood in the early 1970s. In Hollywood, the increasing variations in classical storytelling ushered in by the movie brats broadened the possibilities for sound style (Beck 158), which were further advanced by new techniques such as sound montage. Burgeoning generic trends in mainstream cinema were also changing the sonic landscape, such as the science fiction genre, which placed much emphasis on otherworldly sound effects. Outside of Hollywood, sound provided considerable stylistic alternatives to classical narrational devices, as The Grandmother demonstrates. However the work by Murch also suggests that alternatives were being explored within Hollywood, suggesting some considerable realignments in mainstream storytelling in the contemporary era.

In the late 1970s, further developments on the New Hollywood landscape precipitated readjustments across its sonic dimension. Technological change came with the introduction of Dolby stereo, the industry saw the rise of the modern blockbuster, and consequently genres like science fiction, fantasy and adventure continued their ascent in the big-budget commercial stratosphere. As films like Star Wars would show, these changes offered a partial reshaping of the contemporary *mise-en-bande* while imbuing music, effects and dialogue with new narrational functions. Instead of the deconstructive experiments or challenging of dialogue intelligibility as previously

explored by Murch, Star Wars employed more transparent production methods while demonstrating a commitment to verbal comprehension developed during the classical heyday. The stylistic complexity that came with innovations like sound montage would continue however, and with the revitalisation of symphonic scoring, developments in special sound effects, and the sonic “room” opened up by Dolby technology, soundtracks could be more intricate than ever, tipping into heightened sinuousness, flamboyance and sonic plenitude. Meanwhile, beyond Hollywood’s developments and into the independent sector, Lynch and Splet continued to experiment with sound. Like The Grandmother, Eraserhead reemployed deconstructive sound-image relationships and intensely subjective sonic motifs while exploring and emphasising the narrational possibilities of sound effects. However, Eraserhead was also a dialogue feature film, thereby adopting more traditional means of narrational communication than the non-verbal voices heard in The Grandmother. Eraserhead was an early indicator of Lynch’s gradual journey into more classically oriented filmmaking methods and styles, correlative with his work with the Hollywood studios.

This era saw significant increases in the size and scope of both Lynch’s and Lucas’s directorial projects. Eraserhead (1977) and Star Wars (1977) demonstrated more technical and commercial ambition than their respective predecessors. Sets were larger and distribution was wider. Star Wars saturated theatres worldwide and Eraserhead had a modest release on the Los Angeles arthouse circuit. Both films also showed a slight intensification of the classical codification of narrative compared with The Grandmother and THX-1138. This classicism can be heard on their soundtracks in their increased commitment to verbocentric narration. Of course, Eraserhead and Star Wars still departed with one another significantly, with the latter’s sound style functioning in the service of identifiable genre and classical narrational norms to a far greater extent than the former.

Crucially, significant differences in sound usage can be traced across the axis of history, from the experiments of the early 1970s and towards the end of the decade, and the axis of industry, from Hollywood to the independent sector. They serve as a striking reminder of the breadth and complexity of sound style and technique in American cinema throughout the 1970s.

### Star Wars

George Lucas, Ben Burtt and John Williams are emblematic of significant realignments happening to sound in Hollywood during the late 1970s. As their first collaboration in Star Wars suggests, some of these adjustments display considerable innovation while others entail the exploitation of older classical conventions developed during studio era. Ben Burtt worked in an experimental vein, and like his older contemporary Murch, he aimed to carefully create and combine special sound effects, partially building on the technique of sound montage. By taking advantage of Dolby stereo, the Star Wars sound team established audible improvements in the clarity of, and balance between, the components of the *mise-en-bande*<sup>2</sup>. This meant, among other things, that they could combine a greater number of sounds at any one time, thereby affording a potentially more densely layered and elaborate soundtrack. Sonically, Star Wars also aligned itself with relatively recent trends to emerge in Hollywood. Its spectacular and technologically sophisticated soundtrack bore the extremely high-end production values of the 1970s blockbuster, while its science fiction and fantasy stylings worked within the new generic trend in popular commercial cinema.

However, there is evidence of the film also representing a return to classical narrational and stylistic norms. John Williams reinvigorated the late Romantic

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<sup>2</sup> There are a number of different release versions of Star Wars available, which involve new sound mixes and remasters. The version I use for the purposes of analysis is the Special Edition Trilogy which includes a digital remaster of the soundtrack. While there will be inevitable differences between releases old and new, analogue and digital, and theatrical and home viewing, it is still possible to draw the same conclusions with regard to sound fidelity, *mise-en-bande* dynamics and narrational uptake.



symphonic score; a standard musical component in the films of the studio era whose dominance had hitherto declined after filmmakers began appropriating other musical styles in the 1950s. Star Wars also owes itself to classicism by positioning dialogue at the top of the *mise-en-bande* mix, ensuring its function as chief narrational communicator - although this is not to deny the narrational effectiveness of the film's sound effects. This manoeuvre departs from the previous work by the likes of Murch, who experimented with alternatives to verbocentric narration by obscuring or reducing the presence of dialogue and emphasising the role of sound effects. Technology also plays its part. According to Jay Beck, the introduction of Dolby stereo in the 1970s brought with it mixing practices that placed dialogue in the foreground (161).

Star Wars remains one of the most widely known science fiction adventure films ever made. In terms of narration and style it departs from many Hollywood productions of the earlier part of the decade, especially the more slow-paced, contemplative and dystopian science fiction films like 2001: A Space Odyssey (Stanley Kubrick 1968) and THX: 1138. As Geoff King writes:

The *Star Wars* films also offer a return to something closer to the 'classical' Hollywood narrative built around individual heroics, pressing deadlines and a dash of romance. In this respect they can be contrasted not to just *2001* but to a number of films that explored more complex forms of narrative in the relative freedom allowed to some filmmakers when the major studios were trying to find their way out of the financial crisis of the late 1960s and early 1970s. If one aspect of this 'New Hollywood' was represented by the 'modernist' tendencies of *2001* or the films of Robert Altman, the dominant version was marked by the appearance of 'blockbuster' attractions such as *Jaws* and *Star Wars*, films that offered a combination of spectacle, driving narrative and mythic or ideological recuperation (2000 76).

The story is indeed constructed according to many classical principles. A linear plot is organised around an initial crisis, a battle, and the eventual triumph of good over evil. It involves clear-cut, goal-oriented characters Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) and Han Solo (Harrison Ford), whose task is to rescue Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher), a rebel against an evil galactic empire who has been taken hostage. The film also provides a

number of sights and sounds consistent with the spectacle of the contemporary science fiction blockbuster. Many of its key sound effects are captured by King's term "zap aesthetic" (2000 75): an audiovisual style alive with high-tech special effects, from the rapid whooshing of spacecraft traversing space and time to the fast-paced action of space combat, packed with laser-gun pulse-fire and swishing light sabers. According to critics like Larry Gross, the film's symphonic climaxes and explosive effects (crystallised in a finale that sees, and of course hears, the destruction of the imperial Death Star) fall under his classification of the "Big and Loud" movie: an action-packed big-budget production that ostensibly foregrounds audiovisual hyperbole over narrative complexity (3). With these notions of story, spectacle and genre in mind, the following analysis attempts to locate the sounds of Star Wars within the science fiction blockbuster since the 1970s.

The opening moments of Star Wars reveal Leia aboard her starship accompanied by the android C3PO and robot R2D2. Soon enough, the three face an onboard invasion from imperial agents, which escalates in a perilous battle. Despite the inevitable dramatic chaos of this deadly encounter - during which an array of space-age weaponry is fired back and forth - the soundtrack is in fact remarkable for its clarity, especially in the balance it retains in the *mise-en-bande* (see figure iii). Its chief aims are intelligibility of dialogue and a steady relative volume level between sound components. This involves a careful layering of sounds and mixing patterns so when one component peaks, another troughs to make "room". The sound effects track - made up of several sounds at once - takes up much of the overall soundtrack, but when a character speaks, the voice is by far the dominant sound, fulfilling the aims of verbocentric narration. The music track is a relatively quiet background presence, although it momentarily rises when dialogue or sound effects become hushed or cease altogether (see figure iii). Frequencies are also balanced out in similar ways for

maximum clarity. Both the music and dialogue tracks largely occupy a mid-range frequency, and so when dialogue is spoken, music is positioned low in the mix.

Although the soundtrack is distinctly busy with a range of concurrent frequencies (all three components run throughout with little time for silence at any level), they are all carefully balanced so as to retain a constant volume, thus maintaining a *mise-en-bande* in which all sounds can be heard clearly. The soundtrack of Star Wars may be far more intricate than anything produced in the studio era, but the intelligible dynamic between the soundtrack's components point to a mixing style comparable to one negotiated during the 1930s. Altman et al. write of the *mise-en-bande* mix of the time:

Were we to plot the combined dialogue and effects from virtually any classical Hollywood scene with music, we would find a graph of peaks and valleys, of narrative and atmosphere, of adventure and repose. Adding in the music volume, however, we would find nearly level total volume. Compensating for differences in the other sound components, the music sees to it that overall attention remains high, even in the absence of specific events (2000 353).

This classical technique is a defining feature of the Star Wars soundtrack, and provides a key point of contrast with the experiments of Murch and Splet in the early 1970s, who would frequently allow dialogue to be mixed in a haze of sound effects. Star Wars therefore sees a return to a more traditional model of sound mixing based on intelligibility and sonic fidelity.

The pivotal moment during the film's opening sequence is of course the forced entry of imperial troopers onto Leia's ship. Here, the soundtrack shifts gear from modest and suspenseful (vococentric dialogue, the distant rumbling of spacecraft, quietly brooding brass tones) to "full-throttle" (commotion of laser warfare, canon explosions, falling bodies and frenzied footsteps, all underscored by an intense orchestral movement). This abundance of sounds of course contributes to a considerable degree of spectacle while revealing a shift in aesthetics for both Hollywood blockbusters and the science fiction genre in the 1970s.

Spectacle has long been a key characteristic of Hollywood's blockbusting history but is neither exclusive nor entirely imperative to the blockbuster. King Kong (Merian Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack 1933) and his fall from the Empire State building, Ben Hur (William Wyler 1959) and its climactic 20 minute chariot race, and The Sound of Music (Robert Wise 1965) with its show-stopping numbers are a few prominent examples of films that combined fantastic audiovisual scenery, visceral energy and, of course, big money. But not all blockbusters have flaunted the same aesthetic grandiosity. Major hits like Gone With the Wind (Victor Fleming 1939) and The Godfather (Coppola 1972) are big-budget productions with epic narratives, but they look and sound modest by comparison. Since Jaws and Star Wars however, the terms "blockbuster" and "spectacle" would seem more closely connected than at any other time in Hollywood's history. In addition, it would appear that a distinct kind of spectacle has become the blockbuster staple. Sheldon Hall writes that:

the *type* of spectacle primarily associated with the "new" Hollywood – both technological and emotive, "sophisticated" in its formal construction and primal in its mode of address – found its definitive form in [Jaws and Star Wars] [...] it would not, I think, be an exaggeration to say that all Hollywood blockbusters since have sought to reproduce those moments and the feelings provoked by them, to the extent that whole movies have seemed to be constructed around a succession of climaxes (2006 179-180).

To Hall, the explosive defeats of the Shark in Jaws and the Death Star in Star Wars mark the passage of modern blockbusters into spectacle based on technologically constructed fantastical scenes, fast-paced action, violence, and startling moments. Geoff King refers to this as the "impact aesthetic" (2000 246), while Larry Gross discusses the "Big Loud" quality of modern big budget movies. This type of intense spectacle is partly related to generic trends - science fiction, disaster, fantasy - orbited by modern blockbusters since the 1970s after Lucas and Spielberg invested big money, state-of-the-art technology and mainstream aesthetics in comic book heroics, otherworldly beings and larger-than-life calamity. Of course, many have since followed suit with

films like Batman (Tim Burton 1989), Mission: Impossible (Brian de Palma 1996), Armageddon (Michael Bay 1998), The Matrix (Andy and Larry Wachowski 1999) and Spider-Man (Sam Raimi 2002).

With his emphases on large-scale images, loud sounds and rapid action, Larry Gross discusses the appeal of the blockbuster, or “Big Loud Action Movie”. Of course, much of its value derives from its sensational impact:

[The] ability to make the visual sensation answer all the questions of meaning and value is what makes Lucas and Spielberg the film-makers that a subsequent generation of directors of Big Loud Action Movies have wanted to be [...] food for the eyes (some would say candy) wins audience assent. And not just images: sound plays its part (7).

The “big loud” aesthetic certainly provides an appropriate way of thinking about contemporary blockbusters like Star Wars, but there is certainly more to such films than spectacle. Gross claims that filmmakers like Lucas and Spielberg reduce narrative complexity in favour of thrills and sensation (7). However, a grand, hyperbolic audiovisual style should not be viewed as something that cancels out or eclipses meaningful narrational command. In Gross we once again encounter a perceived division between spectacle and narrative, sensation and intellect. Sergi (2005a) offers a political perspective on this distinction:

Blockbusters and Hollywood cinema at large have often been differentiated from European cinema on this count: Hollywood as sensual, European cinema as intellectual. Blockbusters as sensual rollercoasters, European films as intellectually engaging. This has a postulate: sensual as vulgar and less worthy of artistic merit, intellectual as sophisticated and worthy of being identified as art ([filmsound.org](http://filmsound.org)).

Other recent contributions to this debate emphasise that sensation and intellect, or more generally, narrative and spectacle, need not function in diametric opposition (Smith 1998; King 2000; Bordwell 2006). As Whittington points out, “Throughout Star Wars, [Lucas] provided an “abundance” and “intensity” of audiovisual content [...] these were not simply spectacle effects for awe and show however; rather, they were integrated into the film and became a part of the narrative dynamics” (94). Indeed in Star Wars we see

and hear the spectacular docking of a battleship, with its deep, explosive hiss and slow, steady glide through space. While it is valid to describe these sounds and images as “big and loud” and “spectacular”, they no less constitute a narrative event, signalling invasion and an imminent threat to Leia’s starship: an important moment that sets up the conflict at the heart of the story. The short, piercing sounds of the laser guns in battle may raise the audience’s pulse, but they are still significant in that they sonically define the violent imperial enemy while suggesting significant danger to Leia. Ultimately, irrespective of the number of decibels or the extremity of frequency heard, sounds engage audiences on multiple levels.

For all its sublime sound effects, the *mise-en-bande* of Star Wars emblematises a return to traditional storytelling, prioritising narrative intelligibility via the enhancement of dialogue. After a brief period of departure in experiments by filmmakers like Altman and Murch, films like Star Wars were ready to reconfirm the dominance of verbocentrism. The reestablishment of the classical mode was a key feature in many contemporary blockbusters after the late 1970s, which have been driven by a market geared towards a family demographic. Steve Neale (2002) writes that: “New Hollywood blockbusters, unlike old ones, are principally addressed to the perceived tastes of children, young adults and families” (2). The patent family orientation of the Star Wars franchise means that narrative comprehension is more urgent than ever. By placing dialogue at the top of the *mise-en-bande*, this film restores the Hollywood film back to its classical assumption that dialogue is chief narrational tool, and that verbocentric cinema is paramount to attracting an audience of all ages, particularly children.

It is not only the blockbuster narrative that has been ignored or diminished by critics in favour of discussing spectacle. The more modest, “everyday” aesthetics have also been sacrificed at the altar of the notion of the “big and loud”. The soundtrack of Star Wars is far from an unrelenting assault on the senses. There are many sonic

moments of contemplation and repose which deserve attention, and without them, the spectacular moments would not have their impact. The opening minutes of the film involve sonic transitions from quiet to loud, from sparse to plenitudinous. There is a brief lull in the music and sound effects tracks just before the soldiers invade Leia's ship, and as C3PO verbally reflects on the perilous situation. Just a matter of seconds before the door is forced open and Leia's guards prepare for attack, the music almost completely drops out, so when the battle commences it sounds comparatively loud, dense and impactful. Ultimately, the "big loud" moment of "sonic plenitude" (to avoid the ocular etymology of the term "spectacle") becomes a relative quality, and is one aspect of a whole host of sonic possibilities.

Sonic plenitude is enabled by the sinuous structure of the contemporary soundtrack. Sinuousness is ultimately traceable to developments in sound rerecording, editing and mixing from the late 1960s, when the portable Nagra and newly affordable high quality mixing equipment allowed sound aestheticians to combine and edit together large numbers of original sounds to produce intricate sonic tapestries. The introduction of Dolby stereo also opened up the range of sonic textures and decibels used, allowing impactful sound contrasts, dense clarity and considerable elasticity in fabricating a film's sonic world. Sinuousness and plenitude are defining characteristics of the sound of Star Wars. In addition to providing sensational effects, these techniques serve a plethora of functions within the film's narrative, from constructing spatial dimensions of the story world and defining characters and character relationships to building atmosphere and generating climax. Once more, contemporary sonic sinuousness can provide an aural counterpart to Bordwell's notion of intensified continuity, a contemporary system of editing, camera technique and *mise-en-scène* which he describes as "traditional continuity amped up, raised to a higher pitch of emphasis" (2006 120).

The sound of Star Wars is of course well documented within its technological milieu (Sergi 2004; Whittington 2007). The dissemination of Dolby technology, which began its unprecedented rise at the end of the 1970s, has been viewed as something of a paradigm shift throughout Hollywood. Sergi accounts for its impact:

Dolby's achievement goes considerably further than a technological shake-up. In the 1970s and early 1980s, Dolby achieved nothing less than a comprehensive industry-wide transformation, from studio attitudes to sound, filtering through to filmmakers' creative use of sound and audience expectations (2004 11).

Dolby stereo certainly offered filmmakers considerable creative purchase when constructing soundtracks. Its noise reduction system meant little loss of quality when layering sounds so a potentially dense, but notably clear, soundtrack could be created. Improved volume and frequency response was also a key aspect of the stereo optical system - and so a considerable "sonic space" was opened up for the *mise-en-bande*, in which each channel can dip and rise with intensity. In addition, in theatres its standard four-channel release format (left, right, centre and surround) provided "sonic movement, localization, separation, and new relations between filmgoers and the film's diegesis" (Whittington 116). This technological development is conducive to the possibilities of sonic sinuousness and plenitude in films like Star Wars. The soundtrack is busy, with an intricate classical score, a wide variety of simultaneous sound effects, and the interweaving of dialogical verbocentric passages. Its *mise-en-bande* is dense yet clear, and there is a broad textural and volume range, as is notable in the opening sequence, from the quietly suspenseful approach of the imperial troopers to their chaotic assault. It could also be argued that Star Wars' rich, high-fidelity soundtrack was instrumental in helping sound to rise to prominence in the mainstream cinema in both production and reproduction. Sergi argues that:

From sound architecture to spatial awareness, from sound texture to detail, from mixing to editing, from voice characterisation to physical sound, the film introduced a concept of sound that was finally willing to



abandon its traditional shyness and move forward to claim a primary role (2004 25).

While Dolby stereo may have expanded the creative possibilities for sound mixing and construction resulting in a rise in flamboyant, innovative soundtracks, it would seem that it also facilitated in the Hollywood film's return to undisputed classical verbocentrism. As Beck argues, the introduction of Dolby stereo required that dialogue be placed in the central channel to ensure comprehension, thus in mixing practice it was dealt with separately from the other sound components, and often privileged:

By separating dialogue mixing and elevating it to the top of the postproduction hierarchy, Dolby stereo was a retreat from the creative construction of the soundtrack to a single strategy for mixing [...] Coincident with the introduction of a standard of postproduction sound mixing is a marked change in the way sound is utilized in narrative construction. Narrative emphasis tends to be placed in a single acoustic register, favoring only one component of the soundtrack (161).

According to this view, a shift in Hollywood's technological paradigm did not bear creative innovation alone. It also saw the return to a classical norm that had briefly been challenged in the early 1970s by the likes of Murch, Altman and their contemporaries.

The above discussion has revealed the ways in which the soundtrack of Star Wars functions in the service of classical narration while also embodying contemporary innovations as relates to genre, blockbuster production and technology. However, a micro- study of its soundtrack also yields insights into its narration and style. The quality of Star Wars' individual sound components is worth noting. The effects created by Ben Burtt are similar to those made by Murch on THX-1138. This is in large part thanks to Lucas's vision of the film in which sounds and images are fantastical and yet familiar to the audience. In "The Machinery Aimed at the Ear" Thom writes that:

George Lucas's idea that the look of "Star Wars" should embody what he called the "used future" was an amazing flash of insight that Ben Burtt carried into the sound of his films. Instead of using electronically synthesized sounds, like the sci-fi films that came before "Star Wars", Ben recorded the ordinary objects around him (and a few not so ordinary) then processed and manipulated those sounds to make them believably foreign. The familiar aspect of the sound convinces us that

what we hear is real in a way the sine waves in early sci-fi films never could. The exotic face of the same sound suggests a dimension of reality we hadn't quite imagined before ("Machinery Aimed at the Ear" [Filmsound.org](http://Filmsound.org)).

Indeed, Burt's sound effects in Star Wars are partially anchored in "the everyday", and it would seem that they fit the criteria of Thom's concept of "amplified reality" as associated with the spectacle or science fiction film. The fantastical nature of the film's imagery combine with ordinary sounds to render an indexical relationship both fantastical and believable.

More generally the sound effects of Star Wars are aligned with classical expectations of plausibility and generic verisimilitude. Within the framework of fantasy and science fiction, the film forges conceivable ontological connections between its sounds and images. For example the swish of a spacecraft or a zapping laser gun seem somehow organically fused, and are thus classical in that they are motivated realistically and generically. This is unlike The Grandmother, whose sound effects do not render objects in any believable way, and in violating classical expectations of verisimilitude, they draw attention to the artifice of the soundtrack, thus revealing its construction. That being the case, Star Wars is classical in its ability to forge a fantastical audiovisual world that, within its generic criteria, largely conceals the artificiality of its making.

However, it would seem that Star Wars *can* draw attention to the artifice of the image-sound contract. Take, for example, its various uses of the voice. The Star Wars series is rich with voices of differing timbres, pitches and volumes, from the droning foreign tongue of Jabba the Hut to the roaring Chewbacca. Indeed, many of these interstellar figures do not speak English. For instance, the non-verbal tweeting of the droid R2D2 forms a playful opposition to the Received Pronunciation of C3PO, and yet it is a sound that is mixed to the foreground as if it is a dialogical voice we need to hear. R2D2 is certainly anthropomorphic and can be distinguished from many of the other technologies in the film's arsenal, from the light sabres to the space ships. It is perhaps

the “human” intonation that imbues R2D2 with his “voice” rather than what would otherwise be perceived as nothing more than a series of mechanical noises. Ben Burt explains how he constructed the voice:

I actually wrote out R2D2’s dialogue in English, like ‘C’mon, let’s go this way!’ just to give me a guide [...] This got me comfortable with R2, what elements gave an emotional and informational impression, and from that point I stopped with the literal lines and proceeded from what I understood of R2’s character, more intuitive like a puppeteer (David Sonnenschein 148).

As the robot produces a non-verbal but rhythmic and complexly pitched series of chirps, its companions seem to understand, and often translate them into narratively significant dialogue. The robot therefore presents some interesting relationships between the cinematic body and the voice. Not unlike the voices in The Grandmother the chirps of R2D2 conflate the components of sound effects and voice. However, R2D2 does “speak”, with his companions acting as dialogical conduits. In this sense, R2D2’s verbal voice is not of his body: it is displaced with the effect of a rent occurring between sound and source.

Chion (1999) notes how body-voice relations are being expressed in contemporary films with an increasing emphasis on their very fabrication. He cites three key productions from the 1970s, from the grotesque voices “spoken” by Reagan (Linda Blair) in The Exorcist, the highly stylised vocal timbre of Don Corleone (Marlon Brando) in The Godfather, to the various masked figures of Star Wars, such as the breathy ADR for Darth Vader (James Earl Jones). Ultimately, he observes that such films conspicuously reveal that the voice is “stuck on” to the body, noting that: “Audiences could stop thinking of the voice as a “natural” element that oozes from the body on its own [...] there is no “natural” voice; every voice is a construction and forms a particular composite with the body” (164). The example of R2D2 may well show a way of expressing the voice that is exclusively contemporary. One could go further and

suggest that this represents a break - however minor - from Doane's perceived classical technique of "marrying" body and voice, and the hiding of the sonic apparatus.

The orchestral score is a key element of the Star Wars *mise-en-bande*. Its style has implications for the ways in which major films in Hollywood were scored thereafter. This is in large part thanks to John Williams. Kalinak writes that:

The classical score is hardly in need of resuscitation. It continues to function in Hollywood as a primary determinant on the construction of the film score. Williams was, however, a major force in returning the classical score to its late-romantic roots and adapting the symphony orchestra of Steiner and Korngold for the modern recording studio (188).

Kalinak's designation of a late Romantic symphonic score signals one that is often densely orchestrated and relies on dramatic dynamic shifts and thematic turns. Often drawing on the influence of composers Wagner or Tchaikovsky, the musical structure recurrently plays *leitmotifs*, which in films like Star Wars serve a dramatic function, to signify a character, place or event. Kalinak also notes other key structural qualities characteristic of Williams's work, listing:

A high degree of correspondence between narrative content and musical accompaniment; the use of music in the creation of mood, emotion and character; the privileging of music in moments of spectacle [...] and the careful placement of music in relation to dialogue (190).

Each of these qualities can be heard in the sequence on Leia's Starship. As C3PO speaks, the music falls to make way for his expression. When the characters sense danger on the ship, the music shifts to a menacing minor key, played out at the lower end of the musical stave. During the action scenes the music rises in volume to underscore the drama at play, increasing its instrumental arsenal of brass, strings and woodwind - although it is still generally mixed lower or performed quietly to make way for the sound effects track.

The classical model of scoring is now in widespread use, especially since the late 1970s. Back To The Future (Robert Zemekis, scored by Alan Silvestri 1985), Die Hard (John McTierman, scored by Michael Kamen 1988) and Titanic (John Cameron,

scored by James Horner 1997) demonstrate the endurance of a classically informed contemporary scoring style that began with Williams and Star Wars.

My analyses of Star Wars ultimately reveal the ways in which its soundtrack innovates in technological and generic terms while remaining committed to narrational and musical traditions. Unlike THX-1138, the film's consistent adherence to verbocentrism and a nostalgic symphonic score are comparable to the first years of the classical multiplane soundtrack and the 1940s "golden era" of composing for the movies. The film's sound effects also function to render and represent images motivated by generic verisimilitude and classically unobtrusive mixing and sound construction methods, thus working to a low level of self-consciousness. However, the film does depart from the studio era model in two ways. Firstly, it foregrounds the artificial relationship between the cinematic body and voice by creating a galaxy of highly vocal aliens and droids. Secondly the soundtrack frequently emphasises sound effects, which are often prominent and more densely layered than those of past decades. The soundtrack's intensified intricacy is accountable within the new technical and creative possibilities of Dolby stereo while its emphasis on otherworldly sound effects is connected to the continued rise of science fiction in mainstream cinema. Compared with key films in Hollywood earlier that decade such as THX: 1138 and The Conversation, Star Wars illustrates some distinct approaches to sound, particularly in the service of narration. Crucially this highlights the diversity of contemporary sound as a storytelling tool and moreover reveals the ways in which it can change significantly in light of Hollywood's new technological and industrial developments.

### **Eraserhead**

Considered alongside Star Wars, Eraserhead shows that the options exploited by contemporary sound personnel were different outside of Hollywood's industrial range

and the more classically coded narrational norms associated with its output. For the most part, Splet and Lynch employed some of the sound experiments developed during the production of The Grandmother. As a result, various sound effects of the film are strikingly “extra-material”, and render image-objects with heightened artifice, thus revealing a high level of stylistic self-consciousness. These sounds may also serve to narrate characters’ subjective experiences. However, whereas The Grandmother is non-dialogical, Eraserhead employs verbal narration, thus partially aligning the film with more classically rooted norms. This move into a more traditional mode of narration is one of the earliest indicators of a gradual intensification of classical filmmaking styles and storytelling in the films directed by Lynch.

However, it is important not to overstate the “classicalness” of Eraserhead. This is the first Lynch-Splet collaboration to contain theatrical dialogue, though the filmmakers do at times seek to undermine its dominant place in the *mise-en-bande*. They go about this task in three ways. Conversational silences, or *temps mort* (dead time) are common occurrences, and in the film’s bleak setting, *temps mort* speak volumes about precarious character dynamics and social malaise, and thus serve thematic and narrational functions in themselves. Used to this end, Eraserhead offers a narrational style that, like the art cinema, foregrounds representations of dramatic emotional detachment and alienation (Bordwell 1985b 206). Secondly, dialogue is not only threatened by the characters’ reluctances to speak - it is also on occasion subdued by the presence of other sounds within its *mise-en-bande* mix. Employing techniques similar to those of Splet and Murch in the early 1970s, Eraserhead continues to challenge the classical assumption that dialogue is the undisputed chief sonic narrator, even if, like Murch in THX-1138 and The Conversation, verbocentrism is still utilised. Thirdly, the use of ambient noise is a powerful presence throughout, and like the

complex sound effects montage in THX-1138 it communicates significant narrational information, thus equalling the dialogue in its ability to impart meaning.

Lack of communication, alienation and psychic impoverishment are central to the thematic framework of Eraserhead, and so the suppression of dialogue assists in Lynch's portrayal of an introspective young man named Henry (Jack Nance), whose life in a bleak and industrial world culminates in a nightmare when his girlfriend Mary X (Charlotte Stewart) gives birth to a baby without human form. Their relationship is portrayed in several scenes during which little is said and this soon breaks down, with Mary leaving Henry alone with the grotesque infant. Henry's life quickly becomes a series of fantastical vignettes as he increasingly turns to his inner mental world for comfort, but this finally descends into madness, resulting in the murder of his unwanted son. As with The Grandmother, Henry's internal musings are dramatised using an expressive audiovisual style. Bizarre musical routines are performed by a girl with enormous cheeks on a stage inside a radiator, lighting suddenly changes and shadows lurk in Henry's bedroom, and menacing rumbling sounds and high-pitched screeches underscore his escalating hallucinatory anxiety.

One scenario is particularly illustrative of the expressive sound techniques of Splet and Lynch. Henry is invited by Mary X to meet her parents for the first time. On entering the X household, a series of surreal and embarrassing events unravel. The house is almost silent, save for an atmospheric rushing sound suited to the film's factory-riddled post-apocalyptic setting. After some time, a strained conversation between Henry and Mary's cold and inquisitive mother begins. Their dialogue is pitted with long, uneasy *temps mort*, and so the overall soundtrack volume fluctuates significantly (see figure iv). Sentences pop up like small islands stranded in a sea of silence and social awkwardness. Not unlike The Grandmother, intermittent foley sound effects emerge in the mix, with an unnatural "closeness" and exaggerated, extra-

material quality. An image of a pet dog with a litter of feeding puppies produces a bizarre squeaking while a light bulb hums and pops with oppressive impact. These sounds serve to heighten the intensity of audience experience while linking us to Henry's hypersensitive, anxious psychology. Suddenly a character named Bill, presumably Mary's father, enters the room and attempts to strike up a conversation with Henry with a series of surreal statements: "We're having chicken tonight - strange little things. They're man-made - little damn things!" Bill proceeds to raise his voice in an increasingly frenzied monologue. It is at this point that a dog's barking is heard at roughly the same frequency and volume as Bill, and a low frequency rumbling sound effect, like that of a passing train, rises and begins to obscure his words. This underscores the intensity of his rant - and by extension his seemingly precarious emotional state - while providing a stark contrast with the embarrassed silences moments before. The dialogue, noise and barking increase together in volume, transforming the whole soundtrack into an indistinct chorus until Bill is chased from the room by an embarrassed Mrs X and all three sounds quickly die away. This scene's unsettling inconstant range in volume and extra-material effects express the personal psychologies of the characters, while the reduction of dialogue indicates a distinct lack of connection between Henry and the X family. Finally, Bill's senseless tirade and its loss of clarity against an arsenal of rumblings and barks denotes a world that barely makes sense to its lonely and confused protagonist. A lack of intelligibility characterises Henry's goalless, meaningless place in the film's narrative.

Speech is treated in a highly unconventional way in this scene, and at times subverts the vococentric/verbocentric phenomenon at the heart of American narrative cinema. This is of course suited to the unconventional fractured story central to the film. Chion notes that dialogue in cinema is "one element that remains constrained to perpetual clarity and stability" (1994a 170). He adds, "We seem to have to understand



each and every word, from beginning to end, and not one word had better be skipped. Why? What would it matter if we lost three words of what the hero says? Yet this has remained almost taboo in films” (170). Lynch, it would seem, breaks this taboo. He resorts to the technique of “relativizing” speech (1994a 178), especially through the film’s “rarefaction”, or “rarefying the presence of speech” (179), as is the case with the stilted, minimal conversation at the X family’s home. The familiar mélange of unsettling processed ambient noise that threatens the intelligibility of Bill’s monologue is another striking method of relativising heard in the film’s sequence.

The sound effects are striking in this sequence, and can be compared with those heard throughout The Grandmother in their extra-material rendering. The sounds of feeding puppies are highly unnatural, and do not marry with their corresponding image in terms of classically accepted notions of sonic verisimilitude. This clearly heightens the dramatic effect of the film, and draws the audience into its nightmarish and intensely subjective world in its combination of surrealism and everyday, domestic settings. The result may well be described as “uncanny”, best understood in its ambivalent Freudian sense: familiar and homely yet unsettling and alien; something that is repressed in the unconscious and then re-emerges (1919/2003 130). This is certainly expressive of Henry’s conflicting experiences of the world, which vacillate between dream and reality, while frequently blurring the two realms. Eraserhead employs the technique of extra-material rendering recurrently, from the exaggerated squashing sounds as worm-like creatures are trampled underfoot by the girl in the radiator, to Mary X rubbing her eye to produce a sickly wet, rubbery noise. While the technique contributes to a deeply expressive aesthetic, it also denaturalises the audiovisual scene, and once more reveals the hand of Lynch and Splet in the construction of the film’s soundtrack. To Bordwell, a violation of classically conditioned cinematic verisimilitude is self-conscious. A norm of the art cinema, this violation foregrounds the process of narration and its artifice.

(1985b 211). Extra-materiality therefore has the effect of drawing attention to both the film's expressivities and the working practices behind Eraserhead's making.

The sequence is also characterised by distinctive background noises: low-frequency rumbles, sounds of rushing air and industrial drones. This "Lynchian" soundscape, which in reality was the product of collaboration with Splet, had become a recurring feature of their soundtracks, and was later adopted by Lynch for later projects without the assistance of his sound companion. These atmospheric sounds are complex purveyors of mood, story location and character dynamic. As Lynch says:

I'm real fascinated by presences – what you call 'room tone'. It's the sound that you hear when there's silence, in between words and sentences. It's a tricky thing, because in this seemingly kind of quiet sound, some feelings can be brought in, and a certain kind of picture of a bigger world can be made (Rodley 73).

These sounds are therefore highly effective communicators of narrational information. They define the spatial parameters of the film, creating large and cavernous and yet oppressive and claustrophobic spaces. Their industrial quality establishes the type of location in which the characters live, while showing that the bleak, post-apocalyptic outer world encroaches on domestic space, as is clearly the case in the sequence I have analysed. On a more subjective level, these rumblings cloud thought and meaning, standing in for Henry's doomed mental future while interrupting the act of speech, as is the case with Bill's muted tirade. The film's episodic structure, its subjective verisimilitude, its goal-bereft hero and ambiguous ending (did Henry really kill his infant? What will come of him as he is finally engulfed by blinding light?) work against classical composition, and the murky, all-consuming blanket of sound serves as a reminder of Lynch and Splets' sonic narrational experiments. It thematically represents the story world's limits on intelligibility, certainty and resolution. Once more, Lynch and Splet demonstrate some of the ways in which sound effects function as complex and meaningful narrational tools.

At a time when Lucas, Burt and others were harnessing the creative potential of the burgeoning Dolby facilities, Lynch and Splet were taking a different approach to sound technology and technique, largely due to their budgetary restrictions as independent filmmakers. They instead experimented on the sound effects, feeding organic noises from libraries through an effects console (Hughes 23). Their work as “artistic primitives” (Gentry 63) resulted in a distinctly integrated *mise-en-bande* which involved the stylistic blending of sound components. This example does not suggest that the standardisation of Dolby technology consistently placed creative constraints on those who, during the late 1970s, had access to it: quite the contrary, Lucas and Burt were on the whole afforded more creative opportunities through their work with Dolby. However, what emerged from Lynch and Splet’s sound work without developed technologies was a distinct sound aesthetic that would re-emerge in their later collaborative projects, even when budgets were raised and Dolby stereo became an option (Gentry 72).

My analyses of THX-1138, The Grandmother, Star Wars and Eraserhead have revealed the considerable range in approaches to film sound by filmmakers in the 1970s, which vary according to different industrial contexts and different moments during the decade. They also reveal that sound can play an extremely complex and important role in the generic and narrational identities of individual movies. Within Hollywood, THX-1138 illustrated hitherto unexplored sound recording, mixing and editing methods, from Murch’s intricate and futuristic sound effects montage to the film’s occasional departures from verbocentric narration. These techniques emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s in light of new technological possibilities, and while filmmakers were exploring the boundaries of classical narration and style, and science fiction was rising from B-movie to A-movie prominence. Seven years later, Burt’s work on Star Wars continued Murch’s project of combining sounds with increasing

intricacy, although it also departed significantly from THX-1138 in many respects. It demonstrated a hitherto unheard flamboyancy in its *mise-en-bande*, with Williams reviving the symphonic score and weaving it into a barrage of effects, resulting in sonic plenitude. Moreover Star Wars re-established the convention of verbocentric mixing previously challenged by Murch by privileging the voice as the chief vehicle for intelligibility. Of course, as a spectacular science fiction fantasy using Dolby stereo technology, sound effects were prominent and there is no denying their power as narrational tools. However, Star Wars's blockbuster identity functioned within the market as a family film, and its assumptions regarding narrative comprehension were by and large classical, giving prime place to the dialogue track. Out of Hollywood and into the independent sector, Eraserhead and The Grandmother focused their sound work on surreal, subjective and often unintelligible narration, thus aligning their work closer to the European art cinema than the classical Hollywood mode. Neither mode allows us to adequately describe these films however, which combine influences from older, more surrealist European filmmakers like Luis Bunuel (Un Chien Andalou 1928), John Cocteau (Le Sang d'un Poete 1930), Rene Clair (Entr'acte 1924) and Hans Richter (Ghosts Before Breakfast 1928) (David Hughes 24), who construct loose yet vaguely comprehensible narrative schemes. The Grandmother and Eraserhead stand outside of commercially established industrial contexts or popular markets, thus warranting the terms "independent" or "cult". The sounds of these films also highlight the difficulties in categorising them in terms of widely recognised aesthetic, institutional and industrial frameworks. Lynch and Splet's extra-material effects and powerful, dialogue-obscuring drones serve to remove their style from familiar filmmaking traditions. However, Eraserhead provides moments of traditionalism as it does not avoid verbocentrism altogether, and thus a modicum of the classical narrational mode can be identified. This

classicism would hint at what was to come when Lynch's career moved into a professional embrace with Hollywood.

With the sound teams' texts and contexts ever on the horizon, it is possible to chart further the sonic stylistic developments across ten more years of sound in Hollywood. Throughout the 1980s, the sound style associated with Lynch and Splet altered dramatically, while that of Lucas, Burt and Williams remained relatively unchanged. From the late 1970s to the mid 1980s, Lynch and Splet worked with both low-budget independent cinema and the major Hollywood studios. Their style also varied with these production conditions, ranging from the experimental and surreal stories of independents The Grandmother and Eraserhead to the studio-based blockbusting epics of multi-million dollar science fiction Dune (1984). By contrast, Lucas, Burt and Williams remained quite static with respect to their place in the industry and their production output. Producing once more under Lucasfilm and distributing under Twentieth Century Fox, they embarked on the Star Wars sequel Return of the Jedi under the directorial command of Richard Marquand with Lucas acting as executive producer. The narrational and generic mode of this film was replicated from its predecessor, as was its approach to sound.

The following analyses of Dune and Return of the Jedi reveal a series of shared approaches to sound between the filmmaking teams, whereas in the previous decade there were more significant differences. It is no coincidence, seeing that both films occupy common ground as high-budget space fantasies with classically coded narratives. Most importantly however, Dune begins to chart important changes in Lynch and Splet's sound style concurrent with their career trajectories from complete independence to major filmmaking. Compared with its independent counterpart, the major industry's added emphasis on classical narrational norms and marketable genre

trends, as embodied by productions like Dune, would play an important role in the filmmakers' sonic choices during this era.

However, Hollywood is both a heterogeneous and ever changing phenomenon. During the 1980s the American film industry witnessed the mounting success of key areas of the independent cinema. This did not go unnoticed by Hollywood's majors, and by the mid 1990s it began to assimilate independent distributors via a series of mergers. The effects of this change would ripple throughout the dimensions of storytelling and style. The resulting assimilation of alternative stylistic and narrational influences into the classical cinema had profound effects on the contemporary soundtrack. Lynch's sound team would come to emblematised these changes, working between both major and indie (semi-independent) positions in the industry and incorporating the sound methods developed during work with both. The increasing stratification of Hollywood since the studio era, intensifying in the indie-major mergers in the 1990s, would continually diversify Hollywood's output, thus expanding its narrational and generic horizons and, as Lynch's sound team show, introducing more variants to its sonic style. Supplemented by sound analyses of Dune and Return of the Jedi, the following chapter will chart the complex journey through Hollywood's soundtrack, from its blockbusting successes to aesthetic transformations that took shape towards the end of the 1980s.

## Chapter Ten

### The 1980s: New Adventures in Sci-Fi

Two very different types of movie in the 1980s - the super blockbuster and the independent film - would have equally profound effects on the ways in which soundtracks were approached by Hollywood's filmmakers in the decades that followed. While blockbuster production continued its unprecedented rise in the size and scope of its sets, budgets and special effects, so too did its sounds. Ranging from a raw, politically charged cop action like Die Hard (John McTiernan 1988) to a fantastical space travel epic like Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan (Richard Meyer 1982), these films shared in the task of boosting sonic plenitude while remaining committed to sound conventions that located them in the popular formula of intelligible classical narration. Outside of Hollywood, a number of independent films incorporated alternative approaches to genre filmmaking and classical narration with sound experiments while also proving popular with a wide audience. Essentially, they would pave the way for the development of a semi-independent, or "indie" division within Hollywood in the early 1990s. I will begin my discussion of the decade by examining the ways in which sound continued to work in the service of classical narrational norms and generic traditions in the super blockbuster or megapicture. The science fiction fantasies Dune (David Lynch 1984) and Return of the Jedi (Richard Marquand 1983) provide illustrative examples. Towards the end of the chapter, I examine the rise of the popular independent cinema, which would plant the seeds for the eventual reshaping of Hollywood and its sonic dimension.

The success of the modern blockbuster continued beyond the 1970s, ensuring major profitability for Hollywood to the present (Larry Gross 3; Sheldon Hall 2002 11). Throughout the 1980s major movies increased in size and scale on many levels. The rise of ancillary (non-theatrical) markets and theatrical distribution overseas effectuated

potentially larger returns for major releases, and could act as a “safety net” for any domestic box office failure (Hall 2002 22). Production also continued to cater successfully for genre-oriented markets:

[...] the most common genres for recent blockbusters have been fantasy, science fiction and occasionally horror, but most often action-adventure films the collective generic origins of which lie in the matinee serials, B-movies and exploitation movies (Hall 2002 23).

The time was ripe for the “super-blockbuster” (Thomas Schatz 1993 25). Ever-increasing set-pieces, budgets and returns were boasted by the productions of industry sovereigns Steven Spielberg (ET; Indiana Jones trilogy) and George Lucas (two Star Wars sequels). Other major successes during this era included Ghostbusters (Ivan Reitman 1984), Back to the Future (Robert Zemeckis 1985), Batman (Tim Burton 1989), Die Hard (John McTiernan 1988), Lethal Weapon (Richard Donner 1987), The Terminator (James Cameron 1984), Aliens (James Cameron 1986), Top Gun (Tony Scott 1986), and First Blood (Ted Kotcheff 1982). It is in this climate that David Lynch and Alan Splet - hitherto unlikely candidates for working on a big budget blockbuster - would begin production on the spectacular science fiction feature Dune.

### **Dune**

The film began production in 1981, the year following The Elephant Man which had been Lynch’s largest directorial project to date. The Elephant Man signalled a departure from the independently produced, experimental films Eraserhead and The Grandmother. Working alongside Hollywood producer Mel Brooks and with distribution from major studio Paramount, Lynch directed a relatively classical film compared with previous projects. This true story about John Merrick, a severely deformed man living in Victorian England who found his way from freak show ridicule to nobility, enjoyed critical and commercial success, receiving eight Academy Award nominations. Having seen The Elephant Man, non-Hollywood producer-mogul Dino de Laurentiis (De



Laurentiis Entertainment Group) approached Lynch to co-script and direct an adaptation of Frank Herbert's space novel Dune. In production, the one thousand-strong film crew was Lynch's biggest by far (Rodley 88), but he kept Alan Splet by his side, as well as other mainstays such as Eraserhead cinematographers Freddie Francis and Frederick Elmes.

The resulting film bore significant hallmarks of the blockbuster. Its budget was considerable at over \$50 million, and it employed "event" style promotion, its poster tag-line reading: "A place beyond your dreams. A movie beyond your imagination" (Hughes 67). Due to the complexity of the novel on which it draws and its adult target audience (certified 15 in the UK), the narrative of Dune is sprawling and difficult to follow compared with a film like Star Wars. However, it does contain classical elements. It offers a clearly motivated, heroic quest with romantic subplot and a final conflict that ensures that good prevails over evil. It is also rather classical in its communicativeness, making frequent use of expository voiceover and consistently verbocentric dialogue. Thus it departs from the experiments of previous independent films The Grandmother and Eraserhead.

Dune's audiovisual style is also motivated by its identity as science fiction and Hollywood blockbuster. The film boasts lavish set-pieces, from endless barren deserts, dazzling galactic skylines and palatial buildings, all occupied by huge spacecraft, weaponry and otherworldly characters. The combined orchestral and electronic score form a dramatic and timeless musical accompaniment to the anachronistic interplanetary space, while the sound effects generated by Splet combine the low-level atmospherics of hushed ambient room tones with occasionally "big and loud" moments, including laser explosions and electrical buzzes from the film's various military and travel technologies. Hollywood's earlier science fiction films (THX-1138, 2001: A Space Odyssey) are not without similar features, but the blockbuster offers an intensified

aesthetic. For example, the depth and density of the ear-splitting wind, cracks and rumbles as *Dune*'s hero Paul Atriedes (Kyle McLaughlan) rides a giant spice worm provides a level of plenitude not even achieved in the kinetic cacophony of *THX1138*'s final car chase.

Finally, *Splet*'s sound effects demonstrate significant departures from *The Grandmother* and *Eraserhead* in terms of verisimilitude. Whereas these projects offered flagrantly artificial and therefore self-conscious extra-material sounds, *Dune*'s audiovisual relationships are presented as "natural", each sound offering a believable counterpart to the image-object from which it supposedly emanates. This shift to transparent and verisimilitudinous representation positions *Dune* in close proximity with classical narration, which comes as no surprise, considering its place as a Hollywood blockbuster released by a major studio.

In *Dune*, Paul Atriedes trains an army of warriors on planet Arrakis to fight against the evil Harkonnens, an imperial force in control of a spice *mélange* that offers universal power to those that possess it. In one scene, Paul is demonstrating the "weirding way" to his students, a fighting technique that will enable them to destroy an obelisk of the hardest stone through the power of "sound and motion". As figure v shows, the sonic sequence retains a clean balance between the components of music, dialogue and sound effects, thus demonstrating classical mixing strategies similar to *Star Wars*. The dialogue is tinged with reverb and dominantly audible throughout, while a "flat" ambient effects track of wind howls beneath, retaining a low volume and deep frequency (see figure v). These sounds serve to define the scene's spatial dimensions, helping to produce the empty cavernous surroundings in which the figures plot their revolution. As Paul demonstrates his "weirding" powers on the obelisk, a part-vocal, part-synthesised effect crescendos to a literally explosive climax, smashing the stone into pieces to dazzling effect, and providing a startling contrast to the quiet

atmospherics of the cave just moments before. The sound of destruction quickly dies away, which is met with the proud, approving cheers of Paul's warrior-students. The sequence cuts to a close up of Paul as he prepares to make a speech. There is a slow camera zoom towards his face as he speaks, which is accompanied by the gradual fade-in of pounding drums on the music track. Deep cellos begin to swell, and the drums increase in volume, clearly highlighting the film's theme of militarism and timeless human conflict. The music continues to rise in volume over a non-dialogue action montage of the warriors in training, filling the space left by its wordlessness. The music does remain relatively low in volume throughout however, due to intermittent dialogue and the dominance of impactful sound effects that accompany the warriors firing weapons and destroying stone. The scene ends on another close-up of Paul, his internal thoughts on the impending battle being expressed in a voice-over narration. These moments of psychological reflection have clear functions within the narrative. They are powerful expository devices designed to ensure maximum comprehension by offering direct information about the future events, while signalling character responses to them. In this capacity, the voice-over serves classical narrational ends of communication and comprehension.

The sequence is an example of *Dune*'s heavy and consistent use of verbocentrism. It is also representative of its generic framework, the otherworldly sound effects heavily motivated by the conventions of science fiction and stylistic verisimilitude. The impactful sound effects also reinforce the kinetic tendencies of the modern blockbuster. The dialogue and ambient background effects never occur at the same time, and share the sonic foreground at carefully timed intervals. Music remains a continuous and unobtrusive presence in the background, only rising subtly to fill the auditory space when effects and/or dialogue trough: a strategy typical of the inter-

component relations of the classical *mise-en-bande* as described by Rick Altman et al (2000).

As is clear from this analysis, Dune represents some significant departures from Eraserhead or The Grandmother. In isolation, Splet's "weirding" sound effects - placed in the generic context of the modern science fiction - take on both a distinct textural quality and narrational function. The worlds of Eraserhead and The Grandmother are surreal but their settings are rooted in the suburban and everyday, with objects vaguely tangible and familiar. The sounds that emanate from physical sources - an exploding light bulb, the amplified rustle of bedclothes - are extra-material, and the resulting audiovisual relations primarily function to offer an unsettling feeling, a slippage in our sense of auditory verisimilitude. I must reiterate that these sounds result in a narrational process that is highly self-conscious, their strangeness and unreality foregrounded to the point of revealing the production work beneath. By contrast, in the science-fiction setting of Dune, objects are often fantastical and offer little or no index to reality, thus creating verisimilitude of a different order. As in Star Wars, the sounds that emanate forge believable ontological relationships with the images they represent. They render objects in a manner that does not tend to draw attention to the artificiality of their making and thus they efface the work involved in their construction (Doane 57).

In production practice Splet's techniques for creating the sounds of Dune are similar to those of Ben Burtt on Star Wars. He would record real sounds - "A roto-roter, an electric fan, a jack-hammer" (Gentry 66) - and distort them, creating an effect that would perhaps be at home in Lucas's science-fiction vision of the "used future".

Splet accounted for his work:

One of the things I like about working with natural sounds and then changing them as opposed to synthesizing things electronically, is that you have your foot in reality. It sort of gives you a hook. [...] Even if you totally alter the sound, it's still coming from something that's natural (Gentry 66).

Splet's most prominent sound effects frequently work to create sensational impact at the same time as they hold important narrational signification. They are defining sounds for the film's core theme of imperial conflict, while the "weirding" noises serve as auditory signifiers for the heroic warriors in support of Atriedes. Moreover, they differ in function compared with the effects heard in Dune's predecessors. In these films, sound effects are heavily expressive and psychological, revealing the inner, and often disturbed, feelings of the core characters. This subjective realism is a norm utilised in European art cinema, and does not tend to feature in more classically oriented narration. Dune's sound effects may be likened to something closer to the relatively classical Star Wars films than Lynch and Splet's own earlier productions.

Dune is heavily verbocentric and uses dialogue to effectuate a high level of exposition and communicativeness, which is typical of classical narration. Moreover, it makes frequent use of the voice-over, which makes audible the internal thoughts of Atriedes. While this mentally representational device could be likened to the heavily subjective sound effects in films like Eraserhead and The Grandmother, it differs significantly in its aim to expand audience knowledge, rather than restrict it. With the voice-over, events both past and future can be explained with no need for said events to be enacted. Responses of a character to the world around him/her can be revealed to the audience in the most direct manner: exposition without action, without interaction, or dialogue. In addition to its expository function, the voice-over signals its identity as a character's inner thoughts overtly. Free from the film's spatiotemporal boundaries, the voice-over comments on the story from a position of omniscience. In Eraserhead and The Grandmother however, the representations of characters' inner thoughts are restricted to the direct experiences of those characters and so narration can be less reliable, less expository. In addition, subjectivity may not be overtly signalled as clearly as a device like the voice-over, and so the audience is left wondering if they should take

it on faith that the film's story world really is as unusual it is, or whether it they are identifying with the character's psychological world view.

The voice-overs of Dune are placed at the forefront of the mix, even though many of them are uttered in hushed and breathy tones to emphasise the mystical qualities of the protagonists. Chion views the film's voice-over techniques as rooted in contemporary sound technology. Dune was Lynch's second film in Dolby stereo following The Elephant Man, which most likely impacted on the quality of the soundtrack:

Since Dolby increases dynamic contrast, it makes silence deeper, and from these silences the voice emerges differently. This might well account for the many "dreamed voices" on the threshold between silence and whispering (1999 167).

When discussing Dolby technology in the cinema, critics are most likely to draw attention to the loud passages and densely layered moments in films like Star Wars (Schreger 1985; Sergi 2004). However, the technology is also used to emphasise delicate sound timbres and, as Chion has indicated, silences. Paul's whispering voice-over and the cavernous ambient sounds of the sequence analysed above are sounds that benefit from Dolby noise reduction and frequency response. In exploring low-key tones, many supposedly "big loud" films in fact explore Dolby's capabilities in terms of contrast and textural range rather than serving to highlight spectacular sounds alone.

The music in Dune boasts a range of different qualities. The film was scored by various artists – from Toto and the Vienna Symphony orchestra to Brian Eno. This combination of pop and classical scoring is not unusual, although if we consider it in its blockbuster context, it does not quite resemble the grandiose symphonic score popularised by John Williams. However, the film's key sequence does include some traditional musical functions and manoeuvres, from the military timpani beat underscoring Paul's rousing warrior speech to its generally subdued volume in service of the dominance of voice or sound effect.

Overall, the *mise-en-bande* structure of Dune, its use of voice-over and the functions and qualities of its major sound effects mark the film as working in a classical narrational and generic framework in line with the contemporary science fiction blockbuster. As such, Dune is especially striking when compared with the Lynch-Splet output during the previous decade. Although Lynch himself would never work solely with a major studio, or with a similarly sized budget again, the effects of his brief proximity to blockbusting production would leave an indelible mark on later works. By the time they worked on Blue Velvet in 1986, Lynch and Splet returned to an independent industrial context, working once more with De Laurentiis, and without the distribution of a major studio. This film combined both classical and alternative narrational and formal properties, which saw the consolidation of a distinct sonic style, as will be discussed later. While Lynch and Splet eventually departed from Hollywood's blockbuster empire, Lucas, Burt and Williams were to remain its chief force.

### **Return of the Jedi**

A notable phenomenon associated with the blockbuster of the 1980s was the proliferation in sequel production – something on which the two Star Wars trilogies heavily capitalised. In the context of contemporary Hollywood's commercial logic, sequels have been identified as functioning much like genres. Put simply, they are geared towards a specific market, relying on an existing public knowledge of their franchise, while quite often boasting tie-in products (Jim Hillier 1992; Yvonne Tasker 1996). More recently, Hall has remarked on their considerable financial success:

Repeatable story formulae are certainly a mainstay of blockbuster production with their guaranteed pre-selling of a 'high-concept'. Defying past industry wisdom, many blockbuster sequels in the 1980s and 1990s outgrossed their originals by a considerable margin [...] (2002 23).

In this sense, the Star Wars franchise illustrates just how formidable the sequel format can be. Return of the Jedi made \$165 million in its first year at US domestic box office compared with Star Wars' \$127 million.

Return of the Jedi (directed by Richard Marquand, and on which George Lucas is executive producer) bears all the hallmarks of its successful predecessors.

Narratively, it follows the central arc of Luke Skywalker's mission to overthrow Darth Vader and release his political stranglehold over the galaxy "far, far away". The same characters - Princess Leia, Han Solo, and their non-humanoid assistants Chewbacca, C3PO and R2D2 figure prominently. Their ensemble heroics finally bring the reign of the galactic empire to an end, with a romantic plot involving the intensified relationship between Leia and Solo. As ever, the narrative thrust remains reliant on the spectacular battle scenes and space stunts.

The soundtrack for Return of the Jedi replicates the formula established by Star Wars. As figure vi demonstrates, the *mise-en-bande* mix is dense but clear and carefully balanced. There is an intricate web of sound effects, a richly orchestrated score, and when dialogue is spoken, it alters the relative mix, diving up as other sounds bow down. In this scene, Solo, Leia, C3PO and R2D2 have allied themselves with a forest tribe known as the Ewoks, and soon they instigate a huge battle with Vader's foot soldiers. Han and Leia are firstly captured by the soldiers in the Ewok forest and as the camera arches over the enemies, the score dominates, playing a nine-note, minor-key *leitmotif* (from Williams's piece "The Imperial March", or "Darth Vader's Theme") that signifies the power of the evil empire and the perilous position of the protagonists:





The *leitmotif* is accompanied by the clunking walk of a giant two-legged fighting machine that looms over the forest, representing the threat of military technology. The sounds of this sequence characterise good and evil in clear-cut, easily identifiable ways. For example, the sounds above are contrasted with the innocent, high-pitched chatter of the friendly Ewoks. The sequence rapidly cuts to C3PO and R2D2 concealed in the forest, observing the action. C3PO shouts to the enemies to create a distraction, his voice now naturally louder and clearer than the music and effects. As he finishes his utterance, the enemies pursue, accompanied by a variation on the earlier *leitmotif*, which once again briefly dominates. C3PO speaks again and the music and ambient effects (footsteps of enemy guards, sounds of the forest, robots) take an audible dip in volume, to the point of near silence (see figure vi). This serves for the scene's dramatic effect as well as enabling sonic clarity, as it sets up a brief moment of suspense for the audience, preparing us for an upcoming climax. C3PO verbally feigns surrender. This is followed by a second of almost complete quiet until the Ewoks noisily ambush the enemy in a chorus of war cries, thus offering a striking example of dynamic contrast. Once again the music rises in volume to accompany the fast-paced action. The sounds of laser guns, shooting arrows and destructive explosions soon burst into the mix as the battle commences. The fighting continues in a rather dense web of sounds. No particular sound is foregrounded to the point of dominance, although each is still quite clearly heard. What results is a rich and diverse fictional galaxy of intergalactic species, spacecraft and weaponry jostling for attention, reminding the audience of the sheer size of the film's imaginative universe. In a few moments however, the voices of Han and Leia draw attention to the future events of the narrative, their dialogue foregrounded amongst the sonic chaos to provide an expository exchange on their battle plans and the dangerous situation in which they find themselves.

As is the case with Star Wars, the sounds of Return of the Jedi balance narrative comprehension, sensational impact and triumphant emotionalism wrapped together in a language of sonic plenitude. The verbocentric dialogue, huge sound effects and grand, nostalgic score are complexly interwoven, dipping and rising to form a rich, intelligible sonic fabric. Walter Murch's phrase "dense clarity" captures the inter-component balance of this sequence. Its *mise-en-bande* is busy with differing layers of sound, each pushed to the foreground as much as is possible without sacrificing overall intelligibility. Indeed, it would seem that not a decibel of sonic "room" is spared. The sharpness of its sound is certainly enhanced by the film's use of Dolby technology as well as Lucas's patent interests in sound quality as manifested in THX quality control. (THX is a quality assurance system founded in 1983 by Lucas and Tomlinson Holman, which demands that cinemas adhere to specific technical and acoustical standards to ensure high-fidelity playback. THX certified theatres are required to offer sound quality that closely matches that of the completed mixing stage). The complex mixing, editing and composing of many different sounds is characteristically sinuous and plenitudinous, flaunting the virtuosity of its technology and techniques, which is a method that has intensified since the early 1970s.

However, the sound quality and its stylishness is one component of the soundtrack's multiple effects for the audience. Story, sensation and affect are also offered up by the film's dense *mise-en-bande*: qualities consistent with the original aims of Lucas, Burt and Williams when they coordinated their first soundtrack together in 1977. Return of the Jedi is a true sonic sequel. Consistent with Star Wars, the soundtrack of Return of the Jedi places equal emphasis on both narrational signification and spectacle: two effects that are often bound together in the cinema. They can be married to the same event and designated by certain sonic techniques. Commenting on the contemporary blockbuster at large, Bordwell argues: In action films, we're told,

spectacle overrides narrative, and the result works against the ‘linearity’ of the classical tradition [...] But these claims are untenable because narrative and spectacle aren’t mutually exclusive concepts” (2006 105). He adds that: “Every action scene, however “spectacular”, is a narrative event” (2006 105). Indeed, in Return of the Jedi, the Ewok battle scene is both narrative event (it advances the story towards its conclusion) and spectacle (it involves a huge set-piece with many characters, explosions and fantastical technologies). More specifically, a pivotal dramatic-sensational moment is effectively enabled by a loud, impactful sound contrast, in which the sonic scene is dynamically shaped by changes in specific sound volumes and ambiences. In the sequence, the music lowers in volume, characters stop speaking, and there is a very brief calm (which can be seen in a trough in the *mise-en-bande* in figure vi) before the Ewoks attack. This enhances both the dramatic and sensational impact of the battle event. Indeed, while the *mise-en-bande* of this sequence is by and large dense, there are brief moments of sparseness and quiet that function to a narratively meaningful and affective outcome.

The qualities of dense clarity, sonic plenitude and flamboyance, and sensational narration are identifiable sonic hallmarks of the Star Wars films, and can also be heard in the second trilogy (The Phantom Menace, Attack of the Clones, Revenge of the Sith). The industrial, narrational and generic similarities, as well as an unchanging sound labour structure between every Star Wars film spanning over three decades, ultimately effectuate sonic stylistic continuities.

As has been outlined earlier, megapicture production was far from the only option open to filmmakers. Throughout the 1980s, independent production rose significantly while major production remained steady (Tino Balio 1998 59). A vigorous group of filmmakers could be found working outside of Hollywood, reworking classical narrational conventions or adding innovative formal properties to their movies. Joel and Ethan Coen (Blood Simple 1984), Jim Jarmusch (Stranger Than Paradise 1984) Spike

Lee (*She's Gotta Have It* 1986); *Do the Right Thing* 1989) and Steven Soderbergh (*Sex, Lies and Videotape* 1989) were independent filmmakers with critical and commercial clout, and whose careers would eventually court Hollywood.

Due to a tendency to seek alternatives to the classical narrational mode, the American independent cinema in the 1980s introduced the potential for new sonic stylistic conventions that would find their way into Hollywood filmmaking over the course of the coming decade. For example, a gritty, “real life” mode of verisimilitude manifested itself in dialogical *temps mort* in *Stranger than Paradise*. *Blood Simple* used sounds to thwart audience expectations and create moments of intensely subjective and unreliable narration. In this film, Abby (Francis McDormand) has an affair with Ray (John Getz), who rightly she fears has killed her husband Julian (Dan Hedaya). In one sequence she is woken by the sound of broken glass and as she raises her eyes, she is met with the vision of a blood-soaked Julian. As it turns out, this is a dream. Geoff Andrew points out that this sequence has two functions. It creates a moment of intense ambiguity for the audience (is Julian dead or alive?), while connecting us directly with Abby’s anxiety by presenting her experience it as if it were real (170). The noise of broken glass sonically triggers Abby’s unreliable event, and resonates with the expressive realism identified in art narration (Bordwell 1985b 209). *Blue Velvet* also experimented with alternative elements in a classical framework. A conventional narrational structure sees teenager Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle McLaughlin) fall in love and prevail over psychotic criminal Frank (Dennis Hopper). However the soundtrack displays moments of deconstructive self-consciousness which including a distinctly “extra-material” sequence involving a nest of ants writhing to a cacophony of squeaks and rumbles. There is also a stylish, generic self-reflexivity, which involves Jeffrey creeping downstairs, his movements mirroring a scene from a 1940s thriller shown on a television set nearby. This is accompanied by Angelo Badalamenti’s score, which plays

a suspenseful jazz-classical hybrid (a possible nod to *film noir* composers such as Miklos Rosza who scored Billy Wilder's 1944 Double Indemnity). This film suggests that by the late 1980s, Lynch and Splet were engaging a sonic style that absorbed characteristics of their past work in experimental narrative cinema and the more recently classical-leaning megapicture. This hybridity was apt, given the approaching climate of Hollywood, which would bridge the independent with the mainstream, both in terms of industry and style. Indeed, the films I have described above were a prelude to what Bordwell claims was "an era of experimental storytelling [*which*] was launched in the 1990s, when a fresh batch of films seemed to shatter classical norms" (2006 73). A host of films as diverse as Jacob's Ladder (Adrian Lyne 1990), Pulp Fiction (Quentin Tarantino 1994), The Big Lebowski (Joel Coen 1998), Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas (Terry Gilliam 1998), Fight Club (David Fincher 1999) and Lost Highway (Lynch 1997) would open up the possibilities for cinematic narration and sound style in Hollywood.

Throughout the 1990s, the edges of Hollywood began to blur with the independent sector as New Line and Miramax became part of the major studios. Ultimately this would give rise to fresh approaches to cinematic storytelling by many filmmakers working in Hollywood. In the middle of the industry, the major megapictures would grow ever larger, sticking to the successful formula of classical narratives and a limited cluster of genres. What would raise the audiovisual stakes was the digitisation of film technologies across the industry, including the unveiling of Dolby stereo in a new format. Once more, a comprehensive discussion of key sequences in films by the sound teams reveals the variety across the sonic aesthetics of the contemporary soundtrack while illuminating different practices and the working contexts behind them.

## Chapter Eleven

### The 1990s: From Suburbia to the Stars

Whether it was due to the continued triumph and technological ingenuity of the spectacular megapicture or the explosion of post-baby boomer talent in the commercially climbing independent sector, Hollywood soundtracks were expanding and evolving their creative possibilities throughout the 1990s. In a climate of accelerating technological development involving the digitisation of the Dolby sound system, the megapicture became an attraction of heightened proportions, combining both immersive realism with breathtaking spectacle in a sonic world of super-high-fidelity and improved surround. Dinosaurs stealthily crept up behind audiences and startled with thunderous roars (Jurassic Park 1993) while hyper-realistic, ear-splitting meteors hurtled towards screens and bawled from surround speakers (Armageddon Michael Bay 1998). Away from the multiplexes, independent films also continued to flourish. The independents became beneficiaries of the growth of video, DVD and the internet, which were increasingly important channels for reaching core audiences. A low production budget horror like The Blair Witch Project (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez 1999) could become a hit, taking \$140 million (King 2005 12), partly thanks to aggressive online promotion. Blair Witch involved a teaser campaign that sparked widespread speculation across cyberspace as to whether the movie, shot in a budget documentary style, was real. Interestingly, the film also relied almost entirely on sound for its terrifying effects. The crunching footsteps of an unseen figure and mysteriously thrown objects were used to fabricate an entrapping supernatural ordeal for the film's doomed protagonists. During this decade, the industry-wide consolidation of "major-independents" would serve to blur the independent cinema's industrial and institutional base with that of the studios, giving rise to the hybrid indie cinema. This marriage also means that a number of resulting films released by the new major subsidiaries demonstrated "offbeat"

alternatives to classical narrational norms. Films like Magnolia (Paul Thomas Anderson 1999), Memento (Christopher Nolan 2001), Being John Malkovich (Spike Jonze 1999) and Adaptation (Jonze 2002) complicated plot trajectories, conjured self-reflexive tricks, and boasted morally ambiguous characters while expressing their (sometimes bizarre) psychological experiences: largely conveyed by novel uses of the sound and image.

Hollywood was by now a vibrant industry with a varied output, demonstrating many narrational possibilities, whether these were technologically advanced blockbusters or indie-major crossovers, or mid-budget studio productions. The Phantom Menace (George Lucas 1999) epitomised the former, demonstrating the continued effectiveness of the Star Wars saga's old narrational and generic formula, but boosted by a significant technological upgrade. Indie film Lost Highway (David Lynch 1997) demonstrated the extent to which Hollywood films could distort classical norms. As ever, the sonic styles of these two films resonate with these approaches and their distinctions speak volumes about the diversity across Hollywood during this decade.

Lost Highway (released in 1997 by October films, a subsidiary of Universal) belongs to a strand of indie cinema that demonstrates a complex relationship with classical Hollywood. While employing many classical norms it also reveals significant departures. This is typical of a number of indie films of the 1990s. For example Magnolia, Fight Club, Wayne's World (Penelope Spheeris 1992), The Big Lebowski, Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, The Fisher King (Terry Gilliam 1991) and Jacob's Ladder are very different films in many respects, but they join Lost Highway in employing novel narrational techniques that manifest themselves on the soundtrack.

Most of these films are united by their tendency to present audiovisual events as expressions of characters' subjective experiences, therefore constructing a world of expressive hyperrealism that aligns them with the art cinema as described by David

Bordwell (1985b 209). For instance, in the comedy Wayne's World, the pop song "The Dream Weaver" (Gary Wright) inexplicably begins to play beyond the diegesis when the titular Wayne sees the woman he loves. Similarly, in The Fisher King, Parry (Robin Williams) watches a woman he has fallen for weave through the crowd at a busy Grand Central station. Suddenly, orchestral music swells from nowhere and the crowd begins an elaborate ball-dance routine in an expression of his romantic feelings. The drug-addled experiences of gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson (Johnny Depp) in Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas are played out in a series of fluctuating pitched voices and chaotically mixed psychedelic rock songs. As Jeffrey Lebowski (Jeff Bridges) is knocked unconscious in The Big Lebowski, the harsh smack of a bowling ball against a skittle is heard. Naturally, Jeffrey's favourite pastime is bowling. In Jacob's Ladder, Jacob (Tim Robbins) wakes up in hospital after a series of surreal and terrifying ordeals to the point where he no longer knows which events he has experienced are real. While his wife sits at his bedside reassuring Jacob that all is well, a demonic voice that only he can hear tells him to "dream on". Everything we see and hear in Fight Club is nothing but the prolonged delusional experience of its nameless protagonist (Edward Norton), down to the phone call he makes to what he - and we - believe is another man named Tyler Durden (played by Brad Pitt). It later transpires that Durden does not exist and that the protagonist was conversing with an imaginary companion. Magnolia unites its various characters under the pop number "Wise Up" by Aimee Mann. In a series of cuts, each person sings along in a private lament of the lyric "It's not going to stop". They include a cocaine addict who cannot quit her habit, a cop who has lost his gun, a child abuser dying of cancer, a quiz-show whiz-kid bullied by his father, and so on. All of the above instances discussed function as channels for audience identification and psychological inference. They also have implications for their wider narrational frameworks.



Films like Fear and Loathing, Jacob's Ladder and Fight Club fix the audience's auditory experiences to those of the principle characters, who are extremely unreliable, and are often mystified by their own experiences. This works to restrict knowledge of "what is really going on", thus creating a puzzling plot trajectory. Therefore there is a distinct loosening of the narrational process that in most classically coded films would reveal enough so as to not deliberately baffle.

These films vary in terms of verisimilitude. The subjective states of Fear and Loathing, Jacob's Ladder and Fight Club may at a stretch be considered as realistically motivated. The first two express the hallucinatory effects of LSD, while the latter is a schizophrenic episode. A film like Wayne's World or The Big Lebowski are comedies, so many unusual happenings are permitted and motivated within their generic framework. However, for a drama like Magnolia, its subjective-sonic events leave more questions open regarding verisimilitude. The music certainly reflects the various psychological meltdowns of its characters, but it has also been read as something closer to a stylistic device that stands outside of any bounds of plausibility or compositional motivation (King 2005 90). Having the characters perform the song in this way halts the smooth, unnoticed flow of the narrative and draws attention to the film's constructed fiction, thereby displaying a degree of self-consciousness.

Aimee Mann's number in Magnolia reveals much about the film's overall *syuzhet* construction, because it foregrounds the synchronicity of events, sonically stitching together the times and spaces inhabited by its disparate and lonely characters. Structurally, the film involves multiple *syuzhets* running in parallel, each of its core characters linked in complex, tenuous and often coincidental ways. This focus on chance meetings and loose character association has become more commonplace in the contemporary cinema, and departs from the linear, hero-oriented and meticulously motivated classical structure. Fear and Loathing and Jacob's Ladder also offer

alternatives to the classical mode. They cut back and forth in time with no coherent temporal scheme or cause-effect logic in the first place. These films and their experiential narrational schemes are testament to the possibilities of contemporary plot construction, and are frequently expressed through the power of sound.

### **Lost Highway**

Lost Highway displays a number of the narrational qualities outlined above. In particular, its distinct lack of classical verisimilitude invites the audience to wonder whether the events we see and hear are psychological expressions of its protagonist.

Bordwell writes that:

[...] the entire movie's action seems indeterminate, and then we lose all moorings. We can't be sure that any events or states of affairs count as veridical, and the narration is revealed as thoroughly unreliable [...] The eerie mix of horror-film atmospherics and radiant naiveté may urge us to construe each film as presenting the fantasies of a possessed protagonist [*but*] the absence of definite reference points allows Lynch to rehearse a few obsessive scenarios of lust and blood without settling on which are real and which are imagined (2006 82-89).

The spatiotemporal location and arrangement of Lost Highway's *fabula* events involve gaps and dead ends, and the *syuzhet* is arranged in a distinctly non-linear fashion. Lost Highway dramatises the extreme possibilities incorporated in classical narration in contemporary Hollywood, and nowhere is this better expressed than on the soundtrack. In addition, the sound and music by Lynch and Angelo Badalamenti articulates their collaborative production practices. The soundtrack also points to the film's generic stylings, offering a reworking of elements of *film noir*.

A surreal, semi-investigative murder-mystery, Lost Highway (1997) enacts the supposedly real versus the supposedly fantastical events in the life of jazz saxophonist Fred Madison (Bill Pullman), a jealous husband who may or may not have murdered his wife Renee (Patricia Arquette). While awaiting execution for her death, he seemingly disappears from his prison cell, and the next day a young mechanic named Pete Dayton

(Balthazar Getty) is found in his place, with no memory of how he arrived there. As if in a parallel universe, Renee reappears in the form of blonde *femme fatale* Alice, whom Pete cannot sexually resist, but who could also endanger his life if the two become involved. The *syuzhet* is complex, fragmentary and ultimately circular. In the final scene, Fred, now inexplicably rematerialised, turns up at his own house to deliver an intercom message to a past version of himself who we see in the film's opening minutes. Character identities at times mutate, for example Fred supposedly becomes Pete, Renee becomes Alice. At others, characters appear to duplicate, for example Pete turns back into Fred, who then contacts himself, and Renee and Alice are seen together in a photo. The fluidity of identity, the distortion of space and time, and an apparent outpouring of Fred's anxieties and desires are powerfully rendered by the film's sound design and music. A particular sequence where Fred and Renee return home from a party demonstrates these unsettling distortions.

Back in their house, Fred and Renee quietly prepare for bed. Fred is in a low-lit bedroom folding clothes while Renee is in the bathroom removing her makeup. At this point, it would seem that Fred suspects that Renee is having an affair, or hiding a dark secret from him, and as a result his mind is plagued with suspicious imaginings. The soundtrack is virtually silent as the two carry out their actions. However, Fred appears suddenly distracted at the same time as a low booming noise is heard, although it is not clear whether it occupies the diegesis. He leaves the room, looking almost possessed as, very quietly, an ensemble of cellos and a deep, ambient drone crawl into the sound mix. Fred slowly continues his trajectory through the hallways of his house, whose dimensions are unknown as they are steeped in darkness. Some softly played woodwind - clarinets, bassoon and oboe - play long, menacing notes to accompany the cellos and ambient drones as Fred finally completely disappears into shadow. The combined blackness of the space and the low, sonorous sound and music, function to articulate the

mystery of the sequence: we are literally left in the dark. Where is Fred going? What is motivating him? What is going to happen? Eventually Renee anxiously calls his name but he does not answer. The sound and music swell louder and medium-pitched clarinets and violins can be heard as a cut to Fred and Renee's lounge is shown, immersed in shifting shadows. A processed vocal howl is heard deep in the mix, a sound that expresses great foreboding. Suddenly night turns to day, the haunting sounds and music die away and Fred emerges in his lounge alone. He begins to play one of a series of videotapes that mysteriously arrived on his doorstep. Intense bursts of static noise punctuate gloomy mechanical ambiences as the tape reveals the interior of Fred and Renee's home recorded on a prowling handheld camera. Suddenly, the video cuts to an image of Renee disembowelled and a writhing bloodstained Fred kneeling close by. Dissonant violins and clarinets in the upper register rise in the score, cascading in a frightening atonal *glissandi* (quickly descending notes on the scale), with intense *vibrato* (a rapid and subtle fluctuation of pitch) to accompany the sickening scene that reveals itself to Fred. Shocked and bewildered by what he has seen, Fred screams for Renee. His voice is obscured and overlaid by loud, roaring bursts of thunder, both an expression of lightning terror and overwhelming helplessness.

In terms of narrational effect, this sonic sequence raises many questions and opens up considerable space for interpretation. Is this murky, sonorous and atonal blanket an externalisation of Fred's desires and anxieties? If so, does the menacing drone express some goal of murderous intent? Or does the cloudy mix merely serve to underscore Fred's confusion, his innocence and complete lack of agency in a situation that will destroy his life? Perhaps the soundtrack may serve to represent something other than Fred's internal character psychology. As Geoff King suggests, it may have supernatural significance: "the dark musical accompaniment [is] joined by an indistinct vocal sound that implies some kind of disembodied presence (possible figuring another

version of [Fred], given the strong theme of doubling that develops as the film progresses)” (2005 132). This interpretation is as equally valid as a “subjective” reading because the film is organized around unstable identities, and there are no clear audiovisual signals to suggest that the film’s events are unquestionably the imaginings of a broken down protagonist. Perhaps then this should be taken at face value: Fred really can transform into somebody else, and really does have the ability to duplicate himself, thus denoting departure from any familiar and classical values of realistic verisimilitude. Either way we look at it, the film’s sonic style reveals little, and instead fabricates a cloak of mystery while opening up multiple interpretations regarding subjectivity and identity.

This scene is representative of the film’s mysterious overtones as it restricts audience knowledge in other ways, particularly via the limitations it places on dialogical communication. There is frequent *temps mort* in the conversations between Fred and Renee. This of course signifies a breakdown in marital communication, gesturing that there is something wrong at the heart of their relationship. However, the lack of dialogue also places limits on a fuller understanding of these characters, their relationships, their goals and their motivations. Fred and Renee’s thoughts are never revealed to one another - nor to the audience - and they literally leave questions posed to one another unanswered as the unheeded cries of Renee in this key scene demonstrate. It therefore leaves the death of Renee and Fred’s role in it all the more puzzling because our access of inferential information is restricted. We never know if she was really hiding something from Fred, or whether Fred is truly responsible for the murder. No exposition is available, nor does the sound and music compensate with any suggestive markers.

Lack of communication - especially in the dialogical *temps mort* - is intensified by the film’s powerful emphases on silence. As figure vii demonstrates, there is a fairly

long duration in the opening moments where virtually nothing is heard at all. Chion (1999) believes that silence is enhanced by Dolby stereo technology, which has no doubt increased sound sharpness as well as leading to more subtle uses, particularly since its digitisation. Not only has Dolby drawn greater attention to the details of what is present on the soundtrack, but also what is *not* present. Chion suggests that Dolby's capacity to intensify sound dynamics has led to a focus on the troughs as well as the peaks of the soundtrack's *mise-en-bande*, to far greater effect than pre-existing technologies. He applies this notion to David Lynch, arguing that:

I think that today we are in an age when Dolby is discovering the beauty of silence around sounds, particularly around voices. Think of Kurosawa's *Dreams* and *Blue*, and the later films of David Lynch such as *Wild at Heart* and *Lost Highway*. (Because of very loud and rhythmic passages of rock music, one forgets that the latter two films have many sequences in which auditory emptiness envelops confidences, and scenes where dialogue is slow and sparse (1999 168).

“Auditory emptiness”, “confidences”, lack of communication, *temps mort*. These help to affect the intense mystery behind Lost Highway. So too do the creeping, murky sound design and the abstract jazz/modern classical music, which together reveal neither obvious emotional cues, the likelihood of an event, or clear-cut characterisation. Lost Highway has what I would call an “enigma” soundtrack: it inspires questions, it offers intrigue and atmosphere, but because the film's narrational framework departs from clear-cut, communicative classicism, it functions to block answers and therefore leaves all questions open-ended.

It is possible to locate the “enigma” soundtrack in generic tradition, namely *film noir*. Lost Highway owes much to the motifs often found in the classic *film noirs* of Hollywood from the 1940s and 1950s. Gaining momentum in the late 1970s, many crime thrillers alongside Lost Highway such as Klute (Alan Pakula 1971); Blue Velvet (Lynch 1986); American Gigolo (Paul Schrader 1980); Basic Instinct (Paul Verhoeven 1992); L.A. Confidential (Curtis Hanson 1997) and In The Cut (Jane Campion 2003)

have knowingly employed and updated common tropes from their older counterparts, thus gaining critical recognition as neo-*noirs* (Foster Hirsch 1999). James Naremore has noted Lost Highway's overt generic borrowings:

A thoroughgoing pastiche, [Lost Highway] brims with allusions to three decades of noir [...] almost every image and every character in the film has an archetypal dream quality: a nocturnal road out of Detour [1945] and Psycho [1960]; a “Lost Highway Motel”, where a woman may or may not be dead; an exploding house on stilts like the one in Kiss Me Deadly [1955]; an alienated jazz musician who might be a killer [...] (273-274).

Any satisfactory discussion of *film noir* would require a volume of its own, not least because questions regarding its identity as a genre continue to smoulder in critical discourses on cinema. However, if we consider its sound and music and their narrational functions, Lost Highway shares much in common with the *noirs* that have been produced across the world since the 1940s.

Leaving the various concrete motifs aside such as character types and locations, *noir* narratives tend to be heavily guided by the subjective states of its core characters. Christopher Nolan (Memento 2001) points out that: “film noir is one of the only genres where the concept of point of view is accepted as a fairly important notion in the storytelling” (qtd. in Bordwell 2006 74). In addition, point of view tends to gravitate around psychic malaise and alienation. Foster Hirsch notes that: “noir names a knot of feelings and intuition – dread, uncertainty, paranoia – that won’t go away” (7). There have been few attempts among critics to connect *noir*'s fearful psychological drive to the soundtrack. However, Helen Hanson (forthcoming) has made inroads in her discussion of the “sonic fabric” of *noir*, and the ways in which sound and music contribute to stories and settings steeped in “suspense, fear, threat and desire” (2). Robert G. Porfiro has traced the genealogy of the widespread use of jazz music in *film noirs*, observing the “association of jazz with disturbed mental states” (178), which

began with early films Among the Living (Stuart Heisler 1941) and The Blue Dahlia (George Marshall 1946).

We may use these comments as a springboard for interpreting Lost Highway's sonic narration in the context of *noir*. The electronic ambient rushing, the breathing jazz/classical cellos, howling effects and *temps mort* may well be powerful analogues for Fred's lonesome psychological and physical twist-turns, which result in their deadly resolution. Lynch speaks of how he created the dreaded and alienating atmosphere of Fred and Renee's home by contrasting sounds and silences: "If you have a room and it's really quiet, or if there's no sound, you're just looking at this room. If you want a certain kind of mood, you find the sound that creeps into that silence: that starts giving you a feeling" (Sider et al. 226). This emphasis on ambiences and psychological anxieties in the sound of Lost Highway would seem to align it with the affective strategies of the *noir* tradition. Ultimately, Lynch and Badalamenti draw on a generic cycle that, as far back as Hollywood's studio era, was reconfiguring classical narrational norms. Mood and mystery, expressions of desire and uncertainty were equally if not more important to *noir* than intelligibility and knowledge, clear-cut communication and resolve.

In addition to its generic citations, the soundtrack of Lost Highway vividly articulates the production practices behind its creation. As we can see from figure vii, the *mise-en-bande* does not retain a constant volume or any classically intelligible balance between components, especially in the interrelations between sound effects and music. Rather than dipping and rising inverse to one another to retain a clear and steady volume overall as can be heard in films like Star Wars or Dune, the two sounds remain at a similar level and are at times quite indistinct. The sounds and music also occupy the same frequency range. They both begin with a bass sound and gradually move into mid and then high-range sounds. For example, the deep and ambient rushing background



effects are matched by almost inaudibly deep cellos. As higher pitched effects emerge in the mix, such as processed howling noises, instruments in the upper register - violins and clarinets - rise in the score. These sounds come to a loud and cacophonous climax in the closing seconds of the sequence. Lynch and Badalamenti's sonic scene - unlike that of Lucas, Burt and Williams's dense clarity - is characterised by at times conflicting and cacophonous combinations of effects and music. As Murray Smith writes:

What makes Lynch's approach so distinctive is the degree to which all elements of sound – score and dialogue included – are subordinated to an integrated sound design, in contrast to the relative autonomy retained by music, dialogue and effects in occasional sound design (2003 155).

The collaborative production practice between Lynch and Badalamenti creates a distinctive feature of this sonic scene. As Lynch says of their creative method: "There are sound effects and there are abstract sound effects; there's music and there's abstract music [...] And somewhere music turns into sounds, and sounds turn into music" (Kenny 133). Such a *mélange* of sound and music has moved Smith to comment on the integrated aesthetic as a "sonic blender" (167). This makes sense in light of the "musical- sound design" method employed by the two filmmakers, which involves Lynch sampling excerpts of Badalamenti's music, feeding it into effects processors and mixing with carefully synthesised sound effects.

According to basic classical narrational expectations, the sounds of Lost Highway reveal little. The unintelligibility of its sound and music parallels the uncertainties of character identities and their relationships. Questions are left unanswered, and barely a word is uttered to offer the unknowing audience a hook. The sounds of Lost Highway are fitting, as the film offers a radical restructuring of classical narrational logic and plot composition: a goalless protagonist wanders through undefined spaces, times, and identities, only to end up where he began. However, this far from means that the film is bereft of meaning. Located in the traditions of *noir*, the

film's "enigma" sounds, the interwoven sonic drones, howls and abstract musical phrases, together articulate an intensely affective space of envy, confusion and anxiety, while knowingly subduing direct exposition to engage the audience in the film's mystery. This soundtrack shows just how far Hollywood narrative filmmaking has come in its potential to experiment with storytelling and style.

### **The Phantom Menace**

From the outer boundaries of the indie cinema to the mainland of the blockbuster, Hollywood's soundtrack demonstrated much artistic diversity in the 1990s. Considered together with Lost Highway, the new Lucas/Burtt/Williams collaboration The Phantom Menace (1999) would reveal Hollywood's full sonically stylistic range.

During this decade, the megapicture flourished. The majors continued their aggressive marketing strategies, the most visible evidence of this being the continued outpouring of sequels. The most prominent of these were by now on their third instalment or more. Alien 3 (David Fincher 1992) and Alien: Resurrection (Jean-Pierre Jeunet 1997), Back to the Future 3 (Robert Zemeckis 1990), Lethal Weapon 3 (Richard Donner 1992), Die Hard 2 (Renny Harlin 1990) and Die Hard with a Vengeance (John McTiernan 1995), Terminator 2: Judgement Day: Judgement Day (James Cameron 1991), Batman Returns (Tim Burton 1992) and Batman Forever (Joel Schumacher 1995) are just some of the successors to the blockbuster hits of the previous decade. When not replicating exactly the same story arcs, the majors were putting out similarly formulated fast-paced, classically coded films that gravitated around the overlapping generic categories of action-adventure, science fiction, fantasy, and disaster. They were joined by top-grossers Jurassic Park (\$337 million), Independence Day (\$306 million), Titanic (\$488 million) along with Batman Forever (\$184 million).

With its rocketing earnings, Hollywood was in no hurry to slow down its considerable blockbusting output. Once more it was George Lucas who would add to its continued success with The Phantom Menace (1999), the opening chapter of his second Star Wars trilogy which would pocket \$430 million. In this instalment the narrative attention has shifted to the background story of Luke Skywalker's father Anakin, plotting his childhood steps toward an eventual transformation into Darth Vader. The Phantom Menace adheres to the same classical narrational norms as its predecessors: the clear-cut battle between good and evil (the Jedi Knights vs Senator Palpatine), a pivotal battle scene that determines who will prevail, and a burgeoning romance plot. This is supplemented by the intermittent action scenes, which communicate multiple informational messages at the same time as they thrill their audiences, particularly in their elaborate combinations of sound.

One particular action scene exemplifies these characteristics. Two Jedi Knights including a young Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) and Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson) take on the mission to restore peace to the Galactic Republic. The sequence begins shortly after the Jedi board a space station posing as ambassadors in the hope of brokering a peace deal with creatures of an evil Trade Federation. However, the traders soon discover their true identities and, perceiving them as a threat, order their execution. A small army of droid soldiers march towards a waiting room occupied by the oblivious Jedi, which begins to fill with a poisonous gas. The droid soldiers take aim at the doors, which slide open and a dissonant, suspenseful string and brass chord rings out, punctuated by bursts of percussion and added wind instruments. The audience would perhaps expect to see the Jedi emerge, but instead an apologetic android servant wanders out, delaying the dramatic climax and commanding another suspenseful wavering violin note. The droid soldiers then exchange instructions with their mechanical, uniform voices and cautiously approach the opening as the gas cloud

begins to clear. Suddenly, Jedi light-sabers are illuminated, sonically rendered with their defining electronic swish. The suspenseful quiet has become chaos (see figure viii). The two men are met with pulsing laser gunfire and as they leap from the room, the swishing of their swords and clothing provide a heroic swashbuckling-cum-martial arts choreography that runs up against the cold, inflexible and aggressive fighting machines they face. Even without prior knowledge of Star Wars, the audience is provided sonic cues that facilitate their identification with the heroes. This is reinforced by Williams's brass *leitmotif* which is a key phrase taken from the Star Wars theme tune, played *fortissimo* (very loud) in a major-key. This Romantic piece is bold, optimistic and has a heroic militarism, clearly signalling the "good" force. Its sudden dynamic shift also underscores the spectacular action while compensating for the sudden rise in the volume of the sound effects. The sequence rapidly cuts to the traders in another room. The sound effects track shifts to a very quiet background ambience of whirring computers and mechanical noise while the music lowers in volume too (see figure viii), changing to a brooding minor key phrase to juxtapose the evil, cowardly traders with the heroic Jedi. This dip in the effects and music also makes room for the characters' dialogical exchange, which allows the audience to hear their next moves and make inferences about the outcome of their combat with the Jedi. The sequence then cuts back to the fight happening in parallel and the sound effects and music rise once again in the absence of dialogue. The heroic *leitmotif* also returns, although played out in a minor version key to demonstrate the peril and struggle of the Jedi against the considerable number of droids. The gunfire and sounds of falling droids intensify in volume until Obi-Wan smashes an enemy to pieces with a decisive strike, his physical action accompanied by a percussive orchestral hit, a key example of Mickey Mousing. The sequence cuts back and forth between the two scenes once more, accompanied by the same sound vacillations, thus providing a clear sonic juxtaposition between the heroes

and their enemies, between spaces of spectacular combat and cowardly concealment, and between sonic plenitude and verbocentrism.

This is an elaborate, sinuous sonic sequence that once again displays a fairly rigid adherence to classical narrational norms. Each sound component interrelates within the *mise-en-bande* to privilege the process of story advancement. For the Jedi, the fight is a pivotal life or death situation. Their experience in combat must be foregrounded by stylistic devices so that the audience is cued to identify with their heroism, and with the good galactic “force” at large. Sonically, this means proud, brassy *leitmotifs*, the swishing lightsabers and martial arts moves, which define the protagonists against their robotic enemies and their metallic, clunky renderings. Let it not be forgotten that this sequence offers a good deal of spectacle. The cuts to the talking traders is another strategy of ambient sound “contrast” (Sergi 2004 148), shifting from big and loud to moderately quiet. The editing and its varying sound mixes and orchestrations also fulfil the aims of sound “focus” (Sergi 2004 150), due to a sudden emphasis on the voice and dip in music and effects. The shift to a verbocentric *mise-en-bande* formula provides clear exposition of traders’ plans and the ultimate fates of the Jedi. Therefore the two *mise-en-bandes* on offer in this interplay of edits retain the equilibrium of the soundtrack, offering two distinct types of narrative comprehension in rapidly alternating cinematic spaces. Within a mere minute, the soundtrack alone has defined character qualities, highlighted the dynamic between “good” and “bad”, has helped to create two distinct spaces of action and suggested future events. This highly expository and clear-cut narration locates the film within the classical tradition.

Once more, sonic plenitude highlights the generic roots of The Phantom Menace. We are faced with the familiar spectacle of battle: the electronic swishing of the light sabres, the bursts of rapid gunfire, sparks shooting from robot casualties, and the heavy smash as they fall to the ground. True to the aesthetic of sonic plenitude, each

of Burt's sound effects is rendered in its amplified and sensational way, in order to complement the fantastical imagery at play. As ever, the sound effects are combined with the late Romantic stylings of Williams.

One of the defining characteristics of the *mise-en-bande* in the sequence – and of others in the Star Wars series – is the “separateness” of its components. This is not to be confused with dense clarity, which involves the careful mixing of many sounds to achieve sonic intelligibility. Separateness describes a certain textural configuration of the film's sonic story world whereby sounds of differing qualities combine to create a diverse tapestry. Chion discusses something similar, referring to a method of “juxtaposition without fusion” (2003 154). He applies this notion to the sound and music in the films by Lucas and Lynch:

I am thinking of certain scenes in films by David Lynch but also of the *Star Wars* series, in which, intentionally, the world of sound effects created by Ben Burt (the sharp beeps and twitters of the small robot, the humming and zapping of laser-sabres) is radically foreign to the world of John Williams's symphonic music, and vice versa (2003 154).

Chion's observations are true in the case of Lucas, Burt and Williams. The sounds are organised within an aesthetic of separateness, which creates a vibrant galaxy of alien species, diverse cultures and dramatic battles. Moreover, the symphonic score provides a mythical timelessness, an optimistic grandiosity that disseminates throughout the universe and throughout history, irrespective of the technologies (whether spacecraft or primitive motors) and peoples (whether droids or wookies). The aesthetic of separateness also serves to highlight a shift in popular science fiction movies in contemporary Hollywood. In the early 1970s, film narratives like THX-1138 and 2001: A Space Odyssey (Kubrick 1968) demonstrated a distrust of futuristic technologies, building up dystopian visions of machines out of control, either serving to entrap populations (THX-1138), or to transport them to unknown and nightmarish dimensions (2001: A Space Odyssey). Star Wars, ET and Close Encounters to name three examples

introduced the possibility of space travel being a force for empowerment, energy and, when in the right hands, ultimate good and unity (King 2000 75-80). As William Whittington points out, this transition is embodied in the soundtrack: “Fragmentation of the image and sound tracks that had been so much a part of films such as *THX1138* gave way to a more commercial style that emphasized a new kind of sound-image unification, anthropomorphism and spectacle” (94).

Chion’s observations on separateness, or “juxtaposition without fusion” are not quite so convincing when applied to Lynch and Badalamenti’s work. Their integrated musical sound design is based on dissonances and sonic amalgams rather than separateness. To begin with, they choose sounds that occupy similar frequencies and timbres. In Lost Highway, these amalgamated sounds serve a different narrational and generic function compared with Star Wars. They highlight a kind of claustrophobic domesticity, the breakdown of communication, and intense feelings of desire and despondency, which are qualities generally aligned with the tradition of *noir*.

As my discussion of the soundtrack of The Phantom Menace reveals so far, the Star Wars films are committed to classical narration. However, the technological dimension of The Phantom Menace reveals something of an interesting departure with regards to classical representation and the notion of realism. The Phantom Menace was released in Sony Dynamic Digital Sound (a system that has been in use since 1994 and allows up to eight channels) and Dolby Digital (which debuted in 1992 with Batman Returns and makes use of six channels). With its high fidelity sound and large number of channels, the now standard digital sound system has eclipsed the 6-track magnetic soundtrack that had continued use, albeit in less common prestige presentations. The recent advancements of digitisation have intensified the spectacle of films like The Phantom Menace to the degree that the classical narrational transparency hitherto

typical of the Hollywood megapicture is disrupted. Geoff King conceptualises this process under the “oxymoronic” term “Impressive spectacular realism”:

It combines spectacle that draws attention to itself *as* spectacle, something to be “wowed” by, with a “realism” (self-effacing, in that “the joints cannot be seen”) usually understood as seeking to draw us into a fictional world of the film. It can work either way; maybe both at the same time (2006 339).

If we translate this onto The Phantom Menace and its soundtrack, then the high quality, impactful digitised light sabre effects and the zapping ray guns adhere to classical narrational norms in the sense that they are realistic (to this particular film’s standards of verisimilitude). However, the flamboyance and majesty of the sounds are perhaps so impressive as to flaunt and draw attention to the technology behind their making, in this case, Dolby and Sony digital. As King says: “These kinds of visions (with their multichannel audio accompaniments [...]) function as an advertisement for what Hollywood can do” (2006 339). This self-conscious aspect is distinctly non-classical, and is one of the few characteristics of the blockbuster cinema that demonstrates a break with its largely classical narrational roots.

With its emphasis on sonic plenitude, spectacular realism, unambiguous sonic spaces and verbal intelligibility, The Phantom Menace remains ultimately committed to classical premises while exploring the technological possibilities of sound style, which interestingly add an element of self consciousness. Wielding a different vision, Lost Highway offers a brand of narration that incorporates a high degree of subjective representation while it challenges conventional constructions of spatial coherence and temporal linearity. From the murky, unintelligible “musical-sound design” to its ambient howls, the sonic style of Lost Highway serves to externalise the inner turmoil of its main protagonist more than it aims to construct a classically coherent story. As George Lucas, Ben Burtt and John Williams, and Lynch and Badalamenti moved into



the new millennium these features of their soundtracks would intensify, reflecting the ever diverse possibilities of sonic narration in contemporary Hollywood.

## Chapter Twelve

### Into the Sonic Millennium, 2000-2007

Whether mixed with fantasy, adventure, comedy or suspense, action films followed the same basic formula. As one film executive described it, ‘You need antagonists, the bigger the better. Also, most of our films are about one lone underdog, triumphing over a system of some kind And so you need as easily identifiable a system as possible’ (Tino Balio 2002 174)

The boom in independent production had created a crowded field, and product differentiation was needed. Plot maneuvers could boost the standing of a low-budget film with no stars. *Pulp Fiction* proved that tricky storytelling could be profitable, particularly if it offered fresh take on genre ingredients [...] Soon the major companies realized that there was an audience for offbeat stories, especially if stars wanted to play in them, so *Unbreakable* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* became reasonable bets (David Bordwell 2006 73-74)

From the late 1990s through to the later part of the 2000s, Hollywood has continued to flourish by embracing a host of different storytelling modes to cater for its various markets. This diversification is suggested by the above quotations, which describe Hollywood’s adherence to narrational and thematic formulas on one hand and innovative departures on the other. This chapter will examine different approaches to narration while discussing some of the ways in which these approaches have continued to impact on sound styles. Indie film Mulholland Dr. (David Lynch 2001, released by Universal subsidiary Focus) and megapicture Attack of the Clones (George Lucas 2002) are emblematic of the significant differences to be found in contemporary narration and sound style in Hollywood in this decade. The former uses sound design, music and dialogue to fabricate subjective spaces and challenge classical temporal coherence while the latter employs sound to continue Star Wars’ rich mythical world of action heroics and clear-cut portrayals of good and evil.

Since the year 2000, Hollywood has peppered its output with films whose narratives gravitate around subjective states, representing anything from mental illnesses and delusions to the dreams and fantasies of its protagonists. Memento (Christopher Nolan 2001) arranges the events of one man’s revenge plot in reverse,

reflecting his damaged brain's inability to make new memories; A Beautiful Mind (Ron Howard 2001) represents the schizophrenic hallucinations of mathematician John Nash; The Others (2001) is a ghost story whose dead protagonist mistakenly believes that she is alive and being haunted; Vanilla Sky (Cameron Crowe 2001) reveals one man's broken life to be the product of a lucid dream; Mulholland Dr. (David Lynch 2001) combines the dreams, fantasies and real life of a failed Hollywood hopeful; Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (Michel Gondry 2004) welcomes us into the mind of a man whose memories are being surgically erased and Tideland (Terry Gilliam 2005) sporadically represents the wild imaginings of a young girl. The narrational thrust of these films range from unknowledgeable and deceitful (in Memento, A Beautiful Mind, The Others and Vanilla Sky it is only revealed late in the day that events and memories are the products of dreams and delusions) to the plain bizarre (Eternal Sunshine and Tideland reveal from the start that events are psychologically motivated but these are represented as highly surreal). As Bordwell has always maintained (1985a, 1985b, 2006), classical principles still lie at the heart of Hollywood filmmaking, yet each of these "subjective stories" (Bordwell 2006 72) demonstrate the ways in which classical narration continues to accommodate novel methods. With the exception of Mulholland Dr., the above films eventually reveal which scenarios are to be believed or not, thereby offering resolve and knowledge to the audience. At the same time, their approaches to plot construction, representations of time and space, and innovative audiovisual devices show that the classical narration's modal boundaries continue to expand. Memento, Vanilla Sky and Eternal Sunshine are particularly powerful examples worthy of discussion.

Self-consciously unreliable narration and backwards plot construction are the overriding characteristics of Memento, a film structured around the experiences of Leonard (Guy Pierce) who plots vengeance from a motel bedroom after what he

believes to be an attack has left him a widow with anterograde amnesia (short term memory loss). In this film, the cause-effect chain is in reverse, which is explicitly connected with Leonard's inability to make new memories. Leonard's experiences are represented by sudden cuts to events without explanation. For example, he is perplexed to find an unknown man beaten and gagged in his wardrobe; equally so when he is shown sprinting across a parking lot, unsure if he is chasing someone or is himself being chased. Audience knowledge is restricted to Leonard's fragmentary and puzzling experiences, which are reinforced through an unusual application of the voiceover. Because the present tense is all Leonard can know, his inner thoughts are expressed as questions about his circumstances. This self-consciously highlights his narrational unreliability.

Of course, unreliable voiceover narration is nothing new. Karen Hollinger points out that *film noirs* of the 1940s involved untrustworthy narrators, such as the murderous Waldo (Clifton Webb) in Laura (Otto Preminger 1944) whose opening voiceover temporarily dupes the audience into trusting him, such is his veneer of narrational authority. In Gilda (Charles Vidor 1946), the voiceover of Johnny (Glenn Ford) consistently expresses disdain for the titular *femme fatale* (Rita Hayworth), although his flashback events ultimately reveal his true affections for her. In Memento, the narration is configured differently. Leonard's voiceovers frequently and explicitly reveal little more than confusion, thus self-consciously and overtly highlighting his unreliability from the start: "Now, where was I?" "Am I chasing him or is he chasing me?" "Am I drunk? I don't feel drunk". In addition, these voiceovers refer to the present, reminding us of Leonard's cerebral damage at the same time as it gestures towards the film's unorthodox temporal structure. In this sense the voiceover is self-conscious, constantly reminding us of our restricted knowledge.

Vanilla Sky's subjective narrative is effectuated by different self-conscious sound techniques. The latter half of the film enacts the lucid dream of its protagonist David (Tom Cruise), who unbeknownst to us, has been cryogenically frozen and his mind programmed to play out a perfect version of his life events. However the dream stumbles into nightmare as he loses the girl he loves and assaults a former lover. As David ponders on these unfortunate events, he is approached in a bar by a stranger (Noah Taylor), who later reveals himself to be a technical support assistant with the company that induced David's dream. Commanding David to "take control", the stranger informs him that he can alter any detail of his life, including each and every person scattered throughout the bar. "Well then", replies David, "what I'd love for them is to do is shut the fuck up, especially you". At this very moment, the soundtrack "shuts up", from the jukebox in the background to the ambient chatter of customers. This abrupt auditory cut is highly unusual and so unexpected that the audience would be forgiven in assigning this sudden lack of sound to technical failure. This is most likely because specific mixing and editing practices continue to dominate in commercial filmmaking. Doane writes that "Normality is established as a continuous flow, and the absence of sound, in the language of sound technicians, is its "death"" (57). Even though this "death" is overtly motivated and signalled within the narrative, it is highly self-conscious in its departure from classical technique.

Eternal Sunshine employs sound to express one man's mental experience of distortions in time and space, from temporal loops to the dissolving of the spatial boundaries of the diegesis. Having ended his relationship with Clementine (Kate Winslett) a heartbroken Joel (Jim Carrey) decides, with the help of a private medical company, to erase all memories of her. The procedure begins when Joel is placed under a brain scanner and asked to respond to objects that remind him of Clementine. After a few moments he begins to hear a series of words spoken by his doctor some minutes

before which become gradually obscured by an increasingly loud fizzing sound. Suddenly, a cut reveals Joel in bed in his apartment, presumably some hours later, wired to a computer as two young medical assistants complete his memory erasure. Another cut takes us back to Joel's memory of the consultation that took place earlier that day, although there now appear to be two Joels as he watches his past self converse with the doctor. However, he becomes perplexed to hear the conversations of the medical assistants in his apartment, which have bled into the memory he is experiencing. In this film, sound traverses time and space, connecting two experiential realms: the mental past of Joel's memory and physical present of Joel's apartment. This serves to challenge the classical linearity of time as well as the objectivity and spatial coherence of its narration.

Distortions of space and time, self-conscious narration and intense subjectivity, as the above examples demonstrate, are the hallmarks of a growing strand of films in Hollywood. Once again, Mulholland Dr. is emblematic of this strand. Firstly, the film employs overtly indeterminate narration in that dreams and reality are never clearly distinguished. Secondly, representations of the story world are self-conscious; for example, there are frequent and unexplained shifts from one plotline to the next, disrupting any smooth classical composition. Thirdly, there are breaks and twists in time and space, which include cuts back and forth in time and undefined diegetic boundaries. These are powerfully expressed in the uses of sound design, music and the voice. Ultimately they show the continued importance of sound in the ever-growing complexities and innovations in contemporary Hollywood narration.

### **Mulholland Dr.**

Geoff King points out that Mulholland Dr. combines traditional visual cues with unorthodox auditory techniques. "The bulk of the film is shot in a relatively

inconspicuous and classical style, its dark mood created largely through music and other aspects of Lynch's sound design" (2005 133). Although a relatively minor vignette in Mulholland Dr.'s complex narrative, the following sequence is characteristic of the film's distinctive soundtrack and its key contribution to the film's narrational framework.

The sign from a roadside diner named Winkie's forms an establishing shot, which is accompanied by the ambient background noise of traffic, with a police car siren in the foreground. Inside the diner, two besuited men are conversing. The younger of the two (played by Patrick Fischler) explains that he wished to come to Winkie's due to a recurring nightmare. He recounts seeing a terrifying figure living behind the diner, and he wishes to put an end to his anxiety by checking to see if it is really there. The conversation is foregrounded in a traditionally verbocentric fashion, and the muted rush of traffic is just audible outside. However, as in many of the films directed by Lynch, the utterances are separated by lengthy *temps mort* (see figure ix). These breaks in communication highlight both the social ineptitude of the core characters while expressing their alienated and anxious subjective states. This is a technique employed in the art cinema more commonly than it is found in the classical mode. As his account progresses, the ambient road sounds slowly fade to silence. This mixing technique serves to represent the ebbing of the man's external reality and to sharpen the attention to his lonely and terrified inner state. When the young man admits "I'm scared like I can't tell you", the music track fades in. It is a quiet, single-note drone played on brass and woodwind, which is accompanied by a sound effects track. This replaces the familiar reality of the ambient noise from outside with a foreboding low-frequency rumble, heightening our identification with the young man's dread as he narrates the details of his nightmare. The ambient sounds are once more heard in the mix as his story comes to an end, but the music and designed noise increase slightly in volume,

remaining a collectively frightening, looming presence, like the figure believed to be lurking behind Winkie's. Both men agree that they will go and check to see if the figure is really there. The conversation ends, and as the older man gets up to pay, the music swells louder, and deep woodwind sounds can be heard as the younger is momentarily left alone with his dreaded thoughts. Much like the sequence in Lost Highway analysed earlier, the designed sound effect becomes louder, intertwining with the music to create a deep and reverberant backdrop. The two men exit the diner, the click of the door handle being accompanied by a disconcertingly dense reverb. Once outside, the familiar noise of traffic becomes louder, although the sonic scene is still dominated by the chilling score and electronic effects. As the two men approach the back of Winkie's - shown in a series of point-of-view shots from the young man - the music intensifies, with violins providing a trembling *glissandi* to underscore his fear. Their footsteps begin to produce an unnatural delay (echo) that creates a sense of a huge space - greater than that established by the image - which reduces the man's relative size, thus highlighting his vulnerability. Another point-of-view shot lingers momentarily on graffiti-covered wall. Suddenly a dark witch-like figure slides into view, and the sound of brass and low frequency noise burst into the mix to climactic effect. The young man collapses unconscious into the arms of his companion and all that is heard is a deep, muffled rumbling, under which the voice of the older man can be barely heard, obscured further by heavy delay. For the young man, his nightmare has come true, and the murky, distant sounds fabricate a powerful sense that he is literally frightened to death.

The sounds of this scene are heavily expressive of a blurring between the familiar and not-so-familiar as the space of a small neighbourhood Hollywood diner becomes contaminated by terrifying nightmares. This scene is symptomatic of the very mystery that lies at the heart of the film. The central narrative thread follows Betty (Naomi Watts), who travels to Hollywood in search of an acting career. Soon she finds



herself falling in love with the mysterious amnesiac Rita (Laura Harring). However, this romantic story is interrupted by a series of alternative events, in which Betty's acting dreams never reach fruition and Rita is a condescending Hollywood star, engaged to director Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux). This love triangle enrages Betty, who takes out a contract on Rita's life with tragic consequences for both. With the film's recurring images of sleep, one is moved to assume that the first series of events is Betty's dream and the second the actual happenings. However, the distinction between these realities is never made explicit and so there seems to be a complex, indistinguishable relationship between Betty's objective and subjective worlds. This ambiguous bleed between dreams, nightmares and "real" reality runs throughout these films, and is also redolent of Eraserhead and Lost Highway.

A striking and familiar feature of the diner sequence is the close coupling of sound designed effects and music. This dissonant, murky *mise-en-bande* echoes Lost Highway in its mixing of sounds to similar volumes which also occupy roughly the same frequency (see figure ix). This of course articulates the distinct creative practices of Lynch and Badalamenti, with Lynch producing his rich sound design out of Badalamenti's short modernist compositions, or "firewood". In terms of narration, the musical-sound design by Lynch and Badalamenti functions as an enhancement of the sequence's nightmarish atmosphere and ambiguous – probably subjective – realities. Its blending of music and sound is an aural signifier for the unintelligible story world and the anxious, perplexed characters at its centre.

Of course, Mulholland Dr. draws heavily on psychologically motivated representations, which serve to heighten identification with characters while they intensify the surreal events at work. For instance, as the man falls to the ground behind the diner, his loss of consciousness is expressed aurally, through what Chion (1994a) describes as "the scrambling of the voice that loses speech in a haze of sound" (181).

This sonic manoeuvre is in fact an unconventional take on a common technique. Chion adds that “the visual equivalent of the same device - going out-of-focus to express loss of consciousness- is, on the other hand, widely accepted, having become a standard rhetorical figure of the image” (182). The Hudsucker Proxy (Joel Coen 1994) offers one such example. The point-of-view of Norville Barnes (Tim Robbins) is shown in warped perspective as he struggles with a dizzy spell. This is a stylistic cue which invites identification. Mulholland Dr. adopts a similarly expressive device but incorporates it into its idiosyncratic sonic style. In this sense, sound becomes the chief expressive device in the film, powerfully evoking the narrative’s very meaning in its production of subjective spaces and dream-like representations.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of Mulholland Dr. is its ability to create unconventional relationships between objects and their acoustical space. Chion explains the technique employed to achieve this:

The effects of spatial acoustics [...] can also contribute towards materializing sound. But not systematically: for a certain type of unrealistic reverberation, not commensurate with the place shown in the image, can also be coded as dematerializing and symbolizing (1994a 116).

This sequence demonstrates two instances of “unrealistic” reverb, from the oversized resonance of the closing door at Winkie’s, to the sound of excessive delay on the two men’s footsteps. This has the effect of displacement: the sound seems as if it is emanating from a bigger space than that which is being shown to us onscreen. Once more, this is motivated through character psychology. An opening up of the sonic space has the effect of heightening the perceived threat to the character, making him seem small and vulnerable by comparison. Of course, a technique like this is not entirely unique to Mulholland Dr. An action film like Terminator 2: Judgement Day (James Cameron 1991) saturates some of its key sounds in reverb. This emphasises the spectacle of gunfire or the heavy machine-like movement of its cyborg characters while

it dramatically highlights the threat to the film's child protagonist (John Connor played by Edward Furlong) and to humanity at large. However Mulholland Dr. is unusual due to the context in which the technique is applied. It is used to effect everyday actions (footsteps, doors closing) rather than actions that are emphatic and spectacular. Like the extra-material noises in The Grandmother or Eraserhead, this offbeat manipulation of sound forges a world that offers a sense of skewed realism: more atmospheric than fantastic, once more creating the blurred distinction between subjective and objective reality.

This blurring is also powerfully recalled in a second scene in Mulholland Dr. which employs some fascinating sound techniques that challenge established cinematic constructions of space and audiovisual relations. Critics frequently draw attention to a particularly disturbing sequence during which the film's protagonists Betty and Rita attend a midnight cabaret performance at the mysterious and aptly named Club Silencio (Annette Davison 2004a 120; Martha P. Nochimson 2004 176; Colin Odell and Matt le Blanc 2007 162). One performer, Rebekah del Rio, steps onto the stage and proceeds to sing a Spanish version of Roy Orbison's "Crying" a cappella. The performance is convincing to watch, with various shots focusing on the movements of her mouth and throat as the voice reverberates throughout the auditorium, moving Betty and Rita to tears. Halfway through the song, however, Rio closes her mouth and falls to the ground while the voice continues to sing. The spectator, both diegetic and real, is reminded of the words of the show's compeer, who earlier opens the performance by stating that "there is no band", and "it is all a tape recording". This is nonetheless disorientating, its effects succinctly captured by Odell and le Blanc's analogue: "the musical version of Magritte's painting *Ceci n'est pas un pipe*" (162).

Mulholland Dr. demonstrates a unique application of the technique of "acousmatisation" (a sound whose source is unknown) and "visualisation" (the source is

revealed onscreen) as outlined by Chion (1994a 71-73). It begins by offering a false visual source of the voice in the form of Rio and then reveals her to be a decoy, thus creating rendering the voice acousmatised, when she falls unconscious. Indeed, the source of the singing remains a mystery: it may well be a “tape recording”, as is suggested by the show’s compeer, but it is never visualised and verified.

In addition to having a disorienting effect on the audience, this sonic “trick” once again reminds us of the film’s wider narrative and thematic levels. The artifice of Rio’s performance contributes to the impossibilities of distinguishing between what is and is not real and the experiences of dreaming and waking reality, an enigma that structures the film’s multiple, overlapping narrational structure.

Rio’s performance is also highly self-conscious and foregrounds Lynch’s own control and manipulation of the soundtrack (Davison 2004a 120). It reveals the constructed relationship between the cinematic sound and image. More specifically, it potentially foregrounds the sound work (recording, dubbing, playback) involved in the production of the audiovisual bond. Rio is symbolic of the fabricated marriage between sound and image while the song’s permanent state of acousmatisation estranges the two completely. This effect is not unlike Lynch and Alan Splet’s early experiments with extra-materiality, which rendered a sense of unnaturalness, a slippage, between sound effect and its source.

The events in Club Silencio also have interesting implications for cinematic space. Chion notes that “The opposition between visualized and acousmatic provides a basis for the fundamental audiovisual notion of offscreen space” (1994a 73). Because the source of the singing is not the onscreen Rio but an unseen, offscreen emitter that is never identified, this knowledge has the effect of opening up the diegesis beyond that which we immediately see at the same time as it widens the mystery and indeterminacy of the film’s story world.

The distinction between onscreen and offscreen space, the acousmatic and the visualised, may be explored further and even problematised when considering other films directed by Lynch. Some key examples demonstrate experimental techniques involving these concepts. Ultimately, they run up against our received notions of audiovisual relations and cinematic space.

Let us return for a moment to Lost Highway. Shortly before Renee is murdered, She and Fred attend an opulent party hosted by playboy Andy. Fred is beckoned by a small grotesque figure known only as the Mystery Man (Robert Blake). As he approaches, the music, presumably playing from a stereo system in the diegesis, fades out and increases in reverb level, perhaps to signify Fred's subjective state and his focus on the imminent conversation. The dialogue and action that follows (edited from script) articulate their exchange:

Mystery Man: We've met before, haven't we?

Fred: I don't think so. Where is it you think we met?

Mystery Man: At your house. Don't you remember? [...] In fact, I'm there right now.

*The Mystery Man takes out a cellular phone and holds it out to Fred.*

*Mystery Man: Call Me.*

Fred shrugs, laughs, dials his number. We hear a pick up as we stay on Fred's face.

*Voice of Mystery Man (on phone): I told you I was here.*

During the utterances over the phone, the sequence cuts to the Mystery Man's face, his lips unmoving.

*Voice of Mystery Man (on phone): Give me back my phone.*

Much like Rio's performance in Club Silencio, this sequence is disconcerting, although these particular relationships between sound and source and the spaces they occupy are more complex in their construction. The addition of the mobile phone, with

what sounds like the Mystery Man's voice on one end, results in an audiovisual and spatial scene that is (literally) doubly difficult to construe.

It is appropriate to begin this complex analysis with what Chion terms as "On-the-Air" sound (1994a 76). This describes any sound that is transmitted by an electronic device, such as a radio or telephone. A distinction is then made between the sound's "initial" source (77), that is, the producer of the original sound before electronic transmission, and the "terminal" source (77) from an electronic transmitter such as the mobile phone. Conceptually speaking, because on-the-air sounds have two emitters (initial and terminal), they can potentially cross the bounds of cinematic space, transcending the zones of offscreen and onscreen (77). Of course, the use of on-the-air sound is common, its possibilities explored by many filmmakers in Hollywood. This includes Lucas and Murch's various (terminal) radios playing the same (initial) station in American Graffiti. However, Lost Highway is unique in that it sets up a series of ambiguous sound-source relations, and as such presents an undefined acoustical space. At the centre of this thorny sound sequence is the now aptly named Mystery Man, a figure that embodies the film's questions of subjectivity and identity. Is he a real physical presence or an aspect of Fred's troubled personality? Due to the film's themes of identity merging and duplication it is quite possible that the Mystery Man is one or the other, or possibly both. In any case, there are no straight answers.

There are two possible auditory interpretations of the scene. The first is simple: the Mystery Man has a doppelgänger - an identical but nonetheless distinct double - who, somewhere offscreen, serves as the initial source of the telephone voice. Therefore the sequence involves onscreen dialogue between the Mystery Man and Fred interspersed with on-the-air sound emitted onscreen via the terminal source (the phone). We hear an onscreen sonic scene made up of two spoken voices and one mediated

voice, but we are also conceptually aware of the unheard initial source (the doppelgänger) emitting an unmediated voice in an offscreen space.

A second interpretation heavily problematises the notion of on-the-air sound. If we infer that the Mystery Man has no offscreen double but somehow transmits the telephone voice without speaking (it could well be the case, since a doppelgänger is never visualised), we are left with a terminal source (the phone) without an initial source (speaker). Without the existence of an offscreen doppelgänger, the sequence constructs a sonic space that remains within the boundaries of the screen.

There is no way of verifying either interpretation as the correct version. The unidentifiable telephone voice creates a sonic scenario that is as ambiguous and unsolvable as the film's narrational identities and spatial constructions at large. Lynch's most recent feature Inland Empire (2006) also demonstrates various configurations of on-the-air sounds, but creatively blurs the distinctions between both the initial and terminal sources.

### **Inland Empire**

The film's central protagonist is Nikki Grace (Laura Dern), an affluent Hollywood actress who lands a starring role in a film that she learns is a remake of a Polish production based on a gypsy folk tale called 47. 47 is never finished because the two lead actors have been brutally murdered, and so it is implied that the film was cursed. Soon after learning this, Nikki's identity begins to converge with her onscreen character Sue, as well as with various actors and characters involved in the film's ill-fated Polish predecessor. In a highly surreal scene, Nikki/Sue converses with a young Polish woman - presumably her doomed counterpart - who tells her how to see into a parallel reality (or is it the future?) We see the speakers' faces in black and white, which have been superimposed with a ghostly low opacity onto a close-up of a gramophone needle

playing a record. The sound of crackling vinyl dominates the soundtrack, and the dialogue between the women is heavily distorted as if their voices are being played back from the record. Such is the level of distortion that dialogue intelligibility is significantly reduced and the scene is accompanied by subtitles. The combined image visualises the sound's initial source of production (the women's faces) and the terminal source (the vinyl), yet the sound we hear refers to the terminal source alone. Chion (1994a) rightly points out that it is quite common for films to recall a sound's original state of production by synchronising it with an image of the terminal source, or completely cutting to the image of the initial source along with the sound (77). However, Lynch also shows the women's faces speaking in sync with voices that are mediated by technology. This audiovisual arrangement is quite unique, and once more has a disorienting effect on the audience. Indeed, this is something that is in keeping with the air of narrative mystery and nightmarish turmoil experienced by Nikki/Sue while proving an audiovisual representation of the meeting of parallel spatiotemporal realities.

Inland Empire is Lynch's first completely independent film since Eraserhead, which comes as little surprise considering its extremely perplexing narrational structure. The film demonstrates the most explicit departure from the classical norms compared with Lynch's indie and major studio distributed predecessors. Like Lost Highway, the film involves temporal loops, characters that duplicate and merge and representations of unstable subjective states, but Inland Empire involves many more narrative strands to deal with. Nikki's identity shifts from her original position of actress to that of the film character Sue, whereby the intended film production and reality are merged as one. Nikki's co-star Devon (Justin Theroux) also melds into his fictional alter-ego Billy, while Nikki's possessive and potentially violent husband pursues the pair between realities as they embark on a dangerous affair. Events cut back and forth in time and



across realities and as such it is impossible to extrapolate a coherent, logical *fabula*. Nikki/Sue traverses time, space and identity, which is once more expressed throughout the soundtrack. Rather than simply providing visual answers to auditory questions, an instance of visualised acousmatic sound in Inland Empire results in the intensification of the film's mysterious narrative currents. During one sequence, Nikki is seen attending a preliminary script reading with Devon at the studio hired by Hollywood director Kingsley (Jeremy Irons). As the three begin their work, they are alerted to the tapping of footsteps behind a painted piece of film scenery at the back of the studio. Believing that there is a trespasser on set, Devon gives chase, but the unidentified figure escapes. Much later, in a sequence shown from behind the set, we discover that this trespasser also Nikki, now an amalgam with Sue. The sound is (re)united with the image (we now know the source of the footsteps) but this knowledge leaves in its place far greater questions regarding the organisation of the film's spatiotemporal dimensions and plot structure, to which there are few simple answers. It would appear that at this point, events have partly come full circle. Nikki has duplicated and stands in two places at once, watching her (presumably) past self and Devon rehearse. She is also Sue, shocked to be witnessing an enactment of her life in film script form, played by people that look exactly like herself and her lover Billy.

Over the past ten years, Hollywood's output has seen an increase of films whose narrational processes are driven by explicit and self-conscious psychological motivation, and which experiment with complex constructions of space and time. A number of these films, including Memento, Vanilla Sky and Eternal Sunshine, demonstrate creative approaches to sound which act as powerful devices within these narrational experiments. Mulholland Dr. goes even further in its experimentation. The film questions the very identities of its characters, blurs the line that separates subjective and objective spaces, creates self-conscious audiovisual relationships, and offers no

reliable perspective or clear audiovisual cues to extrapolate a fully coherent story. As my analyses show, sound, music and dialogue are the most powerful materials on which the indeterminacies of Mulholland Dr. draw at the same time as they articulate the working practices of Lynch and Badalamenti. Ultimately these sounds and the stories they tell represent the outer margins of the contemporary narrational mode and its sonic possibilities. Inland Empire employs similar uses of sonic narration and is an independent production. The similarities between these two films also reveal a complex fact: that the films released by Hollywood and those of the independent cinema are not always distinguishable by aesthetics alone.

Further inland and in a part of the industry far, far away is the 21<sup>st</sup> century megapicture, whose sonic innovations with sound are often mobilised by technological developments, rather than the need to differentiate novel storytelling methods. Attack of the Clones leads a clear example, whose sonic narration strives for vivid realism (in a science fiction context), for textural variety, and for clear-cut comprehension.

### **Attack of the Clones**

As well as Hollywood's growing fringe productions and indie market, the blockbuster movie remains a formidable presence. Ever plentiful in production and profit, it shows few signs of diminishing. Indeed, Bordwell writes that: "the action picture – as cop drama, fantasy adventure, or science fiction – remains the exemplar of the box-office triumphs of modern Hollywood" (2006 113). The two Star Wars trilogies have barely strayed from the top. Audiovisual plenitude, a coherent and classically constructed narrative arc involving clear-cut characters and quest narrative leading to a resolution and high-tech production values are key to the dominance of Lucas's cinematic empire. Indeed, Attack of the Clones (2002) is an exemplary movie, and certainly continues to carry the baton of its predecessors. This fact is ever present in the soundtrack, from its rich array of well-defined voices and sound effects, a *mise-en-bande* that privileges

dialogue comprehension, and intermittent sequences of sonic plenitude, both dramatically charged and technologically sophisticated.

Consider the film's opening sequence. This scene follows the journey of a starship bound for the planet Coruscant. On board are a number of senators, including Amidala (Natalie Portman) and Cordé (Veronica Segura) whose lives are at stake due to the recent rise of political separatists of the galactic republic. On landing on the planet, an assassination attempt is carried out after a bomb was placed on the ship. Cordé is killed and Amidala narrowly escapes. This scene is preceded by numerous celestial images dominated by spacecraft in flight. Suited to the science fiction genre, this sequence is plenitudinous and intricate throughout, and layered with striking sound effects to match the visual spectacle of space flight.

The overall volume - with the exception of a startling explosion - is kept at a relatively constant level, whether dialogue, music or effects dominate (see figure x). Much of the sequence sees an oscillation between effects and music. Where one dips in volume, the other tends to rise. Dialogue is infrequent, but when it occurs, the effects and music lower in volume significantly to make way for clarity and intelligibility. The explosion - the one moment when effects (and the whole soundtrack) peak sharply in volume - is carefully placed so as to occur at a time when a dialogue utterance has recently ended. Not only does this juxtaposition have a sensational impact but it provides key narrational information. The dialogue was spoken by a crew member, who expresses relief at the safety of their journey. To follow this with a sudden blast imbues his words with intense irony while gesturing towards the dangers that Amidala will surely face in the future. This blast also signals that the audience should expect a perilous adventure, which is reinforced by the brooding, minor-key brass music that stirs in its aftermath. A similarly careful arrangement of frequencies is in play during this sequence. When a bass frequency sound is heard - often in the whirring of a

spacecraft engine - the orchestra plays a sparse and high-pitched string movement.

When dialogue and effects cannot be heard, the score rises to a crescendo with full, multi-octave instrumentation. When the human voice dominates, the effects and music tend to drop to a bass frequency, so as not to collide with the mid-range dialogue.

Therefore various sounds for this sequence have been carefully orchestrated in order to ensure clarity, particularly dialogue intelligibility, and a relatively constant, comfortable, volume level as well as providing a texturally intricate and varied sonic world, reflecting the rich galactic space that the film aims to construct. Ultimately, this sequence demonstrates the aims for dialogical intelligibility (verbocentrism) and sensation (the explosion), at the same time that it sets up a major development about future events for Amidala (the crew comments and the explosion) and defines the story world with its complexly interweaving sounds of heroism (the brass-led score) and “cultural” plenitude (the various sounds of space technology and species).

The scene is emblematic of the sinuousness of contemporary sound, of which dense clarity, sonic plenitude, sound contrasts and rich textural variations are key constituents, particularly in ever technologically advancing megapicture. It would seem that this aesthetic increases in scale with every Star Wars movie, which is fitting, given that the bar was raised with the sights, sounds and the technical underpinnings of other hits to emerge in the same year as Attack of the Clones, including The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers (Peter Jackson) and the top grossing Spider-Man (Sam Raimi).

The developments in contemporary sonic sinuousness are partially permitted by the capabilities of new sound technologies. Let us for a moment consider volume contrast. As discussed, silence is a key - but often overlooked - component in the spectacular movie, as it produces both dramatic tension and enhances the impact of sounds when they occur. The Star Wars films involve what Chion identifies as silences around sounds, something made more marked by technologies like Dolby (2003 151).

For instance, during a chase scene in Attack of The Clones, a sonic detonator is fired into space. We see it explode seconds before the ear-splitting blast is actually heard. In this sequence anticipation is created in the temporal relationship between image and sound, while the eventual sonic impact is highlighted by Dolby digital's high contrast quality. The momentary silence enhances the sensation of the explosion, while serving as a reminder of the key role of sound - and silence - in spectacular films.

However, we may be reminded of Geoff King's concept "Impressive spectacular realism" (2006 339). The digitisation of audiovisual technology has enhanced the cinematic spectacle to such a degree that it partially draws attention to its technical and technological majesty, thus breaking the transparency of classical narration. The megapicture may be regarded as narratively formulaic and traditional, but there are shifts, as an arguably heightened degree of self-consciousness has come into play in light of new technology.

Crucially, the sinewy intercomponent structure of Attack of the Clones combines spectacular realism, narrational comprehension and a touch of self-consciousness. Its balanced *mise-en-bande* - a combination of clearly spoken dialogue, gargantuan effects and a dynamically shifting, but ever Romantic, symphonic score - is a common character of the Star Wars films right up to the final episode Revenge of the Sith (2005). These latest films retain their rich sonic world of "used future" technologies, chirruping robots, talkative puppet-like aliens and complexly layered sonic battles. The generic and narrational conventions of sonic plenitude and intelligibility are still in place as they were in 1977. Behind the movies, the production context - from the key personnel to the company infrastructure of Lucasfilm and Fox - shows few signs of change. Advancements in contemporary audiovisual technologies, increases in production budgets and expansions in the cinema's global market, mean that the most patent aspect of change to be found in these films is their scale. In terms of

sound, this means that Star Wars is denser, bigger, and certainly louder, with an added modicum of “impressive” self-consciousness.

The sonic collaborations of Lucas, Burt and Williams and Lynch, Splet and Badalamenti vividly illustrate the historical development of two key strands of production that have come to define contemporary Hollywood: the modern blockbuster and the indie cinema. These are particularly interesting as they together represent Hollywood’s growing diversification, from its industrial practices and its marketing logic to its corresponding approaches to narration. As each of my case analyses reveal, Hollywood has witnessed significant changes in its sonic conventions over time, and has accommodated a range of artistic and technological innovations in its different strands of production. Ultimately these changes and accommodations make the contemporary soundtrack the rich and diverse narrational tool it is today.

The late 1960s and 1970s witnessed a number of experimental approaches to sound in a climate of narrational experimentation and technological change, exploited by the movie brats. At this time, Walter Murch developed the technique of sound montage, something I consider to be an early element of the soundtrack’s sinuousness. He applied this to movies such as THX-1138 and The Conversation with the effect of fine-tuning narrational detail while challenging the classically established assumption of verbal intelligibility. David Lynch and Alan Splet were simultaneously carrying out their own sonic experiments in a low-budget independent environment, building intensely subjective narratives out of surreal sound effects while effectuating a degree of self-consciousness with their offbeat “extra-material” effects in The Grandmother and Eraserhead. By the late 1970s, the blockbuster/megapicture began to dominate Hollywood’s commercial activities. Lucas and Burt focused their creative talents under the guidance of technological innovations in the wake of Dolby stereo, departing from the kinds of narrational experiments with which their “artier” contemporaries Scorsese,

Altman and Murch continued. The resulting Star Wars hailed innovation in the technologically sophisticated and detailed sound effects of Burt. It also signalled a return to classicism in the music by John Williams and its other prevalent sound techniques like verbocentrism.

In Hollywood, the 1980s proved to be a lucrative decade for the megapicture, and the Star Wars sequels were no exception, their sonic styles continuing in the vein of the 1977 hit. The sound effects, the music and the dialogue were combined to create a classically intelligible story as much as they were there to thrill with their richness, impact and plenitude. At the same time, Lynch and Splet had moved into major studio production with Dune, employing similar techniques to those of the Star Wars films. By the late 1980s however, the independent sector was growing in commercial stature, and before long, Hollywood would take notice.

In the 1990s Hollywood's assimilation of key areas of the independent sector meant that it could cater for more "offbeat" tastes than those that blockbusters appealed to. Thus storytelling by films released from Hollywood's indie division assimilated the more art based and experimental tendencies of the independents. The indie cinema has introduced new narrational norms to Hollywood, which are powerfully expressed through sound. Many films now focus on subjective states and boast complex plot trajectories, where time and space are no longer tightly coherent when compared with more classically coded products. The soundtracks of Lost Highway and Mulholland Dr. exploit the most enigmatic possibilities of contemporary narration. By contrast The Phantom Menace and Attack of the Clones remain rooted in a formula of classical storytelling and sonic sensation, their most major developments in sound corresponding to changes in technology, such as the digitisation of audio equipment.

As this brief history suggests, the sound style of a particular filmmaker is contingent on the interrelating factors of industrial context, conditions of production and

narrational and generic framework. For the most part I have focused on the ways in which sound works in the service of narration because there has not yet been a systematic study of sound and its relationship with different narrational modes. Since the 1970s, Hollywood filmmakers have continually assimilated new elements into classical storytelling, thereby expanding its modal boundaries. By focusing on two different institutional and industrial areas of Hollywood as possible, I hope to have revealed its considerable narrational range, but more importantly I hope to have highlighted some of the ways in which this range manifests itself aurally. In doing so, this thesis provides a step towards understanding the contemporary film soundtrack in Hollywood.



### **Conclusion: A Bird's Eye View of the Contemporary Film Soundtrack**

This thesis has been committed to painting a comprehensive picture of the film soundtrack in Hollywood by focusing on developments in its production practice and style from the 1970s to the present day. Throughout the preceding chapters I have demonstrated that there has been a proliferation of new professional approaches to film sound at the same time as the soundtrack has reached new levels of stylistic variety and sophistication. In addition I have identified some key strands that run throughout Hollywood's history, including the industrial realignments that led to flexible production processes, technological developments and emerging trends in storytelling technique and generic style, all of which have contributed to the diverse and complex character of the contemporary soundtrack.

In terms of practice, I have detailed this diversity and complexity by tracing the contours of contemporary film sound professionals working on different components of film sound, with special attention to sound design and composition. By compiling a range of accounts from the professional arena I have demonstrated that the working roles of sound professionals and sound relations can vary considerably across individual projects, which are in turn determined by multiple factors. This extends from the director or producer they work with to film budgets and their career histories. The variety in production practice is ultimately rooted in Hollywood's industrial history. The post-1948 shift away from in-house studio production and towards individual package production has given way to a proliferation of different production approaches industry wide.

But while there is considerable variety in sound practice in Hollywood, there are also some identifiable working trends, which are often articulated as shared concerns among professionals regarding creative agency, collaboration and production scheduling. The prominent generation of sound aestheticians in the 1970s including

Walter Murch, Ben Burtt, Alan Splet and Randy Thom closely collaborated or cooperated with directors, the most obvious instances being the movie brats, including Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas and Martin Scorsese. As is the case with films like Star Wars (Lucas 1977) and Apocalypse Now (Coppola 1979), sound effects and design began to be considered during the earliest planning stages. At the time they reached a level of technical and creative complexity hitherto unheard of in the movies.

However, these artistic and professional developments have remained the exception rather than the rule in Hollywood filmmaking. Most sound professionals agree that close consultation with directors and early scheduling are the ideal. Murch says that: “Sound is not something that should be applied later on like a coat of paint; it really has to be like stains that penetrate the wood. Sound needs to be part of the script” (Vincent LoBrutto 97). Quite often however, directors do not work closely with sound professionals, nor do they consider the role of sound early on in the filmmaking process. Another concern shared by most sound professions is that there is little collaboration amongst themselves. Composers and other sound personnel quite often find themselves unable to collaborate due to restrictions in production schedules, and this can result in “sonic wars”: a clash of different sound components. Sound designer Gary Rydstrom says that:

[...] in the mix you meet this big collision. A lot of time in the mix is spent trying to figure out how we could feature music here, feature sound effects there [...] Schedule-wise there isn't much time for the sound people and the composer to work together, but in the long run it would save time (Vincent LoBrutto 232).

Composers in particular run up against restrictions on time, creative freedom and opportunities for collaboration because music is often the last component to be added during production. Therefore their work tends to be shaped by other crafts and considerations, from the editing and mixing processes to the schedule pressures of final-

stage postproduction. As I have pointed out in chapter 5, these trends go all the way back to the studio era.

I have illustrated the ways in which issues of schedules, creative agency and collaboration arise in sound production and postproduction practice through the working examples of Lynch, Splet and Badalamenti and Lucas, Burt and Williams. These sound “teams” are quite different from one another. The former team is distinguished by its significant departure from the mainstream trends and concerns identified in discourses of sound practice in Hollywood, while the latter shares with these a number of characteristics. Lynch has nearly always collaborated with Splet and Badalamenti from a movie’s inception, taking a hands-on approach with both sound design and music while allowing the crafts of direction, writing, music and sound design to inform one another and work as a whole, as for example, in Lynch and Badalamenti’s “musical sound design” process. This approach blurs the boundaries that normally divide these crafts. The distinctiveness of this sound team’s *modus operandi* derives from its personnel’s extensive work on projects outside of Hollywood, where their conditions of production (budgets, personnel organisation, schedules, crew size, skills and so on) are sometimes a far cry from those typical of studio-funded projects. By contrast, Lucas, Burt and Williams have collectively practiced sound production in line with the more common trends identified within contemporary Hollywood’s working conditions. The major studios have provided a relatively stable institutional framework under which these professionals have spent the large part of their careers. For this team there is a more regimented division of labour than that of Lynch, Splet and Badalamenti: Lucas has not practiced hands-on work with sound since Star Wars. This also contrasts with his earlier collaboration with Walter Murch on the sound of American Graffiti (1973), which he claims was made possible due to the size and budget of this Hollywood production in the early 1970s:

The whole post-production staff was about four or five people. And that was everything – sound editing, mixing, the whole thing. We did all of it. I sat on the board – I was Walter’s third hand – and we did it ourselves. That was the way we used to do things in those days, although I think it’s still true of low budget filmmaking today (Larry Blake [Mix online.com](#)).

Rather than directly collaborating with Burt or Williams, Lucas cooperates with them (discussing work in detail with no hands-on approach) or commands (supervising and offering instruction). Many sound professionals acknowledge that the director has ultimate jurisdiction over the sound crafts, and Lucas takes on this traditional role. With his relatively short schedule and limited sound relations with either Burt or Lucas, Williams’s working role is characteristic of the trends identified in contemporary composition. Burt is perhaps the only figure of the three that is relatively atypical in his role. Unlike a number of sound professionals of this era, he is offered ample time to complete his work while he cooperates and communicates closely with Lucas.

In examining these cases in light of a range of professional contemporary discourses on sound production and postproduction in Hollywood, I have highlighted not only some of the common issues and concerns that arise among sound personnel today (schedules, sound relations and creative agency), but have also gauged the extent to which these can be configured so variously in the context of Hollywood filmmaking. I have also shown that these configurations depend on a host of different conditions including individual filmmakers, their career histories, technological changes, production budgets and so on. Ultimately, this survey articulates the intricate and composite processes and contexts involved in the construction of the soundtrack, and goes some way in unveiling its complexity and variety in the contemporary era.

In order to lift the veil further however, I have also discussed and analysed the soundtrack as an object for our aural consumption and comprehension: particularly its style and the key role this plays in cinematic narration. Narration is the process by which story information is imparted, and my aim has been to demonstrate the

importance of the role of sound in this process and more specifically highlight its sophistication and the variety of purposes to which it is put to use by filmmakers in contemporary Hollywood. The importance of this approach is twofold: firstly, it enriches our understanding of the soundtrack by positioning it within the history and theories of cinematic narration and secondly, it augments our understanding of cinematic narration through its emphasis on its sonic dimension - something that narration theorists have not explored in depth.

I discussed four distinct narrational “modes” that describe different storytelling practices to which sound contributes, including “classical” narration and “art” narration as outlined by David Bordwell (1985b, 2007); “independent” narration discussed by Geoff King (2005); and “post-classical” narration as theorised by Eleftheria Thanouli (2005). I have argued that since the 1970s, norms from these modes have to varying degrees intersected to form what I term a “contemporary” mode, which I largely attribute to the increasing integration of international art cinema, the American independent sector and Hollywood. Unlike each of the modes described above, the “contemporary” mode describes storytelling techniques employed across Hollywood’s full industrial and institutional range, which can include films as diverse as the classically coded major studio blockbuster Star Wars (Lucas 1977) to the more art-leaning indie thriller of Mulholland Dr. (Lynch 1997). This “contemporary” mode provides the framework within which I analyse sound style, and moreover which I understand in terms of its many functional permutations in Hollywood filmmaking.

To illustrate these functional permutations, I looked again to the work of Lynch, Splet and Badalamenti and Lucas, Burt and Williams. Just as my survey of their sound work and relations demonstrated the various possibilities of professional practice in Hollywood, my examination of their films revealed that they emblematised different possibilities in sound style and narration. Choosing short sequences from a selection of

their films spanning each decade from the 1970s to the present day, I applied close analyses of the sounds that they used. In the same way that I studied multiple professions and their sound relations in previous chapters, I analysed sound style in terms of multiple components and their interrelations including music, sound effects and dialogue/voice. This took the form of graphical *mise-en-bande* readings and was supplemented by detailed micro analyses of individual sounds and macro sound dynamics (such as contrast, focus and definition) where relevant to the narrational process of the given sequence. The contrasting approaches to sound style adopted by the two sound teams is clearly rooted in their commitments to differing aspects of contemporary narration and, to an extent, generic style. These commitments are in turn traceable to key changes in the industry over the past three decades, from the success of the contemporary megapicture in the 1970s to the full consolidation of the indie cinema in Hollywood during the 1990s.

I found that Lucas, Burt and Williams produce soundtracks that lean towards the classical end of the contemporary mode, employing consistent verbocentrism, the forging of transparent and naturalistic relationships between sound and image and the creation of unambiguous signification (e.g., by using clear auditory signifiers to denote good and evil, or triumph and tragedy). These norms are appropriate to the family-oriented blockbuster, which aim to guarantee story comprehension. The plenitudinous sound effects and score of the Star Wars saga are also characteristic of the modern science fiction film, which rose to blockbuster status in the 1970s. No fundamental changes have taken place in the sonic style and narrational function of the Star Wars saga because it has retained stability in many respects, from its generic stylings, story arc and marketing logic to its relationship with the majors. Any changes have been by and large wrought by technological developments, including the digitisation of sound, which continue to emphasise auditory qualities like dense clarity and sonic plenitude,

but which have not shifted the principal narrational functions of the Star Wars soundtracks. By contrast, THX-1138 (Lucas 1970) exemplifies the “pre-blockbuster” era of sound. It shares with the Star Wars films clear science fiction trappings, and the intricate “sound montage” of Walter Murch was an early example of sonic “sinew”, as found in the later films. However, its sound departed from classical norms in a number of ways, one of which was a challenge to verbocentric dialogue. This reflects a climate in which key Hollywood filmmakers, including the movie brats, felt they were able to experiment with narrational techniques. However, the prominence of the blockbuster and its commitment to intelligibility ensured that classical storytelling techniques would remain at the forefront of popular commercial cinema.

The soundtracks made by collaborators Lynch, Splet and Badalamenti have been created under a variety of institutional and industrial conditions, giving way to a diversity of sonic narrational modes employed in each film. The Grandmother (1970) and Eraserhead (1977) were created in the independent sector and their narratives incorporated many elements that would seem unfamiliar to a classically trained audience used to major studio-based products. The sounds are commonly employed in expressive ways, by and large representing a character’s state of mind. In addition, sound-image relationships are not rendered in a way that would seem realistic to those who have internalised classical assumptions. The extra-materiality of Lynch and Splet’s audiovisual constructions break the seemingly naturalistic and transparent audiovisual relations common in classical films. Because of this, the sound work is foregrounded and the technique revealed. Both films also challenge verbocentrism. The former involves no worded dialogue at all, while the latter conceals voices under a fog of rumbling noise. This is in stark contrast to Dune (1984), a big-budget film distributed by the major Universal, which shares more in common with the Star Wars saga (verbocentrism, plausible sound-image bonds and so on). It is also appropriate, given

the escalating financial fortunes and rising ubiquity of the blockbuster during this decade. Lost Highway (1997) and Mulholland Dr. (2001) seemed to consolidate techniques used in their three predecessors, combining classical norms (verbocentrism) with more experimental art style techniques (subjective expressionism, self-conscious extra-materiality). This was in keeping with the industrial context in which Lynch and Badalamenti now worked. These films were released under indie distributors, a consolidation of Hollywood majors and the independent sector. The films that were released in this context generally introduced “offbeat” elements into their narrational approaches, such as increasingly complex plots, twists in time and space, and a focus on subjective states.

The approaches to sonic narration described above are emblematic of the production contexts and industrial and institutional frameworks in which the two sound teams worked. In turn these approaches chart the changes and developments – technological, and industrial – taking place in Hollywood in the contemporary era. Ultimately, I have revealed that the contemporary soundtrack offers up a sophisticated aural narrational system, which has diversified its norms due to the increasing integration of narrational modes over the last three decades.

However, there are avenues that remain to be explored. As have I pointed out, the configurations of sounds on the soundtrack and the organisation of the people that create them depend on who is involved in a particular project along with their unique skills and tastes, their professional careers and personal relationships. In turn their creative choices and professional positions are influenced by wider industrial and institutional forces.

Yet there are certainly other forces at work that help determine the working practices and styles of the contemporary soundtrack. What, for example, about the influence of particular post-production facilities, or the effects of regional *modus*



*operandi* on the soundtrack of a given movie? For Elisabeth Weis, these factors deserve attention:

[...] the Skywalker method of collaboration yields a different relationship between tracks than does the compartmental approach for creating sound in Hollywood; the use of a single re-recording mixer in New York as opposed to a team on the dub stage in L.A. affects a film's ultimate sonic texture (1999 108).

A division of George Lucas's Lucasfilm Ltd., Skywalker Sound (formerly Sprocket Systems) is a postproduction sound facility currently based near San Francisco. It is the leading resource for Hollywood filmmakers across the whole industry, with recent credits including the Pixar animated family feature Ratatouille (Brad Bird and Jan Pinkava 2007) to indie film The Promotion (Steve Conrad 2007). Key personnel include among others Ben Burtt, Randy Thom, and until 2005, Gary Rydstrom ([Skywalkersound.com](http://Skywalkersound.com)). Skywalker Sound fosters a specific set of working practices and arguably a sonic style of its own beyond the terms set by an individual director and a small group of sound personnel within a specific project. It also offers a way of thinking about sonic practices and styles in contemporary Hollywood productions away from specific "authors" of sound and broad industrial and institutional contexts and towards a more studio-based or perhaps micro-institutional approach. For Ben Burtt, Skywalker embodies an experimental working ethos that extends beyond his individual working mode:

George Lucas has always encouraged a process here at Skywalker Sound of doing temporary mixing and experimenting as early as we can manage to do it, and that has always benefited my work. I get a chance to practice and experiment and groom something along if it needs it (LoBrutto 148).

Sound designer Gary Rydstrom (former Director of Creative Operations at Skywalker Sound) implies that the studio fosters a cooperative environment which can have an effect on sound style:

I was lucky enough when we did Jurassic Park because John Williams composed the music here at Skywalker Ranch so I was able to play him

some of the dinosaur vocals that I had created early on. He thought of them in terms of the pitch, so he would say ‘That dinosaur is a cello, this dinosaur feels more like flutes’ and then he was able to think about it in terms of writing music and orchestrating it for those scenes (Sergi 2004 175).

A close sound designer-composer relationship such as this has potential benefits for a film’s overall *mise-en-bande*, as it avoids “sonic wars” between sound components at the same time as it can enhance the textural quality and narrational intelligibility of the resulting soundtrack.

Interestingly, Skywalker Sound emerged in a historical-industrial context in which the Hollywood studios no longer had primary control over a film’s production process, thus allowing individual filmmakers to organise filmmaking projects. Occasionally these individuals set up their own production divisions, as Lucas (and many others) did. It is perhaps ironic that out of these circumstances Lucas envisaged a facility that would recreate the layout of the in-house sound department typical of the studio era. Tomlinson Holman, who designed and built facilities at Skywalker Sound, says that:

The breakup of the Hollywood studio system was more than just the breakup of the star system of contract players, it was also the breakup of all the technical departments where the studios used to do everything [...] So if we had one model in mind, I suppose it was that of the plain, old Hollywood sound department. The fact that we would be able to do editing, ADR, Foley, scoring and dubbing under one roof meant that you could have a lot more feedback in the loop. The physical arrangement of the building is the idea that the editors are very close to the dubbing stage. Hollywood tends to be more spread out – people cut tracks and they rarely go to the mix and see how they perform – but here you’re almost invited by the fact that the edit/mix suites are kind of hermetically sealed environments for the film, and that’s the creation part (LoBrutto 202).

With its long-term personnel and its studio-wide collaborative and experimental ethos, Skywalker is a site of standard working practices and styles that potentially etches itself on contemporary soundtracks in Hollywood. What remains to be seen is the degree and rigidity of this standardisation, and how its characteristic styles and practices might

compare with those typical of other sound facilities or particular “sound” regions used by filmmakers in Hollywood. Like Weis, supervising sound editor Bruce Stambler has drawn comparisons between dubbing practices and styles in Los Angeles and New York: “All LA-based films, not all of them but most of them have a lot of surrounds and boom; you won’t find much boom coming out of New York [...] I think that is because of the dubbing environment” (Sergi 2004 133). With the factor of individual sound facilities and regions in mind, we have another dimension by which we can explore how the contemporary soundtrack works and the conditions of its making.

To recapitulate: the 1970s forms a crucial starting point at which the contemporary Hollywood soundtrack has taken shape; both as a sophisticated and varied stylistic and narrational system, and as a site of diverse production practices. In the post-studio era, Hollywood has stratified and expanded. Its filmmakers have absorbed stylistic and narrational norms from cinemas worldwide, a process which is particularly noticeable in the “Hollywood Renaissance” of the late 1960s, in the work of the movie brats of the early 1970s and of the many independent figures that began careers in the 1980s and flourished in Hollywood as indie stars in the 1990s. At the same time, Hollywood has consolidated new industrial formations, especially with the growth of the majors following the rise of the 1970s blockbuster and with the merging of the independent sector in the 1990s. Technologies such as the Dolby stereo optical system and digitalised recording and playback equipment are continually upgraded and integrated as the industry standard. These conditions have permitted the proliferation of various sonic narrational norms and techniques by filmmakers in Hollywood, from the subjective and symbolic sounds and music in films directed by Lynch to the flamboyant, sinewy and verbally intelligible *mise-en-bande* moments of the Star Wars series. New and varied ways of professionally bringing these sounds into being have also emerged, from the intricate creative and logistical responsibilities of the sound

designer to the wildly differing sound relations between sound professionals and directors. As Hollywood's wider industrial and institutional frameworks continue to change, it is likely that the soundtrack will grow in its stylistic, technical and professional complexity. It is my hope that, much like the craft, the discourses and scholarly enquiries on the soundtrack will also mature and proliferate. Moreover, I hope that this project has contributed to this process by offering a historically informed study that has crossed the breadth of Hollywood to listen to the contemporary soundtrack, from its tapestry-like arrangements of multiple sounds and meanings to the myriad voices of the people and their professions that create it.

Figure i: THX: 1138 (George Lucas 1970) - Sound Montage in Science Fiction

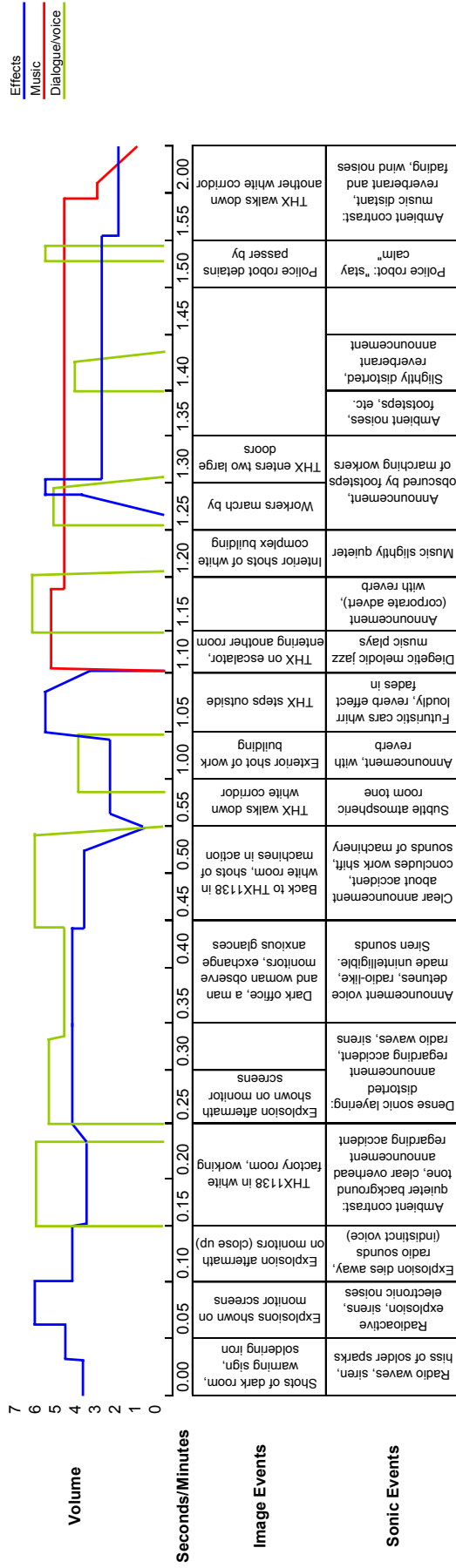


Figure ii: The Grandmother (David Lynch 1970) - Trauma and the Extra-material

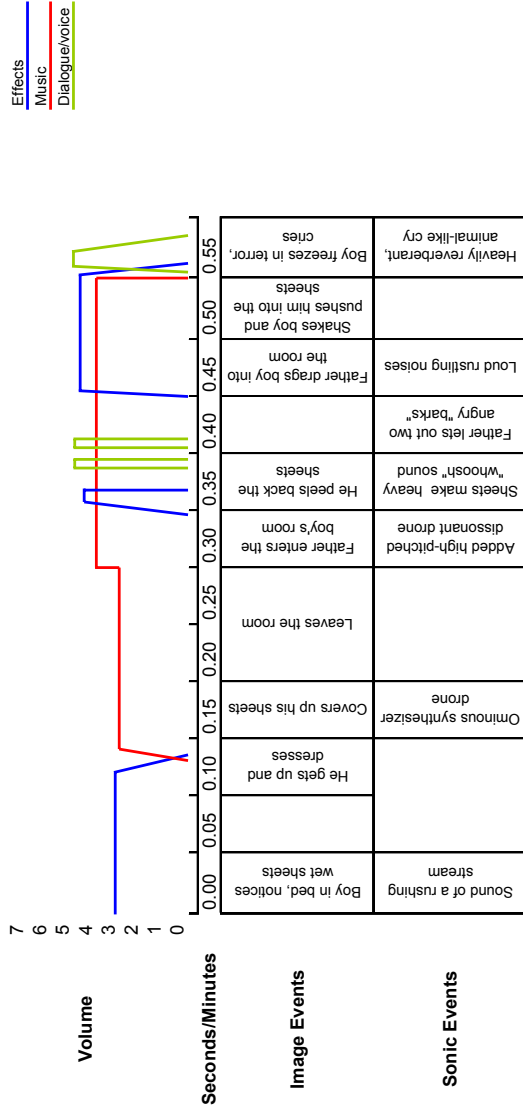


Figure iii: Star Wars (George Lucas 1977) - Sonic Plenitude in Space

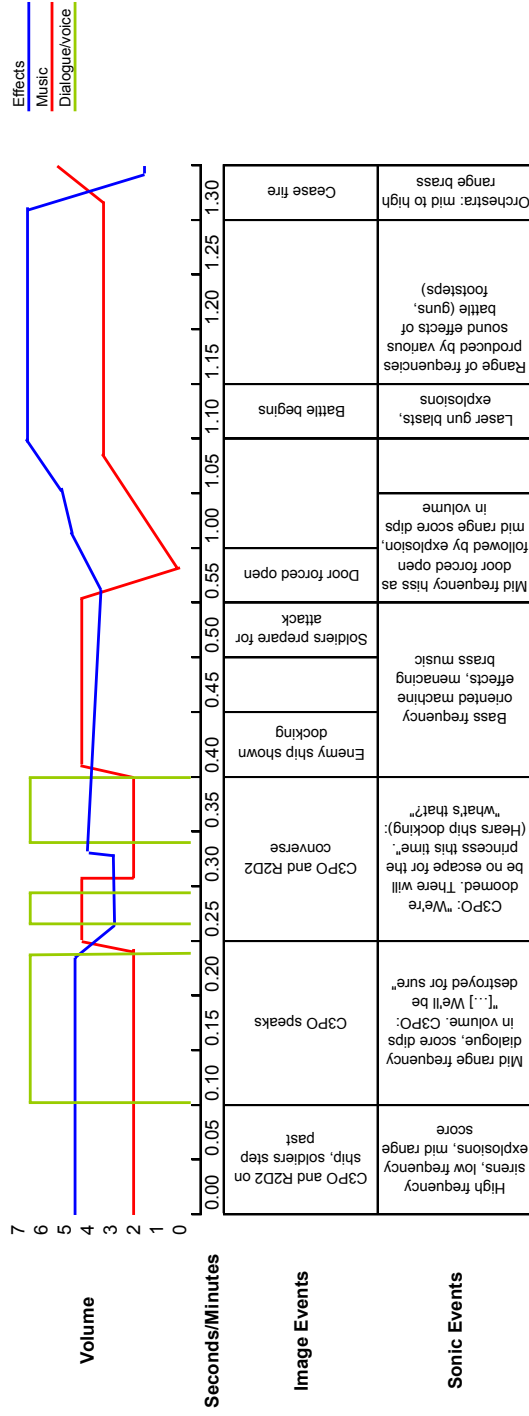


Figure iv. *Eraserhead* (David Lynch 1977) - Dark Drones and the Death of Dialogue

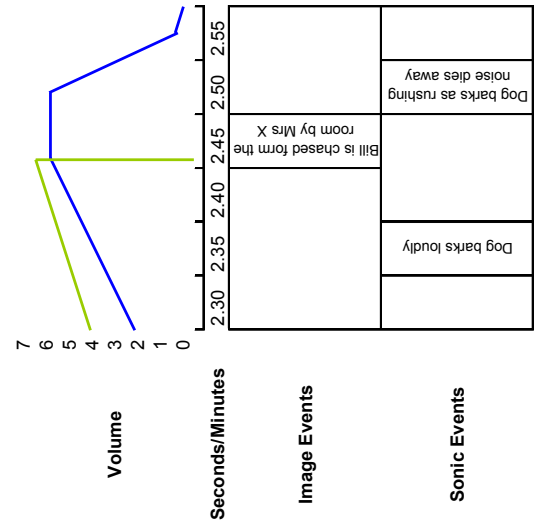
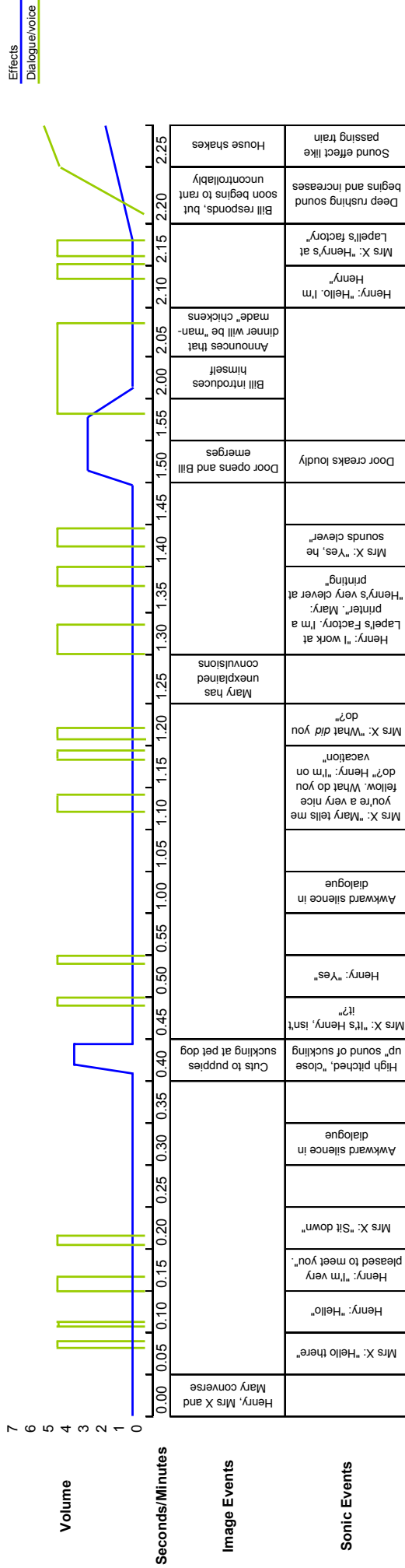
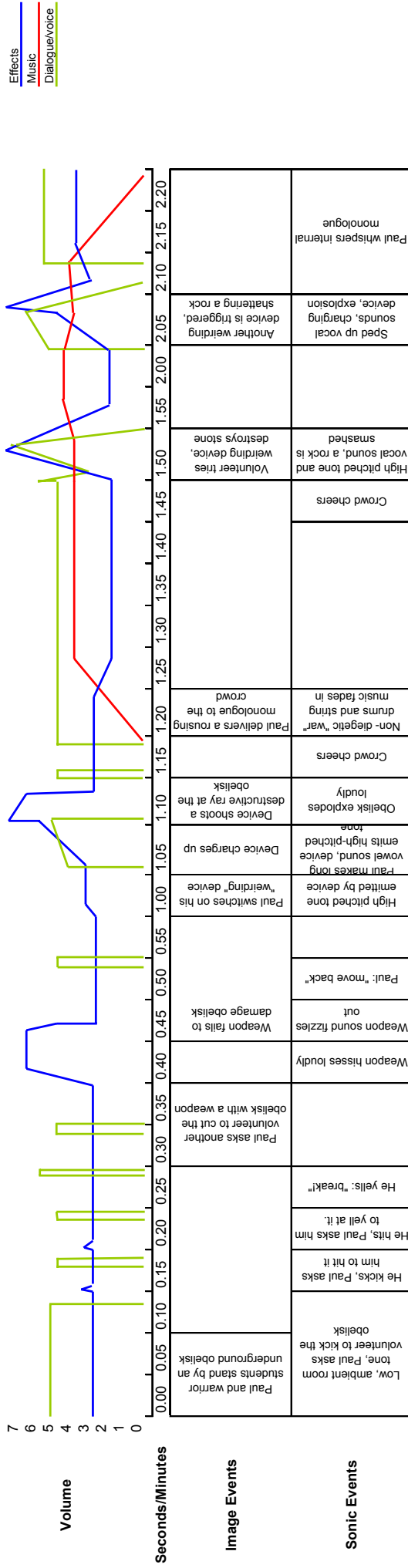




Figure v: *Dune* (David Lynch 1984) - Sound Balance in Blockbusting Mode



Seconds/Minutes	Image Events	Sonic Events
0.00 - 0.05	Paul and warrior students stand by an underground obelisk	Low, ambient room tone, Paul asks volunteer to kick the obelisk
0.05 - 0.10		He kicks, Paul asks him to hit it
0.10 - 0.15		He hits, Paul asks him to yell at it.
0.15 - 0.20		He yells: "break!"
0.20 - 0.25		
0.25 - 0.30	Paul asks another volunteer to cut the obelisk with a weapon	
0.30 - 0.35		
0.35 - 0.40		Weapon hisses loudly
0.40 - 0.45	Weapon falls to damage obelisk	Weapon sound fizzles out
0.45 - 0.50		Paul: "move back"
0.50 - 0.55		
0.55 - 1.00		High pitched tone emitted by device
1.00 - 1.05	Paul switches on his "weirding" device	Paul makes long vowel sound, device emits high-pitched tone
1.05 - 1.10	Device charges up	Obelisk explodes loudly
1.10 - 1.15	Device shoots a destructive ray at the obelisk	Crowd cheers
1.15 - 1.20		Non-diegetic "war" drums and string music fades in
1.20 - 1.25	Paul delivers a rousing monologue to the crowd	
1.25 - 1.30		
1.30 - 1.35		
1.35 - 1.40		
1.40 - 1.45		Crowd cheers
1.45 - 1.50	Volunteer tries weirding device, destroys stone	High pitched tone and vocal sound, a rock is smashed
1.50 - 1.55		
1.55 - 2.00		
2.00 - 2.05	Another weirding device is triggered, shattering a rock	Sped up vocal sounds, charging device, explosion
2.05 - 2.10		
2.10 - 2.15		Paul whispers internal monologue
2.15 - 2.20		

Figure vi: Return of the Jedi (Richard Marquand 1983) - Silent Suspense, Sonic Attack

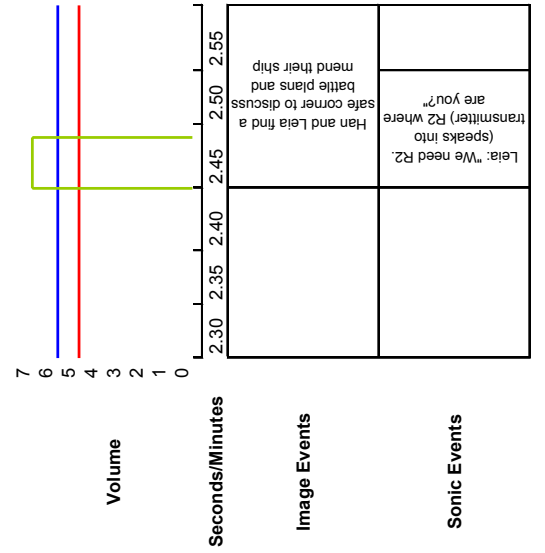
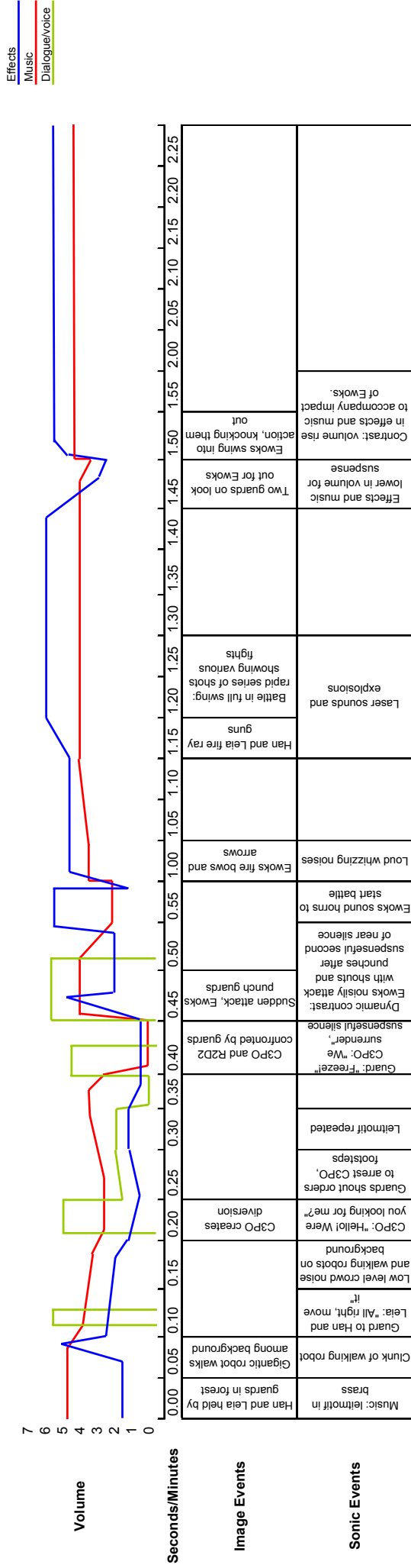


Figure vii: *Lost Highway* (David Lynch 1997) - Murder and Musical Design

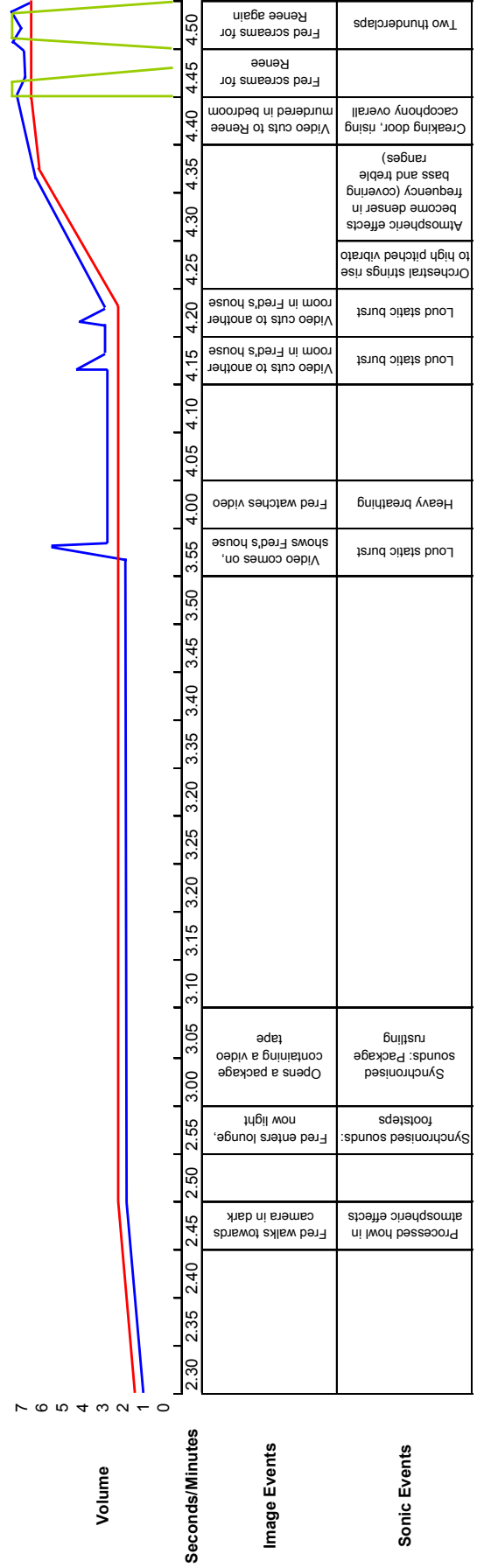
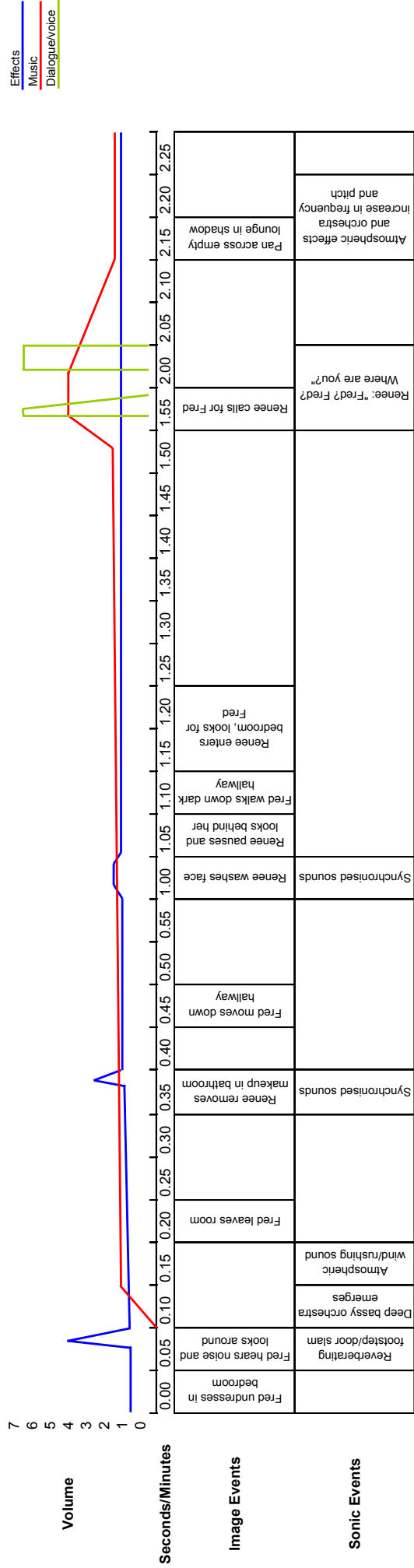
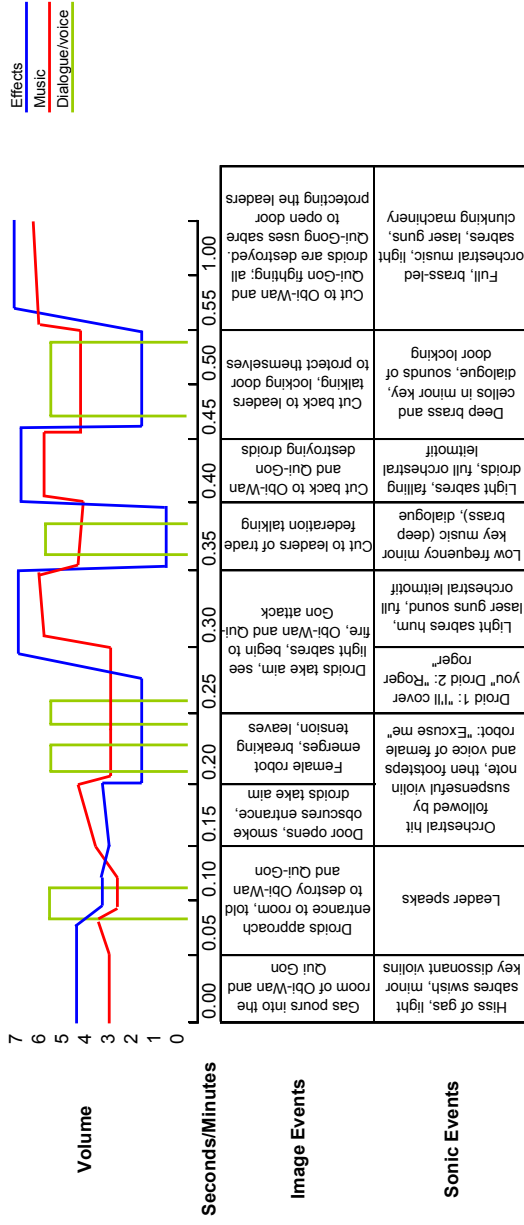


Figure viii: *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace* (George Lucas 1999) - Dense Clarity and Spatial Contrasts



Seconds/Minutes	Image Events	Sonic Events
0.00	Gas pours into the room of Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon	key dissonant violins
0.05	Droids approach entrance to room, told to destroy Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon	Leader speaks
0.10	Door opens, smoke obscures entrance, droids take aim	Orchestral hit followed by suspenseful violin note, then footsteps and voice of female robot: "Excuse me"
0.15	Female robot emerges, breaking tension, leaves	Droid 1: "I'll cover you" Droid 2: "Roger roger"
0.20	Droids take aim, see light sabres, begin to fire, Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon attack	Light sabres hum, laser guns sound, full orchestral leitmotif
0.25	Cut to leaders of trade federation talking	Low frequency minor key music (deep brass), dialogue
0.30	Cut back to Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon destroying droids	Light sabres, falling droids, full orchestral leitmotif
0.35	Cut back to leaders to protect themselves	Deep brass and cellos in minor key, dialogue, sounds of door locking
0.40	Cut to Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon fighting, all droids are destroyed, Qui-Gon uses sabre to open door	Full, brass-led orchestral music, light sabres, laser guns, clunking machinery
0.45	Cut to Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon protecting the leaders	

Figure ix: *Mulholland Dr.* (David Lynch 2001) - Subjective Sounds and Deadly Encounters

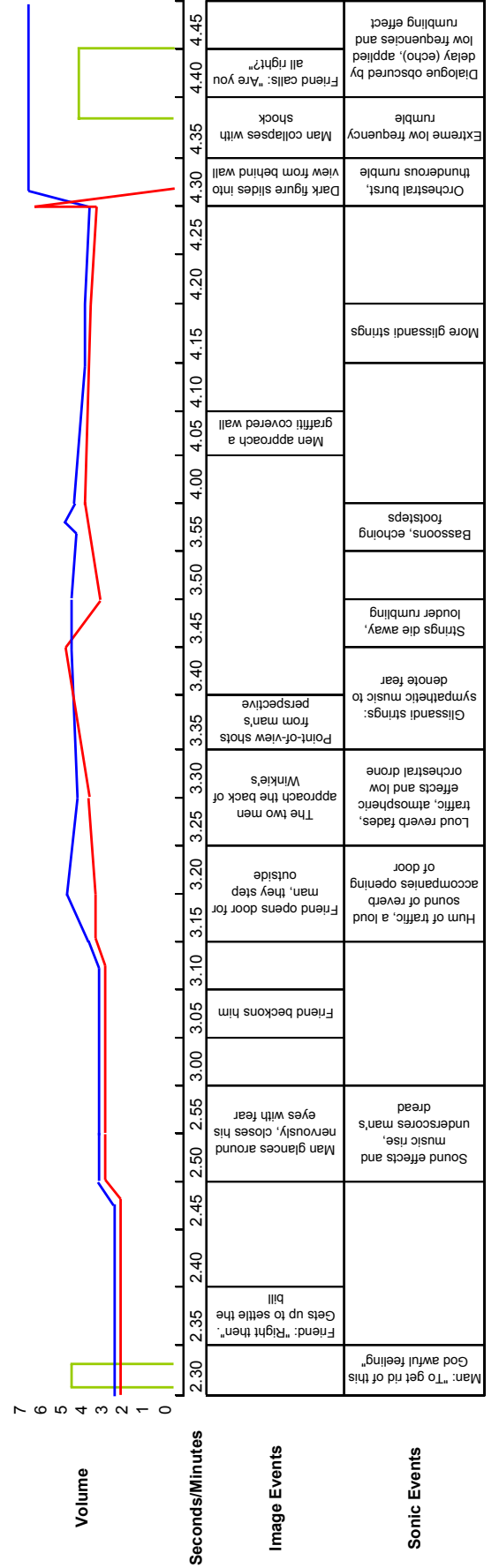
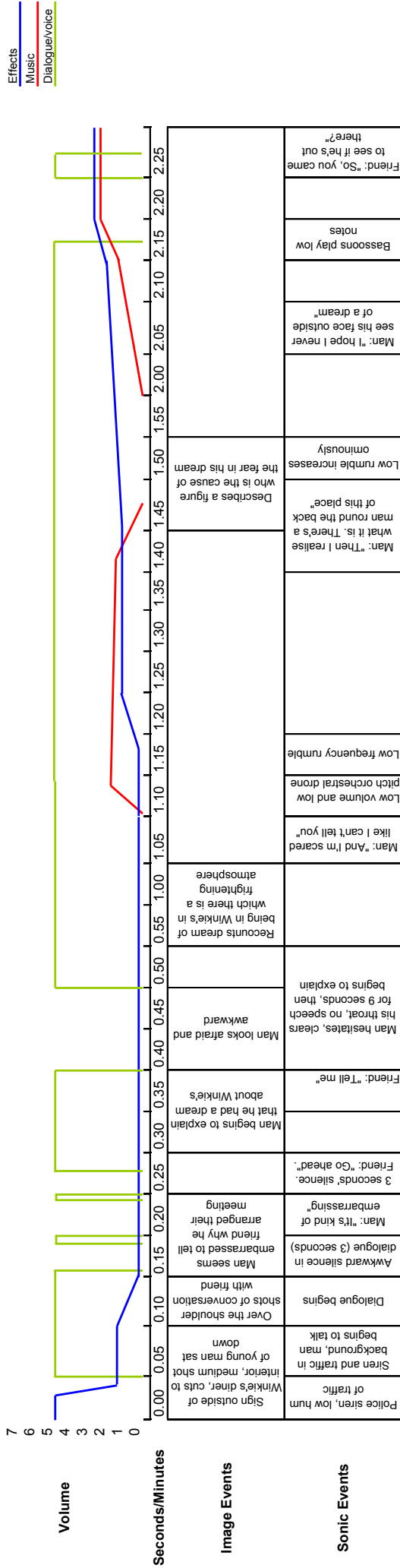
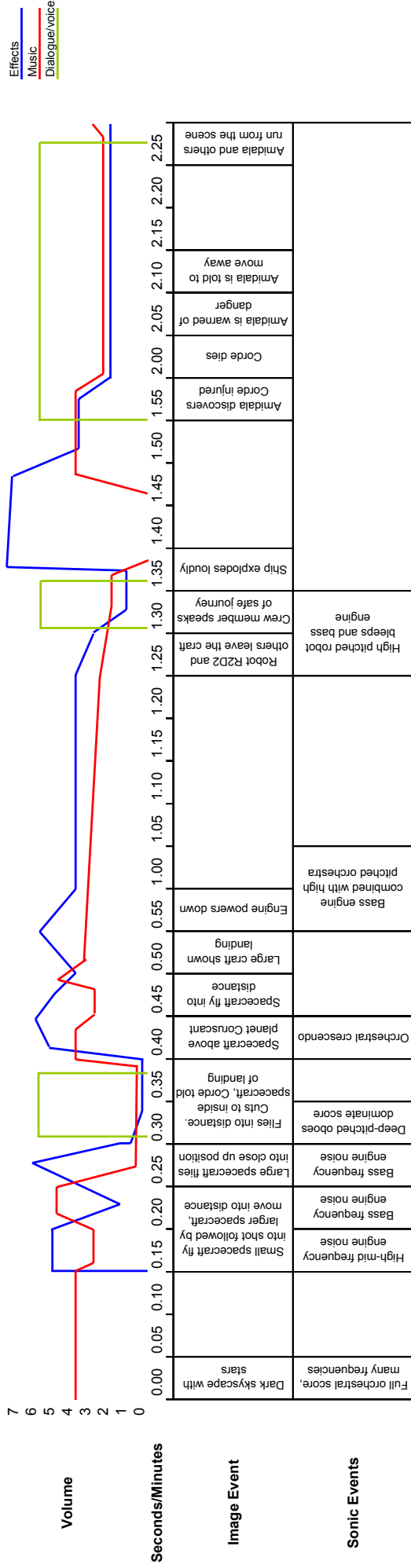


Figure x: Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones (George Lucas 2002) - Sonic Sineu: Explosions and Words



## Filmography

2001: A Space Odyssey. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. MGM, 1968.

21-87. Dir. Arthur Lipsett. NFB, 1964.

8 ½. Dir. Federico Fellini. Embassy, 1963.

À Bout de Souffle. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. Les Films Imperia, 1960.

Adaptation. Dir. Spike Jonze. Columbia/Tristar, 2002.

Adventures of Robin Hood, The. Dir. William Keighley and Michael Curtiz. Warner, 1938.

Alien 3. Dir. David Fincher. 20th Century Fox, 1992.

Alien. Dir. Ridley Scott. 20th Century Fox, 1979.

Alien: Resurrection. Dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet. Columbia TriStar, 1997.

Aliens. Dir. James Cameron. TCF, 1986.

Alphabet, The. Dir. David Lynch. 1968. DVD. Ryko, 2006.

Altered States. Dir. Ken Russell. Warner, 1980.

American Beauty. Dir. Sam Mendes. Dreamworks, 1999.

American Gigolo. Dir. Paul Schrader. Paramount, 1980.

American Graffiti. Dir. George Lucas. Universal, 1973.

American Splendor. Dir. Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini. Good machine, 2004.

Among the Living. Dir. Stuart Heisler. Paramount, 1941.

Amputee, The. Dir. David Lynch. 1974. DVD. Ryko, 2006.

Apocalypse Now. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. United Artists, 1979.

Apollo 13. Dir. Ron Howard and Todd Hallowell. Universal, 1995.

Armageddon. Dir. Michael Bay. Buena Vista, 1998.

Auto Focus. Dir. Paul Schrader. Sony Pictures Classics, 2002.

Back Street. Dir. John M. Stahl. Universal, 1932.

- Back to the Future 3. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Universal, 1990.
- Back to the Future. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Universal, 1985.
- Bad Timing. Dir. Nicholas Roeg. World Northal, 1980.
- Basic Instinct. Dir. Paul Verhoeven. TriStar, 1992.
- Batman and Robin. Dir. Joel Schumacher. Warner, 1997.
- Batman Forever. Dir. Joel Schumacher. Warner, 1995.
- Batman Returns. Dir. Tim Burton. Warner, 1992.
- Batman. Dir. Tim Burton. Warner, 1989.
- Beach, The. Dir. Danny Boyle. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2000.
- Beautiful Mind, A. Dir. Ron Howard. Universal, 2001.
- Being John Malkovich. Dir. Spike Jonze. USA films 1999.
- Ben-Hur. Dir. William Wyler. MGM, 1959.
- Bicycle Thieves. Dir. Vittorio de Sica. ENIC, 1948.
- Big Lebowski, The. Dir. Joel Coen. Gramercy, 1998.
- Big Sleep, The. Dir. Howard Hawks. Warner, 1946.
- Birth of a Nation, The. Dir. D.W. Griffith. Enoch Producing Corporation, 1915.
- Black Stallion. Dir. Carroll Ballard. United Artists, 1980.
- Blair Witch Project, The. Dir. Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez. Artisan, 1999.
- Blood Simple. Dir. Joel Coen. Circle Films, 1984.
- Blow Up. Dir. Michelangelo Antonioni. Premier Productions, 1966.
- Blue Dahlia, The. Dir. George Marshall. Paramount, 1946.
- Blue Velvet. Dir. David Lynch. Embassy Communications/De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, 1986.
- Bonnie and Clyde. Dir. Arthur Penn. Warner/Seven Arts, 1967.
- Bride Wore Black, The. Dir. Francois Truffaut. UA, 1968.
- Buck Rogers. By Babette Henry. ABC. 15 Apr. 1950.



Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Dir. George Roy Hill. 20th Century Fox, 1969.

By the Sword. Dir. Jeremy Kagan. Hansen Entertainment, 1991.

Carrie. Dir. Brian de Palma. United Artists, 1976.

Chinatown. Dir. Roman Polanski. Paramount, 1974.

City of Lost Children, The. Dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro. Sony Pictures Classics, 1995.

Close Encounters of the Third Kind. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Columbia, 1977.

Comfort of Strangers, The. Dir. Paul Schrader. Skouras, 1991.

Conversation, The. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Paramount, 1974.

Countdown. Dir. Robert Altman. Warner/Seven Arts, 1968.

Dames. Dir. Ray Enright and Busby Berkeley. Warner, 1934.

Dazed and Confused. Dir. Richard Linklater. Gramercy, 1993.

Dead Poet's Society. Dir. Peter Weir. Buena Vista, 1989.

Death Proof. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Dimension, 2007.

Deer Hunter, The. Dir. Michael Cimino. Universal, 1978.

Die Hard. Dir. John McTiernan. 20th Century Fox, 1988.

Die Hard 2. Dir. Renny Harlin. 20th Century Fox, 1990.

Die Hard with a Vengeance. Dir. John McTiernan. 20th Century Fox, 1995.

Die Hard. Dir. John McTiernan. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1988.

Do the Right Thing. Dir. Spike Lee. Universal, 1989.

Donnie Darko. Dir. Richard Kelly. Newmarket, 2001.

Double Indemnity. Dir. Billy Wilder. Paramount, 1944.

Driller Killer, The. Abel Ferrara. Rochelle Films, 1979.

Duel in the Sun. Dir. King Vidor. Selznick Releasing Organisation, 1946.

Duel. Dir. Steven Spielberg. ABC/Universal, 1971.

Dune. Dir. David Lynch. Universal, 1984.

Earthquake. Dir. Mark Robson. Universal, 1974.

Easy Rider. Dir. Dennis Hopper. Columbia, 1969.

Elephant Man, The. Dir. David Lynch. Paramount, 1980.

Entr'acte. Dir. Rene Clair. Ballets Suedios, 1924.

Eraserhead. Dir. David Lynch. 1977. VHS. Polygram, 1999.

ET: The Extra Terrestrial. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Universal, 1982.

Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind. Dir. Michel Gondry. Focus, 2004.

Evil Dead 2. Dir. Sam Raimi. Renaissance Pictures, 1987.

Exorcist, The. Dir. William Friedkin. Warner, 1973.

Fahrenheit. Dir. David Cage. Atari, 2005.

Fargo. Dir. Joel Coen. Gramercy, 1996.

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. Dir. Terry Gilliam. Universal, 1998.

Fiddler on the Roof. Dir. Norman Jewinson. United Artists, 1971.

Fight Club. Dir. David Fincher. 20th Century Fox, 1999.

Finians Rainbow. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Warner, 1968.

First Auto. Dir. Roy del Ruth. Warner, 1927.

First Blood. Dir. Ted Kotcheff. Orion, 1982.

Fisher King, The. Dir. Terry Gilliam. TriStar, 1991.

Five Easy Pieces. Dir. Bob Rafelson. Columbia, 1970.

Forbidden Planet. Dir. Fred M. Wilcox. MGM, 1956.

Forrest Gump. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Paramount, 1994.

French Connection, The. Dir. William Friedkin. 20th Century Fox, 1971.

Fugitive, The. Dir. Andrew Davis. Warner, 1993.

Ghostbusters. Dir. Ivan Reitman. Columbia, 1984.

Ghosts Before Breakfast. Dir. Hans Richter. 1928.

Gilda. Dir. Charles Vidor. Columbia, 1946.

Gilligan's Island. CBS. 1964-67.

Godfather, The Part II. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Paramount, 1974.

Godfather, The. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Paramount, 1972.

Godzilla. Dir. Ronald Emerich. Sony, 1998.

Gone with the Wind. Dir. Victor Fleming. MGM, 1939.

Gordon's War. Dir. Ossie Davis. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1973.

Graduate, The. Dir. Mike Nichols. Embassy Pictures, 1967.

Grandmother, The. Dir. David Lynch. 1970. DVD. Ryko, 2006.

Groundhog Day. Dir. Harold Ramis. Columbia, 1993.

Gummo. Dir. Harmony Korine. Fine Line, 1997.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. Dir. Chris Columbus. Warner, 2001.

Hello Dolly! Dir. Gene Kelly. Fox, 1969.

Hindenberg, The. Dir. Robert Wise. Universal, 1975.

Holy Smoke. Dir. Jane Campion. Miramax, 1999.

Hour of the Wolf. Dir. Ingmar Berman. Lopert, 1968.

How to Steal a Million. Dir. William Wyler. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1966.

Hudsucker Proxy, The. Dir. Joel Coen. Polygram, 1994.

Hunt for the Red October. Dir. John McTiernan. Paramount, 1990.

I Confess. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Warner, 1953.

In the Cut. Dir. Jane Campion. Screen Gems, 2003.

Independence Day. Dir. Ronald Emerich. 20th Century Fox, 1996.

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Paramount, 1989.

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Paramount, 1984.

Indoor Fireworks. Dir. Rudolph B. SND, 2003.

Inland Empire. Dir. David Lynch. 518 Media Inc, 2006.

Jackie Brown. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Miramax, 1997.

Jacob's Ladder. Dir. Adrian Lyne. TriStar, 1990.

Jaws 2. Dir. Jeannot Szwarc. Universal, 1978.

Jaws. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Universal, 1975.

Jazz Singer, The. Dir. Alan Crosland. Vitaphone, 1927.

J-Men Forever. Dir. Richard Patterson. International Harmony, 1979.

Jules et Jim. Dir. François Truffaut. Janus Films, 1962.

Jurassic Park. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Universal, 1993.

Kafka. Dir. Steven Soderbergh. Miramax, 1991.

Kill Bill: Vol.1. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Miramax, 2003.

Kill Bill: Vol.2. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Miramax, 2004.

King Kong. Dir. Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack. RKO, 1933.

King of the Hill. Dir. Steven Soderbergh. Universal, 1993.

Klute. Dir. Alan Pakula. Warner, 1971.

Kundun. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Buena Vista, 1997.

L.A. Confidential. Dir. Curtis Hanson. Warner, 1997.

Land of the Giants. ABC. 1968-70.

Laura. Dir. Otto Preminger. 20th Century Fox, 1944.

L'Avventura. Dir. Michelangelo Antonioni. Cino del Duca, 1960.

Law and Disorder. Dir. Ivan Passer. Columbia, 1974.

Le Sang d'un Poete. Dir. John Cocteau. Edward T. Ricci, 1930.

Lethal Weapon 3. Dir. Richard Donner. Warner, 1992.

Lethal Weapon. Dir. Richard Donner. Warner, 1987.

Lisztomania. Dir. Ken Russell. Warner, 1975.

Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers, The. Dir. Peter Jackson. New Line, 2002.

Lost Highway. Dir. David Lynch. October Films, 1997.

Lost in Space. CBS. 1965-68.

Lost Patrol, The. Dir. John Ford. RKO, 1934.

M.A.S.H. Dir. Robert Altman. 20th Century Fox, 1970.

Magnolia. Dir. Paul Thomas Anderson. New Line, 1999.

Man Who Wasn't There, The. Dir. Joel Coen. USA, 2001.

Marcello, I'm Bored. Dir. John Milius. 1966.

Mean Streets. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Warner, 1973.

Memento. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Newmarket, 2001.

Midnight Cowboy. Dir. John Schlesinger. United Artists, 1969.

Midnight Express. Dir. Alan Parker. Columbia, 1978.

Mission: Impossible. Dir. Brian de Palma. Paramount, 1996.

Mulholland Dr. Dir. David Lynch. Universal Focus, 2001.

Munich. Dir. Steven Spielberg. DreamWorks/Universal, 2005.

Mystic River. Dir. Clint Eastwood. Warner, 2003.

Nashville. Dir. Robert Altman. Paramount, 1975.

Never Cry Wolf. Dir. Carroll Ballard. Buena Vista, 1983.

Night of the Living Dead. Dir. George A. Romero. Walter Reade, 1968.

Nightmare on Elm Street 3: The Dream Warriors. Dir. Chuck Russell. New Line Cinema, 1987.

Nightmare on Elm Street, A. Dir. Wes Craven. New Line, 1984.

No Country for Old Men. Dir. Joel and Ethan Coen. Miramax, 2007.

Noah's Ark. Dir. Michael Curtiz. Warner, 1928.

Ocean's Eleven. Dir. Steven Soderbergh. Warner, 2002.

Others, The. Dir. Alejandro Amenabar. Dimension, 2001.

Persona. Dir. Ingmar Bergman. United Artists, 1966.

Peter Gunn. NBC. 1958-60.

Pink Flamingos. Dir. John Waters. Saliva Films, 1972.

Platoon. Dir. Oliver Stone. Orion, 1986.

Poseidon Adventure, The. Dir. Irwin Allen. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1972.

Pretty as a Picture: The Art of David Lynch. Dir. Toby Keeler. Image Entertainment, 1998.

Producers, The. Dir. Mel Brooks. AVCO Embassy, 1968.

Promotion, The. Dir. Steve Conrad. Dimension, 2007.

Psycho. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount, 1960.

Pulp Fiction. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Miramax, 1994.

Raging Bull. Dir. Martin Scorsese. United Artists, 1980.

Raiders of the Lost Ark. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Paramount, 1981.

Rain People, The. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Warner, 1969.

Raising Arizona. Dir. Joel Coen. Fox, 1987.

Ratatouille. Dir. Brad Bird and Jan Pinkava. Pixar, 2007.

Red Heat. Dir. Walter Hill. Tristar, 1988.

Reservoir Dogs. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Miramax, 1992.

Right Stuff, The. Dir. Philip Kaufman. Warner, 1983.

Rising Sun. Dir. Philip Kaufman. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1993.

Robe, The. Dir. Henry Koster. Twentieth Century Fox, 1953.

Rocky. Dir. John G. Avildsen. United Artists, 1976.

Rumble Fish. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Universal/Zoetrope, 1983.

Schindler's List. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Universal, 1993.

Scream. Dir. Wes Craven. Dimension, 1996.

Searchers, The. Dir. John Ford. Warner, 1957.

Secretary. Dir. Steven Shainberg. Lions Gate, 2002.

Seventh Seal, The. Dir. Ingmar Bergman. Janus Films, 1957.

Sex, Lies and Videotape. Dir. Steven Soderbergh. Miramax, 1989.

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