

Student name: William James

Module: Independent project

How do filmmakers use sound design to create fear in horror cinema?

This essay will investigate the sophisticated techniques through sound design that are used to generate fear within horror cinema. Moving past the superficial reliance on sudden audial shocks such as jump scares, the analysis shows that sound operates as a primary psychological tool, which shapes the audience's physiological response, perception and emotional engagement on their subconscious level. This essay establishes the theoretical foundation rooted in cognitive film theory, auditory perception and genre studies, examining foundational concepts such as acousmatic sound, the manipulation of silence and the auditory uncanny. This framework will be applied to two different, contrasting case studies, *A Quiet Place* (2018), which devises its full narrative, and unbearable tension around the diegetic sound rule of silence and extremely focused and *Hereditary* (2018) which uses a dense, layered, and often subliminal soundscape to elicit profound psychological dread and a sense of inescapable familial trauma. Through this analysis, this essay will demonstrate how strategic sound design, encompassing ambient sound, music, voice, sound effects, and strategic silence is crucial in building atmosphere, foreshadowing narrative developments, characterising the terrifying entity, and ultimately triggering entrenched, sustained sense of terror that visual elements alone cannot accomplish. The research aims to conclude that expert horror sound design functions as a sonic architecture, meticulously constructing the psychological space the audience inhabits, making the fear not only something witnessed, but instinctively internalised and felt.

Contents

1.Introduction

2.Theoretical framework, the psychology of sound and fear

- Image vs sound, the role of sound in triggering fear
-
- Key ideas shaping the approach, acousmatics, the uncanny, and diegetic anchoring
-
- Silence as a sound, the power of absence

3.Methodology

4. The anatomy of horror sound, core techniques and functions

- Sound effects: from the recognisable to the abstract.
- The Human Voice: Distortion, whisper, and scream,
- The Non Diegetic Score: psychological manipulation

5. Case Study 1: A Quiet Place – The architecture of silence

- Narrative integration: Sound as plot and peril
- Hyperbolic diegetic sound and subjective auditory perspective
- The violation of silence: Instigating terror

6. Case Study 2: Hereditary – The soundscape of trauma and the subliminal

- Dense atmospherics and the feeling of presence
- Vocal distortion and the uncanny human
- Subliminal cues and sonic foreshadowing

7. Comparative analysis and discussion of key themes

- Contrasting philosophies: minimalism vs. maximalism
- A shared aim: Making fear internal

8. Conclusion

9. References

1. Introduction

The genre of horror cinema is fundamentally an exercise in affective engineering, its main goal is to bring out a strong, felt emotional response, most notably fear. While the visual language of horror, such as how monsters are framed, how shadows are used, and how violence is composed has been explored thoroughly, sound has often been treated as

secondary, and is used mainly to support or illustrate what is already on screen. This essay will argue that this view is a critical false assumption.

In contemporary horror, sound is no longer purely there to merely support the image. It also works alongside it and often leads to shaping fear at a psychological level that reaches a far deeper and more instinctively than what we see. As noted by film scholar Michel Chion (1994, p. 5), sound in cinema is 'added value'; it renders the image, giving it emotional and narrative weight. In horror, this 'rendering' is the rendering of dread.

The central research question guiding this investigation is: How do filmmakers use sound design to create fear in horror cinema? Rather than compiling a surface level collection catalogue of scary sounds, this essay approaches sound design as a deliberate and systemic storytelling practice. It examines how sound functions not only as a narrative device, but as a psychological tool which is capable of shaping an audience's perception, triggering physiological responses, while also sustaining tension in ways that often operate beneath conscious awareness. The aim is to demonstrate how sound design creates fear on an instinctive level building unease, anticipation, and dread that frequently outlast the immediacy of the visual jump scare.

This study is particularly relevant in a contemporary media landscape defined by advanced audio technologies. Developments such as immersive surround sound formats, including Dolby Atmos, alongside the widespread use of high quality personal headphones, have expanded the spatial and the textural possibilities of cinematic sound (Kerins, 2011; Sergi, 2004) Modern horror filmmakers actively manipulate this heightened auditory precision, using sound to invade personal space, manipulate attention, and immerse audiences more fully within the emotional world of the film.

The investigation is structured in three core sections. First, it establishes a theoretical foundation, focusing on psychoacoustics, genre studies and cognitive film theory to explore why particular sounds provoke fear and how audiences process them. Secondly, it examines the key techniques of horror sound design such as ambience, sound effects, voice, music, and silence, analysing how each of them operates individually and in combination to shape mood, tension, and narrative meaning. Finally, and most critically, the essay applies this framework through two detailed case studies of influential 2018 horror films: John Krasinski's *A Quiet Place* and Ari Aster's *Hereditary*.

These films were selected for their sharply contrasting yet equally effective approaches to sonic terror. *A Quiet Place* constructs a hyper diegetic, minimalist soundscape in which sound itself becomes a lethal presence, forcing a narrative defined by restraint, silence, and heightened listening. In contrast, *Hereditary* employs a dense, oppressive audio environment, layering ambient noise, distorted vocal textures, and narrowly perceptible sonic cues to create a sense of psychological suffocation and inescapable dread. Through placing these two frameworks in dialogue, this essay demonstrates the complex, essential, and deeply creative role of sound design in shaping the architecture of fear within contemporary horror cinema.

2. Theoretical framework, the psychology of sound and fear

To understand how sound design creates fear, one must first understand the biological and psychological pathways of auditory perception and fear response. Human hearing is a primal, always on sense; we cannot 'close our ears' as we can our eyes. This biological reality makes sound an uniquely intrusive and continuous channel for affective manipulation (Sergi, 2004).

Image vs sound, the role of sound in triggering fear

Neuroscientific research establishes the amygdala as the brain's central fear processor, with a particularly rapid and primal response pathway for auditory threats (LeDoux, 1998).

A sudden, loud sound instinctively provokes a startle response in a person, a deeply ingrained survival reflex. Horror cinema exploits this reaction in its most immediate form through 'the jump scare'. A trope of the genre, however, more nuanced approaches to sound design, instead operates along slower cognitive pathways, gradually cultivating tension, anticipation, and dread. Unlike the visual image, which is limited by the frame, sound instead exists in space. It surrounds the audience, whether in a cinema or through headphones, enveloping them in an auditory environment that feels physically present. This sense of immersion is key to the vulnerability horror aims to create, making the audience feel exposed within the world of the film. As Whittington (2007, p. 41) argues, sound 'can articulate the off-screen space', making the audience imagine threats beyond the visual frame, thereby expanding the horrific world infinitely.

Key ideas shaping the approach. acousmatics, the uncanny, and diegetic anchoring

Several theoretical concepts are key for analysing horror sound.

Acousmatic sound an acousmatic sound is one whose source is hidden or not yet revealed (Chion, 1994).

A familiar example of this would be the roar of a monster heard off screen, or the faint whisper of a ghost that is unseen. Acousmatic sounds are especially effective at creating fear because they activate the audience's imagination, allowing it to design the threats as far more unsettling than any visual effect could reveal. Uncertainty about the sound's source creates tension, and that unsolved mystery becomes a powerful source of anxiety.

The Auditory Uncanny, Freud's idea of the unheimlich, or the uncanny, where something familiar becomes strangely unsettling translates particularly strongly to sound (Freud, 1919). A human voice that is subtly distorted, a childhood lullaby

shifted into a minor key, or the creak of a house made to feel threatening can all produce very powerful uncanny effects, through turning the familiar against itself, these sounds create a deep sense of psychological conflict and unease.

Diegetic sound vs non diegetic sound, Diegetic sound exists within the world of the film and can also be heard by the characters, while non diegetic sound such as a musical score is intended only for the audience. Horror cinema consistently blurs this distinction in order to unsettle and disorient the audience. Sounds that at first, feel like part of the score may later be revealed to be coming from within the scene, such as music playing on a character's radio. On the contrary, sounds that belong to the film's world may be manipulated to feel distorted or subjective, which can make them seem unreal. This changing boundary undermines the audience's sense of narrative stability and creates uncertainty about what can be trusted within the film's reality.

Silence as a sound, the power of absence

Within sound design, silence is never fully empty, silence typically functions as a purposeful and active element. Within horror cinema, the use of carefully placed silence serves several important functions. It can heighten tension by promoting anticipation, as the viewers wait for a sound they sense is inevitable (Donnelly, 2014). Silence can also communicate audial perspective, reflecting moments when a character is overwhelmed, stunned or highly focused. Most importantly, silence creates a sonic baseline against which other sounds gain a more significant impact. When the soundscape is reduced, even the slightest creak or a quiet breath can feel incredibly grand, sharply intensifying the audience's attention and preparing them for fear.

3. Methodology

This study adopts an interpretive, text analytical approach, combining theoretical discussion with close analysis of screen based 'texts.' The primary material studied is the sound design of the two chosen films, A Quiet Place and Hereditary. These particular films were chosen through purposeful sampling due to their critical acclaim for innovative and highly effective sound design. Their shared release year also allows for a meaningful coexisting comparison. Importantly, each of these films represents a distinct philosophical approach to horror sound, A Quiet Place showcases a minimalist, diegetic approach rooted in silence and restraint, while Hereditary employs a maximalist, psychologically driven soundscape that overwhelms and unsettles the audience.

The analysis involves several interlinked stages.

Firstly, the two films are viewed repeatedly and with focused attention, specifically on their auditory elements. Headphones are used during these viewings of these films to isolate and examine specific sonic details that may be less perceptible in a standard viewing context, such as standard television audio.

Second, specific sound design techniques are identified and categorised as they take place,

shaped by the established theoretical framework, for example, the use of acousmatic sound, uncanny vocal manipulation, or purposeful silence.

Thirdly, the narrative function of these techniques is analysed by examining how each sonic choice contributes to the plot progression, character development, and also the wider thematic concerns of the film.

Finally, a comparative analysis is carried out, placing the two case studies in conversation in order to draw wider conclusions about the range, effectiveness, and artistic potential of different sound design techniques in generating fear.

This methodical approach creates the conditions for a detailed and nuanced understanding of how sound operates systematically within these two cinematic texts, moving from close, particular observations toward broader insights into the creative and psychological functions of horror sound design.

4. The anatomy of horror sound, core techniques and functions

The ambient bed or soundscape, which is often referred to as the 'world tone,' plays a crucial role in establishing a film's underlying mood. In horror cinema, this is most commonly constructed through low frequency drones, subtle rumbles, or unsettling environmental sounds such as wind moving through empty spaces, distant industrial noise, or the hum of malfunctioning electrical systems. These particular sounds often sit just under conscious awareness, generating a sense of unease before any direct threat is presented. This form of 'base fear' works on a subconscious level, suggesting that the environment itself is hostile or unstable. This concept is discussed by industry practitioners, as discussed by Sonnenschein (2001), sound designers like Gary Rydstrom approach ambient sound with the aim of making the environment itself a character, adding to the narrative tension

Sound effects: from the recognisable to the abstract.

Sound effects (SFX) are the punctuations within the ambient soundscape.

Familiar Sounds, Unfamiliar Contexts:

Everyday sounds such as the scrape of a knife, a door slamming shut, or a child's laugh are quite often, usually harmless in isolation. However, when these sounds are placed within a tense or unsettling context, they take on a far more threatening quality. Their familiarity makes them especially effective, as the audience subconsciously recognises them while simultaneously sensing that something is wrong.

Abstracted and "Sweetened" Sounds:

In many horror films, sound effects are not simply recorded from real life but are instead heavily manipulated or entirely synthesised. By processing recognisable sounds until they are almost unidentifiable, sound designers create effects that feel unnatural and disturbing. Examples of this include the creature's distorted vocalisations in *The Thing* (1982) or the warped cellphone ringtone in *The Ring* (2002). These sounds are unsettling because they suggest organic origins while resisting clear classification, placing the audience in an uncanny space between the familiar and the unknown.

Stingers:

Stingers are short, sudden, and often very loud sound cues, which are frequently built around harmonically conflicting musical chords, used to emphasise a visual shock or moment of revelation. Although they are often associated with cheap jump scares, when used carefully and sparingly they can be highly effective. Many skilled filmmakers integrate stingers alongside genuine narrative tension, ensuring they enhance the emotional impact of a scene rather than replacing meaningful suspense.

The Human Voice: Distortion, whisper, and scream.

The human voice is a key component of emotion, sound design within horror attacks it.

Distortion:

Techniques such as pitchshifting, reverberation, and digital glitching which are commonly used to alter vocal sounds in horror cinema. Lowering the pitch of a voice can suggest a demonic or threatening presence, while raising it may signal something unnatural or even inhuman. Reverberation can make a voice feel as though it is echoing through a large, empty space, taking it away from a clear physical source. Together, these forms of distortion strip away human familiarity, often signalling possession, corruption, or an otherworldly influence.

The Whisper:

Whispering is also a particularly effective vocal tool in horror due to its forced intimacy. When a whisper is acousmatic and placed very close to the microphone, it often gives the impression that the voice is uncomfortably close to the audience. This in turn, creates a sense of intrusion, as if the sound is bypassing the screen entirely. Whispers often suggest secrecy or conspiracy, and their quietness demands the audience's attention, heightening the tension and unease.

The Scream:

The scream is one of the most recognisable vocal elements in horror cinema, representing a raw and instinctive response to fear. However, when screaming is used too frequently, its impact can become diminished. Some of the most effective and unsettling screams are those that are restrained, abruptly cut off, or heard from a distance. These choices emphasise vulnerability, isolation, and powerlessness, which often makes the moment more disturbing as opposed to a prolonged or exaggerated outburst.

The Non Diegetic Score: Psychological manipulation

The musical score in horror cinema has developed significantly over time, moving far beyond the sweeping orchestral melodrama associated with composers such as Bernard Herrmann to incorporate atonal composition, musique concrete, and electronically produced dissonance. Influential composers such as Krzysztof Penderecki, whose work has shaped many contemporary horror scores, very often rely on dense clusters of sound, unusual

textures, and unstable harmonies to generate feelings of anxiety and psychological discomfort (Donnelly, 2014) . The primary role of the score is to shape and guide the audience's emotional response to what they are seeing on screen. In many cases, this can be achieved by deliberately working against the image, such as pairing calm or peaceful music with scenes of extreme violence to create an unsettling sense of contrast and dissonance. Equally effective, however, is the complete absence of a musical score. By stripping the soundtrack back to purely diegetic sound alone, filmmakers can immerse the audience in a raw and horrifying reality, making the horror feel more immediate, grounded, and deeply unsettling.

5. Case Study 1: A Quiet Place – The Architecture of Silence

John Krasinski's *A Quiet Place* serves as a strong example of how sound and narrative can work together in a deeply integrated way. The film's central concept is blind extraterrestrial creatures that rely on extremely sensitive hearing to hunt. The film elevates sound from a supporting atmospheric element to a fundamental storytelling device. In this context, sound is not only used to enhance tension, but becomes the primary driver of the plot and the main source of danger. Every noise carries consequences, meaning the soundscape actively shapes the characters' behaviour, the pacing of the story, and also the audience's experience of fear throughout the film.

Narrative integration: Sound as plot and peril

From the very first scene, the film shows a child's choice to activate a noisy toy rocket leads to an immediate and violent death, the film clearly establishes a strict and unforgiving cause and effect relationship between sound and survival. This early moment in the film sets the tone for the rest of the film, creating a constant, almost game like sense of tension. Every decision the Abbott family makes, whether it is walking along sand covered paths, carefully handling cutlery, or even playing Monopoly using soft materials is shaped by an ongoing awareness of sonic danger.

As the film progresses, the audience gradually learns the "rules" of this on screen world alongside the characters, which draws the audience into an active role within the narrative. We are not just simply observing the characters as they attempt to evade the creatures, instead, we are encouraged to listen with them, anticipating the consequences of even the smallest sound. This level of integration means that sound design is not just a tool used to build suspense but it is the suspense itself (Krasinski, 2018).

Hyperbolic diegetic sound and subjective auditory perspective

With very little non diegetic music present for most of the film's runtime, the film places an intense emphasis on diegetic sound. Ordinary noises such as the rustle of clothing, a careful footstep on a creaking stair, or the drag of a marker across a whiteboard are pushed to the

foreground of the mix, which makes them feel overwhelmingly loud and significant. This heightened approach to sound design pulls the audience directly into the characters' subjective listening experience, encouraging us, the audience, to share their constant state of alertness and anxiety.

A specifically effective use of subjective sound is seen through the character of Regan (Millicent Simmonds), the deaf daughter. During scenes presented from her perspective, the soundscape either falls into complete silence or instead, shifts into a low, muffled rumble, often visually linked to her cochlear implant. This technique not only supports empathy by aligning the audience with her sensory experience, but it also creates a powerful sense of dramatic irony. Because the audience is aware of both the audible and silent perspectives, we, the audience, often recognise approaching danger that Regan cannot perceive, which significantly heightens both tension and dread.

The violation of silence: Instigating terror

In the film, *A Quiet Place*, silence functions as a form of protection, while any disruption of that silence carries the threat of immediate death. As a result of this, the film's most unsettling moments are often not the direct appearances of the creatures themselves, but the tense build up that occurs prior to their arrival. Small, seemingly insignificant sounds such as the nail protruding through a floorboard, a lantern shattering, or the mother (Emily Blunt) stepping on a loose stair while in labour, are transformed into moments of extreme suspense. These sounds are given time to resonate, allowing their potential consequences to stretch out painfully for both the characters and the audience.

During these moments in the film, the audience is encouraged to hold their breath, anticipating the inevitable arrival of the creatures, which is typically signalled by their rapid, clicking echolocation sounds. For much of the film, these sounds remain acousmatic, heard before the creatures are fully revealed on screen, which heightens their sense of menace. In the final act, the introduction of high frequency audio feedback from Regan's hearing aid, is capable of temporarily incapacitating the creatures, which offers a rare moment of sonic release and catharsis. However, this resolution is only effective because the film has already conditioned the audience to associate sound itself with fear, danger, and vulnerability. The power comes from the juxtaposition.

6. Case Study 2: Hereditary – The soundscape of trauma and the subliminal

Ari Aster's *Hereditary* adopts a significantly different approach to sound design. Rather than *A Quiet Place*'s approach, relying on extended silence or restraint, the film builds a dense, layered, and psychologically overwhelming soundscape that closely reflects its core themes of inherited mental illness, unresolved grief, and demonic influence. The accumulation of sound creates a constant sense of pressure, rarely allowing the audience any emotional relief. In this way, the film's sound design functions as an aural extension of the family's deteriorating mental state, reinforcing the idea that their environment, and even their own minds, are steadily collapsing around them.

Dense atmospherics and the feeling of presence

From the very beginning of the film, the Graham family home is presented as a sonically “alive” space. A persistent low level ambient hum runs beneath many of the scenes, while unexplained creaks, clicks, and dull impacts punctuate the soundscape. In contrast to *A Quiet Place*, where most of the sounds have a clearly defined diegetic source, even when they pose a threat. Many of the sounds in *Hereditary* remain deliberately ambiguous. A creak might simply be the house settling, or it could suggest an unseen presence moving through the attic. This lack of clarity generates a constant, underlying sense of unease and uncertainty.

Sound designer Pawel Wdowczak and composer Colin Stetson work together to construct an environment that feels haunted at a structural level, as if the building itself is complicit in the horror. Stetson’s non diegetic score, which makes extensive use of circular breathing techniques on the saxophone to produce continuous, breath like drones, merges seamlessly with the diegetic sounds of the house. This blending blurs the boundary between what belongs to the characters’ physical reality and what exists within their psychological experience, immersing the audience in an overbearing atmosphere of dread and mental instability (Aster, 2018).

Vocal distortion and the uncanny human

The film, *Hereditary* weaponises the human voice to devastating effect, using vocal performance as a central tool for expressing psychological collapse and loss of identity. The most widely cited example occurs when the character, Annie (Toni Collette) discovers her daughter’s body, prompting a grief stricken wail that is raw, animalistic, and almost unbearable in its authenticity. This moment resists melodrama; instead, the sound feels involuntary, as though language itself has failed, leaving only the primal noise of a soul being torn apart. As the narrative progresses and Annie’s mental state deteriorates, her voice begins to shift in texture and tone. During the spirit communication ritual, her speech is reduced to hissing whispers, while the infamous dinner table confrontation is marked by manic intensity and uncontrolled rage. What is most unsettling, however, is the film’s climax, in which the demon Paimon speaks through the character Peter’s (Alex Wolff) body. This voice is constructed through a layered, multi vocal effect that blends the fragile sound of a young boy with the reverberation of an older man. The result is a deeply unsettling and uncanny presence, one that sonically gives form to the violent erasure and replacement of the self, aligning closely with Chion’s (1999) theories on disembodied and acousmatic sound.

Subliminal cues and audio foreshadowing

Aster employs subliminal and almost imperceptible sound design to cultivate dread at a deeply subconscious level, which allows unease to take root before the audience is fully aware of it. One of the most effective examples is the faint, distant clicking of the character Charlie's tongue, which appears early in the film and later becomes closely associated with the presence of the cult. Over time, this subtle sound evolves into a sonic marker of the supernatural, quietly signalling danger before it is actually visually confirmed on screen. In the scene where Peter lies awake in bed following the traumatic death of his sister, the ambient soundscape begins to shift almost imperceptibly. What initially registers as silence gradually transforms into a distant, indistinct chorus of murmuring and chanting, suggesting that a ritualistic force is already working its way into his reality. These sounds are mixed at such low levels that they are often felt rather than consciously heard, allowing them to bypass rational interpretation and entrench unease directly within the audience's psyche. As a result, the horror feels internalised, as if it is emerging from within the audience's own mind, reinforcing the film's central ambiguity over whether its horror is rooted in the supernatural or in psychological breakdown.

7. Comparative analysis and discussion of key themes

While both the films, *A Quiet Place* and *Hereditary* achieve terror and dread through sound, they represent two ends of a philosophical spectrum. Their comparison demonstrates the different strategies of horror sound design.

Contrasting philosophies: minimalism vs maximalism

In *A Quiet Place*, sound design operates within a minimalist, diegetic, and rule based framework, where fear is produced through absence and the constant threat of violation. The largely stripped back soundscape results in even the smallest noise being narratively significant and physically dangerous, turning sound itself into a matter of survival. Because the rules surrounding sound are clearly established, the source of terror remains external and environmental, rooted in the hostile world surrounding the characters.

On the contrary, *Hereditary* adopts a maximalist, psychological, and ambient approach to sound. Rather than relying on silence, fear is created through sensory overload and gradual infiltration. The soundscape is dense, layered, and often ambiguous, incorporating a persistent sense of paranoia and entrapment. Here, terror is internalised, slowly seeping into the domestic space and the family's collective psyche, blurring the boundary between supernatural threat and psychological collapse.

A shared aim: Making fear internal

Despite their differences, both films ultimately pursue the same aim, which is to draw fear inward and transform it into a visceral, bodily experience rather than something that is just watched from a distance. *A Quiet Place* achieves this by encouraging the audience to

physically tense up, mirroring the characters as they hold their breath in shared, encased silence. *Hereditary*, by contrast, unsettles the viewer through sustained auditory anxiety and moments of mental unease that destabilise any sense of safety. In both cases, the core of horror shifts away from the screen and into the audience's own mind and body, reinforcing the idea that the most powerful cinematic fear is not just seen, but also heard, felt, and also imagined.

8. Conclusion

This investigation set out to explore a simple question, how do filmmakers use sound design to generate fear in horror cinema? By establishing a theoretical framework grounded in psychoacoustics, cognitive film theory, and also genre studies, then applying it to the different audial strategies of *A Quiet Place* and *Hereditary*. Sound design is not merely an additional layer added to visual horror, but a key component in which dread is constructed, psychological space is shaped, and fear becomes a visceral experience for the audience.

A Quiet Place reveals the power of strategic absence. It builds a minimalist, diegetic world where silence represents safety and sound signals immediate danger, the film forces the audience into a heightened state of attention. The audience are not just passive listeners but anxious participants, constantly monitoring the soundscape for possible threats. The film's effectiveness is in its ability to make us fear not only the creature itself, but the simple act of making noise, transforming perception into a source of tension.

On the contrary, *Hereditary* adopts a maximalist and psychological approach to sound. Its dense atmospheres, distorted vocal elements, and subliminal sonic details work together to externalise trauma and destabilise the line between supernatural intrusion and mental collapse. The horror showcased does not emerge from what might suddenly be heard, but from the sense that the soundscape is already contaminated with inescapable noise that mirrors the characters' broken psychological states and seeps into the audience's own experience.

Despite their differing philosophies, one film rooted in restraint, the other in sensory overload, both films ultimately arrive at the same principle. Effective horror sound design functions as a form of audial architecture, carefully generating the psychological environment the audience has to inhabit. By negating rational thought and engaging directly with instinct and bodily response, sound relocates fear from the screen into the mind and body of the audience. Whether it's through the sudden break of silence or the slow presence of an ambiguous drone, these films demonstrate that the most enduring horror is often not what is seen, but what is heard, felt, and imagined.

The importance of these findings stretches further than this critical analysis and will be incorporated into creative practice. In my case, a writer developing a ten page horror script. This understanding becomes a key creative tool. Recognising that a quiet creak can be as unsettling as a scream, or that the most effective scare could come from a sound deliberately withheld, which structurally reshapes approaches to storytelling. Sound is no longer a technical afterthought but an important narrative force. In this sense, *A Quiet Place* and *Hereditary* function as a masterclass in horror filmmaking, showcasing that fear is not simply represented on screen, but carefully composed.

9. References

Aster, A. (Director). (2018). *Hereditary* [Film]. A24.

Chion, M. (1994). *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*. Columbia University Press.

Chion, M. (1999). *The Voice in Cinema*. Columbia University Press.

Donnelly, K. J. (2014). *Occult Aesthetics: Synchronization in Sound Film*. Oxford University Press.

Freud, S. (1919). *The Uncanny*. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XVII*. Hogarth Press.

Krasinski, J. (Director). (2018). *A Quiet Place* [Film]. Paramount Pictures.

LeDoux, J. (1998). *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*. Simon & Schuster.

Sergi, G. (2004). *The Dolby Era: Film Sound in Contemporary Hollywood*. Manchester University Press.

Kerins, M. (2011). *Beyond Dolby (Stereo): Cinema in the Digital Sound Age*. Indiana University Press.

Sonnenschein, D. (2001). *Sound Design: The Expressive Power of Music, Voice and Sound Effects in Cinema*. Michael Wiese Productions.

Whittington, W. (2007). *Sound Design & Science Fiction*. University of Texas Press.