

Name: Alexandros Triantafyllidis
Module: Research in Context ADAD5003
Words: 1207
Lecturer: Rob Jones

Quentin Tarantino and Sonic Reality

Introduction

Quentin Tarantino is well known for his love of film in general. “What is less talked about is his mastery over sound. Sure, his movie soundtracks are some of the most popular out there, however, his ability to use famous songs to great effect in scenes is not what is most impressive. His mastery of diegetic, or actual, sound in film is what impresses. The diegetic sounds in *Pulp Fiction* work seem to always function in more than one way. They often foreshadow negative events and mirror the character’s feelings and actions, highlighting discursive elements of the film” (Charlie Rose, 2010, Web).

From his top movies like “*Kill Bill*”, “*Kill Bill 2*” and “*Pulp Fiction*” to his less known movies like “*Dance me to the End of Love*”, Tarantino has adopted a unique style of combining moving images and sounds. He pays a lot of attention to small detailed noises and sounds before he processes them in numerous ways in order to emphasize the moment that we simultaneously watch on the ‘big-screen’, with such suspense created also by his choice of soundtrack or other sound effects or even sometimes absolute silence. Action and violence noises and sounds are Tarantino’s most favourite creations as we can clearly see in his “*Kill Bill*” movies.

Discussion

Sounds from chains dropping, clocks ticking, drinks pouring, engines revving and money counting, to punches, kicks, sword fights, body moves, (especially in slow motion) and stabbings are very carefully manipulated and treated in such ways that in most scenes we can hear them, even though we know that they should not be there or at least be able to recognize them in such low levels. Take for instance the scene in *Kill bill 2* where the starring actress, Uma Thurman aka The Bride, arrives at the scene to disclose her “unfinished business” with her top-of-the-list enemy, Lucy Liu aka O-Ren Ishii. The scene is very intense, and includes many action sounds which are either recorded with an ambisonic type microphone or were replicated in the studio and then adapted to the movie in order to have a clean replication of the sound, as well as melody themes, a term also known as <<Synchresis>> .

Defined by Michael Chion, synchresis is drawn from the idea of synchronization and synthesis and describes the urge our consciousness has created to match an expected sound to an upcoming visual (Chion, 1994, p.224). For example if a rock is thrown in the water or if a coin drops on the floor, our brain has connected these sounds to certain moving images and we expect to hear certain sounds. This also works the opposite way for example if we hear coins dropping we can recognize that noise even if we do not get to see where they fell from. As per Chion, synchresis is the factor that applies when a numerous amounts of different possible sounds and different possible images are combined. However, as Chion adds, synchresis can not be achieved by random sound and visual events (Chion 1994 p.63).

Tarantino seems to use specific sounds for every move a character in his films does. In the movies "Kill Bill" every 'karate' move whether it is a kick or a punch or a duck or a jump is supported by a sfx sound. Either created in the studio from whipping a whip or a stick, for example, or recorded during the actual takes and then compressed in the studio for a more efficient result, Tarantino's focus on sounds exceeds any expectation. Background music is very important too in a Quentin Tarantino movie. Usually the director decides to use well known soundtracks but there is moments and scenes that his choice of theme songs and melodies make these scenes or movies very unique. In other words Tarantino likes the battle between digetic and non-digetic sounds.

Digetic is a sound that can vary to on-screen and off-screen and this depends on whether the source of the sound is on the frame of the moving image we are seeing or not. It is also known as actual sound. Now non-digetic sounds are sounds which are coming from a source that is not part of the world-story that we are being viewed. As it comes to our perception, our listening is divided into three sections, casual, semantic and reduced. In Casual listening is when the receiver is seeking the source when semantic listening is when the receiver is seeking the meaning of the sound they just heard. The definition of reduced listening, according to Pierre Schaeffer, is when the the sound is natural and it sounds like the receiver is expecting. Tarantino has been notices to use another technique in his film creations called 'added value'. A technique which is used in order to enrich a given image with a sound and create a definite impression that this sound(s) came naturally from the image itself.

However, Tarantino as one of the most recognized directors, screenwriters, and actors, seems to understand very well the importance of silence too. Best example for a Tarantino silent moment would be in the movie "Kill Bill 2" when the Bride has a very intense conversation with Bill, outside the church the Bride was shot. In that scene all the external sounds like cars, the wind, the people inside the church and the priest, are almost muted as Tarantino wants his audience to be focused only on what is displayed at that very moment rather than anything else.

Conclusion

There is plenty of screenwriters and directors around the world but not so many seem to focus so much on their movies, that is the reason why I believe Quentin Tarantino has reached such high success. His elevation of sound around an image and his combination of created and natural sounds for the representation of a motion in a moving image has brought the experience of a Quentin Tarantino film to a completely different level in the movies. Many people argue that, "anyone can put together a great mix tape, hell, I've made plenty better than his." This is true, it's not song selection that makes Pulp Fiction a masterpiece. It's the subtle intricacies of sounds. It's the television mirroring "real life". It's the way he brings us deeper into a scene by bringing the song into the diegetic world. It's the way he ties scenes together with similar ambient noises that nobody listens for. It's the way he allows characters to communicate through a radio. It's the way he professes his love for movies in movies. It's Quentin Tarantino and for as long as he makes movies he will re-define the meaning of sounds over and over again.

Bibliography

- "An interview with Quentin Tarantino." *Charlie Rose – An Interview with Quentin Tarantino*. Web. 12 Apr 2010.
<<http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/7257>>.
- Chion, M., 1994. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, New York: Columbia University Press.