

Title/Questions: Question 2 - Using at least three examples, consider how storytellers have utilised film and/or music/sound design to explore at least one of the following: Sublime, weird & eerie, transformation conflict, the self, silence, leitmotifs, symbolism, archetypes.

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Introduction

‘Sometimes you don’t have to say anything, Silence speaks it all’ (Patani, 2020). This quote views how silence can speak louder than words, how silence has more impact than noise, how silence resonates with people more than sound at all.

Sound has crafted film since sound and film could be added together. In 1926, Warner Brothers created the first film that used sound mixed with film, the film was called ‘Don Juan’ (Warner Brothers, 1926). In more modern-day examples of film, sound has evolved and developed into a tool that storytellers use to modify their films and experiment with, so that they can invent a new way to tell a story. Sound, for many years, has pushed the audience to have a certain emotion about a certain scene. When there is no sound, the audience must come up with their own outcome to that scene. Their own feelings and emotions towards a soundless moving/still image(s).

In this essay, I will be talking about the importance of silence in media, and how it can, and has, completely shifted how storytellers tell stories. I will also be giving examples of different types of media, and highlighting how they have changed how audiences look and feel at a scene filled with no sound. Finally, I will be delving into why storytellers made these choices for their films, how they have utilised it, and what type of effect this has on its audience.

Silence in Action

One of the first examples of silence in films, is a film called ‘Man of Steel’ (Warner Brothers, 2013). This film was the first film of its kind to come out that would launch the DC live action film series. Man Of Steel was the film that would open the door for other DC live action films to be made. Although the main character has already made a series of films, this film brought more of a ‘story rich’ story with it. Adding: more character development, (some-what) believable scenarios, and an engaging story line.

At the end of the film, the main protagonist was forced to kill the last survivor of his home planet. Though this scene, the sound is filled with violins, with a tempo that is only getting higher, and higher. Once the main character kills the main villain, the violins stop, and the silence fills the room. As the camera slowly cuts to surrounding people’s reactions, everything is still and silent. Soon after, Superman lets out a loud cry to break the silence, before the room then quickly returns to silence once again, before the scene is slowly filled with a slow, harmonic piano playing to jump to the next scene.

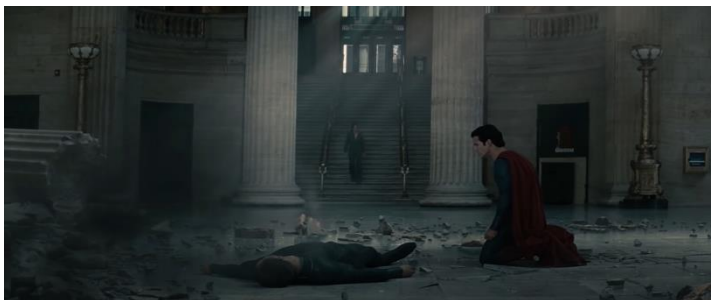


Image 1

(Warner Brothers, 2013)

The audience immediate emotions though this is going to be bewilderment, this is because the main character has done something. He has spoken though the film, saying “he wouldn’t do... [he would

not kill].” In addition, the audience would feel empathetic, shocked, and maybe confused. The bewilderment of the scene if to portray the state of confusion and shock, all combined in to one scene.

However, the sound of the scene tells a different story to the one that is being visually told on the screen. In the scene, as the violins reach the top of their tempo and cut, the room is left silent. The silent has been put there to present multiple different types of emotions. In the image I have used above, the main character is on his knees with his head tilted down, this can be seen as a sign of respect, especially with the added silence. On Remembrance Day, we are silent to remember the people who gave their lives, so that we could live one. The same concept is put into this scene, with the silence and the body language of the character.

Furthermore, when the camera cuts to the other people, no one is looking at other people, all eyes are fixed on to the main character. This is to show the external character’s shock when they see what the main character has done. Some are thankful that he had killed the character who was going to kill everyone, and some others looked traumatised by the whole scenario. For the audience, this scene was meant to present the different emotions other characters had, so that the audience can replicate those emotions.

Into the next couple of shots, the main character attempted to break the silence with a roaring scream. However, the room quickly absorbed the scream, and the room quickly went back to silence. The storyteller is trying to reflect the shock from the external characters to the audience. However, although the audience may have different views of seeing this scene, either in a thankful silence; or a shocked one, the audience will still reflect the same reaction, of pure silence.

The question that would tend to be asked about these senses, is ‘Why would the storyteller use silence in this scene, other than just a sad, amniotic sound to reflect this scene in sound?’ During my research, I found a quote that said, ‘Listen to silence, it has much to say.’ (Rumi, 2020) In reflection, adding this quote in to the point of visual media and sound, this quote is saying how silence has just as much to say than actual sound. Adding that into the scene in question, if the scene had normal ambient music to force the audience to be empathetic, you are only showing to the audience that one emotion. However, adding silence to the scene gives it a greater detail about how the main and external characters are feeling in this time, the characters are either silently grieving, silently thankful, or silently in shock.

Reflecting on this scene, it is evident that the scene would have been much weaker with added sound. As previously discussed, adding a certain type of music would add a certain type of emotion. Whereas the silence gives the audience to come up with their own outcome of feelings. It can be argued that the characters in the scene can force them to feel what their feeling. However, there are so many different emotions being displayed, it would be hard for the audience to grab and feel only one character’s emotion.

The Area with Silence

The next example I will be delving into is ‘A Quiet Place’ (Paramount Pictures, 2018). This film is based off the ideology of sensitive sensory monsters. What I mean by this, is that the monsters can not see, but they have extremely good hearing. This forces all characters to be silent throughout the film, making an eerie, cold feel throughout the film. If the characters make any sound, the monster

will hear them and kill them. I will be analysing a specific scene at the start of the film where the main characters child dies.

Thought the scene, the background noise gets slower and quieter, while the environment noise gets louder and louder. While analysing this, it's evident that the storyteller did this so that he could make the environment that the characters are living in, (for this scene, the forest) and turn the area in to a living character. From the rustling of the trees, to the leaves and sand sounds under them, this all partakes into making the environment an additional character. By creating the environment/area as an additional character, you are making the world feel more lived in and giving the audience an eerie feel of being followed/watched.



Image 2

(Paramount Pictures, 2018)

The scene then cuts to silence, with only the footsteps of the characters being heard by the audience. After a couple of seconds, youngest son in the main family of characters starts playing with his plane, that lights up and plays music. This would be the only sound you would hear until around fifteen seconds later where panic inducing music starts to play, and then gets louder and quicker, until the monster kills the boy, and the scene immediately goes pure silent. Throughout this scene, the mother has been silently crying, as she knows that the death of the child is about to come, the siblings then start to heavily breath at the sight of what's going on.



Image 3

(Paramount Pictures, 2018)

From doing considerable research into this scene, it is evident that the storyteller is playing with sound in two keyways. One, was to make the environment feel like it is lived in, so that it can be made, and felt like any other character. The second reason would be to convey the emotions of the family. Much like my previous example where I talked about loss in Man of Steel, this film does the same, it uses the silence to reflect to the audience how the characters are feeling. However, the difference in this scene posed to the other one, is that the audience are made to either feel sad, or shocked. This is because the characters on screen all have a big relationship with the boy being killed, as it is their family member. By only showing characters with saddened looks on their face,

you are forcing the audience to only feel that one emotion, due to the lack of any other external characters showing their emotion, because there are none.

Silence in Perspective

My final example is going to focus on is, 'Hush' (Blumhouse Productions, 2018). This is a classic horror film, about a serial killer trying to kill the main character(s) in some way. However, this film has many scenes with silence in, that all give a different feeling and emotion in some way. Although this is a classic horror, the films overall theme of silence puts a new artistic spin to serial killer films. The scene I will be focusing on will be the opening scene. In this scene you get introduced to the film's main protagonist.

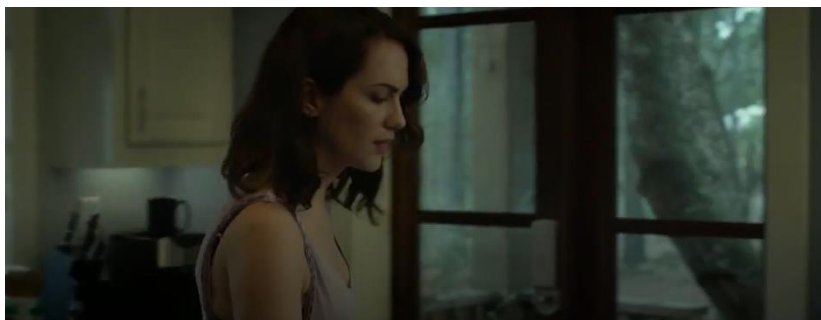


Image 4

(Blumhouse productions, 2018)



Image 5

(Blumhouse productions, 2018)

The film starts in silence, with all the movement the character does, are soundless. The only thing that is heard is a certain ambient music, that is mostly used in horror film scenes where someone is being watched. Looking at this part of the scene, I believe that the storyteller made the incentive to add this in because of the history with the music. By adding this sound, and then removing the rest makes it feel you are watching/listening from the killer's perspective, you can't hear any of her motions, but you can only hear the environment. Again, I feel like the storyteller added this to give the audience the sense of being watched, which leads to uncomfortableness.

Moving on in the scene, after a while, the environment of the character we are looking at seems to come into perspective. We can hear messages on her computer come through, and we can hear the sizzling of what's being cooked. Although this isn't silent, I believe the storyteller was trying to show the fact that now we can hear what the character was hearing, this will then lead into the previous point I made where we are someone else looking at from a different perspective. As the story slowly invests itself into the character, the audience is too, by slowly hearing and learning her surroundings, by sound.

Furthermore, this will lead into the ideology of 'false anticipation'. False anticipation is when the storyteller would make the scene feel weird and eerie to give the audience a sense of 'something is about to happen. However, the anticipation slowly cuts off, leaving the audience feeling either at ease, or paranoid.

In reflection, the storyteller has put a false sense of anticipation for several reasons, so that they could hit a plethora of story beats. One of the main beats being the feeling of uncomfortableness with the perspective sound. By playing with the characters in sight sound, like previously discussed, it brings in the idea that the previous shots were perceived as someone else, with only the sounds.

Conclusion

When looking back at all the examples of films I have previously talked about. It is evident that all films use silence in their own ways, however, they all lead to the same emotion/outcome. The second film made the audience feel sad; the third film made the audience feel on edge with anticipation and paranoia; the first film was slightly different, although the outcome of emotion was sadness, as previously talked about, the scene shows multiple external characters, all of them had, somewhat, a different emotion to the rest. However the main emotion that the audience felt was either shocked, or saddened.

When compiling all the examples, you can see that silence is most commonly used in scenes where something negative is about to take place, either a death, or something happening to a character. Although, this fact can be argued, with some romance films characters look at each other and will be quiet when looking at each other for the first time. However, in a lot of these examples, there will be either some song or noise during these scenes.

In conclusion, silence is a very important part of a story when trying to make a complex story. Some storytellers will use sound to force emotion on to the audience. However, the storytellers who use silence take a risk on the silence falling properly on the scene, and will not send mixed signals to the audience.

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