IV. Silence

- A famous director said after using silence after a very dramatic scene: "Silence was the most awesome sound we could get".
- If we expect sound, silence very powerful.
- Absence of sound creates expectation.
- Absence of sound is eerie, unnatural.
Silence--not necessarily silent

by Matthew Wright; from Aspect Ratio, a Cinema Blog

- “the silence around the solo instrument”
- Gary Rydstrom
  - sound for *Terminator 2: Judgment Day, Jurassic Park, Saving Private Ryan*
  - believes that effective sound design begins with **contrasts:**
- But it’s also about how frequencies work together. There’s a trick to making a gunshot big using multiple layers of elements. You take the high snap of a pistol and add to it the low boom of a cannon and the midrange of a canyon echo. You orchestrate it. On an über scale then, we do that to the whole soundtrack, making sounds work together.
- Silence can be thought of as a type of sound. It’s like when somebody years ago figured out that zero was a number. And silence is just as valid as an amazing sound.
Use of Silence and contrasts from MI-1
MI-1 Contrasts
Gary Rydstrom
sound designer

- mix of near and absolute silence
- CIA -- get computer files
- vault sound and heat sensitive
- very quiet with sonic reprieves
- total silence as knife falls
  - heightens tension
  - emphasizes the choreography
- When sound returns.....more powerful
- Brian De Palma ultimately said, “No, take it all out.” And for the most part, that scene plays with nothing on the track. I went to see it with an audience and it had the desired effect: It made everyone lean in, pay closer attention, get nervous. Tension comes from the silence of that scene.
Spoken Sound

- A. Narration
- B. Dialogue
- what is said is essential to meaning
- how said also shapes meaning
- interpretation is function of director and performer
1. Direct Narration--describes what is being seen or heard

- Storyteller
- Straight news reports
Isabel Allende--Chilean Author
Storyteller
Isabel Allende--Chilean Author
Storyteller

Why does this work?

• personality
• interpretive skill
• quality of the message
• humor (makes fun of self)
• phrasing
• repetition (Passion)
2. Indirect Narration

- action or sound of a scene tells us what is happening
- narration supplements
  - why
  - context
  - significance
Direct Narration-Indirect Narration
from Arabs, Jews, and the News
3. Contrapuntal Narration

• juxtaposes narration and action
• makes a composite statement not present or explicit in either element
Contrapuntal Narration-fiction film
from Platoon
Contrapuntal Narration-fiction film
from Platoon

- Poetic, letter-like lines
- to grandmother
- Explains inner thoughts and feelings
- alienation from family
- Too protected
- family history--WWI, WW2
- bottom of the barrel
- pride about “grunts”
Usually, indirect and contrapuntal narration are stronger than direct.

- supplement and broaden content and are less obvious
Direct most effective when

• sounds and images not convey enough info
• information is complex and educational in nature.
• mixing the styles can improve communication
Direct Narration

from The Nucleus Factory
B. Dialogue

- conversation between 2 or more people
- at the core of storytelling
- not just the writer’s responsibility
  - director
  - actor
  - sound designer
  - editor
Interpretation

1. Accent
   - Location
   - social class
   - origin

Appropriate/believable
Can alter meaning
Accent

♦ from Out of Africa--Meryl Streep
Interpretation

2. Pace -- general guidelines
   - Deliberate -- inner tension
   - Faster -- urgency or nervousness
Pacing

♦ from Schindler’s List
Pacing

- unlimited choices
- not just the words
  - that which is unsaid
  - eyes part of conversation -- “eyes to meet”
  - let the characters study each other

-Spielberg
  - breaths, air, pauses--phrasing
  - silence
The Caine Mutiny

❖ Humphrey Bogart
  • Captain Queeg
    ❖ testified in court martial
    ❖ ball bearings
    ❖ in storm, crew mutiny
    ❖ Queeg was rigid, overbearing, abusive
    ❖ madness, then silence
  • http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1Qzz7K_E1w
Caine Mutiny
Caine Mutiny

- Nominated for 7 Oscars
  - inc. best actor, best picture, best writing
- No special effects or fancy camerawork
- A kind of crescendo to climax
- ball bearings (identified with Queeg)
  - his internal conflict
- Use of silence
Interpretation

4. Emphasis--stressing a syllable or a word changes the meaning

DR JOHANSSEN APPLIED PRESSURE ON ME AT THE OFFICE
Interpretation

5. Inflection--altering the pitch or tone of the voice

- raise pitch at the end of a sentence, declarative becomes question
- speak in higher pitch--intensity and excitement
- I love YOU
- Like PHRASING in music
Interpretation

- Young Filmmakers ignore
  - about the cool shot
  - thinking technically
  - ignore performance

- Story is first
  - function of image and sound
  - interpretation manipulates the story
  - study the great films