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FILM SOUND BEYOND REALITY: SUBJECTIVE SOUND IN NARRATIVE CINEMA

To my knowledge, the first one who proposed the meta-diegetic category for, so called, internal sounds was Claudia Gorbman¹ in her film sound taxonomy. According to Gorbman, sound source on the narrative level may be diegetic², extra-diegetic³, and meta-diegetic. Meta-diegetic sound was explained as sound imagined, or perhaps, hallucinated by a character. Before Gorbman, there have been numerous theories which agree on the basic principle that film sound may be perceived as either diegetic, or non-diegetic--as defined by its source of origin. Therefore, the sound which is normatively perceived and understood by the film characters may be called diegetic; e.g. all the dialogue, sound effects, and music that originate in diegetic space; and non-diegetic sound which would then be the opposite from diegetic; e.g. voice-over narration, and musical score--both of whose existence film characters are unaware.

Bordwell and Thompson⁴ unnecessarily complicated this matter by looking at the diegetic and non-diegetic sound from its temporal relationship to the image. According to them, film sound can appear earlier, simultaneously, or later than the image. Classifying even further, they recognized displaced diegetic sound, which takes place in the past or the future, and simple diegetic sound, which is taking place in the present. In addition, they propose, each of these categories may be external, i.e. spoken aloud by the character(s) and internal, i.e. imagined in the character's head (thoughts).

Theorizing even further Michel Chion proposed two more new categories for internal sound. He writes:

Internal sound is sound which, although situated in the present action, corresponds to physical and mental interior of a character. These include

physiological sounds of breathing, moans or heartbeats, all of which could be named *objective-internal* sounds. Also in this category of internal sounds are mental voices, memories, and so on, which I call *subjective-internal* sounds.⁵

All these film theories that attempt to classify film sound into absolute and complicated categories talk about sound which parallels or counterpoints the images, sound that is synchronous or asynchronous in relation to the images, sound that is either realistic or unrealistic, or sound that is literal or nonliteral. In order to accomplish this impossible pursuit and get to the bottom of the meaning of film sound, all these theories needed several sub-categories which in return required their own sub-sub-categories, and so on ad infinitum. The reason why these film sound theories have difficulties lies in their attempt to get absolutely finite results beyond contingency. Unfortunately, in the end they become more about making classifications than they do about understanding cinema.

Even though Gorbman was critical of over-classifying film sound by the others, she likewise proposed just another set of categories. Gorbman was of considerable significance, since she established the term meta-diegetic and opened up the whole new analytical world of subjective and non-normative film sound. Here, I am going to focus on meta-diegetic sound, but before I do that, let me introduce another term--*oneiric*. In ancient Greek *oneiros* (ονειρος) means dream and the first one who adopted this term was Vlada Petric using *oneiric cinema* to describe films that deal with various kinds of altered states of consciousness. Petric's interest in oneiric film perception exists mostly on visual level, he states:

On a purely cinematic level, oneiric implies film imagery that stimulates a paradoxical experience: while the event on the screen is perceived on a rational level as absurd and impossible, it is at the same time accepted as "reality," with full psycho-emotional involvement on the part of the viewer in the diegetic world presented on screen.⁶

¹ Claudia Gorbman, Teaching the Soundtrack Quarterly Review of Film Studies (November 1976): 446-452.

² The total world of the story action is called *diegesis* (διηγησις) in the ancient Greek.

³ Later writing about film music, she changed it into non-diegetic. Claudia Gorbman, Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.

⁴ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction 2nd. ed. (New York: Addison and Wesley, 1979), 246-249.

⁵ Michel Chion, Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 76.

⁶ Vlada Petric, Oneiric Cinema: The Isomorphism of Film and Dreams, Handout for the course *Oneiric*

There is a significant difference in achieving the oneiric at visual and aural planes of experience, but if there is a common element it is represented by a departure from normative perception of reality. Freud writes in his preface to the first edition of *Interpretation of Dreams* that "the dream represents the first class of abnormal psychical phenomena";⁷ he depicts it as a *deviation* from the usual condition of mind.

I am going to use meta-diegetic to signify character's subjective perception of the reality, and oneiric to signify character's total or partial departure from reality. Both of these terms are referring to the deviation from normative film sound into a subjective sound of altered states of consciousness. Nonetheless, the notion of meta-diegetic perception could be traced back into the silent days of Italian Futurist cinema. Written in 1916 *Manifesto of Futurist Cinema*⁸ among other important points stated that their films would be a sort of *polyexpressive symphonies and dramatized states of mind*. Siegfried Kracauer has written about *special modes of reality*⁹ that could be cinematically represented. Kracauer pointed out that "films may expose physical reality as it appears to individuals in extreme states of mind generated by" various kinds of "mental disturbances or any other external or internal causes." The first actual creative use of meta-diegetic film sound as a dramatized state of mind dates back to 1929 and the first British talkie *Blackmail* by Alfred Hitchcock. In the well known *knife sequence* Hitchcock is using sound to penetrate the subjective mental state of Alice (Anny Ondra) whose aural perception of reality suppresses everything but the word *knife*, which rings in her mind and becomes the solely focus of her attention, until her father interrupts: "Alice, cut a bit of bread, will you."¹⁰

Cinema, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, Spring 1995), 1.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, (New York: Avon Books, 1965), xxiii.

⁸ F. T. Marinetti, Bruno Corra, Emilio Settemelli, Arnaldo Ginna, Giacomo Balla, and Remo Chiti, (Milano: L'Italia Futurista, 1916); In the US could be found in, Umbro Apollonio ed., *Futurist Manifestos*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), 218.

⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 58.

¹⁰ Many authors have written about this scene:

After having killed her assailant with a knife, the young heroine of Alfred Hitchcock's "Blackmail" finally returns to her parents' shop and there overhears the chatter of a gossipy woman customer. The camera is just focusing

The most common use of subjective film sound that is certainly in a form of the internal monologue. Bela Balasz wrote in 1952 that film sound would be most expressive when it was asynchronous to the picture.¹¹ Such sound would be conceived independent of the image but, at the same time, give it a parallel meaning--a sort of running commentary to the scenes. Balasz wrote:

In one of the Soviet war films there was a young soldier whose nerves give way when he first comes under fire. He deserts his comrades and hides in a shell-hole. A close-up shows his face and by his closed mouth we can see that he is silent. Nevertheless we hear him talking. The monologue we hear is in his mind and we listen tensely to what he is silently saying to himself. If he had really spoken aloud and said the same words in a voiced monologue, this scene would have been unbearable. For nowadays even on the stage we find an 'unnatural' monologue difficult to accept.

Balasz also stressed that "asynchronous sound has no need to be natural. Its effect is symbolic and it is linked with the visuals it accompanies through its significance, in the sphere of mind, not of reality." Balasz was convinced that "this is the richest and deepest possibility of artistic expression of sound film," because the action can move on two parallel levels at the same time, "in the sphere of sound and

on the listening girl, as the woman suddenly drops the word "knife."

Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 122-123.

Like images, sound can be used subjectively to express the impressions or state of mind of a character in the film. There is the famous scene from Hitchcock's *Blackmail* in which the words 'Knife, Knife, Knife', are repeated in a frightened girl's mind.

Ralph Stephenson and Jean R. Debrix, *The Cinema as Art*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1965), 198.

Most of the experiments are in the expressionistic mode, the two most famous examples being the subjective distortion of the word "knife" in "Blackmail" and the interior monologue in *Murder*. Both experiments are attempts to convey a character's thoughts and feelings. Yet at the same time both techniques draw attention to themselves as tricks and leave the audience emotionally outside the characters.

Elisabeth Weis and John Belton, *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 302.

¹¹ Bela Balasz, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1970), 218-219.

in the sphere of visual image."¹² Mary Ann Doane stressed the difference between the voice-over and the interior monologue. She emphasized that interior monologue displays what is inaccessible to the image, what exceeds the visible: the "inner life" of the character.¹³

An aural *oneiric-feeling* in narrative cinema, as stated earlier, is usually achieved by some kind of departure from normative film sound. Most of the film sound is normatively diegetic and non-diegetic, thus deviation from it may lead into oneiric or meta-diegetic. There are two terms from theories of sleep and dreams which may come in handy for our understanding of oneiric--*hypnagogic* and *hypnapompic*. Hypnagogic representing the state of falling asleep or drifting away from the reality world, and hypnapompic representing the state of waking up or coming back to the reality world.

Meta-diegetic use of sound as internal monologue has become a fairly common practice in contemporary film making. I would like you to pay attention to a more complex but very effective use of film sound creating an oneiric mood for meta-diegetic soundscape. Now, I am going to present several examples of aural oneiricism as used in different films. Since all these examples share the common element of move into non-normative film sound lets see what are the ways of achieving it. One of the simplest and most vivid jumps into an oneiric mood is by completely dropping off the normative sound effects and letting the music alone to take over.

As in film *Monsieur Hire* (France 1989) directed by Patrice Leconte, when Hire (Michael Blanc) during the boxing match unbuttons Alice's (Sandrine Bonnaire) shirt and starts touching her, very prominent sound effects of the cheering crowd slowly get muffled and fade out (hypnagogic) while the musical score (Michael Nyman) singularly overwhelms the scene making it aurally oneiric. Later on, Alice's boyfriend comes back and we are abruptly (hypnapompic) brought back to diegetic reality cutting off the music and returning the normative sound effects. This form of intrusion into meta-diegetic mood is fairly characteristic of reestablishing reality, a sort of a wake up call for the character. Generally speaking, in oneiric film sound; the hypnagogic state takes place more gradually while the hypnapompic state is rather fast and relatively short.

This is not entirely the case with the sequence from *Empire of the Sun* (USA 1987) directed by Steven Spielberg where US airplanes come to bomb

and liberate the Japanese prisoners of war camp. The main character a boy, Jim Graham (Christian Bale), is obsessed with airplanes, and in this sequence his obsession is presented in an altered state of consciousness. In the midst of the battle Jim is speechless while looking in slow motion at an airplane whose pilot is waving to him from the open cockpit. Sound effects slowly disappear and the musical score (John Williams) completely takes over creating a meta-diegetic effect. Gradually returning from this mesmerizing mood Jim yells "Go!!! B51 the Cadillac of the sky!", and then a big explosion brings the audience back to the fierceness of the battle by reestablishing all the previously dropped war sound effects.

One of the most vivid and interesting examples of an oneiric soundscape comes from *The Witness* (USA 1985) directed by Peter Weir. In the sequence at the police station where detective John Book (Harrison Ford) is showing the mug shots of the possible killers to the Amish boy, Samuel (Lukas Haas), sound effects to create the atmosphere of a police office are deliberately mixed in, much louder than normally. This is done to highlight the subjective reaction of the Amish boy to an alien environment of a police office. Then, wandering around Samuel sees in a display cabinet a paper clip and the photograph of McFee (Danny Glover), a top narcotics officer, honoring him for his achievements in a youth project. At that moment, the boy realizes that McFee is actually the killer, meanwhile the sound effects have been dropped out and the musical score (Maurice Jarre) alone creates an oneiric mood. Detective John Book comes in a subtle slow motion towards the boy who is pointing his index finger to McFee's photo identifying him as the killer. Book stunningly realizes the implications of boy's discovery and the fact that the police department itself is involved in the killing. The "wake up call" from this oneiric state comes as a door buzzer sound effect leading into the upcoming scene.

Transitions to flashback sequences are often accompanied by an oneiric sound treatment like in *The Silence of the Lambs* (USA 1991) directed by Jonathan Demme. Young detective, Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster), while attending the funeral service for the police officer killed in the line of duty is having a flashback. As Clarice walks through the door the sound effects and diegetic music give a way to a non-diegetic musical score (Howard Shore) and set up an oneiric mood. A man playing a "soundless" organ can be seen as Clarice completely drifts away from reality and walks towards the coffin. She is seen in subtle slow motion going into a flashback of her father's funeral, who was, also, a police officer killed in the line of duty. Clarice's altered state of

¹² *ibid.* 219.

¹³ Philip Rosen, ed. *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 341.

consciousness is interrupted by the voice of Jack Crawford (Scott Glenn) who abruptly brakes off the mood saying: “Starling, we are back here!”

Another marvelous example of flashback and oneiric mood comes in a sequence from *Chariots of Fire* (UK 1981) directed by Hugh Hudson, in which British athlete, Harold Abrahams (Ben Cross), is preparing for a race at 1924 Paris Olympics. The high level of concentration and an undoubtedly altered state of consciousness before the race is presented visually through the use of slow motion. On the aural level the same is achieved through the musical score (Vangelis Papathanassiou) by omitting the cheering crowd ambient sounds and selectively focusing onto footsteps and digging-in sounds of the racers as they prepare to take their marks. Then, just a few seconds before the race starts, the music fades out and we hear Abrahams’s heartbeat sound alone. The firing of the starter’s gun brings us back to the reality of the cheering crowd sounds and regular motion. Abrahams wins the race and stunned by that fact goes through a flashback of the entire event depicted in slow motion. We hear the start gun fired again but this time its sound quality is altered and reverberated to portray the subjective perception of Abrahams. Everything is accompanied by the musical score, no cheering crowd sounds, and very few selected sound effects. Still in slow motion, we visually cut back and forth from Abrahams’s flashback to reality but his altered state of consciousness is uninterrupted, even as he (in reality shots) receives handshakes of congratulations and poses for photographs. Abrahams’s flashback ends as he breaks the ribbon crossing the finish line. The music withdraws abruptly and the full blast of the crowd cheering returns us to reality.

It is interesting to see how sound is oneirically treated in a flashback sequence from *Patriot Games* (USA 1992) directed by Phillip Noyce. The CIA detective Jack Rayn (Harrison Ford) is struggling to assemble the puzzle of an IRA terrorist group which is trying to kill him and his family. While washing his face in the bathroom, Jack is going through the series of flashbacks, some of which are triggered from reality by the appearance of a woman who accidentally interrupts his oneiric state. Constantly going back and forth from the flashback to reality, a meta-diegetic mood is achieved through the use of the musical score (James Horner) and acoustically altered sound effects for the flashback parts. What is particularly interesting here, is that in spite of very vivid visual oneiricism, on the aural level we never completely leave reality--ambient sounds are always present. This shallow acoustic representation of oneiric is deliberately used to show Ryan’s striving to connect the puzzle pieces together in his head. The

case of stunning revelation in *The Witness* required a very deep oneiric mood, while for the scattered flashback in *Patriot Games* demanded the use of shallow oneiricism. Sometimes, like in *The Fugitive, USA* (1993) by Andrew Davis, flashback scenes are nothing but glimpses in which to accomplish any sense of aural oneiricism, distorted visual images are being accompanied by acoustically transformed and heavily manipulated sound effects.

Very creative use of acoustically altered sound effects and transitions to flashback may be found in *Dead Calm* (Australia 1989) directed by Phillip Noyce. Early in the film John Ingram (Sam Neill) rushes to the hospital where his wife Rae (Nicole Kidman) is treated in an emergency room after the car accident. As he approaches Rae’s bed and tries to talk to her, we see a subjectively blurred shot from Rae’s perspective. Sound effects of her heavy breathing and heartbeat are overly emphasized while she is oneirically falling in a sort of comatose flashback. We see the windshield wipers whose rhythm perfectly coincides with the sound of Rae’s heartbeat. Now, her heartbeat gradually transforms into the regular sound of windshield wipers, and we are no longer in the hospital, but riding in the car with Rae and her son. She is singing a child song to her baby boy, but her voice sounds reverberated--acoustically mismatching the diegetic space. As she continues to sing the sound of her voice gradually transforms and matches the acoustic perspective of the car. At this point we are out of the oneiric state but still in her flashback which seems convincingly realistic. While witnessing the horrible accident we see Rae screaming, and that scream interrupts everything in an overlap into the next scene which takes place on the sailing boat. For a moment of confusion we see Rae waking up in tears and this entire episode appears to be in her dream. The sequence is integrally scored by an eerie electronic music (Graeme Revell) which non-diegetically unifies these three diegetic places--the hospital, car, and the sailing boat.

Another example of acoustic transformation comes from *Bugsy* (USA 1991) directed by Barry Levinson. Bugsy Siegel (Warren Beatty) is ordered by the mob to kill his friend Harry Greenberg (Elliott Gould). Bugsy reluctantly does the killing and then furiously comes back to his mistress Virginia Hill (Annette Bening) who was waiting by the car. They drive away leaving the murder scene and we can see how much Bugsy is upset he has been forced to commit this murder. Camera closes up on his face as he endlessly repeats aloud to himself: “Twenty dwarfs took turns doing hand stands on the carpet.” At first, his voice has the correct perspective and then, as the camera moves in closer, his voice gains more and more reverberation, finally sounding

completely meta-diegetic. The whole sequence is accompanied by musical score (Ennio Morricone) which dramatically supports the visuals.

Sound alteration is characteristic of a bathroom sequence from the *Reservoir Dogs* (USA 1992) directed by Quentin Tarantino. When Mr. Orange (Tim Roth) loaded with drugs in his bag walks in the bathroom with three cops, he deliberately uses the hand dryer in order to show them he is causal and non suspicious. When Mr. Orange presses the hand dryer's button we hear the sound of an airplane jet which totally obstructs the cops' conversation. This is visually shown in an oneiric slow motion and all the sound effects are dropped giving way to the blasts of the "dryer-jet". Over that noise police officers cannot talk so they look at Mr. Orange while their dog barks "soundlessly." When the dryer sharply cuts off, we are back in reality.

The "Satisfaction" sequence from *Apocalypse Now* (USA 1979) directed by Francis Ford Coppola should be definitely mentioned in relation to meta-diegetic use of sound in film. Listening to *Radio Saigon* Chef (Frederic Forrest) starts dancing to the rock tune *Satisfaction* by *The Rolling Stones*. At first, the sound perspective seems accurate for the small radio transistor and outdoors ambiance; later, as the rest of the crew Chief (Albert Hall), Lance (Sam Bottoms), and Clean (Larry Fishburne) get excited and start singing along, the sound quality becomes non-diegetic. Now, *Satisfaction* bolstered by full hi-fi quality stereo sound may be interpreted as subjective sound perception by the crew members who are, at least for the moment of listening to the music, brought back home to the USA. Then the camera closes on Captain Willard (Martin Sheen) who is looking at the classified documents. At that point, *Satisfaction* is abruptly swapped with the non-diegetic musical score (Carmine Coppola and Francis Ford Coppola) and all the ambient sound effects are suddenly dropped. Willard being completely absorbed in his reading shuts off this reality and through internal monologue we hear him reading meta-diegetically: "At first I thought they handed me a wrong dossier..."

When Claudia Gorbman wrote about meta-diegetic music in 1987, she stated that when non-diegetic music is played from any character's point of view and it strongly emphasizes its subjectivity it may be considered as meta-diegetic.¹⁴ This example from *A Bronx Tale* (USA 1993) directed by Robert De Niro, supports Gorbman's statement. When

Calogero Anello (Lillo Brancato) on his father Lorenzo's (Robert De Niro) bus sees a lovely black girl named Jane (Taral Hicks), he is struck with the feeling of love. At that point diegetic music which was being played from Lorenzo's radio is swapped with non-diegetic music (Butch Barbella) and all the diegetic sounds are considerably reduced. Calogero is mesmerized and he does not even hear his father talking, the only thing he sees is the way Jane smiles back. This oneiric mood is emphasized by using a very emotional and aggressive saxophone musical score which, as Claudia Gorbman would say, plays strongly from Calogero's point of view.

The Graduate (USA 1967) directed by Mike Nichols was a landmark film in many respects including the way it incorporated the use of subjective sound. The first instance of such sound use is at the party held to celebrate the completion of Ben Braddock's (Dustin Hoffman) college studies. He is pressured by family and friends to "get going" with his life, and is encouraged at every turn to find a job, marry, and become a clone of his parents. After being advised that there is a great future in the plastics, Ben has had it. He runs upstairs, while the sound of his mother's (Elizabeth Wilson) voice becomes increasingly louder depicting the level of irritation the whole scene has produced in Ben. Finally, he shuts the door of his room and his mother's voice abruptly goes away. The next instance of the similar sound usage comes in the club sequence in when Ben for first time takes Elaine Robinson (Katherine Ross) out. As the stripper performs a "great effect" behind Elaine's back, the diegetic music becomes increasingly loud subjectively portraying Elaine's state of mind. When she breaks into tears Ben pushes the stripper away and the music abruptly cuts off.

Increased loudness also creates an oneiric mood in *Blue Velvet* (USA 1986) directed by David Lynch. When Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) has his pals restrain Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan), Frank requests "candy coated clowns"--a lyrical excerpt from Roy Orbison's song *In Dreams*. The music is played diegetically from the car stereo while Frank repeats the lyrics as they are sung: "In dreams I walk with you, in dreams I talk to you, in dreams you're mine all of the time...". The perspective of music does not match its diegetic space, it rather appears non-diegetic in hi-fi sound quality. Promising to "send him straight to hell," Frank rubs Jeffrey's face with lipstick and blue velvet; then brutally beats him while a helpless Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini) stands by screaming. Towards the climax of the sequence the loudness of music is significantly raised--playing oneirically to almost everybody present. When Lynch suddenly cuts to his "candle

¹⁴ Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987), 22-23, 83.

segue”, we hear a distant reverberated echo of the Orbison’s song--at it was lingering in beat up Jeffrey’s head.

In *Scarface* (USA 1983) directed by Brian De Palma, oneiric mood is achieved by using the juxtaposition of diegetic disco club music with non-diegetic musical score(Giorgio Moroder). In the sequence when Tony Montana (Al Pacino) and his buddy Manny Ray (Steven Bauer) walk in a disco, they see Tony’s sister Gina (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio) dancing at the dance floor with some guy. This upsets Tony a lot and while camera closes up on his eyes, the non-diegetic musical score is being introduced to parallel Tony’s altered state of consciousness--two different kind of music are heard simultaneously creating a rather abrasive combination. A few moments later, Tony’s business conversation is interrupted as he pays attention to Gina again. Now, she appears to be in a cozy relationship with her dancing partner as they walk together towards the bathroom--this makes Tony absolutely furious. Here again, camera subjectively closes on Tony’s face, and this time the non-diegetic score completely overwhelms the diegetic disco music. The loudness of the non-diegetic musical score parallels the degree of Tony’s anger. As Tony suddenly gets up and runs to the bathroom to attack Gina’s partner, the non-diegetic music is abruptly dropped and we are back in the reality of disco dancing. These two examples are relatively short when compared to the one that follows a few minutes later. Tony sits alone, drunk and stoned, smoking his cigar and drinking scotch while he notices two hit men hiding their machine guns under the table across the room. When Tony realized the seriousness of his situation, the non-diegetic musical score is juxtaposed again with the ongoing disco music. This, not only portrays Tony’s altered state of consciousness but creates a counterpoint to the continuing amusement of other people in the club. Here, two entirely different moods are conveyed aurally through simultaneous use of different music. This music is abruptly cut off as the two hit men start shooting and wake up everybody to the fearful reality.

A very interesting and truly unique use of oneiric soundscape can be found in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (USA 1992) directed by David Lynch. The night club sequence in which Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) and her friend Ronette Pulaski (Phoebe Augustine) decide to go next day to a sex party with Jacques Renault (Walter Olkewicz) and Leo Johnson (Eric DaRe), treats dialogue and diegetic music (Angelo Badalamenti) in an unorthodox manner. Normatively in most of the films, no matter how loud the music in a disco club in reality may be, it is

always cinematically treated as subordinate to the dialogue which is clearly heard over the music. Here, Lynch decides to do the opposite and depart from the norm and move into an oneiric mood in order to sonically depict the altered states of consciousness in his characters who are either drunk or stoned. Therefore, the music is blasting and the dialogue can barely be heard, thus Lynch has to resort to subtitles making the sequence meaningful via written signs. However, once the film gets internationally distributed here is an example of what could happen:

The stroboscopic lights provoke a sense of dizziness and the volume of the music played by the group is purposefully kept very loud , so much so that the director had decided to make the dialogues between the characters barely audible and to use subtitles in order for the spectator to decode what was being said. The original version contributes to offer the impression not only of an infernal environment, but also of a psychological situation of Laura being on the verge of her “breakdown.” The feeling that the spectator gets is sort of “psychological terrorism” on the part of the director, straining to make an almost unbearable “audio-vision” of this sequence.

The Italian distributor has canceled the sense and the strength of this sequence, arbitrarily lowering the volume of the music and bringing up the dialogue, making the recourse to the subtitles superfluous, which in fact, has been eliminated. This description is not sufficient to understand how an operation of this type, besides being always and in any sense stigmatizing because of disrespectfulness of director’s choices, radically changes the nature of the sequence and annuls its destabilizing potential, normalizing it¹⁵

Finally, let me finish with the opening sequence from *Apocalypse Now* by Francis Ford Coppola. It starts oneirically from the very beginning with the song *The End* by *The Doors* . We see the explosions but don’t hear them, the helicopters are flying by, but we hear acoustically altered helicopter sounds which don’t match the visuals in perspective or the rhythm. Then, we see Captain Willard laying on his bed and we discover the opening images are visuals from a nightmare he has been having. While looking at the ceiling fan he hears meta-diegetically transformed helicopter sounds. This mood is invaded by the sound of a real helicopter which comes through Willard’s window, and he is prompted to wake up from this oneiric state while the music slowly fades out into a distant reverberation creating a hypnapompic transition to reality. He gets up and looks through the window talking to himself in an internal monologue: “Saigon, shit...” This

¹⁵ Riccardo Caccia, ed., David Lynch (Pavia, Italy: Il Castoro, 1993), 102-103.

monologue continues and as he talks about jungle, even though we see him in a hotel room, jungle ambience sounds are introduced, subjectively portraying Willard's drunken aural imagination.

I would like to conclude stating that, regardless of the category, film sound is trying to create a hyperreal aural representation of the plot which can make the audience transcend the limitations of cinematic medium and believe the conceit presented before them. Looking at the examples I analyzed, it is clear why narrative cinema is such a powerful medium creating its "better than reality" virtual world. So far, not much has been written about the aural oneiricism as a part of cinematic virtuality, and I hope that my contribution will prompt the film makers to more often effectively use meta-diegetic film sound in their ways of artistic expression.