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COLLABORATION AND INTEGRATION:

A Method of Advancing Film Sound Based on The Coen Brothers' Use of Sound and Their Mode of Production

Two volumes: volume 1

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For the majority of cinema history, the film industry has treated sound as a less integral ingredient in the filmmaking process. This has translated into working practices that have marginalised sound's contribution and have divided personnel. Joel and Ethan Coen's mode of production stands in contrast to a majority of those currently working in the film industry. They foreground sound's contribution by priming their scripts for sound, involving their sound personnel sooner and by encouraging close collaboration between those responsible for the soundtrack. The Coens' model serves as a way of highlighting sound's importance and as way of generating more integrated soundtracks. As such, filmmakers should build upon their mode of production; a notion supported by other professionals and educational institutions. By advocating this alternative way of working, future filmmakers can be encouraged to reassess sound's role in film construction.

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Volume 1

Volume 2

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Randall Barnes
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For Emma, the Widge and all my friends

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A specific approach to the writing of this thesis has been taken in order to support the arguments made. This approach includes:

- Film titles throughout the paper are denoted by capital letters, thus distinguishing them from books, journals or plays.

- Wherever possible, terms that refer to filmmaking and the filmmaking experience have been used generically to avoid terminology that reinforces the dominance of the film image. Examples include: the word 'film' is used because it conjures up less of a visual bias than 'motion picture' or its derivative 'movie'; and audience members are referred to as 'filmgoers' or merely 'audience' rather than 'spectators' or 'viewers'.

- The word 'filmmakers' is also used as opposed to 'director' to emphasise that a film's production extends beyond the responsibility of one individual.

- The use of the word 'soundtrack' refers to the all three elements: effects/noises, music and dialogue.

- When capitalised, 'the Studios', refers to all of the major (and some minor) Hollywood film companies that have been prominent in American cinema history.

Introduction

> *Sound is 50% of a film, at least; sometimes 100%. It is the thing that can add so much emotion to a film. It's a thing that can add all the mood and create a larger world. It sets the tone and it moves things. It has great pull into a world - the sound...without it you've lost half the film.*[1]

Cinematic narratives invite us into worlds forged in the imagination of filmmakers. As a member of the audience, we enter their filmic illusions and are prepared to accept the plausibility of the plots they contain. Our senses ignore the two-dimensionality of the screen, the darkness of the room and the four walls that surround us. We seem eager to accept any storyline with equal merit regardless whether the film is presented in a context that represents everyday human experience or offers one that is far from the familiar. To what degree our suspension of disbelief is stretched may rightfully determine the credibility of the narrative and to some extent our level of enjoyment. Consequently, it is essential that filmmakers generate an overall atmosphere that convinces the audience of the authenticity of that narrative. This means that they must generate worlds that seem reasonable enough to contain the characters and the actions that occur there. These ingredients must lend significant support to themes and motifs expressed within the narrative, in order to strengthen further the credibility of the cinematic experience.

Stories told through film utilise a different array of tools than those of a play or a novel. In film, it is possible to communicate a sequence of events through editing and camera angles that determine and control what the eye can and cannot see: films also allow for the realisation of fantastic places that have depth and scope that are beyond the physical constraints of the stage.

[1] This was said by David Lynch in video interview with The School of Sound (reproduced in Sider, Freeman, & Sider, 2003a. *Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures 1998-2001*, p.52).

Through visual effects, filmed narratives persuade us that the impossible is possible. In addition to these visual elements, cinematic worlds are also conveyed through dialogue, music and sound effects. Since establishing the proof of their commercial viability in 1927, American filmmakers[2] have mainly utilised these aural ingredients to emphasise the visuals, to no greater extent than a stage play. The general use of these elements has been to promote comprehension and defuse any confusion of the narrative. A great majority of filmmakers have conventionally employed music to underscore emotion; they have, for the most part, used dialogue to define characters and sound effects to accentuate specific objects on the screen.

The use of sound ingredients as a thematic or symbolic device within the narrative has been much less prominent throughout American film history. The primary function of sound has been one of utility, that is, to provide aural replication of visual objects within the diegesis. Its role has been generally considered to be subservient to the image, and thus peripheral to the narrative. It has seldom been viewed as a film ingredient that is integral to the storytelling process. A majority of filmmakers in the industry in the United States still view the motion picture as simply that - a moving image. As such, there is more focus on the visual elements of the narrative than on the aural. One can observe this mindset in the actual filmmaking process, where sound editors, mixers and designers are rarely invited to begin work before post-production. The near-domination of the image can also be noted in the fact that the language used to describe how one experiences a film is usually expressed in visual terminology.[3] Furthermore, film critics and

[2] Though this bias is an international phenomenon, the United States serves as the frame of reference for this paper. The reasoning for this is that the Coens are American filmmakers, working in the economical and socio-cultural context of the United States and whose films are also distinctly American. In addition, the Coens' emergence within (and around) the Studio System is not easily comparable to non-American filmmakers of the last two decades, as most (if not all) non-American films are produced independently.

[3] For example, most people talk about 'watching' or 'seeing' a film and audience members are usually referred to as 'spectators' or 'viewers'.

reviewers seldom draw attention to representational uses of music, sound effects and dialogue. Their articles and reviews mainly allude to narrative themes or an actor's performance; both of which are often connected solely to a visual referent.

As filmed narratives (both fiction and non-fiction) already consist of sound and image, it may seem a moot point to argue in favour of the greater integration of aural elements. However, this argument needs to be made because inclusion does not necessarily mean that any significant value has been assigned to them. A great majority of films (especially those made after 1927) would be rendered impotent by the absence of music, sound effects and dialogue. For example, some of these films would be liable to wholly different interpretations. On this basic level, aural ingredients in a film can greatly determine the impact the narrative is to make on the audience; as such, they should not be relegated to a low priority or viewed as an afterthought. The end goal of this argument is not to reverse the pendulum in the direction of music, sound effects and dialogue but it is to show that they are indispensable and integral to the storytelling process.

Suggesting a more meaningful integration of sound and image is also important to the greater body of literature in film studies. Currently, film sound theorists are a small minority. They are championing an aspect of filmmaking that has been marginalised within the industry. Therefore, much of their literature is read mainly by those working in sound or those keenly interested in sound. Supporting and educating colleagues in this way is vital, but it is also essential that the ideas inherent in their work are introduced to a wider audience, especially directors. Beyond the thought-provoking discussions of abstract concepts and sound creation designs, it would be valuable to suggest potential applications of these theories within the film

industry. Other recourse may create a separate enclave of sound-conscious individuals, who (though well-meaning) would be merely writing papers for one another, and thus diminishing any chance for overall change in the industry. In response to this, the intention of this paper is to bridge the gap between not only academia and the industry, but also between factions within the industry.

The first objective of this thesis is to readdress the bias against the aural aspect of filmmaking. In order to do this, it is necessary to examine a number of related areas. The depth to which this bias pervades film production history in the United States is discussed. It shows that despite the advances in technology and the developments in aural aesthetics, American filmmakers have consistently failed to exploit the more creative expressions of sound. This thesis argues that it was business practices that heavily influenced this aesthetic choice, rather than artistic considerations. Early and contemporary film industry procedures, in terms of the acknowledgement and priority given to sound crewmembers and composers, reinforces this economic argument. This is especially noteworthy in terms of the exclusion of sound practitioners during the production and what precludes them from participating sooner.

The second goal of this thesis is to demonstrate, through the use of mostly secondary source documentation and the author's personal interviews, that the work of Joel and Ethan Coen stands in contrast to this long-standing partiality in Hollywood. Evidence is provided that their relatively consistent work habits and their collaborative relationships with co-workers set them apart from many of the other contemporary filmmakers. These practices encourage a greater integration of elements within their films. As such, the

Coen brothers serve as a model of how filmmakers can strive towards achieving a more meaningful partnership between sound and image.

Above all, this paper proposes a different way of working that is based on closer collaboration among the entire filmmaking crew. It challenges the extensive fragmentation that has complicated the American film industry since nearly its inception. It suggests that these divisions have been the main cause of breakdowns in communication, as they have polarised job duties and responsibilities. In doing so, they have also perpetuated an unawareness of the other tasks and individuals involved in film construction, namely those responsible for the soundtrack. It is advocated, through the model recommended in this paper, that by increasing the interaction among composers, sound designers and directors that focus on the end product, as oppose to their individual input, they could help break down these barriers so film becomes more of a collaborative effort. Moreover, by readdressing the issues involved in these working relationships, further impetus will be given to re-evaluating the roles and functions afforded to a film's aural content. This suggests that by following and/or building on this model, future filmmakers will be able to design films, where sound is a more integral ingredient in storytelling.

This introductory section has provided a brief overview of the bases for the arguments made in this paper. What follows is a review of the texts by writers and filmmakers considered essential to the thesis and the issues surrounding it.

Literature Review

Descriptions and analyses of film sound are part of a burgeoning field of study with a wide assortment of topic areas, and as such it is felt that the inclusion of a detailed literature review would detract from the paper as a whole. Furthermore, there are few analyses of the sound-worlds created by Joel and Ethan Coen.[4] This section of the thesis, therefore, highlights the broad scope of research taken by earlier exponents of film sound in their attempts to forge a new field of study (e.g. Eisenstein, Altman, Chion). It chiefly draws attention to historical, theoretical and practical viewpoints. Texts that have become seminal, such as Weis and Belton's *Sound Film: Theory and Practice*, are given particular emphasis. This is followed by a brief description of sound film history and the introduction of material related to the Coen brothers' work. Deeper scrutiny with regard to cinema history and the Coens are withheld until a later section in the paper. Therefore, the purpose of this section is not only to establish the foundations for the claims made in this paper, but it is also to show the rationale behind the selection of specific literature.

[4] At the time of writing this thesis, there is only one documented is Philip Brophy's article on the sound of BLOOD SIMPLE (1983). For further reading, see Brophy's website (*http://media-arts.rmit.edu.au/*).

General Overview of the Literature

Throughout cinema history, the contributions of aural ingredients are absent in a great number of the texts concerning film and filmmaking. A majority focus on the visual aspects alone. To a significant degree, they reinforce the conventional process of storytelling, established by the American film industry. Normally, narration is attributed to how filmmakers edit the picture, followed by discussions on camera movement and mise-en-scene. As Allan Rowe explained in *An Introduction to Film Studies* (1996, p.102, 106, 109):

> Having assembled other components of our shots, the next procedure involves a process of recording these elements [...] Having created the pro-filmic event and lit it, the next set of choices surround the positing of the camera [...] Having established the codes contributing to our understanding of the single shot, we can now look at the combination of shots which construct a film flowing over time [...] The final element in constructing the 'image' of a film is the soundtrack.

A considerable number of texts on the art of filmmaking have rarely included the wider dimensions of sound. Moreover, if it is included, it is often considered in its service to the image, as in the quote above. For the most part, academics and researchers in film studies (and associated arts) have ignored how music, sound effects and dialogue affect and enrich the narrative. In doing so, academia has also indirectly reinforced the emphasis on the non-aural aspects of filming.

General theoretical approaches to film, such as Genre Criticism, Auteur Theory and the psychoanalytical theories of film, have had a propensity to ignore items related to sound. In response, a small number of scholars have begun to incorporate the properties and functions of aural elements into their theoretical understandings of sound over the past few decades. Many texts having been written on film music and many composers having discussed the nature of their work, but only the more contemporary texts consider how

music complements the internal structure of the film: e.g. Claudia Gorbman's *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (1987). Sound effects and to a lesser extent, dialogue, are also gaining more recognition as much more powerful tools in filmmaking. There is evidence of greater interest in their thematic and symbolic functions and a growing number of academics are now incorporating film noise and ambient effects into their analyses of film content.[5] This new literature tends to explore aural ingredients either in terms of how they complement one another or in terms of how they contribute to the narrative as a single unit.

There are quite a large number of texts on the practical aspects of filmmaking. Most are written as training manuals for those learning (or teaching) the various crafts and skills involved in film production. These 'how-to' books or articles almost always focus on technique, usually in the form of personal anecdote, where advice or instruction is given by a professional working in the film industry. Examples would include cinematographer John Alton's *Painting with Light* (1995) and Karel Reisz's *The Technique of Film Editing* (1995 [originally published in 1953]). Over the years, these types of texts have begun to feature the practical techniques of film sound. Most are written to the exclusion of the other elements of sound and few incorporate the theory that underpins the guidance they offer.[6] Nevertheless, in some of the current literature, practitioners and scholars are starting to equate theory with practice, such the Sider, Freeman and Sider's (editors) anthology of professionals, academics and artists, entitled *Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures 1998 - 2001* (2003).

[5] These include Bordwell and Thompson's chapter on sound in *Film Art: An Introduction* (2004), Altman's anthology entitled *Sound Theory/Sound Practice* (1992) and Chion's *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (1994). In addition, the various functions of human speech are discussed in Kozloff's *Overhearing Film Dialogue* (2000).

[6] Exceptions to this are Bell's *Getting the Best Score for Your Film: A Filmmaker's Guide to Music Scoring* (1994), Holman's *Sound for Film and Television* (2002) and Kenny's *Sound for Picture: The Art of Sound Design in Film and Television* (2000), an anthology of interviews with sound practitioners regarding films of the 1990s.

The following is an elaboration on the abovementioned texts. There is special emphasis on those that give support to the theoretical and historical viewpoints expressed in the main body of the thesis. Those of that have become seminal to the study of film sound are discussed first. The two subsequent sections explore literature immediately germane to the most significant topic areas of this paper: film sound history and the Coen brothers. The intention is to provide a framework for the research in these areas thus far. In relation to all the above literature, brief comments are also provided on how this thesis will develop these topics later in the paper.

Foundational Texts in Film Sound Theory

Widespread research in film sound began in the 1980s. The factors involved in this are manifold. Firstly, it formed the 'latter' part of the increase in the greater academic acceptance of film studies that had begun in France several decades earlier. Secondly, it also was inspired by the advent of cine-literate filmmakers in the 1970s (e.g. Scorsese, Coppola and Lucas), who had been educated about sound's wider potential. Thirdly, the general public had become more aware of sound as the result of better fidelity for home stereo systems.

Prior to this, the majority of papers on sound were written by practitioners for professional periodicals, such as *SMPTE journal* and *Mix*. Their focus was either practical or in the cases of Sponable and Kellogg, they involve annotated timelines of the technological development of film sound.[7] Such professional journals had little concern for theory and few discussed the sound practitioner's role in film construction. Their purpose was principally to educate or inform those working in the industry. They had no scholastic objective.[8]

The first wave of academic interest in film sound can be noted through the publication of a number of anthologies on film sound. One of the first was an entire volume of *Yale French Studies* (no.60) dedicated to sound theory in 1980. Under the title 'Cinema/Sound', various aspects of film sound were investigated with the purpose of challenging conventional ideas about all three

[7] Sponable wrote *Historical Development of Sound Films* in 1947 and Kellogg wrote *History of Sound Motion Pictures* in 1955. The latter also contains an extensive technical bibliography.
[8] More recent professional journals would include *Studio Sound*, *Audiomedia* and *Millimeter*. They too adhere to technical and mechanical aspects of film sound production.

aural elements.[9] The intention of these articles was to counter the two fundamental myths regarding film sound: the *historical fallacy* and the *ontological fallacy*. In the introduction to the volume, Rick Altman (p.14) posited the former to be the belief that

> [film was] an art, which once lacked sound, had the capabilities of sound reproduction added to it [...] implicitly hierarchizing them [...] ergo in film analysis of sound cinema sound [was treated] as an afterthought, a supplement which the image is free to take or leave as it chooses.

The latter fallacy is the belief that "film is a visual medium and that the images must be/are the primary carriers of the film's meaning and structure" (p.14).[10] Dispelling these myths has come to form the basis of all future film sound theory. To explain the source of these misconceptions, Altman (p.15) added that these fallacies "are the prescriptive arguments of silent filmmakers intent on preserving the purity of their 'poetic' medium". However, despite the focus of a majority of the articles in this volume of Yale French Studies being to dispute these myths, a few still give pre-eminence to the image, which weakens their position. For example, in reference to synchronisation, Daniel Percheron (p.16) states that "the opposition, sound 'on'/sound 'off'[...] depends on the image, and consequently testifies to the image's primacy".

Though not as widespread, the legacy of the mentality expressed in these fallacies still remains. For example, there is still a preponderance of gaze and spectatorship theories that discuss film as a form of voyeurism but ignore the presence of sounds involved in that 'experience'. As expressed in this summary of Sobchak's model of film in *The Address of the Eye: The Phenomenology of Film* (1992):

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[9] These include: Gorbman's *Narrative Film Music*, Altman's *Moving Lips: Cinema as Ventriloquism*, Thompson's *Early Sound Counterpoint* and Andrew's *Sound in France: The Origins of a Native School*. It also contained a reprint of Metz's *Aural Objects*.

[10] An excerpt was also reprinted in Weis & Belton's *Sound Film: Theory and Practice*.

> Film is not just an object of the viewer's vision; it is also a 'viewing subject' - not that film is human but that it is an act of vision with both a subjectivity that views and a view that is seen (Williams 1997, p.9).[11]

It is also evident, as previously mentioned, in academia's (and laymen's) continual use of terms strictly related to vision to discuss film, such as 'motion picture', 'spectator' or 'viewer' and 'seeing' or 'watching'. Though it seems perfectly reasonable to consider film in these terms, it has, nonetheless, perpetuated the eminence and domination of image in the literature.

In 1980 Evan Cameron (editor) also published *Sound and the Cinema: The Coming of Sound to American Films.* It too provided a variety of texts on a number of topics related to sound. This anthology differed from the previous text in that it included first-hand accounts from filmmakers and sound practitioners, who had worked during the early days of sound film. These include sound engineer and editor, James G. Stewart, composer, Bernard Herrmann and director, Rouben Mamoulian. Despite the anecdotal nature of these articles, these well-known figures exemplified the rare voices in cinema that decried the conventional thinking of sound. For example, Mamoulian (p.85) extolled the positive aspects regarding the introduction of sound, saying:

> The advent of sound not only enriched the medium but gave it a more comprehensive and aesthetically pleasing form, because sound helped sustain the continuity of image on the screen [versus the disruption by intertitles] [...] The first benefit to my mind, therefore, of the coming of sound was that filmmakers were allowed to maintain the visual flow and continuity of the film.

[11] For further reading on Gaze Theory see Mulvey's 1975 article entitled 'Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema', Doane's 1982 paper entitled 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator' and further essays from Williams' 1997 anthology entitled *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film.*

In yet another example, director, Frank Capra (p.83-84), expressed a rather radical conception of sound's relationship to image in the following:

> Reality is not visuals and sound balanced, but integrated - one indivisible unity. I don't think that you should weigh the visual against the audial aspects of film [...] You're telling a tale; you're communicating. This whole business is communicating from people to people. Not from camera to people, but from actors to audience. If the machinery gets in the way - if you notice too much sound or too much visual - you lose your audience, because you lose the communication and the involvement.

What is valuable about Capra's statement is that it clearly asserts that storytelling is a harmonious conjunction of sound and image. It is an open denial of a hierarchy in the sense that both sound and image are considered parts of the same 'machinery'. Nevertheless, it still places priory on performance as the communicator of the narrative, which equates his concept of cinema to theatre. In addition, the sporadic nature of the book offered no consistency to its structure or content.

The third and most significant anthology of the 1980s was *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* edited by Elizabeth Weis and John Belton. Its publication in 1985 brought together not only a wide number of essays and journal articles about all three aural ingredients, but it also organised them into themes and concepts (e.g. modern sound theory, contemporary innovators and practice and methodology). Their intention in compiling the book came from their awareness of the "inadequacies and gaps in the critical literature on sound" (p.ix). The overall objective of compiling the anthology was to readdress the imbalance of research in sound.

Film Sound: Theory and Practice contains a collection of many of the earliest writings posited on sound.[12] Weis and Belton claim (p.82) these texts, written immediately following the silent-sound conversion, are united in their

[12] They include Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov's 'Statement', Pudovkin's 'Asychronism as a Principle of Film Sound', Clair's 'The Art of Sound' and Cavalcanti's 'Sound in Films'.

sanctioning of noise and music and their disapproval of human speech. Nonetheless, they fail to agree on how sound should be used. For example, Sergei Eisenstein favoured the complete contrapuntal use of sound, where his colleague V. I. Pudovkin favoured a use of sound that produced a more exact rendering of what naturally occurs. What is more, they include Siegfried Kracauer's 1960 article entitled 'Dialogue and Sound' in this section, which criticises those theorists' fear that dialogue would lead to an influx of highly cultured dramas and other photographed performances of the theatrical sort, by stating that they had not realised that "what [they] considered a consequence of dialogue actually existed long before its innovation" (p.126-127).[13] Kracauer does not provide examples of these theatrical performances, but he may be referring to the 'silent' versions of Shakespeare's plays. Kracauer also blatantly asserted that film was a visual medium. He (p.127) argued that it was "the motion picture camera, not the sound camera, which accounts for the most specific contributions of the cinema; neither noises nor dialogue are exclusively peculiar to film". Such comments further demonstrates the aforementioned historical fallacy was still prevalent in the 1960s.

In the excerpt of Bela Balazs' *Theory of Film* (1945) in Weis and Belton's anthology, there is a call for greater recognition of sound itself. Balazs (p.116-117) argued in favour of heightening noise to make them more aware of the natural acousmatic environment; in advice to filmmakers, he said:

> Only when the sound film will have resolved noise into its elements, segregated individual, intimate voices, and made them speak to us separately in vocal, acoustic close-ups; when these isolated detail-sounds will be collated again in purposeful order by sound-montage, will the sound film become a new art.

[13] In fact, in 1927 Clair (p.141) stated that “the dramatic film is built on the model of the theatrical or literary works by minds accustomed to verbal expression alone”.

The various uses of sound (i.e. silence, asychronism, spatial, etc.), therefore, should reflect the everyday experience of the film-goer. In this way, Balazs' seems to be responding to the conservative use of sound at the time. In addition, he held the belief that the picture formed the sound. Balazs (p.117) contended that "the sound of a wave is different if we see its movements". Though there is some truth in this statement, the reverse is just as valid. Ultimately, it would appear that Balasz's 'call' was meant to generate greater sensitivity to properties of sound inside and outside the cinema.

Another valuable asset to Weis and Belton's anthology is the inclusion of a section on practice. This is fleshed out in terms of methodologies, pioneers and innovators. Here, as in *Yale French Studies*, the works of individual filmmakers are considered in terms of their use of sound, such as Welles, Hitchcock and Altman. Borrowing from modern textual criticism, chiefly semiotics, the authors analyse either a single piece of work or a selective number of films by the same filmmaker.[14] For example, Lucy Fischer offered particularly valuable insight into Rouben Mamoulian's use of sound for his 1929 film APPLAUSE. She suggested that the sonic properties he employed in this film granted the world therein a greater cinematic space and for this, he was unlike many of the other directors of his period. She (p.233, 239) stated that he did this by emphasising "the aspect of setting, of the material locale in which the narrative action unfolds", that is, by patterning the aural content on the sonic density of the real world (i.e. layers) and by adjusting sounds as character/camera shifted position. Fischer (p.238) was keen to point out the density of the acoustic space in the film which contrasts it with the visual flatness of most early talkies. Despite the perceptive insights these texts offer, there is very strong suggestion that sole authorship is the director's, as

[14] These include Carroll's *Lang and Pabst: Paradigms of Early Sound Practice*, Hanlon's *Sound in Bresson's Mouchette* and Williams' *Godard's Use of Sound.*

they make little or no mention of the contributions made by the sound crew or composers.[15]

One of the first non-anthology texts to offer a section on sound was actually published in 1979. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's *Film Art: An Introduction* has now become a seminal text for contemporary education in film studies.[16] Its chapter on film sound is primarily concerned with how sound can be used to "actively shape how the audience interpret the image" either by clarifying them, contradicting them or rendering them ambiguous (p.348).[17] Bordwell and Thompson cited the example of Chris Marker's LETTER FROM SIBERIA to illustrate this. They (p.348) stated:

> Three times Marker plays the same footage - a shot of a bus passing a car on the street, three shots of workers paving a street. But each time the footage is accompanied by a completely different sound track [...] The verbal difference are emphasized by the sameness of the images; the audience will interpret the same images completely differently, depending on the sound track.

Thus, contradicting the argument proposed by Balazs. To illustrate how this is put into practice, Bordwell and Thompson explored the impact of selection, alteration or combination of sounds. For example, they (p.353) stated that "filmmakers often use sound quite unrealistically, in order to shift [the audience's] attention to what is narratively or visually important". In addition, Bordwell and Thompson described how sound relates to the other film elements in terms of rhythm, fidelity, space and time. To highlight a use of rhythm, They (p.364) provided this example based on Jacques Tati's PLAYTIME:

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[15] *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* also contains Gorbman's 'Annotated Bibliography' (reprinted from Yale French Studies) and Handzo's 'Narrative Glossary of Film Sound Technology'. Both designed to encourage further research.
[16] Bordwell and Thompson section on sound also appears as a chapter in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* under the title 'Fundamental Aesthetics of Sound in the Cinema'.
[17] All quotations and page numbers correspond to the 2004 edition.

In the scene outside the Parisian Hotel, tourists climb aboard a bus to a nightclub; as they file slowly up the steps, raucous, jazzy music begins. The music again startles our expectations because it seems inappropriate to the images; in fact, it belongs with the next scene, in which some carpenters awkwardly carrying a large plate-glass window seem to be dancing to the music. By starting the fast music over an earlier scene of slower visual rhythm, Tati creates a comic effect and prepares for a transition to a new space.

Such distinctions encouraged greater awareness of the functions of sound in film. Moreover, as the book was geared towards a general audience as a basic film studies textbook, it had the opportunity to share this understanding of sound across all film disciplines.

Furthermore, Bordwell and Thompson discussed sound's temporal relationship to image in terms of the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic sound. These terms define aural elements as to whether the sound source occurs within the story space or outside of it. In doing so, Bordwell and Thompson redefined film sound's role by relating it to the narrative context. For them (p.331), diegetic describes a sound that is either "visible within the frame - onscreen" (e.g. a person playing a fiddle in shot) or a sound that "comes from within the story [...] but in a space outside the frame" the sound takes place at the same time as the image in terms of the story events" (e.g. an unseen door slamming). Bordwell and Thompson (p.366) define nondiegetic sound as "[that], which is represented as coming from a source outside the story world" (e.g. score or narration). Thus, it differed from the previous notions of synchronisation in that "synchronisation relates to viewing time" (p.372). These distinctions provided a new way of analysing the contributions of aural ingredients. As a result, Bordwell and Thompson's understandings and descriptions of film sound have informed many of the future film sound theories.

One of the first theorists to expand on the concepts introduced in Bordwell and Thompson was Michel Chion. Chion wrote a series of books, starting in

1982, that brought greater depth to the theoretical understandings of sound. His initially trilogy discussed the role sound and the human voice play in film narratives. In *La Voix au Cinéma* (1982), Chion explored the voices privileged position in cinema insomuch that humans are vococentric. The tendency to localise voices demands it be anchored somewhere, and when it is disembodied (i.e. on the telephone, as a voice-over, etc.) it gains power. This is what Chion called an acousmêtre (p.21). Examples include, the mother in PSYCHO (Hitchcock 1960), the fake wizard in the WIZARD OF OZ (Fleming 1939) and Hal 9000 in 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY (Kubrick 1968).

In 1985 Chion published *Le Son au Cinéma* in which he explored the way the emotional tone of a film is expressed through sound. He suggested that noises and music could be used to communicate two different effects: empathetic and anempathetic. He (p.122-126) stated that empathetic effect denotes when the sound "takes on the scene's rhythm, tone and phrasing" so that it emulates the narrative content; whereas anempathetic is describe as the use of sound that is indifferent to the narrative content, which does not freeze emotion, but rather intensifies it, by "inscribing it with a cosmic background".

Chion's ideas on sound would later be expanded upon in his book *Audio-Vision*: *Sound on Screen* (1990). In this text Chion provides an overview of many of the functions and properties of sound. He espouses an appreciation of sound-image relationships on a fundamental level in that he suggests that "there is no natural and pre-existing harmony between sound and image" (p.xvii). Therefore, filmgoer is required to agree that these two elements are participating in the same world together. In addition, Chion expanded on the concepts of offscreen sound by introducing the term acousmatic, meaning "sounds one hears without seeing their originating cause" (ibid., p.71). This

differed from nondiegetic sounds, as they are utterly external to the film world. Despite grounding his theories in practical application and the benefit of a glossary, some of his more extreme positions are difficult to accept and a number of his esoteric views are hard to comprehend.

In addition to his detailed examination of sound-image relationships, Chion also responded to critics[18] that claim that the distinctions of onscreen-acousmatic-nondiegetic sound create too many exceptions: for example, internal monologues. His response was to state that these new conceptualisations of film sound were not absolute; they were merely "analogous to zones among which one finds many shadings, degrees and ambiguities" (ibid., p.75). Additionally, criticising these notions as rigid categories neglects the fundamental concept that sonic elements are created separately from the image and therefore, they can move freely from one category to another. This aural autonomy is expressed in a number ways. It is common in films to give the impression of movement to have sound effects (e.g. footsteps) begin as an acousmatic noise, which then become diegetic as they are synchronised to an image. Film music often shifts from diegetic to nondiegetic (or vice-versa), as heard in numerous musicals.[19]

A further narrative level, called the meta-diegetic, had been suggested by Claudia Gorbman in her 1976 paper entitled 'Teaching the Soundtrack'; a paper that offers teachers and lecturers a sound film syllabus. She (p.450) defined it as any sound that is "apparently 'narrated' or imagined by the character as a secondary narrator" This type of aural ingredient can be heard in instances where a voice echoes in someone's head or the sound is an aural

[18] Chion does not cite these critics and the existence of them in the literature is thus far unknown. It is quite possible that these dissenting voice are French critics that have not been translated into English, which makes them inaccessible to this author.

[19] A précis of many of the theoretical understandings of film sound described by Chion in the above books also appears in Stam & Miller's (editors) *Film and Theory: An Anthology* in 2000. Its inclusion illustrates the growing acceptance of this subject among film theory academics.

hallucination. Gorbman (ibid., p.450) cited the ringing voice of Christopher Cross' (Robinson) murdered wife in SCARLETT STREET (Lang 1945) and the isolation and repetition of the word 'knife' in Hitchcock's BLACKMAIL (1929) as an example of the former and the audible sounds of a mimed tennis match in BLOW-UP (Antonioni 1966) as examples of the latter. This added dimension illustrated how sounds could be used to suggest the psychological aspects of the emotion of a character or the peculiarity of a situation, and thus offers a key insight.

Building on her initial essay in *Yale French Studies*, Gorbman also published a book entitled *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* in 1987. It marks a transition in the study of film music, in that it breaks away from conventional histories or anecdotal accounts of film composers to explore what justifies the use of music in film and what determines its effectiveness within the narrative. To explain it persistence of music in cinema history, Gorbman drew on psychoanalytical theories of Resolato (1974) and Anzieu (1976).[20] In revisiting her argument in the book, Gorbman (in Hill & Gibson 1998, p.47) offered the following summary:

> Film music helps fend off two potential displeasures which threaten the spectator's experience. The first is the threat of ambiguity: the film music deploys its cultural codes to anchor the image in meaning. Second, film music fends off the potential displeasure of spectator's awareness of the technological basis of cinematic discourse - the frame, editing and so on. Like the sonorous envelope, music's bath of affect can smooth the discontinuities and rough spots and mask the recognition of the apparatus through its own melodic and harmonic continuity. Film music thereby acts as a hypnotist inducing a trace: it focuses and binds the spectator into the narrative world

Thus, Gorbman felt that in order for music to 'fend off' these 'displeasures', it must be imperceptible to the audience (i.e. they must not be fully conscious of its presence). Recently, Gorbman's view has been challenged on the basis that such things as effective narrative cueing would disallow music's

[20] See Rosolato's La Voix: Entre Corps et Language' and Anzieu's 'L'Eveloppe Sonore du Soi'. Both discuss how external and internal sounds prime the imagination of an unborn baby.

imperceptibility. For example, Kassabian argued in favour of a certain level of competency in the apprehension of music. She (1993, p.36) suggested that "like any other language, [music] is acquired, learned, in a specific sociohistorical context". Kassabian seems to imply that music also functions on a cognitive as well as emotional level. Despite these arguments and the fact that her theory still gives primacy to the image, Gorbman's deeper explication of film's musical content proved to be catalyst to other theorists.[21]

Altman revisited the broader issues of sound with the publication of the anthology *Sound Theory/Sound Practice* in 1992. In the introduction, he (p.1) acknowledged the shortcomings of 'Yale French Studies' articles as being "too self-contained" and most focused on "semiotics, the relationship between sound and image, or the functioning of sound in a particular textual situation". In this anthology he not only challenged those previous understandings of film sound theory, but by doing so, he hoped to advocate a whole new way of studying film. Altman introduces the concept of cinema as event, rather than cinema as text. By this, he asked researchers to consider the filmgoing experience as a complex phenomenon that embraced a broad number of social, cultural, economic and material factors. With respect to the materiality of film, he (p.6) suggested that, in addition to the acoustic properties of sound, one should include "the technology used to produce them, the apparatus needed for reproduction and the physical relationship between loudspeakers, spectators and their physical surroundings". This perspective further extends the contextual considerations of film sound analysis.

[21] These include: Kalinak's Setting *the Score: Music and the Classic Hollywood Film* (1992), Burt's *The Art of Film Music* (1994), Brown's *Overtones and Undertones* (1994), Lack's *24 Frames Under* (1997) and Morgan's *Knowing the Score: Film Composers Talk about the Art, Craft, Blood, Sweat and Tears for Writing Music for Cinema* (2000).

In one such analysis, 'And Then There Was Sound: The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky', Truppin investigates the use of aural ingredients in the latter works of the filmmaker. She (p.235) focussed on how Tarkovsky's use of ambiguous sounds dissolve the borders that typically separate the various realms of consciousness. It is only the point of audition that persuades the audience that the sounds emanate from the given film world. For example, in MIRROR (1974) a telephone call is heard as a the camera tracks through an empty house. The unchanging quality in the voices makes the characters "visible" but at the same, the lack of a corresponding visual renders the scene to a dream or a memory. In STALKER (1979) Truppin (p.242) stated that "the shifting spatial signature gives credence to the idea promulgated by the Stalker that the Zone is a constantly, shifting, dangerous place". In doing so, Tarkovsky ignores sound-image synchronisation in favour ambience and mood. Ultimately, Truppin (p.247) equates this ambiguity with the

> powerful unseen realms that literally move the material world and, as such, [lend] itself to the representation of the duelling forces of spirituality and the destructive tendencies of modern materialist society.

Tarkovsky's work would suggest that sound can communicate on a more intuitive level due to its invisibility. As such, it suggests a further function of sound. Truppin's analysis, however, reinforces sole authorship of the director, which seems to deny the more comprehensive approach advocated by Altman. In spite of this, this method forms the basis of the film analyses undertaken in this paper.

Despite the radical shift advocated by Altman et al, it soon became absorbed with the many other approaches to film sound, as the mid to late 1990s saw a move towards unifying theory and practice. At this time, Lobrutto published his series of interviews with various sound practitioners in 1994 (e.g. Walter Murch. Mark Mangini and Skip Lievsay). Though predominately technical and

practical, its very publication denoted a joint attempt to promote film sound. In addition, the School of Sound, a series of conferences, established in 1998, began to bring together an international audience from many different fields (i.e. practitioners, artists and academics). In addition, www.filmsound.org, developed by Sven E. Carlsson in 1997,[22] has provided a central location for practitioners and academics to disseminate a wider understanding of film sound.[23] That said, this cohesion is mainly one of people, not one of ideas. Hence, there is still an ever-increasing number of texts in circulation. Most of which draw upon the aforementioned literature.

One important text that emerged during that period was Sarah Kozloff's *Overhearing Film Dialogue* published in 2000. As the first major text on the essential contributions dialogue makes to a film's development and impact, its initial purpose is to address the partiality against human speech that has existed since the birth of the talkies.[24] Kozloff (p.14) asserted:

> Perhaps the most noteworthy consequence of this anti-dialogue bias is that it has led to misconceptions in our model how films actually work. Many of the ways in which narrative is communicated, empathy elicited, themes conveyed, visuals interpreted come from the interactions of the words with the visuals images. Ignoring the role of the words has led to overestimation of what viewers understand from the visuals and editing alone.

Moreover, Kozloff firmly rejected the complete dismal of dialogue as something that is "supplemental" or "added" to the visual, as suggested by Chion.[25] She (p.18) wrote:

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[22] This is the year it was offered in English. It had been originally developed in Swedish in November 1996.
[23] Subsequently, Carlsson has created an online forum for interested parties to ask and answer non-technical questions related to film sound.
[24] For other examples of texts on dialogue see Brophy's 'Read My Lips: Notes on Writing and Speaking of Film Dialogue' (1992), Devereaux's 'Of Talk and Brown Furniture: The Aesthetics of Film Dialogue' (1986), Fawell's 'The Musicality of Speech' (1989) and Kozloff's earlier book, *The Invisible Storyteller: Voice-over Narration in American Fiction Film* (1988).
[25] To highlight the value added by text, Chion (1994, p.6-7) offered the example of a anchorman on French television who is commenting on air show being transmitted from the UK. Chion explained that his words were "redundant"

> 'Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn' is not some supplemental, optional addition to the image of Clark Gable walking out the door at the end of GONE WITH THE WIND (1939); these words both explain the reason he is leaving and mete out a measure of revenge. The shots and pantomime without these words - with their exact mixture of politeness, affectation, anger and resignation - would not be just less effective, but totally different.

Kozloff asserted to two main arguments to support her study. The first is that film dialogue is "truly meant for an offscreen listener", that is, it is purposely designed so that film-goers can collaborate in the narrative (p.16). This is most often made evident through expositional dialogue, where the audience is primed for the action that is to follow. However, it can also reveal character. Kozloff (p.43) explained:

> Each time a character opens his mouth, filmgoers learn more about him - is his accent 'upper class' or 'hillbilly'? Is he or she polite? brusque? thoughtful? quick? lazy? Does the voice carry a calm authority (Alec Guinness as Obi Wan Kenobi) or a brittle nervousness (Anthony Daniels as C-3P0).

It can also help in establishing the film's setting. Kozloff (p.35) asserted:

> Films use dialogue to identify the diegetic world. That flat farmland could have been anywhere - Oklahoma, Texas, Nebraska - but when Dorothy says, "Toto, I don't think we're in Kansas anymore", it because Kansas.

She also commented on the stylistic variables involved in speaking to the audience, such as the amount of words in each turn,[26] the number of participants, the lack of intellectual language in American films and the use of repetition. In reference to the normal give-and-take of conversations, Kozloff (p.74-75) expressed these two extremes:

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and that any statement could have been made. He said that “their redundancy was illusory, since in each case these statements would have guided and structured our vision so that would have seen them ‘naturally’ in the image”.

[26] A ‘turn’ denotes the give-and-take involved in ordinary conversation. Each individual in a conversation is offered the ‘turn’ to speak, regardless if they utter a word. These ‘turns’ form the structure of a conversation.

> The viewer [can be] put in an inferior position, shut out for the closeness [of the characters in conversation], trying to catch up [...] On the other hand, movies can put the spectator in a superior position, listening to all the characters who have difficulties understanding one another [...] Most often characters misunderstand one another because they lack some information or because they are operating under false presumptions.

Here, again, she further illustrates the level of interaction between audience and the film.

The second main purpose of Kozloff's investigation of film dialogue is that "genre conventions have been powerful in shaping film dialogue, ultimately equally or even more influential than time period" (p.26). Following her detailed descriptions of various film forms, Kozloff (p.267) offered this summary of some of her points:

> Film noirs use short sentences, urban slang, unusual metaphors, toppers,[27] and questions. All war films feature the collision of national languages, and they constantly use dialogue to discuss meaning and rectitude of the military conflict, but a seismic change in the corporation of obscenity separates Vietnam films from those about earlier wars. Sports films regularly build up to a climax in a coach's motivational locker-room speech; this speech act is nearly as important as the final championship game.

To answer potential critics that might attribute these expressions of dialogue to the work of a director or screenwriter, Kozloff (p.268) concluded with this detailed reply:

> I am convinced in terms of dialogue, genre and source material (which itself is determined by genre) trump individual style. TWENTIETH CENTURY does not sound like WUTHERING HEIGHTS, even though Hecht and McArthur wrote both; BALL OF FIRE sounds nothing like SUNSET BOULEVARD, even though Billy Wilder co-wrote both; [etc.] Perhaps minute textual analysis would find recurring patterns of vocabulary and sentence structure, but these don't rise to a noticeable level. Only in the case of screenwriters who repeatedly work in one genre - Preston Sturges's comedies, Bordon Case's Westerns, [etc.] - would one be likely to find a consistent style of dialogue. And as for directors, given the prevailing prejudices against film speech, we know little about their characteristic approaches. The same small handful of insights

[27] 'Toppers' are "retorts that attempt to close off a conversational topic by their finality or nastiness […] A classic example can be heard in Bob Fosse's CABARET (1972), when Sally and Brian are upset by the influence on their lives of the wealthy Maximillian. Brian shouts in anger, 'Screw Maximillian!' Sally thinks that she will devastate Brian when she answers: 'I do.' But Brian tops her with his more surprising, "So do I.'" (Kozloff 2000, p.75).

> repeat endlessly: Capra is corny, Hawks favors overlapping dialogue, Welles manipulates sound perspective, Altman uses radio mikes, Joseph Mankiewicz lets everyone talk too much. Perhaps this study can be of some use to auteur-orientated critics wishing to refine our understanding of directors' approach to their sound tracks.

Despite the consistent use of image-based terminology, Kozloff's text draws attention to yet another under-researched topic in film sound, with the intention of re-orienting readers to its wider possibilities. What is more, it encourages scholars to build on the foundational evidence provided in her book.

What can be noted from the above collection of texts is that there is little dissention. Few authors criticise one another and there is yet no evidence of other areas of film studies having denounced this movement in film sound. What it does show is a united front in favour of championing the significant contributions of sound as well as the strong condemnation of the dominance of image. Nonetheless, these texts are not part of a systematic view of film sound. These overarching themes may exist in all of the literature but there is little agreement between academics and author-filmmakers on how these theories should be applied. The motivation behind this can easily be attributed to their desire to "fill the gaps" in the research in an attempt to promote a new field of study. This thesis, therefore, is an attempt to unify some of these ideas, while continuing to add to the literature in its endeavour to forge a new field of study. There is also further description of the various functions of all three elements of film sound in Appendix A to supplement the film analyses in this paper.

Film Sound History

Cavalcanti (in Weis & Belton 1985, p.98) asserted that "at no period in history of films has it been customary to show them publicly without some sort of sound accompaniment". This evidenced in the use of primitive phonographs, orchestral or organ accompaniment, hand-generated sound effects (e.g. sirens, thunder and child crying), verbal commentaries and actors providing dialogue from behind the screen. but a number of films had spoken commentary. All of which declares that films were never totally silent. What is more, it suggests that had proper amplification been available at the inception, the inclusion of sound would not have been in question.[28]

The movement towards film sound in America was a journey of technological development and economics. It marks one the fastest transition in history: the conversion was all but complete in two years. Gomery (ibid., p.22) explained:

> The widespread adoption of sound - the diffusion - took place quickly and smoothly [...] Since an enormous potential for profit existed, it was incumbent on the [major studios] to make the switchover as rapidly as possible.

In contrast, the Europeans were much more hesitant and for the most part hostile to the introduction of sound. Lead by the French, they not only rejected the idea of talk, but they feared this would lead to embracing Hollywood's less artistic sensibilities. Andrew (1980, p.98) stated that "the French were, in general, stridently opposed to the very existence of sound, if for no other reason than it meant further domination of themes and styles of Hollywood". It is for this reason that France aligned itself with Germany in an

[28] For further reading on the sound of silent films, see Abel and Altman's anthology entitled *The Sounds of Early Cinema* (2001).

attempt to preserve a European front. Though short-lived, due the Depression and World War Two leading to American dominance in the market, it denotes how the introduction of sound helped to demarcate the difference between American and European filmmakers.

The Hollywood style that evolve out of those initial sound films was one that foregrounded talk. This allowed the Studios to compete with the immense popularity of radio and those that capitalised on this, namely Warner Brothers and Fox Film Corporation, bolstered their economic position among the other film producers. By focussing on talk, or singing, films began to resemble staged performances: a convention that would remain a mainstay of the Studio era.

Eyman summarises the American aesthetic in his book *The Speed of Sound: Hollywood and the Talkie Revolution, 1926-1930*. He (1997, p.20) stated:

> Sound changed everything. It changed how movies were made, of course, but more importantly, it changed what movies were [...] Sound standardised movies, made them less malleable, less open to individual interpretation. Allusion and metaphor were the bedrocks of the silent medium, but dialogue literalized every moment, converted it from subjectivity to objective.

The introduction of film sound also altered the strategies taken for film production and the relationships between crewmembers. Eyman (ibid., p.20-21) added:

> Sound demanded writers of dialogue, and it seemed as if anyone with the most modest theatrical or journalistic credentials was imported into Hollywood [...] along with New York journalists, it [also] brought a mass importation of one union or another who saw no reason why Hollywood should be exempt from the same nominal bargaining as New York.

Further advancement in sound film technology during the Hollywood studio era (circa 1930-1965), such as double optical and magnetic recording, did not equate to a more integral use of aural ingredients. Conventional use relegated them to a utility and/or an afterthought. Dialogue remained dominant and sound effects were used sparingly, synchronised with the image. Music, fared much better than the other sonic ingredients, due to its well-established artistic status. Nonetheless, despite the introduction of more musical forms (e.g. jazz, rock'n'roll and electronic), a majority of scores during the Studio era simply mirrored the action on screen.

Exceptions did exist, but their rarity seems to be the norm.[29] Standardisation and conservative thinking about sound production (or post-production) and the marginalisation of sound practitioners during this period also coincides with a large gap in the literature. Beck, in his unpublished thesis, entitled *A Quiet Revolution: Changes in American Film Sound Practices, 1967-1979*, attempted to explicate the industrial determinants that lead to a mark difference in working practices during that period. He especially drew attention to the sound crew's struggle for recognition during the Studio era. Beck blamed the compartmentalisation and unionisation of the film industry. He (2003, p.230,289) said:

> The unions structure was often antithetical to the technological and aesthetic changes occurring in Hollywood [...] They reacted in ways that sought to protect the interests of their constituents often without regard to how their actions might affect the recording and reproduction of film sound.

In the practice of sound recording and mixing, the division of labour was tightly regulated and divided into subunits controlling dialogue, effects, and music recording. It is because of this unbridgeable barrier between divisions

[29] The two examples explored in this thesis are KING KONG (Copper 1933) and CITIZEN KANE (Welles 1941).

in soundtrack construction that there was an impossibility of developing a 'sound auteur' during the heyday of the studio system.

Beck continued (ibid., p.289) by declaring how these divisions had an immediate impact on the next generation of sound practitioners and the expressions of film sound:

> Moreover, the development of Dolby stereo, with its very specific demands for the literal centrality of dialogue mixing, ensured that the recording apparatus encapsulated and perpetuated the divisions of labor from classical Hollywood. This 'vertical' hierarchy of labor had become inscribed in the apparatus, thereby giving rise to continuity between the hierarchical division of labor in Hollywood and mixing practices in an era of Dolby Stereo. The result was that sound practices remained tied to the narratively determined constraints of central character development at the cost and neglect of a progressive and experimental audio.

To improve their status in the filmmaking hierarchy, sound editors created the Motion Picture Sound Editors (MPSE) organisation in 1953. Its function was educational and social, with the objective to "make the job of the sound editor visible to a larger population of Hollywood professionals and non-professionals" (ibid., p.267). To counter the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science's marginalisation of these practitioners, they created a special award ceremony for sound editors and for films that employed sound in innovative ways. Though sound effects editors were not recognised for their individual achievement by the Academy until 1982, the MPSE significantly bolstered the awareness of film sound and film sound professionals.

Following the collapse of the Studios, and the advent of Dolby noise reduction technologies, sound gained much wider recognition. It was in this period of flux that filmmakers as well as sound practitioners were beginning to challenge conventional thinking on sound film production. This is epitomised by American Zoetrope in their desire to avoid "the bureaucratic/technical

swamp at the studios", they established themselves outside Hollywood, both figuratively and literally (Murch 1995, p.244). Their rationale regarding their approach to sound is summarised by sound designer and picture editor Walter Murch (1995, p.245), who said:

> We felt that, given the equipment that was becoming available in 1968, there was a now no reason for the person who came up with the sounds and prepared the tracks not to be able to mix them. The director would then be able to talk to one person about the sound in the film the way he was able to talk to the director of photography about the look of the film. Responsibility for success or failure would lie squarely with that person, and because communication problems would be reduced or eliminated, the chances of success would be increased.

This was also possible because Murch was non-union and therefore did not have to restrict his responsibilities to post-production.[30] As a result of this revolutionary approach, Murch and other like-minded individuals began redefining the position of sound practitioner and with it, the understanding of sound's centrality to film construction has grown.

The legacy of Murch is apparent throughout the industry today. In the last two decades, sound designers and composers are enjoying much more appreciation than they had done previously. More sound practitioners are working as editors and mixers, and many are benefiting from name recognition (e.g. Randy Thom and Gary Rydstrom).[31] What is more, educational institutions, such as the National Film and Television School are beginning to challenge the long-standing conventions of Hollywood. The need to see theory and practice work hand-in-hand is becoming much more prevalent.[32]

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[30] This is explained in much greater detail in Part 2.
[31] This has always been much more common for composers.
[32] For example, in 2001 Sonnenschein published *Sound Design: The Expressive Power of Music, Voice and Sound Effects in Cinema* in the attempt to ground Chion's theories in practical application.

Despite the above texts, the majority of literature on film history still remains relatively sporadic or incomplete. Many speak of the transition from silent to sound film without progressing further and most neglect the wider complexities involved in the historical development of film sound.[33] It is, therefore, the intention of this thesis to add to the above material sources related to the technological, economic and socio-cultural aspects of film sound's creation and innovation.

[33] For example, Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (1985), Schatz's *Genius of the System* (1988) and Maltby's *Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (1995).

Joel and Ethan Coen

Kolker (1998, p.18) defines the classical Hollywood style as one that

> asks the form be rendered invisible; that the viewer see the presence of actors in an unfolding story that seems to exist on its own; that the audience be embraced by that story, identifying with it and its participants [...] it is a form that placates its audience, foregrounds story and characters and satisfies and creates in the audience a desire to see (and pay for) more of the same.

Since the late 1950s this approach has been challenged. A new generation of educated filmmakers considered this style passé, which include the aforementioned Coppola, Scorsese and Lucas. They also shared with their audience a collective knowledge of cinema's past and its artifice. As such, most of these filmmakers embraced the Brechtian view suggested by representatives of the French New Wave (e.g. Godard and Truffaut) or the narrative mode of the Italian neo-realists (e.g. De Sica). Elsaesser (in Kramer 1998, p.300) identified these filmmakers as 'New Hollywood'; with the addition of the above, this group was characterised by "radical scepticism, a liberal outlook and no explicitly intellectual narrative construction".

Joel and Ethan Coen were two of many filmmakers of the subsequent generation, who were motivated by the above filmmakers' independence from Hollywood conventions and their want to avoid Studio intervention. Their general approach to narrative is to synthesise or subvert established film forms. As Bergen (2000, p.26) stated:

> The Coens, from their very first film, were interested in working outside the rules of a genre, and then breaking it from within. They distil the essence of the genre so that each film contains every element that we expect from a film noir, gangster movie, detective thriller, or cons-on-the-run picture, the boundaries being pushed as far as they can go, deconstructing conventional narratives [...] they have found a visual language (and a verbal one) that translates the past into the present.

Through this radical eclecticism, the Coen brothers have forged their own idiosyncratic style, deeply rooted in cinema. Mottram (2000, p.5) stated that they are "masters of bricolage, [their] hybrid works are fuelled, consciously or otherwise, by an appreciation for the medium they work in". In addition, the Coens' work functions as a hybrid between independent and commercial filmmaking, that is, their work questions "the old dichotomy between mass entertainment and high culture" (Palmer 1988, p.3). All of which grants them their own signature style.

The Coens overall approach to working in the American film industry has been just as unconventional. The focus is not on strict deadlines or financial implications or reaching a market, but on product (i.e. the film). Composer, Carter Burwell (in Lippy 2000, p.41) summarised the general work ethos, by commenting:

> If you meet Joel and Ethan, you'll realize that when working with them you don't feel the pressure of schedule, or millions of dollars, or audience response, bearing down on you [...] It's a very relaxed atmosphere [...] They give you a lot of comfort to do what you do best; they put a lot of trust in the people they work with.

This comfortable atmosphere forms the cornerstone of the Coens' whole approach to filmmaking. Joel Coen (in Körte 1998, p.15) explained "We don't go and make films with huge expectations about their commercial potential [...] It doesn't upset us, we don't want everybody to love us". Even in financial partnership with Hollywood, they have managed to create a comfort zone. They negotiated for less funding in exchange for final cut and total artistic control.

The Coen brothers' attitude towards filmmaking is also observable in their working relationships with cast and crew, namely in their regular employment

of Carter Burwell as composer and Skip Lievsay as supervising sound editor/mixer. Burwell's music complements the Coens' style by

> always [seeking] ways to side-step conventional methods of 'emotional cueing' an audience with snippets of mood music. Burwell's prime eclecticism lies in a strange mismatching, whereby his cues at first appear to 'not fit' - but reveal a depth that is rooted in the complex storytelling craft of the Coen's narratives (Brophy 1999, p.15).

In comparing his work with Martin Scorsese to the Coen brothers, Lievsay (in Sherwood 1992, p.14) gave this detailed description:

> [My] task, then, is to fit each director with a soundtrack that with his own filmmaking style. With Scorsese we have to program a lot of temp mixes and lot of cleaning of scenes, looping and sound effects, and we work scene by scene and provide certain tracks right alongside while they're editing [...] The Coen brothers are very different. Their sound stuff is written into the script and they have a complete overview of what they want, therefore, we have fewer designs to come up with. [In BARTON FINK] we would spot and cut and go over things in great detail, then use the Synclavier and do some sampling, then we put up some sound elements on the computer and screen them in great detail before we go on.

Though no value judgment is made on either process, it clearly illustrates Lievsay's flexibility in accommodating the Coens' mode of production. Both sound practitioners suggest a strong desire to adapt themselves to their method of narrative construction.

While at the School of Sound in 2001, Burwell (in Sider, Freeman and Sider 2003, p.195) explained his overall approach to music as being twofold. Both reflected in his work with the Coen brothers. Firstly, it is

> to provide the audience with information [...] It tells you about character, it tells you about story, plot, mood, and by the use of motifs that recur, it creates connections, either subliminally or consciously, for the audience";

Secondly, borrowing from Gorbman's *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, it is there to "bathe [the audience] in affect, not for any specific

reason". He also expressed that this latter point was an important reason to exclude music from a film. He (ibid., p.196) explained:

> Without the music you would often be in a position of confusion and discomfort [...] for me, life is a lot more interesting, I'm a lot more alert, a lot more awake, when I'm confused and uncomfortable and I like to try to put as little music as I can in the films I work on, and convince directors of that.

As a result, the scores in most Coen brothers' films are repetitious, they rarely correspond to the action onscreen and they often lack a continuous flow so that other aural ingredients can emerge from sonic space.

Lievsay's approach to sound editing and mixing is, as stated above, to serve the needs of the filmmaker and their given film. In his work with the Coen brothers, Lievsay's work begins at script-level. As an example, Lievsay (in Lobrutto 1992, p.259) said, "if you read the scripts of BARTON FINK or MILLER'S CROSSING then look at the picture, you can see that there's an integral relationship". His understanding of the function of film sound goes beyond generating aural representations of the image. For Lievsay (ibid., p.258), the purpose of sound in film is to "progress the story mechanically or psychologically". Most importantly, he respects the contribution of the composer, especially when the music is integral to the scene. Lievsay (Sherwood 1992, p.14) sees his role is "to protect rather than compete with the music". In doing so, his sound designs not only augment the narrative content of Joel and Ethan Coen's films, but they also accommodate the musical content of Burwell's score.

The Coen brothers' approach to filmmaking has not been without its critics. Most cite style over substance. In response to BLOOD SIMPLE (1983), their first film, Pauline Kael (p.81-82) decried them as "amateurs", saying:

> [the film] has no sense of what we would normally think of as 'reality' and it has no connection with 'experience' [...] It isn't really about anything except making a movie outside the industry.

Tom Ayres (1987, p.42) suggested the Coens operated in terms of "alienation", in these comments about RAISING ARIZONA (1987):

> We are constantly held at a distance. For instance, we are distanced from the characters by their lack of credibility [...] The general tone of [the film] is ironic detachment. Often the force of the humour comes from the play with sincerity. This style emphasises self-consciousness - the careful placement of objects and colours - and authorial presence.

Richard Jameson criticised the Coens' lack of historical accuracy in BARTON FINK (1991). He (1991, p.26) stated:

> The 1941 timeframe is also at least half a decade too late to accommodate the aesthetic, political, or professional trajectory of a Barton Fink [...] Unfortunately, the Coens hit upon '41 because it positions then, on the eve of World War II, to hazard some supremely silly historical allegory, up to and including a mind-boggling dropping of the name Hitler and a figurative Holocaust.

In response to O BROTHER WHERE ART THOU? (2000), Walsh questioned their lack of social commentary. He (2001) asserted:

> The Coens still feel the need to keep at a distance a coherent social critique [...] After all, one serious look at the South in the 1930s, under conditions where such an ideological prejudice was not at work, would surely convince anyone as bright as these filmmakers that the central problem was the existing social order in all its dimensions: banks, sheriffs, racists, politicians and so forth.

In Joel and Ethan Coen's more recent films, even loyal critics queried their move into more commercial territory. In the Guardian Online Review of INTOLERABLE CRUELTY (2003), Patterson wrote:

> On the one hand, [the film] is the funniest, wittiest movie around now. On the other hand, it's pretty second-rate Coen brothers [...] Perhaps the problem has to do with the rupturing of the Coens' hitherto hermetic seal. Intolerable Cruelty is the first project they didn't originate themselves. They have rewritten a script developed by others and the movie's most Coenesque qualities feel overlaid on a framework considerably less

> sturdy, weird and perverse than one they might have cooked up in their fraternal hothouse.

Such criticism is not without merit, and many of the counter-arguments are discussed in this paper. However, none of the aforementioned texts on the Coen brothers was written by academics; most were written by enthusiasts or professional film reviewers, and none consider their use of sound.

In fact, in view of the whole body of literature on the Coens, few authors remark on the aural content of their films, and those that do refer solely to the musical elements (especially when source music was used).[34] These references are usually passing comments or a compact disc/record review, such as the review of Burwell's music for MILLER'S CROSSING (1990) in *Soundtrack!* magazine (1991, p.18). Paper or online journals that have featured commentaries of their films, include *Cineaste*, *Sight and Sound*, *Film Comment* and *Postscript*. Newspapers, such as The Independent and The Guardian, offer regular reviews of each subsequent Coen brothers' release. Fan-based Internet sites, e.g. http://www.youknowforkids.co.uk, provide an abundance of information on the Coens, ranging from the factual (e.g. costs of production) to the trivial (e.g. Joel Coen's favourite food). The site also features links to a great number of online reviews and to official film websites.[35] General film enthusiasts' websites offer critiques of the Coens' film from a layman's point of view along with their other reviews. These would include *Movie Tracker* and *Nicksflickpicks*. In addition, the one DVD commentary given by the Coen brothers (found on THE MAN WHO WASN'T

[34] This is especially true in reference to O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? (2000), which has a soundtrack dominated by previously-recorded music tracks. This would include: GRASSER's *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* [online]. Available from: http://www.thelocalplanet.com/Archives/Authors/Articles.asp?ArticleID=1915 and GRADY's *Keynote Remarks from T Bone Burnett* [online]. Available from: http://www.ibma.org/about.imba/archived.articles/november.dec/keynote.asp .

[35] Online review include those from the BBC Online Review and Time Online. The site also provides a link to the Production Notes on the official website for INTOLERABLE CRUELTY.

THERE [2001]) they themselves make no mention of the aural ingredients of the film.

To expand on the aforementioned literature, the Coens' mode of production is discussed in full, especially in terms of how their approach relates to mainstream Hollywood. This paper also addresses the dearth of information regarding the sound content of Joel and Ethan Coen's films.

Summary

The fact that there is such an uneven amount of research of variable quality suggests that there is not yet a coherent structure to the study of film sound. Therefore this thesis seeks to amalgamate a great number of the facts and theories posited thus far. It endeavours to broaden significantly the current application of those ideas through the interweaving of these various documents, through the collection of first hand accounts and by the analysis of film content. As much of this area is unexplored, a substantial amount of the argument has also been gathered from fields outside of conventional film studies. As a result, this paper draws together the relevant works that discuss in one form or another issues relating to the subject and its context.

The overall source material for this thesis includes:

1. Texts related to American cinema history, especially those that highlight technological and aesthetic developments in sound. These works emphasise how progressive innovation determined what was possible in film production. They also show that despite these innovations creativity was limited by financial precautions. Other historical texts examine the artistic and business practices of the Hollywood studio system, giving reasons for its necessity and practicality. In addition, more contemporary authors stress the contrast between the traditions of that system ('Old Hollywood') and the rise of independent filmmakers ('New Hollywood').

2. Books and articles that describe theoretical approaches to sound in film. These texts generally describe the art of sound creation with the conceptual understanding of its practical application. These authors not

only discuss the thematic and symbolic uses of film sound, but many have invented new terminology to identify its various functions within the film narrative.

3. Books and articles that explore Joel and Ethan Coen's approach to filmmaking and their relationships to their cast and crew. These range from biographies and textual analyses of their films to a variety of published interviews with the Coens and interviews with their colleagues. Such texts discuss their work ethic, their working relationships and the themes of their films. Any sound analysis of their work has also been used in this thesis. Though, at present, this is limited to one.

4. Personal interviews with Skip Lievsay and Carter Burwell - the Coen brothers' regular supervising sound editor/mixer and composer, respectively. The content of these interviews has allowed exclusive insight into many areas of principal concern for this study. There are also interviews with Larry Sider, Head of Post Production at the National Film Television School and Co-founder of the School of Sound,[36] and music consultant, music supervisor, and producer Bob Last.[37] Edited transcripts of these interviews are in Appendix D. In addition to this, there are personal emails from Burwell and Lievsay in Appendix E along with other emails from sound designers Randy Thom[38] and Ren Klyce.[39]

[36] Larry Sider is also known for his sound design work with animators, the Quay Brothers, whose films include: STREETS OF CROCODILES (1986) and INSTITUTE BENJAMENTA (1995).
[37] Bob Last credits include: BACKBEAT (Softley 1993), LITTLE VOICE (Herman 1998) and CHOCOLAT (Hallesträm 2000). Last has also been a music consultant to the Universal Music Company and as a music supervisor or sound designer on a variety of television programmes in the United Kingdom.
[38] Randy Thom's credits include WILD AT HEART (Lynch 1990), CONTACT (Zemeckis 1997) and HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS (Columbus 2003).
[39] Ren Klyce's credits include SEVEN (Fincher 1995), FIGHT CLUB (Fincher 1999) and PANIC ROOM (Fincher 2002).

5. The films of the Coen brothers and other films related to the innovative use of sound. These materials provide the primary evidence for not only how aural ingredients can affect the nature of the product, but they also show how a particular use of sound can influence and inform the next innovation. Detailed analyses of the films by Joel and Ethan Coen help demonstrate that sound is integral to their storytelling process.

Methodology

In light of the discussions in the previous section, this thesis seeks to present a comprehensive investigation into the Coen brothers' use of film sound and the working practices they have employed to encourage a greater integration of sound and image. To do so, it tests the hypothesis that music, effects and dialogue have traditionally been relegated to a secondary importance as the result of long-standing conventions and financial considerations. This is particularly noted in specific business practices, the development of audio technology, the status given to sound practitioners and the general aesthetic of American films after the conversion to sound.

The general approach to this thesis has been one similar to that of Russian montage.[40] It involved the editing, synthesising and superimposition of a variety of data in order to create a distinct manuscript with reasonable and clear arguments. The research methods were diverse to reflect the complexity of the issues under discussion. These would include semiotic, textual, narrative and hermeneutic analysis, as well as observation and interviews. The research also involved intensive self-reflection and introspection. Thus, subjectivity was considered to be unavoidable.[41] This comprehensive approach was viewed to be the most effective, as:

> the combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical material, perspectives and observers in a single study [is] best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to [this] inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p.5).

[40] Russian montage refers to the film editing style of Eisenstein (among others) who cut several disparate images together with the purpose of communicating meaning through the arrangement of those images rather than the individual images.

[41] "Objectivity is a chimera: a mythological creature that never existed, save in the imaginations of those who believed that knowing can be separated from the knower" (Guba and Lincoln 2005, p.208).

Furthermore, the methodologies were not placed in a hierarchy, but simply employed as needed. As such, emergent data became crucial to this study. Consequently, the criteria for evaluating the validity and reliability of this research was based on how these various methodologies informed one another in the context in which they had arisen.

Two main areas form the basis of this study. Firstly, having attended an earlier university course on sound design, the author was privy to lectures and texts that suggested sound's marginalised place in film history and in individual film construction. The lecturers promoted ways in which sound designers and composers could work more closely together and how they could foster better working relations with directors. The course also included essay writing, for which further research was necessary. As a result, the preliminary reading about film sound, in particular sound effects, was virtually complete by the end of this year-long course. Secondly, the research was significantly encouraged by the author's familiarity with the Coen brothers' entire repertoire. Having a keen awareness of their work enabled the author to recognise potential correlations between sound design principles and the Coen brothers' narrative style. Lectures during the aforementioned course helped reinforce this observation. In addition to this, other lectures suggested Joel and Ethan Coen's working practices were strikingly different than many other filmmakers in mainstream Hollywood.

Building on this foundation it was necessary to examine the documentary evidence available to establish whether these claims had any veracity. The research initially began with gathering historical data. Establishing the place of Joel and Ethan Coen within the chronology of cinema would help set their work in context. In addition, collecting historical data was considered vital in defining Hollywood's conventions. This would aid in determining to what

extent the American film industry had prioritised visual ingredients over aural ingredients. The findings of this data would provide crucial evidence that either supported or opposed the notion that the practices established in the early part of Studio era influenced the subsequent use of sound and the status of sound practitioners. Where possible, quotations of practitioners were duly noted, as they would give greater support to the facts and events.

In the collection of historical data, it is understood that there is a high degree of selectivity. French historian, Fernand Braudel[42] (as quoted in Jensen 2000, p.193) stated, "All historical work is concerned with the breaking down of time past, choosing among its chronological realities according to more or less conscious preferences and exclusions". Therefore, where possible, historical facts have been verified through a variety of different sources (i.e. journals, books and the internet). Complementary evidence was evaluated and considered before arriving at a conclusion. Similarly, inconsistent data was not disregarded, but examined more closely to ensure whether its exclusion would be justified.

To obtain deeper knowledge of the Coen brothers and their mode of production was fundamental to this thesis. Engaging in this area of research had initially begun during the aforementioned sound design course with the submission of a paper on Joel and Ethan Coen's first film, BLOOD SIMPLE.[43] This paper served as a foundation for future research on their films in that the approach was based on gathering information about narrative themes and characters. To determine the meaning behind many of the Coens' storylines, it was viewed practical to read every available book and journal article on them. In addition to the biographer's or reviewer's interpretations

[42] Braudel was a member of the *Annales* School, which criticised traditional historical research for ignoring the underlying factors that shape the deeds of an individual. Their concern was with larger scale histories and they took a longer view of the process of change. (This is noted in Scannell 2000, p.193)
[43] An updated version of this paper is included among the analyses of the Coen brothers' films (p.202).

of their work, every effort was made to note down Joel and Ethan Coen's actual words. Interviews in texts were given a much higher value than other types of texts, as they were considered valid first-hand accounts. Biographies also helped establish the possibility of personal factors influencing their work. As with the historical texts, each book or journal article was compared to the other and evaluated on its ability to corroborate facts and/or add to the data provided in a single text. Ultimately, the Coen brothers' films and their mode of production in this thesis were the result of a synthesis of the accumulated data.

The bulk of the collected evidence came from interviews or email communication with current sound professionals. To substantiate the hypothesis that sound is still of secondary importance in film construction, it was imperative to acquire first-hand knowledge from those working in Hollywood or those involved in the education of sound practitioners. Access to a large number of individuals was limited due to the high profile of many individuals and their prior commitments. Therefore, it was ruled best to acquire a representative sample of different personnel. These include all of those mentioned in the previous section: Skip Lievsay (the Coens' supervising sound editor/mixer), Carter Burwell (the Coens' composer), Bob Last (a music supervisor, consultant and producer), Larry Sider (sound designer, Head of the Post-production Department at the National Film and Television School and Co-founder of the School of Sound), Ren Klyce (sound designer) and Randy Thom (sound designer).

Requests for their participation were made through email and, once agreed, this was followed by a recorded telephone interview or a live interview (with the exceptions of Ren Klyce and Randy Thom; their interviews were conducted solely by email exchanges). The questions focused mainly in

collecting information on their personal experience as well as their opinions of working practices as they are currently being conducted. The interview design was exploratory with the objective that their responses would not be limited to pre-existing categorises or the desire to capture precise data. Due to their proximity to the central argument, interviews with Lievsay and Burwell were much longer and more in depth. They consisted not only of questions about their working relationships with Joel and Ethan Coen, but also how they worked with one another and their approaches to each of the Coen brothers' films.

Answers to all the questions of every interview were treated as honest accounts. Naturally false memories may have emerged during these conversations and it is certain that the responses of one individual would be biased towards their perspective. As Jensen (2002, p.240) asserts, "the disambiguation of interview discourses (or the conclusion that an ambiguity is unresolvable) is the outcome of data analysis and will remain an inference". To circumvent this, answers were weighed against textual and cinematic evidence. Additionally, a relatively unstructured approach was used to allow the interviewees freedom of expression. Most of the questions were open-ended and the author's own follow up questions were mainly used to clarify information or ask for more detail. To preserve a certain level of neutrality, the author adopted a style of 'interested listening' that "rewards the respondent's participation but does not evaluate [their] responses" (Converse and Schuman, 1974, quoted in Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p.702). However, as an interview is ultimately a collaborative effort, the author was not entirely passive.

The remaining material was acquired through secondary sources. This information has been treated with the same care as the others mentioned

above. Though research was conducted to find textual sources that considered it reasonable to limit sound to a utility, evidence was duly lacking. As noted in the Literature Review, this is an emerging field of study and texts about film sound have tended to be neutral or positive in regard to its role in film construction. There is, however, the aforementioned evidence that some filmmakers fervently rejected the coming of 'talkies' in the late 1920s/early 1930s, as it was demeaning to the art of the cinema. However, once sound became an international phenomenon, there is insufficient evidence of any disapproval of sound's place in film construction. Textual sources also provide little proof that it has been justifiable to relegate sound to a lower priority than image. These items are mentioned in the body of paper, with the addition of Bob Last's contrasting opinions.

The structure of the thesis is based on the accumulation and the synthesis of the aforementioned textual and oral evidence. It was decided that the historical data should open the paper, as this would 'set the scene' for both the Coens and the American film industry's treatment of sound and sound technology. This data was divided into two parts. Part 1 covers the chronological development of film sound and the general influences on its status in film production. Part 2 addresses specific business practices that influenced the working relationships in Hollywood: this includes unionisation and the rise of the independent filmmaker. These were necessary in demonstrating how the Coen brothers stand in contrast to many of the traditions and conventions of their industry. These differences have been set in alternating sections to highlight this disparity.

It was logical to follow these historical accounts with a more detailed description of the Coens' working practices as they relate to film sound. Therefore, Part 3 offers a detailed description of their collaborative efforts

with the Skip Lievsay and Carter Burwell. It also provides evidence for how the composer and supervising sound editor complement each other's working style. Here, interviews form the majority of this part of the thesis. The aural interpretations of all of the Coen brothers' current films comprise Part 4 of the paper. This is to demonstrate how the Coens' approach to filmmaking informs the final product. To achieve these analyses, this section incorporates film sound theory and interview material, as they pertain to the individual films. Recommendations based on Joel and Ethan Coen's work ethic forms the basis of the conclusion. It was decided that their practices should then be expanded upon by those currently educating and encouraging future sound professionals, allowing for a view of what is to come, while still commenting on the present state of affairs.

It was also considered necessary to include a large number of appendices. As with any fledging field of study, much of the evidence is yet to be collected and/or synthesised together. It was therefore important to include greater detail to the evidence presented in the paper. The first appendix consists of the descriptions of sound in terms of how it differs from vision and how it functions in film. It discusses sound's general role in film narratives, followed by explanations of music, noise and ambient effects and dialogue individual contributions. As most of the data in this section is a synthesis of previously documented work, it was relegated to an appendix as it was thought that it may possibly interrupt the flow of the paper. It is located in Appendix A.

It was also deemed necessary to condense and/or exclude much of the historical information gathered for this paper, as both sections could justifiably have been expanded into separate doctoral theses. It is reasonable to argue that many of the historical facts in the appendix could be considered relevant to the main body of the paper, but the decision was taken because it

was felt that a detailed chronology would draw attention away from the central focus of this thesis - the Coen brothers. Therefore, a more comprehensive account of film sound history is provided in Appendix B.

Other appendices, such Appendix C and F contain discrete papers written by the author earlier. The former discuss the general functions of sound in work of the Coen brothers, which are relevant but duplicate many of the functions mentioned in the individual films. The other papers are alluded to in the body of the paper, but not essential to the main argument. Appendices D and E consist of transcriptions of the interviews and email exchanges conducted for this thesis. Their inclusion is not only to prove their existence, but also to provide the reader with the greater context for the quotations given in the paper. The final section, Appendix G, is an index of the film clips that complement the analyses of the Coen Brothers' films; the content of which is available to the reader on the attached CD. These appendices, and those mentioned above, are meant to satisfy the reader's desire for further information on various given subjects throughout the paper; they are strictly supplemental.

The overall method taken in researching and writing this thesis has been one of integrating available material with new information from interviews and detailed film analyses. It involved evaluating and re-evaluating textual and cinematic data from a variety of perspectives. Through this approach, this thesis seeks to demonstrate how sound has been hitherto relegated to a lower status than picture and why the Coen brothers' mode of production enables sound to become an integral narrative tool. As a result, this study seeks to advance sound's role in film production, by presenting American cinema's past, present and future, with the hope of suggesting change will lead to a stronger integration of all film ingredients.

Part 1:
The Historical Context

As noted in the introduction, it is necessary to review the historical development of film in order to understand why the American film industry has given sound a lower priority than image. In the United States, film has been considered primarily as an entertainment commodity, as opposed to an artistic endeavour. This is especially salient in Hollywood's treatment of sound. The Studio System in the United States viewed the introduction and application of different sound technologies primarily as a means of fending off competition and increasing profit. Hollywood Studios rarely made attempts to use aural ingredients in a way that would jeopardise their financial gain. Therefore, as these practices became ingrained, various conventions in regard to sound developed. While most of these helped to sustain productivity, few promoted originality. It was not until the dissolution of the Studio System in the mid-1960s, and the subsequent introduction of Dolby technologies, that American filmmakers began considering sound to be a more integral ingredient in the filmmaking process. This part of the thesis provides a general description of the main issues and determinants in sound film production in Hollywood. More specific business practices are dealt with in Part 2.[44]

Early Developments of Sound Recording and Reproduction

Sound in one form or another has always been part of the cinematic experience. During the so-called silent era, 'mute' images were accompanied by live music, hand-generated sound effects, narrators and, occasionally, actors speaking dialogue from behind the screen. Non-mechanical methods of

[44] As noted previously, a much longer and more detailed version of film sound history is provided in Appendix B.

synchronising sound and image were available, but their commercial viability was delayed by the lack of proper amplification. Therefore, little notice was given to them until long after Lee De Forest patented his 'Audion' tube in 1907: a device that made the amplification of electrical impulses possible (Sponable 1947, p.280). This invention paved the way for the development of audio amplifiers.

Over the next two decades technicians and engineers from all over the world focused on creating a film sound system that would be functional and lucrative. During this time, two strands emerged: the sound-on-disc system and the sound-on-film system. Despite its remarkably good results, the sound-on-film system was delayed from entering the marketplace because of disagreements between the parties involved in its development.[45] The sound-on-film system was also hindered by the fact that the alternative system benefited from a concurrently developing technology: the burgeoning record and phonograph industry. Western Electric, the manufacturing branch of Bell Telephone Laboratories, had adapted this machinery to create an operative means of synchronising discs to picture. Its successful results produced interest from many quarters. However, it was not until 1925 that this attention translated into investment. Seeing this system as a way for his company to gain an advantage over the competition, Sam Warner, of Warner Brothers studios, bought the rights to use Western Electric's equipment.[46] Warner Brothers then established a subsidiary company, Vitaphone, to begin production on sound films.

[45] From 1922 to 1925 Theodore Case had agreed to share knowledge and equipment with Lee De Forest. When it proved successful, De Forest made a legal claim on the discoveries made by Theodore Case. This led to a legal battle and the eventual dissolution of their partnership.

[46] Western Electric did not sell its equipment but offered it under a limited license fee. This was to retain control of the equipment, to reduce the risk for the investor and to maximise their own profit.

A large part of the impetus to this interest in new sound technology was the emergence of a new rival to Hollywood: radio. By the early 1920s radio had millions of listeners. The fascination of this new technology had started at the grass roots level with 'crystal sets' and soon grew into a diverse commercial broadcasting system. Through the power of radio, the public was quickly becoming familiar with the sounds of performers, celebrities and politicians. They were introduced to a wide variety of programs, which included news, sport and entertainment. The experience of hearing people's voices for the first time fascinated listeners, and what is more, listeners began to ascribe various personality traits to speakers based on their voices (Douglas 1999, p.102). As a result of this technology, the perception of sound had begun to play a vital role in American society.

Warner Brothers capitalised on this aural awareness gradually. Before beginning a campaign of feature length productions, they released several short films starting in May 1926; many of these consisted of a series of brief performances by vaudevillians. They were exhibited with only a musical score, as they saw no need for dialogue,[47] and found that using pre-recorded music significantly reduced the cost of hiring musicians for every performance in all of their cinemas. The success of these shorts inspired them to begin production on DON JUAN, their first full-length sound film. The film premiered on 6 August 1926, presented with a orchestral score and was preceded by a series of shorts. It was also introduced on screen by Will Hays,[48] who amazed the audience by clearing his throat before he spoke (Eyman 1997, p.91). The critical and popular response to DON JUAN was tremendous, raising Warner Brothers' profile significantly among the Hollywood studios.

[47] Harry Warner was famously quoted to have said in 1926: "Who the *hell* wants to hear actors talk?" (Warner & Jennings 1964, p.168).

[48] Hays was a politician from former United States' president Warren Harding's administration. He was also the first president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. He would later become infamous for instituting the Production Code: a strict set of rules that determined the moral tone of filmed narratives in America until the complete dissolution of the Studio System in the mid-1960s.

However, Warner Brothers was not the only studio to exploit this new technology. In July 1926 William Fox, head of Fox Films, adopted the sound-on-film system, which he named Movietone. He also saw it as a means of competing with the larger studios and as a viable alternative to the sound-on-disc system. After having two studios constructed solely for sound film production, Fox Films re-released WHAT PRICE GLORY on 27 January 1927 with a orchestral score.[49] The practice of re-shooting silents as sound films, or stopping the production of a silent film and beginning it again as a sound film, later became a means whereby Studios saved money while embracing the new technology. In addition to the score, Fox also mimicked Warner Brothers' approach to programming by preceding the film with a series of short performances. However, unlike his rival, Fox did not advertise the sound features. Despite this, there was "no stampede, [and] neither was there an unfavourable audience reaction" at the film's premiere (Sponable 1947, p.408).

The success of DON JUAN and WHAT PRICE GLORY attracted the attention of the international film world, but no other studio was prepared to invest in either sound format. Many assumed sound was a fad that would soon pass, while most considered it a huge financial risk.[50] Nevertheless, as a precaution, on 17 February 1927 several American studios (i.e. MGM, Paramount, Universal, First National and Producers Distribution Corporation) signed an agreement to undertake a year's study of both sound film systems before completely ruling them out (Eyman 1997, p.115). Events of the latter

[49] It had been released as a silent film the previous November.
[50] Most producers had a backlog of silent films that had cost millions and stars on long-term contracts who had little drama technique except pantomime. In addition, film companies had foreign markets that were well established. Worryingly for these companies, they would have to convert their present stages to sound stages and exhibitors would have to have their cinemas rewired for sound (Kellogg 1967, p.186).

half of 1927 were to prove that this cautious gesture would give their competitors a tremendous advantage.

Fox and Warner Brothers moved ahead rapidly. Fox Films expanded their repertoire by sending Movietone cameras out to capture 'live' news events.[51] The footage fascinated audiences. According to Eyman (1997, p.114), "Sound made things more immediate, made it seem as if it were happening now". Furthermore, any exhibitor using licensed Western Electric equipment was also permitted to use Fox's newsreels before their regular features, and this included Warner Brothers. Fox also enlisted the help of eminent personalities, such as George Bernard Shaw and Arthur Conan Doyle, to precede their next full-length feature. These speakers not only captivated audiences, but they also drew the attention of the intelligentsia, who had scorned films for their lack of 'high culture'.

During this period, Western Electric was pressing Warner Brothers to place Vitaphone shows all over the United States. As Western Electric would benefit significantly from the sale or lease of their equipment, it would be to their advantage to maximise their resources. Warner Brothers resisted because it interfered with their economic strategy of gradually introducing sound films to the public.[52] Furthermore, this incremental approach allowed Warner Brothers to continue displaying Vitaphone shorts while working on full-length features. Western Electric, however, countered by creating Electrical Research Products, Inc. (ERPI), a subsidiary that controlled the manufacturing and installation of amplifiers and loudspeakers. Western Electric also offered installations of equipment on a five-year plan, at which time the apparatus

[51] Famously, audiences watched and *heard* the departure of Charles Lindbergh before he embarked on his trans-Atlantic flight.
[52] Warner Brothers wanted to sell motion pictures not sound equipment and had developed a strategy of placing Vitaphone films in first-run houses in a select number of large American cities over a period of time until placing them in the surrounding areas (Gomery 1980, p.41).

would revert to them (Walker 1978, p.21). Because of this monopoly, Warner Brothers (and subsequent sound film studios) was compelled to sign an exclusive licensee contract with Western Electric, or be without a means of sound reproduction (Eyman 1997, p.123). Despite this significant loss of control, Warner Brothers forged ahead. Not be outdone again, they began gearing up for what would become the most important sound film in American cinema history.

After two further motion pictures with synchronised scores, Warner Brothers exhibited a film that included dialogue. Despite their reservations, they needed a device that would lure audiences away from the sound-worlds created by radio. According to Millard (1995, p.153):

> Radio appeared to be keeping Americans at home and way from the movie houses...On nights that popular radio programs were broadcast, receipts from theater attendance dropped alarmingly.

The film was called THE JAZZ SINGER and starred one of the top performers of the 1920s, Al Jolson. As an economic precaution they produced the film as what would later be called a part-talkie (i.e. only selected scenes had synchronised speech). Jolson's famous catchphrase "you ain't heard nothing yet" could not have been more appropriate. Despite this, the inclusion of dialogue was not the original intention of the Studio. It was while recording the song 'Blue Skies' that a disc was left running and Jolson's exuberant conversation with his 'mother' was picked up (Eyman 1997, p.136). This uninterrupted and unexpected flow of human speech mesmerised the public, and critics announced that it had ushered in a radical innovation to the art of filmmaking.

Therefore, at the beginning of 1928 other film producers in the United States began to take the prospect of sound films more seriously; a tactic that would

further divide the American film industry from those elsewhere in the world. For the most part, European filmmakers focused on producing films as a means of artistic expression; most still viewed sound as a gimmick that was cheapening and transforming their art. René Clair, who said that the talking picture was "a fearful monster, an unnatural creation," offered one such attitude (Fischer 1977, p.2). Clair saw American studios as "an organization of industrial Dr. Frankensteins working to fulfill a 'frightening prophecy'" (Ibid., p.2). This idealistic need to preserve film as high art was typical of Europeans during this transformation period, especially as 'silent' film was reaching a creative high point.[53] However, not to have considered sound technology worthy of sustaining a similar level (if not higher level) of art was perhaps short-sighted.

After massive conversions of studios and cinemas, the other major Hollywood filmmakers began production on their first sound films in mid-1928. Infused with dialogue, these features quickly became known as 'talkies'. Engineers and technicians from radio and associated fields were hired to assist them in operating the technology. Having viewed discs as liable to breakage and arduous for recording purposes, the Studios had adopted the sound-on-film system. This change in aesthetic also required a transformation of many of the filmmaking processes that they had used thus far. Most of them focused on excluding extraneous noise from the set. These included: shooting from cameras encased in soundproof booths, using multiple microphones to ensure the recording of voices and demanding silence from crew and non-essential cast. In addition, it involved hiring dialogue writers; many of who came from the press. The rationale was that they were used to writing to a deadline and, therefore, would not delay scheduling.

[53] 1927 alone saw the release of von Sternberg's UNDERWORLD, Lang's METROPOLIS, Borzage's SEVENTH HEAVEN and Murnau's SUNRISE.

At this time, a new competitor, Radio Corporation of America (RCA), was working on an improved sound-on-film format. They called it the 'Photophone' system. After forming a subsidiary utilising the combined research and equipment of General Electric and Westinghouse, RCA began perfecting devices that would rival Western Electric and, thus, supplant their stringent licensing agreements (Sponable 1947, p.420). They also mobilised newsreel recordings to compete with Fox's domination of filmed news. Despite several demonstrations of the systems excellent quality, RCA could not find anyone willing to buy it.[54] Therefore, RCA's president David Sarnoff decided to create his own filmmaking company. In October 1928 he took over a small Hollywood studio known as FBO and the much larger Keith-Albee-Orpheum Theater Circuit and formed RKO Radio Pictures (Eyman 1997, p.153). Combining this new company with the right to manufacture sound equipment quickly made RCA one of the strongest competitors in the industry.[55]

By the end of 1928 every major producer had released a sound film in one form or another. This rapid transition was not without its consequences. Considering that the majority of directors lacked a theatrical background where dialogue scenes were a mainstay, many found it extremely difficult to adapt their skills to this new mode of production.[56] As a recourse, studio heads invited directors from the New York stage to help direct dialogue scenes. Naturally, this tested many egos. Actors too were challenged by the advent of sound and most feared the prospect of failing sound checks if their

[54] Vitaphone and Movietone had already divided the market.
[55] In its first year RKO was committed to twelve sound films, which included Cecil B. DeMille's KING OF KINGS (1928), distributed by Pathé (Karney 2000, p.202).
[56] Examples of some major commercial directors who did not survive the transition to sound film include: Fred Niblo (BEN-HUR, THE MARK OF ZORRO), Clarence Badger (IT), Marshall Neilan (STELLA MARIS, TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES), Rex Ingram (THE FOUR HORSEMAN OF THE APOCALYPSE, SCARAMOUCHE) and Herbert Brenon (PETER PAN, BEAU GESTE) (Eyman 1997 p.192).

voices were found unsuitable to the new technology.[57] To protect their investment, producers brought in vocal coaches and elocutionists to help less able actors perfect their speaking voices. However, they were not averse to acquiring theatre actors who already had the necessary skills. Ultimately, converting to sound also ushered in what has been called the eighteen-month reign of the 'soundman'.

Directors had their authority challenged on all sides by the new influx of sound engineers and technicians, who had mostly come from radio. Producers were torn between their blind faith in the knowledge of sound professionals and their commercial investment in their directors. As the technicians knew very little of film production and concerned themselves primarily with obtaining the 'cleanest' sound possible, numerous clashes developed between them and the filmmakers. Surprisingly, these conflicts often led to innovations in recording techniques. For example, directors frustrated by the demand for actors to remain as still as possible as they spoke, led to a prototype for the boom microphone.

One of the key innovations in sound filmmaking came from Rouben Mamoulian.[58] As a theatre director in New York, he had worked on operettas and musicals in which he frequently used sound for dramatic effect. Once recruited by Paramount in late 1928, he spent the first five weeks studying the whole filmmaking process, and upon embarking his first feature film, APPLAUSE (October 1929), he immediately clashed with the sound crew. The conflict began when Mamoulian suggested the camera booth be mounted on rollers to achieve a complex camera shot. The technicians scoffed at its

[57] For the most part their fears were ill founded as a great majority of the top stars featured in many of the early sound films. If they did not prosper, it is most likely due to the demands of the new filmmaking process with which sound films presented them, rather than their voices being unsuitable. For further expansion of this argument, see WALKER, A. 1978. *The Shattered Silents: How Talkies Came to Stay.*

[58] I am indebted to Eyman's *The Speed of Sound* (p.225) for a majority of the information in this paragraph.

feasibility. Mamoulian soon followed this by suggesting that two separate voices be recorded on two separate microphones, relayed on two different stripes of film and put together in the laboratory. At this, the technicians also laughed. In spite of their protests, the film was treated Mamoulian's way and to their amazement, it worked. As a result of the ability to separate sounds, technicians and engineers were able to begin the development of a sound-on-film system that had two optical tracks.

Nevertheless, this type of experimentation rarely occurred. Studios had made a huge investment in sound technology[59] and most were resistant to anything that would jeopardise ticket sales. Consequently, when the novelty of 'talkies' was wearing thin in early 1929, they reinvigorated the market by infusing established film forms with sound. Chief among them was the musical, which featured static dialogue scenes alongside vibrant sequences of dancing and singing. The fluidity of the musical numbers was created through the invention of playback (i.e. the use of pre-recorded material over the shot). It not only saved Studios the time and cost of a live orchestra, but it also made shooting multiple takes more convenient. Nonetheless, films still featured very little camera movement, and filmmakers longed for the fluid motion they had prior to the introduction of sound.[60] As a result, most motion pictures in America at this time gave the appearance of being captured stage plays.

In contrast, Europeans, who had reconsidered sound's place in the future of filmmaking, took a more creative approach. Although not England's first all-Talkie, Hitchcock's BLACKMAIL (November 1929), has left an indelible mark on cinematic history. It was originally shot as a silent film, but the production company allowed Hitchcock to reshoot many of the silent sequences. Its

[59] The estimated cost for complete conversions was from $23 million to $50 million.
[60] This frustration was finally addressed with the introduction of the 'blimped' camera (i.e. a mobile camera that had its magazine encased in a box to shut out the noise it produced) a few years later.

reputation rests in the fact that "the resulting film retains the visual qualities, pace and use of locations associated with the silents, successfully blended with the recorded dialogue and sound effects of a Talkie" (Karney 2000, p.207). It was also Hitchcock's experimentation with impressionistic sound, namely in the scene where the murderess hears the word 'knife' repeated subjectively, that brought greater enthusiasm about sound to Britain. Germany, despite still battling litigation on patent infringement, began work in late 1929 on THE BLUE ANGEL at UFA. The director, Josef von Sternberg, having returned from the United States, employed the skills in sound film production he had gained there.

Most significantly, Soviet filmmakers began to champion the cause of sound film. As early as 1928 directors Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov argued in favour of more creative uses of sound. In their manifesto A Statement (August 1928) they suggested that there should be "a brutal discord between sound and image" in order that "sound and music can become new elements in the art of montage in that they offer counterpoints and fresh perspectives to the image on screen" (Karney 2000, p.197). Their purpose in promoting this asynchronous use of sound was chiefly to establish a universal language for the cinema insomuch as it differed from the naturalism of the theatre.[61] After these initial steps forward, the other remaining European countries eventually joined Britain, Germany and Russia in the production of sound films.

By the end of 1929 the conversion to sound had made a dramatic impact on the entire cinematic world. In Europe approximately 1200 cinemas had been equipped for sound while in that year alone 4000 movie theatres in the

[61] Despite these strong statements, Thompson (1980, p.139) argues that none of the early Soviet sound films used counterpoint throughout, quite often it dwindled or disappeared after the narrative had been set in motion and it tended to interfere with the clear progression of the narrative when used in relation to positive elements.

United States had sound systems installed, doubling their previous total. The top Hollywood studios were swiftly becoming some of the most financially powerful companies in the United States, despite having overextended themselves to convert to sound film production.[62] Accordingly, the American studio heads were reaping the wealth and influence that came with their new positions in society. When the United States Stock Market crashed on 24 October 1929, the Hollywood Studios were more fortunate than other companies.[63]

Over the next few years America began setting technical and aesthetic standards across the industry. RCA's Photophone system became the accepted format as the result of the impracticality of sound-on-disc films and subsequent improvements in sound-on-film technology. Technicians and engineers began giving lectures to inform the industry about advances in recording and reproduction: a move that gave greater unity to the industry and decreased the rivalry among them. What is more, as a result of a lawsuit brought about by Warner Brothers in 1932, ERPI was forced to drop their compulsory weekly service fee and leasing arrangements and sell their equipment outright (Eyman 1997, p.362). This freed Hollywood studios from Western Electric's five-year monopoly. Consequently, as early as February 1930 only five percent of all films made in the United States were 'silent' and by 1932 the percentage dropped to nearly zero.

The epitome of early American studio filmmaking was achieved in MGM's GRAND HOTEL (April 1932). In America the film was declared "the most important film since the arrival of talking pictures" and "screen art at its

[62] Eyman (1997, p.341) reports that Warner Brothers' profit for 1929 was $17,271,805 (a rise of $15 million from the previous year); Fox's was $9,469,050 (nearly double); Paramount's was $15,544,544 (also nearly double); and MGM's was $11,756,956 (a slight rise as they were already one of the top earners).

[63] The only major casualty of the Depression was William Fox, who not only had outstanding debts but also got involved in a series of lawsuits over alleged patent infringements that eventually led him to bankruptcy in 1936 (Eyman 1997, p.355).

highest" (Karney 2000, p.235). It featured an unprecedented number of stars in staged settings and communicated its narrative chiefly through dialogue. The film's sound effects were sparse, literal and solely used to express fidelity. The film score functioned mainly as an echo of its emotional content, dressing the images in a musical veneer. In addition to the aural content, all the work that had gone into the visual aspects (namely, picture editing and camera movements) was effaced in order that it did not interfere with the dialogue and, above all, that it preserved the clarity of the images. Ultimately, it gave sound a utilitarian rather than artistic function; that is, it was not used as an integral part of the storytelling, it merely supported the images. GRAND HOTEL's outstanding success solidified and confirmed the principal role of sound that would dominate American filmmaking for several decades.[64]

In contrast, European filmmakers, epitomised by the French and German, began using sound as a primary storytelling device. In general, they either employed asynchronous sound to add an additional layer of meaning to the film narrative, or they use synchronous sound to draw attention to literal objects as a way of preserving realism. The former held that sound complemented the contrasting images in Russian montage in that aural counterpoint could infuse the narrative with additional signification by expressing a message distinct from the one revealed through the images. As such, they believed that sound did not need to synchronise with the images to communicate the storyline effectively. The latter saw sound as a means of replicating the 'real world'. Their approach to sound was much more naturalistic and therefore predicated on exact synchronisation. They tended to use sound to highlight the authenticity of historical events so they could be perceived as non-fiction films and not the product of a filmmaker's

[64] Naturally exceptions existed, but this mode of production dominated the industry.

imagination. Attempts to convey these adopted styles resulted in many experimental uses of sound being developed between 1930 and 1932.[65]

What can be inferred by the working practices agreed upon after the transition to sound is that the United States had decided that the novelty of speech was the main attraction. The continual success of early 'Talkies' established a standard for film sound that has now become ingrained in American filmmaking: the clarity of dialogue was paramount and any form of ambivalence was not to be entertained. In light of this principle, very few films released during the subsequent Studio era made use of asynchronous or 'unnaturalistic' sound. This suggests that there was little to no interest in these abstract uses of aural ingredients because it offered potential confusion to how one interprets the narrative. Moreover, as the human voice took precedence, foregrounding any other sound would have distracted the audience from the dialogue. This mode of production ultimately lent itself to sonic fidelity being used in an inconspicuous manner (i.e. sound was made subservient to the image). As a result of this conservative approach, preserving this fidelity soon became the guiding principle in many of the subsequent developments and uses of sound technology in mainstream Hollywood.

Furthermore, it confirms that in the American film industry sound, apart from dialogue, principally served a utilitarian purpose. It initially afforded a competitive edge within the industry's corporate structure, but this was

[65] René Clair's SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS (1930), LE MILLION (1931) and À NOUS LA LIBERTÉ (1931) employed asynchronous sound. His use of counterpoint in these films challenged naturalism and perpetuated an illusion of 'realism'. Editing in Fritz Lang's M (1931) seems to be chiefly predicated on provoking the audience to infer 'offscreen' presences and actions; this is personified in the killer who is not revealed visually until a third into the film. Prior to this, he is only identifiable through his voice or the tune he whistles. In contrast, G.W. Pabst's KAMERADSCHAFT (1931) was shot in a documentary style. Therefore, he was principally concerned about generating authenticity through sonic details. The purpose was to lead audiences to think that the film was an authentic text. However, it must be added that as a result of the subsequent Depression and World War, Europe was overtaken by Hollywood financing and the American mode of production became dominant. In fact, many of the above directors relocated to the United States, where their experimental uses of sound had all but disappeared.

merely to allow Studios to acquire an economic advantage over their opponents. Their interest was not the promotion of a new aesthetic, but in yet another strategy to help them enlarge their empires. By prioritising profits, Hollywood was not acting inconsistently with the general ethos of capitalism. However, once sound became accepted by all the major Studios, all high risk strategies were avoided and any competition that would have inspired alternative uses of sound were stifled. Standardisation may have brought unity to Hollywood, but it also denied the Studios the opportunity to explore a variety of ways aural ingredients could further enhance a given narrative.

The Studio-Era: 1930-1965

Despite the introduction of dubbing (i.e. the re-recording and mixing of tracks) most Hollywood films over the next two decades upheld the convention of preserving inconspicuous sonic fidelity. Music continued to underscore the entire content of the majority of releases, becoming more like aural wallpaper than an internalised ingredient. This continuous musical scoring not only aided in masking the noise of the film stock and loudspeakers, but it also supplied the much-needed atmosphere for these films. This, in turn, gave further emotional depth to scenes and greater emphasis to the action. Noise and ambient effects were rarely added to the atmosphere because they would be drowned out by noisy film stock and hissy loudspeakers.[66] When effects were used they had a basic function, which was to direct the audiences' attention to specific objects or events onscreen. They were generally heard independent of the music and rarely over dialogue. Human speech remained central to film production. Prime examples would include the aural emptiness of the outdoor scenes in FRANKENSTEIN (Whale 1931); Korngold's lush, but externalised, score for THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD (Curtiz 1938); and the lack of sonic space suggested in the voices of the characters in GASLIGHT (Cukor 1944) or ALL ABOUT EVE (Mankiewicz 1950). As such, American sound films from the 1930s to the early 1950s retained a relative consistent aural construction.

During this period two films broke new ground in terms of sound. Both KING KONG (Cooper 1933) and CITIZEN KANE (Welles 1941) raised the bar by using aural ingredients to add an additional layer of meaning to the

[66] In addition to noise masking most effects, their exclusion can also be attributed to sound libraries being relatively limited so the number different sounds used by sound editors was restricted and early condenser microphones were not very sensitive, so they had a hard time picking up footsteps and body movements. Though this latter problem was soon remedied by Jack Foley's "direct-to-picture" method (i.e. actions onscreen were recorded in post-production by duplicating that exact action), it was still used sparingly.

storytelling. KING KONG needed a credible soundtrack to aid in the verisimilitude of its unprecedented number of visual effects. Murray Spivack and his team of sound engineers created the 'voices' of the primitive creatures through many unusual techniques. By recording and mixing zoo animals at different speeds and pitches or by playing sounds backwards and forwards simultaneously they created 'new' creatures (Goldner & Turner 1975, p.188). The results encouraged the audience to respond to these animals as if they were real. Spivack also recorded his own voice at different speeds to express Kong's 'sensitive' side (Faiola 2003, p.4). In doing so, it evoked a sense of pathos for the gorilla, which in turn harmonises with the film's 'beauty-and-the-beast' theme. In addition to his unconventional approach to sound creation, Spivack "studied the script and itemised the unusual sounds he was expected to provided" (Goldner & Turner 1975, p.187). As Spivack had the foreknowledge of what was central to the storyline, one would expect his noises and effects to be more closely linked to narrative.

In addition to these virtuoso sound effects, KING KONG can also claim a landmark score. The composer Max Steiner employed a lush score in the German Romantic tradition to heighten the drama and accentuate the emotional content. It was decided that this score would be virtually continuous to best efface the illusion of the animated creatures. Therefore, he discussed with the director during post-production where music should be excluded or restrained. It was agreed that the score should give way to sound effects in some sequences; for example, when Kong battles the allosaurus. Steiner's music often kept in perfect rhythm with the action seen on screen. He mastered this mode of synchronisation by way of his invention of a 'click track': a device which automatically kept record of the tempo of visual actions and then converted them into a rhythm. This technique, now

called 'mickeymousing' because of its similarity to cartoon music, helped draw the audience's attention to specific actions at key moments of the film.[67] Steiner also made use of leitmotif[68] (i.e. a melodic phrase to denote a recurring character or feeling) to identify specific characters or scenes. Some examples include: whenever Kong makes an appearance it is marked by three descending chords, the 'primitive' nature of the islanders is evoked through a drum-based theme that identifies them as 'savages' and Kong's death is communicated through a tender, romantic theme, which emerges as a variation of the gorilla's own musical motif.

For CITIZEN KANE, Orson Welles brought with him his knowledge of radio and theatre. The film is virtually a visualised radio-play insomuch as the techniques he used to manipulate the sound effects, dialogue and music create an auditory world that could possibly stand on its own. It is this near separation of sound and image that allows the soundtrack to drive the film. The design is emphasised through its attempt to express actual aural perceptions of space, distance and significance. Welles primarily achieves this through the use of the human voice, which is employed as if it were a sound effect. Throughout the film voices are treated with reverberation to suggest large spaces, whispers are amplified and treated with effects, single lines are layered many times and perspective is suggested by lowering the volume of some characters in the background while others speak 'normally' in the foreground. Furthermore, Welles employed unconventional dialogue edits, where voices trail over cuts (usually when introducing flashbacks) or where voices are cut suddenly (usually to show passages of time). These techniques were common in radio, but had never been applied to film before.

[67] For example, when Jack (Cabot) chasing Kong and Ann (Wray), there is bright fast-paced music when he is running and the music stops when he stops; it then resumes when he starts running again.
[68] As Berlioz and Wagner might refer to it. See Appendix A for more detail on leitmotif.

Welles also made significant use of music. Bernard Herrmann's approach to the score was as unconventional as Welles' approach to the entire film.[69] Herrmann avoided using a full orchestra, long passages and orthodox combinations of instruments.[70] He also read the script before viewing the film and began composing before the first edit. This allowed him to create music that was predicated on the narrative themes within CITIZEN KANE rather than impose his own. As a result, Herrmann's score communicated a deeper resonance with the film's overall structure. His understanding was that a film score "[must] seem like playing the accompaniment to a song without a melody". He could not conceive of this or any film using music that was divorced from it. For Herrmann each film was unique and therefore, each score must be uniquely composed for it.

Both KING KONG and CITIZEN KANE were produced by RKO Radio Pictures, a small studio that took risks despite constantly being near economic ruin. Having taken over production in 1931 David O. Selznick had instituted:

> a system whereby independent producers were contracted to make a specific number of films for RKO entirely free from studio supervision, with costs shared by the studio and producer, and distribution was guaranteed by RKO (Cook & Bernink 1999, p.28).

It was in this manner that KING KONG and CITIZEN KANE were made. KING KONG's triumph at the box office instituted a series of independently produced and directed prestige pictures at RKO.[71] However, by 1938 they were faced with bankruptcy. Welles was drafted in to save the company, and after a few false starts, began working on CITIZEN KANE. The freedom given to Welles was without precedent, and the closeness his story shared with the

[69] The information in the following can be attributed to Herrmann (in Cameron 1980) and Carringer (1996).
[70] For example, for the opening scenes Herrmann used three bass flutes, two clarinets, three bass clarinets, three bassoons, a contrabassoon, four French horns, three trumpets, three trombones, a vibraphone, kettledrums, a gong, a bass drum and counter bass (Carringer 1996, p.106).
[71] Some examples include: TOP HAT (Sandrich 1935), BRINGING UP BABY (Hawks 1938) and DANCE, GIRL, DANCE (Arzner 1940)

real life of William Randolph Hearst, drew severe criticism. Hearst's papers denounced RKO and its employees, and it refused to advertise any of RKO's film if they did not withdraw CITIZEN KANE from public screening. Following these troubles RKO had only a few years of success, when it returned to unit production, before collapsing in the mid-1950s.

Notwithstanding its inconsistency in these practices, RKO Radio Pictures stands as a precursor of future independent filmmaking. In stark contrast to a majority of the other major Hollywood studios, it lacked a 'mogul' - a central figure that controlled the style and content of film production - which may suggest why it allowed for greater artistic freedom. It was also unconcerned with identifying itself with a specific 'brand image'; it simply wanted to be the studio, where under certain budgetary restraints, filmmakers could work without interference.[72] In this way, these working practices suggest that RKO offered a working environment that was less repressive than other studios. Furthermore, these practices encouraged greater collaboration. In reference to CITIZEN KANE, Pauline Kael (1971, p.62) stated:

> Most big-studio movies were made in such a restrictive way that the crews were hostile and bored and the atmosphere was oppressive. The worst aspect of the factory system was that almost everyone worked beneath his capacity. Working on Kane, in an atmosphere of freedom, the designers and technicians came forth with ideas they'd been bottling up for years; they were all in on the creative process [...] Citizen Kane is not a great work that suddenly burst out of our young prodigy's head. It is a superb example of collaboration.

What can be gleaned from the above is that KING KONG and CITIZEN KANE would not have been allowed such artistic freedom if they had been under the

[72] In fact, RKO set up a production programme for low-budget films in 1942. One of these units was run by Val Lewton, who was asked to produce a series of horror films that should not exceed $150,000 and should not require more than three weeks in production. Under these constraints, Lewton was allowed to choose his own personnel and work without interference. His first film, CAT PEOPLE (Tourneur 1942) cost $134,000 and on its initial release garnered $3 million. Its success helped save RKO from a second bankruptcy (Cook & Bernink, 1999, p.30). CAT PEOPLE was also one of the first films to replace images with sound effects in order to suggest a threat.

supervision of another studio. More importantly, it demonstrates that the working environment created by RKO, encouraged filmmakers to exploit a wide variety of film elements, including less conservative uses of aural ingredients. These practices also evoke many of the aspects of the Coen brothers' mode of production, as we will see later in Parts 2 and 3.

In the late forties there were many significant setbacks for the Hollywood Studios. A long-standing court battle with the US Justice Department (originally filed in 1938) decided that the arrangements between the Studios and the major cinema chains were illegal. Though challenged over subsequent years, the Studios eventually acquiesced and relinquished any interest they had in these chains.[73] Other changes in war-related income tax laws also stripped the Studios of absolute power over a significant number of directors, producers and stars. Several actors began negotiating new and better contracts; some of which included a share of the proceeds. A lesson which was well-learned in the future. Others established independent production companies of their own that made use of private and Studio investment, however, remaining entirely dependent on Hollywood for distribution. In addition, Studios also began suffering the attacks of McCarthy and the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Accused of being unpatriotic, many filmmakers had their reputations tainted and some were blacklisted.

Nonetheless, Studios forged ahead to take on new competitors: television and the record industry. As increasing numbers of people were staying at home, producers needed to inveigle audiences back to the cinema. In addition to presenting films in various screen sizes, they decided to adopt the magnetic recording technology the United States had 'acquired' from

[73] The first to comply was Paramount, which dissociated itself from its cinemas at the end of 1949 and the last was MGM, which maintained control of their cinemas until 1957 (Cook & Bernink 2001, p.11).

Germany during World War II. Despite it being much more expensive and requiring the Studios to invest in new equipment, magnetic tape was proving to be more practical and more reliable than the alternative optical system. Namely, its dynamic and frequencies ranges were much wider, it created less hiss so it achieved greater fidelity and it was easier to mix or replace. Overall, it presented a 'cleaner' sound, which allowed audiences to hear denser sound effects, crisper scores and more distinct dialogue. Simultaneously, Hollywood introduced multi-channel stereophonic sound to contrast with the monaural sound of television.

Starting in 1953 each Studio began championing their own widescreen audio-visual format.[74] Though each system employed complex sound technology, Studios placed their emphasis on the visual aspects in their advertising and in differentiating one system from another. Twentieth Century-Fox adopted a process they called *CinemaScope* to highlight its wide aspect ratio. While shooting their first widescreen film, THE ROBE (Koster 1953), studio head Darryl F. Zanuck invited other studios to licence the use of *CinemaScope* from them. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) and Walt Disney accepted their offer immediately, followed soon by Warner Brothers, Universal and Columbia.[75] For demonstration purposes, THE ROBE was shown using 3-track interlocking stereo but it was quickly reformatted with 4-track stereo sound upon release. *CinemaScope* used what is called 'directional' sound; that is, it not only had the dialogue follow the action on screen, but it also positioned certain sounds throughout the cinema; such as, marching soldiers were heard moving left to right across the screen, voices were actually heard 'off-

[74] The first public demonstration of this new technology was actually an independent production called THIS IS CINERAMA (Cooper et al 1952). Its excellent fidelity and 7-track surround sound format had encouraged the Studios to consider adopting a similar system.

[75] Paramount refused out right and began working on a similar process (*VistaVision*), whereas RKO and Republic remained hesitant. Warner Brothers later tried to develop their own process (*WarnerPhonic*), but it proved to be inferior to *CinemaScope* and quickly went out of business. A further contender came in the form of Todd-AO in 1955, developed by one of the original investors in *Cinerama*.

screen'[76] and thunder, wind and rain were heard coming from different locations.[77] To achieve this stereophonic effect with dialogue, production dialogue was recorded live with three boom microphones simultaneously.[78] Consequently, upon its release on 16 September 1953, THE ROBE was highly praised for both its sound and picture.

Following the success of THE ROBE, Twentieth Century-Fox declared that they would no longer produce films in the conventional format and many other Hollywood studios began making use of the *CinemaScope* process.[79] However, the expense of converting equipment for cinemas in the United States and abroad forced them to continue producing films simultaneously in the Academy aspect with optical monaural sound.[80]

The major Hollywood studios had also believed that magnetic multi-channel stereophonic sound would become a standard that would replace optical monaural. However, magnetic sound had its drawbacks. The production of 35mm magnetic prints cost double that of optical prints. The magnetic stripes could only be added after the picture frames were fully developed and this was done by painting or rolling them on and then waiting three days for them to dry (Technical Training Resources 2001?). Moreover, the alloys used in early magnetic heads were soft and wore out under the grind of regular operation. In reproduction the surround channel produced a noticeable hiss in loudspeakers and lacked bass response. Often surround sounds were not fully synchronised and they could be heard in the rear of the auditorium before the

[76] This occurs when voices warn Macellus of his ship's departure to Judea.
[77] This occurs in the crucifixion scene.
[78] Fox and Todd-AO were the only other companies to record dialogue with directional sound. All other Hollywood studios provided music in stereo for magnetic soundtracks, but recorded voices and sound effects in monaural (Schoenherr 2001). This latter method has become the norm today.
[79] For example, Fox released HOW TO MARRY A MILLIONAIRE (Negulesco 1953) and BENEATH THE 12-MILE REEF (Webb 1953); Disney produced 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA (Fleischer 1954) and LADY AND THE TRAMP (Luske et al 1955); and MGM presented KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE (Thorpe 1953) and SILK STOCKINGS (Mamoulian 1957)
[80] Twentieth Century-Fox also offered a single-track magnetic version (Handzo 1982, p.420).

sounds from the main speakers behind the screen. Hollywood studios, other than Twentieth Century-Fox, rarely mixed sounds into the surround channels. Consequently, by 1954 a majority of cinemas opted to combine the four tracks into one. Rick Altman (1995) also suggests that panned dialogue, where talk ping-ponged back and forth across the screen, like that used originally in THE ROBE, proved to be distracting and the intermittent use of surround sound worked against the current notions of high-fidelity audiences had come to expect in monaural sound via radio and earlier films.[81] In response, Studios quickly discontinued panned dialogue and also began considering other ways of communicating atmospheres.

Because of the many criticisms of the technology, by 1956 most magnetic sound films were also striped with optical tracks. At first, Twentieth Century-Fox baulked at the use of optical sound with *CinemaScope* features. Upon the introduction of a *Magoptical* print that carried a half-width monaural track in addition to the four magnetic soundtracks, they finally relented. Eventually standard monaural optical sound resumed as the norm with magnetic stereophonic sound only being utilised by first-run cinemas for a handful of major releases each year. The economic strategy of investing in magnetic sound had proved less successful than hoped, and with additional financial difficulties, the Studios made no further internal ventures in sound technology.[82]

While these changes in sound sought to improve fidelity, there were also stylistic uses of sound that generally reflected the radical shifts in society after World War Two. In the years during the war Hollywood echoed the two

[81] Stereo recording and reproduction in radio and the record industry initially became commercially viable in 1954, but it was not until 1958 that the world standard for stereo records was established and 1961 when the Federal Communications Commission of America adopted the stereo format for radio broadcasts (Schoenherr 2001).
[82] Magnetic technology did not completely disappear, it resurfaced in the mid-1970s to accompany 70mm blow-up prints of films, such as STAR WARS (Lucas 1977), APOCALYPSE NOW (Coppola 1979) and E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL (Spielberg 1982).

extremes in American culture: the optimistic (often jingoistic) escapism along with that of pessimistic (and often more realistic) hopelessness. Sound, namely music, brightened or darkened in respect to these extremes. This trend continued into the early fifties, reflecting the concerns of the Cold War between Russia and the United States. Furthermore, music deviating from narrative-lead Romantic scores appeared to become the rule rather than the exception, enabling the Studios to profit from the burgeoning record industry. Following the commercial success of Anton Karas' zither themes for THE THIRD MAN (Reed 1949), film composers were employed to write music that evoked a particular ethnicities or locales (Evans 1979, p.190). They also began incorporating musical forms into mainstream films that deviated from the standard classical tradition, such as: jazz, rock and roll and electronic music. Despite these radical departures, experimental uses of music remained a rarity.[83]

Hollywood studios also continued to be conservative in their use of ambient noises, sound effects and dialogue. They were still quite keen on preserving a 'clean' soundtrack that effaced any added nuances. In contrast, unconventional approaches to these aural ingredients emerged from Europe, which would subsequently have impact on American filmmaking. Two French filmmakers, Robert Bresson and Jacques Tati, challenged the accepted view of sound through their pioneering stylistic uses of aural effects.[84] Both filmmakers demonstrated that sound (or the absence of sound) could serve as a crucial element in the composition of a narrative. Bresson strove for dramatic significance in his soundtracks, while Tati endeavoured to express comic charm. To achieve these ends, they took different approaches to sound. The entire soundtrack, apart from the dialogue, for all of Tati's films

[83] A much more detailed description of these musical variations and how they reflected American society can be found in Appendix B.
[84] Both began their careers in the late forties and retained a consistency in their stylistic approach up to the 1970s.

was usually constructed in post-production and the effects were deftly placed to magnify specific places and objects throughout his filmic worlds. His film designs set the audience outside it, to absorb the detail of the aural and visual, and to be become fascinated by their comic precision. Whereas Bresson rarely employed sound as merely the aural reflection of a visible object; in his films, sound effects often entirely replaced images in order to avoid duplicating what needed to be communicated to the audience. In doing so, Bresson engaged their imaginations, allowing sound effects and voices to take on their own meaning.

Competition in the 1950s and early 1960s forced the American film industry to move further into economic diversity to sustain its existence. Television and pop music were supplanting the previous dominance of the cinema for much of its audience. Furthermore, a climate of change was slowly emerging from society: a more youthful, rebellious climate that rejected any form of restriction. In order to capitalise on the onslaught of television, many Hollywood studios invested in television production and limited the number of prestige films. They also made use of television by advertising their current releases and by selling the rights to previously exhibited films for broadcast. Additionally, Hollywood studios authorised the use of film stories and film characters as templates for television programmes. Greater demands by directors and actors, and the need to adapt to and appeal to a more youthful demography of audiences brought economic pressure.

The conventions that Hollywood studios had built into the system over the years began to disintegrate. Their time-honoured practices were becoming unworkable. Hollywood studio heads soon found themselves impotent to stop the changes from taking place. In order to preserve its financial viability, the Studio System would need to be dismantled and rebuilt in another way.

Consequently, cut backs were made, cinema chains sold, and a post-war generation of filmmakers entered the industry with a vision of creative freedom.

Post-Studio Era: 1965-present

In the wake of the Studio System's demise, this new generation of filmmakers attempted to cultivate a more relaxed attitude to film production. The rationale was to embrace the 'artistic' stance that had come from Europe in order to foster greater self-expression. Most of these creative notions were reflected in the storylines of their films (i.e. taboo subjects) and a majority of the unconventional techniques that they used were notable for the way they treated the image. The new climate of the industry also encouraged formally conservative producers and investors to begin taking more financial risks. Nevertheless, it was not until the advent of Dolby technologies, especially Dolby stereo, when filmmakers began to re-evaluate the role of aural ingredients.[85]

Once again, one of the most influential filmmakers to initiate this change in film production came out of France. It emerged in and through the work of Jean-Luc Godard, who challenged many of the perceptions of the nature of film through his disregard for the established conventions. He especially rejected the classic tradition of how storylines were presented and developed; in fact, in many of his films the narrative was virtually nonexistent. This 'defiance' was inspired by his participation in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, a journal that provided (among other things) a public arena for analysing the content of mainly American films that had been withheld during the World War Two. Building on the creativity of Bresson and Tati, Jean-Luc Godard's realisation of film sound also went far beyond the conventions established in America and Europe. As his films moved away from the accepted norm, his narratives lost logical order and digressions became the dominant feature. Godard's approach to sound was just as divergent. He

[85] This transitional period is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

treated the editing of aural ingredients in the same way one would treat the editing of pictures: music, effects and dialogue were cut and assembled in their own right, separate from the images. Often he would delay a sound source or not reveal it to the audience altogether, and his music cues would frequently start and stop suddenly. Godard particularly favoured the use of dialogue as a sound effect and he regularly departed from convention by masking it under other elements in the final mix. As a result, sounds were allowed their own significance and audiences of his films were forced to appreciate and react to them differently. To this day, he has continued to demonstrate how music, effects and dialogue can influence the narrative, especially when used in an incongruous manner.

A notable exception to the use of conventional film music came from Stanley Kubrick, a film director who had exiled himself from America due to the constraints Hollywood had imposed on him. During the 1960s and early 1970s, Kubrick drew on well-known pieces of music, but subverted or redefined their traditional associations. In 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY (1968) Kubrick decided to integrate many of the temp tracks he had been playing on set.[86] For example, he matched Johann Strauss' *Blue Danube* to the slow and graceful movements in space. The melody of the waltz seems to work in harmony with the simple elegance of these scenes. By placing such a well-known piece of music in a new context, Kubrick subverted any previous associations the audience may have had. Richard Strauss' *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, arguably the most memorable piece of music in 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, was written by Richard Strauss in 1896. The composition was a tone poem based on the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. Kubrick capitalised on the content of Nietzsche's text. As the opening triumphant fanfare fades

[86] Temp is an abbreviated form of the word 'temporary'. In this case, it refers to the music Kubrick considered using for the soundtrack before the final mix. The composer Alex North was asked to write a score in the same style as those tracks, but upon completion and without any forewarning, Kubrick rejected the score and decided to use the original pieces of music in the film.

into the 'Dawn of Man' sequence, the music takes on a referential significance. For in section 3 of Nietzsche's prologue, Zarathustra the prophet proclaims that as man surpassed ape, so must he strive to become the Superman so that he may go beyond the beastly aspects of man. In view of the evolutionary theme of the narrative, the selection of this piece of music was clearly not arbitrary. As the result of endowing this piece of music with such significance, it has now become nearly impossible to disassociate it from the context Kubrick gave it.

Kubrick continued to draw heavily upon concepts of the future and pre-existing music in his next film. In A CLOCKWORK ORANGE (1971), Kubrick fused well-known classical pieces with electronic music. The re-contextualisation of the music for this film was established on two levels: the synthesised re-workings of famous pieces and the use of them set against the imagery of sex and graphic violence. In this context, Kubrick challenged the belief that 'high art' had a morally redeeming quality.[87] By using electronic versions of Purcell, Rossini and Beethoven Kubrick was able to transform the violence into a great action ballet, effectively stylising many of the barbarous scenes. The synthesised tones also encapsulated the futuristic environment of the film world. In addition, the main character belts out verses of *Singing in the Rain* in a brutal scene of rape and violence. Placing this innocuous song against such sadism not only gives the scene a sense of irony, but it also challenges any pleasant associations the audience may have had of it.

[87] In response to the narrative's combination of violence, rape and classical music Kubrick said that "Hitler loved good music and many top Nazis were cultured and sophisticated men, but this didn't do them, or anyone else, much good" (Bridgett 1998).

During the production of A CLOCKWORK ORANGE Kubrick also made use Ray Dolby's noise reduction technology (albeit hesitantly[88]). In 1965 Dolby had developed a system of audio compression and expansion that produced superior quality recordings of extremely high fidelity.[89] It also benefited from being compatible to existing cinema sound systems, so expensive conversions were unnecessary. Discouraged by the fact that the monaural sound in cinemas was substandard to the stereo hi-fis of most filmgoers, Dolby introduced a stereo optical system in 1974. This new system was quieter and cheaper than magnetic stereo, and it required very little maintenance. In addition, it provided a track that could also be configured for monaural playback, which again meant studios only had to release one print. Despite the advantage it would give them over competing avenues of entertainment, Hollywood remained hesitant to adopt it as the industry standard.

Realistic awareness of the impact of this new system arrived with the recording of STAR WARS (Lucas 1977) and CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND (Spielberg 1977) in Dolby stereo. The popular and economic success of both of these films strongly suggested to Studio executives that Dolby stereo was a financially viable option. Once accepted, Dolby established a worldwide consultancy programme to train technicians to install and maintain the equipment. Dolby also insisted on offering the film industry the same high level of quality control on all of their products that they had granted to the recording industry. In achieving this, Dolby has maintained its high standard throughout the international film world.[90] Their subsequent

[88] The music was recorded in stereo on Dolby B-type NR cassette tape machines, but Kubrick was unsure how to master the tracks in stereo, so he rerecorded them in monaural. However, during the mixing session they utilised the Dolby noise reduction system on all aspects of the rerecording. Despite its potential, Kubrick also excluded the production sound for this process (from Vincent Lubrutto. *Stanley Kubrick: A Biography*).
[89] The following information has been obtained from the Dolby website, unless otherwise stated.
[90] Dolby approved films are designated with the "double d" symbol, which has now become synonymous with superior sound quality.

developments in surround and digital sound in both home and cinema systems have only furthered their standard in the industry globally.[91]

Unlike previous 'revolutions' in sound, Dolby technologies did not require a complete reconstruction of the industry. Its circuitry and audio products were designed to work with the existing technology or to accommodate an alternate format. Each item had as its goal the enhancement of the aural experience, achievable through a strict adherence to high standards and superior quality. With the introduction of a practical stereo system, Dolby Laboratories reinvigorated an industry, whose sound quality tended to be much lower than the average filmgoer's home sound system. With the knowledge that the audience would now be listening more intently (as well as watching), filmmakers were encouraged to re-consider the aural content of their films. Dolby technologies now offered a new generation of film sound practitioners the freedom to experiment with the subtleties of sound. As a result, there arose the possibility of the integration of sound and vision.

At the same time, beginning in the 1980s, George Lucas and his chief engineer, Tomlinson Holman, embarked on a strategy for cinema reproduction that would complement the Dolby processors. They noticed that in the aural reproduction of Lucas' Star Wars films that each cinema sounded differently. Upon investigation, Holman discovered this related to the fact that a majority of loudspeakers built since 1940 had been designed at a time when amplification was expensive, and therefore each theatre had the same configuration regardless of its acoustic space.[92] The solution was to upgrade the system to reflect the more recent uses of amplifier power. This resulting system, dubbed THX, was "comprised of customized acoustical design work

[91] The advent of digital technology has inspired rivals, such as: Digital Theatre System (DTS) and Sony Dynamic Digital Sound (SDDS), but Dolby still dominates the market.

[92] Moreover, this lack of concern for the sound quality of individual cinemas not only reflects the lower priority given to sound, but it also overtly demonstrates the misapprehension of the role of sound in the presentation of a film.

for each auditorium, a special screen speaker installation method, a proprietary electronic crossover network, and rigorous audio equipment specifications and performance standards" (Schoenherr 2000). Providing for the individual requirements of each cinema meant they now had the opportunity of reproducing the highest quality sound.

In addition to this, cinema architecture has been converted to accommodate the demands of these evolving sound systems.[93] Sergi (1999) wrote that these changes addressed many of the long-standing problems and that their implementation emphatically declared that there was an awareness of the correlation between the audience and sound reproduction. However, this possible awareness is also consistent with the American film industry's business ethos, as stated throughout this paper. In other words, it seems less likely they have viewed these changes as a way of promoting sound in film, it more likely that their motivation had been to increase profits. It does, however, show that attempts were being made to create a better environment for sound.

As attention to the detail of aural ingredients increased, sound professionals and composers responsible for the auditory content of a film gained in prominence. The importance of communications between directors and the staff responsible for all sound elements were recognised and improvements were made. In this new vanguard were three sound practitioners: Walter Murch, Ben Burtt and Alan Splet. They challenged the conventional and less imaginative uses of film sound. They also significantly broadened the job description of the sound professional so that it applied to the entire

[93] Examples include: (1) By incorporating more phono-absorbant material and avoiding 'bouncy' surfaces, unwanted echoes are reduced; (2) By installing better insulation, extraneous noises such as sounds those from adjacent theatres or air ventilation systems can be minimised; (3) By arranging surround speakers in relation to the seating plan, their potential is maximised; (4) By fitting speakers throughout the cinema complex in order to pipe in music and trailers from coming features, it immerses the audience in sound before the performance. (Sergi 1999)

filmmaking process. Their 'subtle rebellion' helped to elevate the role of sound in the storytelling process. Furthermore, and most significantly, their methods of working establish many of the patterns we will see later in the Coen brothers' mode of production.

Murch's interest in sound developed through his many experimental tape recordings and his interest in Musique Concrète[94] as a teenager. He noticed quite early on a correlation between what is seen and what is heard. In a interview, he said:

> I think that, to a degree, it was already obvious to me [...] it places the image in a physical and emotional context, helping us to decide how to take the image and how it integrates into everything else (Hilton 1998).

During his career, Murch has consistently been a proponent of a variety of practical and theoretical approaches to sound. While working on THX 1138 (Lucas 1971), a film he had also co-authored, Murch noticed that the overlapping of similar sounds gave the impression of a much larger noise that did not require perfect synchronisation. However, the layers had to be limited to three. If you had two and a half to three sounds of footfalls, the mind would believe they were co-ordinated without the effort of exact positioning (Lobrutto 1999, p.87). To recreate the radio programme heard throughout AMERICAN GRAFFITI (Lucas 1973), Murch invented a process he would later refer to as 'worldising' - the recording or re-recording of sounds to produce different tonal qualities in order to duplicate the impression of space and distance. For the sound-driven plot of THE CONVERSATION (Coppola 1974), Murch's skill in creating and manipulating a variety of aural ingredients were essential to drawing the audience into the central character's

[94] Musique Concrète, created by Pierre Schaeffer in the 1940s, challenged many of the traditional definitions of music and conventions of composing. It was based on the manipulation of tape recordings of natural or man-made noises. Most involved the cutting and splicing of disparate sound items, played at various speeds or in different directions or in an endless loop. This musical movement helped give birth to electronic music.

misunderstanding of a recorded message.[95] Murch's soundscape for APOCALYPSE NOW (Coppola 1979) has since become a landmark in film sound creation. He manually constructed the soundtrack in a surround format by mapping out what channels carried the various sound effects and music for the film. For mixing, he revisited his rule of three by using two tracks at full level and a third either moving up or down a level (Lobrutto 1999, p.91).[96] Furthermore, the surround channels enabled Murch to create the illusion of moving sound because a sound could travel to each corner of the cinema, generating a 360 degrees effect. This style of sound infused the film with an ambience that enveloped the whole cinema space and, accordingly, placed the audience in the centre of the narrative.

Ben Burtt chiefly designed the sound innovations of the groundbreaking film STAR WARS. Like Murch, Burtt was involved in the construction of a majority of the soundtrack. This meant his responsibilities included production recording, sound editing and sound mixing. After being given a general précis of the film and a series of sketches of various alien creatures and objects, Burtt was given the freedom to work at his own pace. Lucas and Burtt agreed that the sound effects would be drawn from organic sources rather than electronic in order to ground the film in a tangible reality. In the end, he spent a year recording and manipulating animal and mechanical noises with the sole purpose of making the unbelievable believable.

Because of his ingenuity, Burtt not only gave a film, set in another galaxy, a very naturalistic atmosphere, but he also made it extremely plausible. By avoiding synthetically produced sound effects, he helped generate a strong fidelity between the image and the sonic equivalent. Crucial to this was the

[95] A detailed analysis of THE CONVERSATION can be found in Appendix F (Barnes 2002).
[96] This style of layering dominates the opening scene, the helicopter battle sequence and the sequence at Du Long Bridge.

amount of time and freedom he was given to explore these sounds. The opportunity he had to supervise the creation and development of all the sound effects from pre-production to post-production provided the film with a consistent tone. At the script stage he was able to suggest what he viewed necessary for recording; his frequent visits to the set also allowed him to construct sounds that he knew would be needed later; and his presence at the picture edit encouraged the inclusion of specifically designed sounds from the library he had been compiling (Burt 2004). In addition to showing the benefit of interweaving the roles of the sound practitioner, Burtt also foregrounded the power of prominent sound effects.

At the same time as Murch and Burtt, young filmmakers with the support of the American Film Institute, were also developing a project that put its sound content in the forefront. The result of this endeavour was ERASERHEAD (1977), David Lynch's first feature film. Lynch and sound designer Alan Splet had spent one year entirely devoted to inventing a sonic environment for the film. As ERASERHEAD lacked a musical score, Splet's arresting sound effects and layers of dark Musique Concrète ambience carried the narrative and emotional references normally attributed to music. Moreover, these haunting sounds complemented the film's oblique narrative and its persistent use of shadows and darkness.[97] For THE ELEPHANT MAN (1980), Lynch and Splet created dense, industrial noises to build a sonic environment for Victorian England. The result gives the narrative a sense of the oppressive nature of the nineteenth century. They also attempted to capture the aural perspective within John Merrick's head (the Elephant Man of the title [John Hurt]) in order to generate an emotional connection between him and the audience. As a precaution, the British sound crew made their own soundtrack of much more conventional sound effects. This, however, proved to be unnecessary.

[97] A detailed analysis of ERASERHEAD can be found in Appendix F (Barnes 2001).

In addition to elevating the standing of sound within the industry, Alan Splet, Ben Burtt and Walter Murch have since encouraged many individuals to take a greater interest in film sound production. Most of them have received recognition in their own right, which has given even further relevance to the virtues of the soundtrack.[98] Furthermore, the influence of Burtt, Murch and Splet has inspired many of the current sound practitioners to take on the credit title of 'sound designer', a designation that hints at the artistry involved in the construction of the soundtrack.[99] Consequently, their working practices and stylistic approaches to sound also serve as part of the basis for the arguments made in this thesis.

Thus, it can be seen that sound, especially in terms of noise, ambient effects and dialogue, has only recently received greater attention in American filmmaking. Many of the examples quoted above demonstrate that Hollywood's original decision to exclude stylistic applications of sound was an aesthetic choice driven by economic practicalities. The result was that Studios relegated the aural ingredients to the role of 'visual support' through a series of conventions that were motivated by profit and financial stability. Revolutionary technological achievements were mostly treated like opportunities for the Studios to promote their economic advantage rather than as a sincere interest in advancing the art of filmmaking. Consequently, most of the early unconventional uses of sound came from outside the United States. It was not until filmmakers gained independence from these industrial

[98] They include both Mark Mangini and Gary Rydstrom who began their careers working on Indiana Jones films with Burtt: RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK (Spielberg 1981) and INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM (Spielberg 1984) respectively. They also include Randy Thom, one of the leading promoters of the virtues of film sound. He worked with Murch on APOCALYPSE NOW, Burtt on STAR WARS VI: RETURN OF THE JEDI (Marquand 1983) and Splet on NEVER CRY WOLF (Ballard 1983).

[99] Nonetheless, it still remains a controversial title in the industry, as many still see it as the designation of the crewmember responsible for speciality sounds while others view it as a replacement for the supervising sound editor and mixer.

determinants that original voices offered the soundtrack a more profound significance.

Part 2:

Coen Independence: The Commodity of Originality

This paper has thus far described the various artistic and technical innovations that have led to the evolution of sound in the American film industry. The long-running pressures of historical conventions and technical advances combined with contemporary commercial stresses create the milieu in which the filmmakers Joel and Ethan Coen emerged in the early 1980s.

The Coens form a fraternal partnership that has thrived on the fringe of the mainstream for over twenty years. In this time their skill in creating well-plotted cinematic narratives has earned them international recognition as well as several Academy accolades. As storytellers, they have remained relatively unconventional in terms of plot and characterisation. Quite often their plots have unsympathetic lead characters and inexplicable events. Their overall narrative style is one based on the manipulation of established genres, drawing on both literary and media sources. A cursory view of their oeuvre shows an eclectic mixture of narrative worlds that have very eccentric characters who find themselves in increasingly troubled circumstances. Much of the tone of the Coens' work is either light-hearted and quirky or dark and moody.

Despite partnering with Hollywood throughout their career, Joel and Ethan Coen's independent attitude towards filmmaking is well established. They have consistently retained total artistic control of most of their films by keeping their budgets relatively low, even when receiving financial backing from major studios. In fact, the Coen brothers have developed a reputation of deliberately pitching a film at a much lower price to investors and distributors to secure total creative control over the project. This resolve, to

place artistic integrity before commercial success, has enabled the Coens to maintain their independence, regardless of popularity or ill favour. This self-assurance may well have stemmed from the fact that the Coen brothers were able to finance the production of their very first film entirely on their own.[100] Joel Coen explained that BLOOD SIMPLE (1983) was made "outside of any established movie company anywhere" and a majority of their cast and crew consisted of "people who had no experience in feature films, Hollywood or otherwise" (Bergan 2000, p.91). The film was a profitable and a critical success and it proved that remaining outside of Hollywood was not only possible, but was also a financially viable option.

Because the Coens were not viewed as a financial threat to the Studios, they have been able to develop their filmmaking style with very little restraint. This freedom has allowed them not only to direct their own scripts, but also to edit and produce them. As with other filmmakers that have this much input in their productions, Joel and Ethan Coen have a close affinity with all the elements involved in their films. This has translated into the Coens creating narratives that express their own idiosyncratic style. Essential to this process has been their continuous experimentation with various filmmaking techniques. Not only is this reflected in the Coen brothers' visuals, but it is also heard through their integration of sound effects, music and dialogue in their films. The value of these ingredients to the story is pre-meditated; they are written into the script and often discussed prior to production. For the Coens sound is not an afterthought. It plays a vital role in their style of storytelling. What this suggests is that their freedom of expression, as the result of greater independence, has been instrumental in facilitating this sound-conscious mode of production.

[100] After shooting a short trailer, Joel Coen visited a hundred members of a Minneapolis Jewish philanthropic organization, who invested $750,000. The rest of the budget they obtained from 68 other investors, who pledged various amounts. They even received contributions from their parents. (Bergan 2000, p.71-72).

The Coens appear to be the exception rather than the rule. Sound-conscious filmmaking is still only practised by a small minority within the industry today. Only within the last thirty years have American directors shown a greater awareness of sound's wider potential. This can perhaps be attributed to the fact that Production Code rules and the aforesaid financial restraints had all but disappeared by the mid-1960s, along with the subsequent improvements in technology. This lack of industrial-institutional control ushered in a new type of filmmaking. Many critics and journalists have identified this movement as part of a 'Hollywood renaissance'. Encouraged by commentators and scholars of the French film journal, *Cahiers du Cinéma*,[101] filmmaking was gaining recognition as an earnest subject for academic study. Consequently, filmmakers, most commonly directors, gained status and wider reputations. The demise of the Hollywood studio system also saw the gradual resurgence of viable independent production companies.[102] Most of these encouraged creativity and artistic autonomy albeit within rather modest financial budgets. By promoting unconventional thinking, this 'movement' introduced less restrictive narratives which often demonstrated a greater open-mindedness about aural ingredients. Moreover, innovations via the advent of Dolby and, ultimately, other forms of digital technology have increased the potential of sound in film significantly.

[101] These would include François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard and Claude Chabrol.
[102] A prime example would be Roger Corman's company, American Independent Pictures.

Origins of Independence

The term 'independent' has been used to describe two related forms of filmmaking throughout cinema history. The first reflects a classification of producers that as early as 1908 fought to make and distribute films outside of the direct control of Edison's Motion Picture Patents Company. According to Palmer (1988, p.5):

> These efforts characterised not only by their subversion of cartelized controls (e.g. the purchasing of stock from sources other than George Eastman), but also by a concerted effort at a profitable differentiation of product (this involved, for example, Adolph Zukor's use of established 'legitimate' acting personnel and the re-definition of feature films on the model of the theatrical spectating experience).

Once the major Studios were established, these 'Independents' came to characterise those production companies that chose to make their films autonomously. By establishing their own companies, they were able to work on their own projects and pursue their own mode of production. Despite this 'freedom', these producers were forced to partner with Hollywood, as they did not have the mechanisms to advertise and distribute their own films. As such, they became increasingly reliant on the Studios for financial support and distribution. Many companies that tried to remain totally independent soon faced insolvency. These were either absorbed by Hollywood, or liquidated. A few survived and became more vibrant after the collapse of the Studio System. Since the corporate takeovers of the late 1970s, these 'Independents' are still quite small in number; however, they still strive to promote both their own modes of production and their own unique products.

Secondly, 'Independent' has also referred to individual filmmakers who generate products that fall outside of the commercial mainstream. They are generally financed by private sponsors (or self-financed) and are handled by small production and distribution companies that encourage their creative

autonomy. These filmmakers tend to challenge or exploit the conventional views of Hollywood by adopting a self-expressive 'artistic' modus operandi. Their narratives tend to be told in an unorthodox manner and the content of their films is usually not for mass consumption. Often these features are categorised as 'art house' films, and they refuse strict advertising regimes and market campaigns that target a specific audience. In essence, their motivation appears to be to produce films that are not based on their profitability.[103] Both 'definitions' suggest that independence not only expresses the marginalised forms of film production, but it also emphasises a spirit of creativity and originality.

Cinema history, in practice, shows a minority of filmmakers and producers have engaged in both of these forms of independence. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985, p.317) state that self-financing became a possibility with the advent of multi-reel films in 1911. These transactions were often executed by a high profile 'star' or a free-lance producer, who encouraged a distribution deal through a larger producer or through self-promotion. During the 1920s this form of independent production continued through a consolidated distribution system and an increase in outside financing.[104] However, the conversion to sound nearly ceased their output for they could not afford the necessary equipment. They were rescued by the introduction of the double feature in 1931. Hollywood studios saw these films as a way of sustaining financial stability. By appealing to a wider market, "second features" helped finance and distribute extravagant prestige films. The success of this approach led to much more investment and greater encouragement for Independents to work with the Hollywood studios.

[103] It is reasonable to argue that all filmmakers must make a profit or they would not survive. This is not in question. What is suggested here is that the driving force behind their reasons for making a film is much less materialistic than those involved in mainstream filmmaking.

[104] Outside financing was used to acquire cinemas as well as make films. Many companies and individuals saw it as the potential for large earnings. It was usually based on the reputation of the producer/Hollywood studio, the story or cast and the release or distribution arrangements (Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson 1985, p.314).

Simultaneously, the United States government was initiating economic reforms in response to the Great Depression. In 1933 the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) sanctioned monopolies as a means of stabilising the economy. At the time, the top eight Hollywood studios jointly owned about one sixth of the all of the cinemas in the United States. As most had begun as distribution companies, they also controlled the distribution of the films they produced. Eighty percent of these cinemas were first-run theatres. This generated between fifty per cent and seventy-five per cent of the industry's revenue (Cook & Bernink 2001, p.11). Because of the government's intervention, the economic structure of nearly all the Hollywood studios was well preserved and in effect they had control over the entire market.[105] This allowed the Studios to present films at cinemas at their own discretion. In addition, it also obliged smaller production companies if they wanted wider distribution to use their cinema chains. A further advantage was that the value of the cinema property could be used as a form of collateral when raising financial backing for future productions.

Federal regulations standardized working conditions for artists, technicians and labourers. The Studios also instituted their own reforms to ensure greater stability for the future. Beginning in 1931 a majority of the Hollywood studios decentralised management and introduced 'unit producers'. These were men whose function was to oversee every aspect of production and advise where necessary. They were vital in ensuring that the work conducted at the Hollywood studios prospered. Despite this perception of efficiency, Maltby (1995, p.83) states:

[105] Apart from Paramount, as mentioned in Part 1, whose grand plan to expand coincided with the Wall Street crash and they nearly went bankrupt.

> many directors and writers despaired over the inexperience and the lack of creative ability of many of these line producers [...] most felt it just put another barrier between them and the Hollywood studios executives.

The executives themselves were the means of communication between the Hollywood studios (usually based in Los Angeles) and their business office (usually based in New York). Their job was to ensure each film in production was released according to their budget and schedule but few were involved in the actual day-to-day activities of production. Executives also instituted a Production Code that reflected "a characteristic ensemble of economic aims, specific division of labor, and particular way of conceiving and executing the work of filmmakers" (Smith 1998, p.5). Hollywood studios also reduced the 'power' of actors by placing them on contracts that dictated their pay, the number and type of films to which they had to commit and whether they could be loaned out to other Hollywood studios.[106] The result of these policies, procedures and practices was a production line style of filmmaking built on formulaic narratives and well-established genres. The purpose of these measures was complicit with their entire ethos, which was to instil stability through regulation and standardisation.

Throughout the subsequent decades American studios continued instituting schemes to bolster their economic position. In the early 1940s one of the key tactics was to maintain the two-tiered marketing system by maximising themes and formulas established in the 1930s. They had a system of producing first-run 'A' films, which were intensely supervised, and a system of producing or distributing 'B' films, which required less management because they were viewed to be less of an economic risk. This strategy ensured that the Studios met the needs of a much broader market, and consequently provided greater opportunities for profit. The 'B' film system

[106] An exception may be found in Bette Davis, who set up her own company in 1937, after a failed attempt to sue Warner Brothers over low pay.

also made Studios less anxious about financing projects for 'untried' directors and backing smaller film production companies. Regardless of their origin, these films were designed to follow an accepted 'House' norm to preserve audience comprehension and reduce uncertainty.

The film crew also experienced limitations from industrial practices. Producers regularly involved themselves in the production alongside directors (and sometimes writers). This usually determined how much authority the director had over the filmmaking process. Frank Capra said in 1939:

> There are only half a dozen directors who are allowed to shoot as they please and who have any supervision over their editing [...] most shot what they were told and some received the scripts only days before the production (Maltby 1995, p.85).

Hollywood studios often employed several writers for a single film. Writers would specialise in a particular facet of the script: generating dialogue, creating treatments, or amending inadequate narratives. Most worked independently of one another. At this time it was fashionable to import writers from other fields. As mentioned previously, the most popular screenwriters were journalists because they were accustomed to producing work to a strict deadline. Though significantly less in number, novelists were also hired for their ability to generate dialogue and creative scenarios.[107] Conventionally, Hollywood studios curtailed staff time to the bare working necessities in order to keep costs down. For example, directors of photography "were rarely engaged on a movie any longer than the period of shooting" (ibid., p.86). All other personnel came under the general control of the production manager and the assistant director who organised the logistics of the production.

[107] These would include William Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald; both of whom found it difficult to work within the limits put on their creativity. This, in turn, contributed to their propensity to drink excessively, which ultimately diminished the quality of their overall output.

One of the consequences of this system was that it compromised the working aesthetic of other crewmembers. This could be chiefly noted in the work of the picture and sound editors, whose work was the most self-effacing of any personnel within the Hollywood studio system. They had adopted a style that chose not to draw attention to the editing process (i.e. the apparatus) because they believed this helped preserve the clarity of narrative. The financial reasons for this have already been noted. Therefore, films, in the main, were edited using a fairly inflexible set of conventions, leaving little room for experimentation. According to Maltby (ibid., p.87), "[Sound] editors worked largely independent of other personnel". This implies that producers either implicitly trusted sound editors (which is inconsistent with their other practices) or, more likely, the sound editor's contribution was viewed as perfunctory. Furthermore, the advent of mixing made it easier to add music and sound effects at the later stages of the editing process and this quickly became customary. Though extremely practical, deferring the inclusion of aural ingredients to post-production helped reinforce the rationale to exclude sound personnel from participating in the process any earlier. Typically, visuals were rarely edited in deference to the score or the aural effects. Music was routinely composed and orchestrated by different personnel and simply matched to precisely timed sequences; usually dictated by the unit producer. Other remaining aural ingredients were generated by a small team, consisting of a recordist and a sound engineer. The content of effects was typically determined by straightforward requirements, and often this meant only sounds that directly matched images were considered.

These practices continued until the 1950s. When the anti-trust lawsuit was decided in 1948,[108] Studios were forced to divorce their cinema chains from their means of distribution. As a result, they could no longer guarantee

[108] See page 83

screenings. In addition to many other economic cutbacks of the late forties,[109] Studios were compelled to split their distribution and production divisions in order to survive. According to Staiger (1985, p.332), this latter separation discouraged any need for Hollywood to return to mass production and, as a result, they began to "concentrate on making fewer specialised projects and financing or buying the more desirable independent films". Over the next few years, as competition with television and the recording industry increased and their economic stability became more difficult to maintain, the Studios' interest in financing and distributing independent films increased. As a consequence, the Studio System of production slowly transformed into a system of banking, investment and facilities for smaller companies.

Hollywood studios also developed a new marketing system to cope with these changes. In partnership with an individual producer or talent agent, the Studio assembled the basic 'properties' of a film (i.e. the script, one or two stars, and perhaps the director) and sold them to a company (Maltby 1995, p.72). This scheme became what is known as 'the package-unit system' or 'packaging'. This system was advantageous to the Independents because most were already supported by their own technology, studio space and expert technicians; while the unions provided a ready supply of crewmembers (Staiger 1985, p.332). Throughout the next decade, Hollywood stepped up its 'packaging' output, selling films on an individual basis.

Without the constraints of the Studio System, independent producers, filmmakers and actors[110] began to promote their own projects. Many of them welcomed this lack of intervention because it allowed them a means of free and innovative expression. Other Independents enjoyed the opportunity of emulating the European 'art' film. As young filmmakers they were also able to

[109] See page 83
[110] Several actors had formed their own production companies. Others had gained power through influential agents.

cater to the attitudes of more youthful audiences. Their identification with sixties culture could be observed in their tendency to flout many of the traditional approaches to storytelling and by overtly incorporating 'immoral' subjects, such as sex, drugs and violence. The shift in Hollywood's economic needs provided a fertile environment for such films. Nonetheless, overall attendance still decreased and less mainstream filmmaking meant fewer earnings at the box office.

Throughout the seventies an attempt was made to continue promoting artistic integrity, but it soon clashed with commercial interests as corporations began assuming power over the floundering Hollywood studios.[111] These huge financial entities saw it as their mission to resurrect the industry. They instituted (or re-instituted) practices that mimicked corporate America. In addition to high-profile packaging and a surfeit of television advertising, they introduced merchandising on a grand scale. This usually included any number of toys and t-shirts, and the record sales of the music from the film (often consisting of previously recorded tracks). They also returned to a simple, linear style of narrative based on recognisable film forms. These practices culminated in a lucrative strategy based on serialisation and a significant increase in the remake of previously released films. Economics and aesthetics became inextricably linked through marketing and the prospect of earning a huge return on an investment.

By the early 1980s 'blockbuster' and 'high concept' filming was well established. Many of the large studios were becoming channels of merchandising and product placement.[112] This economic strategy led to the creation of films whose storylines are based on other manufacturer's products

[111] This had actually begun in 1966 when Paramount was purchased by Gulf and Western. Following this, other studios were either bought by large corporations or mergers occurred.
[112] Product placement is the deliberate and obvious reference to a sponsor's product in a film.

(e.g. videogames). This move towards marketable goods epitomised the media industry's attempt to appeal to the widest population possible. As a way of ensuring success, Hollywood studios also re-introduced private pre-release screenings to gauge audience reaction. The main purpose of these screenings was to allow producers and/or other Studio executives to adjust any of the film elements that audiences found displeasing or confusing before it was offered to the general public.

As the result of larger corporate mergers in the eighties and nineties, few films were truly independent of Studio financing. This allowed for a reformation of the two-tiered marketing system. In this system a nominal amount of private and corporate funding was allocated to 'smaller' films, while larger investments could be made on blockbusters - as their commercial viability ensured a profitable return. This benefited both markets. By carefully minimising their costs in Independents, the Studios managed to sustain the Independents' market while risking very little of their capital. Therefore, very few American filmmakers today operate completely outside Hollywood's sphere of influence. As we will see with the Coen brothers, most are dependent on the Studios for funding and distribution. As a result of this link between Independent filmmakers and the Studios, the current notion of 'independence' focuses more on the degree of interference from Studio personnel and the creation of original, groundbreaking work.

With the focus on inventiveness, current Independents tend to champion less traditional forms of storytelling. Many of their films contain unconventional camera and editing techniques, unsympathetic characters and non-formulaic narratives. A great number use music, sound effects and dialogue as integral ingredients in their plots. The intent of the 'new' Independent filmmakers is to express their own unique style. Unlike the previous generation, a majority

are not revolutionaries in terms of their film's narrative message, but they are radical in terms of production methods and how their films defy strict 'genre' classification. According to Breitbart (1985, p.51):

> What this new group of filmmakers is saying is that they want to make movies - in their own way and on their terms [...] they don't want to change the world, and they don't want to re-create the language of cinema every time they pick up the camera.

Ironically, in order to accomplish this, most Independent filmmakers, such as Joel and Ethan Coen, have adopted a mode of production that emulates that of the 'mini-studio'. In view of Hollywood's history, it is reasonable to assert that this has been done to maintain a united front firmly based on the belief in the product and a shared perspective on 'unobstructed' filmmaking. Because of this approach, each member of the crew is considered an essential part of the film's creation. The overriding motive for current Independent filmmakers is still self-expression rather than financial gain. This is no way denying that many of these filmmakers have made profitable products, but what it does suggest is that their objective was not one based on obtaining high returns.

Models of Independence

Exceptions to the Hollywood system can be found throughout American cinema history. The following serve as prototypes of Independents that significantly inform the working practices and narrative styles of the Coen brothers. They are presented in chronological order.

The first to be discussed are the producer David O. Selznick and the director Alfred Hitchcock. Selznick began his career in the film industry as a producer for MGM in 1926, but his passion for film artistry, regardless of cost, marked him out as an exception to the prevailing conventions. From the beginning, he sided with the European view that directors were artists and that therefore they should be given greater control over their work. This soon caused a falling out with Irving Thalberg, MGM's head of production, who felt creative freedom would lead to excess. He moved to Paramount where he tried to further his understanding of film as 'art'. This led to widespread investment, namely in sound equipment. However, he ultimately overstretched the budget and Selznick was forced to move on in 1931 to yet another Hollywood studio, RKO Radio Pictures. As noted in Part 1, while at RKO he set up a system of production that allowed directors considerable freedom. It sparked interest in many filmmakers, but caused disagreements between Selznick and Hollywood studio personnel. After another short period with MGM, he decided to found his own production company in 1935. Once again, Selznick established it with the hope of producing 'artistic' films.[113] He also courted many directors to sign with him; even those already contracted to other Hollywood studios. In late 1937 Alfred Hitchcock, longing for more creative freedom, became interested in joining Selznick. Later the next year they began working on REBECCA together. This film proved a tremendous success

[113] His company went on to produce A STAR IS BORN (Wellman 1937), PRISONER OF ZENDA (Cromwell 1937), NOTHING SACRED (Wellman 1937) and GONE WITH THE WIND (Fleming 1939), among others.

with critics and the public. More importantly, it demonstrated that filmmakers could thrive outside of the Hollywood studio system.

Following REBECCA, Selznick experienced the strain of overwork and liquidated his production company. He then opened a new company that sold packaged prestige films to interested Hollywood studios. This consisted of a two-picture deal for Hitchcock for RKO that included the scripts and the stars. After successes with SPELLBOUND (1945) and NOTORIOUS (1946) for Selznick, Alfred Hitchcock went on to work as a 'freelance' director with very little interference from any of the Hollywood studios. In 1947 he expanded his independence further by establishing his own distribution company. It was during this transitional period that Hitchcock released ROPE (1948) and UNDER CAPRICORN (1949). These two films experimented with extended uninterrupted takes. They also featured antagonists that Hitchcock tried to present in sympathetic light. By 1955 he further demonstrated his ability to compete with the Hollywood studios by presenting and occasionally directing his own television series. At the height of his success, Hitchcock released PSYCHO (1960), which challenged Hollywood conventions through the film's graphic content and by allowing the main star of the film to be murdered one-third into the narrative. Alfred Hitchcock's success proved that independence and popularity were not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The filmmaking enterprise that marks the transition from the Studio era to a time of greater independence is exemplified by Roger Corman. Corman began his career at American International Pictures as a producer and director of a plethora of extremely low-quality B-pictures in the 1950s.[114] By infusing a variety of traditional film forms (such as the western, horror, crime and

[114] Titles include: FIVE GUNS WEST (1955), THE DAY THE WORLD ENDED (1956), ATTACK OF THE CRAB MONSTERS (1957), ROCK ALL NIGHT (1957), MACHINE GUN KELLY (1958) and A BUCKET OF BLOOD (1959).

science fiction) with an attitude that tapped into the emerging youth culture, he established himself very quickly. He produced these films very rapidly, quite often within a week or two of each other, on extremely small budgets. A great majority of his films were financially successful, despite their poor technical quality. In the 1960s he began a series of films based on the stories and poems of Edgar Allen Poe. These adaptations achieved a small amount of critical acclaim and gave him a greater reputation within the filmmaking community. In view of this success, Corman's production company furthered its repertoire by providing opportunities for a generation of up-and-coming filmmakers and actors to work on their own features.[115] They were given the chance to begin their careers free of the stultifying restraints of Hollywood. This freedom fostered a frame of mind that supported their future careers. Under the name of various production companies Corman is still promoting films and filmmakers that fall outside the commercial mainstream.

Simultaneously, some filmmakers were beginning to look completely outside the Hollywood system for a means of creative freedom. After a short career on television portraying a private eye, John Cassavetes earned enough money to finance his first film, SHADOWS (1960). He assumed responsibility for the entire production and managed to create this film independent of any Hollywood interference. Cassevetes kept costs down by shooting it on 16mm film and by not using fabricated sets but real locations. The script was largely improvised by the actors and the crew consisted of only four people. Though it was technically restricted, many young filmmakers were inspired by its raw vitality and unconventionality. After two unhappy experiences making films within the system,[116] Cassavetes took independence to another level (Karney 2000, p.788). In 1968 he developed his own Hollywood studio-like production

[115] These would include Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Peter Bogdanovich, Jonathan Demme, Joe Dante, Ron Howard, Jonathan Sayles, James Cameron and Jack Nicholson.
[116] These were TOO LATE BLUES (1961) and A CHILD IS WAITING (1963).

team, consisting of a group of technicians, actor-friends and his wife, the actress Gena Rowlands. In production of subsequent films, Cassavetes continued employing a *cinéma vérité* style, using extreme close-ups and improvised scripts that generally focused on emotional crises. His critical success demonstrated that no one need limit their filmmaking talents to established formulas and conventional modes of production.[117]

The late 1960s also saw the creation of American Zoetrope, the brainchild of director and producer, Francis Ford Coppola. This production company, as with Cassavetes' mini-studio, established itself geographically outside Los Angeles with the intention of creating a facility that would allow for self-determined artistry. The focus was not necessarily on achieving high art, but on the means of expressing one's vision, uncompromised by corporate influence. However, American Zoetrope differed from Cassavetes' concept in many other ways. Coppola brought together a collection of film school student-friends,[118] who were to use their cine-literate knowledge to produce different films collectively. Their united awareness of the trappings that big Hollywood studios had established over the decades encouraged them to remain fervently opposed to any interference with their final product. Coppola functioned very much like a studio head/unit producer, brokering deals and arranging financing and distribution. He also purchased $80,000 worth of state-of-the-art editing and sound mixing equipment after visiting a trade fair in Germany. The advantage of having this kit to hand made it possible for American Zoetrope to be self-sufficient. Unfortunately, this dream was short-lived, as Warner Brothers were displeased with their first offering, Lucas' THX-1138 (1970) and resolved not to distribute the film if it were not edited to their satisfaction. This failure affected the remaining films set for

[117] I am indebted to *Cinema: Year by Year, 1894-2000* (Karney 2000) for the majority of information in this paragraph.
[118] These included George Lucas, Walter Murch, Carroll Ballard and Matthew Robbins.

production and American Zoetrope quickly became financially insolvent, forcing those involved to work within the industry.

Nonetheless, this disheartening result did not extinguish the spirit of independence from these and other filmmakers. Though made with the backing and distribution of studios, many of the films of the late 1960s/early 1970s also began to challenge the morality found in previous film narratives. Here, filmmakers were moving further away from treating film as a commodity; they saw it more as a statement, a form of artistic rebellion. In 1967 BONNIE AND CLYDE (Penn) radically departed from the Production Code through its provocative violence and its anti-establishment theme. It was also principally championed by its star Warren Beatty, who secured the rights and the financial backing for the production (Biskind 1998, p.27-32). In addition, that year saw the release of THE GRADUATE (Nichols), which gave a voice to disaffected youth and included 'inappropriate' sexual behaviour that set it against traditional Hollywood. The 'rebellion' eventually culminated in the release of EASY RIDER (Hopper) in 1969. This film captured the drug-taking, freethinking culture that had been emerging in society. These films not only mirrored a society disillusioned by war and political and social unrest, but they also emulated the radical changes occurring within the film industry.

American Independents continued to generate films that flouted the conventions of the classical Hollywood narrative. Many followed the examples of BONNIE AND CLYDE and EASY RIDER by challenging social morals. Nevertheless, many also subverted tradition in the actual construction of their films, for from the mid-1930s Hollywood had established a mode of narration within a specific framework and everything else became subservient to it.

Noel Burch (1973) called the rules that governed 'classical' filmmaking the Institutional Mode of Representation. He noted that they consisted of cinematic codes regarding such things as *mise-en-scène* and framing. These included:

(1) Editing had to be unassuming and subservient to the communicating of a readily coherent narrative with clear space/time arrangements.

(2) Editing should move the story temporally and spatially without confounding the audience's interpretation of events. There should be a clear sense of continuity.

(3) The story is to be structured in such a way as to propel the story forward in an obvious fashion, while disguising the actual apparatus that drives it.

(4) Matching the eye-lines of characters became vital for maintaining believability. This particularly applied in shot/reverse-shot sequences where the audience was positioned in line with one of the character's point of view.

(5) Camera shots should establish locations, objects or even characters before revealing detail to guide the audience's perception.

(6) Fictionalised characters should engage an audience but never reveal the film's illusory nature.

This specific range of cinematic codes has since become synonymous with American filmmaking.

The 'classic' narrative structure revolves around a form of conflict-resolution. Events are based on the connection between cause and effect, which proceed step-by-step in a linear fashion towards an inevitable outcome. The film world of the 'classic' narrative is determined by its verisimilitude rather than actual *vérité*. Consequently, its component parts - the events, the objects and the players - must convince the filmgoer that they conform to what can logically exist in that world and what can plausibly occur there. Classic narratives generally focus on the main protagonist (or 'hero') resolving the conflict in a conceivable fashion with the chain of events built around his or her progress. These individuals tend to be uncomplicated characters endowed with obvious personality traits that the audience identify with, either by wish fulfilment or through a realistic similarity between the character and themselves. Their motivations are clear or relatively clear, and quite often those who oppose them or hinder their path to resolution have equally clear reasons for doing so. The end of a classic narrative is usually marked by a 'happily-ever-after' style of closure. Every question raised during the story has been answered and all conflicts have been resolved and the resolution is achieved through punishment, reward or atonement.

The new style narratives of the post-Studio System Independents significantly challenged these classic conventions in terms of the amount of clarity they conveyed. The films became more complex, demonstrated by the ambiguity the stories portrayed and/or through the subversion of traditional film genres. American cine-literate directors, inspired chiefly by the creativity of European styles, were beginning to refer to previously established narrative forms and infuse them with more contemporary perspectives.

Pakula's KLUTE (1971), Altman's THE LONG GOODBYE (1972) and Polanski's CHINATOWN (1974) all drew heavily on the *film noir* tradition while flouting it at the same time. Pakula's film combines "quite traditional elements of classic narrative cinema with a degree of openness which would certainly have been inadmissible in the classic era" (Cook & Bernink 1999, p.42). The character, Bree Daniels (Fonda), is shown simultaneously as an enigma and an object of desire. This ambiguity is noticeably drawn out in a sequence, where a conversation with her therapist regarding her uncertainty about her relationship with Klute (Sutherland) becomes a voice-over that is heard while she is making love to him. Altman reworks the hard-nosed Marlowe character into a blasé, awkward layabout, making him more empathetic with the current mentality. At the same time he explores the conventional themes of blackmail, suicide, betrayal and murder in an updated atmosphere. Polanski, like many others, brought his European sensibility to Hollywood. He offers a melding of classic narration with a contemporary variation by deviating from the detective tradition that stipulates they are more perceptive than their betters. Throughout the film Gittes (Nicholson) consistently misinterprets people and their motives, culminating in the scene where Evelyn Mulwray (Dunaway) reveals her incestuous relationship with her father.

The ambiguity of 'new' narrative forms included those that simply had a very loose construction. This can be particularly noted in two 'existential road-trip' films from that period. Following on from the erratic, pop-psychedelia of HEAD (1968) Rafelson created FIVE EASY PIECES (1970). This film appears to function as a classic character driven piece, where the actions of Bobby (Nicholson) communicate the links between sequences. However, the purpose behind what motivates the character is never overtly disclosed. Elsaesser (1975 cited in Cook & Bernink 2001, p.101) characterises this film as one that epitomises a more liberal cinema, that is, one which has departed

from the goal-orientated protagonist of classic Hollywood. The enigma of the character maintains a level of mystery that denies the audience a clear interpretation. Similarly, in Malick's BADLANDS (1973), the main protagonists offer little introspection into the nature of the horrendous crimes in which they are involved. This ambiguity is also suggested through a consistent contrast amongst the dialogue, the images and a voice-over that is infused with triviality. Unlike Rafelson's film, Malick's BADLANDS is based on a true story, and as such, it provides the audience with a conclusive end to events. Nonetheless, it still leaves the audience with more questions than answers.

In addition to Cassavetes, other filmmakers made use of aspects of cinéma vérité in fictional story-telling to offer a more realistic representation of the events. Cinematographer Haskell Wexler employed these techniques while working on his directorial debut, MEDIUM COOL (1969). Having already established himself as a political documentary-maker, Wexler suggested enough realia in his film about the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention to suggest that the fictional storyline was an actual account of the events. This approach challenged Hollywood conventions by including mainly hand-held camera shots, which allowed for oblique angles, wobbly framing and greater proximity to individuals in crowd scenes. In 1971 William Friedkin, who also came from the documentary-making tradition, shot THE FRENCH CONNECTION using a form of *cinéma vérité*. His purpose was to capture the real-life events of the two policemen on which the film was based. Consequently, the narrative of the film is represented not only through hand-held camera techniques, but also via unconcealed edits. In many scenes, the actors were not given the exact position of the cameras. It was hoped that this would produce acting that was more naturalistic. Moreover, the film ends enigmatically by not allowing the audience to see the outcome of the final gunshot.

The Coens' Approach to the Narrative and Finance

The Coen brothers have demonstrated many of the aforementioned approaches in their narratives. Through their keen awareness of various cinematic modes and techniques, past and present, the Coens have been able to incorporate a variety of filmic references in their work. This knowledge has allowed them to bend many of the 'rules' that govern the classic narrative. It has also inspired them to blend a variety of film forms (i.e. genres) which play against audience's expectations. Maintaining this method of storytelling throughout their career, Joel and Ethan Coen have developed a distinct narrative style. To ensure their artistic freedom, they have developed economic strategies that mirror those attempted by the Independents cited earlier. As we will see, this unconventional mode of production informs their entire filmmaking process.

This strategy of flouting longstanding filmic conventions through the melding of signifiers and codes that have traditionally characterised classical film forms has placed the Coen at the forefront of postmodernist filmmaking (Jameson 1998 and Notali 1999).[119] Joel and Ethan Coen demonstrate this by consistently constructing narratives that make use of intertextuality (quoting, citing and alluding to other texts within a single text) and, on one occasion, by utilising hypertextuality (deriving an entire text from another pre-existing text)[120](Genette 1997, p.1-7). The Coens are also practitioners of a post-modern approach that Jameson (1998, p.8) called 'metonymic' (a nostalgic mode of storytelling characterised by the reinvention of the feeling and shape

[119] Jameson (1998, p.7) defines postmodernism as historical-cultural period where true stylistic innovation is no longer possible; all that is left is to imitate dead styles. Elsewhere he states that postmodernist art is no longer divided between 'high' and 'low' art because of the dramatic increase in mass cultural and popular arts [*i.e. cinema*] (1998, p.19). What is more, the Coen brothers are included in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures* (Notali, J. 1999, p.88-92).
[120] O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? (2000) is based on Homer's Odyssey.

of characteristic art objects of an older generation). All of these artistic devices lead to yet another post-modern narrative technique: intersubjectivity (building a text on the shared knowledge between the filmmakers and the audience). Here, the Coen brothers' layering of past filmic references, whether cultural or textual, tests the knowledge of those experiencing the film. This is a narrative style that invites audiences to sort out mentally the visual and aural ingredients and then associate them with past plots, sounds and visual memories. The recurring and integrated use of these post-modern methods appears throughout their entire repertoire.

The narrative of BLOOD SIMPLE (1983) actually comes from a rather conventional source. It finds its origin in the novels of James M. Cain, several of whose hard-boiled detective stories have been made into films [(e.g. DOUBLE INDEMNITY (1941) and THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE (1946; 1981)]. However, Joel and Ethan Coen grounded their film solely in the complexities of the literary sources, avoiding any of the film clichés spawned by the cinematic versions of Cain's books. In addition, they flouted the time-honoured *film noir* style normally associated with these types of films, which, in turn, subverted the audience's expectations. This can chiefly be seen by the fact that the film was shot in colour, it is based in suburban Texas and the killings are based on misinterpretations of the events.[121] The film is represented in the classic cinema narrative form of cause and effect, but the arrangement of the narrative gives the audience an omnipresent perspective of the unfolding story, while denying any individual character knowledge of any of the other characters' actions. This empowers the filmgoer to sympathise with the progressive web of events that unfold throughout the narrative. Russell (2001, p.24) explained that this leads the audience to connect "with the agency responsible for story-telling" rather

[121] Some of the many characteristics of *film noir* include shadowy black and white images, urban settings and murders that are intentional acts of revenge.

than the characters; in this way, "we become emotionally and intellectually invested in the narrative process that delineates the fictional world presented to us". Moreover, the world the characters inhabit offers no morality or redemption; there is a sense of inevitability, a lack of hope. This is epitomised by the fact that at the end of the film the characters are no wiser than when it began.

With the release of their second film, RAISING ARIZONA, Joel and Ethan Coen continued to defy the expectations of audiences and critics. In direct contrast to their previous film, this 1987 release featured fast-paced, cartoon-like humour and focused on family life. In the construction of the film the Coens arranged a wealth of cinema's historically identified 'genres' in an eclectic fashion. These include slapstick comedy, family films, prison films, the yuppie/baby films of the 1980s and spaghetti westerns. However, by choosing to make a narrative about the institution of parenthood, Joel and Ethan Coen made this potentially chaotic film more accessible and easier to identify with than BLOOD SIMPLE. Furthermore, "the crude melange works because the film makes no effort to conceal its counterparts, nor does it ever try to marshal them into some kind of hierarchy" (Kriest 1998, p.83). For the financing and distribution of this film the Coen brothers were determined to remain 'independent'. Ben Barenholtz, head of Circle Releasing Corporation (the company that had distributed BLOOD SIMPLE) helped create a context for the Coens to work with the minimum amount of interference by providing half the financing and guaranteeing them final cut.[122] This arrangement marked the starting point of any future agreements they would make with their investors.

[122] The distributor, Twentieth Century- Fox provided the other half. The film in total cost them $5 million to make.

While the narrative of RAISING ARIZONA followed many of the conventions of the screwball comedy tradition (circularity and repetition), eccentricity and originality can also be found in its content. Firstly, it is told predominately through a voice-over narration; a device briefly used in BLOOD SIMPLE. However, the wording of these lines has the flavour of 'old-time-country' poetry, which gives it an anachronistic quality.[123] The 'lines' are in contrast to the character, as this style of discourse is never used in any of his dialogue scenes. This suggests the Coens are not attempting to promote an authentic person, but rather use him as a representation of a person of a particular status (i.e. "trailer trash") and a geographical area (i.e. the American South).[124] Secondly, the film wilfully neglects marking a clear distinction between dream and reality. This is denoted when a character from H.I.'s (Cage) dreams enters the 'real' world of the film and interacts with other characters.[125] This surrealism adds to the film's cartoon-like atmosphere. In fact, the Coens make no attempt to represent 'naturalism'. The film is full of larger-than-life characters, exaggerated events and inflated emotions. It would appear that their purpose in making RAISING ARIZONA was to champion the 'little things': the weak, the simple, the no-hopers. Their 'backwards' characters are given a sense of dignity even as they demonstrate the impossibility of achieving the American Dream. As a means of complementing this atmosphere, the Coens shot many of the scenes from low and oblique angles using erratic camera moves quite often shot at varying speeds.[126]

[123] For example to describe Edwina's (Hunter) inability to have children, H.I. (Cage) says, "Her insides were a rocky place where my seed could find no purchase" (Coen & Coen 1996, p.129).
[124] Attention is specifically drawn to this 'impossibility' when, after Edwina acknowledges his presence, H.I. asks, "D' you see him too?" (Coen & Coen 1996, p.231).
[125] This is discussed in further detail when the films are interpreted in full in Part 4.
[126] Attention is specifically drawn to this 'impossibility' when, after Edwina acknowledges his presence, H.I. asks, "D' you see him too?" (Coen & Coen 1996, p.231).

For MILLER'S CROSSING (1990) Barenholtz again arranged for the Coens to have total artistic control, providing Twentieth Century-Fox approved the script. If they accepted it, "they were not entitled to dictate anything, from cast to title [...] the only way Fox could intercede creatively during production was if the Coens had deviated substantially from the screenplay" (Bergan 2000, p.115).[127] The film offers audiences what appeared on the surface to be a tribute to the Gangster film tradition. However, it is more a narrative about deception and perception inspired by the content of the literary works of Dashiell Hammett[128] and Damon Runyon.[129] In what is nearly the opposite of BLOOD SIMPLE, the motivation of the main character is not only hidden from the others but also completely hidden from the audience. It forces the filmgoer to contemplate the rationale behind the character's action, especially as they wonder who is a friend and who is an enemy. The narrative is woven around a series of double-crosses that exploit many of the concepts associated with the Gangster film form: family, loyalty, ethics and honour. Nonetheless, it remains detached from the convention by mocking these themes. The opening of MILLER'S CROSSING appears to reference the beginning of THE GODFATHER (Coppola 1972) but by way of contrast. In MILLER'S CROSSING gang boss Leo (Finney) refuses to help Casper (Polito) who appeals to his sense of ethics, whereas Don Corleone (Brando) agrees to 'assist' Bonasera (Corsitto), despite Bonasera's lack of respect towards the Don. According to Horst (1998, p.91) it announces "the demise of old gangster etiquette". As such, it declares the Coens' 'desire' to subvert the traditional approaches from the outset. They further develop this by having homosexual undertones, drifting loyalties, multiple ethnicities, moments of conscience and no untouchables. Moreover, the film ends without a sense of closure; it suggests that all of the efforts of the main character

[127] The Coens again kept the budget relatively low. In total it cost them $14 million to make.
[128] There are definable allusions to The Glass Key and Red Harvest.
[129] Though never specifically cited by the Coens as an inspiration, Runyon's highly imaginative brand of English bares a striking resemblance to the stylistic dialogue used throughout the film.

had been in vain. Surprisingly, this engenders identification within the audience that had finally come to understand the reasoning behind his motivations. Though the film did not do as well at the box office as prior releases (perhaps due to its complexity) it still managed to be a critical success.

Staying with Circle Films, the Coen brothers undertook their grandest venture into ambiguity, BARTON FINK (1991). The film lacks much of the evidence one would need to understand the characters' motivations or indeed the causal connections between the sequence of events in the narrative. As such, it has evoked various interpretations by audiences and critics alike. It is told from the point of view of the main character, who is portrayed as a naive, idealist who cannot relate to the subject he says he is championing. The fact that he is unsympathetic, in the traditional Hollywood sense, adds to the enigma of the film. It is not only difficult to determine the rationale behind many of his actions, but it is also difficult to ascertain whether the ways other characters respond to him are justified. On one level it is the story about the consequences of compromising one's art for commerce, on another level it is a revelation of the 'evils' of Hollywood. On yet another level, it is a comment on the illusory nature of representation in film. In countless interviews, the Coen brothers themselves refuse to define the true nature of this film, preferring to leave the meaning obscured.[130] The historical content of film also seems slightly awry. Many critics have noted that despite the 1941 setting the items are more reminiscent of the 1930s or merely misguided.[131]

[130] For example in Time Out magazine, Joel Coen said, "One of the things that'd been rattling around for a time was to set a movie in an old, decrepit hotel. We weren't sure what the story would be, but several years earlier we'd read *City of Nets* (Otto Friedrich's definitive behind-the-scenes account of Hollywood in the '40s), and we felt we might talk about some of those things he dealt with. But really the film was just a confluence of different strands we'd been thinking about; I'm not quite sure about specifically how and why it came about as it did, you know what I mean?" (Geoff Andrew 1991, p.19).

[131] Richard Jameson's article in Film Comment (1991, p.26, 32) is typical of this critique. He states that Capitol Pictures would have made more sense as Cohn's Columbia Pictures in the early 1930s and Clifford Odets' political

However, the Coens make no claim to historical authenticity nor do they assert that any of the characters are the accurate representation of historical figures. In truth, the similarities are meant to be superficial. They are simply devices of the story-telling process that Joel and Ethan Coen employ. The result of these significant departures from Hollywood norms probably enabled the film to earn much higher critical acclaim in Europe.[132]

Having concluded their four-picture contract with Circle Films, the Coens needed an alternative financial support for their next film, THE HUDSUCKER PROXY (1994). London-based Working Title films agreed to back them, as did the flamboyant Hollywood producer, Joel Silver, with further assistance from Warner Brothers. Silver had been greatly impressed with their work for many years. However, he thought that they just "[hadn't] connected with the right piece of commercial material yet" (Bergan 2000, p.148). Initially though the Coens shied away from Silver but he encouraged their cooperation by allowing them final cut with an expandable budget.[133] Having access to more money, the Coens were able to shoot using four separate units on this film and they were able to employ a variety of visual effects. The overall narrative consisted of an overt pastiche of the films of Frank Capra, Howard Hawks and Preston Sturges. Through its direct quotation and similar characterisations, it serves as a clear demonstration of the intertextualisation of the classic cinema narrative codes. Nonetheless, the setting, like BARTON FINK, is metonymic. As Joel Coen said, "it is not historical - everything is cheated. This is a mythical 1950s. We wanted everything to be unspecific, like a fable" (Mottram 2000, p.102). There is also a voice-over narrator, who also features later as an omniscient character within the narrative itself. This device defies the effacement of the work in the cinematic world while simultaneously

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aesthetic shared by Barton (Turturro) reflected his leanings of a decade earlier; additionally, he suggested the J.P. Mayhew character (Mahoney) resemblance to William Faulkner was a “careless melange of Faulkner-bio minuate”.

[132] BARTON FINK won the top three prizes at the Cannes Film Festival that year.

[133] This film cost approximately $25 million to make.

reinforces the nature of story-telling. It contains films within the film (i.e. mini-narratives): such as the 'Tidbits of Time', a homage to Movietone Newsreels. There is also a psychiatrist sequence, which parodies the clichés of psychoanalysis in 1940s films. Sadly, the film was criticised for drawing too much attention to its artificial construction and that, along with some unfavourable views of the film's title, led to its failure at the box office.[134]

Almost as a direct response to the disappointment of their venture into 'big-money' Hollywood, the Coen brothers retreated into familiar territory for their next film, FARGO (1996). They returned to their home state of Minnesota, low-budget filming[135] and the art of film form manipulation. According to Joel Coen, "Fargo does not fit into any genre, so we had to warn the public in the opening credits" (Reinicke 1998, p.171). That warning consisted of a clear declaration that the content of the film was based on actual events. This, however, was not entirely true;[136] it was merely an attempt to force the audience to expect a certain framework for the film. The Coen brothers said, "By informing the public that it was based on fact, we prepared them not to see the film as an ordinary thriller" (Bergan 2000, p.166). Therefore, it was as conscious an effort as their previous films in that they sought to make a comment on a particular film form. Yet, in this case, it is presented with greater subversion. Furthermore, this film comments ironically "on the limits of objectivity, while referencing Hollywood's long tradition of subjectifying history" (Russell 2001, p.138).[137] This deliberate fiction also enabled the Coens to invent characters that significantly depart from convention. Jerry

[134] It has been estimated to have earned only $2 million of its $25 million budget.
[135] FARGO cost $7 million to make. The Coens stayed with Working Title for production costs, but moved to a much smaller subsidiary, Polygram Filmed Entertainment, who had assisted in the production of THE HUDSUCKER PROXY for further production costs and distribution. They also retained total artistic control.
[136] Joel Coen said, “But there was a kidnapping of a wife in Minnesota in 1987. We’re not big on research. We just didn’t care at a certain point. We found the story compelling, and beyond that, we were not interested in rendering the details as they were” (Bergan 2000, p.166).
[137] Consider the historical inaccuracies or biased views of recent historical films, such as BRAVEHEART (Gibson 1995) and U-571 (Mostow 2000).

(Macy) is depicted as the antithesis of what Ethan Coen called "the Hollywood baddie being a super-professional in control of everything" (Mottram 2000, p.122). His character epitomises a weak-minded and unfulfilled man whose desperation leads him to his own destruction. Marge (McDormand), the kind-hearted, pregnant police officer, is a radical deviation from the tradition of hard-nosed macho cops. To further capture the 'real', the film consists of very little artifice and most of the camera techniques conform to the classic cinema style. A radical departure for the Coens in this film is its moral tone: a clear distinction between good and evil. The 'worlds' of the opposing characters seem overtly black and white, in the traditional Hollywood sense. It is possible that the explicit use of this convention assisted the film to garner the praise of critics and audiences. This success resulted in seven Academy nominations and improved box office success.[138]

Building on that success, the Coen brothers continued with Working Title and Polygram Filmed Entertainment for THE BIG LEBOWSKI (1998). However, this film did not mark their further progress towards conventional filmmaking. In fact, it denoted their most daring hybrid of film forms thus far. It is comprised of various elements: western, Busby Berkley musical, film noir, buddy film and screwball comedy. This strategy could be described as one based on risk. On the other hand, their last two films had proven that the market was unpredictable. Therefore, it seems to be more of a strategy based on their willingness to indulge their current interests, together with a hope that it would resonate with audiences. The plot of THE BIG LEBOWSKI is reminiscent of a classic cinematic/literary convention. Its labyrinth nature evokes the episodic style of Raymond Chandler's "high minded pulp fiction [...] with its variety of colourful locations and characters [which]

[138] FARGO was nominated for Best Director (Joel Coen), Best Actress (Frances McDormand), Best Supporting Actor (William H. Macy), Best Screenplay (Joel & Ethan Coen), Best Cinematography (Roger Deakins) and Best Editing (Roderick Jaynes). In the end it won only two: Best Screenplay and Best Actress.

demonstrates the different social strata through its juxtaposing of people and places" (Mottram 2000, p.137). The Coens deviate from this form by avoiding dark overtones, having a sense of continuation at the end and by having the main character differ significantly from a Chandler-esque protagonist. In fact, the Coen brothers redefine the role of this character for the audience (through the opening narration) by stating that there is no such person as a hero but merely, "the right man for his time and place". Moreover, by depicting him as a laid-back, semi-educated 'loser', they challenge the audience to accept this new definition. As with THE HUDSUCKER PROXY, this film also makes use of the narrator/character, which not only reinforces the fictitious nature of film, but it also re-emphasises that story is central to the Coen brothers' filmmaking process.

Joel and Ethan Coen's next release offered yet another mixture of literary and cinematic sources. Firstly, O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? (2000) derives its title from the serious social drama that the crusading director in SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS (Sturges 1941) plans to make. However, he abandons it upon realising that people do not want tragedy, they just want to laugh. The ethos of Sturges' film is not only celebrated in this Coen brothers' release, but it best describes their entire career. Joel and Ethan Coen have expressed no desire to change the world and they make no claim that their films will improve humankind; they simply want to entertain their audience. In O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? the Coens bring amusement through a narrative loosely based on the 'low art' of the comedy-musical tradition and the 'high art' of Homer's *Odyssey*. Rather than taking a principled stance on the political and social situations presented in the film, the Coens bring humour and song.

Furthermore, an enthusiasm for early American blue-grass, folk, country and gospel music initially informed the shape of this film.[139] The songs, sung or heard by the characters, place the story in the Deep South of 1930s America. Consequently, the Coens draw on the relevant Americana in order to transpose the elements of Ulysses' homecoming to that era. For example, the Cyclops is a dishonest Bible salesman with an eye-patch, the Sirens are washerwomen and the blind seer is a simple, countrified African-American. As in previous films, the Coens again blend the fictitious and the factual to give, among other things, authority to their story. Examples of this these include: the notorious criminal 'Baby Face" Nelson, bluesman Tommy Johnson and the politician W Lee (Pappy) O'Daniel (who had toured Texas with musicians called the Light Crusty Doughboys) (Mottram 2000, p.153-4). The political parties, though relevant, are merely story-telling devices, not an observation on society. Joel Coen explained that:

> The political undercurrent of the movie functions primarily for dramatic purposes...the bad guys are racial bigots and KKK Grand Dragons,[140] and the good guys are the heroes of the movie. So it's all kind of a story thing (Guardian article quoted in Mottram 2000, p.157).

By interconnecting familiar forms of story-telling the Coens also compliment the intelligence of the audience. Designing films in this way demonstrates that the Coens acknowledge the cinematic and literary knowledge of the public.

THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE (2001) marked a 'return' to the classic cinematic narrative. However, it was to comment on a particular film form rather than a mode of commercialisation. Its overall design pays homage to

[139] This will be discussed in greater detail when analysing the sound content of O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?.

[140] KKK stands for the Ku Klux Klan, a society of white supremacists that had formed after the American Civil War. Their racism against African-Americans and Jews is notorious. The Grand Dragon was the title given to the head of this organisation.

film noir melodramas of the forties, again those based on the writings of James M. Cain.[141] The editing and camera work are reminiscent of the styles of that era. In addition to the period sets and costumes, they enhanced nostalgia by having the colour film stock 'bleached out', thus retaining an authentic black and white look. The film is infused with the slow, steady pacing that is associated with films of that time. This tempo challenges the contemporary trend of fast-paced mainstream films and it is also personified the main character. Ed Crane (Thornton) is portrayed as a stoic barber, who offers the audience very little in terms of action and dialogue. Nonetheless, this unconventional protagonist gains sympathy through a voice-over commentary that pervades the film. Ultimately, he discloses more insight regarding himself than any previous Coen brothers' character. At the end of the film, this voice-over is also revealed to be narration,[142] that once again expresses their fondness for story-telling and its pre-eminence within their work. On another level, the explanation of the story acts like a catharsis, it helps Ed "sort it all out". It gives him peace so that before death he is apologetic and he finally recognises the love he had for his wife. The outcome offers the audience a sense of complete closure, and despite its melancholy, it shows a strong connection to the classic narrative.

The Coen brothers were due to release what would have been their first adaptation, Dickey's *To The White Sea*, when, prior to principle photography, they reached an impasse with their financers. It is the only recorded instance of them abandoning a project in order to maintain their artistic integrity. Joel Coen explained:

[141] See page 124
[142] Ed Crane is actually recounting the events in the film for a magazine article he has been asked to write. What is more, he says, "They're paying me five cents a word, so you'll pardon me if sometimes I've told you more than you want to know" (Coen & Coen 2001, p.103).

> It wasn't anybody's fault, it was just that a certain amount of money was available to make the movie, and a certain amount was necessary to make it properly, and it came to a point where we either radically reconceive how we were going to shoot the movie or move on to something else (Mundhra 2001).

Instead of continuing, the Coens began several different writing projects for other filmmakers. It is reasonable to assert that their intention was to recuperate some of the money they had lost on *To The White Sea* so that they could finance their next feature. However, a sequence of events led them to taking over production of two of these films and, to some extent, the studio presence that was attached to them. As a result, these two films, INTOLERABLE CRUELTY (2003) and THE LADYKILLERS (2004), show a shift in their normal mode of production. INTOLERABLE CRUELTY is a modern pastiche of a fifties 'battle-of-the-sexes' romantic comedy, which is offset by the modern legal system. It was heavily publicised. Much of the advertising focused on its two main stars: Catherine Zeta-Jones and George Clooney[143] The narrative followed the classic tradition in terms of its construction and plot, however, with few hints of Joel and Ethan Coen's predisposition to eccentric treatment of plot and character. THE LADYKILLERS is a remake of an Ealing Studios comedy, which may have been chosen due to its relative obscurity in the United States.[144] As it was yet another contemporary remake, it not only generated hostility from the non-commercial purists, but it also resulted in reproaches from the British, who claimed that the Coens were tampering with an English 'classic'. In addition to these factors, Tom Hanks, one of the 'biggest' actors in Hollywood, starred in the film. Notwithstanding these reservations, the narrative is reminiscent of a Coen brothers' film. It features a story-driven plot built on an array of unconventional characters.

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[143] Clooney had worked for the Coens before on O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? and was their choice for this film. It is uncertain whether Zeta-Jones was part of the Studio package or the Coens' choice.

[144] Ealing Studio made a series of comedies in the 1940s and 1950s. In the United Kingdom most of them have become well-established examples of Britain's comic past: whereas, in America, they have not enjoyed this long-standing reputation. In fact, the film's star Tom Hanks stated, "I haven't seen the original and precious few people have actually in the United States of America…" (Gibson 2004).

However, in the end, both films were less successful than anticipated. It is possible that the 'different' quality of both films is a direct result of changes in their usual mode of production, and from compromises they may have had to make because of commercial pressures, as the two films made more appeals to market demands than their previous releases. Furthermore, many of their fans (who have contributed significantly to the Coen's success) expressed a great disappointment in these films and felt the Coen brothers had 'sold out'. Nevertheless, it could be argued the Coen brothers' acceptance of this work is consistent with their wish to cover a wide variety of film forms. The brothers had never before released a blatantly commercial film or a remake. One could say that they saw both of these films as a chance to experiment in those areas.[145]

Irrespective of this, the overall objective of the Coen brothers would appear to be to engage an audience as cine-literate filmgoers rather than as a means of generating huge box-office results. They are less inclined to follow fashions or trends that are encouraged by the mass-market economy. The promotion and advertising of Joel and Ethan Coen's films have been relatively minimal and a majority of them have not used the hype and strategies employed for marketing most Hollywood feature films. This may have been encouraged by the fact that most of the narratives of the Coen brothers' films have been geared away from any blatant marketability. As previously noted, most of their films walk the line between mainstream and European 'art house' films. Their style draws upon multi-layered references and various filmic forms. All of these approaches make the brothers' work difficult to categorise. Additionally, their style, like many independently-minded filmmakers, is unpredictable so that there is not always a clear market to aim for when

[145] All of the aforementioned films are looked at in greater detail in Part 4. There is particular reference to the 'differences' in their last two films on pages 256 to 271.

promoting any particular film. This makes a Coen brother's film harder to sell to the general public and helps explain why they have retained a small devoted fan base. They do not appear over-concerned with pleasing the public with simple storylines, sympathetic lead characters and cliché dialogue. They are predominately interested in designing original and entertaining films. Joel and Ethan Coen's view of their market is summarised by their composer, Carter Burwell, who stated:

> The Coens are different from any other filmmaking enterprise I've ever worked on [...] I've never heard Joel and Ethan discuss an audience at any point - the audience will get this, or get that, or we'll sell tickets [...] In other films, the process does seem more geared towards audience - they test them, to see what they do and don't understand. The concept of audience is very different from how Joel and Ethan make a film. They have their own quality; they're not bent out of shape to fit whatever the market demands (Bergan 2000, p.23).

To some extent their creative process is a very personal one; they wish to please themselves rather than pursue a mode of production that would satisfy the mass market. As a result, the Coen brothers have relied on word-of-mouth rather than conventional means of gauging audience reaction. This has not only reduced monies spent on advertising but it has also helped them build a more loyal fan base.

In addition, their films may harbour hidden meanings, but they are not full of weighty importance or judgmental messages. Audiences of Joel and Ethan Coen's films are often left to make their own interpretations of the actions that characters take or in terms of the outcome of the film as a whole (e.g. BARTON FINK [1991]). However, it would appear that they would be just as pleased if the audience simply 'went along for the ride'. Profundity is not their concern. In fact, the films constantly mock any suggestion of depth, interpretation or enquiry. Gilbey (in Mottram 2000, p.135) summarised this assertion, by stating:

> The Coen brothers make films about nothing. Really, nothing...and does that matter? Well, people said similar things - and worse - about Orson Welles. The truth is, though, their films may convey nothing, examine nothing, and demonstrate nothing, their particular brand of meaninglessness is so keen, so [inimitable], and so rib-crackingly funny that their work can be exhausting to watch.

Moreover, the way the Coen brothers synthesise earlier film forms into unconventional narratives, while not unique, engages audiences. This is a technique that is perhaps their best 'marketing' tool. This is because it provides the filmgoer with the freedom to assume roles that are simultaneously passive and active. In this, they share and exchange elements that exist within the collective subconscious of the public.

Taken as a whole, the filmmaking process of the Coen brothers appears to be mainly concerned with telling a good story in a manner that best exemplifies their 'personal' tastes and interests. Occasionally these interests have a hint of the mainstream, but they would most likely find strict categorisation intolerable. The Coens merely select items that will help generate the elements of the film worlds they are creating, regardless of their potential profitability. Often these items transgress the invisible line between 'high' and 'low' art. For the Coens there is no differentiation between these two aspects of 'art'. It is all part of culture. Their rejection of this accepted hierarchy has afforded them greater scope in their creativity. As such, Joel and Ethan Coen's true originality as filmmakers comes from taking all of these items and making them their own.

Hollywood Tradition and Infighting

Close collaboration among the different departments involved in a film's production seems to have been a rare practice in Hollywood. Over the years, various personnel have had disputes over financial control or creative freedom. As a result of these disputes, individual departments were often able to improve their working conditions, but only to the exclusion of any other department. This has perpetuated divisions between industry personnel, which led specific departments to seek recognition and protection though union representation. As a result of this infighting, industry personnel have been discouraged from working outside agreed conventions or designated union restrictions. These long-established divisions are set in contrast to the Coen brothers' mode of production, as we see later in this section.

One could argue that the creation of the Studio System was itself the result of a rebellion against Edison's attempt to monopolise film production and distribution through the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC) in 1908. Edison's attempt to force film companies to pay him a license fee for use of *any* film equipment and *any* film rental encouraged distributors, followed by production companies, to revolt. In response, among others, Carl Laemmle established the Independent Moving Picture Company, Thomas Ince founded the New York Motion Picture Company and William Fox created the Fox Film Corporation. Though the MPPC was dissolved as the result of antitrust allegations in 1915, it is suggested that it was not caused by the rise of these independent companies, but by its inflexible business practices, which discouraged companies from "[experimenting] with new modes of production, distribution or exhibition" (Cook & Bernink 1999, p.5). Consequently, while

Edison had been championing 'short' films, other companies were moving towards longer films with higher production values.

This first schism encouraged film companies to compete amongst each other. In order to establish themselves within the industry, they had to attract exhibitors and audiences to their particular 'brand'. Thus, each company vied for the highest box office result through the promotion of 'stars' and increasingly lavish productions. However, while doing so, many of these 'stars' were quickly beginning to appreciate their influence and so sought to capitalise on the 'power' they had to draw audiences. The rapid rise in an actor as a financial asset can be noted in the early career of Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin moved from Keystone (where he was artistically and financially restricted) to Essanay and a salary of $1,250 a week. After the dissolution of the MPPC he left Essanay for Mutual, where he earned $10,000 a week, and Essanay quickly became financially insolvent. After perfecting his 'tramp' character at Mutual, he moved to First National with an eight-film million-dollar contract. Chaplin's power culminated in the creation of United Artists with other top-paid actors, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, and top-earning director, D.W. Griffith in 1919. However, this bold declaration of the marketing power of actors was rendered virtually impotent by the fact they lacked both a means of production and exhibition outlets.

While executives and film stars fought over who was to control the entire production, skilled employees argued for fairer compensation. Between 1918-1921 there were three major occurrences of industrial action. These led to the formation of five unions in the Studio Basic Agreement of 1926 (Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson 1985, p.311). Though these organisations protected the workers, they failed to end disagreements. In fact, as new technology was introduced to the industry, further negotiations were needed to establish new

duties and training. Quite often these changes would encourage further divisions between previously instituted work sectors. Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson (1985, p.312) note that one internal dispute occurred between the introduction of new forms of body augmentation; Motion Picture Costumers were allotted control of body padding and the Make-up Artists took responsibility for rubber aids. These types of disputes led to the identification of specific job positions across the whole industry that were then allocated to an appropriate union.

Skilled workers on a production also lacked the recognition attributed to others by way of the screen credit system. Initially introduced in 1897, screen credits were merely a means of retaining property rights. They usually contained the title of the production, the company's name, a copyright symbol and nothing more. As 'stars' and notable directors became marketable commodities they too featured prominently in credit sequences. Consequently, credits soon became a sign of status within the industry. The exclusion of the 'ordinary' production workforce implied that film companies considered the jobs of these employees to be of less value, as they did not directly represent the visible products in the marketplace. Guilds and unions fought for recognition, and with the creation of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1927, provisions were made to include and 'recognise' many of those workers. These acknowledgments, and the prospect of receiving an award, was also meant to encourage the standards the Academy was instituting.

Sound professionals had their rights protected by their own unions,[146] but this brought them no further recognition within the industry. In fact, their struggle for recognition parallels the visual bias of the industry. From the

[146] Of which, there are two: Local 695 for sound technicians and Local 776 for sound editors.

forties to the sixties entire sound departments were identified with a single screen credit of "sound", and this was mainly in deference to the Studio sound director. In direct response, sound editors had to create an organisation outside the industry: the Motion Picture Sound Editors (MPSE). Founded in 1953, its function was not related to bargaining, but it was as an educational and social body that served to "make the job of the sound editor visible to a larger population of Hollywood professional and non-professionals" (Beck 2003, p.267). This was mostly achieved through a high-profile awards ceremony that honoured individuals and films that used sound in innovative ways. At the fourth ceremony producer Sam Katzman noted in his speech that "most pictures systematically ignored crediting the work of sound editors" and that "he would give [them] credit on all of his future films" (ibid., p.268). Unfortunately, this type of recognition was a lone voice in the industry.

In 1954 Raymond Bomba, president of the MPSE, attempted to raise awareness through the dissemination of an essay entitled, *What Does the Sound Editor Do?.* This article specified the various responsibilities of the position, but more significantly, it highlighted the value of aural content in the construction of a film. Bomba demonstrated how sound identifies action as much as image does: the buzz of a bee, the drone of a plane, the discharge of a revolver and the sound of a kiss. He also stated how sound could be used to identify various conditions such as turbulent surf, the melancholy sounds of night, or a dripping tap. Despite raising the profile of the work of the sound editor, it brought no immediate recognition. Over the next two decades, their work remained relatively unrecognised and they were deprived of a separate screen credit. Moreover, it took until 1982 for the

Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to award sound professionals for their efforts.[147]

Despite this acknowledgement of the work of the sound crew, the positioning of screen credits still emphasised the visual bias of the industry. This was mostly because there was a convention that the work of sound effects editing should be defined as a 'craft' and not an 'art'. The rationale behind this is summarised by Beck (ibid., p.266) in the following:

> Most of the work of the sound editor occurs after the production recordings have been made and after the image track has been edited. Hence, in many circles the job of sound editor was often considered to be a form of manual labor, retrofitting the recorded material to match the picture cut.

Because sound was relegated to this subservient role, it was no surprise that the industry has viewed noises and atmospheric sounds as elements that lacked artistic merit. Whereas, perhaps as a result of images' historical precedence, picture editing has recently been considered among the 'arts'. This partiality seems rather debatable as picture editing also involves 'manual labour' and both are traditionally performed in post-production. Nonetheless, tradition and union restrictions state that any position considered a craft within the industry must be listed among the end credits and never the title credits. Consequently, these sound crewmembers have been relegated to this later position.

Despite their advantages, unions have also restricted the point in time at which the sound crew can join the production. Prior to the 1970s, the union Local 695 (which represented the needs of sound technicians) and union Local 776 (which negotiated on behalf of sound editors) defined an impenetrable barrier between the production and post-production workforces.

[147] Academy Sound Effects awards emerged in the 1960s but they represented the total work done in post-production, rather than individual efforts. In doing so, they even included sound editing as an added ‘effect’ (Beck 2003, p.269).

This compartmentalisation existed until the Studios began to collapse in the 1960s and sound work was relocated to independent sound companies. A need arose to streamline the quality of the work across every strand. Initially the position of the supervising sound editor was created, whose responsibility was to oversee the entire post-production process. This became possible only after both unions aligned themselves with The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE). This new agreement allowed individuals to have multiple sound jobs on a film, as long as those jobs did not crossover from pre-production to post-production.

Concurrently, outside the confines of the Hollywood-based union restrictions, film sound practitioners were able to push the boundaries further. Chief among them was Walter Murch, who as this paper has already noted, sought to champion the recognition of sound and the sound crew. In his early work, Murch was identified in the screen credits as the individual responsible for 'Sound Montage'. Based on Eisenstein's film theories that celebrated the construction of narratives through picture editing, *sound montage* suggested Murch's work involved the designing and assembling of sounds for storytelling purposes. More significantly, during THX-1138 Murch was intimately involved in the production from start to finish. During THE GODFATHER he supervised the soundtrack throughout the entire filmmaking process. In the latter instance, he was identified as a 'Post-Production Consultant' to prevent union intervention. Murch would eventually become the first to be credited as a 'Sound Designer'. This term, along with the other designations, varies in definition as they all fell outside the unions' purview. Nonetheless, these new positions have goaded the industry forward into a wider appreciation of role of sound, especially as one that functions across the entire production.[148]

[148] That said, when the Coens were asked to join the Director's Guild, following the success of FARGO, they agreed to do so only if their credit and titling remained unchanged. The Director's Guild resisted the Coens' inclusion of the

In contrast to sound technicians and editors, film composers have enjoyed much greater recognition in the industry. The artistic merits of music were acknowledged by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences from as early as 1934. In further recognition of their talent, composers and songwriters were given screen credits at the head of the film, set apart from other members of the production. Composers were also unlike other sound professionals in that they were creating a product that had a legal standing outside of the film, protected by copyright and performance rights. In the United States, this was and is ensured by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) and Broadcast Music, Incorporated (BMI). They assist in the collection and distribution of royalties.[149] Because these organisations were in place, there were discernable benefits of music being an art and because there were already external musicians' unions, a specific film composers union has never seemed necessary.[150]

In general, this bias towards the visual tends to limit the communication between filmmakers and those responsible for the soundtrack. By denying themselves a deeper investigation and appreciation into the value of aural ingredients, filmmakers have fostered a relatively narrow understanding of sound's potential. Therefore, they have lessened the possibility of creative input from sound practitioners. As it stands, many filmmakers require the sound crew or the composer to create material based on very little interaction with them. This work is then met with either approval or disapproval upon completion. This lack of concern or involvement may have a variety of

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supervising sound editor as a top credit, but eventually relented when Joel and Ethan Coen threatened to withdraw their membership (taken from Skip Lievsay's talk at the School of Sound, 2003).

[149] However, composers must share royalties with the Studios, as they also belong to these organisations as publishers (Bell 1994, p.69).

[150] There had been the Composers and Lyricists Guild of America until the 1970s, but it did not function as a union.

causes, but still demonstrates an unwillingness to appreciate how integral sound can be to a film. Perhaps more worrying is that lack of communication can result in the sound crew exchanging few ideas with the composer, and the outcome of the first dubbing session often results in a clash of egos with both parties competing for territory.

The Coen Mode of Production

The Coen brothers' mode of production is predominately collaborative, which resists the Hollywood tendency towards strict divisions of labour. Firstly, this can be observed in the brothers' working relationship. Joel and Ethan Coen write their scripts together. Their interaction is predicated on challenging each other to find ways out of the 'corners' they etch into the storyline. In addition, Joel Coen is credited as director and Ethan as producer, but in practice they assume the responsibilities of both positions.[151] Julianne Moore, who featured in THE BIG LEBOWSKI, noted that you could approach either brother with a question and they would suggest something without needing to consult the other (Bergan 2000, p.193). Both brothers contribute to the picture editing albeit under a pseudonym (Roderick Jaynes). This is used as an expression of modesty and it has also allowed them to treat him as if he is another member of their team. In fact, they have generated a detailed history and personality for this non-existent person. Secondly, it can also be observed that the Coens value the working relationships they have with their crew and performers. They have regularly employed the same personnel and quite often many of the same actors for each of their films. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that these bonds are important to the Coen brothers and that they appreciate the significance of strong group dynamics in film production.

The personnel and cast members chosen by Joel and Ethan Coen tend to be like-minded individuals, mirroring the very relationship shared by the two brothers. As Joel Coen stated about Ethan Coen:

> We share the same fundamental point of view towards the material. We may disagree about detailed stuff, but it's just a case of the one person convincing the other that their

[151] An exception is THE LADYKILLERS (2004), which credits both Joel and Ethan Coen as directors.

> point of view is truer to the final objective. It gets talked out and decided through discussion. Also, by that point we are also collaborating with a lot of other people (Bergan 2000, p.12).

By retaining personnel who share the same vision of the film, the Coen brothers encourage an environment where, over time, each person becomes aware of how the others think. A member of their crew expressed his compatibility with Joel and Ethan Coen by stating:

> We see life in a similar way, which is to say that the paradoxes of life make it so much fun, and the horrible things in life are what makes it really funny (Brophy 1999, p.19).

As most of their films echo that perspective, it is understandable why their cast and crew find it an enjoyable environment in which to work. It further suggests that this continued unity has enabled the Coen brothers to preserve a consistent level of quality in their work.

What is significant in regard to Joel and Ethan Coen's hiring procedure is that they have employed the same composer (Carter Burwell) and the same supervising sound editor/mixer (Skip Lievsay) for each of their films. Long-standing director/composer relationships are a relatively common occurrence in the industry,[152] but consistent employment of the same supervising sound editor/mixer or sound designer is rare. Both of these individuals have worked for the Coens since the beginning of their careers, and their relationship has progressed to such an extent that Joel and Ethan Coen will hire them regardless of the amount of time they are actually needed on the project.[153] This is a comment on their friendship and it expresses how much the Coens value Burwell's and Lievsay's contributions. Additionally, it suggests that as a result of consistently working with the Coen brothers, it is possible for them to develop an intuitive understanding of what is required of them from the

[152] Consider the examples of Hitchcock/Herrmann, Fellini/Rota, Leone/Morricone, Greenway/Nyman, Spielberg/Williams and Zemeckis/Silvestri

[153] For example, Burwell was hired to record six minutes of music for O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?.

Coens and from each other. Therefore, this closeness encourages Burwell and Lievsay to work effectively with each other and with Joel and Ethan Coen.

Pre-production discussions held by Joel and Ethan Coen also contrast with the normal industry tradition of limiting attendance to only a few 'key' personnel or by meeting with each department separately. As a general practice, once the script is complete, the Coens not only discuss it with the necessary production team members, but they quite often include Lievsay and Burwell in these conversations. The benefits that arise of doing so are manifold:

(1) The sound personnel are privy to the script before filming, which allows them to estimate the number of sound cues needed for the film.

(2) The script also communicates the various themes and concepts pertinent to the film's creation. This enables the sound personnel to 'pre-hear' aural ingredients that reflect these narrative items at an early stage.

(3) Early awareness of the nature/tone of the film could encourage attempts to record workable sketches of music or sound effects near the beginning of the process.

(4) By involving the sound personnel in pre-production discussions the sound team can anticipate on ways of eliminating or reducing troublesome set-ups.

(5) By including the sound personnel early on in the production of the film, the Coens demonstrate the democratic process and the value they impart to the aural elements.[154]

The above practices show the Coen's willingness to ignore the budgetary constraints set by Hollywood that would normally relegate these crewmembers only to post-production.

Maintaining a working environment where everyone feels at ease appears to be paramount to Joel and Ethan Coen's filmmaking process. Indeed, most of their cast and crewmembers have desired to work for them based on their artistic as well as their personal reputations. As Robertson (1998, p.33) stated:

> The most commonly expressed opinion about the Coens by members of their production crew is the lack of confusion, the unchaotic, egoless, calming atmosphere that consistently pervades the sets of their movies.

Actors who have worked for them have also noticed a notable difference in the atmosphere on set of Joel and Ethan Coen's films. Jeff Bridges, who starred in THE BIG LEBOWSKI, said of the production:

> It's not like those big studio movies where everybody feels the tension of the money and the studio executives breathing down the neck of the director and producer. Here, the money-people are so happy to be working with them, it's kind of the other way around (Bergan 2000, p.194).

As a way of preserving this 'relaxed' environment, cast and crewmembers are willing to receive lower salaries in exchange for their services. In doing so, they demonstrate their confidence in the Coen brothers' work, while at the same time they support Joel and Ethan Coen's arrangement to receive less funding in exchange for artistic control over the film.

[154] The wider implications of these practices are discussed in the Conclusion.

Often the Coen brothers write scripts with a particular actor in mind. Both George Clooney and Billy Bob Thornton had screenplays written specifically for them (O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? and THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE, respectively). Both agreed to do the films without reading them first. Writing screenplays for specific actors is common practice in the industry. Most scripts are written for a pre-selected number of actors and many are specifically packaged in that manner. However, where Joel and Ethan Coen differ is that they are also willing to defer a project in favour of another, if it means that they are able to accommodate a particular actor at a later time. They would prefer this arrangement rather than merely substituting another actor in that role.[155] For example, THE BIG LEBOWSKI (1998) was written about the same time as BARTON FINK (1991), but neither John Goodman nor Jeff Bridges was available at the time. Consequently, the Coen brothers chose to delay the filming of THE BIG LEBOWSKI until both actors were available (Bergan 2000, p.192). This action demonstrates the Coens' desire to ignore the pressures often forced on Hollywood productions, in favour of their own timetable. This flexibility is one of the benefits of their willingness to work with lower production costs.

Joel and Ethan Coen have also had generally good experiences with actors. Many have returned to work with them. For example, John Goodman, John Turturro and Steve Buscemi have featured in four of their films, and Frances McDormand (Joel Coen's wife) has appeared in five. However, they have had a few less than amicable experiences. Following the production of RAISING ARIZONA Nicolas Cage complained that his ability to improvise was severely limited by the Coen brothers' "autocratic nature" (Bergan 2000, p.98). This was only Joel and Ethan Coen's second film and their first Studio funded film.

[155] An exception is the hiring of Frances McDormand for BLOOD SIMPLE. Her roommate, Holly Hunter, was busy so she suggested they consider McDormand.

Because of these factors, they feared that veering away from the script would compromise their tiny budget and therefore they keep to a very tight schedule. One must consider that Cage's suggestions may have been justified as this was his eighth film and he had worked with his uncle, Francis Ford Coppola, on many of those features. Nevertheless, John Goodman, who also plays a major character in the film, had appeared in ten previous features and has since gone on to be one of the Coens' staple actors. On THE HUDSUCKER PROXY, Paul Newman was full of admiration for the Coens' earlier work, but admitted that he had to adjust his acting style to their non-Stanislavsky language[156] (MacGregor 1994, p.28). Gabriel Byrne also had some confusion on MILLER'S CROSSING regarding the dream about a floating hat. He pursued the Coens throughout the shoot, requesting to know the significance of the hat as he felt it would help him to better understand his character's motivation. Eventually, Ethan Coen turned to him, and in true Coen fashion, said, "Gabriel, it's just a hat" (DVD interview with Byrne 2003). However, it can be observed in these 'negative' examples that they merely reinforce their idiosyncratic approach to filmmaking.

The practices and approaches mentioned above have helped build the Coen brothers' reputation as a filmmaking enterprise that differs from many in the American film industry. Their general attitude towards all the ingredients in the filmmaking process suggests that they are less inclined to comply with Hollywood conventions, even in their more commercial films. This is especially true in relation to the priority they tend to give to aural elements and the value they award sound personnel by often including them early on in the production. It is through Joel and Ethan Coen's relaxed, collaborative and consistent work practices that they foster greater cooperation between

[156] Konstantin Stanislavsky developed a popular 'method' that required an actor to use his emotional memory (i.e., his recall of past experiences and emotions) to identify with the character's inner motivation. Based on this method, directors would use psychological language to assist their actors in achieving more believable performances.

colleagues, namely Skip Lievsay and Carter Burwell, who they have used since their filmmaking career began. It is for the sake of these methods that the oeuvre of the Coen brothers serves as a model of how filmmakers can cultivate a working environment that allows sound and image to be integrated into a film as a whole.

Part 3:
How the Coen Brothers' Mode of Production Influences the Sound Content of their Films

> *Collaboration is not simply marching in more or less the same direction in parallel and virtually never talking to each other. It's only when every craft informs every other craft and something is synthesised out of that interaction that real collaboration is happening. And the principal tragedy of film sound is that it's been the one craft left out of that collaboration. It is affected by all the other crafts, but it's not allowed to have an effect on them.* - Randy Thom, sound designer (Sider, Freeman & Sider 2003c, p.137).

As discussed in detail in the previous section of this thesis, the Coen brothers' mode of production forms the basis of a new aesthetic that attaches greater importance to aural ingredients. Joel and Ethan Coen have achieved this different approach by challenging the long-standing conventions that have relegated sound to a secondary element. They have ignored film industry practices that divide film personnel and deny constructive communication. Collaboration from the earliest stage of the production process appears to a one of the key elements of their success. Consequently, it is important to explore those practices in detail, especially in terms of how they are used as a means of generating fully integrated audio-visual films.

Fundamental to the Coen mode of production is cooperative partnerships. As mentioned previously, this is expressed from Joel and Ethan Coen's fraternal connection to the working relationships shared among members of their crew and actors. It has also been noted in that many of the Coens' crew have been employed since the beginning, and many actors have returned to play different roles. The fact that there have been very few personnel changes

over their nearly twenty-five-year career suggests that building and sustaining relationships is a vital part of their filmmaking process. It would also imply that the longevity of such relationships has been dependent on friendly interaction and mutual respect. A working environment assuredly encouraged by the Coen brothers' humility towards their reputation within the industry.

Rarely have sound personnel shared such enduring relationships with their filmmakers. Since the advent of independent post-production houses, the loyalty of sound designers, editors and mixers is usually limited to their current employer. Composers tend to build more consistent relationships, but this is more the exception than the rule. The dedication of Skip Lievsay and Carter Burwell to the Coens' work recalls the classic Hollywood era when artists and craftspeople were contracted to a particular studio. However, in this case, Lievsay and Burwell offer their services themselves and they are free to work for other filmmaking enterprises without needing to gain permission. The fact that the Coen brothers have invited them to work on all of their films, regardless of the extent of their contribution, illustrates how much they appreciate their skill and their input. It also demonstrates how important it is for Joel and Ethan Coen to maintain their working partnerships.

The consistency of these relationships has also allowed for a closer camaraderie between composer and supervising sound editor/mixer. More typically in films the two sound professionals treat their portion of the aural content of the film separately and rarely do they speak to one another regarding their contribution. Often the first day of the final mix becomes a battle zone, where both parties have recorded too many conflicting elements.

Sound designer Randy Thom[157] describes them as "very traumatic situations because you're confronted with this wall of sound and nobody seems to have a clue in the beginning about how to make it work" (Sider, Freeman & Sider 2003c, p.129). Consequently, most sound mixes become divide-and-conquer sessions. The victor is quite often the composer, who is not generally present at these mixes, because filmmakers tend to possess a closer affinity to music than sound effects.

Other factors that contribute to the non-communicative nature of Hollywood sound professionals are the huge egos and the large salaries paid to top composers. Thom (ibid., p.130) stated that "ten to twelve composers do seemingly 80 per cent of the major feature films released in the United States" and they are paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for four or five weeks work. Furthermore, they are in great demand so many have overlapping schedules and therefore have no time to talk. Thom (ibid., p.131) adds that even if they made time it would be pointless, as most of these composers are fatalistic about sound effects, that is, they believe that they "are just going to screw up the music anyway". This attitude may not describe *all* composers but it expresses the general climate of mainstream filmmaking in America. It also clearly demonstrates another reason why there is such confusion regarding the role of sound in film.

Carter Burwell and Skip Lievsay defy these trends in several ways. Firstly, Lievsay stated that their long and amicable relationship is built on a "healthy and constructive regard for each other's contribution" where they "try to do what's best for the movie and try not to let [their] personal agendas get in

[157] Randy Thom is a prolific sound recordist, editor, mixer and designer with a international reputation. He has been nominated for nine Academy Awards (receiving an Oscar for THE RIGHT STUFF [Kaufman 1983] and for THE INCREDIBLES [Bird 2004]) and is best know for his work with Skywalker Sound. Among his credits are WILD AT HEART (Lynch 1990), CONTACT (Zemeckis 1997) and HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS (Columbus 2003).

the way" (Barnes 2003). This mutual respect translates into many of their working practices. Most importantly, they have 'spotted' a majority of the Coen brothers' films together, that is, they have shared the decision-making process with the Coen brothers in regards to the use and positioning of aural ingredients before the final mix. Lievsay explained how this is achieved in a light-heartedly manner:

> We all get together to spot. The music editor comes and writes distracting detailed notes and the ADR editors are there and they make really distracting notes. And Carter and I just try to keep our wits about us and be entertaining. Joel and Ethan are very good, very specific. They'll say 'Well you have this and we want to have this. Obviously we need to have your musicians do something here (Barnes 2004).

Both profess that other sound practitioners seldom hold joint spotting sessions for the reasons similar to those mentioned by Randy Thom above. This suggests that the contributions offered by composers and sound professionals have become less about creating a cohesive soundtrack and more about hierarchical thinking. Another contributing factor to this division is that composers retain the rights to their work and sound professionals do not. One must consider that Studios, in partnership with music publishers, can benefit from compact disc sales. All of these factors promote music's 'separation' from other aural elements. Lievsay described the situation in this way:

> We mainly make sound effects to give to the picture department and during the temp[158] we work out everything else. With the Coens and Carter, we still spot the movie together. That rarely happens even in the most gracious filmmaking communities that they spot music and sound effects at the same time. And even if they are being done simultaneously, it's pretty much an armed encampment on both sides of the room and never the twains shall meet. Unfortunately, the nature of the beast is that most people

[158] Temp is an abbreviated form of the word 'temporary' and 'the temp' refers to any music or sound effects placed in the soundtrack before the final mix. Often these preliminary mixes are used to test the effectiveness of certain items. It is also provides pieces of music as a substitute score until the composer finishes writing their own music or until the rights of previously released music are obtained. Though, this does not preclude any items from the temp mix from becoming part of the final mix.

> are clamouring for a few yards of real estate. For sound effects, we mostly want to survive the music juggernaut (Barnes 2003).

He then added:

> I would never accuse my brothers in musicland of a mercenary approach to doing the soundtrack, but there is certainly a lot music in the movies, with few exceptions, like gunshots and explosions, although I have worked on many movies where those were taken out in lieu of the music track. That's the way it's evolved - good, bad or indifferent - there is a kind of us against them mentality and unfortunately, it tends to make the mix an unhappy period for some people. I try not to buy into that, but that's the way it is most of the time. It's always sad to see somebody's hard work being removed in lieu of someone else's hard work (Barnes 2003).

By trying to avoid this situation, Lievsay suggests that he and Burwell produce more integrated soundtracks because of their willingness to 'give ground' in a manner that prioritises the film over their individual contributions.

Furthermore, advances in technological and market demands have influenced the rapid pace of film production and have decreased the time allotted to post-production schedules. Lievsay said, "There is a maxim in sound post[-production], *speed-quality-cost*: choose two" (personal email 2005). This further reinforces the separation of the two 'camps', as they must focus on the job at hand so the film can be delivered before the imposed release date. Thus, the opportunities for dialogue and mutual experimentation are diminished. Quite often sound professionals are in different locations and will not make the effort. According to Burwell:

> It's not that it never happens [...] It's just not a normal part of the process. If you want that conversation to happen, you have to go out of your way to make it happen (Barnes 2004).

Despite this tendency, Burwell and Lievsay have managed to continue negotiating the soundtrack beyond the spotting session on a number of films.

Frequent exchanges of ideas and work-in-progress seems paramount to their work with the Coens. Carter Burwell explained how it normally occurs, by saying:

> We get together pretty regularly and talk, especially with Joel and Ethan, that's the main thing. They usually will come to my studio and listen to synth sketches of the scores I'm developing on major lines and we'll listen to it and we talk. And sometimes it's very hard to talk about it, sometimes the music doesn't work and we all try to come up with some words to describe what doesn't work about it or what's missing. (Barnes 2004).

The simplicity of this explanation seems to fly in the face of the opposition against it. One would also find this 'time and location' argument ineffective in light of email, instant messaging and video conferencing.[159] Nonetheless, it would appear that ingrained practices in the American film industry have perpetuated the belief in such obstacles.

Each of the Coen brothers' films has contained instances where effects and music needed to be negotiated. The amount of exchanges between Burwell and Lievsay has varied depending on the needs of the film. For example, the sparseness of the soundtrack for THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE required both parties to have foreknowledge of the other's contribution for the entire film; while for THE HUDSUCKER PROXY Burwell gave this example:

> We had to talk about what the sound of the clock was like because that's a very recurrent thing, and there's often music going on when we're either inside the clock mechanism or outside the clock. I had to get an idea of what the tonality of the clock was and the bell and things like that (Barnes 2004).

[159] Consider the example of LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE KING (Jackson 2001). The director Peter Jackson was able to view the images and listen to temp tracks in London on a 5.1 system that had been sent from the studio in New Zealand. Conference/video calling enabled him to communicate 'live' with his crew, allowing for immediate feedback (This information has been taken from the film's DVD featurette).

He concluded by saying: "So most films have some thing like that, but honestly, for most films, other than the ones where Skip is working, this conversation often never happens at all" (Barnes 2004).

Lievsay and Burwell's discussions with the Joel and Ethan Coen are not limited to post-production. In another practice that defies convention, both sound practitioners often speak with the Coens before filming has commenced. They are both given a script to read. Lievsay and Burwell claimed this aids them in predicting the needs of the film on both an artistic and practical level. After reviewing the script, the composer and supervising sound editor/mixer talk with the filmmakers separately about the immediate issues. These sessions usually focus on what will save time and money. Lievsay highlights his concerns gleaned from the text and shares them with the Coen brothers. He offered this example from a film that was in pre-production at the time of the interview:

> There's a scene they're going to shoot on a sound stage, which takes place on a big bridge over a river. They are going to shoot that with a lot of fog and I advised Joel that the fog machines make a hissing sound. Having read THE LADYKILLERS script I know most of those scenes will be MOS[160] or at least not have much talking. We can reproduce sound effects, but there are a couple of scenes that have dialogue. I advised him that he'd have to turn the fog machines off during the dialogue or we'd have to loop those scenes (Barnes 2004).

During these pre-production sessions Lievsay rarely offers the Coens detailed descriptions to how he will approach particular sound events. However, this is not because the Coens prefer to postpone talks on these aural elements. On the contrary, their scripts have so many elaborate sound scenarios that Lievsay needs only to begin considering creative ways of generating them. He sees these scripted sound events as "real direction" rather than just

[160] MOS defines scenes or sequences shot without recorded sound.

reference, and therefore, saves discussion for the temp mixes when he has generated sounds for these moments.[161]

Burwell explained that his pre-production sessions with the Coen brothers are also brief. They often involve deciding the type of orchestration that might be involved, as this affects the budget, and nothing more. However, on occasion, themes and references to characters will be made. For example, he describes their initial meeting about THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE in this way:

> Ethan and I had a discussion of what the role of the music would be, that is, what the music has to say. Obviously they've written a lot of Beethoven into the script and I think we settled on the idea that the score was going to express longing [...] We're looking at Crane's character [Thornton] and he's obviously pretty non-descript. He's sort of a cipher and that's part of the idea of the film. So we decided that the music was saying that he wants something more in life, but he, himself, doesn't know what it is. So the music hopefully just expresses this sense of longing. And that's as far as the conversation will go until the film's been shot (Barnes 2004).

Having this awareness before post-production, Burwell could begin 'sketching' out ideas within a particular frame of reference.

As a result of starting earlier, Lievsay and Burwell are afforded the opportunity to experiment. Most importantly, they are allowed the time to trial sound elements that may or may not be included in the final release. Having a longer period to test what will work or not work assists sound practitioners to respond more creatively to the film. It can also help them perfect their craft. Randy Thom (Sider, Freeman & Sider 2003c, p.134) stated that Walter Murch made many 'mistakes' in generating the sound world for APOCALYPSE NOW, but "every one of those mistakes was instructive and informed all the decisions that wound up making it as wonderful a movie as it was". Thus, more time releases the sound practitioners from the tyranny of

[161] This will be discussed in detail when individual films are analysed.

the deadline and allows them to concentrate on generating an inventive soundtrack.[162]

Skip Lievsay also finds it helpful to visit the set during filming. Carter Burwell mentions he has visited sets but he did it "just for fun" or to say "Hi" (Barnes 2004). The purpose of these visits for Lievsay is often to speak to the sound recordists in order to resolve potential problems. For example, for THE LADYKILLERS, he advised them on how they should record the music for some scenes. He also tries to remind them to record wild tracks, as their time is often devoted to recording dialogue.[163] On the set of O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? Lievsay had been able to assist in remedying a potential hindrance to the production. He recounted:

> There was a scene that was meant to be shot to playback but the actors were not actors, they were performers - it's the three black gravediggers scene. We tried playback and they didn't have a clue how to do that. So after one take, Joel said let's just do it live. We realised that there are three men standing in front of three big holes in the ground so we put plant mics in each grave in front of each actor and recorded it with three microphones for a majority of the takes and that worked pretty well (Barnes 2004).

Though not every visit to the set of one of the Coen brothers' films has proved to be this helpful, Lievsay had the foresight to make himself available if necessary.

It is clear from these practices that Joel and Ethan Coen want their cast and crew to enjoy the luxury of time. As most filmmakers are pressurised by external forces to release their films before a certain date, sound crewmembers and composers are often left a limited timeframe to complete all their work. The Coens insistence on a more relaxed pace throughout the

[162] A notable exception to this is Jerry Goldsmith's score for CHINATOWN, which was written in five days.
[163] Wild track refers to extra recordings of the sound of the set or production location. It helps eliminate any deadness in the soundtrack and helps maintain the consistency of the background noise.

entire filmmaking process has often translated into having more time in post-production. Carter Burwell explained the contrast this way:

> Joel and Ethan tend to allow as much time as they can in the making of their films. A lot of feature films are made as quickly as possible. Once you start production it's as though a stopwatch begins and you want to deliver the print as soon as possible because you've borrowed money and interest payments are due. And Joel and Ethan tend to, in my experience, make the decision to pay people less money and therefore give everybody more time. And there's some people who might not like that trade-off but I think for most of the people who work with them it's a great thing because we all get more time to think about what we're doing (Barnes 2004).

As mentioned previously, these financial arrangements contribute significantly to the casual atmosphere that Joel and Ethan Coen try to cultivate in their working environment. This ethos encourages people that work for them to feel part of a team, working towards a single goal. Accepting less money also decreases the potential for inflamed egos and, therefore, fewer opportunities for personality clashes.

The Coens' intimate knowledge of their material profoundly shapes their understanding of how sound will contribute to their films. Many directors in Hollywood create films based on other people's scripts and therefore are distanced from the subject matter to some degree. Furthermore, many see intricate storyboarding as a waste of time, especially as studios are prone to ask for changes. This has radical implications. Not knowing the intricacies of a script could decrease their understanding of what the film is actually about and/or make them less interested in communicating the narrative on a more significant level.[164] If one combines this with the general misunderstandings of how sound works, it explains why many exchanges between most

[164] As Burwell suggested, "Directors should actually have some idea of what their film's about. Not just the story, but the film. What are people supposed to come out of the film with? What has it given them when they experience it and step out of the theatre? And for some Directors you get a sense that they don't really know that. They like things about the film and they're very excited about shooting it, but they'd be totally at a loss if you had to ask them what the film was about or why we were making it. (Barnes 2004).

filmmakers and the sound practitioners are kept to a minimum. Lievsay said that these directors only seem to know what they do not want when it comes to sound. With these filmmakers, he said:

> We review a scene and discuss what the basic components should be. Then the filmmakers will either simply encourage or discourage more elaborate sounds and sometimes that can be pretty much the limit of the collaboration (Barnes 2004).

Naturally, filmmakers who do not write their own material can have an intense awareness of sound[165] and those that write and direct their own films may do little in exploiting its aural dimensions.[166] Nonetheless, in the main, developing one's own material allows the filmmakers an insight beyond the rudimentary needs of the film, which suggests they would be better acquainted with the thematic underpinnings of the narrative. This knowledge, therefore, would facilitate collaborations that are more fruitful, providing the filmmakers can articulate these themes to other key members of the crew.

Joel and Ethan Coen's distinct style is further enhanced because they remain faithful to their meticulously drawn storyboards. In addition to aiding their own understanding of the film, it helps to clarify their vision for other members of the crew. Burwell explained it in this way:

> They, compared to most filmmakers, really do shoot what's on their storyboards and they put it together. Sometimes they tighten the film by dropping bits here and there and occasionally a whole scene will get dropped out, but in fact, because they write and produce and direct and edit, the films are much more what you'd expect they were. If you read the script, the film that comes out the end is much closer to what was written. If you look at the storyboards, it's much closer to the storyboards (Barnes 2004).

By maintaining this consistency, the Coen brothers decrease the potential chaos that often occurs in the filmmaking process. This is greatly enhanced by the fact that Joel and Ethan Coen are involved in almost all the aspects of

[165] An example that has been previously noted is Alfred Hitchcock.
[166] One need only to consider the work of Woody Allen, who authors all his films using mainly the same crew, but focuses strictly on dialogue and acting almost to the exclusion of everything else.

their productions. By way of contrasting his experience with the Coens and other filmmakers, Burwell stated:

> Most films I've worked on are written by one person, directed by another person, edited by another person, and all the time there are other people looking over their shoulder. In that type of process you're much more likely to get unpredictable changes, especially at the last minute, where they'll have done a preview of the film and the audience doesn't understand something so they suddenly decide to rearrange scenes or even story elements. That actually happens much less. Joel and Ethan are much less apt to, how shall I put it nicely, fool around with the music after it's been recorded, than most of my other experiences (Barnes 2004).

A further and significant advantage of the Coen brothers rarely deviating from their own projects is that it helps them to create that situation where key sound practitioners can be involved earlier in the filmmaking process.

Individually, Lievsay and Burwell approach their work for Joel and Ethan Coen in different ways. The length and content of Burwell's scores vary from film to film, especially if previously released tracks are used. The following therefore is a description of his overall mode of composing, where specific examples are given later with the individual film analyses. The Coens generally do not have any preconceived answers as to what the musical content of their films is supposed to communicate, which allows Burwell much scope (Brophy 1999, p.16). They may discuss the scale of the music and narrative themes at pre-production discussions, but the Coen brothers tend to leave Burwell to decide what music he thinks is appropriate. Usually this brings pleasing results, but occasionally Joel and Ethan Coen have disagreed with Burwell's interpretation of their film. For example, Burwell's original intention with the main theme of MILLER'S CROSSING was to express the love Leo (Finney) and Tom (Byrne) had for one another. However, according to Burwell:

> They just hadn't anticipated that the music might be warm in this very brutal film, so they were uncomfortable with it. And when we talking about it they said, "Well how about neutral?", I was thinking that if you could suggest with the music that all of Gabriel's character's actions throughout the film are actually tied to his love for Albert

> Finney's character, that that would help to give some reasoning to what he's doing, which sometimes seems to not make any sense, because he's performing these double-crosses or crypto double-crosses. So that was my idea and when I played the theme for Joel and Ethan, and they liked the theme. They saw immediately how this warm music against this cold film leant it something new that helped and especially helped Gabriel's character. But after sitting down and describing exactly where the music is going to go, it turned out that there were no scenes between Albert Finney and Gabriel Byrne's character in which I could put score. I have this grand plan and I think it's going to really help to explicate the film and it's the purpose to which I've written this theme, but in the end there just isn't any place to put that music where it will serve the purpose I had in mind (Barnes 2004).

In spite of the 'negative' results of this example, it typifies Burwell's view of the function of film music. It demonstrates that he first considers "what [his] music needs to do for the film: what it can contribute, and how [he] can translate that into melodies" (Brophy 1999, p.16). As the Coen brothers' scripts are often character-driven, it shows that Burwell initially considers ways of attaching themes to their main characters on an emotional level and then seeks out how these musical ideas can be interwoven among the overall themes of the film. Burwell's music, therefore, does not simply 'emotionally cue' an audience with predictable mood music; it expresses something deeper within the narrative itself. Implicit with this technique is that his scores generally avoid the Hollywood cliché of referring directly to the action onscreen. As a result, Burwell creates music-images in Joel and Ethan Coen's films that at first seem mismatched. However, their appropriateness lies in the fact that by detaching his music from specific objects or events, his scores communicate the internal context of the film. What is more, Burwell often expresses this 'mis-matching' as pathos and irony simultaneously; a mixture that highlights the dark comedy quite often found in Joel and Ethan Coen's films.

Skip Lievsay's work for the Coen brothers also involves interpretation, but unlike Carter Burwell's music, he is given much more guidance. This is mainly due to Joel and Ethan Coen's screenplays containing detailed information

concerning the sound content and the Coen brothers' films being relatively consistent with their original design. The primary objective of Lievsay's sound crew is to translate those written scenarios into audible facsimiles. In order to do this, they are given the freedom to explore various designs, which are reviewed by the Coens and then refined. Lievsay (Barnes 2003) explained that this process is now worked out in a temp mix because Joel and Ethan Coen like to be able to hear how sound effects are going to work in the movie before they go to the final mix, especially since they often cut their films to the sound effects.

Working within the confines of the script does not mean that their remit is restricted in terms of creativity; in fact, the Coens are open to ideas offered to them. Lievsay explained his collaboration with them in this way:

> They are very elastic when it comes to embracing other people's contributions. Even though it seems at face value that they are very demanding and they are very rigid [...] Their demands and expectations are flaccid enough to include your weird idiosyncratic maunderings of their concepts (Barnes 2003).

Consequently, the only limit appears to be that which is defined by the narrative itself. Experimentation is encouraged and occasionally Lievsay, like Burwell, has produced something the Coens had not expected. For example, during the 'execution' scene in MILLER'S CROSSING, he stated:

> We put the thunderclap there to help extend the gunshot release. I don't believe they intended the gunshot and the thunderclap to be quite so married together. They asked that the sound of the gunshot reverberate in the woods and we used the thunder as a way to make that reverberation. We could have taken reverb and made the gunshot echo, but instead we used something which is a well known long sound [...] and they liked it (Barnes 2004).

In addition to generating unique sound combinations,[167] Lievsay approaches the areas of auditory perspective and the stripping out of layers of effects and noise in a less traditional manner. In relation to the former, he said:

> I prefer to have stuff shift when the perspective and the point of view changes, even to the point where some people think it's distracting. I really go through it and make it distracting and then say 'Well let's pull that back a little bit' or 'Let's make that a little more centred with those few shots.' And then where we can, we'll make it wide again so that the perspective changes are dramatic without being distracting (Barnes 2004).

Lievsay regularly decreases the sheer number of possible effects in favour of sounds that provide what is essential to the narrative. This is illustrated in the way his team trimmed away the motorcycle noises in RAISING ARIZONA. To achieve this, a large quantity of noises were recorded and placed against the image. Lievsay then gradually eliminated any sounds that were not essential to the scene until:

> the track is actually almost spartan compared to what you're seeing on screen. And the beauty of that was that the [filmgoer] had so much in reserve. In these sequences a lot of dramatic stuff was happening yet the sound was carefully presented providing only the most important information (Barnes 2004).

Lievsay also uses this technique to let music be heard in the foreground when effects are present. He would often mix sounds lower or remove them altogether to give prominence to the music, depending on what was negotiated.

Another regular practice Lievsay and his team try to incorporate in all of Joel and Ethan Coen's films is a sound joke. In keeping with the relaxed atmosphere of the filmmaking process, the sound crew has developed over the years a series of effects that have either started as a bit of silliness between themselves and the Coens or as curiosities that have remained.

[167] More examples are discussed in detail in a latter part of the paper in relation to the film in which they occur.

Lievsay offered this example that occurred during the filming of BLOOD SIMPLE:

> I was doing recordings of traffic sounds outside my window and a car made a curious sound and for some reason we decided that sounds like a cow mooing. So we put that in BLOOD SIMPLE and we now refer to that as the cow-car. Subsequently we put that in every other movie - the BLOOD SIMPLE cow-car (Barnes 2003).

Another example that is heard in all of their films is the 'hub-cap', a wobbling sound that is attached to anything round and has the capacity to spin. Though audiences may find these sounds humorous, the insertion of these items is primarily a way for them to amuse themselves. Often these noises are unnecessary and they try to sneak in as many as they can just for a laugh. In fact, Lievsay spoke of it as thing they often try to do without the Coens' knowledge, just to see if they would notice.

Despite all of this, Joel and Ethan Coen, like other filmmakers, are largely concerned with recording actor's voices. As such, they intermittently neglect obtaining certain sound effects during filming because they are focused on capturing an actor's performance. They are also aware that many sounds can be re-created in post-production and as such, it can save them money.[168] Car-bys (i.e. the sound of a car passing) featured in many of the examples Lievsay gave in interview. One extreme example occurred on set of THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE. Lievsay recounted:

> The one day where they shot the exteriors, where they had all those period cars. The sound crew was laid off for that day and they shot all that stuff MOS. They didn't bother to shoot wild track or guide track - they just shot it all MOS (Barnes 2003).

[168] Sync sound recording is often more expensive because of the costs of equipment rentals, employee wages and the costs of the objects to be recorded. For example, on MILLER'S CROSSING they saved $50,000 by reproducing sounds of cars in post-production.

However, processing dialogue with the Coens and dialogue editors is a mutually beneficial situation. Lievsay offered this detailed example of a typical session:

> It goes like this, 'This section here really doesn't sound good. Let's use alternates from this section and make it sound like it's all happening in the same day.' Or I say, you know, 'In this scene here there's 40 lines and that line right there is really noisy. Give me an alternate to that.' Then we go to the dialogue pre-dub and the editor sits next to me at his Pro-tools session. As I'm going through and mixing, I will ask him, 'Can you find me some fill?' or 'Can you get rid of that line?' 'Let's find an alternate.' And we do it together. When the predub is complete, we play it back for Joel and Ethan. We go over all the things that we've done, to which they will say 'Good', 'Put it back' or 'I prefer the other' whatever. In this way we all constructively try to find the best sounding track. It's a very positive, happy event. Some people I know would be furious if we tried to put in alternate takes. And a lot of times they just don't want to invest the energy (Barnes 2004).

Using constructive sessions such as this means that the Coen brothers rarely use Additional Dialogue Recording (ADR), which can be quite costly.

Working with the Coen brothers in this way, Lievsay and Burwell have been able to focus on the final product as a joint project. Their interests seem to be directed at constructing a unified soundtrack so that all of the aural ingredients complement the given narrative. The fact that they have more time to generate ideas and create their portion significantly influences this process. More crucially, their regular open dialogue with the Coens and each other allows them the opportunity to make these exchanges, quite often from the earliest part of the production. These discussions usually veer away from surface-level issues and concentrate on how the sound can highlight the given narrative's internal themes. Furthermore, the Coens' scripts and storyboards rarely veer from the final product, allowing Lievsay and Burwell to be confident that their early efforts are not in vain. As a result, Joel and Ethan Coen's approach to the soundtrack demonstrates their interest in resisting the practices of mainstream Hollywood by making sound central to their filmmaking process.

PART 4:
Interpretations of the Sound of the Coen Brothers' Films

To substantiate how the Coen brothers' working practices demonstrate a greater integration of aural ingredients and to illustrate the roles played by sound in filmed narratives, it is necessary to review how these items are applied in their films. The following, therefore, offers interpretations of the Coens' entire oeuvre from an aural perspective. The first example is BARTON FINK, Joel and Ethan Coen's most integrated sound-image film. The remaining films are presented in the order of their release dates. Each analysis covers different features of the Coen brothers' use of sound. In doing so, they not only allow for a discrete interpretation of the aural aspects of each film, but they also offer a wider perspective of their work.

Introduction: Internal and External Factors

Before exploring the content of the Coen brothers' films, the following section will briefly discuss the major theoretical approaches to discerning meaning in the soundtrack. Interpretation, for the most part, is based on subjectivity. Therefore, to draw conclusions from the aural content of their work, one must establish a framework for these readings. Initially, it is important to state that there are not an infinite number of interpretations. As Eco (1990, p.16) stated, "[They] must be related to the basic nature of the intentions". One cannot assume the precise intentions of the filmmakers, but one can glean the function or role of the soundtrack from the context of the films. While many of these factors are universal, listening experiences, as declared earlier, are directly informed and influenced by social and cultural factors.

An accurate interpretation of what film sounds signify is highly problematic. As stated previously, sound expresses no meaning of its own, due to its abstract nature. It can allude or refer to an object, an emotion or an atmosphere but it is not endowed with any significance on its own. It is, therefore, dependent on the competence of the filmmakers and the ability of the audience to comprehend the meaning within a specific context. While personal beliefs, perceptions and desires may play a role in this interpretation, they are influenced by certain historical and cultural structures. Whether consciously or unconsciously, these structures are communicated from *within* the film narrative by the filmmakers and, from *outside* the film they are imposed upon the narrative by the filmgoer.

Signifiers are therefore determined by the interdependency between these external and internal aspects, subject to the context of the entire film. To ensure that an interpretation is pragmatic, the filmmakers need to provide evidence of their intentions. Only then can recognition of those signs be possible. Structures in the film function much like the author/reader relationship. Evidence can either be overtly coded, which relates to a universal competency, or it can be non-coded, which requires more knowledge. For example, as mentioned previously, Kubrick's use of Richard Strauss' *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY communicates on both levels. It announces the triumphant beginning of the film (internal context), while simultaneously referencing Nietzsche's ideas of man's evolution (external context).

If one considers that the Coen brothers are working within western/American culture, it is likely that the context they are drawing from will be accessible to those who have a similar cultural understanding. Therefore, composer Carter Burwell's coded scores evoke those gestures historically associated to the

western world. His choice of instruments, tonality and melodic structure reflect and allude to that of western culture. Interpretations of these scores are helped through the previously mentioned long-standing conventions adopted by the film industry. Western audiences have now come to internalise those conventions and make instinctive and informed associations. Burwell's non-coded scores are still based in the history and culture of the west. However, they tend to be asynchronous, which requires the audience to interpret their meaning strictly from the thematic structures of the narrative. This involves an appreciation of the film's overall structure and the development of the characters.

Noises and ambient effects have a similar historical context, but their encoding can transcend a single culture.[169] The linguistic nature of literal sounds (coded noises and atmospheres) has enabled audiences to develop associations based on a logical connection between the sound and its cause. Nevertheless, noises and ambient effects can denote a deeper significance within the narrative. Supervising sound editor/mixer Skip Lievsay uses several devices to communicate symbolic notions within the film's context, such as: repetition, layering and exaggeration. As with music, the interpretation of these devices requires an understanding of the themes of the film. Similarly, ambient effects function like non-coded scores because they do not have a visible sound source. Their interpretation is based on the emotional content they evoke, and as such, this is dependent on their place within the film in its entirety.

A proper interpretation of the dialogue is very dependent on one's knowledge of the given language and one's familiarity with the culture from which it has emerged. Uses of prosodic elements, such as intonation and word stress, can

[169] Audiences tend to interpret a footstep as a footstep, even if the shoe type reflects a specific cultural origin.

radically alter the semantic content of a spoken message. A cinematic example can be found in THE CONVERSATION (Coppola 1973) when Harry Caul (Hackman) misunderstands the intonation of a single word in a recording he had made. This misunderstanding causes him to read the entire context of the conversation incorrectly. Knowledge of the given culture is also important to the interpretation of irony and slang. In the case of the Coens, lines may also require a secondary reading because they are literary or cinematic references. Lastly, Joel and Ethan Coen's use of particular accents or dialects evoke cultural significances, especially in terms of ethnicity, class and geographical background.

Therefore, the following interpretations of the aural content of the films by the Coen brothers are contextualised within a predominantly western/American perspective, rather than a universal one. All of the examples are presented from an internal and external perspective that takes into account their narrative themes. Every attempt has been made to ensure that the suggested meanings of the aural content of each film reflect what most likely had been Joel and Ethan Coen's intentions. However, this is no way implies that these readings are flawless interpretations, as first-hand accounts of the filmmakers could not be attained.

BARTON FINK: The Atmospheric Sounds of the Creative Mind

Joel and Ethan Coen have consistently used music, effects and dialogue to shape the atmosphere of their films. This is most evident in the 'world' they created for BARTON FINK (1991). One of the main reasons for the film's highly communicative sonic environment is that it is expressed through a soundtrack that weaves together all of the aural ingredients. The integration of these elements is achieved principally through the Coens' collaborative filmmaking efforts; detailed extensively in this paper. As a result, the aural elements are truly homogeneous: all striving to complement the narrative. This approach to the construction of the soundscape for BARTON FINK stands in contrast with a majority of the general practices of Hollywood mentioned earlier in this thesis. Its critical success offers an example of a viable alternative to those modes of production.[170]

While embarking on their third film, Joel and Ethan Coen experienced a creative impasse. During this state of uncertainty they temporarily abandoned that project and started a new one. The end result was BARTON FINK, a film that has its main character experience a similar creative impasse. However, the narrative of the film transcends this simple plotline by emphasising the internal and external anguish this naïve and idealistic character (Barton Fink) experiences. It is chiefly with the help of auditory elements (i.e. sound effects, dialogue and music) that the Coen brothers are able to cultivate an atmosphere of unease that not only highlights Barton's state of mind but also complements the film's ambiguities. By knitting together the sparse sonic ingredients in a subtle undulating fashion, supervising sound editor/mixer Skip Lievsay and composer Carter Burwell

[170] BARTON FINK won an unprecedented number of awards at the 1991 Cannes Film Festival by achieving the top three prizes: Palme D'or, Best Director and Best Actor. It was also nominated for three Academy awards (Art Direction, Costume Design and Supporting Actor [Michael Lerner]) and at several Critics awards ceremonies won several prizes for cinematography and actors in supporting roles.

bring a well-defined cohesion to the soundtrack. Consequently, the sound scenarios in BARTON FINK transcend the traditional role of merely reinforcing the visuals, which in turn, encourages deeper levels of meaning.

The overall sound design of BARTON FINK is one based on the cooperative efforts of Lievsay and Burwell in partnership with Joel and Ethan Coen. Composer and supervising sound editor/mixer were given copies of the script to use as the basis for preliminary discussions in pre-production. Following this, they 'spotted' the film together, during the rough cut, by negotiating all the ingredients of the soundtrack. Lievsay and Burwell then continued to exchange preliminary ideas and samples of sounds or music on a regular basis so that their work complemented the script and the sounds augmented each other. According to Burwell (Barnes 2004), they had gone through the film scene by scene and divided up the frequency spectrum: a typical exchange would involve Lievsay saying he was going to use a high frequency sound for a particular item and Burwell offering music with a low frequency in response, or vice versa. The net result of these efforts was that the score and effects were partners in expressing the tonality of the film. They were also constructed in such a way that "the sounds had room to be heard and space in which to play out" (Underwood 2004). Consequently, there was less chaos than usual in the industry in processing the final mix.

In interview Carter Burwell gave a detailed example of the importance of the shared input for BARTON FINK. It highlights the relevance of knowing what Skip Lievsay had in mind so that their efforts could work in harmony. It also emphasises the affability of their working relationship. In particular, it draws attention to the give-and-take involved in the sessions. Burwell said:

> The sonic space Skip created is something that you could not just guess by watching the film. Often before a film you can guess what the sound effects person is going to do like there's lightning outside or there's going to be thunder or there's a gunshot so there's

> going to be a loud bang. But in BARTON FINK it would not be easy to guess what sounds were happening in most of those scenes. That was one reason why the spotting was important. You could be watching a scene that just takes place in a hotel and Skip might say, "I've got these very low creaking sounds. You know, like the metal plates, the bulkheads of a submarine, creaking." And so I'd say, "OK, I'll let you have the low frequencies here and I'll do a high violin note that will echo the mosquito we had in the previous scene." And then we'd come to the next scene and Skip would tell me what he had in mind. And then I would say, "Then I'll do this." And sometimes I knew what I wanted to do and I told him. We often traded off the frequency range for the picture. Skip would say, "You've got this 'danging' thing you want to do with prepared piano in the low middle range, so I'll stay away from that. I'll just do some wind sounds here" (Barnes 2004).

Maintaining this free exchange of ideas, Burwell and Lievsay worked on BARTON FINK for approximately four months.

One of the main reasons that this method of working was encouraged was that the Coens envisioned the film being more sound-driven than music-driven. The script actually contains a number of scenes with little or no dialogue and a preponderance of sound events that have a direct impact on the storyline. According to Carter Burwell (Barnes 2004), "They were not even sure they wanted any score at all". Therefore, if any music were to be included, it would have to be designed to work with the given sound effects. Faced with this challenge, Burwell decided to compose some sketches, assured he could produce something that would achieve this purpose. In the end, he conceived cues that accommodated the other aural ingredients, while adding to Barton Fink's personality and background. Upon playing these pieces for Joel and Ethan Coen, the composer explained that they "immediately knew that [they] lent something to Barton's character" and gladly accepted them as part of the film (Barnes 2004).

The narrative of the BARTON FINK is a dark, comic cerebral nightmare that denies any strict categorisation. This may principally be due to its focus being the mental life of a writer. The film's narrative seems to depict 'the life of the mind' with all of its creative power as well as its delusions and perplexity.

Barton's intellectual journey is formed by his own blind passion to promote the Common Man: a single focus that results in him being simultaneously insensitive (to others) and misunderstood (by others). Throughout the film Barton's zeal seems to be tied to his identity, cemented by insecurity and naivety. Consequently, this callowness causes him to be unaware that his idealistic diatribes are merely intellectualisations that are completely alienating him from the people he so wished to champion. In the end, he is left lost in his own mind, disillusioned: his ideals unclear.

The Coen brothers emphasise Barton's intellectual journey by communicating the film's narrative solely through his perspective (i.e. Barton appears in virtually every shot). Sound establishes this subjective point of view from the very beginning of the film. The first sounds we hear after the opening title music are diegetic mechanical noises of adjustments being made backstage and the voice of John Turturro, the actor playing Barton Fink. However, he is not speaking as that character, he is in fact heard out of view as an actor on stage performing in one of Barton's plays. The camera eventually pans over to where Turturro is standing in the wings, hanging anxiously on every word. At this moment sound and image seem to define Barton's identity: hearing his voice through the language of the play not only functions as an embodiment of Barton's beliefs, but also displays the level of disconnection he has between those beliefs and his true self. It operates very much like a revealed acousmêtre: associating the voice with Barton's physical presence almost immediately shows him as weak and powerless. What is more, the hyperreal sound of the backstage noises draws attention to the inner workings of the creative process. Thus, from the onset Joel and Ethan Coen are establishing themes that will repeat throughout the film.

The nondiegetic music for the title sequence recurs quite regularly throughout the remainder of the film. However, the overall use of score in BARTON FINK is minimal. According to Burwell (Brophy 1999, p.24-25):

> the melody is extremely childlike in nature and the octave jumps make it sound like it might be played on a toy piano [...] It suggests Barton's naivety [and] some of the darkness, confusion and cruelty of his childhood.

As the character is portrayed rather unsympathetically, the composer's music certainly helps to evoke the needed pathos. Furthermore, by communicating Barton's child-like qualities, Burwell reinforces the idea that "he's a complete innocent [...] He pretends to be knowledgeable about many things, but in fact he knows nothing about the real world at all" (Barnes 2004). Stating these notions from the onset of the film, the music helps establish (albeit indirectly) the psychological makeup of the main character. Therefore, even before he is revealed, the melodies are meant to prime the audience for sympathy.

Joel and Ethan Coen place Barton in Hollywood, where he has been invited after having achieved success with his most recent play. They give the year as 1941, but this is merely to contextualise the events of the film; it is not meant to offer the audience historical accuracy. By setting BARTON FINK in this timeframe, it allows the Coens to exploit Hollywood's machine-like mode of production and its keen interest in increasing the profit margin of its products. It also allows for a framework where studio moguls could embody this machine with their self-importance, their unwillingness to take economic risks and their capacity to restrict creative output.[171] In other words, the setting forms a constructed backdrop where artistry and idealism might be corrupted rather than an attempt to authenticate a period in the history of Hollywood. The characters are simply emblematic of people who would have

[171] As noted in the opening sections of this thesis

existed during Hollywood's studio era. As Landry (1993, p.43) stated BARTON FINK is not about any of the historical figures for whom cinematic analogues have been devised; it merely incorporates them as pliable intertext.[172] By using this setting as a template, it allows the Coen brothers to manipulate the historical timeframe to generate conditions in which the conflicts the main character faces could be plausible.

The absence of narration, a common Coen brothers' technique, demands that external factors represent the internal processes. This is never truer than when he arrives in Los Angeles. His transition from New York to Hollywood is marked by a building wave that crashes against a rock; it is followed by the seawater washing into a hotel lobby (via an extremely slow dissolve) that leaves Barton standing motionless near the entrance. Prior to his arrival the sound of the wave rumbles thunderously under the end of Barton's conversation with his agent, who has just made a joke about the Common Man that leaves them in cold silence. Having the wave begin acousmatically underscores the tension in the scene. Furthermore, its power seems to echo Barton's solemnity as well as his incomprehension. We are never shown what finally convinces him to go to Los Angeles, but we can insinuate from the wave building and then crashing on the cut that a trajectory is implied. It is as though he was thrust into that 'new world', compelled against his will. Moreover, the sharp edit and the powerful noise mark a schism in Barton's life and the beginning of his mental journey. Consequently, his momentary hesitation may be attributed to a subconscious fear that the sound-image of the advancing sea spray and sea foam means that he will be abandoned to his fate.[173]

[172] One summary of the suspected historical inaccuracies can be found in JAMESON, R. 1991. What's in the box? *Film Comment*, 27 (5), p.26, 32.
[173] The Coens' script directly identifies the sound scenario for this entire sequence (Coen & Coen 2002, p.407).

The audible wash of the wave dissolves ominously into the low rumble of the deserted lobby. Here, Carter Burwell's bass trombones and samples of prepared piano were mixed in with Lievsay's sound of the ocean spray (Sider, Freeman & Sider 2003d, p.199). This dissonant sound introduces the presence of the Hotel Earle, Barton's chosen residence. The atmosphere throughout the hotel is densely packed with aural ingredients, which gives one the impression that it is yet another character in the film.[174] Joel Coen claimed that he wanted to "make it a decaying organism" (Andrew 1992, p.20). Thus, in addition to the rumble in the lobby there are the subtle sounds of electric fans, the squeak of Barton's shoes and the knock of his luggage. The hyperreal quality of these sounds, amidst the relative quiet, expresses that Barton is alone and unwelcome. The sound that first breaks the near-silence is just as foreboding. Barton taps the bell to register his arrival, but instead of a short, quick ring, the sound of the bell continues well beyond its normal time-span.[175] It is perhaps for Barton the first diegetic sound that intimates that something is awry. He is, however, undeterred. Presently, Barton hears footsteps, but is only able to note their source when Chet (Buscemi), the hotel clerk, emerges from a trapdoor in the floor and stops the bell with his finger.[176] Here the threat of the unknown and its bizarre resolution not only suggests the film's absurdity, but also furthers Barton's unease.[177]

The heightened sounds of the electric fans and the low rumble follow Barton up the lift. Once out of the lift and in the corridor, these atmospheric effects increase as a wind-like noise fills the cinematic space. As there is no visible means for air to flow through this area, this noise serves as a sinister

[174] Much like the Overlook Hotel in THE SHINING (1980 Kubrick)
[175] It was stretched out a full thirty-five seconds by underlining and prolonging the natural sound with a synthesised tone.
[176] Both the elongated bell and Chet's 'dull scuffle of shoes on the stairs' are included in the script (Coen & Coen 2002, p.407).
[177] This entire sequence can be heard in film clip number one on the accompanying CD.

metaphor. In the spirit of making the hotel like a mausoleum Skip Lievsay (in Lobrutto 1994) stated that "the [corridor] was a stepping off point into oblivion, and that each room off the [corridor] would be a sealed vacuum bottle where the occupants lived" (p.257). Thus, by entering his room Barton was encountering an environment that lacked life and inspiration: a place that is ripe for writer's block. Lievsay added elsewhere that these vacuum-sealed rooms allowed nothing to enter or escape, including ideas (Barnes 2003). As a result, every time Barton opens and closes his door a sudden rush of wind would enter the room as if the seal had been broken.[178] Ultimately, this would suggest that the hotel room was a symbol for how Barton's blind idealism isolated him from the real world.

Barton manages to find some solace in the hotel in the form of a picture hanging on the wall in his room. It is of a beach setting where a young woman with her back turned looks at the sea. Every time Barton peers up at it, the soundtrack emits a quiet roll of waves and seagulls (scripted) accompanied by a progressively building high note (unscripted). The nondiegetic sound effects and music evoke a sense of calm, or perhaps hope. The camera often zooms in from Barton's point of view giving the impression that he is mesmerised by it. However, Mottram (2000) quotes the Coen brothers, saying the picture was meant to designate 'a false paradise' (p.87), suggesting that if the room represents his mind the picture is symbolic of his self-delusion, and the 'realistic' sounds only reinforce that misconception. Therefore, despite the encouragement it supplies him it is in fact yet another instance where Barton's aspirations are not based on a tangible reality.

[178] The inclusion of this sound actually began as one of Lievsay's inside jokes. He said, "That was something I stumbled on and I stuck in a few places as a little funny sound. [The Coen brothers] laughed and they thought that it was funny. They hadn't realised it was a joke, so when it came to the next sequence and they weren't there, they said, where's the door whoosh sound. We had to lay up that sound for all the doors of Barton's hotel room (Barnes 2003).

Any momentary peace Barton experiences is constantly thwarted by external audible forces. From the very first night in the hotel Barton is plagued with irritations. Initially, the most prominent is a mosquito that disturbs his first night's sleep. Following the initial sequence with the picture on the wall there is a brief silence in the soundtrack. An irritating buzz underscored with low droning trombones seems to emerge from that empty space and audibly pan across the room. Lievsay worldised a real mosquito sound by playing the mosquito's buzz on tiny speakers mounted on a stick and waved the stick in front of a microphone, which recreated the Doppler Effect (Shulevitz 1991, p.14).[179] For many seconds this insect dominates the soundtrack, becoming the sole focus of attention. The shot looks down on Barton from the mosquito's perspective showing his inability to sleep. When the buzz is subsequently combined with a soft pulsing beat from a prepared piano its presence becomes more than a nuisance; it functions as an ill omen.

The near quiet of that night is ruptured by a sharp cut to a boisterous workplace as Barton is ushered into the office of Jack Lipnik (Lerner), the studio head of Capital Pictures: his new employer. On the cut, the phone rings are siren-like, and once through the door Barton is greeted with insincere praise and loud, bombastic speech.[180] Lipnik's manner of speaking is authoritative and nearly uninterruptible, setting it in contrast to Barton's quiet reserve. Consequently, without protest, Barton is assigned to a Wallace Beery wrestling film. This is Barton's first experience of Hollywood; it is noisy, overbearing and deceitful, giving the impression that it is unwelcoming and threatening. This is further emphasised when Barton visits Ben Geisler (Shalhoub), another fast-talking employee of Capital Pictures. Geisler later arranges for Barton to screen dailies from another wrestling picture in order

[179] Revisit page 96 for information on worldising
[180] The transition from Barton's first night at the Hotel Earle to his meeting with Lipnik can be heard on film clip number two on the accompanying CD.

to dislodge his writer's block. The sequence begins with the dailies, accompanied by the click of an old film projector, but the focus soon turns to Barton's face that holds an expression of horror. With the camera still fixed on him, the sound of bodies being slammed down on the mat of the wrestling ring takes on a hyperreal quality. The effects build in pace, setting a rhythm that generates tension. The close positioning of the noises suggests a trajectory, but their unusual qualities make their destination unclear.[181] Lievsay explained the rationale for the sound design and the degree of experimentation involved in this scene, as follows:

> We had to have something there that reinforces [Barton's] utter panic and the desperation he's feeling - he has no idea what they want and it's inaccessible to him [...] I wanted to have sound that goes from point A to point B - point A would be the sound of the dailies and point B is eventually the sound of the hammering home that he is completely lost, which is the sound of the bodies slamming on the canvas [...] In fact, [body slams] become the transitional sound as we go from that scene to the next. So I wanted there to be a sound that would be a transitional texture from the raw dailies to the sound of those huge explosions. I made this association with a gravel-turning machine [which has] a big metal cylinder with grinders in it, where the big rocks go in one end and the gravel come out the other. It's a kind of percussive, explosive, slightly rhythmic but arrhythmic crunching sort of rock-splitting type of sound. I feathered that in and with EQ I made it softer in the beginning and harsher at the end and of course with volume we just let it get louder and louder [...] Towards the end when you really close in on his eyes I took a chainsaw sound and I filtered it so it's this roaring low sound and then at the very end I took this European train whistle sound and I did this reverberant type of thing, which became a topper and a nice transition because the bomb sound didn't grab the reverb very well but the European train sound was a nice high sound to grab the reverb and echo out of the scene (Barnes 2003).[182]

This sequence is also underscored by strings that develop slowly and help build the tension. The combination of these elements with the close-up seems to signal the chaos and confusion Barton is facing.[183]

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[181] For a more detailed description of trajectory in film sound see Appendix A.

[182] Skip Lievsay (Barnes 2003) also stated that he reprises this light steam train whistle in scene near the end of the film, when Charlie (Goodman) comes into Barton's room after he hears him screaming and he takes Barton into the bathroom. Charlie then tells him to calm down and Barton passes out. As hits his head on the wall, a faint whistle can be heard.

[183] The wrestling dailies sequence can be heard in film clip number three on the accompanying CD.

The threat from all sides in effect provides Barton with no safe haven. Back in the hotel Barton experiences the second harbinger of irritation. Barton sits down to type, but he has no idea what to write. His eyes move to the picture of the woman on the wall and the soundtrack revisits the aforementioned sound effects and music.[184] However, they are suddenly muted by an exaggerated squelch heard behind him. Its presence quickly eliminates any inkling of inspiration he might have had. The source of the noise is that of the wallpaper above his bed, which is slipping off the wall: a sign of the hotel in decay. As he attempts to repair it, the mosquito returns to add further distraction and annoyance. The conspiracy of these elements recurs when the mosquito rouses Barton from sleep. It is accompanied by the nondiegetic sound of bells, notorious symbols of doom, which gradually transforms into the main theme as Barton eyes his typewriter. Here the melody ebbs and flows around Barton's actions until they are disrupted by the entrance of Charlie Meadows (Goodman), the only other identified guest of the Hotel Earle.[185] Before he exits, the wallpaper near the front door squelches as it splits from the wall. Charlie's irritation with the dilapidated state of the hotel is clear, while Barton innocently justifies it by stating: "You pick your poison" (Coen & Coen 2002, p.457). Thus, offering further evidence that he does not understand the Common Man's position: Barton is a visitor, choosing freely to live in impoverished conditions; where Charlie is a resident, whose choices are restricted by his circumstances.

Barton is recommended to seek advice from a fellow writer, but only comes upon one by chance. While washing his hands in the studio's restroom, Barton hears the sound of someone vomiting in a nearby toilet stall. This

[184] In fact, it does every time he looks at it.
[185] Charlie too is introduced aurally. Initially, he is identified by his loud crying, heard by Barton through the walls of the hotel, and then by his voice on the phone in his room following Barton's complaint of too much noise. Charlie's presence is then expressed through his pounding footsteps, as he goes to knock on Barton's door. This lack of visual identification builds suspense and forces only a mental representation of the character.

noise announces the entrance of Bill Mayhew (Mahoney), declared by Barton to be "the finest novelist of our time" (Coen & Coen 2002, p.432). Mayhew's dress and demeanour are meant to resemble William Faulkner, who notoriously had an unsuccessful time in Hollywood and often turned to alcohol to solve his problems. Mayhew's 'Southern' intellectualism is emphasised by poetic turns of phrases, such as: "Bein' occupied in the worship of Mammon" and "Well, m'olfactory's turin' womanish on me - lyin' and deceitful" (Coen & Coen 2002, p.433, 446). The script also highlights Mayhew's accent by spelling words phonetically, e.g. 'Mistuh' for *mister*, 'wrastlin' for *wrestling*, 'mebbe' for *maybe* and 'lit'rary' for *literary*. In addition, Mayhew's misery, which also comes from a lack of inspiration, is heard but never seen. Following their initial meeting Barton visits Mayhew's bungalow and overhears him in the midst of a drunken rant. Later, Mayhew's ravings can be heard while Barton is on the telephone with Bill's secretary, Audrey Taylor (Davis). Both instances leave Barton no further on his quest for creative insight.

The mosquito's last visit marks Barton's final decline. The night before he must present Lipnik with the rough outline for his wrestling script Barton panics. He pleads for assistance from Audrey, and after much hesitation, she agrees. However, instead of helping him with his writing Audrey offers him 'understanding'. What follows is an ambiguous lovemaking scene, predominately played out of frame, where sounds are used to suggest the action onscreen.[186] Initially only fragile verbal sighs are heard along with a variation of the main theme, but when the camera pans over and into the sink in the bathroom the soundtrack shifts into a much darker mode. The film erupts with sensual moans that become ghostly as they mingle with what Russell (2001, p.80) described as a "demonic cacophony of voices blended

[186] All of which is detailed in the script (Coen & Coen 2002, p. 471).

with the sound of running water". However, these sounds are reminiscent of the lovemaking noises heard from another couple in the hotel from earlier in the film. This combined with the fact that these sounds are detached from Barton and Audrey, presents the question of whether it was them making love. Simultaneously, the 'demonic cacophony' hints at a much darker purpose.[187]

Underscored by bass trombones and prepared piano sounds, this eerie flood of effects continues over Barton's sleeping face and abruptly stops when he opens his eyes. This unexpected cessation of sound hints that something is awry. At this exact point the buzz of the mosquito is heard. It finally alights on Audrey's side, making itself visible for the first time; possibly stating that the moment of doom has arrived. Barton smashes the mosquito with his hand, but Audrey does not react. The minor achievement he feels in killing this insect that had disturbed him almost every night vanishes as he realises the woman is dead. The music builds as the bed fills with blood, mickeymouses the turn of the body and cuts out at Barton's scream, adding dramatic intensity to this horrific event. As it is a reprise of the child-like innocence theme, Carter Burwell stated that it also lends itself to the absurd dark humour of the moment (Barnes 2004).[188]

The enigma of Audrey's death pushes Barton from incomprehension to utter confusion. He discovers subsequently that Charlie Meadows is actually a serial killer named Karl Mundt and it is most likely that he had killed Audrey. However, in the midst of these devastating revelations Barton feels inspired to write. In Barton's room the camera cuts to a box wrapped in paper and

[187] Skip Lievsay also explained that this sequence involved intense collaboration between Carter Burwell and himself. In interview he offered this sample: I sent him sounds, samples of what we were going to put into this scene and he said, 'Why don't you knock out these sounds and I'll put violins in there. And why don't you amplify these other frequencies and I won't use double bass for whatever it is" (Barnes 2004).
[188] The lovemaking sequence can be heard in film clip number four on the accompanying CD.

tied up with string: it has been left for Barton by Charlie/Karl and it is strongly suggested to contain Audrey's severed head. As Barton moves toward the box and lifts it delicately, the main theme surfaces and increases steadily, highlighting the fear and uncertainty of that moment. The music pauses momentarily as he shakes the box, allowing a dull thud to be heard from within, and then places the box next to his ear so that it shields his own head. The noise suggests a large object but it is ambiguous; and the visual seems to indicate a 'mental' identification with that uncertainty. However, Barton does not open the box; he simply places it on his desk near his typewriter.[189] As he does so, the main musical theme resumes but at a higher pitch and Barton begins to type. It is perhaps at this moment he is experiencing the inner pain he claimed was the source of his writing for it was then inspiration descended.[190] The melody and the sound of the typewriter continue working in harmony and remain during a brief fade to black, which marks the passage of time. The telephone rings, but Barton is undeterred. He simply places cotton in his ears to block out the sound; the soundtrack physically registers this by muffling the volume of the phone and the typewriter. From that point Barton works on through the night accompanied by the main melody, dictating his script to himself in layers of overlapping speech. Midway his voice becomes disembodied as the camera moves to other locations in the hotel. The combination of these sounds resolves when Barton decides to ring his agent in New York. In a hoarse voice he tells him that "this may be the most important work [he has] done", but his agent's response is less than encouraging (Coen & Coen 2002 p.500). Following this, the music does not return, but he resumes typing until the script is finished.

[189] It has been claimed that this is a sign of maturity on Barton's part (internet interview with the Coen brothers).
[190] Responding as to whether he thought writing was peaceful Barton answers: "No, I've always found that writing comes from a great inner pain. Maybe it's a pain that comes from the realization that one must do something for one's fellow man - to help somehow to ease the suffering. Maybe it's a personal pain. At any rate, I don't believe good work is possible without it " (Coen & Coen 2002, p.446).

The end of BARTON FINK is both a violent display of Barton's obliviousness and his utter self-delusion. After a night's revelry at the local USO he returns to find two police officers in his hotel room reading his script. The intrusion on Barton's private world is made clear by his angry reaction. They explain that they are awaiting Meadows'/Mundt's return and handcuff Barton to the footboard of his bed, claiming he is an accessory to the serial killer's crimes. Charlie's/Karl's arrival is announced with measured dissonant chords and the previously mentioned ominous bell tones; it is accompanied by the diegetic roar of a raging fire. The music builds until Charlie/Karl announces: "I'll show you the life of the mind" as he shoots one of the policemen, leaving only the sound of the flames as he shoots the other (Coen & Coen 2002, 510). Before killing the second policeman Charlie/Karl says: "Heil Hitler" (Coen & Coen 2002, p.512). Ethan has claimed that this allows an:

> even greater apocalypse to be incorporated into the background - the war..." and then adds that "all that brings us back to [the idea of] this world which has become a prison; the tragedy happening to Barton is in fact taking over the rest of the world" (Mottram 2000, p.84).

Barton's utter misapprehension forces him to ask Charlie/Karl why he had targeted him and Charlie/Karl's response speaks volumes. He bellows: "Because you DON'T LISTEN" (Coen & Coen 2002 p.514). This statement reveals Barton's inability to honestly see beyond himself and his own ideals. Above all, he is unable to understand the Common Man which Charlie/Karl had come to symbolise.

Freed from the footboard, Barton goes to Capital Pictures still intent on handing over his script to Lipnik. He claims that the work was intended to "show [him] something beautiful" and "something about all of us", but it is utterly rejected by the studio head on the grounds that it is overly grave and sentimental (Coen & Coen 2002, p.518-519). Lipnik continues to berate

Barton by declaring that his ability to write is a façade and that his personality is best described as self-important. As 'punishment' Barton is forced to honour his contract by continuing to write for Capital Pictures, but none of his work would be produced. The Coens do not allow Barton a chance to rebut or acquiesce to these statements; instead the scene cuts sharply to the wave heard earlier in the film as it pounds against a rock. This is done to mark the next significant moment in Barton's mental journey. It would appear to denote that he has been forced to realise that his idealism is flawed and that he can no longer trust it to enable him to perceive the world truthfully. Locked in this confusion, he wanders onto the beach carrying the box that may or may not contain Audrey's head. There, he meets a woman, who resembles the bathing beauty in the picture in his room. Her presence is matched by the sounds of the waves and the seagulls that were heard earlier. She asks about the contents of the box, but in his utter bewilderment, all he can say is "I don't know" (Coen & Coen 2002, p.520-521). His uncertainty would seem to indicate that he had lost his point of reference, which had been the basis of his identity and, as a result, it has left him totally unsure of anything.

BARTON FINK ends in an enigma. The bathing beauty assumes the same pose as the woman in the picture, suggesting reality and fantasy are blurred. This is not to suggest that Barton's intellectual journey finishes here. In fact, it is reasonable to argue that it is far from over. The soundscape having mapped the deterioration of his mind continues to wash into the credits: the sea ebbing and flowing in an endless cycle. What he will do is impossible to predict; no suggestion is made; no hint is given. Perhaps one day he will understand?

The creative efforts of Skip Lievsay and Carter Burwell in collaboration with Joel and Ethan Coen are demonstrated throughout BARTON FINK. It is especially notable in their ability to generate an atmosphere that reflects Barton's internal and external world. In this way, the aural ingredients brings greater understanding to the Coen brothers' main character, which in turn helps give some clarity to the ambiguous presentation of the narrative. In particular, their use of abrupt sound edits on and off the cut communicates constant threats to Barton's psyche. In sequences where only sound effects cues are used, suspense and menace are markedly enhanced. Burwell's music not only underscores the drama, but also communicates the wounds left by Barton's childhood.[191] Above all, it was Lievsay and Burwell's unified approach to the soundtrack in relation to the Coens' script that gave the sound world of BARTON FINK an integrated structure. As a result, their efforts not only complemented one another, but they also worked in harmony with the overall construction of the narrative.

Burwell (in Brophy 1999, p.25-26) stated that his work with Lievsay on this film "is a perfect example of how it should be done...it is an optimum interaction between the composer and the sound designer". Burwell added that BARTON FINK has thus far been their most collaborative effort. Nonetheless, he was keen to point out that each of the Coen brothers' films contain quite a number of scenes where effects and music needed to be negotiated. The amount of exchanges between them was determined by the requirements of the film. What follows are interpretations of the use of sound in the other films in their repertoire. They are presented individually or as a comparison between two.[192]

[191] As noted on page 179

[192] In Appendix C there are two additional sections that offer an analyses of aural ingredients that can be heard across their entire repertoire.

Sound and Music Made 'BLOOD' Simple

As discussed throughout this paper, noise, ambient effects and musical scores can be used to evoke layers of meaning to manipulate the audience's perception of the images and to guide their understanding of the storyline. This is particularly striking in the Coen brothers' first film, BLOOD SIMPLE (1983). In this film, Skip Lievsay and Carter Burwell designed a soundtrack that was subtle in communicating meaning as well as deeply emotive in terms of tone and atmosphere. They wove together the thematic elements of the film, integrating sound into the storytelling process. They also established many of the collaborative working practices that would set a pattern for the future.

The approach to the sound design for BLOOD SIMPLE was less conventional than the Coen brothers' films that would follow it. Most likely this can be attributed to the fact that private financing has its limitations and their lack of experience. For this film, Lievsay agreed to a fee that would run out at some point and he would have to receive the rest on deferral. The post-production schedule was based on the availability of the studio, which in the end lasted approximately six months. Lievsay viewed the flexibility of this length of time as extremely advantageous. He said:

> because we had an open-ended schedule, we had the luxury to be able to go back and change things we didn't like. That's the best thing about having a long schedule (Barnes 2003).

Despite his inexperience in film composing, Burwell was asked to join the film, after Joel and Ethan Coen preferred his non-traditional thriller music over the other pieces put forward. Burwell's approach to the score was not to write to any scenes in particular, but to capture a mood. What is more,

because of their ignorance regarding synchronisation, the length of the music was dictated by the duration required for the scene. Burwell explained:

> I would just put a watch on the piano and play and we would try to make it work. I actually have a fond recollection of all of our naiveté and lack of experience. It made it special in a certain way, when you don't really know what you're doing (Barnes 2004).

This lack of precise synchronisation also allowed the Coens to position the music in different scenes or add effects to it, which they viewed necessary after a private screening. This, in the words of Carter Burwell, allowed them to treat the music "more like a sound element" (Barnes 2004).

This unusual treatment of the sound also complemented their relatively unorthodox approach to the narrative. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the narrative of BLOOD SIMPLE is described as a film noir, and yet it clearly flouts that cinematic form. It has little in common with those films that were originally made under the Hollywood studio system. The film was independently financed, shot in colour, set in suburban Texas and does not promote any sense of social or political malaise. Nevertheless, the classic *film noir* themes of mistrust, crime, betrayal and cynicism can be clearly seen throughout the film. It was Ethan Coen's desire "to emulate the source that those [*film noir*] movies came from rather than the movies themselves" (Bergan 2000, p.79-80). Therefore, the Coens took the ideas of early twentieth-century fiction (e.g. James B. Cain, Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler) and gave them a modern twist. In this story no one has the upper hand. Despite the intricate connection between the characters, they are never totally aware of what the other is doing, or has done. Everyone is in the dark. Lievsay and Burwell are principally concerned with representing the relationships between characters and their misunderstandings through the soundtrack. They mainly achieve this through

the repetition of effects and music cues that play against audience expectations.

Visual and aural ambiguities mark the film from the beginning. It opens with a nondiegetic narrator speaking over a series of bright location stills. This serves several purposes. This type of narration follows a *film noir* tradition, where a number of detective thrillers began with the voice of the private investigator telling the story that was about to unfold. Unlike the anti-hero of those films, this character, Visser (Walsh), is a seedy, unsympathetic private eye. He is also not recounting a story, but instead is giving the audience the film's setting (Texas) and its overarching theme - "You're on your own [in life]". Furthermore, unlike those earlier detective thrillers, Visser is not the main character; he is, in fact, somewhat peripheral to the story.

The film cuts quickly to a dark scene where the audience is set behind two characters, Ray (Getz) and Abby (McDormand), in a moving car. The dialogue between the two characters is expressed awkwardly while layers of sound fill the background. Car-bys are solely noted by a transient Doppler effect that is matched to approaching headlights. The constant motion of windscreen wipers creates a steady rhythm, which fills the emptiness between the characters' lines. Persistent rain helps generate an aural backdrop, which adds a depressing tone to the darkness. Underlying these sounds is music - a simple series of synthesizer chords. The rhythm of the wipers makes it look as if they are beating in time to the music and the noise of the passing cars seems to generate the credits as they appear on the screen. This unity of sound and music only ceases when Ray slams on the brakes and the music disappears. The specific placement of all these sounds and their steady

repetition give the entire sequence a quality that is believable, yet discomforting.[193]

One key element that links the three main characters - Abby, Ray and Marty (Hedaya) - together is the visual and aural use of electric ceiling fans. We first notice one of these fans through an acousmatic source. Ray receives a phone call while he is in bed with Abby and the faint whirl of a ceiling fan is audible behind the caller's voice. The audience is then told that Marty, Abby's husband, had been on the line. This same ceiling fan is heard again later in Marty's office. It is seen at the beginning of the scene and as the exaggerated sound of the motor continues the audience is encouraged to identify it with Marty. This connecting metaphor is further drawn out in the next scene where Abby answers the phone at Ray's house to hear only the sound of that powerful, spinning motor and she knows immediately that Marty is at the other end. The use of these fans crystallises in a sequence that unites the characters together. Once again it begins by cutting directly to the loud hum of Marty's ceiling fan, but this time the title music underlines it. As we drift into the next scene both sound and music work together as we are shown Ray's ceiling fan and Abby sleeping under it. The sequence shifts back and forth between the three characters repeating all the auditory elements throughout. Burwell's intention was to give "the idea that they are all thinking about each other, even though they are in different spaces" (Brophy 1999, p20). As a result, this repetition of sounds builds an emotional bond, which is deeply intimate but at the same time extremely tense.[194]

After a failed attempt to get Abby back, Marty hires Visser to kill her and Ray. Discreet sound effects and dissonant music heighten the tension when Visser enters Ray's house. The lone sound of extremely loud crickets from the

[193] This opening sequence can be heard in film clip number five on the accompanying CD.
[194] The night of the ceiling fans can be heard in film clip number six on the accompanying CD.

previous scene is linked to this scene by the electronic keyboard cue that draws us out of the bedroom and into the front room. Once there, the crickets continue and the music resumes - this time rising in pitch. The sounds of Visser's lock-picking, his entry, his rifling through Abby's bag and his subsequent walk towards the bedroom are significantly heightened against this aural backdrop. This combination of sparse elements amplifies the suspense, giving an intimacy that draws us into action. However, once we are gripped, the music drops out and Visser changes direction. The music then begins again as we follow Visser around the house. A lower and louder more dissonant tone builds forcefully as he moves towards Ray's bedroom window and we see the two sleeping figures. Our expectations are acute. The building trajectory of the music tells the audience that the evil deed could be committed at any moment. The scene culminates in an explosion of white noise matched to a blast of white light. The tension is gone, but uncertainty remains. The Coens have left the audience puzzled; they want them to believe that the main characters have not been killed, but the sound design suggests something to the contrary.

The uncertainty of Ray and Abby's death is resolved when Ray enters Marty's bar planning to take the money for wages he is owed. However, much to his surprise, he finds Marty dead in his office, having been shot with the gun that had been in Abby's handbag. The sound design created for the subsequent cleaning of Marty's office and Marty's burial is one that is anempathetic to the repulsive situation. The music used while Ray is cleaning up pools of blood is diegetic and quite upbeat; the jukebox in the bar plays a track by The 4 Tops called *The Same Old Song*. The timing and choice of this selection performs many different roles. According to Brophy (1985-1987):

> the music functions on two levels: (a) irony - the murder is given an air of ordinariness which is undercut by the realistic fact that someone happens to be playing a song whose

mood totally goes against the horror and suspense of the murder; (b) realism - Ray can make a lot of noise, and thereby do it quickly.

This ordinariness is continued, but is notably heightened while Ray drives off to a deserted area to bury Marty's body. During this sequence a series of noises are hyperrealised to enhance the tension: Ray's spade scrapping against the road, an oncoming truck passing them at high speed, Marty suddenly reviving and grabbing at Ray's shin, the digging of the grave and the crisp clicks of an empty gun barrel as Marty tries to shoot Ray before he is buried alive. Once again lively diegetic music is used to contrast with this horrifying predicament: mariachi music, emanates from Ray's car radio as he discovers Marty is still alive, maintains its volume as he runs from the car. The music cuts off at the moment of sheer terror - Marty is crawling along the road, inspiring Ray to see no other recourse than to run him over. The arrangement of all these sound elements gives us a feeling of tremendous discomfort that desperately longs for resolution.

The resolution comes in the form a sound and music joke - some light relief to offset the relentlessness of the last scene. During Ray's departure for the gravesite his car stalls, but at the same time the music accompaniment stalls too. The scene is introduced with the musical theme that had already occurred several times, namely during the 'night of the ceiling fans'. The Coens, therefore, tease us by playing on the audience's expectations. Familiarity with the piece of music is undermined when the cue hesitates in the middle of the melody. Carter Burwell (in Brophy 1999, p.20) admitted it was purposefully done to subvert the repetition of the musical theme and to provide a sense of 'release' for the audience. In addition to these explanations, this music and sound effects cue also serves several other purposes:

(1) Irony - it is set against the seriousness of the last scene

(2) Interactivity - it allows us, as the audience, in on the trickery of filmmaking

(3) Nonconformity - it defies normal filmmaking conventions.[195]

Blood Simple ends in a resurgence of several musical themes and effects that had been heard in previous portions of the film. During the sequence where Abby dreams that Marty has come back to visit her, only his ghostly footsteps and a low musical rumble are audible until he is fully revealed. This de-acousmatization creates a sense of fear for both Abby and the audience alike. This same set of sound effects is repeated later when Visser is heard approaching Abby's flat and then entering it. For yet a third time, it is repeated when Visser is in the bathroom and Abby is walking around in the flat. Yet, during these latter two scenes, the music has no apparent fidelity with the images as it did with the dream sequence; it is diegetic Mexican pop music perceivably coming from another flat in the building. Here, again, the lively and festive track music is ironically anempathetic with the character's actions. Additionally, just prior to the point where Visser crushes Ray's skull with a ceramic walrus piggybank, a layer of increasing dissonance is added to the track music, generating a greater feeling of dread. Nearing the end of the film the track music cuts out suddenly as Abby picks up a gun left by the front door. This sudden drop in sound alters the mood further and demands our attention. It is soon replaced by the reoccurrence of the 'tribal' music heard in an earlier part of the film when Marty had tried forcefully to bring Abby home with him. This musical cue of "parchment penal colony prisoners

[195] The burial sequence to this musical joke can be heard in film clip number seven on the accompanying CD.

[played] backward under a huge synthesizer drum track" intensifies until Abby fires the gun through the bathroom door (Brophy 1999, p.22). It is possible by using this form of self-referentialism that these themes reinforce our understanding of the intricate storyline and the connection between each of the characters in the film.

The subtlety of Lievsay and Burwell's repetitious use of effects and musical cues unifies the many complex themes in BLOOD SIMPLE. The sounds, even when in contrast, appear to relate to the larger picture of what Joel and Ethan Coen had wanted to communicate to the audience. This unconventional approach grants the audience a closer attachment to the images on the whole at both a cognitive and emotive level, despite their cold harshness. As a result, the audience sees and hears a film that has an encompassing affect, that is, a sonic atmosphere that not only breathes life into every scene, but also joins the narrative together.

THE SOUND OF COMEDY: Music, Dialogue and Sound Effects in RAISING ARIZONA

> *...Lookahere, young sportsman. That-there's the kitchen area where Ma and Pa chow down. Over there's the TV, two hours a day maximum, either educational or football so's you don't ruin your appreciation of the finer things. This-here's the divan, for socializin' and relaxin' with the family unit. Yessir, many's the day we sat there and said wouldn't it be nice to have a youngster here to share our thoughts and feelings* - H.I. McDunnough to the recently kidnapped Nathan, Jr.[196]

The main theme of RAISING ARIZONA (1987) is family life in the United States in the 1980s. However, it is not explored in order to comment moralistically on this social institution. Film reviewers O'Brien (1987)[197] and Ayers (1987)[198] have criticised the Coens on that very point and, as a result, conclude that the film lacks substance. Yet, one could say that this is what the Coens were hoping to achieve. RAISING ARIZONA is simply meant to be exploitive: a utilisation of topical issues for the sake of comedy, rather than a film with a social conscience. By choosing to make a narrative about the institution of parenthood, Joel and Ethan Coen could make a film that was more accessible and easier to identify with than their previous feature, BLOOD SIMPLE (1984). In reference to this, Ethan said, "It's like a cheap and shameless bid at making a commercial movie" (Edelstein 1987, p.28). Furthermore, the Coens may have been mocking the 1980s trend in Hollywood of making 'cutesy' films about parenthood.[199] RAISING ARIZONA is ultimately a farce; it exaggerates the seriousness of child rearing and parental responsibility, so that one may be allowed to take a step back and laugh at it.

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[196] All quotations or references to the script are taken from COEN, E & COEN, J. 2002. Raising Arizona. In: *Collected Screenplays 1*. London: Faber and Faber.
[197] O'Brien, T. 1987. Young and Tender: "Arizona" and "Facing Southeast". Commonweal, 24, 242-244.
[198] AYERS, T. 1987. Raising Arizona. *Cinema papers*, Sept, 41-43.
[199] BABY BOOM and THREE MEN AND A BABY were released the same year. LOOK WHO'S TALKING (1989) and PARENTHOOD (1989) soon followed.

The overall design of the narrative of RAISING ARIZONA is one based on repetition. Everything within the film recurs, often at breath-taking speed. Kriest (1987) suggests that a "cyclical structure is a vital characteristic of all slapstick comedy". As the narrative returns to a previously experienced situation in the film, absurdity is emphasised and the audience's recognition of that revisited situation grants them deeper intimacy with the storyline. This is especially relevant in the film's extended prologue that precedes the credit sequence. Here, the Coens condense narrative conventions by establishing the film's tone, plot and characters in a rapid series of short repetitive scenes. As the audience has little time to process one piece of given information before the next one arrives, it commands their attention and keeps them vigilant for the remainder of the film. By reinforcing it with repetition, the experience is neither taxing nor complicated. Accordingly, this repetition also allows the film to continue at a manic pace without losing its audience. As story is paramount in RAISING ARIZONA (i.e. character development is not used to move the plot), one would consider this a necessity for maintaining its readability.

The characters themselves are exaggerated stereotypes of poor white Americans. They are not necessarily Arizonians. In response to a criticism made by the Tempe, Arizona press, Ethan stated that the film is not meant to be accurate portrayal of Arizona life: "It is all made up. It is an Arizona of the mind" (Edelstein 1987, p.56). The main characters could be best described as 'trailer trash'. They live in a mobile home and embody the lower-class whites that struggle to live out the American Dream. Perhaps Arizona and the southwest were chosen because they exemplify a further stratum of American society: the 'hick'. These individuals have been represented through film and television history as simpletons, who are either kind-hearted

or devilishly evil.[200] In RAISING ARIZONA, we are offered characters that are at neither extreme. They are petty criminals portrayed as misguided no-hopers, half-wits and has-beens, yet with a certain degree of dignity (Mottram 2000, p.42). It is because of this degree of dignity that the Coens make these characters extremely likeable. By following this course, Joel and Ethan Coen allow them to be something more than two-dimensional caricatures.

Throughout RAISING ARIZONA sound effects are used to heighten the circularity and the social class of the characters, as well as to offer a contrast to the seriousness of parent/child relationships. Skip Lievsay's sound design functions as a means of giving the film a hyperreal structure. The sound effects are expressed in cartoonish exaggerations of their expected associations. In no way are they attempting to mimic naturalism. The sonic ingredients used in the film draw attention to the objects or situations that they represent by regularly mickeymousing the action and by amplifying emotion. Despite this Brechtian approach to sound, it does not dominate the film.[201] It is in fact balanced by equally inflated visuals. As a result, RAISING ARIZONA could be described as a live-action cartoon. What is more, Joel and Ethan Coen included onomatopoetic words in the stage directions of the script to enable Lievsay to design the most appropriate sound effects for their film.[202] Most of these were based on the cartoon-oriented Mad magazine, in which both the Coens and Lievsay have had a long term interest (Lobrutto 1999, p.259).

[200] Consider the BEVERLY HILLBILLIES (TV-series from 1962-1970) and De Niro's Cady in CAPE FEAR (1991).
[201] Dramatist and poet, Bertolt Brecht, believed that drama should not seek to create the illusion of reality. Thus, the effect of any device used in production was never hidden from the audience. (DRABBLE, M., ed., 1985. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, p.127-128)
[202] Examples include *THWACK*, *WHOO-WHOO*, and *KA-POP*.

The music in the film functions in a similar fashion. Carter Burwell's score is composed of melodies that utilise many non-symphonic sources, such as banjos, whistling, humming and yodelling. The predominant themes for the film are played in a bluegrass style that conjurers up the West, the geographical position of Arizona in the United States. Yet, it is not in any way specific to Arizona; that is, the score has a rather antiquated style that lends itself to the idea of the Wild West of the late 1800s, rather than a contemporary approach or a particular location. Burwell explained that the rationale beyond his music was to emulate "the heart of a cowboy" (Brophy 1999, p.22). Therefore, his music not only reflects the general setting of the film, but also helps express the fundamental nature of the characters. Moreover, he felt that by using what he considered "humble materials" he could give the characters "some sense of nobility" (Sider, Freeman & Sider 2003d, p.199). As the characters are constantly striving for better things throughout the film but never achieve them, Burwell's sentiment assists in lifting the audience above utter pathos. Ultimately, his lively hillbilly melodies echo the film's cartoonish qualities and tell you in the words of Morgan (2000, p.62) that "no one's really going to get hurt in this movie".

Highly stylised dialogue decorates the entirety of RAISING ARIZONA. Here again their manner of speech and use of expressions does not attempt to depict that of an authentic Arizona resident. All of the characters communicate in strong accents reminiscent of the American south, which only gives further credence to the fact that the film is attempting to capture the old West rather than a specific location. In order to generate the required pronunciation, the Coen brothers wrote most words in the script in either a clipped form or they spelled them out phonetically, as they had done for J.P.

Mayhew in BARTON FINK.[203] The actual language used by most of the characters is filled with countrified expressions, such as *y'all*, *this-here* and *a-walkin'.* Additionally, the main character's voice-over narration often borders on the lyrical, giving greater weight to the notion of his humble nobility.[204] However, his elegant thoughts are never heard as actual spoken dialogue. Cheshire and Ashbrook (2002, p.23) stated:

> the fact that [the main character] will never be able to elucidate the complex and almost poetic thoughts rolling around in his head is the key to his inevitable failure as a social climber.

In view of the exaggerated visual and auditory elements, this stylised use of language is totally compatible with the general aesthetic of the film.

As the pre-credit prologue compresses narrative conventions, it also establishes the sound conventions for the remainder of the film. In fact, RAISING ARIZONA opens with sound against a black screen. Without a corresponding image, the audience must aurally interpret what 'world' the rattle of chains and the sliding of metal doors could inhabit. Additionally, the voice-over narration that continues throughout the film also begins against this black screen. Here, the voice is heard introducing himself. In the emptiness, the voice is momentarily given an acousmatic quality, allowing the audience's initial reading of the character to be their own. The first visual appears after an even louder metal door sound and a single banjo chord;[205] it is the sight of a wall used for criminal line-ups and the main character being pushed over to it. The voice-over narration at that point articulates the

[203] Examples of phonetic spellings are the word *months* is written *munce*, *repeat offender* is written *Ree-peat O-fender* and *bouque*t is written *boo-kay*. Clipped speech can be heard in questions like *What'm I talkin' about* and *What're you doin' creepin' around in the dark*.
[204] One example has the main character explaining that "her insides were a rocky place where my seed could find no purchase" (p.129).
[205] 24 seconds into the film

character's name, providing the audience with immediate identification.[206] All of which tells us that RAISING ARIZONA will be a film to watch closely and listened to attentively.

The remainder of the sequence consists of visual and aural repetition.[207] The main character H.I. McDunnough (Cage) is a recidivist, who is shown being repeatedly incarcerated for robbing convenience stores. Every time he is arrested the same female police officer, Ed (Hunter), takes his photo. Each hyperreal flash of the camera not only denotes the literal reality of taking a picture, but it also helps mark time. Furthermore, since the sound used for each flash is identical, it assists in establishing the circularity of the narrative. The music in this sequence, consisting of a banjo, whistling and humming, also complements this function. During the sequence two melodies are used: one reminiscent of early bluegrass music and the other a hummed version of Beethoven's Ode to Joy. The repetitions of these two melodies are only interrupted by the positioning of a punch line in the dialogue or when cutting to a new scene. Additionally, a single line of dialogue ("OK then") is repeated by the chairman of the parole board and the minister that presides over Ed and H.I.'s wedding.[208] As these words are positioned at the end of each short scene, they not only serve to mark transitions, but the overt repetition also engenders humour.[209]

Later in the film, there is a sequence where music, sound effects and dialogue interweave in order to complement its hyper kinetic action. Feeling under pressure, H.I. decides to rob a convenience store in order to

[206]This same positioning of the voice-over narration also occurs at opening of THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE (2001).
[207] It concludes 11 minutes and 5 seconds into the film.
[208] "Ok then" also emerges once more in the latter part of the film (at 1:14:12). However, the line is not in the original script, therefore, its placement could possibly be viewed as a spontaneous in-joke between the Coens and the actor and/or it could be a line that was added as an in-joke for the audience.
[209] A portion of this opening sequence can be heard in film clip number eight on the accompanying CD.

experience a moment of 'normality'. Upon entering the store, a diegetic muzak version of the main theme can be clearly heard. The use of muzak not only fits the purposes of the scene, but this humorously overt self-referentialism also reminds the audience that they are watching and listening to a film that is both comical and fictitious. Carter Burwell stated that this cue is intended to tell the audience "this isn't a serious movie, this is not intended to represent anything like reality, it's a film" (Sider, Freeman & Sider 2003d, p.199). This observation is highly significant considering that a madcap chase sequence, reminiscent of silent comedies, follows.

However, immediately prior to the chase, the music remains diegetic as the camera shifts from inside the shop to outside, while far in the distance the sound of a police siren builds. The far away sound literally interrupts Ed reading the story of the *3-Little-Pigs* in the car and draws her attention to the shop, where she sees H.I. pointing a gun at the cashier. Under the ever-increasing sound of the siren, H.I. notices Ed move into the driver's seat of the car and he tells the cashier rather matter-of-factly, "Better hurry it up, I'm *in dutch* with the wife". Here, the Coens' use of an odd regional expression lends humour to the charged situation. As H.I. stands dumbstruck that his wife has driven off without him, the **SMACK-CRACK** of a gun smashes through the glass behind him. As the sound's source is somewhere out of view the hyperreal power of the blast makes the audience as bewildered about its origins as H.I. appears to be. It is just prior to the second **SMACK-CRACK** of gunfire that we see it is being delivered by the young cashier with a .44 magnum. With the sirens drawing in even closer, H.I. decides it would be wise to try to make his escape on foot.

The next six minutes of the film show H.I. running from location to location and culminates with him retrieving a packet of Huggies nappies he had to

abandon while on the run. While this is occurring, the music, which has now resumed the 'cowboy' theme, cuts in and out, allowing space for specific sound effects and occasional lines of dialogue. The first cut occurs when H.I. is nearly bitten by a Doberman after climbing over a wall. A slow-motion camera technique mixes with H.I.'s extremely heavy breathing and the dog's terrifying growl, giving the audience a temporary respite while simultaneously heightening the suspense of the attack. Once H.I. has survived the dog, the music resumes as before until he rolls onto the bonnet of a passing pick-up truck he was trying to signal. This cut allows space for two lines of brief dialogue.[210] The banjo and yodelling melody then returns until H.I. is thrown out the broken front windscreen, but it is simply to allow a quick thud as he hits the ground and for him to utter a quiet "thank you" to the driver. Immediately afterward, the melody starts again to underscore a cavalcade of dogs, which had joined the Doberman, and of police officers in pursuit of H.I. through a residential home. There are also multi-layers of sounds in this section, consisting of mainly dogs barking and chains, gunshots, the television in the home, a megaphoned warning and the internal sound of H.I. breathing. Despite introducing so many different ingredients, each element can be distinctly heard and identified, giving the chaotic atmosphere total clarity. Later H.I. enters a supermarket in search of a new packet of nappies and the same diegetic muzak version of the main theme can be heard. However, this peaceful reprieve is extremely short-lived. The banjo melody quickly resumes after a shotgun's cannon-like **KA-BOOM** announces that H.I. is not free of trouble. The final musical cut of the sequence occurs simultaneously as Ed screeches to a stop in the rear car park of the supermarket in order to rescue H.I. from his pursuers. The last minute and a half contains no music, which allows the audience to focus on the exchange of words between the two characters. It begins with Ed **THWACK**ing H.I.

[210] Driver: Son, you got a panty on your head
H.I.: Just drive fast…. (p.188)

across the chin and ends with H.I. declaring, "Well...It ain't Ozzie and Harriet"[211] as he scoops up the packet of nappies.[212]

The final 'show-down' of RAISING ARIZONA finds H.I. facing his nemesis, Leonard Smalls (Cobb), the Lone Biker of the Apocalypse. Every time Smalls appears in the film, a choir of disembodied voices, a single strummed guitar chord and a minor key synthesizer melody announces his presence. Quite often he is shown riding a Harley motorbike, which is solely represented by thunder and jet engine noises. A further sound that is attached to this character is one of the exaggerated jingling of two brass baby booties that hang from his belt. Lievsay explained that he and the Coens decided that the concept for this larger-than-life character was Leone's spaghetti westerns and, therefore the soundtrack emulates them by being quite sparse and highlighted with only a few specific sound effects (Lobrutto 1999, p.258). As a result, the Coens asked for any distinct motorbike noises in the film to be removed.[213] The face-off begins as Smalls emerges from beyond the crest of a hill in a ball of flame. Out of the explosion the spaghetti western-like musical score can be clearly heard.

The sequence that follows is not a conventional 'High Noon' standoff. It has much more in common with the fight scenes in the cartoons of Walter Lantz.[214] It is filled with high-octane explosions, **KA-BOOM** shotgun sounds and **WHOOSH WHOOSH** noises reminiscent of a 1970s kung-fu film. Generally, the music builds to the climatic moments, where it mickeymouses the action for greater emotional impact. Following Smalls' kung-fu whoosh of

[211] *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-1965) portrayed a real-life couple and their family in one of American's longest-running television series. They typified the traditional American family and conservative American values. (WALKER, J., ed. *Halliwewll's Who's Who in the Movies* (2nd Edition), p.324)
[212] This Huggies sequence can be heard in film clip number nine on the accompanying CD.
[213] Initially, many recordings were made for the film that never made it to the mix. Despite this, Lievsay does say that one motorbike noise can be heard to underscore the moment Smalls suddenly disappears from Nathan Arizona's office in a Merlin-like *poof* (Lobrutto 1999, p.258-259).
[214] Creator of Woody Woodpecker

knives, the music slows to a pulsing beat. Here, in the relative calm Ed's demand for the baby to be given back to her can be heard. Despite being much quieter than previous music, the throb still maintains the tension of the moment.[215] Ed manages to take the baby as Leonard is distracted by a bullet piercing his chest. The exit wound is given a small but significant burst of flame. Later, after exiting the rear of the bank, the biker pivots his head about, which is given a cartoonish whipcrack effect. Ed evades him and H.I. smacks Smalls on the head with a plank. In spite of being knocked off his motorbike, Smalls manages to get back on his feet with ease and throw a knife at the unsuspecting H.I. A noticeably springy **TWANG** is used to mark the knife's impact with the plank he lifts to defend himself. Meanwhile, Burwell's spaghetti western style music reinforces the Biker's presence and helps magnify the action. Soon afterward, there is a loud operatic wail as H.I.'s body is being crushed by Smalls, but it quickly dies and the whole soundtrack is replaced by a hyperrealised wind. This moment is isolated in order to reveal to H.I. (and the audience) that he and the Biker both share the same Woody Woodpecker tattoo. The noise of the wind then is overwhelmed by a powerful return to Smalls' theme as the action resumes. The sequence ends with the resurgence of the wind followed by what the script calls "a roar as if the earth were cracking open and flame as if hell were slipping out" as Leonard Smalls explodes (p.239). The brass baby booties fly off him with a reverberating ghost-like jingle coupled with the acousmatic cry of a young infant.[216] The music transforms into a major key, expressing a melody that is 'child-like' and 'magical', communicating that the worst is over.[217]

[215] This may be because it mimics the heart's natural rhythm.
[216] An identical cry to one heard earlier in the film.
[217] A portion of this final battle with Smalls can be heard in film clip ten on the accompanying CD.

RAISING ARIZONA concludes with H.I.'s final dream.[218] As with previous dreams in the film, H.I.'s voice-over narration announces it with the words: "That night I had a dream" (p.244). Yet, the sound ingredients in this last dream are significantly different from the previous ones. Lievsay and Burwell approached the final dream in a more conventional manner. The sounds are sparse, designed to identify only with specific images within the frame. They are each given an echoey reverberation effect that allows them to sound ethereal. Sections of the dream that feature large numbers of people (i.e. an American football stadium and a big family reunion) are marked with an unnatural sense of distance. The music is a repetition of the 'magical', 'child-like' melody heard at the end of 'show-down', which furnishes the sequence a happily-ever-after fairy tale quality. Whereas earlier dreams that feature Leonard Smalls are filled with loud tangible noises and the aforementioned spaghetti western musical theme. In view of the fact that the earlier scenes offer no clear aural delineation between 'dream' and 'reality' (apart from H.I.'s declaration), many commentators have queried whether the whole film is actually a dream concocted by H.I.'s wishful thinking.[219] However, this demonstrates a disregard for the oneiric treatment of sound in this scene.[220] Moreover, the fact that Smalls transforms from a vision into a physical character in the film may account for Joel and Ethan Coen's willingness to leave the earlier dream sequences aurally ambiguous. Regardless of a definitive interpretation, these scenes demonstrate that sound played a crucial role in their construction.[221]

RAISING ARIZONA is an unconventional film, requiring a sound design that would reflect its rather unusual qualities. Lievsay and Burwell's employment

[218] Dreams are a common element of all Coen brothers' films.
[219] See KRIEST (1987), BERGAN (2000), RUSSELL (2001) and MOTTRAM (2000). All four reference H.I.'s line of dialogue during this last dream: "Was I fleein' reality, like I know I'm liable to do?" (p.248) as a strong suggestion that the entire film is a sleep-induced fantasy.
[220] See Appendix A for a description of oneiric sound.
[221] This final dream can be heard in film clip eleven on the accompanying CD.

of repetitive sound ingredients and musical themes helped to highlight the narrative's cyclic construction. They also made use of exaggerated hyperrealism in order to complement the film's cartoonish characters and action sequences. The pacing of their sound and music cues correspond to the brisk speed at which the narrative is told. At the same time, the audience is offered moments of calm to allow for the comprehension of specific actions or a spoken line. Moreover, the dialogue written by Joel and Ethan Coen not only helps to locate the characters geographically, but also helps engender the audience's sympathy and engages their sense of humour. Ultimately, by the skilful interweaving all three of these sonic elements, the Coens, Lievsay and Burwell were able to produce this highly stylised comedy.

AURAL COUNTERPOINT: Stylised Sound in MILLER'S CROSSING

The Coen brothers' MILLER'S CROSSING invites us into the corrupt world of gangland rivalry. Its complex narrative is full of deceit and hidden messages. The characters tend to cloak themselves behind masks of ruthlessness and violence. They rarely reveal their true selves to one another; their real thoughts and feelings are often omitted or disguised. A theme encapsulated in the main character's mantra: "Nobody knows anybody - not that well" (Coen & Coen 2002, p.300). Thus, a character misunderstands the motivation of another based on a lack of trust or a misguided assumption. The layers of deceit increase progressively through the narrative, building in intensity, and thus creating a sense of disorientation. To maintain this guile throughout the entire film, the narrative keeps the audience at a distance, allowing them to be an omniscient observer of all its perplexities. As of result, Joel and Ethan Coen employed a sound-world for MILLER'S CROSSING to communicate the emotional resonances necessary for greater pathos and stronger character identification.

In addition to complicating one's perception of the truth, it can be argued that MILLER'S CROSSING also communicates the contrast between the heart and the head; two words heard repeated throughout the film.[222] This intellectual/emotional dialectic is regularly expressed by decorating scenes with contrasts. The Coens quite often have sequences of callousness disguised as sentiment, or humour. This can often be heard in conversations Tom (Byrne) has with Leo (Finney) about Verna (Harden) and Bernie (Turturro); he speaks maliciously of them out of his deep respect for Leo. The mistrust of a character is compounded by moments of vulnerability that produce undesired results. Chiefly this occurs in the repercussions that visit

[222] The word 'head' or its synonym (e.g. skull, brain, mind) occurs 64 times in the screenplay (Horowitz 1991, p.30). What is more, the working title for the film was THE BIGHEAD (Robson 2003, p.68).

Tom when he refuses to kill Bernie. The film also features several double-crosses that are shown to conflict with conventional gangster ethics, blurring the line between friend and enemy. Furthermore, the tactics employed by the three distinct communities in the film (i.e. Italian, Irish and Jewish) allow for different approaches to various problems. All of these contrasts give MILLER'S CROSSING a narrative that is intricate and, therefore, demands attention.

To complement these complex themes the sound design for the film is lush and to some degree exaggerated. Hence, Joel and Ethan Coen agreed with Carter Burwell that the music for the film should be scored for full orchestra. Despite having never written an orchestral score before, Burwell saw it as an opportunity to learn and experiment in a 'new' style. On approaching the film, his desire was to avoid blatant clichés that would dictate to the audience how they should think or feel at any particular time (Morgan 2000, p.5). He knew the music had to fit the tone of the film in that it tended to be rich and even ostentatious at times. As a result, Burwell's overall approach to the film is harmonious with its contrastive nature; it uses overtly romantic or sentimental music as a means of counterpoint. It juxtaposes the cold-blooded nature of the characters with the unspoken 'love' between them. In doing so, Burwell's music not only echoes the film's surface/undercurrent distinction, but it also helps provide a reason for their actions.

The music for MILLER'S CROSSING includes a mixture of styles. It is perhaps Burwell's inexperience with orchestral scoring that most likely enabled him to be more flexible with its construction. To capture the ethnicity of two of the main characters, Tom and his gang boss Leo, Burwell gives them a theme with an Irish flavour. Therefore, amid full orchestration, a solo pipe plays a melody based on *Limerick's Lamentation* (aka *Lochaber No More*), granting to

these characters a charming melancholia. Burwell (in Brophy 1999, p.30) also stated that this 'warm' music was to establish the 'love' that Tom has for Leo early on in the film so that when it is recalled, the motivation for his actions would be easier to understand. To build on this Irish theme, other well-known Irish tunes are used elsewhere in the film. Most notably is the use of *Danny Boy*, which begins nondiegetically as score until it is heard diegetically from a record being played by Leo in shot. Then it resumes being nondiegetic, underscoring the gun battle that follows. According to Burwell (ibid., p.31), the music tells you an awful lot about Leo, for as it accompanies him it "clings to him like his clothes, his slippers, the cigar in his mouth [...] He feels comfy and relaxed in this situation". Its powerful melody seems to declare the actions to be that of a mythical hero certain of victory.[223] Elsewhere, the score includes music that appears to be inappropriate; such as, the diegetic use of *Goodnight Sweetheart* as the main character is being beaten up by his boss. This, however, may be appropriate in that it communicates the 'love and respect' subtext suggested between the two characters. The score also includes ragtime pieces that not only identify the film's nightclub setting, but they also help establish the film in an earlier timeframe.[224] Ultimately, the variety of musical genres broadens the scope of the film by illustrating its emotional depths and its place in time.

Noise and ambient effects, on the other hand, directly assist the film's hyperrealistic qualities. Their overall design appears to be one of amplification. Throughout the film Skip Lievsay grants prominence to specific items while maintaining an exaggerated level of fidelity overall. Most of the modified sounds seemed to be created to correspond with actions in the film

[223] The Coens felt this song to be so important to the film that they had it rerecorded live to synchronise with the actions (i.e. matching the timing with the edits) (Burwell 1999, p.32). The 'Danny Boy' sequence can be heard in film clip number twelve on the accompanying CD.

[224] Ragtime usually denotes a time before the First World War, however, it also heavily influenced music of the 1920s and 1930s.

that are equally excessive and, as a result, this treatment infuses the effects and noise with credibility rather than artificiality. Other predominant sound effects (namely car-bys, wind and ship foghorns) are used to highlight the atmosphere of each scene. Though thinly layered, these sounds help reinforce the film's plausibility. A majority of Lievsay's sounds are heard on the picture cut or over the picture cut. By laying them in these positions the noises and effects are able to provide an overt aural contrast from one scene to the next. Hence, the soundtrack again emulates the theme.

In addition, there are scenes where sound effects achieve a dramatic significance. This applies particularly when Tom goes to the woods to murder Bernie, a character who had been stirring up trouble. Upon reaching an open space (called Miller's Crossing) Tom is left alone with Bernie. Following a crackling of lightning, a peal of thunder combines with the gunshot in a powerful boom and then continues to rumble and roll to nearly the end of the scene. According to Lievsay (Lobrutto 1999, p.262), his mixer was able to achieve a balance of both sounds so they could be heard distinctly; he stated it created an echo effect that provides relief for when we see Tom has not actually killed Bernie. As this is one of the only scenes where Tom reveals his heart, it also suggests that the potential repercussions could be ominous.[225] Thunder features later, again as a precursor to disaster. For example, when prior to the firebombing of the Sons of Erin Club, the windows rattle with rumbles of thunder. These sounds then fade under the mighty explosion that follows it.

Elsewhere ambient effects and noise amplify the intensity of the violence. Underscored by low, dissonant music the roar of a log fire progressively builds as The Dane (Freeman) begins to smack and choke Tom. The potential

[225] This sequence can be heard in film clip thirteen on the accompanying CD.

vector of the sounds, combined with the images, suggest that this is the moment when Tom's plan may be foiled. However, Casper (Polito), the rival gang boss, believing Tom is on his side, hits The Dane with a spade across the face. The sound that accompanies this is foreshadowed by a sudden rumble, which emerges from under the impact of the spade. It is then joined by 'Drop' Johnson's (Todisco) violent bellows, as he watches in horror as Casper continues to whack The Dane. Casper turns to threaten Johnson and the roar of the fire and the music reach boiling point. The trajectory of the music and these hyperrealistic noises reach a dramatic climax when Casper is restrained by Tom and Johnson stops screaming. What follows is a brief moment of 'silence' until, without warning, Johnson begins bellowing again, bringing the sounds back to a crescendo. After a few seconds it is revealed that this is in response to The Dane trying to lift his bloodstained body. The scene ends with an additional peal of thunder as Casper shoots The Dane in the head. In achieving this horrific sequence, the various uses of sounds exemplify those used throughout the film to generate a taut atmosphere.[226]

Perhaps the most overt use of sound is in the film's dialogue. In MILLER'S CROSSING the Coen brothers furnish their characters with a distinct vocabulary all their own. Inspired by the literary rather than the cinematic stories of urban corruption, Joel and Ethan Coen's film emulates a style found in novels by Damon Runyon, Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler.[227] The characters speak in an invented slang rather than natural speech, using words like 'twist' to mean 'woman' and 'what's the rumpus?' to mean 'how's it going?'. In addition, most of the minor characters are referred to by their nicknames, such as Mink (Buscemi), The Dane, or Clarence 'Drop' Johnson. All the characters speak this language, regardless of their gangland affiliation,

[226] This sequence can be heard in film clip fourteen on the accompanying CD.
[227] Hammett's *The Glass Key* and *Red Harvest*, in fact, inspired the narrative of the film (Bergan 2000, p.119).

creating a completely self-contained world. This helps make the events of the film plausible and therefore, more acceptable.

The Coens also use the human voice in contrast to other sounds. When Bernie is being taken out to the woods to be executed, he pleads desperately for his life. Throughout the scene Tom remains silent, while the only other sound is the wind blowing through the trees causing the branches to creak. The serenity of the wind and Tom's muteness clashes with Bernie's wild panic, giving the scene a fearful pace that builds until the gunshot. In a later scene that mirrors this, Tom is taken to Miller's Crossing by Casper's gang to seek out Bernie's corpse. In this sequence Tom's silence announces fear rather than menace. The Dane, his potential executioner, full of hatred for Tom, uses veiled threats in the form of mockery. The suggestion that no body will be found in the woods is strengthened by the confidence in his tone of voice. Simultaneously Frankie (Starr), another gang member, sings a Neapolitan song, which not only states his nonchalance about the task but it also provides the scene with diegetic music. When a body is found, the singing ceases and the hyperreal wind grows louder, heightening the emotion of that moment. Despite the similarities between the two scenes, the use of ambient effects and the presence or absence of dialogue allow for different interpretations.

In MILLER'S CROSSING Joel and Ethan Coen have created a film full of contrasting sounds and images. By generating a very complex narrative and establishing characters that reveal very little of themselves, the film required a deeper dimension of meaning. To achieve this, it was necessary to invest the film with music, sound effects and dialogue that would not conflict with the secrecy and yet keep the audience engaged. The nature of significant contrasts in the use of sound in this film not only helped to communicate

further details of the plot, but also served to heighten significant dramatic moments. This employment of sound helped the audience to be involved on a more subjective level. Thus it can be noted that the sound used by the Coen brothers in this film typifies their filmmaking process; it helps authenticate the hyperrealism of the fictitious worlds that they create by retaining their credibility, despite their overt stylisation.

FILM WORLDS IN CONTRAST: Sound in THE HUDSUCKER PROXY and FARGO

> *Film isn't life...it might borrow from life, but that's not the same thing. It's just a film. And why should it be anything else? (Levine 2000, p.102).*

In the mid-1990s the Coen brothers released two consecutive films that were very dissimilar, thus requiring noticeably different approaches to their sound design. THE HUDSUCKER PROXY (1994) consists of a completely artificial world, which is based solely on cinematic sources, whereas FARGO (1996) is presented as a true crime story that was meant to have actually occurred the previous decade. However, despite the claim to the veracity of FARGO, the narrative was in fact embellished and had only a minute basis in truth.[228] To help sustain that pretence, Joel and Ethan Coen employed a conventionally naturalistic sound design to harmonise with the necessary images. In direct contrast, THE HUDSUCKER PROXY made no such claim; the aural ingredients utilised for it merely serve to strengthen its artificiality. The result is two feature films that have sound ingredients serving diametrically opposed purposes. Moreover, by making use of sound designs consistent with the nature of the two narratives, the plausibility of both films is significantly reinforced.

THE HUDSUCKER PROXY is the Coen brothers' fifth and most overtly stylised film. As with most of their other productions, its filmic world is impressionistic, that is, hyperreal. In this film the world is fictionalised by setting it in a past commonly found in the comic films of American classic

[228] Joel Coen explains that "a friend had told us about this event and we were attracted because of some reason we've always liked kidnapping stories, and because it took place in Minnesota, where we grew up…The basic events are the same as in the real case, but the characterisations are fully imagined; we weren't interested in that kind of fidelity[…] But actually, the fact-based nature of the film liberated the storytelling. If an audience believes something's based on a real event, it gives you permission to do things they might otherwise not accept." (Andrew 1996, p.26)

cinema.[229] They make no concession to an actual existing setting, apart from having Moses (Cobbs), the narrator of the film, declare the cityscape as "New York" in the opening line of the film. The images that accompany it are noticeably artificial, signifying that this utterance is meant to evoke that idea rather than act as a declaration of fact. Joel Coen adds, "the intention with the opening was to create a scene where we were moving into a building that didn't look real [...] We wanted it to have a slightly fantastical quality" (Boorman & Donohue 1996, p.133). Moreover, the character speaking these lines (Moses) emerges not only as the narrator but also, eventually, as a fully realised person who speaks to camera. He personifies the omniscient guardian of time and plays a key part in the denouement. His function is that of a storytelling device, conceived to aid the audience as well as the other characters in the film. This artificiality or fictitiousness marks the entire film; both sound and image consistently present a narrative based entirely on the hyperrealism that have been established by cinematic and narrative conventions.

Furthermore, the film seems immersed in a fairy tale, screwball universe. Its fantastic elements are infused with the fundamental ideas of good and evil and the ending hints strongly at a moral. Moreover, the characters reflect those virtues essentially in one-dimension. Throughout THE HUDSUCKER PROXY they display no depth or development, but merely serve the purposes of the narrative. It would appear that they too are simply meant to maintain the fictitious nature of the film. The overall sound design, therefore, reflects these characters and their actions in darkness and light without losing the humour and the magic. The Coen brothers' production designer, Dennis Gassner, explained that it was a "matter of [synching] an emotional state and an illogical state" (McGregor & Carroll 1994, p.29). By maintaining this

[229] Chiefly the films of Frank Capra, Preston Sturges, Howard Hawks and Frank Tashlin made from 1930 to 1960

balance, its film world achieves the state of being totally self-contained and as a result, the absurdity of the narrative never appears far-fetched or utterly implausible.

The overall technical approach to scoring THE HUDSUCKER PROXY also contributes to its artificiality. According to Carter Burwell (Brophy 1999, p.33), Joel and Ethan Coen rarely re-edit shots to accommodate the music or make use of temp tracks. However, due to the major Studio input on this film and a much larger budget, the music editor, Todd Kasow, cut and positioned a temp track for a preliminary screening.[230] In it he married Khachaturian themes with the action. The Coens liked this music so much that they asked Burwell to arrange those themes for particular scenes, and for the remainder of the music to be based on them. This required Burwell to take a different tack to his normal method of composing: a method he found less conducive. Having to create music based another composer's style, he said, "most of what I was doing didn't work, and it was just pretty hellish for me" (Barnes 2004). Nonetheless, Burwell found this an interesting challenge and managed to overcome most obstacles. As the film emulated those made during the Studio era, the score predominantly mickeymoused the action. Therefore, to achieve accurate timing, Burwell utilised a Steiner-like 'click track'.[231] As a result, the music was shaped around the picture, superimposed, rather than internalised.

In contrast, FARGO is a film of trivialities, simplicity and reason. The subtle deception inherent in the narrative is hidden by the Coens, taking an extremely conventional approach to its construction. As with THE HUDSUCKER PROXY the film establishes its design before the title sequence.

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[230] I am indebted to the Coen brothers' interview in J. BOORMAN, J. & W. DONOHUE, eds. 1996. *Projections 6: Filmmakers on Filmmaking*, p.133-148. for this information.
[231] As noted on page 79

The audience is told in a written preface that FARGO is based on a real-life case that took place in Minnesota in 1987 and "at the request of the survivors the names have been changed" and "out of respect for the dead, the rest has been told exactly as it occurred" (Coen & Coen 1996). As these phrases have become synonymous with true life stories (usually shown on American television), their use as a narrative device would have been well known to the Coens and their audience. The 'seriousness' is underscored with a delicately intimate melody, which Carter Burwell lets slowly build to a large scale. Burwell stated that the music here is played 'straight' to simulate the melodrama normally employed in true crime stories (Brophy 1999, p.36). As the film dissolves to a white, snow-covered environment, the only sign of movement is an approaching car. At this point, the orchestra joins Burwell's simple melody in bombastic fashion. Its rather exaggerated melody does not seem to match what is happening on the screen. Burwell hoped that this would not only set audiences up for a true crime drama, but it would also prepare them for the dark comedy of the film (Sider, Freeman & Sider 2003d, p.205). Hence, from the start of the film nothing seems to suggest deception or imply a charade. In fact, one could easily infer the contrary.[232]

The only alterations to FARGO made by the Coen brothers were some minor details in post-production.[233] However, these changes also show a desire to express authenticity in the film. After mixing it, they noticed that the pacing of certain scenes felt different with the score added. They decided to go in and extend those scenes a bit to accommodate the music. Their intention was to slow down the film so that the action was less heightened, less hyperreal. As a result, these sequences took on a more natural rhythm, enhancing the film's 'documentary' quality.

[232] A portion of this opening music can be heard in film clip fifteen on the accompanying CD.
[233] I am again indebted to the Coen brothers' interview in J. Boorman, & W. Donohue, 1996. *Projections 6: Filmmakers on Filmmaking*, p.133-148 for this information.

The dominant motifs for THE HUDSUCKER PROXY are time and the circle. In addition to the invention of the hula-hoop and the flexi-straw, the film begins and ends at the same point in time. It also contains several plot repetitions and a karmic cycle of fate. Sound effects, dialogue and music also repeat accordingly. Burwell (in Brophy 1999, p.33) stated, "the theme that plays here [at the tragic climax when the main character attempts to commit suicide] is a restatement of the theme from the very beginning of the movie [which also features a suicide]", which seems to reinforce the "idea that what is happening 'now' was destined from the start". Norville Barnes' (Robbins) claim that he had not expected so much "hoopla" over his invention is first spoken in innocence but repetitions become emblematic of his cocky confidence and eventual downfall. Mussberger (Newman) and Buzz the lift operator (True) are given catch phrases they repeat throughout the film, "sure sure" and "buddy" respectively. Near the end of the film these phrases plus several others are repeated oneirically through a series of disembodied heads that spin in the air, expressing Norville's declining psychological state.[234] Moreover, the character of Amy Archer (Leigh) has a line so often repeated that other characters predict its occurrence before she says it.[235] In addition, the clinking of metal balls and a ticker tape machine constantly emerge to mark the passage of time and the progress of commerce. Both of which noticeably stop short when Moses stalls the movement of the clock near the end of the film.

This circular theme also manifests in the use of stories within stories. There are three sequences in the film where Joel and Ethan Coen make use of this type of device and each involves a character (or characters) verbally

[234] See Appendix A for a description of oneiric sound.
[235] Although it is never stated prior to its first utterance in the film, the line “I’ll stake my Pulitzer on it” must have been heard in the press office often enough for other reporters to be willing to place a wager on whether she would say it.

commenting on the action. When Norville first meets Amy she pretends to be a waif desperately seeking his attention. The scene is played without a word from either of them; two onscreen characters heard mainly just out of frame provide a running commentary of their actions. The near-silence of the scene also directly conflicts with the rapid talk of the next. Later in the film the Coens imitate an old style newsreel, which they call 'Tidbits of Time', to mark Norville's sudden rise to the top. In a similar fashion to Orson Welles' *News on the March* from CITIZEN KANE, Joel and Ethan Coen present a 'straight' news report with pseudo-archive footage and an old style narration.[236] Lastly, Norville's gradual mental decline is documented in a short film that directly borrows from classic cinematic presentations of scientific evidence. This convention is further enforced by using a Freudian psychiatrist with a German accent to preside over the film's content.

A frantic fast pace marks the rest of THE HUDSUCKER PROXY; much like the chaos and hurried frenzy found in the screwball comedy tradition. This is notable in several prominent scenes. Norville's entrance to the Hudsucker warehouse is marked by continuous requests from fellow workers and an amazingly detailed and confusing orientation heard among loud industrial noises. The warehouse noises resume after a calm interval to erupt in a cacophony of effects, dialogue and music. The announcement of a 'blue letter' is met with anxious voices, a siren, an alarm, a horn, a buzz and a haunting angelic choir.[237] By giving the soundtrack in this scene such overt aural ingredients, the comic seriousness of this unknown item is made perfectly clear.[238] Norville's rise to fame is also swift and manic. It is built on a short sequence of word-less scenes cut together by laughter and flashbulb

[236] The voice of which is John Goodman's, who is credited as Karl Mundt, the character he played in BARTON FINK (Cheshire & Ashbrook 1999, p.67).
[237] A similar angelic choir can also be heard when people are about to jump from the top of the Hudsucker building. Burwell (Brophy 1999, p.34) states that he "wrote a separate part for a soprana because [he] wanted her to get up to a high C so that by the time the body in question is nearing the sidewalk, the sound would almost be out of control".
[238] This sequence can be heard in film clip sixteen on the accompanying CD.

pops, which transform into photos that progressively mark his ascent. The scenes are also underscored with major keys, bringing a light-hearted tone to chain of events.[239] The development of the hula-hoop is expressed through a long montage of sights and sounds that highlight each stage. Hyperrealised sounds of running footsteps, the swoosh of message tubes, the loud stamps of approval, the swish of sand in the hoops combine with the circus-like Khachaturian themes to set a trajectory that builds expectations of a successful completion of the project.[240] In addition to all of this, Archer is plainly conceived as a fast-talking 'His Girl Friday' character and fills most her scenes with rapid-fire speeches.[241]

In contrast, FARGO is replete with everyday (even dull) experiences in an attempt to convince the audience of its vérité. Characters watch television, have 'family' meals and in one long scene, the main character meets an old school friend for a drink. As a result, the film lacks the fast-paced tension or heightened drama one would expect from a conventional thriller. What is more, despite the cold, harsh climate the personalities of Marge (McDormand), her husband and colleagues are shown to be wholesome and sweet-natured. Their ambitions are small, the police procedures are routine and the pace of life is slow. Marge herself conducts the investigation while seven-months pregnant, blissfully unburdened.[242] The easy-going nature and the goodness of these characters are epitomised by the singsong Scandinavian lilt in their dialogue: a dialect called 'Minnesota Nice'. This slight exaggeration of the actual regional dialect has a musical quality that is simultaneously humorous and endearing. It seems to express a cheerful simplicity: a state where one hardly ever becomes angry or discouraged. In fact, the closest Marge comes to a gruff retort is when she says, "You have

[239] This sequence can be heard in film clip seventeen on the accompanying CD.
[240] This sequence can be heard in film clip eighteen on the accompanying CD.
[241] Her lines are also set in contrast to Norville's slow delivery.
[242] Apart from a bout of morning sickness, but even that is treated with much levity.

no call to get snippy with me" (Doherty 1996, p.47). Thus, even aggression is instilled in down-home charm. This is set in stark contrast to the criminal elements in the film, who are the only characters that use profanity. All of which suggests that the film does nothing to glamorise or sensationalise its characters or subject, but it merely allows them to represent a form of realism.

Sound also helps to authenticate the more abhorrent elements of the film. Jerry Lundegaard (Macy), who organises his wife's fake kidnapping, is a conflicted character. Through the narrative we learn he has concocted this plan because he wants a more financially stable future but lacks his own means to do so. He is also intimated by his father-in-law. Lundegaard is depicted as a man who no longer has the simple contentment of his fellow Minnesotans because he desires something beyond his humble surroundings. Consequently, his scheme is short-sighted and goes horribly wrong. Burwell's score provides for the much-needed pathos for his character. He stated that:

> [he] found a Norwegian folk song-turned-hymn called 'The Lost Sheep' [...] Its melody plays the pathetic quality of Bill Macy's character, and the fact that it's called The Lost Sheep seemed perfect, also (Morgan 2000, p.68).

All scenes of violence and sexual encounters in the film are heard without added effects; most of which are alternately contrasted with scenes of banality. None of the gunshots are heard as powerful explosions and when Shep Proudfoot (Reevis) beats one of the kidnappers with a belt, nothing accentuates the strikes made to the body. Elsewhere, near the end of the film, one of the kidnappers, Gaear Grimsrud (Stormare), kills the other with an axe, but the actual 'chop' is heard in a sudden fade to black.[243] He later tries to dispose of the body by putting it through a wood chipper. The sound

[243] Though scripted in this way, the reasoning for it is unclear. Nonetheless, having the sound drive the moment functions similarly to the Bressonian idea of avoiding redundancy.

of the wood chipper fades in with Marge's approach and builds naturally as she moves increasingly closer to the man at the machine. The loud volume not only drowns out her entrance but it also muffles her attempt to get Gaear's attention. It would suggest that the attempt to 'naturalise' these acts makes them more gruesome.[244]

Therefore, as a result of utilising sound designs that consistently support the worlds created for FARGO and THE HUDSUCKER PROXY, the Coen brothers have significantly enhanced the credibility of both narratives. Had the designs been reversed or altered dramatically, the overall integrity of both films could have been put in question. As they are, THE HUDSUCKER PROXY makes a noticeable claim for artificiality and FARGO for authenticity. Joel and Ethan Coen's use of sound effects, music and dialogue to serve these purposes, asks the audience to accept the films as nothing else. Their skill in communicating such consistency within each film helps demonstrate one of their greatest strengths as filmmakers.

[244] An untreated violent sequences can be heard in film clip nineteen on the accompanying CD.

DEFINING CHARACTERS WITH SOUND: The Dialogue and Music of THE BIG LEBOWSKI

The film environments created by Joel and Ethan Coen are often inhabited by eccentric, yet likeable characters, who are recognised more for their failings than their strengths. In their films these characters are significantly complemented by their imaginative integration of music, dialogue and sound effects. In fact, sounds are at times a priority in their realisation. THE BIG LEBOWSKI (1998), the Coen brothers' seventh film, exemplifies this inventive approach through their use of music and various speaking styles to define the individual personalities of their characters.

The overall design of the music in THE BIG LEBOWSKI is similar to that of Wagnerian leitmotif, whereas the human speech used serves to highlight each character's identity. In the film musical themes (usually that of previously released material) quite often mark the point in time when each character enters the narrative, but unlike typical motifs they rarely repeat with each subsequent appearance.[245] The music simultaneously comments on the main characters' perception of the 'new' people that enter his life. As the film's narrative is quite complex and hinges on those that cross his path, this technique serves the dual purpose of internal (this character's) and external (the audience's) identification of those individuals. This, in turn, aids the audience's comprehension of the storyline. Carter Burwell (in Brophy 1999, p.38) said, "[They] agreed from the start this was not going to be anything that sounds like a score" as it would have changed the nature of the film and changed [the main character's] relationship with the film. The awareness of the impact that the musical content was to have on the film can also be noted by the fact that most of the songs were included at the script stage.

[245] The exception is the recurrence of the Stranger's theme.

In terms of the spoken word, the film functions as a polyglot. Each character speaks with a distinct set of phrases, using specific stress and intonation patterns. Giving characters these distinct qualities in their speech enables them not only to echo the multicultural nature of the Los Angeles setting, but it also allows them to highlight their separate personas within the narrative. As the film is modelled on Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* insomuch that its 'detective' interacts with various layers of American society, these distinct vocal styles help exemplify those layers. Similarly, the Coen brothers use the human voice to reflect the status of individual characters. The utilisation of language styles in such an overt fashion brings greater depth and scope to the narrative, and therefore, it helps to clarify the intricacies of the film and reinforce the internal and external identification.

The importance of music to THE BIG LEBOWSKI can also be noted by the presence of a piece of music at the very beginning of the film. In all previous Coen brother releases, either noises or dialogue have been the first sound to be heard.[246] They are quite often immediately followed by music, but effects have regularly taken precedence. It is debatable whether this was a conscious intention. However, in view of the contents of Joel and Ethan Coen's script and the aforementioned functions of music in the film, it seems likely that it was deliberate.

The music that opens the film is the *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* by the Sons of the Pioneers. It is matched visually by a shot of sprawling chaparral and an actual rolling tumbleweed (i.e. dried sagebrush). The song is also aurally matched by the voice of The Stranger (Elliott), whose narrator/character

[246] In their next film, O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? (2000), music is also vitally important to the narrative and it too begins with a song. Admittedly, the first sound heard in the film is the noise of hammers smashing rocks, but it soon becomes apparent that this sound also functions as the percussive rhythm of the song. This is confirmed by the inclusion of the 'breaking rock noise' on the CD soundtrack for this track.

serves as storyteller. His voice is deep and resonant with a strong country twang. As he introduces the film and its main character, The Dude (Bridges), his dialogue includes phrases typical of the southwest of the United States, such as: 'this-here' and 'I done introduced him enough'.[247] This particular American dialect can also be heard in his pronunciation, chiefly of places (e.g. Los Angeles is said with a closer approximation to its Spanish origins and Iraq is voiced as EYE-rack).[248]

This sound-image presentation of the American West is further emphasised when The Stranger is de-acousmatised midway through the film and converses with The Dude. The Sons of the Pioneers music resumes and the camera shows him dressed in contemporary cowboy regalia (which is remarked upon during the scene, though based on a misunderstanding[249]). During this sequence The Stranger orders a sarsaparilla, a non-alcoholic drink flavoured with the roots of that tropical American plant.[250] Cinematic conventions and Looney Tunes cartoons have made this drink synonymous with the old West. To reinforce this idea further, he is given a Sioux City Sarsaparilla, which connects it to a town in Iowa that had a dominant Native American population. Presently, while asking about The Dude's troubles The Stranger offers him some 'cowboy' philosophy: "Sometimes you eat the bear and sometimes the bear eats you" (pronouncing bear as bar). The Dude initially understands this as Eastern thought, but to further his connection to the West, The Stranger says it is "far from it". Moreover, this overt clarification suggests such statements were not only for The Dude's sake, but also for the audience. The scene ends with The Stranger recommending The

[247] All quotations from this film are taken directly from the DVD release (1998).
[248] As in previous films, this accent is written phonetically in the Coens' script. This opening sequence can be heard in film clip twenty on the accompanying CD.
[249] After the Stranger tells the Dude that he likes the Dude's style, The Dude interprets this as a reference to his fashion sense (not his approach to life). The Dude responds by commenting positively on the Stranger's "whole cowboy thing".
[250] It is commonly referred to as root beer.

Dude "Take 'er easy". A bit of advice he is not able to follow until the very end of the film.

It is in the final scene that The Stranger reappears to "wrap 'er all up". He physically enters the frame as The Dude repeats his line about 'the bear' (also pronouncing it 'bar'). The repetition is said in causal confidence, suggesting that he now truly understands its meaning. After a short exchange of words, they part, with The Dude saying: 'The Dude abides', a rather countrified expression that refers to how life goes on regardless of circumstances, and The Stranger echoes this phrase. His solemn tone denotes respect and he treats the words as if they were immensely profound. Immediately following this, The Stranger speaks directly to the audience in a close up. His lines comment reflexively on the narrative itself: he expresses his admiration for The Dude's easygoing nature, how "it was a purt good story, dontcha think?" and that it had made him laugh. The Stranger concludes by again appealing reflexively to the audience, by saying: "I hope you folks enjoyed yourselves. Catch you later on down the trail". All of which suggests that behind his characterisation, he also functions as a narrative device that speaks of the nature of cinema. By simultaneously serving as a physical marker for the script's three acts and as storyteller, The Stranger blurs the line between reality and fantasy. Thus, he represents the whole film-going experience. Pearsall (1998, p.74) added that ultimately The Stranger:

> signifies the film's separation from what is on the reel and what is actually real. His presence lets the audience know that what they are [experiencing] is not reality by reminding them that they are indeed just [experiencing] a movie.[251]

[251] This is not a unique device for the Coen brothers. As mentioned previously, Moses, in THE HUDSUCKER PROXY (1994), also serves the same function.

The Dude (aka Jeffery Lebowski) first appears in the film when The Stranger utters in his opening narration: "Sometimes there's a man". This line signals one of the key themes of the film: the absurdity of the American masculine mystic and/or what it means to be a man in the later twentieth century.[252] The Dude exemplifies such a man with all his foibles and imperfections. The narration continues to explain that he is not exactly a hero and that he is probably one the laziest men in world, but he is the right man for his time and place. This matched by the visuals showing him in supermarket sniffing cartons of half-n-half[253] and then paying a minuscule amount by cheque. The scene ends with the cessation of the narration and with *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* reaching its climax.[254] It is possible that the presence of the music here connects The Dude to The Stranger, which would in turn connect him to the whole narrative of film.[255]

To reinforce the theme of post-modern manhood The Dude's musical motif is Bob Dylan's *The Man in Me*. The lyrics of the song are confessional in that they tell of one man's inability to be a 'real' man without the love of a woman. Throughout the film, The Dude and his companions remain unattached and there is never talk regarding relationships with women.[256] This lack of love (or significant other) seems expressed in an 'immature' manliness in that the dialogue between them is much like that between young boys. They argue, insult and bully one another into action. It is possible that the manner of their verbal interaction comes as a result of a lack of 'motherly' or 'womanly' attention. Accordingly, this piece of music first

[252] The Stranger himself serves as a prime example of virulent manliness.
[253] A combination of cream and milk
[254] While in the supermarket the music is retained, but transposed to sound like shopping muzak, as they had done in RAISING ARIZONA.
[255] However, conceivably, it is only a sound bridge to the next sequence.
[256] The only suggestions are on the occasions when Walter (Goodman) defends his actions for still helping his ex-wife.

occurs over the titles sequence connecting its significance to The Dude and the entire film.

The song firmly establishes this connection to The Dude in its second appearance. *The Man in Me* can be heard during the first dream sequence that occurs as a result of him being knocked unconscious.[257] Just prior to this, The Dude looks up to get a momentary glimpse of Maude Lebowski (Moore) framed by two thugs. The dream itself consists of him pursuing her through the air as she floats on a flying carpet well out of his reach. The combination of sound and image expresses what the 'man in him' truly needs, but will never attain. Later in the dream this subconscious fear is further manifested when a shrunken version of The Dude cowers under a bowling bowl that engulfs him and rolls him down the lane towards the pins. 'Reality' is ushered in with the loud, pulsing sound of a beeper and the song transforms from nondiegetic to diegetic; it is now emitting from The Dude's Walkman via a high frequency mix. The walkman had been originally playing noises from a previous bowling competition. Clearly marked on the cassette case are the name of the tournament and the name 'Bob'. As bowling is a vital part of The Dude's existence, the inclusion of Dylan's song on this tape may also suggest a similar relevance.

The remainder of the music in the film further enhances The Dude's 'immature' manhood. These previously released songs establish him in a timeframe that is out of step with contemporary fashion. The use of songs such as Captain Beefheart's *Her Eyes are a Blue Million Miles*, Credence Clearwater Revival's *Run Through the Jungle* and Santana's *Oya Como Va* not only reinforce the visuals, but they also place The Dude's world squarely in the past. The world has moved on, however, he has not felt the need to

[257] This sequence of events also serves as a link to Raymond Chandler's fiction/films.

emerge from 1960s/1970s. Much like when he is in the bowling alley this suggests that he feels safer 'then' as opposed to 'now'. Both serve as a form of retreat that actually prevents The Dude from true 'maturity'. However, his relative obliviousness and/or laissez-faire attitude never let this become a hindrance to his lifestyle. Thus, at the end of the film, he may have unravelled the mystery of the kidnapping, but his character has grown no further in discovering his deep-rooted needs.[258]

Despite their prominence, The Dude's best friends are not identified with music. Their characters are overtly represented by the manner and content of their speech. Walter Sobchak (Goodman) is depicted as a man whose life is based on conflict. His recollections of the Vietnam War are not only living memories for him, but they define his entire personality. Throughout the film his verbal interactions are argumentative and full of aggressive overtones. All of which is couched in a juvenile form of one-upmanship, where he speaks or acts before he thinks. Thus, he too is an example of the 'immature' man. Walter frequently challenges other characters' viewpoints while justifying his own. For example, he convinces The Dude to seek compensation for his rug citing "unchecked aggression" that requires "drawing a line in the sand". Walter forcefully defends his right to observe the Sabbath though his conversion to Judaism is only as a result of a marriage that ended in divorce. He also claims his first Amendment right to free speech when he is told to curb his language in a 'family restaurant'. In addition, Walter verbally abuses Donny (Buscemi), their mutual friend and bowling partner, by regularly telling him to "shut (the fuck) up" or that he "is out of his element". Moreover, in two instances his verbal attacks lead to child-like physical threats. In one sequence his pulls a gun on a bowler, whom he accuses of violating the rules and in another later scene he smashes the windscreen of a

[258] Nonetheless, as the Coens are unconcerned with making meaning statements in their films, this is consist with their narrative style.

car that he believes belongs to someone else, while repeating the imbecilic phrase: "This is what happens when you FUCK a STRANGER in the ASS". His man-boy image truly manifests itself at the end the film after Donny dies. At the 'funeral' Walter says some sensitive words about his friend, but he illogically connects his death to those who died in Vietnam. This leads him to apologise to The Dude, which seems totally out of character. It is followed by a big hug that suggests that underneath all of this aggression is a man desperate for love and acceptance.

The character of Donny is small and relatively insignificant and the Coens reflect this in his dialogue. Despite this, he is the most 'mature' of the men. Throughout the film his lines are few and more often than not they are used as a comic foil to Walter's bravado. Donny generally remains on the periphery of the narrative and is often unaware of the content of conversations between Walter and The Dude. Despite any of his well-meaning intentions to ask questions or offer his own comments, he is either shouted at or ignored. The only exception to this is when he tells Walter that the next round of the tournament has been posted: Walter begins to tell him to shut up, but immediately restrains himself so he can listen to Donny's information. What is noticeable in his speech are the soft tones he uses; he is never harsh or abrasive (perceivably to offset Walter's bellows) and he expresses a self-satisfied thrill every time he makes a strike while bowling. Donny's good-natured attitude and his simplistic dialogue, allows his character to generate sympathy even though he has very little screen time. Thus, when he dies suddenly, the right amount of pathos has been generated to make the event highly emotive.

Other minor characters in THE BIG LEBOWSKI also have either a musical or verbal motif. Maude Lebowski's unusual intonation patterns and word choices

depict her as woman from a wealthy, well-educated background. The voice she uses smacks of East Coast rich with its mid-Atlantic accent and condescending tone. This is most notable in her use of the Latin 'coitus' in place of the word 'sex', her fluent Italian and her condescending reference to money when she says: "bones or clams or whatever you call them". In addition, she is depicted as a committed feminist. This is not only pronounced in her art, but it is also demonstrated in her forward, and at times, business-like manner. When Maude first meets The Dude she forces the word 'vaginal' on him to test his reaction, and while discussing her plan with him she does so with formal language. Moreover, their meeting is marked by a musical motif of females using a highly rhythmic, breathing form of singing.[259] It too introduces her feminism, but it also introduces her sexuality and her unconventional thinking. This combination enables the audience to accept the plausibility of her desire to use The Dude to help her conceive a baby. An act she also executes in a matter-of-fact fashion. Ultimately, her character's confident femininity demonstrates another challenge to contemporary masculinity.[260]

Jesus Quintana (Turturro) is a member of a rival bowling team. His screen time is extremely short, but the music and the language he uses emphasise his presence and leave a lasting impression. His wild perversion as the lowest of men, a convicted pederast, is announced at the same time 'Hotel California' by the Gypsy Kings is on the soundtrack. This song not only establishes a geographical connection, but the non-standard Spanish sung by the band simultaneously highlights Quintana's Hispanic heritage and his non-conformist nature. The music is choreographed to a sequence of Quintana bowling. The melody is also matched visually by slow motion camera work

[259] This song is entitled *Walking Song*, performed by Meredith Monk.
[260] The sequence featuring Maude's first appearance can be heard in film clip number twenty-one on the accompanying CD.

and a raised fist, cut to mirror the beginning of the chorus. Presently, it grows quiet to allow Jesus to speak. His only words are vulgar threats directed at The Dude, Walter and Donny. The force of his dialogue is spoken in a strong 'Mexican' accent and ends with him saying, "Nobody messes with the Jesus". Thus, in this one and only scene that Quintana appears sound declares him to be quite an intimating character.[261]

Music and manner of speech mark the individual identities of the members of the Lebowski household. Mr Jeffery Lebowski (aka "the other Lebowski") is a large, wheelchair-bound character, whose arrogance is matched by the condescending tones he uses. In his initial meeting with The Dude he portrays himself as a self-made man who has little compassion, despite his many charitable contributions. During their conversation where The Dude is asking for compensation for his rug, Mr Lebowski denies any responsible and then enquires whether The Dude is employed. He further demeans The Dude by asking if he speaks Spanish, inferring that Mr Lebowski may be classifying him as a 'lazy' Hispanic migrant who does not speak English. Moreover, his use of the title 'sir' in reference to The Dude overtly suggests pretence in that he is clearly using it towards someone he does not respect. Music highlights this pomposity in a later scene. Mozart's *Requiem in D Minor* plays diegetically throughout Mr Lebowski's 'What is a man' speech. The sombre, dark tone of the music matches the seriousness of his words and thus helps to generate the heavy emotion the scene. However, the narrative eventually reveals this is all a charade. Mr Lebowski's self-importance is merely to cover his shame of having no money and no power. As a result, the sounds help enable his character to represent men of 'the old order' who must maintain this image of supremacy despite their shortcomings.

[261] The sequence can be heard in film clip number twenty-two on the accompanying CD.

Mr Lebowski's wife, Bunny (Reid), is nearly the antithesis of her husband. She is young, slim, attractive and, most significantly, her morality has no pretence. From her very first line, she is identified as a sexual animal, who has no interest in her position in society or her husband.[262] Bunny's voice also has an explicitly husky quality; one typically associated with sexual provocation. The diegetic music played over this short scene is a 'cha cha' dance melody that seems emblematic of her fun, carefree lifestyle.[263] Bunny re-emerges only briefly in two other scenes later in the film and two different diegetic music tracks reinforce her rather wayward personality. The first piece of music is heard when Maude Lebowski shows The Dude an excerpt from a pornography film that features Bunny.[264] The second scene shows Bunny driving down Pacific Coast Highway, singing along to Elvis Presley's *Viva Las Vegas*. Despite the fact that she was suppose to have been kidnapped and had her toe cut off, her devil-may-care attitude and her undamaged toe, clearly demonstrates that neither occurred. It could also be added that the city of Las Vegas evokes decadence, bringing more associations to her already tainted character.

In addition, the Coen brothers use a trio of Jazz pieces to identify other minor characters. While Jackie Treehorn (Gazzara), the Malibu pornographer, is trying to smooth talk The Dude into revealing the location of some missing money, the music is equally smooth. The diegetic, lounge-like jazz matches his 'cool' laid-back manner and slow, even-paced speech. At the end of his one and only scene Treehorn's calm, casual attitude persuades The Dude that he has nothing to fear, that is, until he is rendered unconscious by a spiked

[262] Bunny, who has just finished painting her toenails, asks The Dude to blow on her toes. She subsequently degrades this 'innocent' request by offering him oral sex for a fee.
[263] This song is entitled *Mucha Muchacha* by Esquivel.
[264] This song used here is entitled *Traffic Boom*, which was written by Piero Piccioni and used as score for an Italian pornography film (Mottram 2000, p.134).

drink.[265] Mr Lebowski's chauffer makes an extremely brief appearance in the film, but his identity is also marked with music and dialogue. While driving and speaking to The Dude he is listening to *Standing on the Corner* by New York rat packer, Dean Martin. Accordingly, the chauffer speaks with a strong New York accent and uses cinematic New York-ese phrases like "busting my balls". Though the audience never actually get to see his face, the song and the style of speech define his character very clearly. Lastly, another character who makes an extremely brief appearance accompanied by jazz is Dafino (Polito), the private eye. Unlike the other pieces of music, this one was composed by Burwell. It begins as conventional nondiegetic score then transforms into diegetic music coming from Dafino's car radio. Burwell (in Brophy 1999, p.39) explained: "At first it seems that it is playing [The Dude's] idea of what detective music should be" and the transformation identifies "someone else who also thinks he is a detective and who we have never seen before". Thus, all three pieces also help tie together the traditional perceptions of the audience (and The Dude) of film/novel characters.

Burwell also created the music used to highlight the Nihilists. Prior to adopting this philosophy, this group of characters had been a fictitious electronic music band modelled on late 1970s and early 1980s German group, Kraftwerk.[266] Drawing on his own background in electronic music, Burwell created a short piece called *Wie Glauben* (meaning 'we believe' in English) that repeats the line 'we believe in *nussing* [i.e. nothing]' in German and English. It is highly technical, repetitive and merely serves to enable these characters to identify with themselves and nothing more. As their belief system is based on the conviction that nothing exists outside of the self, the

[265] While unconscious The Dude has a bizarre dream, featuring dance routines in the fashion of Busby Berkley and the song "I Just dropped in (to see what condition my condition was in)" by Kenny Rogers and the First Edition.
[266] In addition, their band is called Autobahn, which is the title of a 1972 Kraftwerk album and song.

self-reflection provided by the music seems to add to this principle. Moreover, the Nihilists switch on the music themselves and allow it to match their violent actions towards The Dude, Walter and Donny. This multilayered self-obsession also epitomises their stop-at-nothing approach to getting the ransom money back, even after it is known that a kidnapping had not occurred.

Overall, this extensive integration of music and stylised dialogue grants THE BIG LEBOWSKI greater associative and representational properties. By doing so, the Coens help to emphasise the individual personalities of their characters so that no matter how brief their appearance on screen was, their identity was not lost or forgotten. Moreover, this use of sound assisted in clarifying their place within the twists and turns of the intricate narrative. Ultimately, what Joel and Ethan Coen achieve is a multi-faceted film that communicates meaning on many levels.

THE UNUSUAL MUSICAL: O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?

> *Rarely is a movie's raison d'etre its music. It's even more unusual to record a film's soundtrack before the movie itself is made* (Grasser 2001).

Throughout cinematic history the musical has utilised the aesthetics of film sound differently than most other film forms. From BROADWAY MELODY (Beaumont 1929) to CHICAGO (Marshall 2002) filmmakers have made consistent use of playback to help the visuals tell the story. Most markedly, musicals demand the foregrounding of the musical content so that it is made an inseparable part of the storyline. This seamless integration of song into the narrative drives the plot and quite often lays bare a character's underlying thoughts and emotions. Used in this way, the music disrupts the diegetic and nondiegetic divide; it occurs 'unnaturally' in a scene where a character or characters respond to it as if it were 'natural'. The result jars the vérité of the moment and places it entirely in the realm of hyperreality, where the represented reality is still believable in spite of being an exaggeration. This is because the transition into these musical sequences adds a further level of fiction on an already fictitious world. Ultimately, the filmmakers' intention would be to encourage the audience to accept this shift as an inherent part of the world presented in the narrative.

Lyrics grant musicals further levels of association. Most languages are expressed in a lexical code with a semantic content that is culturally determined. Thus, to interpret these codes properly one must be aware of the meaning of a given word in that particular context. Songs present audiences with music that foregrounds language through the singer's voice. The initial comprehension of the song's lyrics is determined by their ability to decode the lexical content. Once this is achieved they are asked to match the semantic content of the song with the character or situation on the screen.

Often the lyrics narrate the film in terms of emotional depth or by commenting on the action. Contemporary filmmakers frequently use previously released songs because they draw on the audiences' personal memories. They also evoke strong associations with events of historical and cultural significance. Putting these songs in this new context allows them to express several layers of significance at the same time.[267] Accordingly, filmmakers use these conventions to add a greater sense of familiarity or to manipulate that familiarity.

Joel and Ethan Coen's O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? (2000) features many of the above characteristics of musicals, however, its lack of conventionality flouts the traditional structure. Firstly, the defining factor of this film is that the music drives the story rather than the reverse. In the words of T Bone Burnett (2000), the music supervisor, Joel and Ethan Coen were in fact making "a film about the history of American folk music". This suggests that the songs and the artists were the focal point of the film, and that the characters and narrative merely grant the film a chronological and geographical context. Secondly, the Coen brothers keep within the musical tradition by making use of song sequences that function as either 'performance' or 'commentary'. The characters that sing these selections usually do so with diegetic accompaniment, giving one the impression that the film could also be experienced as a form of live 'music video'. The songs often transfer from on-camera performances into pieces of nondiegetic score, which links scenes or simply adds to the hyperrealism. As a result of the mixture of its old and new styles and its unorthodox structure, Joel and Ethan's film affirms the definition of the musical while introducing a more contemporary interpretation.

[267] Consider the aforementioned example of Kubrick's use of Richard Strauss' 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' in 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY and also Coppola's use of Wagner's 'Flight of the Valkryes' in APOCALYPSE NOW.

The non-conventional tone of O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? is established before the opening scene. While still on the Universal Studios' logo, a loud sound (a combination of a bang and a crack) is heard. Moments later, the twittering of birds and men's voices underscore further repetitions of this sound. These voices introduce the song, which they begin singing despite the lack of a visual match. It is a full one minute and twenty seconds before the visual source is revealed: a chain-gang pounding rocks with sledgehammers. This Godard-like delay communicates to the audience that the aural ingredients of this film have been given priority. By postponing the image-to-sound match at the opening of the film, the audience is forced to focus on the sounds. The absence of an immediate referent encourages them to envisage their own meaning before it is made known to them. Furthermore, by isolating these sounds in the very beginning of the film, the aural-centric pattern of the narrative is introduced immediately.

The opening song, entitled *Po Lazarus*, helps communicate the initial narrative elements of the film. Firstly, it establishes the time and tone of the movie. The style of the song is that of a chain-gang chant: a music form from the early part of the twentieth century. They were mainly sung by ex-slaves from the southern states of America as a form of spiritual to counter the negative conditions they were enduring. Secondly, by having it open the film, it helps reinforce the setting: the South during the Great Depression. It expresses that this will be a narrative that involves hardship that can only be overcome through the power of song, as often these songs were sung as a means of lightening their burden. The lyrics themselves speak of the running conflict between criminals and those in law enforcement, with sympathy towards the criminals. Thus, it prepares the audience to empathise with the

main characters (Everett [Clooney], Delmar [Nelson] and Pete [Turturro]), who are members of this chain-gang.[268]

The film's following song is strictly nondiegetic. Its external rather than internal nature allows it to serve as a commentary on the hopes and dreams of the main characters. After two minutes and twenty seconds Po Lazarus fades out as *Big Rock Candy Mountain* (sung by Harry McClintock) emerges on a black screen. It plays throughout the title credits, which are intercut with shots of Everett, Delmar and Pete escaping through a wheat field. By having the song accompany the titles, it further enforces the overall thematic qualities of the narrative. The cheerful tone of the song not only helps convey the playfulness of the film, but also the demeanour of the characters. It tells the audience that these three men are not dangerous, which adds to the audience's ability to identify with them, despite them being fugitives. Lyrically, the song speaks of a magical place where a man can live free of work and worry. During these difficult times this form of escapism was quite common. In the film, each of these characters has a dream to live a life free of toil inspired by Everett's claim to a buried treasure that he agrees to share with them: a claim that had originally inspired their escape.

The narrative also includes the subplot of two opposing political factions, both of which use music as part of their political campaign. The song *You are my Sunshine* is first heard on the radio as a part of an advertisement on behalf of the incumbent, Pappy O'Daniel (Durning). His opponent, Homer Stokes (Duvall), makes use of *Keep on the Sunny Side*, which is performed 'live' in various venues throughout the film. The Coen brothers present O'Daniel as a self-seeking politician, who is trailing heavily in the polls. This may explain why his theme song pleas fondly for the return of a lost love. Its sentiment

[268] This opening sequence can be heard in film clip number twenty-three on the accompanying CD.

also echoes the pains of hardship, which demonstrate his desperate need to show that he understands the troubles of his constituency. Stokes' song also highlights the adversity people were facing, but the chorus celebrates the idea that one must think positively and then wait for it to pass. This may also suggest that the 'darkness' refers to his opponents mishandling of past political decisions and the 'sunny side' is the reform he promises to bring. Whatever the case may be, as both songs refer to the positive virtues of the 'sun', the two parties seem to be offering similar futures.

The central song in the film, *I am a Man of Constant Sorrow*, is sung by the main characters under the alias, the Soggy Bottom Boys. It is performed twice diegetically and there are two instrumental nondiegetic versions that function as commentary. This song emphasises one of the other main themes of the film: the role faith can play in one's life and death. In view of the desperate times during the Great Depression, many people reaffirmed their religion beliefs or adopted new beliefs (especially those held by the various forms of Christianity) to give them a sense of hope. Baptist beliefs, which are epitomised by adult baptism and passionate sermons, dominated the South and have helped to identify the area known as the Bible belt. This theme can be seen from the earliest part of the film, where Delmar and Pete are baptised as a result of hearing a host of believers sing Down to the River to Pray. Throughout the film, other songs are used to emphasise these beliefs and practices. For example, *I'll Fly Away* (played by the radio disc jockey) and *I am Weary (Let Me Rest)* (performed 'live') emphasise the Christian belief in Heaven as a place where one receives comfort by being in the presence of God; and *In the Highways* (performed 'live') speaks of living out one's religious calling.

I am a Man of Constant Sorrow refers to one of the descriptions attributed to Jesus Christ and suggests the Christian belief that as he suffered for us, we also are to identify with him in our sufferings. As stated before, America in the 1930s was full of harsh conditions, especially for those who resided in the South and the Mid-west, where there tended to be poorer populations. Unhappiness and an early death, therefore, were common and this group would particularly welcome the hope presented to them by Christian salvation. The first time the audience hears the Soggy Bottom Boys singing this song is at a recording session at an isolated radio station. Prior to this, the troubles experienced by Everett, Delmar and Pete do not typify the average trials faced by those at the time; however, the song does express their identification with others and the general sense of despair.

The irony of *I am a Man of Constant Sorrow* is that it proves to be the Soggy Bottom Boys' salvation. During a 'live' performance, they sing the song disguised as bearded hillbillies. The crowd reacts with great excitement, but Homer Stokes interrupts their singing. He not only identifies them as fugitives, but also as the men who had disturbed a Ku Klux Klan lynching where he had been presiding. As a result of this announcement and the fact that it is being simultaneously broadcasted on the radio, Stokes quickly loses favour with the audience and his entire constituency. O'Daniel takes advantage of this moment by joining the Soggy Bottom Boys on stage and by pardoning them of their earlier crimes, quickly wins the crowd. Following this, they begin playing the song again to the great joy of the audience. Hence, the song of great hardship and death proves to be a means of deliverance for Everett, Pete and Delmar as well as the channel of victory for Pappy O'Daniel.[269]

[269] The final 'performance' of this song can be heard in film clip number twenty-four on the accompanying CD.

However, this sense of well-being is short-lived. The three characters return to Everett's ancestral home to discover the sheriff and his posse are waiting for them. The sheriff, who had been tracking them throughout the film, is overtly referred to as the Devil incarnate and his presence in this scene announces their final judgment. The former fugitives begin to pray to God to spare their lives while a group of gravediggers sing. Their song *Lonesome Valley* reinforces their petition for divine intervention, as it speaks of the need for individuals to meet God alone so they may ask for His forgiveness. This is highlighted in Everett's prayer. He had been repeatedly denying the existence of God and in this moment seriously acknowledges his sinfulness, is repentant and begs for God's absolution for himself, Delmar and Pete. God appears to answer their prayers in the form of a flood that had been alluded to several times previously in the film. However, despite this 'miraculous' event, Everett resurfaces to deny it as an act of God and justifies his prayer as momentary lapse of rationale thought.[270]

The film concludes with Everett reunited with his wife and children, which was the true reason for his escape from the chain-gang; the buried treasure had been a rouse to entice Delmar and Pete to come with him.[271] Harmony swiftly becomes discord as Everett's wife declares that the ring he had valiantly retrieved after the flood was not the right one. Their argument contrasts with that of their five daughters singing *Angel Band*, a hymn that speaks of the Christian view of Heaven. Their voices are joined by a blind seer, who had prophesised many of the events at the beginning of the film, and then continues into the end credits. Thus, the musical elements communicate a sense of hope at the end of the film. It suggests that regardless of the trials and tribulations we may suffer, one can still rise above them; in addition, there may be solace beyond the grave.

[270] Lonesome Valley to the flood can be heard on film clip number twenty-five on the accompanying CD.
[271] They had been chained together and his escape would have been impossible without them.

It is dubious whether O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? can truly be classified as a musical. The challenge it presents, nonetheless, is how one categorises films. In this so-called 'post-modern' era, strict definitions of 'genre' merely have lead to confusion at best and division at worst. Joel and Ethan Coen's reputation as genre-bending filmmakers necessitate that critics and the public reassess their understanding of traditional film forms. O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? is no exception. By making a performance-based film that communicates multiple meanings, while blending reality and fantasy, the Coens seem to be indicating that we should reconsider the more orthodox conventions of the musical. This is not meant to replace these conventions, but it is merely to add to our appreciation of the changes in aesthetics. Ultimately, the Coen brothers' film may prove to be a pioneer in that transition.

The Internal Nature of THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

The overall tone of the Coen brothers' 2001 release, THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE (2001), is one of muted sadness. A gloom hangs over the narrative that is not only prevalent in its shades of black and white, but it is also in the aural ingredients that foster the film with a greater emotional depth. For Joel and Ethan Coen it is a much more sombre affair than their previous releases. Their usual black humour is all but hidden within the bleak storyline, eccentricities are limited to a few minor characters and the camera work is relative static. It is through the music, sound effects and dialogue that the Coens principally communicate the affective resonance necessary to generate pathos. It is mainly through this that the narrative resists detachment from the audience, and they are able to gain deeper insight into the plot and characters.

Despite the title of the film, the main character of THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE, Ed Crane (Thornton), permeates the entire narrative. The story is not only about him, but it is also told by him through a disembodied voice.[272] He is in nearly every scene in the film. Crane's narration and constant presence provide the audience with information regarding the motivation for his actions, while little is made known to other characters. Accordingly, the audience perceives an individual who is 'there', but has almost no impact on those around him. Ed's insignificance is such that when he murders Big Dave Brewster (Gandolfini) no one suspects him of doing it. The audience, however, is made aware of the thoughts and actions that had led him to kill Dave. Because of this understanding, those experiencing the film are given access to Ed Crane over and above anyone in the film and this in turn generates a unique connection between the audience and the character.

[272] We discover later that this voice is actually him speaking aloud an article, which he is writing for a men's magazine.

From the beginning, Ed's narration is conversational. He speaks to the audience as if they were his interlocutors. His voice is extremely slow and even-paced with a tone that is often downbeat. This pattern of speech corresponds to Ed's personality and mannerisms. Each drag on his cigarette is unhurried and deliberate, each hair cut is performed with measured skill and dexterity, and as each crisis develops, he is neither panicked nor deterred. The film shows Ed living in an existential state; he is merely 'there', resigned to the inevitable.[273] The intonation of his voice expresses no passion or craving, though his actions sometimes betray this. Above all, he communicates no sense of guilt or moral responsibility for the wrongs he has committed; the consequences of these things are merely part of his destiny. He speaks as someone whose fate is sealed and nothing can alter its course. It is only in the last scene, at the moment of his death, that he speaks of any remorse and of any appreciation of his life.[274]

Therefore, any reasonable understanding of narrative comes from internal rather than external factors. By verbalising his thoughts, Ed Crane helps the audience make sense of his detachment and how he responds to the various plot points. His corresponding speech pattern evokes the slow-sad tone of the film and the words themselves reflect his sense of invisibility. One can suppose that the intention was to allow this 'unsympathetic' character to build a relationship with the audience. It is also suggests that this quiet man has an earnest need to share his unspoken words with somebody. It is, after all, a confession and those listening to his story may have been meant to grant him a form of absolution: the satisfaction of the truth being told.

[273] In fact, this can be heard from his first lines, where he states that he never really considered himself a barber and that he merely 'stumbled' into it through marriage.
[274] His opening voice-over can be heard in film clip twenty-six on the accompanying CD.

The audience gains further insight into Ed Crane's character and his understanding of his circumstances through the overlapping of his narration over the dialogue of other characters. A notable example can be heard in the final court scene, where Ed comments on Riedenschneider's defence (Shalhoub). The Coen brothers use a delicate mix of layers of dialogue, which allows those listening to hear snippets of the lawyer's words while Ed's voice remains prominent. It is designed in a similar way to that when a translator interprets a speech for an English-speaking audience. In this case, the people in the cinema are given Crane's perception and opinion of the sequence of events. His commentary also highlights key points in Riedenschneider's line of reasoning, condensing it to a much shorter dialogue than one would normally find in court scenes. As a result of the clarity of both voices, the audience is not only able to follow the lawyer's argument, but it also provides them with an even greater awareness of the attitude of the main character.[275]

Ed Crane's internal nature is further revealed through the music of Carter Burwell and Ludwig Van Beethoven. The music establishes a dimension to his character that is purely emotional. In pre-production discussions with Joel and Ethan Coen, Burwell decided that the score should suggest a sense of longing in that "he wants something more in life, but he himself doesn't know what it is" (Barnes 2004). Consequently, the film is predominately full of slow-building stringed instruments, which are occasionally dotted by single piano chords. The gradual ascending strings set a trajectory that never truly resolves and quite often repeats. In this manner, the score helps suggest Ed's desire to strive for something that is out of his reach. Significantly, Burwell's use of minor keys seems to emphasise the beautiful sadness of the film. Its dark, slow tones resonate deeply within its unhurried pace and the

[275] An sample of the court dialogue can be heard in film clip number twenty-seven on the accompanying CD.

black and white images. The result helps generate an emotional understanding of Ed's character.

Ed's desire crystallises when he meets Birdy (Johansson) and she is playing the second movement of Beethoven's *Piano Sonata No. 8*. The music stirs something within Ed, something beautiful and moving. The exact definition of this 'feeling' is nebulous, but it stirs emotions deep within him. He claims that it provides him with "Some kind of escape...Some kind of peace" (Coen, E & Coen, J. 2001, p.66). Through the course of the film, Birdy becomes the embodiment of this 'longing' and is regularly shown playing the Beethoven piece with Ed sitting in the room. She and the music intertwine, inspiring Ed to strive for something more. He explains to her that he "can't stand by and watch more things go down the drain" (Coen, E & Coen, J. 2001, p.87). However, this is short-lived as his hope of managing Birdy's musical career is extinguished after her first audition.[276]

Elsewhere music serves to bolster Ed's quiet invisibility. For a majority of the film, nondiegetic background music pervades entire scenes; however, it is nearly inaudible.[277] Two early examples can be heard during the dinner party and the scene where Ed is shaving Doris' legs (McDormand). Both sequences take place in the Crane home and highlight Ed's relationship to his wife. The quietness of the music not only epitomises Ed's personality, but it also aurally demonstrates how his wordlessness had formed the basis of their marriage.[278] Joel and Ethan Coen do not show it as a burden or a bone of contention, but merely as something that just is. However, one could stipulate that it was one of reasons why Doris was having an affair with Dave

[276] A sequence featuring Birdie playing Beethoven can be heard in film clip twenty-eight on the accompanying CD.
[277] The only scenes that contain music mixed at a 'loud' volume are the ones at the Nordlinger party and the wedding reception. Both events make Ed uncomfortable. What is more, both sequences contain several people enjoying themselves, which Ed does not seem capable of doing.
[278] Ed tells us later that one of the reasons Doris wanted to marry him was because she liked that he did not talk so much.

Brewster. A low volume mix of opera is also present in every barbershop sequence. This may be an ironic reflection on the lack of high drama or true emotion in their work, as opera music usually carries these references. It is unlikely that its function is to elevate hair cutting to a high art when one considers Ed's attitude toward the job. In all probability, it suggests that Ed's humble position in the film is to be considered grander than it appears. Overall, by lowering the volume in these scenes the music is neither intrusive nor obvious - two traits that are shared by Ed Crane.

Amongst the distinct layers of sound in THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE, ambient effects and noise are on the lowest rung. Nonetheless, they too help realise the character of Ed Crane. Throughout the film, noises and atmospheres are kept to a minimum. To the less discerning ear, one might argue that they are in effect non-existent. Most scenes are provided with single elements, like wind, crickets or car-bys. There are no notable moments where a complex mixture of effects are used. Even in scenes, such as the car accident, noises are positioned in such a manner as to be distinct from one another. Consequently, it is reasonable to suggest that this use of sound also reflects the quiet inconspicuous nature of the main character.[279]

Other uses of sound contribute to Ed's perception of himself. His feeling of isolation is illustrated in the scenes where he walks through crowds. The visuals not only take on an unnatural representation, through speed adjustments and lighting, but the oneiric tone of the atmospheric effects adds to Ed's feeling of being a 'ghost'.[280] The throng walk passed, averting their eyes, seemingly unaware of his presence, but there is neither noise of their passing nor any noise of the shops or cars along the road. This narrow

[279] Admittedly, this minimalist approach could have been done to simulate the sound design of many films made in the 1940s - a style of which this film is attempting to emulate. However, the Coens use of sparse noise also grants the film a sense of hyperrealism.
[280] See Appendix A for a description of oneiric sound.

extension of sound emulates Ed's sense of detachment and the fact that he feels no one can help him.[281] Immediately following the car accident, Ed experiences a memory (or a fantasy) where he is at home and Doris is alive.[282] During the entire sequence there is no music, no narration and sound effects are 'normal', giving it an atmosphere unlike any other scene of the film. Nothing out of the ordinary occurs in the scene; it is a relatively routine segment of the Crane's home-life. As this memory is what Ed imagines in the midst of misery, it perhaps highlights that Ed finds comfort in the mundane and the relative quiet.

His submissive nature is notable in two scenes that involve shaving. In the aforementioned sequence Ed is asked by Doris to shave her legs. Her request is polite and the task is appreciated, but she never once looks at Ed from behind the magazine she is reading. Nevertheless, Ed is compliant and makes no complaint. The sound of the razor scraping against Doris' leg is overtly hyperrealised. The exaggerated noise dominates the scene. However its true significance is unknown until the very last scene of the film. At that time Ed Crane is sitting in an electric chair, being prepared for execution. A man kneels down beside Ed and the same scraping noise can be heard; the man is shaving a portion of his calf where an electrical device will be strapped. The noise must remind him of his wife for he begins speaking of her then, and in turn, it must also remind him of all that he had done to bring him to this point. Nonetheless, Ed's capitulation is clear. He does not fight or struggle. He merely accepts his fate and dies with the hope that he may reconcile with Doris "on the other side".

[281] This sequence can be heard in film clip number twenty-nine on the accompanying CD. In addition, see Appendix A for a brief description of sound 'extension'.
[282] Doris had killed herself under the stress of being on trial for Dave Brewster's murder.

The overall sound design of THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE puts the audience in a unique position. They are made privy to some of the inner most thoughts and feelings of an extremely detached character. The music, effects and dialogue help generate an emotional resonance and an overriding tone that reflects his personality and his general outlook on life (all of which is unavailable to the other characters). As a result, these aural ingredients aid in fostering this 'unsympathetic' individual with much greater attention and concern. This suggests that the soundtrack was central to the creation of the film and Joel and Ethan Coen had the forethought to conceive of the aural elements prior to production. Consequently, without this appreciation of the potential of sound it is quite possible that the audience would have been left with a beautiful but remarkably different film.

JOURNEYS IN COMMERCIALISM: INTOLERABLE CRUELTY and THE LADYKILLERS

As noted in the section entitled 'The Coens' Approach to the Narrative and Finance', INTOLERABLE CRUELTY (2003) and THE LADYKILLERS (2004) had marked a shift in Joel and Ethan Coen's normal mode of production.[283] Based on these differences, both films took on a distinctly commercial flavour, making them quite different from their previous releases: the former being more explicitly mainstream than the latter. It would appear that this venture into more marketable filmmaking was a conscious effort on their part. However, it is apparent from the less-than-expected financial returns for these films that these types of projects are not the Coen brothers' forte.[284] This suggests that in their attempt to work with much larger budgets, more conventional narratives and more accessible styles, their originality had been diminished and/or compromised. As such, their use of music, sound effects and dialogue reflects the dissimilar approaches brought to each of these films.

The alterations in the Coens' normal mode of production for INTOLERABLE CRUELTY and THE LADYKILLERS may originate from the fact that both of these projects were ventures in unfamiliar territory. In reference to the former, Skip Lievsay said, "It was a big change of approach [...] It's a Hollywood Star type movie, which they had never done before" (Barnes 2004). Thus far in their careers they had not worked on an overtly commercial film nor had they made a remake. In reference to INTOLERABLE CRUELTY, Ethan Coen is quoted saying, "It's more of a 'glam' thing than

[283] See pages 134-136

[284] One need only to compare the costs and United States box office results of THE HUDSUCKER PROXY, their previous attempt to enter the commercial mainstream. It cost $25 million to produce and the ticket sales were $2.8 million. INTOLERABLE CRUELTY and THE LADYKILLERS suffered similar losses in America. The former cost $60 million and made $35.3 million (though it made $76.8 million overseas), and the latter cost $70 million and had box office results of $38.6 million.

certainly we've ever done before" (production notes 2003). To which, Joel Coen added, "For us, it's trying something a little bit different but I wouldn't call it unique exactly" (production notes 2003). It is this lack of distinctiveness that would suggest that INTOLERABLE CRUELTY would be more a product of comprise than one of artistic intention; it would not be a Coen original, but the Coen framework for another person's film. As both films were intended as writing assignments for the Coen brothers that they had not planned to make themselves, this is a reasonable assertion.

An initial deviation that affected both films is that they departed from some of their core scripting tactics. In response to his overall approach to adapting the script for THE LADYKILLERS, Joel Coen said:

> Frankly, it's easier because you have a template you are working from. It's different because there is an element you are making up and then the other aspect is that when we are writing for other people [...] we don't usually write with specific actors in mind for specific characters because we don't know who they are going to cast in the part (Lee BBC Online Interview 2004).

Normally their characters are composed of a combination of the actor they imagine in the role and the character's attributes. Clearly, the characters in these films were formulated without this foreknowledge. Joel Coen later admits, "it's just a little different if we are writing knowing that we will direct" (ibid., 2004). As a result, the Coens demonstrate their usual flare for the mechanics of characterisation, however, from a distance. Consequently, their usual casting methods were subject to different procedures. Whether this caused them to alter their directing style is unclear. However, what it did mean was that Joel and Ethan Coen found themselves working with actors outside their usual troupe.

INTOLERABLE CRUELTY has many of the outward signs of previous Coen brother films, but it is decisively different from them. It is a film about

marriage, divorce and the legal system; it is neither a social commentary nor a moralistic manifesto. As in other films, the Coens merely use these subjects as the circumstances for the comic milieu of the story. The film flouts the conventions of current romantic comedies, while evoking the screwball comedies of 1930s and 1940s.[285] Actors from previous films, such as George Clooney, Billy Bob Thornton and Richard Jenkins were invited by Joel and Ethan Coen to return and take on crucial roles. As previously mentioned, location also proved important to the story and the characters. In response to the glitz and glamour of the film, Joel Coen said:

> Los Angeles and the culture of L.A. and Beverly Hills are significant parts of the idea or the comedy [...] You can tell the story elsewhere, but I think it would be quite different, because the movie is informed by attitudes and a lifestyle which are particular to Los Angeles (production notes 2003).

Furthermore, like their other work, this film world is hyperrealised, but retains its internal consistency. In addition to this, they have also employed the same crewmembers that had used on many of the previous films.

The exception to this came in one of many producers on the film, Brian Grazer. Grazer, like Joel Silver, is an Oscar-winning film producer, who has primarily worked on big star-driven mainstream features.[286] Grazer expressed a great admiration for the Coens, calling them: "the coolest, purest filmmakers in modern movies" (ibid., 2003). It was hoped that his presence on this film would help ensure the Coens a commercial success without detracting too much from their signature style. Over the course of the film, he supervised many aspects of the process, while acting as a liaison between the financiers and the filmmakers to make certain that everyone was pleased with the final product. He was also instrumental in organising

[285] Chiefly THE AWFUL TRUTH (McCarey 1937), THE LADY EVE (Sturges 1941) and THE PHILADELPHIA STORY (Cukor 1940)
[286] Some examples include APOLLO 13 (Howard 1995), THE NUTTY PROFESSOR (Shadyac 1996) and LAIR, LAIR (Shadyac 1997).

preview screenings that, according to Carter Burwell, led to some script changes (personal email 2005). Apart from this, it would appear that corporate interference was minimal. As Joel Coen stated:

> The studios wouldn't be asking us to do it, I don't think, if it was a movie they wanted to get into themselves. What you see is what you get with us, so they let us do what we want to do (Lee BBC Online Interview 2004).

Interestingly, actors who Joel and Ethan Coen were able to cast had a semblance to other characters. Clooney only joined the production when the Coen brothers agreed to direct it. Upon reading the script, he saw his character (Miles Massey) as a descendant of Everett McGill, the role he played in O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? because of his cocky self-assurance and his obsession with his appearance (production notes 2003). As O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? was the Coens last highest grossing film, this slight reprise must have been considered a viable option. Jenkins, who played a lawyer in THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE, also played a lawyer in this film. By way of contrast, Thornton's character, Howard Doyle, represents more of an inside joke in that compared to his taciturn character in THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE, Howard is chronically loquacious. The Coen brothers' reputation also attracted many of the other members of the cast, like Geoffrey Rush, Catherine Zeta-Jones and Paul Adelstein. Rush said, "With each film they make, they invite you to visit another planet, but you kind of know that each planet is in the Coen brothers solar system" (ibid., 2003).

One of the biggest contrasts to previous Coen brothers' films demonstrated throughout INTOLERABLE CRUELTY is its conventional presentation. It follows traditional Hollywood rules in terms of the look of the film and in terms of the way the story unfolds. Most of the other Coen brothers' films have a degree of unpredictability, usually fostered by ambiguity or utter quirkiness, but this

film develops in a very simple cause-and-effect manner. As one reviewer asserts: "Intolerable Cruelty is the first Coen brothers' picture that's asking a single question throughout its duration - will Miles and Marilynn [Zeta-Jones] wind up together?" (nicksflickpicks website 2003). A question easily answered from the beginning of the film, but in true Hollywood fashion it is revealed before the closing credits, when the two combatants finally fall into each other's arms. Nonetheless, as the narrative is based on the cold, calculated one-upmanship expressed by each of these characters, the thought of love between them seems ludicrous. As such, the film is highly dependent on the sex appeal of the two stars, George Clooney and Catherine Zeta-Jones. Without that, there is very little to engage the audience.

Ultimately, it is a film about surface-level appearances. The Coen brothers' regular cinematographer Roger Deakins was told that INTOLERABLE CRUELTY was to be "a conventional-looking, glossy movie [...] much more straightforward in many ways than the others we have done" (production notes 2003). Joel and Ethan Coen's regular costume designer, Mary Zophres, was asked to consider more mainstream ideas for the characters' wardrobe. In keeping with the atmosphere of the film, the outfits were designed to be glamorous but not ostentatious. In response to the wardrobe Zophres created for Zeta-Jones, Joel Coen offered this very telling comment: "It is interesting in terms of what Mary has done with Catherine's character, because the clothes tell the whole story" (ibid., 2003). In addition, Leslie MacDonald, the Coens' production designer (who had worked for them previously as an art director), was told to keep it 'normal'. However, in the example of Massey's office, this meant maintaining that level of surface beauty. She explained it this way:

> Miles is at the top divorce law firm in town, so we wanted something to reflect that. When you walk in, you can immediately visualize it being on the cover of a magazine (ibid., 2003).

There is a lot of humour in INTOLERABLE CRUELTY, especially from the minor characters. In fact, there are sequences of great hilarity. However, for the most part, many of the comic moments in the film seem grafted into the story, like deliberate constructions. They do not seem like inherent parts of the narrative. Commenting on the gags and jokes of the film, Anthony Quinn (2003) of the Independent Review stated, "They don't feel properly integrated, and they never build, as great comedies do, into a rhythm". As a result, the various forms of humour are delivered in isolated blocks: often having very little consistency between them. Overall, what the film lacks is the absurdity found in most of their previous films.

Conventional methods were also used in constructing the soundtrack.[287] Skip Lievsay and Carter Burwell had very little contact, apart from Burwell being present while Lievsay was mixing. Both explained that post-production followed a traditional flow because the intention was to design a soundscape that was commercial and straightforward. In keeping with this, Burwell's score mainly supports the images by mickeymousing the action, drawing attention to specific moments in the plot and underscoring dialogue. Another departure from the norm was that Brian Grazer was present at most of the composers' playback sessions. Burwell explained that Grazer "expressed the belief that the music would be very important in creating the right comedic milieu", and therefore felt it needed more attention. Though Burwell was not restricted in his process of composing in any way, he was conscious of the fact that an additional pair of ears was listening to his music. This influence eventually led the Coens to agree to change the main theme, though they

[287] Quotations of Lievsay and Burwell in this paragraph, and those in subsequent paragraphs, were obtained from personal emails (June 2005), unless otherwise indicated.

had agreed on the music in pre-production after Burwell had read the script. He explained:

> On [Intolerable Cruelty] I think our attitude about the score changed once they started screening it for preview audiences because they found that it took a very long time for folks to realize it was a comedy. This necessitated [amplifying] the "screwball" in the opening scene.

The Coens, who have usually showed very little interest in making sure the audience 'gets it', demonstrate here their willingness to accept the change in order to ensure the marketability of the film.

In addition to Burwell's score, INTOLERABLE CRUELTY had many previously released tracks spread sparsely throughout the film. They are not used randomly; there are signs that their positioning is purposeful. While a few hint slightly at the personality of the characters, most indirectly emphasise the events taking place on the screen. Following the 'beach' sound effects over the production company logo, the film cuts sharps to *The Boxer* by Simon and Garfunkel. It is heard diegetically from a car stereo with Donovan Donaly (Rush) singing along. In view of the exuberance Donaly displays in singing, it would seem that the song is meant to help introduce the light-hearted atmosphere of the film. This then prepares the audience for humour of the next sequence when the character finds his wife with another man. After this prologue, Elvis Presley's *Suspicion Minds* is heard over the title credits. The love and mistrust mentioned in its lyrics set up what are to be the main themes of the film. As the song fades it transforms three times: first as muzak in a dentist office, second as though it were coming from a car stereo and third it returns as nondiegetic score. All transitions are in connection with Miles Massey, which immediately associates him with the love-and-mistrust theme.[288] Later in the film, Gus Petch (Cedric the

[288] These transitions of Suspicious Minds can be heard in film clip number thirty on the accompanying CD.

Entertainer) uses Melissa Manchester's *Don't Cry Out Loud* as nondiegetic score over some of the videos of the undercover investigations he had solved. As the videos show sexual liaisons between unmarried couples, it ironically comments on their predicament. During a wedding the minister (Lindson) is shown singing two Paul Simon songs: *April come she will* and *Punky's Dilemma*. The former sets the overly-romantic tone of the ceremony and the latter expresses humour, as the only line we hear is "I wish I was a Kellogg's cornflake". Simon and Garfunkel feature again in the wedding between Miles and Marilynn. In this scene, an organ version of Mendelssohn's *Wedding March* segues into *Bridge Over Troubled Water*. It is heard as Mendelssohn is scratched off, like it had been on a record, and begins as an organ version but presently transforms into a bagpipe rendition, as a bagpipe player appears in the scene. In doing so, the Coens mix the sentimentality of the song with silliness. This reinforces the tone of the film. The next song is Edith Piaf's *Non, Je Ne Regrette Rein*, which directly translated means: 'No, I regret nothing'. It is heard nondiegetically after Marilynn triumphs over Miles; however, she is shown being in two minds about it. As a result, the song is ironic. The last two songs are heard over the end credits. The first, *The Glory of Love* by Big Bill Broonzy, comments on the biggest theme of the film and the second is Lindson's version of *The Boxer*. It is unclear why this song is repeated, or why there are so many songs by Paul Simon (and Art Garfunkel), in the film. Taken as a whole, most of these tracks lack the obscurity of songs found in previous Coen brothers' films, making them much more accessible to a wider audience.

Lievsay also followed the established Hollywood methods as supervising sound editor/mixer on the film. His involvement was virtually restricted to post-production. He had visited the set of INTOLERABLE CRUELTY for one day, but it was not for 'business' purposes. However, he claimed it also

allowed him to get a thorough understanding of the geography of the scenes that took place at Caesar's Palace. Lievsay's overall approach was to view the film like a traditional 'genre' film, which meant it was vococentric and all other aural elements were kept to a minimum. He explained:

> generally we tried to really just keep a low profile [...] There are certain sound effects that pay off, like gun shots and door slams, but it's not an atmospheric movie at all. There are hardly any backgrounds in the movie. The only backgrounds that we put in were put in to support the dialogue production track (Barnes 2004).

In the scenes involving Herb Myerson (Aldredge), Miles Massey's boss, there was potential for experimental sound, but most of it had to be reduced because of interfering factors. Herb talks incessantly through these scenes in a very thick accent and wheezes regularly. In addition, there is a lush, building piece of music that fills the entirety of both of the sequences. Consequently, while mixing, Lievsay asked his sound effects mixer to remove more and more elements. What remained were the sounds of a respirator and an electronic beep.[289] In the end, this 'beep' served to represent all of the machines in Herb's office. Though it proved successful, 'last-minute difficulties', such as this, may have been prevented if Lievsay and Burwell had followed their usual routine of exchanging more ideas with each other and the Coens prior to the mix.[290]

This mainstream approach meant that Lievsay focused most of his efforts on dialogue. For the majority of actors, he respected the tradition of making the voices of the characters as crisp and as clean as possible. However, for George Clooney, he also introduced a further element: he added more bass to his voice. Lievsay explained the effect was to make "you almost feel like your hand is on his chest, so it feels very intimate" (Barnes 2004). He felt

[289] For this tone, Lievsay referenced the docking sequence from 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY.
[290] One of the sequences in Herb's office can be heard in film clip number thirty-one on the accompanying CD.

that this would draw the audience closer to the character, and in that way, find him more endearing.[291]

THE LADYKILLERS is another attempt by the Coen brothers to attract a wider audience. However, it is expressed in ways more evocative of the Coens than INTOLERABLE CRUELTY. In fact, it functions very much like a variation on the themes and ideas of previous films. The overall structure of the film borrows heavily from O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? In addition to getting support from the same studio (Disney), it also tries to rekindle the successful combination of the American South and previously released music. In this case, the music was not restricted to a specific period; however, a majority of it is early twentieth-century gospel songs. As with O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?, some were diegetic, while others were performed 'live' to playback or heard as if they were coming from a record player. Further songs were nondiegetic and used more like traditional score. Moreover, these songs often moved between these two categories, as they had done in O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?.

Despite the familiar ground, the music is not arbitrary; it does more than provide an opportunity for lucrative compact disc sales. The music serves a fundamental purpose in the narrative, as it had done in O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?. The central character is Marva Munson (Hall), an African-American, who is portrayed as a conservative, Bible-believing Christian. Her strong beliefs provide the story with many of the narrative premises: her suspicion of Professor Dorr (Hanks), her disapproval of smoking, stealing, vulgar language and, naturally, her regular church attendance. Consequently, the gospel music reinforces Munson's presence and personality. It also helps to emphasise the setting of the film: Mississippi, an area of the American

[291] An example of Clooney's voice can be heard in film clip number thirty-two on the accompanying CD.

south that forms part of the 'Bible-belt'. Again, like O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU? it helps evoke the old-fashioned values and fiery sermons associated with this area.[292] By conjuring up the South, the music also draws attention to the representation of Professor Dorr as a Southern gentleman, though he is far from a religious man.

In addition to these gospel songs, THE LADYKILLERS is quite eclectic in terms of pieces of music it includes. Diegetic Hip-hop features in various parts of the film, usually played on car stereos or portable radios by the street-smart African-American characters, while 'Renaissance' music is also used diegetically to represent the music played by Dorr's band. It is in the treatment of this music that this film differs from previous ones. Over the course of the film, much of the music fades into one another, or is blended together or transformed from one style into another. Because of the detail involved in this, it required early planning. Burwell explained the procedure in this way:

> On Ladykillers we spoke at length - even while shooting [Intolerable Cruelty] - about how to integrate "Renaissance" music, Gospel and hip-hop. Which would come first? Who would be responsible for each? We assumed T-bone Burnett[293] would wrangle the gospel singers, and since they appear on screen they did end up being recorded first. As soon as the production was wrapped, the Coens asked me to come up with some rough "baroque" interpretations of the gospel tune "Troubles of this World" to which they could cut. I gave them a synth version and they used it to cut the tunneling/burglary scene. Pretty soon thereafter we recorded a rough version with some early music players to see how it worked when we intercut between that and the gospel. Soon after that T-bone had some LA hip-hop producers donating beats that we mixed in. Over the course of post[-production] we worked with many different artists on the hip-hop bits, so I can't even say for sure whose beats are in there in the end.[294]

Furthermore, the music 'played' by Dorr's band is the same music that is 'played' by the 'musicians' in Ealing's original version of THE LADYKILLERS.

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[292] A sermon is, in fact, included in the film.
[293] Burnett was Music Producer on this film. He had also worked on THE BIG LEBOWSKI and O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?.
[294] An example of this can be heard in film clip number thirty-three on the accompanying CD.

However, the Coens seem to be using it more as a multi-layered joke than homage. The music is Boccherini's *Minuet op.13#5*, a composition written for a string quintet where all the instruments are bowed. The Ealing band is composed of that ensemble, whereas in the Coen brothers' film the instruments include a sackbut,[295] a French horn, a violin, an theorbo[296] and a harpolyre[297] - only the latter three are stringed and only the first is designed to be played with a bow. It is therefore impossible for them to be playing this piece of music. In addition to this, these instruments are copies of medieval instruments, which seems to conflict with Boccherini being an early classical composer (1743-1805) and Dorr's professorship in Renaissance music. However, this may just be reflective of Joel and Ethan Coen's disinterest in historical accuracy.

The film also includes much more original score than O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?. Consequently, with all the source material, there needed to be discussions about the role the underscore would play in the film. As the Coens began editing the film, they started asking for additional music. To which, Burwell said:

> I think the first thing I came up with was for Hanks' character. I wanted to elevate his poetry recitations, taking this part of his character 'seriously', in the hope of paying off when his last recitation is interrupted by a piece of concrete hitting his head.

The intricacies of the soundtrack also meant that Burwell and Lievsay found it necessary to work in closer collaboration than they had done on INTOLERABLE CRUELTY. Moreover, Lievsay, having read the script earlier on in the process, was also in contact with the Coens regarding potential sound

[295] A sackbut is a precursor to the trombone.
[296] An theorbo is similar to a lute, but it has sympathetic strings that are located above the main body of the instrument.
[297] A harpolyre is a three-necked stringed instrument that apparently had no known music written for it (DVD documentary).

issues before the film went into production. The composer offered this example:

> We did collaborate on the "heist" sections of the film. For instance the tunneling, the burglary, the toast, the final explosion. I needed to allow space for certain sounds - ticking of the time fuse or clinking of glasses - and we needed to agree how the SFX and the various musical elements would interact. For instance, when would we be able to hear the hip-hop source and when would we play score instead?[298]

Other aspects of this film that are recognisable in the Coens' previous work are the use of fanciful names and eloquent language. Inventing unusual names for characters seems to be part of the Coens' creative process, consider Bernie Bernbaum, Garland Standford, Homer Stokes and Wash Hogwallop. In THE LADYKILLERS they offer us, in addition to the fantastically named Professor Goldthwaite Higgenson Dorr III, PhD., Gawain McSam (Wayans), Garth Pancake (Simmons) and Mountain Girl (Delano). Dorr's academic-laded verbosity may be reminiscent of the more intellectual speeches of Bill Meyhew from BARTON FINK but Dorr's language is also full of sibilant consonants and outdated phrases. At one particular point of crisis, Dorr declares, "We must have waffles...we must all have waffles forthwith" (Empire online 2004). In contrast, the Coens enter new territory by loading McSam's dialogue with gangsta-rap, using words like 'booty' and phrases like 'my nigger'. Even Marva Munson is given choice expressions that epitomise her own distinct form of Ebonics, consider: "They calls it hippity-hop music, but it don't make me want to hippity-hop".

One usually finds a similar mixture of characters in other Coen brothers' films, but usually they are more commonalities between them. One can accept the inclusion of Dorr and Munson in the same story. They are products of an earlier generation. However, McSam's 'gangsta' character and

[298] The heist sequence can be heard in film clip number thirty-four on the accompanying CD.

Pancake's 'former activist' character are part of the contemporary world; while Lump (Hurst) and The General (Ma) are products of past cinematic stereotypes. All of them are constructed as distinct caricatures, who never quite come together. Never have the Coens created a scenario with such dissimilar characters. It is understandable that this had been done to set up the comic situations and to be consistent with their version of the narrative,[299] but with such diversity it seems an obvious contrivance. As such, it highlights another technique used by Joel and Ethan Coen that radically departs from their previous films.

One could argue that the inclusion of Tom Hanks in this film demonstrates another move towards commercialism for the Coen brothers. However, Joel Coen said:

> The reason why we were interested in working with him was not because he is a big star - because frankly, it was not the kind of movie that needed a big star to get it financed, for instance. We are always looking for actors who can carry a movie as a leading role but who are essentially characters actors [...] we don't care whether they are stars or not (Lee BBC online interview 2004).

In essence, they chose Hanks because he can work in an ensemble situation. Again, it was not written with him in mind, as it had been intended to be someone else's project; nonetheless, he was the Coens' first choice. However, unlike Clooney and Thornton who agreed to work with Coens without reading the scripts first, Hanks' interest was less reckless. He said, "My attitude wasn't, 'I'll work with them no matter what', but it was definitely 'what are they up to?'" (Hewitt 2004). After reading the script, he immediately understood the character and agreed to take the role. He especially enjoyed the fact that Dorr differed from the Hollywood clichés of criminal masterminds in that he is a 'doofus', not a genius putting on an act,

[299] In the original THE LADYKILLERS (Mackendrick 1955), the gang are known to each other before 'the job', where in the Coens' version they come together as a result of answering an advertisement in the newspaper.

but a real 'doofus' (Hewitt 2004). Moreover, as Hanks has not played a comic role for over ten years, it bucks the trend that has regularly pigeonholed him in serious roles. In light of this, it is very unlikely Hanks presence in the film was because of market demands.

One of the most curious departures for the Coens in THE LADYKILLERS is a slight alteration in screen credits. For the first time both Joel and Ethan are listed as directors. In previous films both brothers had acted as directors, only nominally giving Joel Coen's name on screen or in advertisements. It is uncertain whether this decision was made to finally state 'the truth' or it had some other purpose related to commercial pressures. Whatever the reasoning, it marks yet another change in the Coens' usual mode of production.

Overall, this analysis seems to suggest, despite appearances, that the sound worlds created for both of these films were consist with the nature of each project. INTOLERABLE CRUELTY's overt commercialism dictated a much more conventional approach. Consequently, everything on the soundtrack was streamlined and straightforward to accommodate the dialogue. There was also little contact between Lievsay and Burwell, as one would normally find on a Hollywood production. In addition, changes in the music were implemented after initial screenings and external influence to ensure larger audience acceptance. THE LADYKILLERS, on the other hand, was less conventional due to it being a quirkier narrative. However, the Coens still attempted to draw upon previously used tactics in the construction of the soundtrack. The use of music from the American South to emphasise thematic devices seemed to recall the soundtrack of their highest box office success. As in earlier films, they made use of distinct linguistic devices and particular turns of phrase. Following practices closer to the norm, greater

collaboration transpired between Lievsay and Burwell than there had been in the preceding film.

The consequence of Joel and Ethan Coen altering many of their working patterns is a change in results. Though one could argue that successful outcomes are often unpredictable, neither of these films did as well as they had hoped; both films got mixed reviews and their commercial flavour baffled many of the Coen brothers' long-term fans. One would surmise from their whole body of work that they were actually using these films as time-fillers and money-earners until they could work on one of their own original narratives, where they would have more influence over the whole process. Comments made by Joel Coen after shooting THE LADYKILLERS seem to add to this rationale. He said: "The next one we do will probably be from our own story and we'll be approaching it much more in the way we have approached our previous work" (Lee BBC online interview 2004). His words indicate that these projects merely 'fell in their laps'.[300] As a result, many of the elements that were developed were out of their control. Moreover, it strongly suggests that they were aware that these films were developed differently. As a result, the aural content of both films reflects the modifications they had to make in order to complete each project.

[300] Currently they are one of twenty filmmakers creating individual segments for a film entitled PARIS JE T'AIME, due for release in 2006. The narrative is to be constructed from fusing together each of the filmmakers' contributions so they are read as one story. Each segment will have a brief transitional sequence to prepare the audience for the next segment and to give the film a sense of cohesion. The contributions of the filmmakers, including Joel and Ethan Coen, are to be original works based on their impressions of Paris. As it is still in production, little else is known about this project, except that the Coens' segment features one of their regular actors, Steve Buscemi, as a tourist (information acquired from www.imdb.com).

CONCLUSION:

Recommendations based on the Coen Model

This final section reviews the laudable aspects of the Coen brothers' mode of production. In addition to discussing their efficacy, the arguments against introducing these working practices to the greater American film industry are considered. In some cases, it is recommended that filmmakers should exceed them in order to achieve an even greater integration of sound and image. This section also offers examples of film schools and similar institutions that are promoting sound with the purpose of introducing a future generation to a different way of working.

The approach to filmmaking practiced by the Coen brothers and their crew presents an achievable model for treating film sound ingredients with greater prominence in film construction. The overriding difficulty of implementing them lies in Hollywood's historical reservations about radical change and the concomitant financial implications. This conservatism has caused viewpoints of film production to become entrenched. When combined with the steep rise in commercialised mainstream filmmaking, this resistance is deep-rooted. Adopting their working practices as a financially viable standard would require a significant shift in the mindset of the American film industry. Nonetheless, as the awareness of sound's potential is being realised through the increase in research and educational programmes that emphasise aural ingredients, filmmakers and Studios are beginning to welcome different approaches.

As previously noted by Skip Lievsay, primary to the Coen brothers' integration of aural ingredients is that a great number of their sound scenarios are inherent parts of their scripts. Thus, their consideration of sound begins before the genesis of the film and, as such, is intrinsic to their

storytelling process. Consequently, there is less confusion about the aural needs of their films. This provides Lievsay with a framework from which to consider his ideas. Moreover, the Coens' scripted sound scenarios also provide direct reference points for any future discussions between Lievsay and the filmmakers.

A large number of scriptwriters in Hollywood tend to comply with the traditional ethos that the visuals and dialogue drive the narrative. In the words of sound designer and educator Larry Sider,[301] they "don't allow, in structure and conception, the space for effective sound" (Parker 2005, p.1). This is fundamentally because dialogue sells most scripts. Post-production, therefore, becomes a time where sound effects and noise merely fill the gaps between conversations and music often underscores the dialogue or acts as a link to the next 'talking' scene. This denies sound the opportunity to help tell the story, relegating it once again to an item of secondary importance. It also disregards the inter-relationship between film elements, which limits the aural ingredients to surface-level functions. Even the Coen brothers tend to be dialogue-heavy in their films, which consequently restricts their number of creative sound scenarios.

In direct response to this prevailing style, the director and composer Mike Figgis[302] suggested reducing the amount of dialogue by twenty-five percent at every stage of the filmmaking process. By doing so, Sider declared:

> [Figgis has] created a space around the dialogue for sound and music, which not only makes the dialogue more significant but it allows the audience to hear the environment, to hear and feel the world that he is creating (ibid., p.2).

[301] Larry Sider is best known for his work with animators, the Quay Brothers, whose films include: STREETS OF CROCODILES (1986) and INSTITUTE BENJAMENTA (1995). He is also the Head of Post-production at the National Film and Television School in London and the co-founder of the School of Sound. Both of these institutions will be discussed in great detail later in this section.

[302] Figgis' films include: INTERNAL AFFAIRS (1989), LEAVING LAS VEGAS (1996) and TIME CODE (2000).

However, decreasing the number of dialogue-driven sequences does not ensure that filmmakers will use the space effectively. Sider also offered scriptwriters this advice for creating more sound scenarios in their screenplays:

> I am saying that the scriptwriter needs to understand that a sound is seen as well as heard, and it's not just words that are being heard; a great deal of information is carried through sound effects, by atmospheres - atmospheres is a whole subject in itself - and by the absence of sound. But sounds are seen, too, and shots and events have to be thought through aurally as well as visually. The writer should be able to write descriptions of aural events or impressions that allow for the interpretation just as location is described and interpreted by the designer and cinematographer (ibid., p.3).

Thus, by making themselves available to these methodologies, scriptwriters will build audio and visual qualities into the foundation of their narrative.

It would also appear from Joel and Ethan Coen's example that one of the most effective ways of initiating a means of constructing a more integrated soundtrack is to involve those responsible for sound earlier in the filmmaking process. In addition to it being a symbolic gesture to the priority given to aural ingredients, it also serves as impetus to many other processes noted throughout this thesis. First and foremost, meeting at the script stage or during pre-production offers the composer and supervising sound editor/sound designer an opportunity to discuss fundamental themes within the storyline and how elements might fit together. By exchanging information based on the screenplay, they would be given an insight to the overall tone and nature of the narrative, as well as an understanding of the characters in terms of personality and background. Such knowledge would allow the sound practitioners to begin thinking along lines that would best enhance the specific needs of the film, and thus complement the filmmaker's vision. Composers could have more time to conduct any necessary research and they could have more opportunities to produce rough sketches that would aid future talks. The sound crew could begin assembling a library of literal

sounds and ambient effects that express the particular aural makeup of the film.

Pre-production discussions should also allow for sound professionals to speak to the filmmakers about ways of approaching potential challenges they have gleaned from the script. This enables them to gain an appreciation of the filmmakers' rationale behind a particular narrative event. As such, it empowers the sound practitioners with a deeper awareness of these sequences, which, in turn, guides them towards the most appropriate response. It also enables them to talk about issues the filmmakers may not be aware of, such as loud machinery (e.g. wind fans) disrupting the recording process. During this time the supervising sound editor could offer creative solutions, or alternatives to the chosen course of action.

These talks could be further augmented by inviting both sound professionals to attend these meetings together. This would provide them the opportunity to have a shared understanding of what is expected from both parties. By uniting them at such an early stage, it would help build a greater rapport between them, which could then foster a greater exchange of work and ideas. From the example of the Coen brothers, it is evident that camaraderie is key to their working processes. This is not to advocate that filmmakers need to maintain the same crew on every project to sustain that close relationship. It is, in fact, to recommend that more interaction between these individuals throughout the entire production should allow for a greater appreciation of each other's contribution, regardless if this occurs on one film or several films. Thus, by building in this 'sound alliance' from the onset, sound professionals are discouraged from viewing one another as rivals.

By promoting preliminary exchanges between the composer of the film and the supervising sound editor/sound designer, the need for a full spotting session may not be necessary. It is reasonable to assume that if these two professionals have read the script, have had a joint meeting with the filmmakers during pre-production and have then proceeded to collaborate on the outcomes of that meeting, it would be clear how the soundtrack is to be shared between them. The spotting session could therefore be used as a means of confirming those ideas with the filmmakers and to allow for any additional changes they may be required. Had the composer and sound crew worked independently after their combined pre-production meeting, it would follow that a full spotting session, where both individuals were present, would be needed. In either case, the possibility for conflict during the editing and mixing sessions would be dramatically decreased.

Nonetheless, asking sound professionals to work to script from such an early stage may be seen as wasteful, as on many occasions films differ noticeably from the original screenplay. This, of course, could also be the reason for precluding detail, i.e. sound scenarios, from the script. In terms of musical input, music supervisor and consultant Bob Last[303] offered this summary of the rationale behind this point of view:

> The biggest single reason why they don't consult with [composers] early on is a historical reason in that the way that movies were made was invented at the time of silent movies and it is entirely, and in many fundamental ways, structured so it is difficult to accommodate thinking about music and sound earlier on. When you make a movie, you are creating a one-off business with a couple hundred people from scratch in a number of weeks. It has to be organised in very very traditional ways everybody understands, otherwise they don't work. That tradition goes back to the time of silent movies, so it is difficult to integrate the process. But the bigger reason is those people who are wise filmmakers know you only really find out what a film is when you see your first cut - after you've shot it - without fail, the first cut of a movie is a surprise to everybody. Sometimes it's a good surprise; sometimes it's a bad surprise. But it is

[303] Bob Last is best known for his work as a music supervisor in film. His credits include: BACKBEAT (Softley 1993), LITTLE VOICE (Herman 1998) and CHOCOLAT (Halleström 2000). Last has also been a music consultant to the Universal Music Company and as a music supervisor or sound designer on a variety of television programmes in the United Kingdom.

> always a surprise and anyone who is experienced learns that and therefore you do not want to commit to where and how you are going with your music prior to that surprise (Barnes 2005).

This is emphasised further by composer David Bell in his advice to filmmakers about music scoring. He said many composers

> prefer to be brought in during the rough cut - by this time, the film may have changed quite a bit from the script and the filmmaker's pre-shoot vision. In this [way], the composer enters the post-production process with a fresh perspective that hasn't been colored by months of discussion; this can be beneficial (1994, p.7).

Despite this, Bell also recommended that filmmakers hire composers as soon as possible to ensure they have enough time to think and discuss the needs of the film. He emphasised that the very latest they should be involved would be before the picture is locked and/or at the early stages of the rough cut.

As the Coens seldom veer from their original vision, it is reasonable to suggest that this is another way in which their approach differs from the Hollywood mainstream. It is also fair to say that a script for many filmmakers is just a template or a means for getting a project greenlit. Even Carter Burwell said that

> early discussions [with other directors] are so often mooted by changes that occur during the shooting and editing of the film - so that early discussions come to seem like academic exercises rather than substantive work (personal email 2005).

Moreover, even when composers and supervising sound editors/sound designers are offered a script before post-production they often read it without the intention of understanding the essence of the narrative. They may read it enough to find out what the story is about, but "they do not understand why the dialogue is where it is, why the shots have been conceived in a certain way and why the cuts occur where they do" (Parker 2005, p.2). In many cases film sound professionals all approach the film as a

large problem that they have to solve individually. As Sider stated, "Everybody in post-production is looking to make the film from their point of view and the script is left behind" (ibid., p.2). Consequently, this mentality reinforces the fragmentation of the industry not only by encouraging the separation of the soundtrack, but it also excludes these individuals from becoming a more integrated part of the film's construction.

In addition, it is difficult to accept that a film will depart so far from the original script that it becomes in the words of Bob Last, a "different beast". It is credible to suggest that scenes may move, minor characters may be eliminated, a different actor's performance may influence the presentation of their character and certain plot elements may be altered. However, it would be illogical to assume that these changes should cause a radically different reading of the underlying structures of the film. Editing a scene in a particular way or shifting it to another part of the film should not nullify the thematic concepts that drive the narrative. An actor's ability to communicate his or her role should not distort the background and general personality traits of the character as written. To assume that these factors should influence the initial work of a composer or a sound designer is to support the idea that visual elements are responsible for telling the story and sounds are merely support. To strengthen this argument, Sider recounted this example that contradicts the perspective offered by Last:

> I went to a lecture by Randy Thom and picture editor Peter Honess. They were talking to writers at BAFTA. And one person in the audience asked, "How often does the story change in the cutting room? Very loaded question, meaning we know you always change our ideas anyway. Honess said in the thirty of years of editing it has never happened to him that what they cut in the cutting room was profoundly different from the script and Randy Thom said in thirty years of track laying and sound design, it happened once. They both said scenes will change; things will move around obviously, the end of the film may change halfway through. They said the story is still the same story and the characters are basically the same - you may drop a character, but basically the story is there. They said you just don't have time to change it radically. Because the whole thing is to make the film work. Even though you are going to find all sorts of exceptions to that, that's fairly common (Barnes 2005).

One would also assume that the primary reason for Hollywood to oppose the inclusion of sound personnel earlier in the filmmaking process is that it would incur more costs. However, this argument is more myth than reality. Due to tradition and union rules, composers and sound personnel are paid differently: composers receive a flat fee, whereas sound crew are paid weekly. One can understand a producer's hostility to paying an entire sound crew from the beginning of the production when the bulk of their work is usually in the last six weeks before the film is released. Nonetheless, the recommendation here is to include the supervising sound editor (or a similar position) in the pre-production discussions and to pay him or her accordingly. Allowances should then be made for sounds designed by their team before post-production in the overall sound budget. This may mean a slight increase in the budget, but as it will be spread over a longer period with the intention of using aural ingredients more efficiently, it will prove to be of greater financial benefit to the final product.

This should only require minor alterations to the current system. According to sound designer Ren Klyce,[304] sound budgets are set by the producer and the post-production supervisor before filming begins.[305] He added that the supervising sound editor is already paid differently than the other members of the sound crew. This pay is based on their own criteria and what the studio is willing to pay, which may be influenced by the reputation of the given individual. It would follow that the aforementioned recommendation could be implemented through tactful negotiations with the studio and/or producer. Alternatively, sound practitioners could sacrifice their right to more pay in

[304] Ren Klyce is best known for his work with director David Fincher. His credits include: SEVEN (1995), FIGHT CLUB (1999) and PANIC ROOM (2002).
[305] This is information is taken from a personal email (May 05).

favour of more time. According to Larry Sider, sound professionals are not averse to this arrangement. He made this comment:

> You'll get more money if you follow union rules and you say I'm going to work so many days and I get overtime [etc.]. Once you start breaking that up, you are basically saying I'm willing to pay some of my salary in order to have more input into the film. For a lot of those people, it doesn't matter. And it's the people who aren't getting paid a lot to begin with that are willing to do that (Barnes 2005).

Budgeting for music is a more complex issue.[306] Big studio films set their film music budgets before pre-production and this is usually handled by the chief executive, in association with the separate music department, who will remain responsible for the budget through the entire production. The amount is usually based on market factors and the category of composer they wish to attract. On independent features, the producer decides the amount of money dedicated to music and this usually occurs at an even earlier stage because it is crucial in determining how the finances are distributed. As most independent films have small budgets, they tend to attract a different category of composer. Smaller studio films fall in-between, where the responsibility is shared between a studio representative and the producer. Here, the category of composer is also reflected by the overall budget. If the score includes previously released material, the budget may be decided later because it has a different impact on the marketplace and it has a different value to a distributor. These budgets may also have to be worked out in partnership with a record label.

Most composers receive their first payment after the spotting session. Financiers may fear the need to alter their initial budgets in order to pay the composer to join the production earlier. They may also fear hiring a composer who is of the 'wrong' range, that is, someone who is not up to the job.

[306] I am indebted to Bob Last for the information in this paragraph (see Appendix C).

However, these fears are unfounded, as there are many financial benefits to hiring a composer before post-production. Firstly, if an 'inappropriate' composer is hired earlier, then there is more time to replace them without the threat of the release looming over the decision. Secondly, one way financiers could save up front costs would be to give the composer at least fifty percent of the PRS upfront (Bell 1994, p.85). Thirdly, as mentioned in relation to the sound crew, composers may be willing to sacrifice extra pay in exchange for extra time. Carter Burwell receives no extra money to be involved in the pre-production discussions with the Coen brothers. He believes in their product enough to forego this possibility. In doing so, Burwell also acknowledges that his work is an integral element to the film, not a separate entity, and he believes it is important to be involved at that time. Fourthly, inviting a composer in early allows the filmmakers to use actual pieces of original score for their temp tracks. As music can often colour the tone and rhythm of a film, this allows the filmmakers to hear how the images and music work together and to avoid the influence of someone else's music. This also allows the composer more time to make the necessary changes, if advised to do so. Lastly, in the words of David Bell (ibid., p.40):

> If communication between the filmmakers and composer took place early enough and often enough to agree on the general style of the music, no major rewrites should be needed [at the recording stage]: it's all a matter of fine-tuning.

What this all suggests is that involving the composer earlier would help the production run smoother because they would not be distracted by office politics, and it would significantly decrease the amount of potential chaos in post-production. As a result, the filmmakers would have a much more cohesive soundtrack. All of which should translate into a less expensive process.

In spite of these benefits, some sound professionals may find the input from so many different individuals disruptive to the flow of creativity. Not everybody is equipped to generate their work in stages and some may prefer to work in isolation. In addition, sound professionals working consistently with one another in partnership with the filmmakers is very time consuming. As Bob Last asserted:

> not just the time of interaction, integrating the results of the interaction itself takes time. It's not the time to talk to each other and consult, but the time it requires exponentially increases if you are going to usefully implement the talking back and forth.

Nevertheless, everything in film production involves time and adjusting to change. The collaborative efforts of a director and an actor may cause a character to grew and transform over the shoot. Instructions from the cinematographer to the lighting crew may be vary from day to day, depending on how closely they are keeping to schedule. Production designers may have to change their set-ups constantly if material is not available or bad weather forces them to consider alternatives. It is also important to keep in mind that most of the initial decisions regarding the above examples are determined before production and would most likely be part of the proposed budget.

Fundamental to this model is regular and consistent communication. There needs to be a broader exchange of ideas between not just filmmakers and sound personnel, but also between all the individuals responsible for the soundtrack. This does not mean that directors need to learn musical terminology or the language of acoustics.[307] It simply means that filmmakers must be prepared to engage with their sound professionals in way that is

[307] According to Burwell, "The discussions should really be about drama and emotion and cinema. They shouldn't really be about music as far as I'm concerned. It's really not helpful to have a Director say, 'I think what you need here are woodwinds. Woodwinds against a small string section' […] In fact, it's often been a problem because a director will say, 'What I want is a trumpet' and what they're really thinking of is an oboe [...]A little bit of musical education is dangerous in that sense (Barnes 2004).

comfortable for both of them. Bell (1994, p.7) recommends filmmakers speak to composers like they speak to actors, meaning that they should discuss sound in terms of emotion and drama. Sider (Parker 2005, p.3) suggests talking about how the world is meant to be heard by the audience and what the emotional undercurrent of that world is. In most cases, guidance is better than instruction and listening proves better than talking. Ultimately, closer working relationships need to be developed to instil a sense of security and build confidence.

One of the most effective ways to initiate these changes is through education. Two prime examples of where this type of instruction can be found is at London's National Film and Television School (NFTS) and at the School of Sound conferences also held in London. The NFTS has been a premier location for the teaching and learning of practical skills involved in film (and television) production for several years, but it has only recently encouraged a more unified approach to the construction of the soundtrack. Approximately three years ago they began implementing a curriculum that puts a priority on collaboration and integration from the earliest stages of the production process. Like many other film schools they had been offering the accepted industrial methods, which focused more on technology and promoted a system where students learning post-production skills worked parallel to one another and then only during the latter stages of the given project.

Currently at the NFTS, all the members of the post-production team (composer, sound designers and picture editors) are being introduced to a different way of working. Larry Sider, Head of Post-production at NFTS, explained how this is implemented from the onset of the course:

> The very first thing they do when they get here is a workshop which is done on mag stock, where they break up into teams of mixed editors, sound people and composers and they draw out random bits of different films that have been made here and then they

> have to create meaning from this. It's an abstract exercise. It's poetic in some ways. They have to use at least 5 recorded words of dialogue. They can use music. They can add sound effects - in a very limited way, maybe three sound effects. It makes them take random elements and build a coherent idea and teaches them about this relationship. This integration is worked out on many different levels, but in a very abstract playful way.[308]

Sider then described how these themes are emphasised throughout the course:

> There are three workshops that work with all three departments and others where we just make sure that when they are working on the same thing with a director that we've built into the schedule crossover points so people understand what the other people are doing. For example, we are coming up to a workshop called Without Words. The fiction directors shoot a five-minute film without the dialogue, so they must tell the story through images and sound and music. During the first week of post-production they cut it, composers are coming in feeding in ideas on temp tracks, sound people may be feeding in ideas. The second week we do the sound edit with the editors on the Avid so it's not taken away to Pro-Tools. There are various workshops like that where we get people to work on each other's territory, making sure there is this constant overlap of work so they are feeding one other.

Sider admitted that there has been some difficulty in establishing these methods throughout the school. He explained that this was not due to resistance but what he called a lack of knowledge because so many people are ingrained with industry methods. This is not only true for the professional tutors who have never communicated their particular area of expertise to others members of the post-production team, but it also influences the students. For example, the course requires students work to scripts and:

> sometimes getting composers to write to script and feed their own temp tracks into the cutting room can be a factor. The thought is that it might be a waste of time and why not wait until later on when they can see the picture when they can have a think about it because they know their other ideas may not be used.

However, Sider is very much in favour of an ethos that asks the student composers to write sketches based on their initial inspiration and then to turn them into the cutting room as their gift to the film. He equates this with the

[308] This and subsequent quotations from Larry Sider are taken from a personal interview (see Appendix E).

way an actor gives their part to the film, which is then shaped by the picture editor. The score can always be refined after this point. Moreover, Sider also said it allows the filmmakers an early form of feedback. He gave this example:

> If you have a composer that comes back with a very sad piece of music having read your script and you think, I thought I had a comedy, you begin to think that there's something in your script that you are not aware of.

Though the student directors are not part of the initial team building workshops, the NFTS emphasises the need for building a bridge between those responsible for the soundtrack and the filmmakers. In relation to the directors themselves, Sider explained how this is progressing:

> working with directors is more difficult because they have to work with three different sets: documentary, animation and fiction. They all have different needs and issues and they don't get to work with them as often. But once thy start working with them on an actual workshop, my ideal is that we all sit down at the beginning and we talk about what is it that makes it different working on this kind of film as oppose to working on another kind of film - what is it about a documentary that poses challenges for an editor, a composer and a sound person? How do they work together? Do they work together in this instance or is it more separate? Can it be helped by coming together? How can these be done within the schedule and time restraints that we have? If you're editing for all this time, do you need a composer working at the same time?

To describe how this relates to the other members of the crew, he then added:

> There's no point in talking to a composer about technique unless you have a director there because they will say, the director told me to do this - it's a negotiation. So there's tutoring along the lines of: what did you ask for? What are the words you used? How do you respond to that? How can this person best understand your ideas - through what kind of language? Same thing with sound and editing. How are you talking to one another? Are you talking to one another?

The objective of these talks is to ensure that all those involved in the production of a particular project are pursuing the same goal, that is, the

techniques and strategies discussed reflect the needs of the film rather than the individuals.

Nonetheless, the NFTS is deficient when it comes to offering their students film history and theory. It is no surprise that these topics would be at a lower priority, as with most film schools, it is practice-based and prefers to focus on what is readily applicable. Currently guest speakers offer history and theory lectures one day a week, and they are not targeted at any specific area of filmmaking. However, Sider is eager to include more history and theory at the NFTS because he sees it as another way of unifying departments.

In its fledging status this new curriculum at the NFTS is still evolving. It is also influencing the way other institutions teach the filmmaking process, such as Bournemouth University, which has transformed its two MA programmes in Sound and Music Design for the Moving Image to an MA in Post Production. The name change is the result of embracing this new methodology that emphasises the unity of all three disciplines: picture editing, music and sound design. What is more important is that this new curriculum is giving a new generation of filmmakers an alternative mode of production.

The School of Sound offers those interested in the uses of aural ingredients an even broader emphasis of that perspective. Larry Sider, who is also the co-founder of The School of Sound, offered this explanation of its origins:

> The School of Sound began as a reaction to the way sound is generally under-valued in film and television, both in professional productions and where it is taught, in film schools and media courses (Sider, Freeman & Sider 2003, p.vii).

Established in 1995, the format of the School of Sound is to combine the commercial side with new sound media installations through a series of symposiums of master classes on all three forms of sound: music, dialogue

and effects. Its principle objective is to bring together an international audience from various disciplines to discuss and share ideas that explore the non-technical uses of sound. Sider explained:

> We wanted people to take time out from 'doing' in order to think about the creativity, imagination and ingenuity that our speakers - who come from different cultures and work in different areas of the arts and media with different technology - use in producing effective audio-visual creations (ibid., p.vii).

The first School of Sound was held in April 1998, and there have been five others since that date. Each conference has featured a wide assortment of speakers, ranging from professionals in Hollywood such as Walter Murch, David Lynch, Mike Figgis, Dede Allen and Michael Nyman; to academics, such as Sarah Kozloff, Laura Mulvey, Ian Christie, Michael Chanan and Michel Chion; to experimental artists, such as Gerhard Eckel, Joëlle Bouvier, Heiner Goebbels and Chris Petit. In addition to this, both Carter Burwell and Skip Lievsay have given talks at the School of Sound (in 2001 and 2003, respectively).

Many speakers have echoed the arguments made in this thesis. In particular, composer Gabriel Yared,[309] who spoke at the 2005 School of Sound, expressed a keen interest in being involved from the beginning of a project.[310] He preferred reading the script and creating musical sketches before seeing the images because it allowed him to capture "the spirit of the film". He, in fact, tended not to work to images at all. Yared's explanation for this was that "[He is] a craftsman, not a factory". Quite often these early

[309] Gabriel Yared is best known for his work with the director Anthony Minghella. His credits include: EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF (Godard 1980), THE ENGLISH PATIENT (Minghella 1996), THE TALENTED MR RIPLEY (Minghella 1999) and COLD MOUNTAIN (Minghella 2003).

[310] Information given in this paragraph and the following paragraph is based on notes taken at the conference, which includes any quotations, unless otherwise stated.

sketches would be used on set to guide actors and the director. He added that this also educates the filmmakers by compelling them to listen to music with the images together before the final mix. He emphasised that this would be possible if the composer has built a relationship with the director, editor and sound personnel, and to do so, he said required more time.

Sound professionals emphasised notions that reflected the conscious integration of sound and image. At the 2003 School of Sound, Walter Murch, in his capacity as picture editor and sound designer, spoke of viewing the dailies silently in order to understand how the scene is telling the story. He admitted that sound collisions may occur, but feels that they would aid you in discovering which aural ingredients are feasible for that sequence. Also at the 2003 conference, Ren Klyce expressed the value of having access to the sets before post-production because it allowed him to 'capture' the natural acoustics of the environment. In his talk at the 2005 conference, Klyce also posited the idea that technology was stifling creativity. He felt that technology was accelerating the filmmaking process, which encourages the studio's expectations of bringing more films into the marketplace; thus putting more pressure on those responsible for their creation to work within narrower timeframes. Moreover, at the 1999 School of Sound, Owe Svensson, sound mixer, editor and recordist, emphasised the homogeneity of film by stating:

> none of the components can live on their own: they are all interdependent. If you consider an edited film without the soundtrack, it is only a sketch. Pictures in their own right can be beautiful and emotional in many ways, but they cannot gain depth without sound. It heightens the feelings. Film, in its highest sense, is a total experience of sound and vision (Sider, Freeman & Sider 2003b, p.117).

The new curriculum at the National Film and Television School and the School of Sound indicates a growing trend. They demonstrate that sound

professionals and academics are beginning to challenge the long-standing conventions held by the Hollywood mainstream. They also confirm that future practitioners are interested in pursuing this change, and that anticipates exciting prospects for the film industry. Above all, as they have only begun recently, one can assume that their promotion of sound will continue and this will further encourage the greater integration of sound in the filmmaking process.

In consideration of all that has been discussed in this thesis, let us reflect on the words of Michel Chion (1994, p.142):

> Re-evaluating the role of sound in film history and according it its true importance is not purely a critical or historical enterprise. The future of cinema is at stake.

Following the practices advocated in this thesis will not guarantee that any film will be of superior quality. That may be a perceivable outcome, but this judgment would have to be based on subjective criteria and would therefore be impossible to qualify. What these recommendations do offer is another way of making films that allows for all of the professionals involved to work in unity. These practices would provide every member of the team the opportunity to be aware of the entire process of the filmmaking experience. This would encourage a stronger partnership between the individuals responsible for constructing the soundtrack. This would also help build closer relationships among those individuals and the filmmakers. Ultimately, they would assist in readdressing the bias against sound that has been part of the American film industry for many decades.