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(for Sound/Image)

***Bodyguard*: The Rush of the Ride**

Introduction

The drama series *Bodyguard,* aired on BBC 1 in the UK between 26 August and 23 September 2018, attracted a considerable amount of media attention along with remarkably high viewing figures. Its twisting narrative, inscrutable characters and high production values, together with cliff hanger plot devices, kept viewers engaged from one week to the next. Indeed, with the help of enthusiastic media coverage and 'catch up' viewing, the show managed to build on an initial 'overnight' audience of 6.8 million until, for its sixth and final episode, 10.4 million viewers tuned in.[1] With the exception of royal weddings, major sporting events or similarly significant occasions, such viewing figures are hardly ever achieved during a scheduled broadcast in our era of ubiquitous streamed content and 'on demand' platforms. A month after the final episode, according to the *Independent*, over 38 million requests had been made for the I-Player box set.[2]

Jed Mercurio, the writer of the series, self-effacingly attributed the success of *Bodyguard* to the 'magnetism' of lead actors Keeley Hawes and Richard Madden. The BBC's Simon Heath, CEO & Creative Director of World Productions agreed, telling the BBC's online *Media Centre* that 'These figures reflect how Jed's terrific scripts in combination with Richard and Keeley's brilliant performances made

[1] Several million more viewed the final episode via BBC iPlayer https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/sep/24/bodyguard-audience-peaks-with-104m-viewers-series-finale-bbc [Accessed 14/11/2018]

[2] https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/bodyguard-viewing-figures-record-tv-drama-episode-bbc-season-2-a8597681.html [Accessed 14/11/2018]

Bodyguard 'appointment to view' TV'.[3] These explanations, however, focusing as they do on popular conceptions of the television writer-auteur and celebrity-star, do not give due credit to the role of televisual craft in the show's success. The star line-up and legacy of earlier successful dramas certainly had attention-grabbing potential; however, this chapter will argue that *Bodyguard* managed to draw and maintain high viewing figures largely because the makers understood how to integrate sound and image to seduce and grip an audience.

Notwithstanding the hype, the convoluted plot of the show was implausible at times, while the murky motivations of its characters did little to draw audiences into the 'reality' of the story world.[4] The highly anticipated final episode in particular, as many commentators remarked,[5] stretched the viewer's credulity to breaking point. However, such reservations proved unimportant as audiences rode the emotional rollercoaster of every episode and were left on tenterhooks by each beautifully crafted, if improbable, cliff hanger. Week after week, the show successfully deployed the storytelling strategies of the action movie, leaving no time or space for a reality check amid the adrenalin rush of the ride.

Sound: sublimely manipulative

The series editing[6] was complex and fluid, while sound design and music converge in a darkly artful masterpiece. We would argue that the creative and

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[3] https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2018/bodyguard-ratings [Accessed 14/11/2018]

[4] Reviews in the popular press, like this example from the *Telegraph*, were quick to critique the plot, but all agreed that viewing pleasure was entirely independent of such concerns. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/0/believable-bodyguards-bomb-scene-asked-experts/ [Accessed 26/11/2018]

[5] For example in this *Guardian* review: https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/sep/24/barely-credible-but-who-cares-your-bodyguard-reviews (accessed 14/11/2018)

[6] By Andrew McClelland and Steve Singleton

evocative use of sound throughout the series played a particularly important role in *Bodyguard's* appeal and popular success. That this is not as widely acknowledged in its critical reception is unsurprising, given the endemic neglect of sound in so much writing about film and television. As Michel Chion remarks: 'In continuing to say that we "see" a film or a television program, we persist in ignoring how the soundtrack has modified perception.' (1994, p.xxvi).[7] Yet sound has always been an essential component of the cinematic 'ride'. Live sound, typically provided by an organ, piano or string instruments, was already critical to the cinema audience's experience in the era of the 'silent' movie, and with the advent of synchronous sound recording and amplification during the late 1920s[8], cinema realised further potential for narrative complexity. Chion (p.5) describes the 'added value' that accrues when sound and image work together to create an experience that is far more than the sum of its carefully edited parts.

According to Stephen Deutsch (2007) the key functions of a film or television soundtrack[9] can be categorised as either literal (supporting the credibility of the story-space) or emotive (inducing the audience to feel something about what they are seeing). Arguably cinema has more consistently explored sound's potential in terms of the latter function than television. Whereas film has its roots in spectacle, heightened by the affective promptings of non-diegetic sound, television drama has historically relied more on dialogue driven narrative to engage audiences. This was attributable in part to television's status as the domestic successor to radio, in part to a commercial model predicated on a fast and repetitive production turnaround, and in part to technical limitations. However, technological advances have responded to (and generated) consumer demand for better image and sound quality, as well as adapting to creative drivers, changing production systems and commercial relationships. The most recent impact of these developments can be seen in the advent of what Jason

[7] Indeed of Christian Metz's five channels of cinematic expression (moving photographic image, dialogue, noise, music, and written materials), three are auditory.

[8] Notwithstanding a widely-held expectation in its early days that sound should slavishly demonstrate a direct causal link to image.

[9] The combined sum of all aural elements: speech, sound effects, atmospheres, music, narration etc.

Mittell (2015) has called ‘Complex TV’, elsewhere referred to as ‘quality’ or ‘appointment to view’ television. . Mittell discusses this new breed of drama largely in terms of narrative strategies and character; however, they are also marked by generous production budgets enabling the technically sophisticated use of sound and image referred to within the industry as ‘high production values’. Commercially, ‘high production values’ have become part of the armoury employed by broadcasters and streaming platforms, to remain competitive in a crowded marketplace. While by no means guaranteeing creativity, the resources made available through increasingly complex co-production and distribution models have supported an ambitious approach to the craft of programme making. Thus shows like *Game of Thrones* (2011-19), which made Richard Madden a star, exploit the advantages of long-form narrative in terms of complex plotting while at the same time offering audiences the more visceral pleasures of spectacle, soundscape and the emotional ‘ride’.

Setting the tone: sound and image in the opening scene of *Bodyguard*

Bodyguard certainly demonstrates considerable creative ambition in its visual storytelling and, in particular, its atmospheric sound design. Its unnerving score and frequently claustrophobic framing create an overarching sense of paranoia that speaks to contemporary concerns with a vague but ubiquitous terror threat. The opening scene depicts the central protagonist single-handedly foiling a terrorist’s attempt to detonate a suicide bomb on a crowded train. Shots along the length of the moving train, surveying the large number of passengers at risk, together with busy external wide shots depicting troops of police officers and emergency vehicles, suggest the scale and jeopardy of the situation. At the same time mid -shots and close-ups, particularly of our hero, framed within carriage doorways and in the low-ceilinged, constricted spaces on board, serve to produce a sense of entrapment and escalating tension. However, the most critical factor in producing the intense paranoia that pervades the scene is the soundtrack, an ambiguous blend of composed music and aural *mise-en-scène*. The unsettling score integrates atmospheric elements of the diegetic story world

such as train squeaks and rumbles, in an approach that owes more to Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète*[10] than to a conventional musical underscore.

This element of ambiguity in the soundtrack plays a significant role in establishing and reinforcing an emotional undertow of paranoia and dread, as well as contributing the more specific ebb and flow of dramatic tension that drives the narrative. Sonic ambiguity, as Brian Kane (2014) argues, has an unsettling function in audio-visual texts. Its workings in *Bodyguard* can be understood from the perspective of diegetic fluidity and from that of acousmatic sound, a term borrowed from musicology.

Claudia Gorbman (1976) first coined the term extra-diegetic (later revised to 'non-diegetic'[11]) to describe all sounds that are within the screen work, but outside the story-world: sounds that, like most specially-composed musical elements, cannot be heard by characters in that world. These she distinguished from diegetic sounds: sounds with their origins in the world of the film, irrespective of whether such sounds are on-screen or off-screen, recorded synchronously or added in post-production. She also identified a third set of sonic elements, meta-diegetic sounds, which can only be heard by one particular character – such as imagined sounds or aural hallucinations. While the theoretical distinction between these typologies may be clear, in practice there is a degree of diegetic fluidity in audio-visual texts, which can be exploited by composers and sound designers to create ambiguity in the viewing experience. The soundtrack of *Bodyguard* teases the audience with sounds that move between diegeses to create an element of instability that reinforces the paranoid undertow of the text.

Acousmatic sound was originally theorised by Jérôme Peignot in 1955, and further described by Pierre Schaeffer a decade later as 'sounds one hears

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[10] Music created by recording naturally occurring sounds, and using them as compositional source material

[11] In her seminal book *Unheard Melodies* (1987).

without seeing their originating cause' (Chion 1994, p.71). Repurposing the musicological term for audio-visual media, Chion uses it to describe sound that manifests a specific kind of diegetic ambiguity. In his definition, acousmatic sound is usually resolved, as it is 'visualized first, and subsequently acousmatized, or it is acousmatic to start with, and is visualized only afterward' (ibid. p.72). Where the sound begins with a visual source but subsequently becomes an independent element of the sound track, it can carry with it the narrative and emotive associations of its diegetic origins. The effect of an acousmatic sound that precedes the visual confirmation of its diegetic source, on the other hand, has much in common with the function of the enigma (Hermeneutic) and action (Proairetic) narrative codes theorised by Roland Barthes (1974), whereby an audience is drawn in by the implied question, then offered a satisfying (or partly satisfying) resolution to that question.

The opening credits of *Bodyguard* offer a prime example of *acousmêtre*. The episode begins with a black screen, then, out of the black, comes a sound: 'rattatatat – rattatatat – rattatatat'. A moment later, the single word, 'BODYGUARD' appears in bold, white letters on the black background. As the font increases in size, the colour in 'GUARD' is gradually wiped away from right to left, to leave only 'BODY' highlighted, while the final syllable has been rendered into a thin outline of 'GUARD'. Still, the 'rattatatats' burst rhythmically on.

The title's visual dichotomy sows a seed of doubt, suggesting that not everything is as it first appears. This visual shift is echoed in the soundtrack: the 'rattatatat' seems to represent bursts of gunfire from an automatic rifle, but as the title fades back to black, the staccato sound changes subtly in tone as it is joined by a Doppler effect[12], the 'neeeeeeow' of an engine approaching at speed. At the 'up and past' moment, the picture cuts to the top of a young man's head, suddenly raised and turning towards a window. The man (Madden) has woken with a start. As he blinks and looks around him, a whip-pan reveals that he is in a train carriage, and the sound is nothing more alarming than two trains passing on the

[12] A perceived semi-tone shift of the sound of an object passing at speed.

tracks. The opening has successfully conveyed a sense of premonition and subtle paranoia through its shape-shifting sound and graphic design.

The ambiguous nature of the programme's overture creates a disturbing sense of non-specific danger, as well as a glimpse into the inner world of the protagonist: a meta-diegetic sonic landscape in which gunshots are more recognisable than the mundane sound of a train encroaching on sleep. The transformation of gunshot to train-sound foreshadows a complex backstory, hinting at the PTSD that will prove a key factor in understanding our hero, and his reactions to the events that will unfold during the series. A key enigma is set up within less than ten seconds through image and sound: who is this man, and why is he haunted by the sound of automatic rifle fire in his dreams?

The thunderous whoosh of train passing train subsides and gives way to a calmer ambience. An interior railway carriage at night, most passengers asleep or quietly resting, some snippets of subdued, indistinguishable conversations merge with a reassuringly bland interior thrum. This relative aural stillness within the fast moving train is augmented by the sound of the man's breathing, as he regains his equilibrium and looks around the carriage. The sounds of his breathing, and physical movements as he shifts in his seat, are the sonic equivalent to a camera zoom. As we adjust to the new acoustic landscape, the protagonist scans the interior. We are not initially shown what he is looking at, because the important visual and emotional anchor in this moment is the table at which the man is seated within the carriage, and in particular the two children asleep next to him. The symbolism of this vignette is powerful. The man, set up by the single word 'bodyguard' of the title, is now shown watching these children, caring, covering them with their coats and reassuring them as they stir in their slumber. The children surrender themselves to the protection of their parent, mirroring the relationship of trust between 'subject' and bodyguard.

Our protagonist surveys the busy platform where the train has just stopped. In the foreground, people brush through the frame this way and that. Beyond the passing bodies, and the reflected faces of passengers in the carriage window,

something catches his attention: a man in a big coat, standing on the platform talking on a mobile phone. This ordinary moment swiftly takes an unexpected turn: on finishing his conversation, the man breaks the phone and deposits tit in a rubbish bin, before boarding the train. Something is not as it should be. As the image cuts to a mid-shot of our protagonist, his interest clearly piqued, a sonic gesture emphasises this curious moment. Not as yet a discernible musical score, but a high pitched metallic sound in keeping with the railway setting, this sound intensifies as the camera zooms in closer on the protagonist's troubled gaze. Once again, the sound of his breathing reinforces the audiences' alignment with his perspective.

In visual terms, the physical separation between exterior (train platform) and interior (passengers on the train) is transcended by our protagonist's ability to notice what others do not. Aurally it is bridged by that metallic sound, the origin of which is never confirmed. Although initially the audience may feel inclined to decode the metallic sound as that of another train's brake squeals, it is soon joined by further harmonic elements that belie a specific diegetic source or location: the sound has metamorphosed into musical score. Dialogue is almost completely absent. Conventional examples of televised crime drama tend to rely heavily on dialogue to set up the premise of the story, but here it has been limited to a few soothing reassurances to settle the sleeping children and a couple of platform announcements during the train's brief stop. Human speech has been treated as just another component in a tapestry of sound, providing an anodyne atmosphere of normality inside the train carriage, now in counterpoint to emerging unsettling elements of the soundscape.

Throughout the sequence, the score (composed by Ruth Barrett and Ruskin Williamson) has a chameleon-like quality, imperceptibly emerging from the metallic landscape of train squeaks and squeals, building gradually into something more recognisably score-like, before dissolving again into the sonic ambience of the train's interior. In merging environmental sounds with musical elements, this nuanced soundscape draws on the legacy of John Cage's

compositional experiments as well as Schaeffer's *musique concrète*.[13] But this is not concert music – this is a carefully crafted underscore that hides amongst the foliage of the story, emerging and disappearing like a portentous ghost in the machine.

Enigma and action: tension and resolution in the opening scene

We are less than two minutes into the episode but we are already invested in the world of the story. Responding to the powerful combination of enigmatic visual storytelling and seductive sonic cues, our curiosity has been aroused, and our emotions engaged - aligning us closely with the protagonist who is still observing the stranger on the platform. With our hero, we clearly see the stranger's face for just a moment, as he looks back up the platform - then a continuous point-of-view shot follows him along the platform, peering through one window, then another, before panning round to check the interior of the lobby between carriages where we anticipate the stranger will embark. He does not appear. Instead there is an empty space where we (and our hero) might have expected to see him, a space framed by other passengers settling themselves and their luggage ready for their journey. Meanwhile, the high-pitched sound (suggestive of steel on steel, although the train is not actually moving at this moment) evolves into a plaintive moan. The tension is punctured by an unseen guard blowing a whistle, and a distant 'Stand clear of the doors'. The whistle constitutes an aural sleight of hand, pushing the disturbing sound from our perception; as it fades, the implied threat dissolves into more ordinary train noises. The soundtrack here is closely aligned to the protagonist's point-of-view. A medium close-up shows him momentarily troubled by the 'missing' passenger while the moan continues; then, as the whistle sounds, he briefly checks on his sleeping children before raising his eyebrows as though to dismiss his concerns, and opening a book – this last action accompanied by quiet but distinct Foley to accentuate the moment.

[13] Coincidentally, *Etude aux chemin de fer*, the 1948 composition which embodied Schaeffer's idea of creating music from the noises of real world objects, was about train sounds.

At this point, a cut to the exterior shows a high-angle shot of the train departing slowly from the station, gathering momentum amidst a new sonic backdrop of squeaks and metallic screeches: elements that straddle the perceptual edge of ambience and musical score. Suddenly, there is a further element in the soundtrack: a dark and ominous sound is heard as the train moves off, inducing doubt as to whether all has indeed returned to normality. The portentous sound gesture, reminiscent of the deep drone that evolved into an iconic cypher of danger in *Inception's* 2010 soundtrack, is almost immediately lost amongst ordinary train noises, but now the audience is primed to expect more drama. The rising tones of the soundtrack that overlay the diegetic sounds, bridging to the next scene, seem to pose a question, emphasising the enigmatic structure of the narrative.

Back in the train compartment, our hero puts down his book as a train guard walks past him. He watches her surreptitiously size up a passenger, as if discretely looking for someone. The other travellers seem oblivious, but the audience recognises the significance of her actions, not only because we are aligned with our hero in the shot/reverse- shot sequence, but also because of the dissonant soundscape which has increasingly washed into the interior atmosphere of the train ever since it resumed its journey. Whilst we are shown mundane shots of the train interior – a close up of a water bottle, gently vibrating on a train table, a focus pull from anonymous passengers to a diffuse and dark landscape scrolling past the exterior of the train – the soundtrack raises the spectre of fresh dangers through a build-up of cacophonous screeches and squeals, alongside the plaintive moan heard earlier. These sounds now dominate the sonic foreground as the guard, finding the toilet beyond the carriage door to be locked, calls out to its occupant. Seen in long-shot, the sounds of her knock on the toilet door and her voice are pushed into the background by the anxiety-inducing score. This moment aligns us closely with the protagonist's aural and visual perspective, enforcing the primacy of emotion over information in the functioning of the scene's soundtrack.

Commented [CvR1]: Illustrating? Demonstrating?

Evidently troubled by the locked toilet door, the train guard walks back down the carriage. The dissonant soundscape increases slightly in volume and pitch as she passes our hero: these metallic screeches and moans bear a closer relationship to the emotional temperature of the drama, than to the movements of the train that provide their diegetic alibi. The metallic sounds dissipate as our hero decides to take action. Setting off down the carriage, he catches up with the woman between compartments, following her into the train guard's office. For the first time in the episode, the soundtrack foregrounds dialogue. The man introduces himself: David Budd, a police officer trained in firearms and personal protection. From the guard we learn of an imminent threat posed by a suicide bomber believed to have boarded the train. The crew have been instructed to divert the train into a disused depot, where armed counter-terrorism units are waiting. Budd proposes to work with the railway staff limit the potential danger of an explosion. All essential exposition is condensed within this brief exchange, allowing the focus to shift once again onto the atmospheric suspense created through sound and image.

An exterior segue to the railway depot reveals the scale of the counter-terrorism operation underway. The soundtrack mixes the wail of police sirens and the swish of vehicles arriving on the wet siding with a dissonant aurality similar to that which accompanied the train's departure. As the commanding officer dispenses instructions, a low, rhythmic beat starts up, throbbing across the cut back to the interior of the train, where Budd now searches for the suspected suicide bomber. As he walks through the train, the pulsing soundtrack continues in its gradual build-up of tension, augmented by further aural elements gradually rising in pitch. A low tracking shot follows Budd's progress so that we see the faces of each of the unsuspecting passengers he passes, emphasising jeopardy of the situation. The last passenger clearly shown before Budd exits to the next carriage is a woman comforting a crying baby. The sound of the baby's voice continues to reverberate within the soundtrack for slightly longer than necessitated by the diegesis, marking the vulnerability of the lives at stake.

Moving into the next carriage, Budd pauses a moment and gasps[14], as if taken by surprise, by the sight of his own children, still sleeping peacefully where he left them. Regaining his composure, he makes his way to the locked toilet, his search for the bomber again accompanied by a rising tone that straddles diegetic and non-diegetic spheres.

Budd's breathing and the Foley accentuating his movements continue to be gently exaggerated within the mix, their hyper-real representation focusing our attention on his perilous progress. The throbbing sounds, muffled and rhythmic enough to blend into the diegetic sounds of a train journey, increase in intensity until his mobile phone loses its network signal in the middle of a tense conversation with the train guard. Simultaneously the predictability of the rhythmic beat is snatched away by the sonic impact of the train entering a railway tunnel. With the rhythmic structure removed, the audience is left hanging onto the visual cue of the absent signal bars on Budd's mobile. The soundtrack foregrounds his breathing, as the tension continues to intensify through the high-pitched *glissando*[15] of the score-cum-sound-design, suggesting the sound of our train apparently (though not, strictly speaking, logically) gathering speed. The moment of suspense ruptures with the sound of the train emerging from the tunnel, and the simultaneous visual cue showing the return of the mobile signal. Rhythmic sound effects return in the background, but now a faster paced, metallic variant, that creates a peculiarly brittle sense of tension.

During their brief telephone exchange, Budd has instructed the guard to unlock the train doors, so that he can attempt to throw the bomber from the train. As he prepares to carry out his plan the soundtrack reprises the portentous sound, previously introduced over the high-angle shot of the departing train, a sonic gesture redolent with brooding inevitability. Just as the train is now in motion, events also seem set on a pre-destined course. Visually, the editing follows the intensifying pitch and rhythm of the sound, cutting between close-ups of the

[14] According to Dan Johnson, dubbing mixer and dialogue editor at Molinaire Sound, the post-production sound team invested considerable attention to recording breath sounds for Madden's character to intensify the audience's emotional engagement.
[15] Perhaps more accurately referred to as a Shepard-Risset glissando

train door, the guard, the toilet door and Budd in turn as, jaw-muscles clenched, his gaze intent on the 'engaged' sign, he prepares to pounce. Many of these images are edited during a zoom, enforcing the notion of moving ever closer to a climax. The sound of Budd's shallow, fast breathing augments the building sense of dread, paralleled by the continually rising pitch of the background blend of train noises and tensely orchestrated score.

At the height of emotionally charged expectation, the lavatory is unlocked and out steps the man whom Budd had previously observed on the platform, but now divested of the bulky jacket that could have concealed a suicide-vest. In this moment of anti-climax, the two men eye each other up, while the orchestration of sonic tension is suspended and the ambience returns to the mundane chuntering of the train carriage's interior. But this narrative resolution is incomplete, its uncertainty echoed in the soundtrack, as a new element is introduced: a rather unnerving creaking of unclear origin, which remains with us as Budd follows his erstwhile suspect down the carriage. Once Budd is satisfied that the man poses no further threat, the creaking effect fades away, and Budd updates the train guard, informing her that he is going to search the toilet.

A brief exterior scene reminds us that the threat has not been entirely dissipated. Counter-terrorism forces are assembled on the railway siding, where the train will arrive in three minutes – a timeframe emphasised as the commanding officer repeats the information to her troops. Back on the train, however, as Budd resumes his investigations, mundane ambient sound belies the potential for ongoing danger. This absence of tension in the soundtrack is, of course, a deliberate ploy to maximise the dramatic impact of the next moment: Budd pushes the toilet door open to find himself confronted by a terrified woman wearing a suicide-vest, a rapid cut-away showing her thumb on the detonator. For the third time, we hear the low-pitched sound of threat, now orchestrated into a resonating bass note. While the dissonant orchestration of train-related noises resumes, it is now punctuated by the shallow but intense sound of the woman's breathing. As the two exchange startled glances the background score builds edgy, electronic sounds of returning danger. In the ensuing sequence,

Budd - evidently a veteran negotiator - tries to build a rapport with the would-be bomber, who seems torn between engaging with him and detonating the suicide-vest. The growing sense of trust between them is mirrored by a temporary dissipation in the jarring soundtrack. However, the resulting lull only serves to heighten the impact of the resonating sonic gesture that accompanies the next dramatic close-up of the woman's thumb on the red button, as her destructive intentions appear rekindled.

Each time the woman's (and the camera's) focus returns to the detonator, the resonating sound signals impending doom. Each time the danger seems to have passed, it is replaced by an uneasy blend of breathing and train noises. Meanwhile the volatility of the situation is sonified through an array of subtly irritating non-diegetic sounds: jarring strings and moans, echoing the earlier soundtrack. The individual booming sounds become more frequent, following as they do the woman's movements and Budd's fears, until they build into a single, continuous presence. The reverberating tone underscores Budd's increasingly desperate pleas, until finally the woman appears to relent, dissolving into tears, and the tension is alleviated by a cut to the train guard receiving Budd status update.

Recurrent aural themes

The opening scene establishes a highly emotive and ambiguous soundscape, which utilises sound elements from the story space and shifts elusively between diegetic ambience and musical score. Sound here does far more than simply support the storytelling affordances of image: it challenges, undercuts, and heightens the images by turn weaving a complex tapestry of meaning and emotion. It also sets up a number of aural themes that will be revisited over the course of the series. The first of these is an elaborate soundtrack incorporating *leitmotifs* derived from train noises. The second is the use of quiet ambient sound, rendered uncanny in contrast to the dominant sonic mode. The third is the use of point-of-audition and meta-diegetic sound to align the audience with the drama's protagonist, drawing us into his inner world. All three themes

involve the soundscape work closely with – and at times, it seems, against – the imagery of the programme to manage and manipulate audience engagement with the programme.

1. Revisiting the acousmatic sound palette: the recurrence of sonic motifs

The opening scene utilises a rich repertoire of sounds, either literally drawn from the diegetic world or suggested by it, to create a sense of realism and guide our emotional response. The soundtrack of *Bodyguard* will continue to draw on this repertoire in successive episodes, where, divorced from their original setting, they are deployed purely for their emotive impact. They function as what Barbara Flückiger (2001) calls *unidentifizierbare Klangobjekte* or UKOs: unidentified sound objects that have no clear source within the story-space.[16] A UKO, intrinsically ambiguous, has the ability to create an atmosphere of unease within a text, particularly when the source is never revealed. The soundtrack of *Bodyguard* frequently hovers on the edge of resolution, where UKOs are potentially explained by trains, traffic or other diegetic sources, but behave like non-diegetic effects, fading and returning with the movement of the narrative and without reference to any visual cue in the story-world.

The opening scene has established a sound palette largely based on railway trains, along with diegetically ambiguous *motifs* such as the low, ominous note associated with the would-be suicide bomber. In subsequent episodes this same palette is used at moments of extreme tension, and the same *motifs* recur, serving to associate different narrative strands and to reconnect the audience with the emotional dimension of the opening scene. In episode two, after a sniper attack on his 'subject', Home Secretary Julia Montague (Keeley Hawes), Budd tracks the attacker through the deserted corridors of an office building, when an effect of steel on steel is heard, like a train grinding to a halt. A similar combination of sounds is used over a sustained period in episode three, during

[16] The source of a UKO sound element may never be revealed, creating an air of mystery such as that which characterises the enigmatic soundscape created by Alan Splet for David Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1977).

the run-up to a second assassination attempt on Montague. Again we hear the deep and portentous sound of doom, together with the high metallic effect that heralded the bomb plot on the train. Again the effect of brakes squeaking on a railway track intensifies dramatic tension as the Home Secretary begins her speech; the railway sounds all the more effective for their diegetic incongruity, existing as they do in counterpoint to the imagery of politician, autocue and audience These effects have become UKOs: 'sound objects' freed from their origins, yet powerfully reminiscent of earlier moments of tension within the text.

Owing to the byzantine twists and turns of the intervening plot, the final episode sees Budd become a suspected terrorist and the reluctant wearer of a suicide-vest. Action focused on disarming the device mirrors the opening scene to 'bookend' the story arc, the symmetry reinforced by the soundtrack. When Budd (having been drugged and kidnapped) comes round to find himself trapped in a suicide-vest of the same design as that used during the opening scene, we hear the same reverberating, ominous tone. The sound is repeated as he inspects the device and uncovers each of its diabolical features. Metallic sounds reminiscent of train wheels, brakes and gears, and a beat very like the rhythmic sound of the engine, are combined with sounds that mimic the Doppler effect of passing trains. These are repeated at intervals under the musical score that drives the action and the diegetic sounds of sirens and traffic. The incongruity of train noises is what turns out to be a London street is matched by the visual incongruity of Budd standing in the middle of that street, bloodied, bruised and wrapped in a filthy blanket. When Budd finally sets about disabling the device, the soundtrack again exploits a repertoire of train sounds incongruous within the quiet, leafy residential location where the scene is set. Removed from their diegetic context, these sounds are rendered all the more disturbing, their ambiguous origins and emotive associations contributing to the overall effect of prolonged and almost unbearable tension.

2. *The absence of sound: the use of silence and ambient sound*

At the climactic moment, as Budd prepares to disarm the bomb, most sound elements are reduced, rendering a scene of comparative silence. A relatively

open ambience of bird song, wind in trees and an occasional distant helicopter is mixed with Budd's Foley which complements the extreme close-ups that track his tense and tentative movements. It is as though the soundtrack itself were holding its breath - the aural equivalent of Hitchcock's empty frame, just waiting for someone to step into it; [17] this is the silence that precedes an explosion. When no explosion comes, we, with our hero, can breathe out again as the silence is filled with the sounds of distant traffic, mixed into an ominous rattle that warns us the job is not yet done. The release in tension is echoed in the cinematography as the intensely focused close-ups are replaced by a more relaxed wide shot before Budd makes a run for it.

Ironically, it was the arrival of synchronous sound that facilitated the concept of silence in the cinema, for silence acquires meaning only when contrasted with sound. Chion (1994, p.89) distinguishes between absolute and relative silence: whilst the sonic dynamics of louder and quieter sections are a staple of most dramatic narratives, the concept of absolute silence is more eerie. It has become a science fiction signifier of outer space,[18] but is more often the preserve of a meta-diegetic state. In *Bodyguard,* the use of relative silence is effective due to the contrast it provides with a complex dominant soundtrack that layers music and effects over a noisy urban diegetic soundscape.

The series harnesses relative quiet and ambient sound in manipulating audience response. In the opening scene, the discovery of the *actual* suicide bomber is preceded by non-threatening ambient sound, designed to lull the audience into a false sense of security after the earlier aural intensity. Similarly, the first assassination attempt in episode two is preceded by a pulsing beat and anticipatory score – which then dissipates with a cut to the interior of the Home Secretary's car; here only the sound of the muffled engine is heard, beneath a

[17] A useful discussion of Hitchcock's technique is to be found in William Rothman's book *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze,* 2nd Ed (1984 pp239-242)

[18] Though strictly speaking only experienced in an anechoic chamber, absolute silence (or at least a filmic version thereof) has been used to great aesthetic effect in science fiction, aided by advances in noise reduction and other post-production technology.

brief exchange between Budd and Julia We are distracted not only by the dialogue itself, in which Julia is clearly being less that transparent with Budd, but also by the image of her face which is shown in the rear view mirror, framed and partly veiled by the play of reflected light that suggests an element of mystery. When the relative quiet is shattered by the sound of gunfire and breaking glass, the audience is as surprised and shocked as the protagonists.

A variation on this narrative strategy is used earlier in the episode, when a lorry packed with explosives heads for a school. Its approach is accompanied by a rising tone and pulsing rhythm alongside sounds of traffic, sirens, screaming children, and eventually the gun-fire that brings the lorry crashing to a halt. The soundscape is instantly reduced to the eerie effects of a car alarm, a dog barking in the distance and the horn onto which the lorry's driver has collapsed. The absence of a non-diegetic score makes the explosion, when it comes, all the more shocking. Immediately after the blast, all sound is muffled, as though heard by a bystander, temporarily deafened by its shockwave. This draws the audience into a diegetic point-of-audition, to experience the incident as a witness at the scene, rather than spectating from beyond the story-world.

3. Subjectivity through sound: point of audition and meta-diegesis

Sound plays an essential part in establishing subjectivity in *Bodyguard.* In a text so riven with paranoia as *Bodyguard,* even the protagonist cannot be trusted – especially a protagonist so obviously damaged as Budd. As an audience, there are moments in the series when we are not entirely sure where his loyalties lie. Is he using Julia? Spying on her? Working against her? Complicit in her assassination? Without insight into his thoughts or motivation, these nagging doubts persist.[19] To cultivate an effective dramatic connection, it is all the more essential that we are emotionally aligned with our flawed and fallible hero.

[19] This cognitive distance is most starkly apparent in the moment before the second assassination attempt, when he demands to see inside a suspect briefcase; when it is opened we are offered no reverse shot revealing the contents – only Budd's inscrutable reaction.

In the opening scene we found ourselves aligned with Budd in terms of visual point-of-view. We were also explicitly aligned in terms of Budd's point-of-audition, allowing us to hear sounds taking pace within the story-world from the aural perspective of the protagonist. A similar emphasis on Budd's point-of-view/audition occurs near the start of episode two. We see Budd on guard outside a glass-walled office, where Julia is engaged in a 'private meeting'. In fact, the conversation concerns Budd's children, who are in danger of a terrorist attack. He, however, is oblivious of this development. The soundtrack highlights his cognitive separation by cutting sharply back and forth between locations without the usual smoothness of transition supplied by a sound bridge. The difference in ambient sound makes the effect particularly stark: inside the glass-walled office, there is almost no ambient sound beneath the dialogue, while the landing where Budd stands is noisy with footsteps, phones and office chatter. When a formal security briefing begins in an adjoining office, Budd's exclusion is further emphasised by a protracted shot of him looking on, wearing his radio earpiece, but hearing nothing of the discussion beyond the glass. From a cognitive perspective we are aligned with Julia and her advisers, party to the knowledge that is withheld from Budd, but emotionally we are aligned with our hero.

Meta-diegetic sound, only audible to the protagonist, is another strategy used throughout the series to draw us into Budd's inner world. In his appraisal of the meta-diegetic, Chion (1994) distinguishes 'objective-internal' and 'subjective-internal sounds'. Objective-internal sounds are the auditory equivalent of an extreme close-up, such as exaggerated Foley or other embellished diegetic sounds. In *Bodyguard* these are represented primarily by the sounds of Budd's breathing at moments of tense anticipation.[20] Subjective-internal sounds are purely imaginary, more intimately subjective and revealing than point-of-audition, and give access to the interiority of a character. In *Bodyguard*, these

[20] Phillippa Lovatt (2016, p.170) discusses how the absence of music and other dialogue can allow the sound of breathing to stand out as the locus of a 'sensory intimacy' between spectators and the screen. The corporeal quality of breathing sounds have been a cinematic feature of war films, as exemplified by Terence Mallick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998) or Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* (2008).

sounds are closely associated with Budd's PTSD, as heralded by the dreamt sounds of automatic gunfire with which the series began.

The use of meta-diegetic sound helps the audience empathise with Budd's experience and reactions, particularly at moments of extreme stress. On many of these occasions there is direct reference to his PTSD as he enters a fugue-like state, permeated by aural flashbacks to his time in combat. After the first assassination attempt, the diegetic sounds of the shooting are replaced with an echoing effect of aircraft passing overhead, while the camera slowly zooms in to a close-up of Budd, viewed through a bullet-pocked and rain-streaked window, showing him briefly confused. The return of his presence of mind is signalled by the return of diegetic sound, and the usual non-diegetic accompaniment, along with an uninterrupted mid-shot of him as he takes control. The following scene, as he tracks down the assassin, offers a similarly intimate moment, when the sniper, who is revealed as Budd's old comrade-in-arms, shoots himself. We, along with Budd, momentarily lose all sound apart from a very faint, low pitched reverberating effect emulating the aftermath of an explosion. However, this is not the physical effect of the pistol shot, but an emotional response to the suicide. Budd's horror is captured in a series of close-ups, which show him swearing soundlessly over and over again, the use of jump cuts reinforcing the dream-like effect.

This fugue-like state is fleetingly reprised at other moments in the series. Each time the faint, echoing reverberation of Budd's internal soundscape replaces both the sounds of the diegetic world (representing his experience) and those of the usual non-diegetic tracks (reinforcing ours). Each time the association with Budd's PTSD is critical. Thus in the car, the morning after his attempt to strangle Julia during a nocturnal flashback, Budd briefly 'zones out', as the soundtrack gives way to the muffled sounds of mortar-fire – which are swiftly resolved (along with the unfocused background of the shot) into the sound of a protesting crowd in the street outside. Similarly, in the concluding episode, as Budd prepares to cut the second wire that will finally disarm the suicide vest he is wearing, the sound of his breathing gives way to an echoing effect that takes us

right inside his heightened state of awareness, sharing the moment of jeopardy that could be the last of Budd's life.

These are moments of great intimacy, in which the audience is invited into Budd's damaged psyche. Visually they are dominated by close-ups of Budd and point-of-view shots, drawing us into his reality, with very little reference to the world around him. A rather different approach was taken to represent the impact of the bomb that kills Julia Montague. After an extended sonic build-up, the explosion itself is over very quickly, followed by nothing but a high-pitch sound that suggests ringing in the ears and a pall of smoke that completely obscures the image for a while. In contrast with previous scenes depicting the aftermath of violence, here long musical notes build into an elegiac score reminiscent of a battlefield scene as the camera roves erratically over the casualties lying on the floor of the hall, and as Budd checks first his murdered colleague, then Julia, for signs of life. The blending of the meta-diegetic into the non-diegetic lifts us up out of the confines of Budd's consciousness. The scale of the event and of its repercussions can be more fully appreciated through the detachment afforded by a more panoramic approach in terms of sound and image.

Conclusion

Bodyguard is an interesting text for its time. It is a television series that successfully utilises many of the strategies of the cinema, particularly in terms of sound and image, to create a rather different kind of audience experience - one that we are beginning to associate with the new breed of 'box-set' long-form dramas commissioned by the new streaming services. A co-production with Netflix, who own the worldwide distribution rights, it is, nevertheless, primarily a product of the BBC, screened (in the UK) initially on a legacy broadcast platform, and thus may be seen to exemplify the shifting practices of domestic broadcasters in the light of the new media ecology. Unlike some of the more celebrated texts of this brave new world, such as *Game of Thrones*, it does not wear its production values on its sleeve, eschewing the headline-grabbing visual

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effects and garish visual palette of the fantasy genre, and adopting instead a realist aesthetic that grounds it in a very recognisable present. Although it draws on the idiom of the action film in terms of its relentless pace and frequent dramatic climaxes, the actual on-screen action is limited in its physicality, making it particularly well-suited to the small screen. The drama depends rather on the presence of paranoia and suspense as an almost constant state, one that continually varies its tone and emphasis so that its edge is never dulled. There is no respite, unless to prepare briefly for the next assault on our senses and emotions.

The importance of image and, in particular, sound to this achievement cannot be over-estimated. According to Dan Johnson, a key member of the post-production sound team,[21] *Bodyguard* benefitted particularly from a close collaboration between sound effects editor Marc Lawes and the series' composers Ruth Barrett and Ruskin Williamson. The outcome is a highly accomplished soundtrack that matches and enhances the tantalising qualities of Jed Mercurio's storyline; qualities that were not only rewarded by *Bodyguard's* record-breaking audience figures, but also recognised by the Royal Television Society in 2018.[22]

The technical achievements of *Bodyguard* do not draw attention to themselves because they are largely designed to escape the conscious notice of the audience. Despite the improbable machinations of the plot and the opaque motivations of its characters, sound and image seduce us into leaving our disbelief at the door. Buckled tightly into the rollercoaster, we are afforded no opportunity to look to the left or right, and joyfully surrender to the pleasures of the ride.

[21] Johnson was the dialogue editor of episodes 1, 2 and 5, as well as the dubbing mixer of all six episodes of *Bodyguard*.
[22] The series won the award for best sound in a television drama. . https://rts.org.uk/article/winners-rts-craft-design-awards-2018-announced [Accessed 08/03/2019]

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