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The Creative Aspect
of Sound Engineering Process in Feature Film

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to discuss and clarify the numerous controversies regarding the creative aspect of sound engineering process in feature film. The author describes the core of the sound operator's work and focuses on the analysis of two different methods employed by a sound engineering on the set: designing and recording.

Key words

What prompted me to discuss this subject in a form of a paper were the numerous controversies regarding the creative aspect of sound engineering process in feature film, mainly concerning the activities of a production sound engineer on the set or a production sound mixer.

In this case, it seems particularly important to notice and emphasise the author's factor. The controversies regarding the core of the sound engineering work might vary in their origins, but their main feature is ignorance (unfortunately present even in the operations of the production division, particularly at the stage of documentation). This ignorance concerns the fundamental aspect of sound design – the creative, auteur sound design of an audiovisual work being one's professional duty and a task entrusted by the film director and the producers. At the same time, it is a task set by the work itself right at its literary source – a screenplay.

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It is quite frequent that even people involved with films can barely realise what the sound recording on the set is about, let alone understand the issues of sound engineering at the postproduction stage of the film. In this context, I would like to focus on the analysis of two very different methods employed by a sound operator on the set: engineering or designing (which I use interchangeably) or simply recording. I will also describe the conditions necessary for producing a correct and effective production (location) sound recording, as well as the circumstances making such a recording completely impossible.

Undoubtedly, it is fundamental for our further investigation to assume that sound is one of the most important factors actively carrying information. And if so, then it is also a carrier of meaning. This in turn makes it, often, a carrier of emotions. The realisation of this fact resulted in including sound as one of the means of expression in film and subsequently in widely using it as yet another – equal to picture – mean of narration. It made it also possible to distinguish the professional categories of sound designer or sound engineer in film. And as the technical means of producing and broadcasting spacial sound in film develop, this field is experiencing a rapid growth. Sound, as an extremely plastic material, allows shaping the world also beyond the frame, creating sound values of the unreal world. Sound engineering in film became a discipline enabling creative activity oriented towards a particular goal: performing its ancillary role in creating a film work as a consistent, audiovisual whole. In that sense, the "discovery" of the core and meaning of sound in film is nothing particularly new. For years now, the results of sound designers' creative work have been awarded with the individual prizes in the category of "the best sound" in film festivals around the world. These are not technical categories. These are categories of creative action, generating noticeable aesthetic values in the auditive sphere of the film work – and they have their own individual, auteur character.

As a sound engineering, I am usually responsible for the entire sonoristic statement of the audiovisual work – from the analysis of the screenplay to the final recording and accepting the standard copy – and I take a number of personnel, technical and aesthetic decisions, which have a clear impact on the quality and significance of the film as a work of art.

Here I would like to show how the ideas, decisions and actions of the sound operator or sound engineer directly influence the final shape of sound in film and – most importantly – the achieved aesthetic value and significance of this work as a consistent, integrated whole.

The creative aspect of sound engineering in feature film

Discussions concerning the creative aspect of sound engineer's work sometimes lack a reliable analysis and methodology. They are usually of an emotional nature and rarely pertain to the subject matter. They tend to end as quickly as they began, the only outcome being the already highly antagonistic stances solidified even more. It is extremely difficult to accept a situation where any actions of the sound engineer face an almost hostile attitude of the film people themselves: the more or less experienced producer, the cameraman or director, let alone the technical staff working on the film set. The main obstacle seems to be a common inability to distinguish between the tasks related to the sound recording process and the activities related to its creative production.

In a volume of selected works of Balázs published in 1987 and containing elements of his film theory formed as early as the 30s, we read:

> When two cameramen happen to film the same scene, it frequently occurs that the images – even if the object can be easily recognised – have hardly anything in common. But when two sound operators given identical technical conditions make a recording of the same voices, then individual differences in them almost must not occur[1].

In the justification of such opinion he states:

> Why? Is it a result of imperfection of our sound recording equipment? Or are there other, more profound reasons in the nature of sound or our own hearing ability? When a cameraman shoots acting as a visual phenomenon, we are dealing with a synthesis of two artistic productions. Apart from the unique facial movements of the actor there is also the specific take of the cameraman, through which he seeks the most characteristic contours and the best lighting. The expression of the actor's face is enhanced by the expression of the frame, in which the cameraman can appropriately modulate the acting and increase its clarity. And hence, the film take is not merely a reproduction but a creative art. A sound record, however, will only have as much expression as the actor puts into it and as the microphone faithfully records. A sound operator merely registers and reproduces sound. The sound operator's individuality and his subjectivity cannot possibly have any impact on the sound records through different takes. And only such subjectivity would open

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[1] B. Balázs, *Wybór pism*, Warszawa 1987, p. 209 [trans. M. Bręgiel-Benedyk]. Numbers in parenthesis refer to the positions in the footnote table, p. 21.

the realm of artistic possibilities in sound recording. The perspective itself cannot change the form of sound and its design, as it happens in the case of visual objects. The angle of looking alters the character of objects, but «the angle of the ear» does not change the character of sound. The same voice coming from the same place cannot be recorded in any different way. But if we have no choice between the options then the sound recording remains only a mechanical reproduction[2].

I am allowing myself such long presentation of the above mentioned stance because it has undoubtedly shaped the attitudes of a few generations of filmmakers and continues to function even today.

I am convinced that for many years now the practice of sound design on the feature film set has been c o m p l e t e l y overturning this opinion.

However in the introduction to the quoted publication Aleksander Jackiewicz states that: "Unfortunately, what is justly noted by the film theory historians, he (Balázs – author's note) was unable to create an integral theory of sound cinema, although he had said many interesting things about sound in film which remain valid even today"[3], he fails to indicate particularly which elements of the sound layer described in Balázs' theory he has in mind.

Still in the introduction, Aleksander Jackiewicz writes that:

A few generations of Polish filmmakers […] were raised on Balázs theory (older ones would even attend the master's lectures in the National Film School in Łódź). His books – at that time available in Poland only in German – were often the future film critiques' (including myself) first readings on film[4].

In another place, as if parenthesizing the components of the presented theory, he makes it clear that: "No such theoretical system exists that would be absolutely right and valid beyond its time (especially since in the realm of cinema time passes faster than in other arts)"[5].

To show fundamental discrepancies in the perception of the same problem, I will quote the words of Eugeniusz Cękalski – a director, a researcher and a teacher, one of the main representatives of the Polish film avant-garde of the 30s and the Dean of the National Film School after World War II – published in 1932 (almost simultaneously):

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[2] Ibidem.

[3] Ibidem, p. 5.

[4] Ibidem.

[5] Ibidem, p. 6.

The long practice of silent film allowed us through the association of images to subtly and easily construct a new reality in our imagination. Through the isolation of the phenomenon (a close-up), through the union with another phenomenon (the positioning of the camera), and through association with another phenomenon (montage) the visible world got organised – a silent language of images was invented. Now, how to approach sound to achieve the same success? How to organise the sound reality? A microphone instead of a lens, the sonic wave instead of light – the necessity of analogy with the silent film was obvious. Proper sound film attempts to approach the sonic phenomenon through the s o n i c c l o s e - u p s: a sigh, the rush of blood in the veins, the whistle of a breaking breath – these are the sonic close-ups, matching the close-ups of the human speech – inconspicuous and hardly perceptible sonic phenomena, becoming powerful through isolation and magnification. The microphone was set in search of the possibilities that camera settings could offer. Through various settings of the microphone with reference to the source of sound, the listener might be introduced to the s o u n d p e r - s p e c t i v e. In the beginning the simplest experiences: in David Golder, the hero is being called to the phone. He walks away. Slow, heavy steps gradually die down. Space is built out of sounds. Finally, a sound coming after another sound – the sound m o n t a g e provided the same opportunities as the montage of pictures[6].

We can regret that Cękalski's views did not reach the awareness of the subsequent generations of filmmakers unlike Balázs' whose only recently outdated opinions are still being valued by many contemporary film artists, not only in the local market. Yet, the elements of Balázs' theory could be used to build a contrary stance. These days, the choice of technical means – microphones or microports – is as important to the sound design on the set as the choice of lenses and settings is to the clarity of a take. The choice and application of the means in sound design binds the sound engineer's subjective vision with the aesthetic value of his work both on the film set and at the postproduction stage. A microphone without the sound engineering is dead and needs to be "taught to listen" to a clearly defined section of the acoustic reality. Variable takes and dynamic quest for the most desirable location and direction of hearing (position) of the microphone are clear examples of finding the "angle of the ear" which Balázs had questioned, or rather – using more contemporary language – the angle of hearing. Attention to the appropriate ratio of the voice recording on the set to the activity of all the other components of the sound background as well as shaping

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[6] E. Cękalski, *A, B, C... taśmy filmowej*, "Kino" 1932, nr 13, 18, 21, 25, 27, 29, in: *Polska myśl filmowa. Antologia tekstów z lat 1898–1939*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk 1975, p. 193 [trans. M. Bręgiel-Benedyk].

the most desirable sonic and spatial values of the recording are in turn the equivalents of framing and designing a take. And finally, "[...] The same voice coming from the same place [...]"[7] contrary to Balázs' claim, can be recorded in many different ways. His statement that: "[...] if we have no choice between the options then the sound recording remains only a mechanical reproduction"[8] has become obsolescent, since these days the options unquestionably exist and constitute one of the elements of the sound engineering's technique. Technical development of the means of sound recording, the progress of electronics, electro-acoustics, interior acoustics and the technology of emission formats have completely transformed the form of sound and image coexistence in the audiovisual work. Not only the quality of the challenges the artists undertake, but also the audience's expectations have changed. And it is a variable and ever modulating process. The above mentioned components are only a fracture of the parameters influencing the recording's distinctive character, the subjective auteur vision of the sound designer. The diversity of techniques and the individual sensitivity of the sound engineering complete the work.

Let us now establish that r e g i s t e r i n g the sound means uncritical recording of all the acoustic events on the film set. D e s i g n i n g the sound, however, encompasses various activities performed within the acoustic environment of the film set in order to obtain a sound recording which is thoroughly planned and strictly defined with technical and aesthetic parameters. To confuse these two concepts or to use them interchangeably is a formal mistake at the very foundation of any discussion. Unfortunately, the lack of differentiating these two radically different realities is typical of many artists, including the very experienced ones. However a great majority of directors at the preproduction stage declares the need for the correct production sound (location sound, the sound from the film set) in their work, only very few of them eventually consistently cooperate with the sound operator and fully accept his actions on the set. The wishful thinking and passive attitude will not suffice. Blind faith in superhuman powers of the sound operator will not guarantee a correct sound implementation on the set. Without the active support from the director and the cameraman, and without them understanding the basic rules of sound engineering and trusting, sound designing on the film set can be simply impossible.

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[7] B. Balázs, op. cit., p. 210.
[8] Ibidem.

Usually, negative attitudes are being justified with the economic reasons. For example, the necessity to reconcile too "ambitious" production guidelines with a modest budget causes drastic cuts in the shooting time which results in constructing unrealistic, impossible daily schedules. Rush and lack of time dedicated to rehearsals seriously affect the process of film making, particularly in the sensitive realm of sound. Ambitious guidelines dissolve in the face of hard economic conditions of the production.

These facts should be causing outrage. Still, there are numerous other causes of this state of affairs. First and probably the most primary, is the low level of general musical culture resulting in little sonic sensitivity. Local professional discourses and echoes of the university actions cannot make up for the low common level of sensitivity or even complete insensitivity to the essence, role and values of sound expression.

Looking at the professional environment of audiovisual production, we see the generally low level of higher education when it comes to shaping the sonic sensitivity of the students and alumni of the film, theatre and television direction, direction of cinematographer and film art and television production departments of many film schools. Negligence in this area resulted in a severe unawareness of the vast potential of sound, and the technical requirements of sound engineering on the film set and at the post-production stage. On the other hand, the Sound Engineering Department of the University of Music in Warsaw has for many years supplied the film market with specialists perfectly familiar with the sound reality of the film both in its technological and aesthetic aspect. An encounter of the two structures of film education is usually combustible: people who are very highly qualified in sound engineering, on the film set do not have anyone to address their postulates to, however important they would be for the artistic principles and production of the work. The expectations of young apprentices of sound engineering who do not have significant artistic achievements are most often ignored. They are simply dismissed. And it would seem that on the film set everyone belongs to the same team and aims at the same goal. Such ignorance is particularly painful and dangerous, because it contradicts the fundamental aesthetic and technological needs of the sound cinema and ties the hands of the sound engineer. Regretfully, I am often under the impression that a sound engineer on a film set must be first and foremost a good social engineer and psychologist; he constantly negotiates, explains why and why not, points to how and for what, and anticipates the threats to the proper sound implementation. Of course after many years of working together some specialists develop an

ability to recognise their mutual expectations and meet the requirements of the other in advance. This way is perhaps not easier, but certainly more effective, more efficient and more creative.

For the above mentioned reasons I particularly value my cooperation with the Department of Radio and Television and Faculty of Fine Arts and Music of the University of Silesia in Katowice. It gives a realistic chance for an effective change in the "sound awareness" among the future directors, cinematographer and production managers.

Another crucial problem is the acute shortage of professional sound engineering literature in Polish, dealing with pre-production, on set and post-production phases. Such literature regarding local market simply does not exist. Nothing, apart from rare articles in film magazines, but these too of little importance and poor content. Yet, a reliable presentation of the real situation could efficiently tackle the myths persisting in common imagination. One of them is the claim that Polish films do not have good sound, that in this aspect they are always awkward and bad, because they have too low budgets and lack technology and qualified crew. It is not true. Our native filmmaking lacks procedures supporting financial and technological discipline of the project, also in its sound engineering aspect – from the analysis of the screenplay to the distribution of the work on electronic carriers and other fields of exploitation. It directly influences the aesthetic quality of the film.

Such procedures should include:
– detailed analysis of the screenplay from the sound engineering perspective,
– extensive consultations with the director, the cinematographer, the producer, the production manager, the manager of the set and the divisions' representatives,
– identification of the creative plans and production guidelines of the film,
– presentation of the concepts and basic guidelines of sound engineering to the artists including the actors and the composer, and a discussion with them,
– documentation of the shooting venues, with a particular stress on the possibility of recording the location sound,
– discipline of the shoot – as a rule rejecting the takes which do not meet the basic criteria of the location sound, when the location sound is supposed to be the base of the final sound structure,
– preparing the post-production chain,

– constant technological and aesthetic supervision over the most sensitive moments, e.g. the sound conversion.

Within thus established procedures, some unfortunate but common operations would have been unacceptable. As much as it is unthinkable to employ a completely unqualified person as a cinematographer, the producers still easily do it when it comes to sound engineers. It is always a great loss both for the professional sound engineering and for the film work itself. The failure to meet any technological and aesthetic requirements of the completed material stems in such cases from the fundamental lack of qualifications in sound engineering, unawareness of the basic rules of effective and creative activity on the film set and at the stage of post-production. Such operations remind us of charlatanry: a mixture of the lack of experience, crude ignorance and a systematically updated choice of "extremely attractive" myths about sound engineering on the set and in the studio. In the short term such an attitude gives the director and the cameraman a sense of security, perhaps even comfort. How often do we hear from some film artists that the most positive aspect of their highly appreciated sound engineer's work on the set was that this "professional" worked as if he was inaudible and invisible... And it is crucial to know that in most cases the results of such operations are pitiful, while the odium is then undeservedly borne by the whole professional group of sound engineering.

Of course it does not mean that life of the more experienced and established sound engineers is a winning streak. Quite the opposite, I should say. The ability to perform a consistent action aiming at creating proper conditions for the set recordings might actually stem from the bitter taste of many failures. It is from them that one learns to set the limits of possible compromise. Going beyond these limits unavoidably results in defeat.

Yet, there is a way to understand the reasons behind such state of affairs. Sound designing in film is still a relatively young discipline of art. It is only 85 years old, which is very little comparing to the multifaceted history of art over the centuries. It is also very little in respect to the moment when the primitive man made his drawings on the walls of the Lascaux cave, still similarly expressive despite thousands of years that have passed. The history of this discipline of art is not even as long as the history of cinema. Cinema was born around 1895, when on 28 December in Paris, the first public film projection took place thanks to the brothers Lumiére. The beginning of real sound cinema on the other hand, falls on 1927. The projection of Alan Crosland's film "The Jazz Singer" (the first ever film "equipped" with a synchronised soundtrack) opened film to

a completely new realm of possibilities. Not everyone welcomed this new achievement with equal enthusiasm. Enough to mention Charlie Chaplin, one of the most recognizable icons of the cinema, who saw the innovation not only as the end of the language and the distinctive narration style developed by himself, but of the cinema as a whole. Today we know how vain these concerns proved to be. Full sound cinema's development is a history of many technical achievements allowing, first of all, to bring film closer to reality, whose sonic dimension constitutes one of the basic factors in inter-human communication. Over the years, the progress of the technical means of sound engineering made it possible to create worlds of surreal, unprecedented sound.

Analysis of the screenplay – the initial stage of creating the sound layer of a film work

An idea is the beginning of every audiovisual work. An idea of a hero and a story. Such an idea materialises in written forms, diversely representing the essence of the content. These are:
- a screenplay, being the literary prototype rendering the content and the course of film action,
- a script, being a detailed description of the particular scenes and takes in the film,
- a storyboard, being a graphic representation, a "pictorial" visualization of the screenplay's and script's content.

A screenplay is the most common literary base of a film work and a constant point of reference in the process of filmmaking. For the sound engineering, a careful reading of the screenplay is a rich source of information regarding the heroes, their behaviour, the light of the scene and its atmosphere, the time of the day, and most importantly the intentions of the author. Usually, the analysis of the screenplay causes a clash of the initial notions regarding the sonic world of the situations and heroes, with the possible threats to the successful sound implementation on the set. At the same time, getting into the creative intentions of the director and a proper recognition of the aesthetic needs and requirements of the work, allows us to develop our own idea of the film's sonic layer.

Usually, much of the information included in the screenplay requires further specification long before the shooting begins. Any knowledge (regarding the chosen venues, the types of the cameras and lighting, the

cast, the costumes, the concept of the vehicle based shots and the shots using special effects) acquired at that stage will be crucial to the organisation of the sound engineer's workshop. The phase of the screenplay analysis preceding the shoot is one of the most important stages of the sound engineer's work. These days, unfortunately, it is often underestimated. It is a period of necessary, many-sided consultations with the director, the cinematographer and the production manager. All the sound engineer's actions aim for constructing a structure of parameters determining the possibility of recording the location sound. One of the most basic tasks is taking part in the documentation and expressing opinion on the selected venues in terms of their usability for the effective location sound recording. Regretfully, the production managers often fail to engage the sound engineer's attention at that stage. On the other hand, the sound engineering do not demand it with sufficient determination. The results are very disappointing: allowing the shoot to take place in a "noisy" location, (i.e. one in which there is no control over the intensive acoustic activity of the environment), might make the recording of the location sound completely impossible. Accepting locations placed in the vicinity of particularly noisy places, like intersections, bus stations and busy streets is a common mistake. We might call it a matter of acoustic cleanness of the set. It can be better understood through an analogy to the visual aspect of the film: as much as the frame is a way of revealing a consciously selected section of the perceivable reality, a c l e a n frame is a frame whose composition encompasses solely the desired components. It is beyond doubt that an unexpected appearance in the frame of an object alien to the film set design, e.g. allowing a lamp, a tripod or a microphone in the frame, disqualifies the take. There is no discussion over that. Such a frame is usually called a dirty frame, and the flaw is eliminated by shooting a retake. If we look at the level of awareness in case of an identical situation occurring in the acoustic reality, it simply appears that no such awareness exists. Very often nobody but the sound engineer worries about the sound being dirty, when a silent conversation of the heroes is being accompanied by a completely unjustified street noise entering the frame and the sound of pneumatic hammers from a nearby construction site. It is hard to imagine a montage and editing of such material, where the uncontrollable intensity of the sonic background is so variable in its character and dynamics. At the same time, the reality of the post-production stage proves that the process of sound reconstruction is not only time consuming and costly, but also ineffective: by eliminating

the superfluous components we most often destroy the sonic values of the sound material and disqualify it completely.

A careful reading of the screenplay provides an opportunity to clarify all the controversies regarding the technical aspects of the shoot. A lack of proper coordination of the technical means and the shooting technique can seriously affect the aesthetic quality of the image and sound, and heavily influence the general expression of the film. Therefore it is important to find out what are the director's and the cinematographer's ideas for the vehicle based shots already at the pre-production stage. Most certainly it would be useful to ask: will the vehicle really be moving or will we be shooting on a carrier or in a studio using a blue box or a green screen? Will the windows be opened or not? If open, then which one and to what extent? What is the planned speed on which the car will be moving? What surface will the car be driving on? How important the landscape will be? What outfits the cast will be wearing? Asking these questions on the film set only is far too late. Involving the production division in discussing these matters long before the shooting commences will positively influence the sound recording on the set.

The period of reading and analysing the screenplay is at the same time a very particular stage when gradually a certain inner i m a g e of the world of heroes and situations is being created. This particular inner vision is the first and perhaps the most fundamental component of the specific language of the developed creative expression, both in the visual and the auditive aspect. In this way, however imprecisely, we might be able to describe the imagined acoustic character of the places, people and situations in respect to the nature of the film story as a whole already at that stage. The implementation of this vision is in fact simply its material "revival"; it is making the formerly imagined components alive. From the very first day of the shoot and the first clap, till the last moment of the final edit – it is an unceasing confrontation of this primary i m a g e and the calculations regarding it, with the living tissue of a film work.

While analysing the process of adapting a literary work for a movie, Jan Jakub Kolski notes that it is necessary to "[...] cut the tissue of events out of the literary mass"[9], and then rebuild the literary (imagined) hero into a film (visible) one. Transposing the conclusions to the relations of literature (the screenplay) and the film sound, we might claim that the analysis of the screenplay is supposed to lead us to "extract" the t i s s u e

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[9] J. J. Kolski, *Pisemna dysertacja*, Łódź 2008, p. 4 [trans. M. Bręgiel-Benedyk].

of the sonic events out of the literary body, and then "rebuild" the "imagined" sonic world into a film/audible one.

Basing the construction of the film soundtrack on the production (location) sound as the fundamental postulate in composing the sonic world of a movie plot

It is beyond any doubt that shooting a film according to the parameters necessary for the location sound recording is significantly more difficult than shooting it not worrying about the location sound at all. So what makes this effort worth taking to the extent that it has become a world standard? An indisputable advantage of the location sound is that it makes the content of the take far more credible. It convincingly mirrors the details and the most sensitive components of acting, the dialogue interpretation, the emotional nuances carried by every word and every breath, the dynamics of sound illustrating the movement. The value of impression that the audience gets from the uniformity of the visual layer and the accompanying sound is absolutely unique. To give up the location sound (with the exceptions I will discuss later) is to cripple the film work and deprive it of its natural defenses. It is an irreparable act of destruction, for the reconstruction of the film set reality in a studio environment is usually completely impossible.

The technical aspects of the production (location) sound recording, the pilot and the wild track sound on a film set – general remarks

Making an attempt at defining the concept of the production, or location sound we are facing some difficulty: first of all, it is a relative concept – on the one hand it depends on the technical parameters, on the other it is always inscribed in a precisely defined situational context. Yet, what do we call a production sound, or the so-called good, correct production (location) sound? For my further deliberations I will assume the following definition: production sound is a sound recording made on the film set and during a take, possessing particular features qualifying it to be further edited at the post-production stage and to be included in the final merging of the soundtrack and the visual layer.

The quality of the production (location) sound depends on three parameters:
– the selectivity of the sound,
– the timbre and the dynamics of the sound,
– the legibility of the dialogue.

The selectivity of the sound is in my understanding a feature describing the proportion of the usable sound volume to the remaining acoustic phenomena in the background.

The timbre of the sound is a feature facilitating the differentiation of the sound of various instruments, voices or sonic objects. It is a quality allowing us to describe a certain sound as more or less natural for the given source.

The legibility of the dialogue is a parameter related to the level of clarity in the verbal field, with the intelligibility of the produced speech recording.

The indicated parameters are interrelated – the quality of any of them influences the remaining ones. It is common to claim that the location sound is a recording of the text layer of a take, namely a recording of the dialogue. It is, however, only part of the truth: when a take contains no text, the content of the location sound is the sound effect accompanying the movement of objects. When even that is missing, the production (location) sound will still be the sound atmosphere of the set.

For an effective implementation of the production sound recording on the set, operations of the sound engineer need to focus on two areas: the first one includes locating and neutralising all types of risks and sound disturbances, the other focuses on obtaining appropriate sound material (compatible with the creative intentions and expression of the audiovisual work as a whole). A proper implementation of the tasks in the first area is crucial for the second.

It is informally said that the production (location) sound might be "clean" or "dirty". These are very general descriptions of the sound quality of a particular take. By a "clear location sound" I understand a recording, whose content encompasses exclusively the components related to the course of the take, as well as those which result directly from the intentions of the sound engineer. Briefly put, a clean, properly recorded location sound contains solely the d e s i r a b l e content, directly resulting from the screenplay and compatible with the artistic and production principles of the work. Therefore all the u n d e s i r a b l e elements present in the sound take considerably distort it. What we are dealing with is a "dirty location sound", qualifying for a thorough editing at the post-production stage.

It might be frustrating for the freshmen in sound engineering, but one of the main tasks of the sound engineer on the film set is to create proper conditions for recording. The most crucial seems to be to eliminate or maximally reduce any hums, noises and sound effects in the shooting environment. Any sounds that could in any way affect the clarity of the recorded dialogue and render its montage impossible due to the high intensity of the background in a given take, should be completely eliminated or significantly reduced. It is this struggle for the selectivity of the recording that often causes the sound engineer to be perceived as the one who is disturbed "always and by everything". Of course it matters how we express our doubts, concerns and needs in front of the film director, the cinematographer or the set manager. It is crucial not to begin with an uncompromising arbitration and not to express our needs in too emphatic a form. However, as we know from experience, even the most subtle form of persuasion sooner or later causes the sound engineer to weigh heavily on the crew, making him and his work undeservedly disliked. Very often we get the impression that the sound engineer is completely forlorn in his actions. As if he was a private who happens to be in the set, and his requirements had no significant connection to the work and its quality. The attempts to justify certain requirements are not particularly helpful, as each situation is very specific and might require the sound engineer to provide a proper explanation each and every time. The lack of implemented procedures as well as of an appropriate acoustic discipline on the set, causes the majority of the sound engineer's activity to focus on locating the risks and taking all efforts to eliminate them. We can divide them into two groups: those of a common type, almost universally occurring in the set, and atypical, rare ones. In case of common risks we need to take actions i n a d v a n c e, "clearing" the venue beforehand. The remaining potential might then be "invested" in locating and neutralising the atypical and unforeseen difficulties.

Typical risks we might face in a film set are related to the qualities of:
– the power generating unit,
– the fans of the power supply units and the fitting of the lights illuminating the set,
– the bulbs of these lights,
– the mechanical systems and the electronic optical and digital cameras,
– the trolley and the parts used for the dolly shots,
– the vehicles if they are used to shoot particular scenes,

- the car carrier,
- the floors of the interiors.

A "pilot" sound is the sound recorded on the film set during a particular take, but lacking the quality of a clear, selective and well defined location sound. The "pilot" sound is the location sound for reference and replacement. Whenever there is no possibility to create appropriate conditions to record a location sound, the pilot might constitute a priceless sound material, providing information on the real sound parameters on the set and creating a map of events to be used at the post-production stage. By definition it is not suitable for the final editing, but it is a point of reference for recording the Automatic Dialogue Replacement (ADR) and the sound effects.

The decision to qualify the recorded material for later reference in other sound recordings might be prompted by a number of circumstances (occurring independently or simultaneously). Among them the most common are:

- the technique of shooting (e.g. using the Steadicam system),
- a high level of the background sound and the undesirable noises on the set,
- a particular character of the scene (the pyrotechnic and stuntman scenes or the scenes involving the rain and snow machines, propellers, etc.),
- failures of the shooting equipment (lack of properly prepared ground for the takes on a car carrier, failures of the camera or damage to the case containing photosensitive material),
- a need for a partial or complete replacement of an actor's line in the quest of the right interpretation of the text.

The circumstances completely excluding a location sound record are, e.g. the usage of a rain machine, a snow machine and a propeller. The location sound might be "recreated" through a "wild track" recording.

The "wild track" sound is a recording of the sound content of a take or a scene, implemented in the conditions appropriate for production sound, but with the camera turned off and all sound phenomena making a clean location recording impossible eliminated. Such a recording made in a few versions can be effectively used as a replacement to be synchronised with the sequences of events in a given take.

Possible mistakes made during the "wild track" sound recording are related to the partial or complete change of the formerly developed parameters of the take, particularly:

– a change of the camera location,
– turning off the set illumination,
– giving a break to the staff not directly involved with the recording,
– postponing the recording of the "wild track" sound to another time than immediately after shooting the scene the recording is meant for.

As a consequence of such action, the actor is deprived of some crucial components of the scene environment he had previously got accustomed to while shooting the scene. The actor whose environment has been altered so significantly will simply act differently. He will play someone else and often not to the point. For the "wild track" recording to make sense, the interpretation of the text and the movement dynamics must m a t c h the accepted double. Therefore announcing: "Silence please! Wild track sound recording. Anybody who doesn't need to be here, might leave the set now" is a gross irresponsibility on the part of any set manager. Firstly, a "wild track" recording is not being made "for the sound" but for the film – for the audiovisual work being made on the set. The "wild track" recording is not meant to function autonomously, with no connection to the form of the film. It is meant to become its integral part. Secondly, as a result of such an announcement, part of the crew feels exempted from keeping silent. Instead of deep concentration, a chaos begins. The atmosphere necessary for a proper recording implementation is irrevocably gone, and the loss it causes is hard to estimate. For the "wild track" recording is a priceless material: the actor plays in the scene environment, wearing the costume, and placed in a thoroughly parametric surrounding, determining the expression of interpretation. The recording is made in an acoustic environment facilitating its proper montage and effective "matching" with other sound recordings made in the same space. The obtained material is of a priceless value: it has all the components a u t h e n t i c a t i n g the content of the take.

Another crucial element of a proper implementation of a "wild track" recording is the active attitude of the director. The director is undoubtedly one of the most essential sources of information and inspiration for the actors in all their enterprises. Moreover, he has a deep knowledge of the causal, temporal, spatial and emotional relationships linking the components of the film work. He should be involved in the "wild track" recording to the same extent as he is in the shooting itself. And it is not about the director distrusting the sound engineer. It is about effectively producing a recording which could meet absolutely all the aesthetic and technological requirements. Therefore I am not particularly encouraged by a state-

ment: "Record it alone, you can make it". Grateful for the trust placed in me, I immediately underscore that it is exactly the case when I prefer to refuse the offer. Accepting such arrangements I would need to agree on depriving the film set (being the venue of the recording) of its most fundamental parameters, whose main core is the i n s t i t u t i o n of the director. Of course some special circumstances might occur, constituting an exception from this rule. It is important, however, to understand the possible consequences.

Whereas it is unacceptable to postpone the "wild track" recording beyond the time immediately after shooting the scene in question. The need for making a "wild track" recording should be immediately reported to the director, the assistant director and the set manager, emphasising the willingness to record i m m e d i a t e l y after shooting the scene. Some inexperienced set managers offer unacceptable perspectives: recording during a lunch break, at the end of the day or even at the end of the whole shooting process. Restoring the complete set of parameters necessary for the making of a proper and effective "wild track" recording (compatible with the requirements of the work) is then absolutely impossible.

The above information might seem trivial or unimportant, or perhaps not even worth mentioning. On the contrary, all the described techniques concern the necessity to build the space for making a proper location recording. Without an appropriate care given to it and without making all the necessary effort, the effective production of a location recording is impossible.

The stage of sound recording on the film set might be called the c o n q u e r i n g   o f   t h e   p r o f a n e. Ignoring its continuous presence within the essence of what we eventually perceive as the s a c r e d, is a form of intellectual myopia. Admiring a violinist's virtuosity, reaching with its interpretation to our most sensitive feelings will be incomplete and dishonest, if we do not notice that an important part of his artistry is also the struggle against gravity. Admiring the birds flying high above, we should not disregard the fact that their beauty is closely related to the unceasing effort to fight the Earth's attraction, and that without this enormous strain our true admiration would have not occurred.

On the language of film work

In *Język filmu* Jerzy Płażewski claims that:

The spoken language, the way of expression specific to an individual or community, has four main features determining its role in the interpersonal relationships. Firstly, the language serves as a means of c o m m u n i c a t i o n a n d e x c h a n g e o f t h o u g h t s. Secondly, the language facilitates a g r e e m e n t of the interlocutors based on the principle of mutual i n t e l l i g i b i l i t y, and thus on the principle of equality [...] Thirdly, the language needs to be characterised by precision, u n a n - b i g u o u s n e s s of the concepts, permanent association between the sound and the meaning of words. Fourthly, the language needs to possess an adequate potential of expressing s u b t l e and a b s t r a c t concepts[10].

At the same time, the author states that

[...] the spoken language meets none of these requirements in a perfect way [...] mainly because in the modern spoken language the word-symbol, the word-sign does not completely identify with the concept it designates. The word becomes a barrier between the object and the subject, a deforming filter of the thoughts[11].

Recalling the French theoretician, André Bazin's view on the nature of film language, Jerzy Płażewski states that:

Its semantic potential is so much richer and more diverse from the languages of traditional arts that it should be considered separately, as the only form of expression, which can genuinely compete with the spoken language... A drawing or a color can also have a technical and mundane application: a white triangle on a black board is not a work of art, but a mere mathematical symbol. Similarly, it applies to the drawings of an architect. And still, we cannot say that drawing or painting are languages. They are languages only additionally, because they have to designate, but for these arts a sign is only a kind of a semi-finished product, rarely separate and separable from the synthesis, which remains superior. On the contrary, film seems to be an art resembling literature, whose material – the language – is a primary and independent reality[12].

Why do I recall the above views? Because in fact: as much as "[...] an image does not speak, an image shows [...]"[13], an image complemented with

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[10] J. Płażewski, *Język filmu*, Warszawa 1982, p. 17 [trans. M. Bręgiel-Benedyk].
[11] Ibidem.
[12] Ibidem, p. 18.
[13] Ibidem.

the sonic values begins to speak its own language. In other words: while an image informs, the sound directs the character of interpretation. Also Z. Lissa emphasises the essence and the autonomy of the auditive layer of a film, claiming that: "Film became an art of its own rules, its own aesthetics and its own way of functioning, especially in its auditory layer"[14].

Summary

Shaping an individual language of a film work through creating its sound layer is a complex process. It begins at an early stage of analysing the screenplay, by:
– "extracting" the tissue of the sonic events out of the literary body,
– creating an "image" of the sound world,
– rebuilding the "imagined" sonic world into an audible one.

Such an "image" of the sonic world translates into the production principles. The following stages, from the documentation to the final editing, are a continuous confrontation of this primary "image" and the diverse factors determining its implementation.

The main compositional premise in constructing the sonic layer of a film plot is to base the whole work on the location sound – the sound recorded on the set. Therefore it is crucial to ensure a proper quality of the environment. This aim is best addressed through the decisions made already at the stage of documentation. The phase of shooting in its own way rectifies the initial "calculations", adding its own epilogue to the premises and postulates. It is important not to betray our initial premises. The unarguable value of the location sound provides a firm foundation for the construction of the auditive layer compatible with the image.

Sound engineering as a discipline does not always allow the implementation of creative tasks granting the sound material an individual character. Whenever sound engineering is only about performing routine, strictly technical actions, with no significant influence on the audiovisual work as a whole, but serving merely as a necessary supplement to the visual layer, it is indeed hard to speak of any creative work. Less demanding genres are in this case advertising, news, information programmes and reportage. The situation is different in the case of TV series or TV film,

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[14] Z. Lissa Z., *Estetyka muzyki filmowej*, Kraków 1964, p. 432 [trans. M. Bręgiel-Benedyk].

and completely opposite in case of documentary film, in which the creative component of the auditive layer is an immanent part of the long developed language of the genre. However, it is indisputable that every feature film requires developing a mature, characteristic and auteur auditive layer. In this way, through an individual structure of auditive values, the film acquires its particular character and language. Giving up the support of the auditive layer is a great loss to many films, as it severely cripples and impoverishes them.

In fact, it is not about appropriating the film in its sonic aspect, nor about building another, autonomous work of art within it. The goal is to fully employ all the possible means (including the sonic ones) to create a coherent audiovisual whole. At the same time, every action contradicting this postulate should be immediately forsaken. It might involve, for example, a really painful decision to abandon some very attractive ideas (or even whole parts of soundtrack already produced) which however do not match the film as a whole, but instead spoil its language and bring chaos into the harmony of its many components. Within this established order the slightest hitch becomes a foreign body to the film work construction. The creation of a feature film soundtrack which is a layer composed of many diverse elements and its coherent coexistence with the image should achieve the anticipated goal: produce an aesthetic experience.

Therefore shaping of an individual language of a film work in its sonic aspect is influenced by:
  – the faultless production of the production (location) records, with respect to their sound quality, selectivity, dynamics, spacial qualities, legibility and comprehensibility of the dialogues,
  – the composition of a sound set design (the selection of sound effects, the atmospheres and their placement during particular scenes),
  – developing a musical conception and implementing it (recording and post-production of music),
  – establishing the relations between the particular elements of the sound layer with reference to the visual sphere.

The above list is for sure not exhaustive. It allows, however, to show how much of a film work language might be shed and irretrievably lost. And so, the quality of the production (location) sound material, both in the technical and the aesthetic sense, in a natural way influences the choice of many other components of the sound layer and determines the relations between them. The quality of the location sound particularly marks

a film work from the very first moments of its existence on the film set. In other words, the location sound with all its features determines the parameters of the remaining components of the sound layer of the film, their type and ratio. Many elements influencing the ultimate shape of the film's sound concept stem directly from the material created during the shoot. It is therefore completely unjustified to belittle the period of the location sound recording on the set and level all the undertaken efforts with a thoughtless registering of the sound material. On the contrary, all the technical means and decisions serve the fulfillment of a particular, imagined aesthetic value. Without exaggerating, we might claim that the quality of the foundation determines the shape, the form and other features of the superstructure which the film work acquires in the post-production process.

It is a stage of s a t u r a t i n g the film work with the sound values resulting from transforming, adjusting and editing the set sound, to gradually enhance it later with the remaining components of the rich sonic world.

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