
Original title / Originaltitel
TonSpuren – die virtuelle Klangwelt des Films

Summary / Zusammenfassung
During the mid-seventies the aesthetic vocabulary of film sound began to change dramatically. Screaming jets flew all around the audience and ghostly helicopters were heard out of nowhere; the Dolby logo appeared on the screens and formerly unknown collaborators were called sound designers. A generation of sound-conscious filmmakers like Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas and Martin Scorsese discovered the suggestive power of sound.

The study Sound Design – The Virtual Soundscapes of Films investigates the changes in sound aesthetics in the period from 1975 to 1995. Its objective is to examine conventions and seemingly implicit factors in the soundtrack, to understand the soundtrack’s function in conveying meaning, and to explain the complex architecture of virtual soundscapes in movies from a cultural perspective.

The systematic research was based on a precise and database-driven analysis of 96 films, primarily American mainstream productions. Attention is focused on sound design, that is, the compositional work with those elements of the soundtrack that are commonly referred to as sound effects and for which the composer Pierre Schaeffer has created the term sound object (objet sonore). Beyond the narrative and aesthetic functions of the sound object, the structural organization of the material at hand was measured and reviewed on the basis of hypotheses from perception psychology and psychoacoustics. Interviews with some of the leading sound designers in the US clarified the relationship between technical innovation and aesthetic production in a broader institutional context.

The organization of the work takes into account the vast array of methodologies that are necessary to explore the complex subject. Therefore the topics are organized in the manner of a handbook, thoroughly and independently, connecting the theoretical foundations with the corresponding research results. Taking this concept as a point of departure, the work is divided into five parts with the following topics.

In part 1, Premises, two preparatory chapters cover the technical developments and formats as well as the transformation process of sound recording in the age of virtual and abstract sound production.

Semantic dimensions of sound objects are the central focus of part 2, Aspects of Meaning. This includes the identification of sound objects and the sound/image relationship, as well as higher order semantics, so-called “super signs,” such as leitmotifs, symbols, and stereotypes.

The third part, Tonality, covers the psycho-acoustic features of individual stimuli, the perception of complex sound patterns under the aspects of Attention and Selection, as well as research on the techniques of sound processing and the musical treatment of natural sound material.

In the fourth part, I present Narrative Functions of sound objects: the orientating function of the soundtrack for defining geographic, social, and cultural settings; the use of materials with specific sound objects – mainly water, metal, wind, and glass – to represent a relation between character and environment, and finally the numerous finely graded subjective transformations which represent the sound universe or individual parts of it from the perspective of the film characters’ perception.

Finally, part 5, Model Analyses, uses the acquired analytical instruments to describe three
complementary strategies by means of selected scenes from the films Jurassic Park (USA 1992, Steven Spielberg), The Silence of the Lambs (USA 1991, Jonathan Demme), and The Right Stuff (USA 1983, Philip Kaufman).
The monograph "Sound Design. Die virtuelle Klangwelt des Films" is a huge success in the German speaking countries and has been published in a fourth edition 2010.

**Publications / Publikationen**
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**Other Links to external Webpages / Andere Links zu externen Webseiten**
http://www.zauberklang.ch/

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