Drama 394 - Design Styles

SECTION 1 - Core Concepts

SECTION 2 - Functions of Sound Using Kaye's Terms

SECTION 3 - Script Analysis for Sound Design

SECTION 4 - Working with a Director for Sound Design

SECTION 5 - Design Styles in Action – Bridging Theory and Practice

PREAMBLE

This series of lectures explores the art and practice of theatrical sound design, drawing from three key texts:

- *Sound and Music for the Theatre* by Deena Kaye & James Lebrecht,
- *Sound Effect: The Theatre We Hear* by Ross Brown, and
- *The Art of Theatrical Sound Design* by Victoria Deiorio.

While all three authors provide unique insights, we will rely heavily on Kaye's terminology—**Ambiance**, **Spot Effects**, **Transitional Cues**, **Underscoring**, and **Commentary Cues**—as our primary framework.

We will also reference *On the Track* by Fred Karlin and Rayburn Wright to connect cinematic influences to theatrical storytelling.

These lectures aim to bridge theory and practice, equipping you with the tools to interpret, design, and deploy compelling soundscapes for the stage.

Kaye's Term	Definition (Kaye)	Ross Brown's Perspective	Victoria Deiorio's Perspective
Realism	Literal, representational soundscapes tied to the physical reality of the play (e.g., naturalistic sounds like birds, traffic, footsteps).	**Verisimilitude**: Sound as a direct replication of the real world to create authenticity and grounding.	**Literal Sound**: Realistic, grounded soundscapes that establish the world of the play.
Stylized Sound	Abstract or exaggerated soundscapes that deviate from literal reality to convey mood, emotion, or theme (e.g., whispers, drones, or distorted	**Symbolic Sound**: Sounds that transcend realism to evoke emotion, metaphor, or the psychological state of characters.	**Abstract Soundscapes**: Sounds used as an emotional or symbolic storytelling tool, heightening theatricality.
Representational Sound	Sound that aligns with the physical and narrative reality of the play—mimetic and directly tied to onstage action (e.g., a doorbell rings).	**Onstage Realism**: Sound exists as part of the live action, fully integrated into the play's diegetic space.	**Practical Sound Effects**: Representational sounds that interact with actors or the set, supporting literal moments.
Cinematic Sound	Sound or music that transcends the literal world of the play—heightened, symbolic, or emotionally layered to drive narrative impact	**Scenographic Sound**: Sound as an artistic and spatial element that enhances emotional meaning and subtext.	**Theatrical Sound**: Cinematic approaches, like non-diegetic layers or underscoring, to heighten emotional impact and mood.
Ambiance	Environmental or background sounds that establish setting and mood (e.g., city streets, forest birds).	**Auditory Scenography**: The environment becomes part of the storytelling and immerses the audience.	**Aural Texture**: A carefully crafted "bed" of sound that sets emotional tone and location.
Spot Effect	Practical, synchronized sounds tied to onstage actions (e.g., door slams, phones ringing).	**Literal Effects**: Realistic, diegetic sounds that anchor actions and maintain physical believability.	**Practical Effects**: Sound that is grounded in the live moment, often diegetic and directly linked to the action.
Transitional Cue	Sound or music that bridges scenes, signaling shifts in time, space, or tone.	**Temporal Sound**: Sounds or musical cues that mark changes in theatrical time or emotional shifts.	**Scene Transitions**: Auditory signals or music that guide the audience through time and tone changes.
Underscoring	Sound or music beneath dialogue or action to enhance emotional arcs subtly without overwhelming the scene.	**Emotional Underscoring**: Sound that complements the emotional tone or subtext without intruding.	**Music as Underscore**: Subtle scoring that heightens emotional beats, borrowing from film composition techniques.
Commentary Cue	Sounds or music that provide thematic or emotional commentary (e.g., ominous tones underscoring betrayal).	**Symbolic Sound**: Non-literal sounds that comment on subtext or themes, often abstract or heightened.	**Emotional Commentary**: Sound layers that interpret the emotional or thematic significance of a moment.
Framing Cue	Soundscapes that open or close the play, introducing or concluding the story's world (e.g., prologue music, final ambiance).	**Bookending Sound**: Auditory elements that frame the production and provide thematic cohesion.	**Prologue/Epilogue Soundscapes**: Sounds that set the story's tone or provide closure, often symbolic.
Diegetic Sound	Sound that exists within the play's world and is heard by the characters (e.g., a radio playing onstage).	**Onstage Sound**: Sound that emerges from the narrative reality of the play, tied to the action and setting.	**Literal Sound**: Sound that characters interact with and respond to. Focused on realism and practicality.
Non-Diegetic Sound	Sound external to the world of the play, used for the audience's emotional or thematic understanding (e.g., underscoring, abstract	**Extraneous or Symbolic Sound**: Sound that enhances mood, subtext, or meaning for the audience but is not "heard" onstage.	**Theatrical Soundscapes**: Sound as a storytelling tool that conveys mood, emotion, or symbolism outside of the literal space.

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SECTION 1 - Core Concepts

SECTION 1: Core Concepts

Welcome to our exploration of sound design styles! Today, we'll lay the groundwork by understanding the core terminology and concepts that shape our approach to theatrical sound design. We'll focus on how sound can be realistic or stylized, and how these choices impact the storytelling process. Throughout, we'll use Kaye's framework, adding some deeper insights to expand our understanding.

SECTION 1 - Core Concepts

SECTION 1: Core Concepts

1A. Realism vs. Stylization

1B. Diegetic vs. Non-Diegetic Sound

1C. Representational vs. Cinematic

1A. Realism vs. Stylization

SECTION 1: Core Concepts

The first major consideration when designing sound is whether it will follow a **realistic** or **stylized** approach. Let's define each:

SECTION 1: Core Concepts

Realism

Definition:

Realistic soundscapes mirror the real world as closely as possible. They're tied to the physical setting and are designed to immerse the audience in a believable environment.

Examples:

- The hum of a busy coffee shop.
- The chirping of birds in a forest.
- The distant rumble of city traffic.

Why Use It?

- Anchors the audience in the play's physical world.
- Supports a naturalistic acting style and script.

Challenges:

- Too much realism can become overwhelming in live theatre, especially when competing with dialogue.

Stylization

Stylized soundscapes deviate from realism to evoke mood, symbolism, or heightened emotional states. This style can take two forms: ***impressionistic*** and ***expressionistic***.

Impressionistic Sound:

Definition:

Suggests emotions, atmosphere, or ideas in a subtle, indirect way.

Key Characteristics:

- Subtle and restrained.
- Suggests emotions or settings without directly stating them.
- Built around light, ambient sounds or abstract textures.
- Purpose: Guides emotional/psychological responses, leaving room for interpretation.

Examples:

- Faint, echoing piano notes in a scene about memory.
- Low rhythmic hum during suspenseful moments.

Why Use It?

Useful for subtlety and emotional resonance, particularly where actors' performances take precedence.

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Stylization: Impressionistic

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SECTION 1: Core Concepts

Stylization: Expressionistic

Definition:

Bold, exaggerated, and often abstract, designed to externalize a character's internal emotions or symbolize thematic ideas.

Key Characteristics:

- Exaggerated and intense.
- Focuses on emotional or symbolic amplification.
- Often abstract or distorted.

Purpose:

- Makes internal emotions or thematic ideas tangible.

Examples:

- Distorted, thumping heartbeat during a panic attack.
- Cacophony of industrial machinery during a scene of societal oppression.
- Screeching violin as frustration peaks.

Why Use It?

Ideal for moments where emotional or symbolic meaning must take centre stage.

SECTION 1: Core Concepts

Key Differences:
Impressionistic vs. Expressionistic Sound

Aspect	Impressionistic Sound	Expressionistic Sound
Tone	Subtle and restrained.	Bold and exaggerated.
Function	Suggests emotions or moods indirectly.	Amplifies emotions or themes directly.
Audience Engagement	Leaves room for interpretation.	Demands attention and creates immediate impact.
Level of Realism	Hints at real-world elements with subtle abstraction.	Abstracts or distorts sound to symbolize ideas.
Examples	A faint echo in a memory scene.	A distorted scream to symbolize internal turmoil.
Use Case	Best for subtle, introspective moments	Best for heightened or symbolic moments.

1B. Diegetic vs. Non-Diegetic Sound

SECTION 1: Core Concepts

In addition to understanding realism and stylization, it's important to introduce the concepts of **diegetic** and **non-diegetic** sound—terms borrowed from film that are equally applicable to theatre. These describe the relationship between sound and the narrative world of the play.

SECTION 1: Core Concepts

What is Diegetic Sound?

Definition:

Diegetic sound exists within the world of the characters—it is sound that they can hear and interact with. It's tied directly to the play's narrative environment and helps ground the story in realism.

Examples:

- A ringing phone answered by a character.
- A live band in a party scene.
- Rain hitting a windowpane that characters acknowledge.

Purpose:

- Reinforces the play's reality.
- Enhances realism and believability.

Question for Reflection:

What are examples of diegetic sound you've experienced in theatre? How did it interact with the onstage action?

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SECTION 1: Core Concepts

What is Non-Diegetic Sound?

Definition:

Non-diegetic sound exists outside the characters' awareness and is designed exclusively for the audience. It provides emotional or thematic insight, deepening their understanding of the story or characters.

Examples:

- Swelling orchestral underscore during a monologue.
- Dark, ambient pad under a suspenseful scene.
- Recurring musical theme symbolizing inner struggle.

Purpose:

- Engages the audience directly.
- Adds emotional or thematic depth.

Question for Reflection:

Have you noticed sound influencing your emotions but not heard by characters? How did it change your perception?

Blurring the Lines

Theatre often blurs the lines between diegetic and non-diegetic sound, creating opportunities for symbolic storytelling or emotional impact.

Examples:

- Transformative Moments: A train whistle morphing into a symbolic underscore.

- Dual-Purpose Music: A live band's diegetic music evolving into non-diegetic underscoring.

Diegetic vs. Non-Diegetic Across Realism and Stylization:

- In **realistic soundscapes**, diegetic sound is usually prominent, with non-diegetic elements used sparingly for subtle emotional depth (e.g., light underscoring during a tense moment).

- In **stylized soundscapes**, non-diegetic sound often takes a larger role, amplifying emotional and thematic elements in ways that may not align with the characters' awareness.

SECTION 1: Core Concepts

Examples Across Realism and Stylization

Type	Realistic Example	Stylized Example
Diegetic Sound	Characters react to a thunderstorm outside a window.	A character sings live on stage, but their voice transforms into an ethereal echo.
Non-Diegetic Sound	A subtle, melancholic underscore during a heartfelt goodbye.	A pulsating, abstract soundscape reflecting a character's rising panic.

Closing Thoughts: D vs Non-D

Diegetic and ***non-diegetic*** sound offer different tools for shaping the audience's experience. Whether you stay within the characters' auditory reality or create sound purely for the audience's insight, both approaches are invaluable in theatrical sound design. As we explore specific sound functions later, think about how this distinction can help clarify your creative choices.

1C. Representational vs. Cinematic

Kaye's "Representational vs. Cinematic" Distinction

To refine our understanding of design styles, Kaye introduces another layer: **representational** vs. **cinematic** approaches.

Representational Sound

Definition:

Simple and functional, this sound style aligns directly with the live performance. It avoids complexity to leave space for the audience's focus on dialogue and action.

Example:

- A single dog bark to suggest a neighbourhood.

When to Use It:

- Representational sound works best when the focus needs to remain on the actors or the text.
- It respects the "aural bandwidth" of the audience, avoiding sensory overload.

Cinematic Sound

Definition:

This style uses layered, immersive soundscapes, often mirroring the rich auditory experience of film.

Example:
- A fully layered soundscape for a jungle scene, including wind, rustling leaves, birdcalls, and distant animal noises.

When to Use It:

- Cinematic sound is effective in transitions or abstract moments where sound takes centre stage.

Challenges:
- In theatre, cinematic sound can overwhelm live text or performance if not used sparingly.

SECTION 1: Core Concepts

Key Point:
Realism and Stylization Spectrum

Realism and **stylization** can exist on both the ***representational*** and ***cinematic*** spectrum.

Example:

- Representational Realism: Soft breeze in a garden scene.

- Cinematic Stylization: Distorted soundscape for a dream sequence.

Audience "Aural Bandwidth"

In theatre, audiences must process multiple sensory inputs simultaneously: text, movement, lighting, and sound. Unlike in film, where sound can dominate, theatre requires sound to take a supportive role.

Challenges:

- Dense soundscapes during dialogue-heavy moments can split focus and distract from the actors' performances. (Overload the audience!)

Solution:

- Use representational sound for critical dialogue.
- Reserve cinematic sound for transitions or abstract moments.

Analogy:
Think of sound as a supporting actor. It can steal the show at times, but only when it doesn't overshadow the leading performers—the actors and their dialogue.

Practical Examples

Example 1: Realistic Ambiance (Representational Realism)

- A simple soundscape of a city street with occasional car horns and murmuring pedestrians during a grounded, dialogue-driven scene.

Why? Keeps the focus on the actors while setting the location

Example 2: Impressionistic Stylization

- A faint, echoing wind layered with distant whispers in a memory scene.

Why? Suggests the character's emotional state without dominating the moment.

Example 3: Cinematic Expressionism

- A cacophony of distorted industrial sounds and sirens during a climactic breakdown.

Why? Enhances the character's inner turmoil and builds tension.

SECTION 1 - Discussion Questions

SECTION 1: Core Concepts

A. When might a director prefer realism over stylization?

B. Can you think of a moment where cinematic sound would enhance a scene without distracting from live performance?

C. How would you choose between impressionistic and expressionistic approaches?

Conclusion:

Understanding design styles is about knowing how sound shapes storytelling. Keep these distinctions in mind to guide your creative decisions.

SECTION 2 - Functions of Sound Using Kaye's Terms

Objective:

- Explore the six major functions of sound in Deena Kaye's framework while incorporating insights from Ross Brown's dramaturgical approach, Victoria Deiorio's focus on emotional resonance, concepts from "On the Track - Fred Karlin" about thematic development and continuity, and the distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic sound.

- In this lecture, we'll dive deeper into the specific functions of sound in theatrical storytelling, using Deena Kaye's framework of six core functions: ambiance, spot effects, transitional cues, commentary cues, framing cues, and underscoring. Each function serves a unique purpose, whether grounding the play in reality or giving the audience emotional and thematic insight.

- To enrich this discussion, we'll revisit the concept of diegetic and non-diegetic sound, a film term that applies equally well to theatre. Diegetic sound exists in the world of the characters— they can hear and react to it. Non-diegetic sound is outside their awareness, designed to give the audience deeper insight into the play's subtext, themes, or emotions. We'll analyze how these distinctions can apply to each function of sound and how blending them enhances storytelling in theatre.

SECTION 2 - Functions of Sound Using Kaye's Terms

2A. Ambiance

2B. Spot Effects

2C. Transitional Cues

2D. Framing Cues

2E. Underscoring

2F. Commentary Cues

2A. Ambiance

SECTION 2: Functions of Sound Using Kaye's Terms

Definition:

Ambiance refers to environmental soundscapes that establish the setting and mood of a scene. It immerses the audience in the world of the play by creating a continuous auditory background.

Examples:

- The hum of an urban street with passing cars and distant voices.
- Forest ambiance with birdsong, rustling leaves, and a soft breeze.
- A low industrial hum for a factory or warehouse.
- Role in Storytelling:
- Ambiance provides cues about location, time of day, and social environment.

Ambiance helps create a sense of immersion, subtly drawing the audience into the scene.

Diegetic vs. Non-Diegetic Ambiance

Diegetic Ambiance:

- Sounds the characters would hear and possibly interact with.

- Example: A character pausing to listen to thunder or distant church bells.

Non-Diegetic Ambiance:

- Soundscapes that provide subtext or emotional tone without being part of the characters' world.

- Example: A low, ominous pad underneath a forest scene, suggesting danger that the characters don't consciously recognize.

Brown's Influence

Ross Brown's concept of 'auditory scenography' expands the idea of ambiance to include its spatial and dramaturgical role. Ambiance shapes how the audience perceives not just location, but emotional and thematic elements of the scene.

Example:

- A cavernous echo suggests isolation, while layered birdsong evokes a lush, vibrant setting.

Considerations:

- Balance subtlety and presence—ambiance should enhance the world of the play without distracting from dialogue.

- Experiment with layers to create realistic or symbolic environments, but avoid overloading the soundscape.

2B. Spot Effects

Definition:

Spot effects are practical, synchronized sounds that directly support onstage actions or events.

Examples:

- A phone ringing in sync with an actor picking it up.

- The creak of a door as it opens.

- The shattering of a glass during a dramatic moment.

Subtle Spot Effects:

Spot effects can also function as quiet reinforcements within representational ambiance.

Example:

- In a beach scene, a single seagull cry during a pause in dialogue can subtly remind the audience of the setting.

Diegetic vs. Non-Diegetic Spot Effects

Diegetic Spot Effects:

Sounds directly tied to onstage action, acknowledged by the characters.

Example:

- A character reacting to a gunshot or footsteps in a hallway.

Non-Diegetic Spot Effects:

Sounds that serve symbolic or emotional purposes but aren't heard by the characters.

Example:

- A chain breaking sound effect used metaphorically as a character decides to free themselves from an emotional burden.

Deiorio's Influence

Deiorio's concept of 'literal effects' highlights the importance of precision in diegetic spot effects, while encouraging creativity in non-diegetic applications that enhance audience insight.

Considerations:

- Timing is critical—spot effects must align perfectly with onstage action.
- Use subtle spot effects to deepen ambiance without overwhelming the text.

2C. Transitional Cues

Definition:

Transitional cues occur within the timeline of the play, bridging scenes or acts and signalling shifts in time, location, or tone.

Examples:

- The rumble of thunder leading into a calm morning to mark the passage of time between scenes.
- A swelling orchestral transition from the climax of Act 1 to the start of Act 2.

Role in Storytelling:

- Transitional cues guide the audience seamlessly between scenes or moments without requiring visual or verbal explanation.
- They help maintain rhythm and pacing, ensuring the audience stays engaged.

Diegetic vs. Non-Diegetic Transitional Cues

Diegetic Transitional Cues:

Sounds tied to the narrative world, like a train whistle heard as a scene shifts to a station.

Non-Diegetic Transitional Cues:

Music or abstract sounds that create emotional or thematic continuity without existing in the characters' world.

Example:

- A rising orchestral swell during a transition to build tension.

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Tops and Endings of Acts

Often considered transitional cues because they reorient the audience within the narrative:

- Tops of Acts: Reintroduce the world of the play (e.g., ambient city noise signalling the location).

- Endings of Acts: Punctuate key moments, like a crescendo leading into intermission.

2D. Framing Cues

Definition:

Framing cues occur outside the direct action of the play and shape the audience's broader theatrical experience, including:

Pre-Show:

- Establishes mood, time period, or thematic elements as the audience enters.

Entre-Acte:

- Maintains continuity during intermission or resets tone before the next act.

Post-Show:

- Leaves the audience with a sense of closure.

Diegetic vs. Non-Diegetic Framing Cues

Diegetic:

- A live band on stage performing a pre-show number.

Non-Diegetic:

- A curated pre-show playlist reflecting the themes of the play.

2E. Underscoring

Definition:

Underscoring is music or sound played beneath dialogue or action, subtly enhancing emotional depth without overpowering the performance. It operates on a subconscious level, guiding the audience's emotions and reinforcing the story's themes.

Why Use Underscoring?

1. Enhancing Emotional Depth:

- Underscoring amplifies the audience's connection to the scene's tone—joy, sorrow, tension—creating a visceral emotional response.
- Example: A soft piano melody can add tenderness to a reconciliation scene.

2. Guiding Transitions:

- Underscoring bridges contrasting tones, such as shifting from a comedic moment to a dramatic one.
- Example: A playful tune gradually darkening into a low drone prepares the audience for a scene's emotional pivot.

3. Unifying the Production:

- Recurring musical motifs associated with characters or themes create cohesion and emotional resonance throughout the play.
- Example: A heroic theme introduced early might return in a minor key during a moment of loss.

Approaches to Underscoring

1. **Dynamic Evolution:**
   - Underscoring should evolve alongside the scene's emotional arc, rising or softening to match its intensity.
   - Example: A suspenseful drone builds during an argument, cutting to silence at a climactic line.

2. **Balance and Subtlety:**
   - It must complement, not compete with, dialogue or action.
   - Use restrained instrumentation and volume to avoid distraction.

3. **Diegetic vs. Non-Diegetic:**
   - Diegetic: Underscoring is part of the play's world (e.g., a character plays a song on the piano).
   - Non-Diegetic: Underscoring exists for the audience's insight, reflecting subtext or internal emotions.
   - Example: A live violinist onstage (diegetic) vs. a haunting string motif representing grief (non-diegetic).

4. **Incorporating Motifs:**
   - Borrowing from film, motifs—short recurring musical phrases—can emphasize character arcs or thematic elements.
   - Example: A hopeful melody introduced early might return in a fragmented form during a character's despair.

Examples of Underscoring in Action

1. **Realistic Play: Death of a Salesman**

   - A recurring flute motif underscores Willy's longing for simpler times, reinforcing the play's themes of nostalgia and loss.

2. **Stylized Play: The Tempest**

   - A magical, swirling soundscape reflects the island's supernatural presence, blending diegetic (Ariel's music) with non-diegetic elements.

3. **Emotional Underscoring: A Streetcar Named Desire**

   - Bluesy, diegetic music from a nearby bar transitions to a non-diegetic ominous underscore as Blanche spirals into instability.

Considerations for Effective Underscoring

Volume Control:

• Keep it subtle so dialogue remains clear.

Purposeful Restraint:

• Avoid continuous underscoring to maintain its impact during critical moments.

Collaboration:

• Work closely with the director and actors to align underscoring with the play's pacing and tone.

Conclusion:

• Underscoring enhances emotional depth and unites a production's tone and themes. Whether diegetic or non-diegetic, it guides the audience's emotional journey, ensuring sound remains a powerful but unobtrusive storytelling tool.

2F. Commentary Cues

Definition:

Commentary cues 'comment' on the action or emotion of a scene. They rely on the audience's pre-existing knowledge to grasp their meaning, much like a 'meme.' There is no existing 'slot' for a commentary cue. It is an insight that is artistically applied to other cue-types.

Examples:

- A nursery rhyme melody subtly playing during a scene of danger, evoking an eerie juxtaposition.
- The first few notes of a national anthem to evoke patriotism or irony.

Diegetic vs. Non-Diegetic Commentary Cues

Diegetic Commentary Cues:

- Embedded in the world of the play, such as a character hearing ominous news on the radio.

Non-Diegetic Commentary Cues:

- Reflect themes or emotions the characters are unaware of, like a minor-key piano melody underscoring a betrayal.

Considerations:

- Subtlety ensures commentary cues enhance rather than overshadow the scene.
- They can offer deeper thematic insight by referencing something external to the play's immediate world.

SECTION 3 - Script Analysis for Sound Design

Objective:

Teach students how to approach a script from a sound design perspective, using insights from Ross Brown, Deena Kaye, and Victoria Deiorio to analyze and interpret the text. This lecture will focus on sound as a dramaturgical device, identifying sound opportunities in a script, and setting goals for a cohesive design.

SECTION 3 - Script Analysis for Sound Design

Preface: Sound as a Dramaturgical Device

3A. Why Analyze a Script for Sound?

3B. Steps for Script Analysis

3C. Goals for Sound Design

3D. Examples of Script Analysis in Action

Preface: Sound as a Dramaturgical Device

Ross Brown: Sound's Dramaturgical Role

Ross Brown views sound as a core component of dramaturgy, much like set design or lighting. Rather than being an accessory, sound actively shapes the audience's perception of time, space, and emotional arcs.

Key insights include:

1. **Sound as Auditory Scenography:**
   - Sound defines the geographical, temporal, and emotional space of a play.
   - Example: A soft, echoing hum can suggest a cavernous hall or an emotionally isolating space.

2. **Sound and Subtext:**
   - Sound offers a way to externalize the unspoken—character psychology, relationships, or thematic undercurrents.
   - Example: A rhythmic drone might reflect rising tension between characters, even when their dialogue is calm.

3. **Layered Narratives:**
   - Brown emphasizes that sound design can create layers of meaning, adding depth to the story by operating symbolically.
   - Example: The sound of crickets fading away into silence as a storm approaches can symbolize a shift from calm to chaos.

Deena Kaye: Sound as Narrative Support

Kaye frames sound as a functional and emotional support for storytelling:

Clarity and Audience Orientation:

- Sound provides practical orientation, such as signalling scene changes, time shifts, or action cues.

Emotional Amplification:

- Sound reinforces emotional beats, making pivotal moments more impactful.

Victoria Deiorio: Sound as an Emotional Conduit

Deiorio focuses on sound's ability to connect the audience emotionally with the characters and themes:

Subtlety Over Obviousness:

- The most effective sound design often works in the background, enhancing the mood without distracting from the live text.

Empathy Through Sound:

- Using sound to evoke visceral emotional responses, like tension or heartbreak, ensures the audience stays deeply engaged.

3A. Why Analyze a Script for Sound?

Goal of Script Analysis:

Script analysis helps the sound designer identify where sound can support, clarify, or elevate the storytelling. By understanding the text deeply, designers can uncover:

- Literal cues (e.g., sounds explicitly mentioned in the script, like a phone ringing).
- Implied cues (e.g., a description of a storm that could benefit from layered effects).
- Symbolic opportunities (e.g., using abstract sound to enhance subtext).

Key Questions to Guide Analysis:

1. What is the play's tone?
   - Is it realistic, stylized, comedic, tragic?
2. What is the play's structure?
   - Are there abrupt transitions, flashbacks, or dream sequences that need sonic support?
3. What are the emotional arcs?
   - Where are the moments of tension, joy, sorrow, or suspense?

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   • Where are the moments of tension, joy, sorrow, or suspense?

3B. Steps for Script Analysis

Step 1: Read the Script for Overall Understanding

- Read the entire play without focusing on sound. This first reading is to absorb the narrative, themes, and tone.

- Ask broad questions:

  ‣ What is the world of the play (time, location, social context)?

  ‣ What is the primary mood or atmosphere?

Step 2: Annotate Sound Opportunities

On a second read, start marking:

- Explicit Sound Cues: Any sounds mentioned in the script (e.g., 'The sound of thunder cracks outside').

- Potential Ambiance: Places where environmental sound could enhance the setting or mood (e.g., a bustling marketplace, a quiet forest).

- Transitions: Moments between scenes or acts that could benefit from sound to maintain pacing or mood.

- Underscoring Opportunities: Emotional beats that might be supported by subtle music or sound.

- Symbolic Sounds: Places where abstract or impressionistic sound could deepen the narrative.

Step 3: Identify Sound Functions

Use Kaye's six functions as a framework for analysis:

1. **Ambiance**: Where does the world need environmental grounding?

2. **Spot Effects**: What actions require specific sound effects?

3. **Transitional Cues**: Where do scene changes need smoothing or emphasis?

4. **Framing Cues**: What pre-show or post-show elements set the tone?

5. **Underscoring**: Which emotional arcs could benefit from musical support?

6. **Commentary Cues**: Are there moments where sound can comment on the action?

Step 4: Align Sound with Style

- Determine if the sound should be realistic or stylized, and whether diegetic or non-diegetic elements are appropriate.

Example:

In a naturalistic play, diegetic sounds like a creaking floorboard might be more fitting. In a surrealist piece, a distorted heartbeat might work better.

3C. Goals for Sound Design

Practical Goals:

1. **Clarity**: Ensure the audience understands the narrative without confusion. (*K.I.S.S. , Lowest Common Denominator*)

2. **Consistency**: Maintain a cohesive sound world that fits the play's tone.

3. **Subtlety**: Avoid overpowering the dialogue or other design elements.

Creative Goals:

4. **Support the Director's Vision**: Collaborate to understand the director's interpretation of the text.

5. **Deepen Emotional Engagement**: Use sound to amplify the audience's connection to the characters and story.

6. **Add Thematic Layers**: Introduce symbolic or impressionistic elements to enrich the narrative.

7. **Quality**: Ensure your original recordings, pulled sound effects, music are of the best quality you can access.

3D. Examples of Script Analysis in Action

SECTION 3: Script Analysis for Sound Design

Example 1:

A Realistic Play (e.g., Death of a Salesman)

- Explicit cues: Car horns, the hum of a refrigerator.

- Implied cues: Ambiance of a working-class neighbourhood.

- Symbolic opportunity: A faint, growing wind underscoring Willy's emotional unraveling.

SECTION 3: Script Analysis for Sound Design

Example 2:

A Stylized Play (e.g., The Glass Menagerie)

- Explicit cues: The sound of Laura's glass breaking.

- Implied cues: A soft ambiance of memory, like distant echoing voices.

- Symbolic opportunity: Abstract, impressionistic underscoring for Tom's reflective monologues.

Example 3:

A Surrealist Play (e.g., The Caucasian Chalk Circle)

- Explicit cues: Live music performed by the narrator.

- Implied cues: Environmental sounds suggesting shifting locations.

- Symbolic opportunity: Distorted, rhythmic sounds to heighten the play's moral conflicts.

SECTION 3 - Conclusion

Script analysis is the foundation of effective sound design. By examining the text deeply, we can uncover opportunities to enhance the narrative, whether through realistic diegetic sounds, stylized non-diegetic underscoring, or symbolic auditory elements. Remember Ross Brown's insight: sound is dramaturgy. It doesn't just accompany the story—it shapes the audience's understanding of it.

SECTION 4 - Working with a Director for Sound Design

Objective:

Equip students with strategies for collaborating with directors to create cohesive sound designs. This lecture will cover understanding and respecting the director's vision, navigating different communication styles, and offering creative input while maintaining the director's priorities.

SECTION 4 - Working with a Director for Sound Design

4A. The Role of the Director in Sound Design

4B. Understanding the Director's Vision

4C. Respecting and Enhancing the Director's Vision

4D. Offering Creative Input

4E. Navigating Challenges

4F. Case Studies: Applying the Process

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4A. The Role of the Director in Sound Design

Definition:

The director is the primary creative visionary for the production. As a sound designer, your role is to interpret and enhance their vision through auditory elements.

Why Collaboration Matters:

- Sound design doesn't exist in isolation—it interacts with all elements of the production, including text, acting, set, and lighting.
- Effective communication ensures that your work complements, rather than clashes with, the overall vision.

4B. Understanding the Director's Vision

How to Clarify Their Vision:

Initial Questions:

- "What tone or atmosphere do you envision for this production?"

- "Are there specific sounds or styles you already have in mind?"

- "How should sound interact with the other design elements?"

Script-Specific Questions:

- "Are there any key moments where sound should take the lead?"

- "Should the sound design be realistic, stylized, or a mix?"

- "Do you see sound as subtle and supportive, or bold and central?"

Tools for Understanding Vision

1. **Director's Notes and Concept Meetings:**

   - Use early production meetings to gain insights into their thematic goals, stylistic preferences, and priorities for sound.

2. **Mood Boards or Sound Samples:**

   - Share auditory examples (e.g., music tracks, soundscapes) to refine their preferences and gain alignment.

3. **Listening Sessions:**

   - Present sample soundscapes or effects early in the process to gauge their reactions and make adjustments.

4C. Respecting and Enhancing the Director's Vision

Adapting to the Director's Approach:

1. Collaborative Directors:

- These directors offer clear input while welcoming your creative contributions.
- Strategy: Brainstorm ideas with them, propose alternatives, and explore options together.

2. Non-Communicative Directors:

- These directors may struggle to articulate their vision or defer decisions to you.
- Strategy: Offer multiple options (e.g., representational vs. stylized sound for a scene) and use open-ended questions to draw out their preferences.

3. Micromanaging Directors:

- These directors have very specific ideas and prefer close oversight.
- Strategy: Deliver what they ask for while offering subtle creative suggestions when appropriate.

Respecting Boundaries:

- Avoid pushing your ideas if they conflict with the director's priorities.
- Remember that your job is to enhance their vision, not replace it.

4D. Offering Creative Input

When and How to Offer Ideas:

Timing:

- Share creative ideas after understanding their vision.
- Introduce alternatives during concept meetings or rehearsals when there's room for flexibility.

Framing Suggestions:

- Use phrases like:
- "Would you like to hear an alternative approach to this moment?"
- "I think a subtle underscore here might enhance the emotional impact. What do you think?"

Presenting Options:

- Show contrasting approaches (e.g., a realistic diegetic soundscape vs. a stylized non-diegetic option) to give the director a choice.

Creative Negotiation:

Scenario: The director envisions a busy urban soundscape for a dialogue-heavy scene, but you worry it will overwhelm the text.

Strategy:

- Acknowledge their vision: "I love the idea of a rich urban environment here."
- Propose a solution: "Would you be open to using a lighter ambiance during the dialogue, then layering in more sounds during the pauses?"

4E. Navigating Challenges

Challenges You Might Encounter:

Vague Directions:

- Example: A director says, "Make it sound eerie," but doesn't explain further.
- Strategy: Ask clarifying questions and offer examples (e.g., "Do you want something subtle like a low drone, or more literal, like howling wind?").

Contradictory Feedback:

- Example: The director wants the sound to be subtle but also "big and impactful."
- Strategy: Identify priorities by asking, "Which aspect is most important for this scene?"

Disagreements on Approach:

- Example: You propose abstract soundscapes, but the director insists on strict realism.
- Strategy: Respect their decision while suggesting subtle ways to incorporate your ideas. For instance, propose blending realism with slight abstraction for emotional emphasis.

Dealing with Last-Minute Changes:

- Stay flexible. Rehearsals often reveal new opportunities or challenges, so be prepared to adjust your design.
- Keep a toolkit of alternative sounds ready for quick implementation.

4F. Case Studies: Applying the Process

Case Study 1: A Collaborative Director

Play: *Our Town*

Situation:

- The director envisions a quiet, minimalist soundscape but isn't sure how to handle transitions between scenes.

Solution:

- Offer two transitional options: a simple bell chime (diegetic) or a soft, ethereal pad (non-diegetic).

- Collaborate to decide which better supports the play's tone.

Case Study 2: A Non-Communicative Director

Play: *Macbeth*

Situation:

- The director gives little input on how to handle the witches' scenes.

Solution:

- Present two soundscapes: one using naturalistic ambiance (e.g., howling wind and cawing crows) and another with abstract, distorted whispers.

- Use their feedback to refine the chosen direction.

Case Study 3: A Micromanaging Director

Play: *The Glass Menagerie*

Situation:

- The director has specific ideas for the memory sequences but struggles to describe them technically.

Solution:

- Translate their ideas into auditory terms by asking focused questions like, "Do you want the memory sequences to feel dreamlike, nostalgic, or unsettling?"

SECTION 4 - Conclusion

Collaboration with the director is at the heart of effective sound design. By respecting their vision, asking the right questions, and offering creative input, you can ensure that your work enhances the overall production. Remember that every director is different—your adaptability and communication skills will be just as important as your technical expertise.

SECTION 5 - Design Styles in Action – Bridging Theory and Practice

Objective:

Explore how sound design styles (Realism, Impressionism, Expressionism) are practically applied, incorporating the concepts of diegetic vs. non-diegetic sound and representational vs. cinematic approaches. Discuss collaboration with directors, practical testing, and conflict resolution.

SECTION 5 - Design Styles in Action – Bridging Theory and Practice

5A. Quick Review: Sound Design Styles and Core Concepts

5B. From Script to Sound: Interpreting Design Choices

5C. Practical Deployment: Two Key Scenarios

5D. Practical Testing and Refinement in Rehearsal

5E. Case Study: Balancing Styles Across a Production

5F. Collaboration and Conflict: Managing Director's Vision

5A. Quick Review: Sound Design Styles and Core Concepts

Key Terms (Review):

Sound Styles:

- Realism: Literal, grounded soundscapes.

- Stylization: Deviate from realism to evoke mood, symbolism, or heightened emotional states.

  - Impressionism: Abstract, mood-based sounds.

  - Expressionism: Exaggerated or symbolic sound reflecting emotion or psychology.

Diegetic vs. Non-Diegetic Sound

- **Diegetic**: Sound that exists within the world of the play (e.g., footsteps, doors closing).

- **Non-Diegetic**: Sound the characters don't hear. Used for mood or commentary (e.g., music underscoring, abstract drones).

SECTION 5: Design Styles in Action – Bridging Theory and Practice

Representational vs. Cinematic Sound

- **Representational**: Sound that aligns with the physical action and reality onstage (*e.g., a phone ringing on cue*).

- **Cinematic**: Sound used with a more filmic approach—heightened, layered, or abstracted to drive emotion, mood, or transitions (*e.g., an amplified heartbeat underscoring tension*).

Key Reminder

These terms guide sound choices as you transition from theory to practice.

5B. From Script to Sound: Interpreting Design Choices

Example: *The Glass Menagerie* – The breaking of Laura's glass unicorn.

1. **Diegetic/Representational Option:**
   - A sharp, realistic shattering sound.

   Effect: Literal and grounded in the reality of the scene.

2. **Non-Diegetic/Impressionistic Option:**
   - A resonating, bell-like shatter that fades into silence.

   Effect: Suggests emotional fragility of Laura and the symbolic loss.

3. **Cinematic/Expressionistic Option:**
   - A distorted, echoing shatter layered with tonal swells, growing louder before fading.

   Effect: Amplifies Laura's internal collapse and heightens the moment's symbolic weight.

Takeaway:

Designers determine how sound interacts with the world of the play. Does it serve the literal action (diegetic, representational), or does it heighten the emotional and thematic elements (non-diegetic, cinematic)?

Scenario 1: Representational vs. Cinematic Tension

Play: *Macbeth* – The dagger soliloquy

1. Representational Approach:

- Silence, focussing on the actor's performance.
- Occasional diegetic elements: faint footsteps wind from surrounding space.

Effect: Keeps the moment grounded, relying on the text and performance for tension.

2. Cinematic/Expressionistic Approach:

- Non-diegetic sound: a pulsing heartbeat, distorted whispers, or tonal drones.
- Sound grows louder as Macbeth's paranoia intensifies.

Effect: Externalizes Macbeth's psychological state.

Director Interaction:

- The director might feel that *cinematic* sound is intrusive.

Solution: Suggest testing both approaches in rehearsal to find the balance—"Let's try a subtle layer of sound that builds tension without pulling focus from the actor."

Scenario 2: Diegetic and Non-Diegetic Blending

Play: *The Cherry Orchard* – The "breaking string" moment.

1. **Diegetic Sound:**
   - A literal string snapping—sharp and sudden.

   Effect: Clear and representational, aligning with the action described in the script.

2. **Non-Diegetic Sound:**
   - The string snap reverberates and fades into an abstract drone.

   Effect: Enhances the moment's emotional weight and its symbolic representation of the family's collapse.

   Conflict Example:
   - The director wants strict realism but struggles to articulate why.

   ResolutionStrategy:
   - Frame abstraction as enhancing realism—"What if it's literal at first, then resonates emotionally?"

Key Point: Combining diegetic and non-diegetic elements can satisfy realism while enhancing the thematic weight.

Example: *Death of a Salesman* – Willy's late-night return home

1. **Diegetic/Realistic Design:**
   - City ambiance: distant cars, footsteps, and house creaks.
   - Represents Willy's mundane, external world.

2. **Non-Diegetic/Impressionistic Design:**
   - A faint ticking clock layered with a low, tonal hum.

   Effect: Suggests Willy's anxiety and emotional unravelling.

3. **Cinematic/Expressionistic Design:**
   - Amplified clock ticking, fragmented whispers, and distorted noise as Willy enters the house.

   Effect: Embodies Willy's psychological collapse, overwhelming the audience alongside him.

Testing in Rehearsal:
   - Allow the director to hear options: diegetic realism vs. Abstraction.
   - Adjust levels to blend representational grounding with cinematic tension where needed.

Play: *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

1. **Realism/Diegetic**: Ground the world with village sounds (footsteps, voices, livestock).
2. **Impressionism/Non-Diegetic**: Use tonal drones or subtle chants to transition between emotional beats.
3. **Cinematic/Expressionism**: Amplify symbolic moments (e.g., drums and distorted soundscapes during moments of war or chaos).

Key Challenge: Directors may struggle with transitions between styles.

- **Solution**: Justify stylistic choices—"We begin with realism to ground the audience, but expressionism heightens critical emotional moments."

Common Scenarios:

1. **Directorial Resistance to Non-Diegetic Sound:**

   Example: A director rejects underscoring in favour of silence.

   - **Strategy**: "Let's test a subtle layer in rehearsals - it's easy to remove if it doesn't fit."

2. **Overemphasis on Literal Sound:**

   Example: The director insists on diegetic footsteps for every character moment.

   - **Solution**: "Literal footsteps can become distracting. Can we streamline them to maintain focus on the story?"

3. **Conflict in Representational vs. Cinematic Styles:**

   Example: A director prioritizes realism, but the play's themes suggest abstraction.

   - **Strategy**: Propose blending styles - "We can start '*literal*' and gradually evolve to abstraction for emotional emphasis."

SECTION 5 Conclusion - Sound Styles as Storytelling Tools

Sound design bridges realism and abstraction through careful choices about diegetic, non-diegetic, representational, and cinematic sound. Designers must interpret the script, collaborate with directors, and refine designs in rehearsal to achieve a balance that enhances storytelling. Conflict, when approached creatively, often leads to the most compelling results.

SECTION 5: Design Styles in Action – Bridging Theory and Practice

SECTION 5 - Final Thoughts

"Sound design shapes how an audience experiences a story—it can be literal, it can be abstract, but it must always serve the play's emotional truth."

> \- Deena Kaye and James Lebrecht in *Sound and Music for the Theatre*.

"Sound is not just an effect but a dramaturgical element. It can shape the world of the play, engage the imagination, and articulate emotional truths that go beyond the literal."

> \- Ross Brown in *Sound Effect: The Theatre We Hear*

"An effective sound design requires intention—it's about understanding the why behind every choice. Whether realistic or abstract, sound creates an emotional journey for the audience."

> \- Victoria Deiorio in *The Art of Theatrical Sound Design*

"Sound design is not just about creating effects—it's about shaping how the story is heard and felt."

> \- Matthew Skopyk