



## **Take sound into account when writing scripts**

7 March 2019, by [Benoît Labourdette](#).

'A scenario that gives, on reading, the sensation of the soundtrack of the film, will have a rare, extremely convincing evocative power.'

### **Physiological thinking of the scenario**

A film is, physiologically, an object that addresses only two of our senses: vision and hearing. The scenario is the prefiguration of the film, its moment and its space of invention, and it deals with an immense number of elements. From only a few words, it must bring to the reader's mind: a story, characters, costumes, sets, sound atmospheres, music, sound effects, historical contexts, emotions...

## Sound represents 70% of the film

In the viewer's experience, I usually say that sound represents 70% of the film. Why this hypothesis, which is quite basic, is true? Because we are physiologically freer in front of the image than in front of sound: it is easy to close our eyes, to look away, but much less so to come out of a sound in which we are immersed. One could object to me that this is true in the case of a screening in a cinema but much less so in the case of a screening on a mobile phone for example: we are less bathed in sound (except if we wear headphones, in which case the sound can be even better than in a cinema). Moreover, just as a film can be seen in different contexts, and in particular by being immersed in the soundtrack, sound does not become, under any circumstances, a secondary element of cinema.

Imagine a strident, bumpy, unpleasant sound on beautifully framed and illuminated images: the film will be unbearable in thirty seconds and you will probably leave the room very quickly. Now imagine fuzzy, poorly filmed, shaky images, served by a magnificent soundtrack of deep counterpoints between orchestral music and real sound effects: you will live a powerful film experience. That's why I propose this simplistic idea that sound represents 70% of the film. This does not mean that the 30% of the work on the image is not essential, of course!

## How to write the sound of a movie

It is not complicated in itself to write, in your script, sound evocations. The important thing is to think about it, and especially to think, when reading again, about what we hear in our heads during the reading.

In cinema, we usually separate the sound into four "tracks":

- **The dialogues** : easy in the scenario. But do not hesitate to add indications on the volume of the voice, intonation, hoarseness, whispering or screaming, the slow or fast rhythm of the speech...
- **The sound atmosphere**: it is the sound universe in which the scene is immersed. A busy street, a market in a village, high mountains in summer, a stream, the raging sea... Indicate some details to enrich the sound atmosphere: the jolt of the stream, the rushing wind, the honking of the horn... The reader-spectator will then really have the feeling of "being there".
- **Sound effects**: a gunshot, footsteps, a car accident, the wrinkling of a garment... naming the sound that corresponds to actions that take place in the film makes them all the more alive, real, embodied. This makes the reader "live" the dramatic situation.
- **Music**: Music is, of course, a major element of cinema, especially in musical films, of course, but also in all films. In the scenario, you can name the song or type of musical style. But don't forget to describe the psychological effects that this music has on the viewer. The anguish caused by the strident music, the cottony softness in which Chopin's piano plunges us, the energy that this techno dance music sound gives us...

When we "write the sound" in our script, we realize that these new sound elements that we integrate can, for some, because we have taken the trouble to describe them, become real dramatic actors: the sound of the school bell will become a major element of the character's psychology, which will intervene at a key moment in the film, to bring about a fundamental awareness in the story, for example.

In short, by choosing to "write the sound" in your script, you give yourself the opportunity to make the sound truly an actor in the film. For the final spectator it will be an even more intense cinematic sensation. For the reader of the scenario, its reading will be of exceptional pleasure. And for the screenwriter, it is an opportunity to find new cinematographic ideas.

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