

A Study on Dissonance Functions of Scenes and Background Music in Movies

Kang-iL Um

Adjunct Professor, Department of Broadcasting Entertainment, Paekche Institute of the Arts, Korea
E-mail: kyleum1004@gmail.com,

Abstract

Soundtrack dissonance, which appears in the background music of a movie scene, is a phenomenon of using songs or compositions that contrast with the general sentiment of the situation. A sad scene usually uses a slow tempo of sad music to match the mood of the scene. However, sometimes, in order to play background music that follows a depressing, sad, or anxious scene, there is a case of inserting music with an opposite atmosphere such as bright music, exciting music, fast-tempo music, or magnificent music. The method of presenting music that is contrary to the mood of the scene is a kind of psychological technique that inflicts a kind of mental shock on the audience and makes them remember a particular situation. In this study, we have investigated the meaning coming from scenes and Soundtrack Dissonance in movies, in order to understand the role that music and images play.

Key Words: *Soundtrack Dissonance, Paradox, Unconscious Realms, Cognitive Dissonance, Background Music*

1. Introduction

In music, concepts of consonance and dissonance are types of simultaneous or successive sounds. Consonance is usually associated with sweetness, pleasantness, and acceptability, but dissonance is usually associated with harshness, unpleasantness, or unacceptability [1]. When we watch a movie, our brain interprets the scene by constantly inducing empathy according to the scenes in the movie. However, exceptionally, if soundtrack dissonance is used as background music as a disharmony with the scene, our brain accepts images that are conflict with sound, leaving us the image strong in memory. The reason is that the scenes we enjoyed are emphasized and expressed. For example, if we were in a great shock or experienced a great anxiety as a child, the incident will be remembered for a long time. The reason is that the old incidents continue to exist in our unconscious realms and appear at some special moment. The unfamiliarity obtained by dissonance is represented by paradox by connecting different objects together. The term Paradox is a term that means structurally contradictory or irrational. However, it is also used to indicate the inherent meaning of the content, symbolic expression, metaphorical expression, or further a method of exaggerated expressions. Soundtrack Dissonance is used to prevent the audience from being overly immersed in the scene, so that the audience can

enjoy the Narrative more firmly by having a new perspective, a different interpretation, and a transcendent view of the movie scene at a certain distance apart. We examined when a soundtrack dissonance that collides with the video is shown, the dissonance not only creates a new concept, but also gives audience various effects emotionally. The audiences will appreciate the narrative of a VR film in the same way as common movies, but they exist in the same space in VR films and thus need a different way of narrative structure from the scenes of common movies [2].

Since we have a psychology of trying to maintain our self-consistency, it could be an interesting attempt if we try to change our perceptions using dissonance. There have been many previous studies of cognitive dissonance from a psychological point of view and there have been attempts to use the dissonance artistically. However, few attempts have been made in order to interpret this dissonance in the relationship between the scene of the film and the dissonance of soundtrack [3]. We look at the definition and use of Soundtrack Dissonance in this study. In this paper, we will further investigate the role of soundtrack dissonance in order to express a new meaning of dissonance, by producing and systematizing different meanings from the existing meaning of soundtrack dissonance and by breaking away from the conventional concepts.

2. Background Music of a Film

Film, also called movie, motion picture or moving picture, is a visual art-form used to simulate experiences that communicate ideas, stories, perceptions, feelings, beauty, or atmosphere through the use of moving images [4]. All the music used in movies is called film score or film music. It is original music written specifically to accompany a film. The background music of the movie plays a very important role to the audience as well as the dialogue and sound effects. Film Music has artistic value in itself, so the composition and arrangement of the music are also part of the film. Film music is composed by composer or selected from library according to the scene of the movie. There are no genre restrictions for Film Music. In addition, film music is used not only as the role of 'Background Music', which is played according to the dialogue or movement of the scene, but also as a sound effect.

Film music is used to express the emotions and thoughts of the audience according to the scene of the movie. Music basically consists of three elements: melody, rhythm, and harmony. In order for the audience to recognize the sound as music, various social factors are used; that is, collective consciousness or personal consciousness that share culture is used. Film music has a different meaning to the audience, functions as a language of different concepts, and interacts with narrative. Michel Chion wrote many books and essays about the interaction between the sounds and the images used in the movie. His book titled *L'audio-vision. Son et image au cinéma*, originally published in France in 1990, has been considered by all critics as the definitive book on the relations between sound and image [5-7]. Previously, a sound of movie scene was mainly discussed in terms of narrative, but in this book he discussed the sound from a linguistic point of view and an aesthetic point of view. Also, the film is played with appropriate background music from the first scene. In other words, the sound of the movie is divided into the sound of choice and the sound of exclusion. After selecting the sound for use, it goes through various editing processes and modifications. In this regard, Michel Chion said, "The real sound, shown in the image, is not to reproduce the sound source but to renew it." He also categorized the functions of sound in video into empathetic music and anempathetic music. In general, video music maximizes the emotions of the audience and makes the audience more immersed in the narrative by playing music that matches the process of emotional change that occurs to the actor in the video. He called the music 'emotional music' that matches the emotions of the movie scene.

According to his theory, "depending on the movement of sadness, joy, and emotion. music can be directly involved in the scene, by using the appropriate scale, composition, and rhythm changes." On the other hand, the music that is inserted as opposed to or unrelated to the emotions of the movie scene was called anempathic

music. The music directly informs the audiences that the situation of the movie scene is irrelevant. By maximizing the emotion of the scene by using indifference, a new meaning is derived from the a montage occurred between image and sound. Anempathic music is a way to bring out emotions to a new level. In this way, a variety of meanings can be created even in a specific group. Michelle Chion called anempathic music a harmonic or counterpoint between sounds and images.

3. Eisenstein's Theory of Collision Montage

As a film theory, let's look at Serge Eisenstein's theory of montage. Russian film theorist and director Sergej Eisenstein is a student of Lev Vladimirovich Kuleshov. He established the Theory of Collision montage in order to create a new concept, which is not a simple combination of shorts but a third meaning that appears as a result of collision between shorts [8]. He also established the "Theory of attraction montage" by systematizing new methods of film composition and techniques. He used a counterpoint method for scene, shot, and sequence. In other words, in order to create an unpredictable third outcome, he used a theory that uses the method of introducing the opposite themes. He said that if the film is synthesized separately using a counterpoint method to create a different time and space from reality, the audience can get impression and psychological sympathy. He said that if the counterpoint method is used in video and music, there is a possibility for new perception and development of montage. He used a counterpoint method to define the basic structure of montage, the principle of the subject, and the structure of the whole film.

Sergj Eisenstein criticized the montage techniques of his teacher Kuleshev and his fellow Pudoffkin, saying that there is no special difference from the continuous editing techniques used in Hollywood [9]. He insisted that the editing of films should be dialectical and criticized Fudoffkin's montages for being connected mechanically and non-organic. He was influenced by his teacher, Vsevolod Meyerhold. Therefore, his theory was built on the basis of Meyerhold's technique [10]. He used a directing technique using incongruity and counterpoint harmony, had a strong tendency to oppose the existing art order, emphasized non-mainstream art rather than mainstream art, and showed a lot of folk tendencies. Eisenstein criticized the act of imitating 'movie sound' using existing ideas and made an experimental attempt; that is, he said that the image of the movie and the movie sound do not necessarily have to match. In addition, he pursued a new result from the exact match (or thesis-antithesis-synthesis) that appears when using the counterpoint method. The exact match is a progression of three ideas or propositions. The first idea, the thesis, is a formal statement illustrating a point; it is followed by the second idea, the antithesis, that contradicts or negates the first; and lastly, the third idea, the synthesis, resolves the conflict between the thesis and antithesis [11]. He said that images and 'Movie Sound' play different roles independently, allowing audiences to interpret diverse and rich images.

Eisenstein made good use of the Grotesque feature in the image. Therefore, it gave the audience a feeling of embarrassment from discomfort. He used the heterogeneity and the discomfort to block the audience's immersion into a scene, to make the audience judge the scene objectively and rationally. His Montage of Collision can be said to be 'an editing of a collision'. He induces a new interaction that did not exist in the existing editing by linking shots based on the dialectical conflict and contrast of Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. We also call the new results from the process of dialectics 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis', which is also used as a synonym for dialectics. He used the 'Montage of Attraction' technique in his film *Stachka*. The Montage of Attraction technique is a technique that gives a psychological shock to the audience by combining elements that cause the audience's strong emotional reaction and using similarities and differences. In the movie *Stachka*, he gave an emotional shock to the audience through the scenes where the head of a cow was cut and the scenes where the crowd rolled down in order to maximize the meaning of slaughters of cow and crowd by using mutual similarity.

4. Consonance and Dissonance of Background Music in Movie

Consonance and Dissonance are classified as either simultaneous or continuous. In the traditional western way of thinking, harmony typically means sweetness, delightfulness, and receptivity; on the other hand, disharmony represents the meaning of discomfort, unpleasantness, harshness, and violence, and structurally, it forms mutual exclusion or dichotomy [1]. A Harmony is not a disharmony, and A disharmony is not a harmony. The two concepts have never been fully explained so far, and the definitions of concepts have varied for a long time. The 'Sonance' is a terminology proposed to include both concepts of consonance and dissonance at the same time. Most music is subjective, customary, cultural, and often time-dependent. For example, from the 1700s, in Johann Sebastian Bach's work, consonance and dissonance were distinguished. However, in the works of Claude Achille Debussy in the early 1900s and in contemporary works, the boundaries between consonance and dissonance have disappeared.

4.1 Disharmony theory based on a psychological background

The dissonance theory is an epistemological theory that arises at the moment when the relationship between the related existing perception and the actual object contradicts or disagrees. It is also called 'Incongruous Resolution Theory' because it occurs in the process of understanding the meaning by recognizing and solving the incongruity rather than having meaning in the incongruity itself. This soon leads to humor, because it goes through the process of dissonance of cognition, recognizing that the object or situation is not appropriate. In other words, we feel humor as we deviate from the logical framework when we do not naturally expect or do not recognize it. It develops and appears as catharsis.

Immanuel Kant said, 'If a situation of tension suddenly turns into the situation of nothing, a surprise is needed when laughter manifests itself.' William Hazlitt said, "If we understand the discrepancy that causes feelings that are contrary to unrelated thoughts or expectations, laughter will result." Schopenhauer said, 'When viewers and audiences recognize the discrepancy between the concept they expect and the phenomenon that reverses their expectations, laughter comes out.' Therefore, even if the same situation is given, the humor expressed by the audience by resolving the inconsistency of the situation may have completely different effects and reactions depending on the circumstances of the audience and the inner cultural differences of the audience. In some situations, audiences may feel uncomfortable with disharmony situations, and may stimulate trauma of inner psychology. On the contrary, the situation of dissonance may give more interest and humor to the audience. Therefore, there should be factors in dissonance; such as rapid resolution, slightness of information contents, and appropriate psychological atmosphere.

4.2 Ambivalence Theory Applied to Background Music of Film

Ambiguity is a psychological term that refers to the phenomenon with opposing emotions existing together. Ambivalence is a state of having simultaneous conflicting reactions, beliefs, or feelings towards some object [12]. If viewed as a general meaning, ambivalence is a universal phenomenon. In the conscious world, only one of these two types of emotions is allowed. It can be said that it is very important to find out what the elements of the suppressed emotion are and how they are expressed. E. Bleuler, a Swiss psychologist, first used the term ambivalence in <Vortrag uber Ambivalensens and classified it into three main categories [12].

1. Ambivalence in terms of emotion,
2. Ambivalence in the aspect of willingness that cannot make action decisions,
3. An intellectual ambivalence in terms of accepting the opposing premise.

Obvious ambivalence may appear unpleasant or pleasant when both the positive and negative aspects of the

object are present at the same time. Inconvenient ambivalence creates avoidance, delay, or attempts for the purpose of resolving ambivalence. It can also cause great inconvenience when we make decisions to change the situation. Since we perceive our two sides to different levels, the impact of a two-way state depends on the individuals and the situations. In modern psychology, the main concern is ambivalence in the emotional aspect. This trend began with Freud. Freud said the characteristic of ambivalence is that the opposing elements are almost equally developed.

5. Conclusion

In this study, we investigated the important roles of soundtrack dissonance of the background music in film, which gives the audience a new concept by reproducing and systematizing different meanings, and by breaking away from the conventional concepts. We have confirmed that soundtrack dissonance in music can exist in an independent form, not just the role that helps the video. We have confirmed that when a soundtrack dissonance that collides with the video is presented, the dissonance not only creates a new concept, but also gives audience various effects emotionally. In this study, we have investigated the meaning coming from scenes and soundtrack dissonance in movies, in order to understand the role that music and images play. In this study, we have investigated the meaning coming from movie scenes and background music showing a soundtrack dissonance in movies, in order to understand the role that music and images play.

References

- [1] Imre Lahdelma and Tuomas Eerola, "Cultural Familiarity and Musical Expertise Impact the Pleasantness of Consonance/Dissonance but Not Its Perceived Tension," No. 8693, May 26, 2020.
- [2] Kim Tae-Eun, "Interactive VR film Storytelling in isolated space," *International Journal of Advanced Smart Convergence(IJASC)*," Vol. 9, No. 1, pp.163-171, March, 2020.
- [3] <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/SoundtrackDissonance>
- [4] Andrei Severny, "The Movie Theater of the Future Will Be In Your Mind," Tribeca, September 5, 2013.
- [5] Chion, Michel, "L'audio-vision. Son et image au cinéma. Paris," Editions Nathan, pp. 123-135, 1990.
- [6] Romina Daniele, "Ascensore per l'échafaud, Il luogo della musica nell'audiovisione," Milan: RDM, ISBN 9788890490590, pp.13–14, 2011.
- [7] Elisabeth Weis, John Belton, "Film sound: theory and practice," Columbia University Press, ISBN 9780231056373, 1985.
- [8] <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news/50-greatest-films-all-time>
- [9] Jean Mitry, "Sergey Eisenstein - Soviet film director," Encyclopaedia Britannica, March 18, 2020.
- [10] Edward Braun, "Meyerhold: a Revolution in Theatre. A & C Black," ISBN 9781408148808, p.5, 1998.
- [11] Sarah A. Schnitker and Robert A. Emmons, "Hegel's Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis Model," *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religions*. Berlin, Springer, p. 978, 2013.
DOI:10.1007/978-1-4020-8265-8_200183. ISBN 978-1-4020-8264-1.
- [12] Christopher J. Armitage and Mark Conner "Attitudinal Ambivalence: A Test of Three Key Hypothesis," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. 26 (11), pp.1421–1432, 2000.
DOI:10.1177/0146167200263009.