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Eng 1302

Film Essay

The Sound of *Signs*

The jump from adolescence to adulthood can be very frustrating, monotone, and sometimes depressing. This gets worse when the jump is also from living with the family to living alone in a big city. However most people get used to it and find a way to overcome the fast busy life of the city. In the short film *Signs*, director Patrick Hughes, uses the transition of emotions from loneliness and monotony and hope to happiness through a series of non-diegetic and very few diegetic sounds to transmit the feelings of the main character to viewers.

The music begins with the film, a set of slow and deep piano notes, followed by violin and cello accompanying the main character while he gets ready for a work day. During these scenes the bass notes of the cello transmit the sense that something is not right or might be missing. These same notes repeat a couple of times, until the main character begins to communicate through signs with the girl in the next building. At this point the notes of the piano accelerate the pace and the cello is not so noticeable anymore, simulating the excitement of the character. While the story advances, new instruments are added to the non-diegetic sound of the film. These new instruments like drums and percussion create a different rhythm, which gives brightness to the whole film, projecting a sense of happiness and excitement. The rhythm speeds up again when the main character is rushing up to ask the girl if she wants to meet this change of pace in music creates an atmosphere of stress and desperation since the character

can't find the girl. This same music keeps going on until the end of the film, when the two characters meet. In this case the same music is used to represent two different emotions, since at the end the audience is left with the comforted emotion of the main character finally finding love.

However the combination of diegetic and non-diegetic sounds through the whole movie makes the connection between spectator and main character even stronger. During the first half of the film the atmosphere of sadness and loneliness is projected to the audience through key diegetic sounds. In one scene the camera shows the main character sitting with a group of people while the boss is giving a speech in a foreign language. It is not until the boss makes a joke that the feeling of the main character being misplaced is represented; this happens because the laughter of everybody in the room except the main character is heard.

A feeling of monotony is well transmitted when the character is making copies, and only the sound of the copy machine followed by the notes of the piano can be appreciated. Monotony is also represented when the bell of the alarm-clock is heard every time the character wakes up. Later on, the non-diegetic music stops while the main character checks his answering machine, finding the recording of his mother saying how wonderful everything must be going for him. This recording is another element that produces the effect of sadness during the first half of the film. In the second half of the film the director uses a diegetic sound to reinforce the projection of the sense of joy of the main character. This happened when the two characters of the film are communicating through signs, and the main character's laughter can be heard.

Overall the emotions that *Signs* projects are mainly communicated through the music. However, is through the combination of diegetic and non-diegetic sounds that Hughes is able to create a real impact on the audience. The use of sounds that are very common in people's daily lives create a sensation of identification with the main character. It revives those moments of being the new guy or the lonely one because almost everybody has had them. *Signs* creates a sense of reality strongly emphasized by a musical theme and a few, accurate diegetic sounds, which not only identified, but also transport the audience to the character's life and time.

Work Cited

Hughes, Patrick. *Signs*. *Youtube*. Google. 29 Jan. 2009. 25 Nov 2011.