

Philippine Cinema Soundtrack: A Trialectic Mediation of Sound and Image Historiophoty

Crisancti L. Macazo
University of the Philippines

Historiophoty, as coined by Hayden White in his 1998 essay “Historiography and Historiophoty” in the *The American Historical Review*, is historiography in cinema. In addition, I support this statement by saying that films are a historiophoty of the current popular trends as well, the creation of films itself in the current time is witnessed in the output. Film genres other than historical is a repository of current technical aspects which are, but not limited to, various conventions in cinematography, music scoring, acting, and special effects. Thus, every film is a historiophoty of cinema. Philippine cinema is traceable of three cultures. This hybridized culture is comprised of Filipino, Spanish, and American. Filipino film scholar Nick Deocampo calls this cultural hybridity as a trialectic relationship between two dominant cultures hybridized with the local and resulting to a Filipinized culture. Themes of films, costumes, and music are strongly traceable of this hybridity.

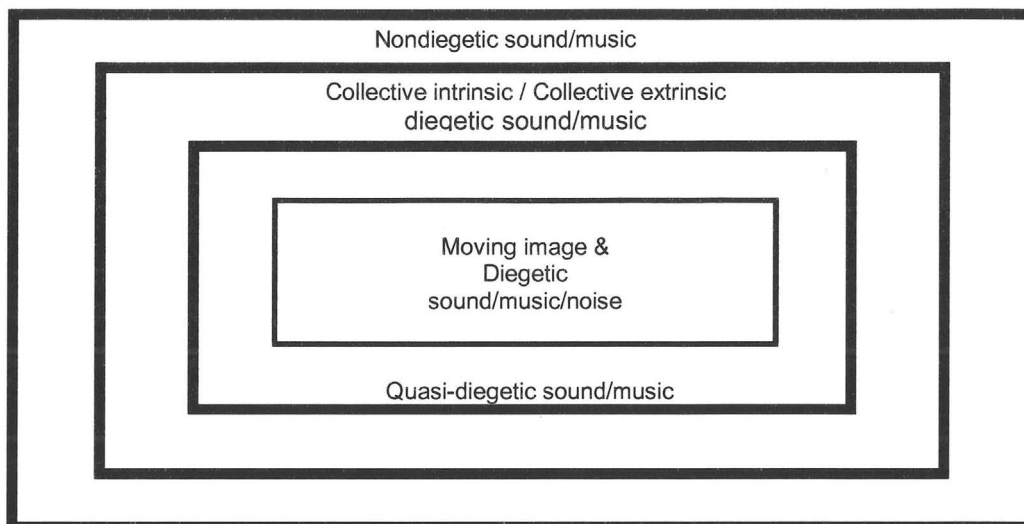
The functions that film music play in this study come in various forms such as metaphor, metonymy, leitmotif, and sonic bridge. All of these represent and symbolize the moving images. The film scorers’ utilization of sound as carriers of the implied and embedded meanings of sound paralleled or counterpointed with the images in the narratives of the films. These sound cues are diegetic, nondiegetic, quasi-diegetic, *collective intrinsic diegetic*, and *collective extrinsic diegetic* sounds. *Collective intrinsic diegetic* sound/music narrates the collective thoughts and emotions of at least two actants in specific events. *Collective extrinsic diegetic* sound/music is external diegetic music which source is not known to the actant in the diegesis. In films, diegesis is a conglomeration of characters, setting, various events, and time of the story. It is the depicted world in the narrative.¹ Apart from the capacity to convey implied and embedded meanings, sound/music act as a narrator in occasions where the actual actants or voice narration is not present. Sonic versatility in the sense of crossing frames or borders helps in the smooth transitions of scenes and cinematic techniques such as time-lapse and montage. Furthermore, its capacity to cross the borders between time and space, such as in a flashback or asynchronicity in the diegesis complements well in solidifying the needed effect in such scenes. As mentioned by Bela Balazs, “[a]synchronous sound...produces the tension arising from curiosity and expectation...The surest means by which a director can convey the pathos or symbolical significance of sound or voice is precisely to use it asynchronously.”

Conceptual Frame: Larawan

The films included in the study showcase various themes. Morality and differing ideologies that reflect Filipino-ness endowed the selected films. Aesthetic sensibility on visuals, cinematic technique, and film music scoring complement each other as a tapestry of sound-image production. My conceptual framework is based on various factors concerning the creation of a film. This starts with the diegesis that narrates themes from a specific artistic standpoint. Generally, producers and filmmakers create films for economic purposes, a lucrative entertainment business in which box office revenue is a consideration. Other aspects involved in the creation is the aesthetic value of the film that relates to the viewers’ senses. Furthermore, these films are filled with social relevance. “*Larawan*” conceptual framework represent the four sides of the frame. “*Larawan*” is a Filipino word for a photograph or an icon for something. It is a picture of a subject that can be reproduced physically or an image resembling the form of the object in our minds. I posit that what is seen in the frame is not the total depiction of the event or object inset. To unravel its broader meaning, one has to have knowledge on time, space, and composition of the subject in the picture. The inner part or inside of the frame are the ones seen and heard in a cinematic experience, referring fundamentally to the moving images and soundtrack. The moving images comprise the actants and the diegetic location, while soundtrack can be categorized as music and noise that is heard as, diegetic, nondiegetic, quasi-diegetic, *collective intrinsic diegetic*, and *collective extrinsic diegetic*. Yet the diegesis of the film really begins

¹ Paula Flasch, *Film Scoring Today – Theory, Practice and Analysis* (Master Thesis: University of Bergen, 2012), 23.

with the writer or creator of the story. He conceptualizes how this narrative is made into a plot within his imagination. As the director decides on how to put the elements together, he creates a tangible framework for actualizing the diegesis. In a sound film narrative, these two elements are inseparable. Therefore, filmmakers act as implied authors. As filmmakers, they can focus on what the audience should see and hear in the films. This manipulative technique directs the eyes and ears to the more important parts of the “frame.” Nevertheless, the less important or less-focused parts of the film equally deserve examination. It is germane to the sonic framework the inclusion of all the cues in a film for a more critical comprehension of the diegesis. It may be true that the director focalizes the spectators to one specific point. However, a film scorer as another implied author is also capable of coding any cue in the soundtrack, which makes it a vital part of the film. Below is the diagram that was used in the analysis of the films.



The innermost frame is shared by the moving image and diegetic sound/music/noise. They share in the same frame because these sounds are in the scenes being represented. It consists of the sound environment of the diegesis itself where vocal sounds such as singing and talking take place. It also entails instrumental music and mechanical sounds as heard in the film. The next layer of the frame is where the partly heard sounds are heard. The quasi-diegetic sound is heard by an actant but not everyone in the diegesis nor the audience. These sounds include flashbacks, and thoughts of the actants, their emotional states, etc. An example is the recollection of something, or a letter read silently, but a vocal narration is heard by the actant and the spectators of the film. The voice of the actant’s conscience is another example. The next frame contains *collective intrinsic* and *collective extrinsic* sounds. The former, as mentioned before, is the collective thought of actants. An example is a tenor singing the prayer that is shared by everyone in the same psychological condition. In the real time of the diegesis, numerous actants pray at a specific time. However, the tenor and male chorus collectively and synchronically “pray” together as in the 1941 film *Ibong Adarna* (Adarna Bird). The latter, on the other hand, is the non-locationable sound/music created or heard externally from the focalized scene. Similar to Chion’s *acousmetrê* but the disembodied sounds remain ambiguous throughout the film. An example is the exit music of the King and his princesses in the 1954 film *Prinsipe Teñoso* (Prince Teñoso). Throughout the film, only the trumpet and horn players are visually inset during fanfares such as entrances and exits of the royalties, afterwards, a fully orchestrated cue follows. The sound of an orchestral ensemble may suggest the presence of the group in the diegesis. However, the absence of its visual presence construes it as nondiegetic at the same time. Moving on, the outermost frame in the schema is where the majority of the music score is found. This is the frame of nondiegetic sound/music. In this frame, the sounds are only heard by the spectators but not the actants in the diegesis. In short, filmmakers inform spectators what they want to convey with various sounds in the multimedia creations. Through musical scorers, messages and meanings are coded in the sounds that intertwine with moving images in the various form of symbolization. These can be found in musical themes, phrases, motifs (leitmotif), stingers, quotations, and even canned music. The gist of this study is to scrutinize every single cue for they are a part of the sonic framework of a film.

Socio-Cultural Discourses

The films studied show varying social issues to the spectators. The filmmakers/implicit authors challenge viewers to think critically on what they see and hear when experiencing films. In *Ibong Adarna*, the focus is on equality as witnessed in the decision of the King to give equal chances to his three princes in succeeding his throne. Equal importance to non-Christian faith as the tenor praises Allah for the welfare of the King was highlighted. Stress on giving and being selfless was also focused as opposed to the selfishness of siblings. The morality is that bad fate always awaits a person who only takes care of himself. In the 1955 film *Pilipino Kostum, No Touch* (Filipino Custom, No Touch), the implied author (director) juxtaposed modern and “old-fashion” music, dance, and visuals of the sound film. He resolves this binary opposition by mediating the conflicting ideologies. He informs the audiences that while there is nothing wrong with modernity, old customs and traditions must not be forgotten. The 1956 film *Krus na Kawayan* (Bamboo Cross) is an examination of communist ideology that was spreading in the country at that time. As rebels push their ideology to the masses, the film informs the audiences of possible negative effects that would blanket the country should this ideology win the hearts and minds of the locals. Stingers and other short, monotonous cues may not be aesthetically important and are the least focus of study among film scholars. However, I argue that they are also, if not equally, important in the quest to unlock meanings of the sonic tapestry. There are numerous stingers and short cues in the films studied that conceal meanings. One of which is the close-up shot of the Vietnamese flag signifying the horrors of communism as an ideology. The fabula is about a mock trial that would put the parents of Vinh to death in the hands of their own farmers. Fabula is “a series of logically related events that are caused or experienced by actors.”²

Conclusion

Filmmakers are implied authors of the diegesis. They interpret the artistry and technicalities in the creation of the film. In Abbott’s words, “[a]n implied author ... accounts for the narrative in the sense that the implied authorial views that we find emerging in the narrative are consistent with all the elements of the narrative discourse that we are aware of...a kind of construct that among other things serves to anchor the narrative.”³ A musical scorer for films plays its role as an implied author as he composes the varying cues essentially needed according to the framework of another implied author, the film director. Although music scorers have the freedom to compose music incorporating their own style and interpretations, this freedom is not absolute. Edward Cone asserts that,

music can create an environment that we share with the characters portrayed. We often feel the need of this illusion, even in talking pictures, for the screen produces the effect of a separate world that we know we can never enter. By binding us together with the inhabitants of that world, the music convinces us of its reality. Sometimes we can interpret it as referring to the subconscious life of the characters; often, however, it seems to have more general function, attaching itself as it were to the psyche of the camera-eye itself. Skillfully handled, it can encourage us to identify ourselves with the camera-eye, which represents the point of view of the filmmaker — or better, of his persona.⁴

The social relevance of a film is vital for it projects the *larawan* that the society recognizes. The music encoding process penetrates the aural and visual tropes of the cinema.

Thus, the soundtrack as a sonic framework in the creation of a more meaningful sound film encompasses all the cues in deciphering the meanings. This tapestry of sounds codes meanings through various types of symbols. In exploring the soundtrack for its implied meanings, one needs to consider looking for details and mapping these into the entirety of the soundtrack suite. Filipino-ness is manifested through hybridized themes of the diegesis and its soundtrack. Music and image may sound and look “western” but that is the reality about Filipino culture, a product of hybridization, thus a repository of history through image and music.

² Bal, 5.

³ Abbott, 77.

⁴ Edward T Cone, *The Composer’s Voice* (California: University of California Press, 1974), 144–145.