

An analysis of the use of sound in Iwai Shunji's film 'Love Letter'

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Abstract

Iwai Shunji, a Japanese filmmaker, is responsible for directing the film "Love Letter," which is considered an outstanding example of a pure love picture from East Asia. The film is lauded for its sincere and uncomplicated approach to the narrative, its new and breathtaking camera images, and its delicate and gentle emotional expressions. The sensitive depiction of feelings from the viewpoint of the female protagonist and the aesthetics of materialism demonstrate the unadulterated emotions of East Asian love in a manner that is both new and uncluttered. The concept of "love without knowing where it comes from," which is sometimes believed to be the epitome of a crush, is shown as the emotional output of the characters in this movie. This article will investigate the qualities and benefits of the use of sound in Love Letter, directed by Iwai Shunji, in terms of the relevance of the study, the introduction to the film's plot, and the use of sound. Specifically, the article will focus on the characteristics and advantages of the use of sound.

Keywords

Iwai Shunji, Love Letter, sound, music.

1. Significance of the study

Since the 1990s, a new chapter in Japanese cinema has begun, with a new group of directors emphasizing their style, revolutionizing traditional Japanese cinema with new film concepts and creative techniques, and creating a powerful new film movement in Asia and even around the world, which has contributed to the recovery of Japanese cinema and is known as the New Japanese Cinema Movement.

The post-war impact of Western culture and the growth in material living standards as the economy recovered led to the establishment of new social values in Japan, which were destined to have a profound impact on the Japanese film industry in the 1990s. He has been referred to as the "leader of the new Japanese film movement." Love Letters, April Story, and Hana and Alice are collectively referred to as the Pure Love Trilogy. However, other of Iwai's works, including All About Lily Chou-Chou, The Man Who Would Not Die, and Mad Men, is also recognized as "harsh stories." The Man Who Wouldn't Die" and "Crazy Love" is not about the beauty or disillusionment of youth, but rather about its cruelty and violence. This double-sided extreme by Iwai is a demonstration of the Japanese nation's view of the two extremes of beauty, it must be mentioned.

Love Letter is the debut feature film of Iwai Shunji, whose charming, fresh film style reflects the light depression and naivety of youth, as well as their attractiveness. Love Letter exemplifies Iwai's distinctive artistic approach, as both the story setting and the use of color exhibit his appreciation for beauty and life in the greatest possible way. He emphasizes and conveys to his audience the beauty of youth and his respect for life. The debut of Love Letter caused an unprecedented sensation, with various South East Asian nations using the film's iconic premise for parodies and tributes in television programs, films, and television shows. The majority of Sister-in-music Law's is an episode from Love Letter, such as "Forever Friends," which was directed by Hong Kong filmmaker Wong Jing Po. The use of sound in Iwai Shunji's films is

equally instructive and worthy of study. Love Letter's tone and aesthetic are influenced by an Eastern aesthetic, and the film's meaning and feelings are consistent with the East Asian term for 'love'.

REMEDIOS has written an appropriate soundtrack for the picture, which, in addition to fitting the scenes, helps to express and set the tone of the film, and contributes to the film's appeal.

The purpose of this study is to carefully summarize and classify the elements of sound in Iwai Shunji's films, and to examine how Iwai Shunji employs sound to enrich the overall style of his films, as well as the deeper reasons and values of his sound creation processes. While most current studies of Iwai Shunji's films focus on camera language, narrative style, and the expression of physical beauty in his films, studies of sound in Iwai Shunji's films exist only as a small part of the overall study of cinema, or in a single aspect of sound (such as the characteristic use of "off-camera" sound in Iwai Shunji's films). The sound in Iwai Shunji's films has only been analyzed in a limited portion of the overall study of cinema, or terms of a single feature of sound (such as the usage of 'off-camera' sound). Some people's understanding of film sound in the present day is still characterized by the phrase "image first, then sound." However, a film's sound cannot be isolated from the film's style because it is integral to the film's aesthetic. In this context, this study seeks to summarize and analyze the sound texts of Shunji Iwai's films from the standpoint of film and television sound production, following the film ontology assumption.

2. Plot Summary

Two years after the passing of her fiance, a man named Itsuki Fujii, Hiroko writes a letter of love to his previous residence out of a sense of longing. To her surprise, she receives a letter back from a woman with the same name who goes by the name Itsuki Fujii. A young love between the female Itsuki Fujii and the male Itsuki Fujii is revealed throughout the course of their correspondence with one another. It turns out that female Itsuki Fujii and male Itsuki Fujii were classmates in junior high school. Additionally, it turns out that female Itsuki Fujii had always had a crush on male Itsuki Fujii but never told him about it. Itsuki Fujii, a male, later in life encounters Hiroko, a woman who looks like Itsuki Fujii, a female, and falls in love with her "at first sight." However, Itsuki Fujii dies suddenly, and they are never together again. The emotional journeys and experiences of both heroines are conveyed in the form of a letter. It is necessary for Hiroko to have some knowledge of her lover's history in order for her to feel his presence. For Itsuki, it is necessary for her to reconnect herself with the boy who has the same name by way of incomplete recollections. As her memories progress, Hiroko realizes that her lover's love for her includes the shadow of female Itsuki Fujii and forgives him. At the same time, female Itsuki Fujii learns by accident that male Itsuki Fujii has a deep crush on her and laments the fact that she missed out on this beautiful relationship. Hiroko comes to understand that her lover's love for her includes the shadow of female Itsuki Fujii and forgives him. However, all of the unexplainable feelings and affection are buried in the mountain where male Itsuki Fujii passed away. The mountain is covered in pristine white snow and has a serene and reflective atmosphere.

3. The use of sound

In 1927, sound was added to motion pictures, and the "great mute" finally began to speak. The introduction of sound enriched the cinematic vocabulary, and films began to utilize sound in addition to the visual effect of the image to portray the tale more comprehensively.

Typically, music is employed to underscore the action on screen, enhance the mood of a scene, anticipate upcoming action, or even convey a message (Gena, 2022) There are three types of film sound sources: music, human speech, and natural sound. In the film Love Letter, Iwai

Shunji's use of sound is delicate and intelligent, whether for the explanation of the plot, the expression of mood and atmosphere, or the linkage of the editing. Sound plays a significant part in all of these aspects.

(1) A lot of Voiceover

Documentaries were the first to employ voiceover as a supplement to line dialogue. During this time period, the narrator's primary function was that of a commentator, introducing and supplementing the picture's content and occasionally providing indirect commentary. Through the filmmakers' persistent efforts, however, the significance of narration as a distinctive aspect of cinema language has been increasingly apparent, and its techniques have become more diverse.

In *Love Letter*, Hiroko and the female Itsuki Fujii do not formally meet and converse, but instead connect through letters, which are not portrayed through filming, but rather through the Voiceover of the two women, and the reading of each other's letters becomes an integral aspect of the film. Not only does it quietly change what is meant to be a literary language into an audible one, but it also lends the film an air of beauty and heightens its effect. In literature, the direct and precise use of language ensures that large portions of psychological description are always used to express the thoughts and actions of the characters. Voiceover inherits this advantage from literature by transforming words into language and employing them skillfully to achieve the same effect in film.

In this instance, Voiceover functions as an interstitial narrative, a component of the film's language that is designed to clarify the creator's intentions for the audience. Thus, the film Voiceover can exist as both a narrative device and an artistic form.

In the film, the letters between Hiroko and female Itsuki Fujii contribute to the development of the plot and play a crucial part in elucidating the story, beginning with Hiroko's greeting, when the two are testing each other without knowing the other's identity. Later, Hiroko discovers that Itsuki was a junior high school classmate of her deceased fiancé, so she continues to write letters to Itsuki, wanting to learn more about her fiancé's past, because Itsuki Fujii is a person who conceals many 'secrets' from her, such as having a wedding ring ready but not mentioning it. Hiroko ultimately takes the initiative to ask him whether he wishes to marry her... To uncover these truths, the letters continue and the story is progressively completed, revealing everything about a youth's past.

Hiroko and Itsuki are two women that are vastly dissimilar. Hiroko distributes the letters to her friends and reads them aloud while searching for answers. Itsuki's vocabulary, however, is filled with expectation and enthusiasm, and it is for this reason that Itsuki "responds" to a letter from a stranger, assisting Hiroko in taking photographs, etc.

The voiceover in the movie is basically jumbled up from the very beginning to the very end, which is a quality of the movie *Love Letter* and has evolved into the film's style throughout the course of its runtime. You won't be able to get a clear picture of the love that existed between male and female Itsuki Fujii while they were still in high school and naive about their feelings for one another. Due to the fact that Hiroko was previously in a relationship with male Itsuki Fujii, the fact that Abika is in love with Hiroko cannot be made public. Hiroko and male Itsuki Fujii do not get along in their expressions. These mental states are endemic to East Asia and cannot be found elsewhere. They are strikingly different from the zeal that characterizes the Western world. Expressing "letters" and Voiceover are implicit expressions of writing one's feelings on paper but having them conveyed by another person, which is highly appropriate for the film's constrained, restrained love. Also, "letters" are an implicit expression of writing one's feelings on paper and having them conveyed by another person.

(2) Sound and Transitions

As was said earlier, the voiceover performer is also responsible for a large portion of the transitions. The movie *Love Letters* transitions between numerous scenes through the moment when the letter is received and read aloud, which feels extremely natural and establishes a distinct connection between the beginning and the end of the film.

The film is also edited with creative camera groupings, using the same set of actions (sneezing/opening doors) performed by the same individuals in different settings to create a feeling of drama and coincidence in the temporal and spatial transitions. This is done to create a sense of continuity throughout the film.

For one thing, the actions in both sections are sneezing, while the conclusion of the first area is powder being dusted all over the face and the conclusion of the second area is something falling to the floor, producing confusion and making the transitions feel more natural.

After that, the nurse asks for a woman named Itsuki Fujii. The scene then shifts to a school roll call, during which both Itsuki Fujiis simultaneously raise their hands and answer "yes." The camera then cuts back to the adult female Itsuki Fujii answering "yes."

It is essential to point out that the soundtrack of the movie shifts melodically whenever the storyline or the scene does, which makes it much simpler for the viewer to follow the shift in perspective. For instance, because the same actor plays both Hiroko and female Itsuki Fujii, when the music is played, the scene naturally depicts a party reading or writing a letter. This eliminates the confusion that could have been caused by frequent scene changes and one actor playing two roles, and it bridges the spatial gap so that the memories of male Itsuki Fuji flow together without any interruptions.

Sound and Atmosphere, mood

"Nurtured by the natural terrain of the island nation, the Japanese have developed a unique cultural character and spiritual structure, cultivating a reverence for sadness, mystery, and elegance, which has become the undercurrent that breeds the spirit of Japanese art, producing a correspondingly distinctive form of Japanese artistic beauty." (Weiqu Yuemei, 2022) The use of sound subtly contributes to the atmosphere and mood of Iwai Shunji's films, which adhere to the distinctively Japanese aesthetic of material sadness. There is always a delicate sense of melancholy in the films, with the use of sound helping to create the atmosphere and ambiance. The film begins with a close-up of Hiroko lying in the snow, with only the ambient sound of the wind and snow whistling, and then after a few seconds Hiroko begins to breathe heavily, a sign that one has been holding one's breath for a long time, as Hiroko appears to be attempting to feel his deceased fiancée's breath. Following this is a sequence of deep pictures of Hiroko flapping in the snow, a series of depth-of-field shots that blur the background so that only her movements and facial expressions are visible. The sound of the wind and snow, along with the sound of her breathing, creates a little melancholy atmosphere. Hiroko's gloomy disposition and feelings are indistinguishable from the sound of the wind and snow close to her ears.

Following this comes a long shot of Hiroko wandering alone in the snow, with a large expanse of white snow in the front and a patchwork of houses and trees in the background. At this point, the piano begins to play, and Hiroko simply vanishes into the snow. In the Japanese aesthetic sense, which is highly impacted by the tradition of material mourning, the background of the Japanese flag is pure white, which is rarely seen. The Japanese adore white because it resembles snow, which symbolizes purity. The snow's mournful metaphor and the piano's tone both contribute to the creation of atmosphere.

After female Itsuki Fujii hears of the death of male Itsuki Fujii from his teacher, the background score features the sound of a strong wind. The sound of the wind represents not only the cold of winter in Otaru, but also how the death of male Itsuki Fujii has awoken memories in the deepest part of female Itsuki Fujii's mind. Immediately after, Itsuki Fujii recalls the day of her father's burial, when she went skiing and witnessed a dragonfly frozen to death with its wings

spread as if it were 'embracing death.' Instead of direct lines, the film employs the sound of wind whistling to connect the emergence of her memories from the past.

In addition, the film's use of sound and musical rhythms effectively conveys the mission's tone and emotions. In the early half of the film, when Hiroko visits Akiba, Akiba asks, "So what kind of connection do we currently have?" However, because Abika is a friend of Hiroko's boyfriend, she remains silent despite Abika's urging. Immediately after the iron bar falls to the ground, the ear-piercing sound explains the abrupt shift in the plot, as Abika kisses Hiroko as a piano plays a melodic tune. Abika touches Hiroko's chin, and Hiroko shuts her eyes, indicating a change in her mindset so that the second kiss between them is logical. The piano also becomes more frantic as Hiroko's emotions shift, perhaps elucidating the change in Hiroko and Abika's feelings at this moment, when both have their hearts set on the other.

Hiroko and Abika arrive at the mountain where male Itsuki Fujii died at the end of the film, and Hiroko, partially alleviated of her emotions after the previous night's chat, yells to the mountain, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" "How are you? I'm fine." It sounded as if the deceased guy Itsuki Fujii was greeting Hiroko and responding to her query via an echo from a faraway valley. Hiroko's transformation from crying and expressing disbelief when he discovers that he resembles female Itsuki Fujii to accepting himself and male Itsuki Fujii is effectively demonstrated by the use of 'echoes.'

Music deepens the theme

"Ensuring that at every turn of the picture, the audience feels it from the inside out," states soundtrack maestro James Roy Horner. The soundtrack is lurking in the film, rendering, setting, and showing the plot, as well as catching the pace of the plot.

The band REMEDIOS wrote the score for the movie *Love Letters* specifically for the movie, and the title of the score represents the profound nature of the film as well as the delicate feelings it conveys. For example, in the episode in which Male Itsuki Fujii is seen hiding behind the curtains to read a book, the episode's soundtrack is titled "Fading," which is meant to symbolize the final destination of youth, as if it were being kept hidden behind the curtains and vanishing with the passage of time. The piano and the cello are featured prominently throughout the score of the movie, both of which make substantial contributions to the overall flavor of the movie.

The piece of music that is considered to be most deserving of analysis in this article is not the soundtrack, but rather a song that is hummed, from 'Blue Coral Reef' by Soko Matsuda. This song is mentioned and hummed by male Itsuki Fujii's friends in the film because it is the song that he sings before his death. They are baffled after learning from his friends that he had previously held negative feelings for Matsuda Seiji. "Blue Coral Reef" is a cheery music, but male Itsuki Fujii was singing it at the end of his life; as a result, the contrast can make one feel even more upset by his passing. "Blue Coral Reef" was written by Itsuki Fujii.

"My love is carried away by the south wind," begins the first verse of the song "Blue Coral Reef." In the movie, the location of Otaru, which is where female Itsuki Fujii lives, is shown to be in the north. The song that male Itsuki Fujii sings at the end of his life reveals that he truly loves female Itsuki Fujii, and that the south wind carries his thoughts to the north, attempting to express his feelings at the end of his life. Otaru is shown to be located in the north. He has a strong need to communicate his feelings as he nears the end of his life.

4. Conclusion

Film sound composition is now widely recognized as a creative artistic technique that should be considered from the earliest stages of a film's production. In the past, film sound composition was merely seen as the recording of sound for a film. However, this perception has since changed, and film sound composition is now seen as a creative artistic technique that should be considered from the very beginning. Film sound design has been developed to a fine art thanks

to the Hollywood cinema industry system, which has perfected the production of film sound down to the location of each cut. It is unquestionable that the process of creating sounds for films has progressed from relying solely on recording technology to incorporating elements of both technology and art. This development exemplifies the expanding significance of sound as one of the two components that make up cinematic language. In a movie, the visuals always take precedence over the music, and the visual style of the movie almost always determines the tone of the soundtrack. However, the overall stylization of a film is also significantly impacted by the sound composition used during the production.

Walter Murch says the following in the introduction to his book "In the Blink of an Eye: "The most successful sounds seem to affect not just what the observer sees, but also go beyond, sparking a "conceptual resonance" between picture and sound: conceptual resonance. This new image causes us to hear the sound differently, which in turn causes us to see something different in the image, which in turn causes us to hear something different in the sound. This chain of events continues until the sound causes us to see something different in the image, which in turn causes us to hear something different in the sound. Except for the painting on the back of the borrowed book card at the end of the film and the song that male Itsuki Fujii sings before he dies and the meaning that is embedded in the song to explain the love that is in male Itsuki Fujii's heart, the movie does not give a direct account of male Itsuki Fujii's affection for female Itsuki Fujii when they were teenagers. Instead, the movie makes extensive use of metaphors. And in the beginning of the movie, Hiroko lays down in the snow after holding his breath for a long time, heavily panting in order to build a melancholy atmosphere and set the tone for the story. Because of how expressive the voice is, we are able to feel the story that lies behind it.

In addition, the substantial usage of voiceover in the movie is not tedious; rather, it is a clever method that is utilized to change the plot, communicate feelings, and explain the story. Sound also plays a crucial part in the process of generating the atmosphere, with each piece of music serving as the ideal match to the tone that the movie is attempting to convey. The progression of the storyline is influenced concurrently by the film's use of sound.

As a result of the changing times, people have a new point of view on relationships, and it would appear that there are no excellent movies geared at young people that are currently being produced or distributed in the market. Love Letter is a piece of work that exemplifies how Iwai's unique perception and presentation of beauty, as well as the East Asian approach to love, are diametrically opposed to the fervent fervor that is prevalent in the Western world. If spectators are able to grasp the aesthetic of Iwai Shunji's films, they may be prompted to think more profoundly about the emotional experiences they've had and the lives they've led.

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