HANDOUT: SOUND IN FILM

Sound can be divided into two types:

Diegetic sound is any sound where the source is visible on the screen, or is implied to be present by the action or environment of the story. With diegetic sound, you basically hear what you see. When it comes to diegetic sound, filmmakers must make sure the sound is clear.

Non-diegetic sound is sound that does not occur as part of the action and cannot be heard by the film's characters (background). Non-diegetic sound, which includes music or voiceover, is largely determined by artistic choices and can greatly impact the tone of a film.

Dialogue: Characters' speech is recorded during filming, and the recorded dialogue is then either cleaned up digitally and used in the finished program or replaced with new audio. As location sound is much more difficult to control, actors often re-record much of their dialogue during post-production in a studio in order to enable precise control over auditory variables. This process is called ADR (Automated Dialogue Replacement).

Music: Non-diegetic music in a film is generally referred to as the score or soundtrack. The term score generally refers to orchestral background music, while lyrical music used in films (as opposed to instrumental) is generally referred to as the soundtrack. Few feature films (of any era) do not include some type of non-diegetic music. Diegetic music is also a an important element of many films, most notably musicals. Music that is performed by on-screen characters (or played by on-screen radios, etc.) is considered diegetic.

Sound Effects: All sounds in a film or TV program that are neither music nor speech are considered sound effects. Occasionally, human sounds (such as a scream) will be embellished by (or created entirely from) sound effects. Much like dialogue, sound effects may either be recorded during production or, more commonly, added during post-production. While these sounds are so ambient that viewers often do not consciously notice them, sound effects such as footsteps, the movement of clothing, the movement of wind outdoors, etc. are important considerations for filmmakers attempting to create a plausible soundscape for a given scene. Specific (as opposed to ambient) sound effects must also match up with visible on-screen actions (e.g., a key entering a lock, a gunshot, an alarm going off, a high-five, a car starting, etc.)