

SOUND ELEMENTS AS INVISIBLE COMMUNICATORS IN THE FILM *TWO DISTANT STRANGERS*

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of visual meaning in a film depends on the support of sound; hence, the interplay between visual and auditory elements forms the foundation for narrative development, emotional resonance, and audience interpretation. Accordingly, this study seeks to analyze the interplay between visual and auditory components, including ambiance, dialogue, sound effects, and background music, in enhancing the narrative in the film *Two Distant Strangers*. This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing Roland Barthes' semiotics to analyze the meanings generated by the integration of visual and auditory design. The results demonstrate that atmosphere intensifies emotions of confusion, fear, frustration, and tension; dialogue, particularly when paired with music, enhances the audience's comprehension of the scene; sound effects accompanying character actions clarify the message of injustice; and background music aligns with the emotional tone of the scene, reinforcing the visual atmosphere. Well-designed music profoundly deepens emotional resonance, elucidates the narrative, and enhances the coherence of the film's overall cinematic experience.

Keywords: *ambiance; dialogue; film; music scoring; sound effects*

ABSTRAK

*Pemaknaan visual dalam film tidak selalu utuh tanpa dukungan tata suara; karena itu relasi visual–audio menjadi dasar pembentukan narasi, emosi, dan arah interpretasi penonton. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis sinergi visual dan elemen suara, yaitu *ambiance*, *dialog*, *sound effects*, dan *music scoring*, dalam meningkatkan *storytelling* pada film *Two Distant Strangers*. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif melalui semiotika Roland Barthes untuk membaca makna yang dibangun oleh rangkaian visual dan tata suara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan *ambiance* mempertegas emosi kebingungan, ketakutan, frustrasi, hingga ketegangan; *dialog*, terutama saat musik hadir, membantu pemahaman adegan; *sound effects* yang menyertai aksi tokoh menajamkan pesan ketidakadilan; sedangkan *music scoring* selaras dengan emosi adegan dan memperkuat mood visual. Tata suara yang terkonsep baik dapat memperdalam emosi, memperjelas narasi, dan meningkatkan koherensi pengalaman sinematik.*

Kata Kunci: *ambiance; dialog; film; music scoring; sound effects*

1. Introduction

Communication is a form of interaction that involves the transmission of messages to an audience. However, when communication takes place through the medium of film, which is inherently dominated by visual construction, the question arises as to the extent to which meanings constructed through visual presentation are genuinely understood by all viewers. The presentation of information through sound design can indeed assist in conveying information and facilitating audience comprehension; yet the fundamental question remains: if visuals already function as the core of cinematic narration, why does visual meaning frequently appear ambiguous, easily shifted, or even open to multiple interpretations?

In practice, audiences tend to remember events, composition, camera movement, gestures, and expressions as the primary carriers of meaning. Nevertheless, this visual dominance may obscure the fact that the clarity of visual meaning is often shaped by elements that are not visible namely sound. At this point, a conceptual problem emerges: sound elements in film production are frequently regarded merely as complementary components, even though they provide added value that allows meaning to appear as though it naturally emerges from the image, when in fact such meaning is carried by carefully designed sound production. The concept of added value emphasizes that sound enriches a message and often becomes the primary source through which meaning is constructed.

Within the context of communication, sound is also used to deliver verbal messages to audiences while simultaneously constructing emotional atmosphere. Sound elements consist of dialogue, sound effects, and music scoring (Permana et al., 2021). These three elements collectively contribute to the construction of meaning within film narratives, making the central research question increasingly relevant: do audiences truly understand visual meaning because they see it, or because they are guided by sound design functioning as an invisible communicator?

Sound is defined as a medium of verbal communication that utilizes the vocal cords, respiratory system, and vocal mechanisms to produce varied intonations; moreover, sound serves as a device through which individuals express themselves publicly (Nurhuda, 2022). In film, however, the issue extends beyond verbal

utterance. Film employs sounds whose sources are sometimes not visible on screen, creating acousmatic conditions, sounds that are heard without their visual causes being shown, which can construct space, threat, or presence without explicit visual representation. This raises an important question: how do audiences “read” visual imagery when spatial, emotional, or causal information is primarily conveyed through non-visible sound elements?

This question is crucial because sound elements in film are commonly categorized into dialogue, music, and sound effects, all of which influence continuity, rhythm, and the direction of audience attention toward visual image. Studies on film music further indicate that music often operates subconsciously and appears to be unheard, yet it plays a significant narrative role by guiding emotional responses and instructing audiences on how to feel about a scene. Thus, the issue is not merely the importance of sound, but how sound, despite rarely being the focal point of attention, directs audience interpretation within visually dominant cinematic structures.

To situate this problem within a measurable scientific framework, this study adopts Roland Barthes’ semiotic approach. Semiotics is the study of signs and signifiers used to analyze meaning within information. Barthes’ theory explains meaning through three analytical levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the object of analysis in the form of words or elements being examined; connotation refers to emotional or associative meanings; and myth refers to ideological ideas or broader significance embedded behind a sign. Barthes conceptualizes language as the object of analysis by identifying the signifier as the form of expression and the signified as the content of the sign (Mustajib, 2022).

Within Barthes’ framework, myth operates as a second-order system of signification, whereby first-order signs are elevated into new signifiers that normalize certain ideologies as natural and self-evident. Barthes further emphasizes that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary; meaning does not arise naturally, but is shaped by convention, context, and reading practices. Consequently, denotation, connotation, and myth constitute relevant analytical tools for film analysis (Hidayati, 2021). By positioning visual imagery as the most dominant sign perceived by audiences, this study interrogates how sound elements

function as reinforcing (or shifting) mechanisms that stabilize visual connotations and guide the construction of myths (such as power, threat, normalization of violence, or injustice) without requiring explicit visual representation.

The object of this study is the film *Two Distant Strangers*, a short film that won the Academy Award for Best Live-Action Short Film at the 93rd Academy Awards (Grobar, 2021). This film was selected due to its time-loop narrative structure, which allows scenes and situations to be repeated, making it a strong case study for examining how recurring visual meanings can continue to intensify, or shift in nuance, when accompanied by specific sound design patterns. In other words, when relatively similar scenes are presented repeatedly, what causes audiences to experience increasing tension, fear, or frustration? Are these changes primarily driven by visual modification, or by sound design elements, such as ambience, dialogue, sound effects, and music scoring, that accompany the scenes?

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the role of sound elements in supporting narrative and cinematic experience, to identify how ambience, dialogue, sound effects, and music scoring contribute to audience perception, and to examine the application of sound design in enhancing storytelling quality in film. This research is expected to provide insights into the use of sound as a reinforcement of visual meaning in *Two Distant Strangers*, while also contributing to the broader discourse that visual dominance in film never operates in isolation, but is always accompanied by sound design functioning as an invisible communicator.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sound as a Narrative and Communicative Element in Film

Sound is a fundamental component of cinematic language that functions not merely as an auditory supplement, but as an integral narrative device. In film, sound operates as a medium of communication capable of transmitting meaning, emotion, and ideological messages to audiences (Permana et al., 2021). Although often perceived as secondary to visual elements, sound plays a crucial role in shaping audience perception, emotional engagement, and narrative comprehension.

Moving film creates a multi-sensory effect for the viewer by introducing audio, including music and voice, and sometimes text (Swanson & Ardoin, 2021).

Nurhuda (2022) defines sound as a verbal communication medium produced through vocal articulation and processed cognitively by listeners to generate understanding. In cinematic contexts, sound extends beyond spoken language to include non-verbal auditory elements such as ambience, sound effects, and music scoring. These components work collectively to construct meaning, atmosphere, and emotional resonance. As Manullang (2023) argues, sound possesses mnemonic power, enabling it to evoke memory, emotion, and ideological associations that strengthen narrative impact. Audio elements, in context of audiovisual dissonance is a powerful tool for inducing psychological effects. It can create mental shock by contrasting the expected harmony between audio and visual, forcing viewers to reinterpret the scene (Utami et al., 2025)

Several studies emphasize that sound in film functions as an “invisible communicator,” conveying meanings that may not be consciously perceived by audiences but significantly influence interpretation (Permana et al., 2021; Rizali et al., 2021). This implicit nature of sound makes it a powerful tool for reinforcing narrative themes, particularly in films that address complex social issues.

2.2 Classification of Sound Elements in Film

Sound elements in film are commonly categorized into dialogue, ambience, sound effects, and music scoring (Permana et al., 2021). Each category contributes distinctively to narrative construction and cinematic experience. When most audiences watch films, their first focus is anything seen, which is the actors or actresses, the environment, mise-en-scene, or, in other words, everything visual. Then they will notice the sounds, which are the dialogues and the sounds that we naturally listen to in the real world, for example, the sound of steps when people are walking, the sounds of the vehicles running on the road, or the chirps of the birds (Alam et al., 2023).

Dialogue serves as a direct verbal signifier that conveys explicit narrative information and character relationships. However, dialogue gains deeper meaning when supported by appropriate musical and environmental sound contexts.

According to Muhlisun (2024), even in films with minimal or no dialogue, sound can effectively substitute verbal communication by guiding emotional interpretation.

Ambience refers to background sounds that establish spatial, temporal, and emotional settings. Ambient sound creates realism and situational context while subtly influencing audience emotions. Rizali et al. (2021) note that ambient sound often functions semiotically, providing environmental cues that reinforce narrative meaning without overt emphasis.

Sound effects act as auditory signifiers that enhance realism and dramatization. They are often used to mark transitions, signify actions, or intensify emotional tension. Manullang (2023) highlights that sound effects can also operate symbolically, especially when associated repeatedly with specific characters or events, thereby forming associative meaning structures.

Music scoring plays a dominant role in shaping emotional tone and narrative rhythm. Agusta (2024) explains that musical intervals, tempo, and harmonic structure can evoke psychological responses such as anxiety, fear, calmness, or hope. Instrumental music, particularly when used subtly, enhances emotional immersion without distracting from dialogue (Nurkhasanah, 2025; Pebriana & Nurhaswinda, 2025).

2.3 Semiotics of Sound in Film: Roland Barthes' Perspective

Semiotics provides a theoretical framework for analyzing how sound functions as a system of signs within film. Roland Barthes' semiotic theory emphasizes three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth (Hidayati, 2021; Mustajib, 2022). Denotation refers to the literal or descriptive meaning of a sound, what is directly heard. Connotation involves the emotional, cultural, and associative meanings that emerge beyond the literal sound. Myth operates at an ideological level, where repeated signs naturalize certain values, beliefs, or power structures within society.

Barthes asserts that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary and culturally constructed. In film, sound functions as a signifier that interacts with visual elements to produce layered meanings (Hidayati, 2021).

Anggasta and Franzia (2016) further elaborate that semiotic analysis in film involves narrative codes, including the hermeneutic, symbolic, and proairetic codes, which collectively guide audience interpretation. Through a Barthesian lens, sound elements are not neutral; they participate in ideological discourse. Recurrent musical motifs, specific sound effects, or ambient noise can function mythologically to reinforce themes such as power, injustice, fear, or resistance.

2.4 Sound, Affect, and Cinematic Experience

Sound plays a critical role in generating affective responses, emotional and sensory reactions that shape audience engagement. According to Wood (2023), film-based research leverages audiovisual elements to evoke affective intensity that can surpass traditional academic discourse. This affective dimension enables audiences to experience meaning bodily and emotionally rather than solely cognitively.

Music and sound design contribute significantly to this embodied experience. Nurkhasanah (2025) states that rhythm, harmony, and tempo stimulate auditory perception and emotional response, while Pebriana and Nurhaswinda argue that instrumental music can induce calmness, hope, or emotional reflection (Pebriana & Nurhaswinda, 2025). These affective qualities allow sound to deepen narrative immersion and reinforce thematic messages.

In cinematic storytelling, sound often signals emotional transitions, foreshadows events, or intensifies dramatic moments. The strategic manipulation of sound volume, tempo, and silence creates tension and anticipation, thereby shaping the overall cinematic experience (Agusta, 2024).

2.5 Sound Elements and Storytelling Quality in Film

The integration of sound elements is essential to enhancing storytelling quality in film. Sound complements visual storytelling by adding emotional depth, reinforcing narrative structure, and guiding audience interpretation. Manullang (2023) emphasizes that sound influences how audiences evaluate narrative coherence and emotional authenticity.

Effective storytelling requires deliberate sound design choices that align with narrative intention. According to Muhlisiun (2024), storytelling prioritizes meaning-making, and sound functions as a critical narrative support system that enriches plot development and character portrayal. When sound elements are carefully synchronized with visual action, they contribute to a cohesive cinematic language that strengthens audience engagement.

Overall, sound and music are not merely aesthetic enhancements but fundamental narrative instruments that shape meaning, affect, and ideology within film. Their application determines the extent to which a film can communicate complex social realities and emotional truths effectively.

3. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research approach employing Roland Barthes' semiotic method, as Barthes' framework enables a multi-layered examination of film meaning, ranging from overt or surface-level meanings (denotation), to implicit and emotional meanings (connotation), and ultimately to cultural-ideological meanings (myth). This approach is particularly appropriate for analyzing audiovisual texts that are dominated by visual signs while remaining significantly influenced by the reinforcing function of sound elements.

Procedurally, the primary data, namely the film, are treated as a system of signs, with the unit of analysis consisting of selected scenes or shots chosen based on narrative intensity and the recurrence of visual motifs. Each analytical unit is documented through a scene log comprising timecodes, descriptions of actions, frame composition, color, gestures, lighting, camera angles, as well as detailed notes on sound elements such as ambience, dialogue, sound effects, and music scoring as reinforcements of visual meaning. These units are first analyzed at the denotative level by identifying signifiers and signifieds in descriptive terms (what is seen and heard), which serve as the foundational layer of data analysis.

Subsequently, the connotative level of analysis is conducted by interpreting associative meanings and emotional charges attached to visual signs through Barthes' reading codes, particularly the hermeneutic code to map informational enigmas and narrative tension, the symbolic code to interpret oppositions and

symbolic structures (e.g., light–dark, safe–threatened), and the proairetic code to trace sequences of actions that drive narrative progression (Anggasta & Franzia, 2016).

The final analytical stage is myth analysis, which formulates how recurring connotative patterns are naturalized as common sense and produce the film’s ideological messages, such as power relations, the legitimization of actions, or the normalization of injustice, through a second-order system of signification as articulated by Barthes in his studies of popular cultural mytholog.

The selection of Barthesian semiotics is further justified by its robust conceptual tools for interpreting images as a rhetoric of signs and for linking visual representation to meaning-making operations structured through narrative codes. Consequently, the findings of this study move beyond mere scene description and are able to explicate the mechanisms through which meaning is constructed, from the level of visual representation to the ideological level circulated by the film (Darmawan, 2016).

4. Discussions

4.1 Identification of Sound Elements

a. Ambience

Ambient sound plays a crucial role in film as an expository and atmospheric device that conveys information about time, space, and emotional tone without relying on explicit dialogue. Through the careful construction of background soundscapes, such as environmental noise, spatial reverberation, and subtle sonic textures, filmmakers can situate the audience within a specific location and temporal setting while simultaneously shaping the mood and psychological atmosphere of a scene. This use of ambience not only enhances realism and continuity but also guides audience interpretation by embedding contextual cues within the auditory layer of the film. As such, ambient sound functions as an integral component of cinematic storytelling, enriching narrative meaning and fostering a more immersive viewing experience (Cheng, 2025)

Ambient sound plays a significant role in conveying spatial and locational information within film, allowing audiences to understand the environment without

explicit visual or verbal cues. Through the careful layering of environmental audio elements, filmmakers are able to construct atmosphere and create an immersive spatial experience that situates viewers within the narrative world. Furthermore, sound contributes to the development of a strong “sense of place,” as it not only reflects the physical characteristics of a setting but also reinforces its emotional and cultural context. In this way, ambient sound functions as a critical component of cinematic storytelling, shaping audience perception and deepening engagement with the filmic space (Chattopadhyay, 2017).

Sound elements are identified in several scenes categorized as ambience, namely at 0:45, 4:35, 8:15, 9:30, 9:46, 15:45, and 26:44. At 0:45, a typical metropolitan ambience emerges, characterized by the rumbling noise of a busy roadway combined with the distant sound of police sirens. At this moment, visuals show Carter and Perri coming from inside a bedroom. These visuals and sounds indicate an ambience suggesting that Carter and Perri are in a bustling city. This ambience element depicts an urban atmosphere, marked by roadway noise and interior visuals oriented outward. The sign of noise, which is often unnoticed due to its subtlety, conveys the meaning of two individuals living in an urban environment.

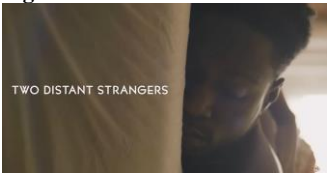
At 4:35, faint music can be heard coming from another room, accompanied by the sound of birds chirping and police sirens. In this scene, visuals of fairly bright sunlight are included. The signs in this scene indicate two individuals engaging in morning activities. At 8:15, the ambience of city crowds from outside is presented within a dream sequence. This sign shows that Perri is indoors and dreaming, serving as a form of narrative cue.

Scene 9:30 presents the ambience of music coming from outside the apartment, accompanied by visuals of confusion. Scene 9:53 shows the ambience of music combined with distant sirens. This condition indicates that Carter is outside the apartment and enjoying the outdoor atmosphere. Scene 15:45 depicts the ambience of Perri’s residential environment with the loud sound of a passing train, signifying a sense of inner calm. The mood of tranquility is conveyed by showing only the movement of a noisy train, with no additional background noise.

Scene 26:44 introduces soft horn sounds, New York City traffic, instrumental


music, and the sound of a pet dog expressing sadness. The camera angle is taken from above and held slightly longer, signifying an unjust and violent story leading to death. The meaning of this ambience reflects a narrative of injustice experienced by Black individuals who are killed unjustly.

Table 1. Semiotic analysis of sound elements at timecode 0:45

<p>Signifier:</p> 	<p>Signified: Sound of a large, active metropolitan environment</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (First System): Urban ambience indicating a busy city setting</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier: The persistent yet understated presence of police sirens</p>	<p>Connotative Signified: A sense of vigilance, pressure, and the normalization of noise in urban life</p>
<p>Connotative Sign (Second System): Carter and Perri are positioned as urban subjects whose everyday life is shaped by constant environmental noise and latent social tension</p>	

The soundscape of a large and active metropolitan environment functions as a key auditory signifier that shapes the narrative context. At the denotative level, the urban ambience establishes a busy city setting through layered environmental noise. Connotatively, the persistent yet understated presence of police sirens operates as a subtle auditory cue, signifying vigilance, pressure, and the normalization of continuous noise within urban life. At the second-order level of signification, this sound design positions Carter and Perri as urban subjects whose everyday experiences are shaped by constant environmental noise and an underlying sense of latent social tension.


Table 2. Semiotic analysis of sound elements at timecode 4:35

<p>Signifier:</p> 	<p>Signified: Morning activities within an urban domestic space</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (First System): Morning ambience characterized by natural light and environmental sounds</p>	

Connotative Signifier: The juxtaposition of natural sounds and police sirens	Connotative Signified: An attempt to maintain routine and normalcy within a potentially oppressive urban environment
Connotative Sign (Second System): Domestic life appears peaceful on the surface, yet remains subtly permeated by the realities of the surrounding city	

Morning activities within an urban domestic space function as the primary signifier of everyday life. At the denotative level, the scene presents a morning ambience characterized by natural light and environmental sounds, emphasizing routine domestic normalcy. Connotatively, the juxtaposition of gentle natural sounds with distant police sirens signals an effort to sustain a sense of routine and stability within a potentially oppressive urban environment. At the level of second-order signification, the domestic sphere appears calm and peaceful on the surface, yet it is subtly permeated by the persistent realities of the surrounding city, revealing the fragile boundary between private comfort and public tension.


Table 3. Semiotic analysis of sound elements at timecode 8:15

Signifier: 	Signified: Public activity occurring in the urban environment
Denotative Sign (First System): Urban crowd ambience	
Connotative Signifier: The placement of the crowd ambience within a dream sequence	Connotative Signified: Psychological tension and the internalization of external social space
Connotative Sign (Second System): The city is not merely a physical setting but an internalized presence within Perri's subconscious	

Public activity within the urban environment functions as the primary signifier of the scene. At the denotative level, the presence of urban crowd ambience establishes a recognizable city setting. Connotatively, the integration of this crowd ambience into a dream sequence transforms the sound into a marker of psychological tension, suggesting the internalization of the surrounding social environment. At the level of second-order signification, the city is constructed not merely as a physical backdrop but as an internalized presence within Perri's


subconscious, indicating how urban space permeates personal and psychological experience.

Table 4. Semiotic analysis of sound elements at timecode 9:30

<p>Signifier:</p>  <p>Music originating from outside the apartment</p>	<p>Signified:</p> <p>Social activity in a public space beyond the domestic interior</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (First System):</p> <p>Environmental music heard within a residential setting</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier:</p> <p>The absence of a visible sound source</p>	<p>Connotative Signified:</p> <p>Emotional disorientation and a sense of intrusion</p>
<p>Connotative Sign (Second System):</p> <p>An uncontrollable external environment symbolically penetrates the private space of the characters</p>	

Music originating from outside the apartment functions as the central signifier that connects the private interior with the surrounding public environment. At the denotative level, the environmental music is heard within a residential setting, indicating social activity occurring beyond the domestic space. Connotatively, the absence of a visible sound source generates a sense of emotional disorientation and intrusion, as the sound enters the scene without clear spatial boundaries. At the level of second-order signification, this auditory element symbolically represents an uncontrollable external environment that penetrates the characters' private space, blurring the boundary between public and domestic spheres.


Table 5. Semiotic analysis of sound elements at timecode 9:53

<p>Signifier:</p>  <p>Music combined with distant police sirens</p>	<p>Signified:</p> <p>An active outdoor urban environment</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (First System):</p> <p>City ambience associated with public space</p>	

Connotative Signifier: The absence of a visible sound source	Connotative Signified: An ambivalent atmosphere oscillating between enjoyment and latent threat
Connotative Sign (Second System): Carter’s engagement with the city is framed as pleasurable yet inherently conditioned by systemic urban risk	

Music combined with distant police sirens serves as a key auditory signifier of an active outdoor urban environment. At the denotative level, these sounds construct a city ambience associated with public space and everyday activity. Connotatively, the absence of a visible sound source produces an ambivalent atmosphere that oscillates between enjoyment and latent threat, blending leisure with subtle tension. At the level of second-order signification, Carter’s engagement with the city is framed as pleasurable yet inherently conditioned by systemic urban risk, highlighting the coexistence of freedom and vulnerability within the urban experience.


Table 6. Semiotic analysis of sound elements at timecode 15:45

Signifier:  The loud sound of a passing train	Signified: A residential area located near urban transportation infrastructure
Denotative Sign (First System): Train ambience within a neighborhood setting	
Connotative Signifier: The isolation of the train sound without additional background noise	Connotative Signified: A paradoxical sense of inner calm within mechanical noise
Connotative Sign (Second System): Tranquility is redefined not as silence, but as emotional stability amid persistent urban motion	

The loud sound of a passing train functions as the primary signifier of a residential area situated near urban transportation infrastructure. At the denotative level, the train ambience establishes a neighborhood setting shaped by the presence of urban mobility. Connotatively, the isolation of the train sound without additional background noise produces a paradoxical sense of inner calm within mechanical noise, transforming what might typically be perceived as disturbance into a stabilizing auditory presence. At the level of second-order signification, tranquility

is redefined not as the absence of sound, but as emotional stability maintained amid the persistent motion of urban life.

Table 7. Semiotic analysis of sound elements at timecode 26:44

<p>Signifier:</p>  <p>Soft car horns, New York City traffic, instrumental music, and the sound of a mourning dog</p>	<p>Signified:</p> <p>The continuation of urban life following a tragic event</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (First System):</p> <p>City ambience enriched with emotionally charged sounds</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier:</p> <p>Melancholic music, the dog’s vocalization, and a prolonged high-angle shot</p>	<p>Connotative Signified:</p> <p>Grief, injustice, and the finality of death</p>
<p>Connotative Sign (Second System):</p> <p>The scene constructs a cultural myth of systemic injustice, emphasizing the wrongful deaths of Black individuals within an oppressive social structure</p>	

Soft car horns, New York City traffic, instrumental music, and the sound of a mourning dog function as layered auditory signifiers that mark the continuation of urban life following a tragic event. At the denotative level, the scene presents city ambience enriched with emotionally charged sounds, situating the narrative within an ongoing urban environment. Connotatively, the melancholic music, the dog’s vocalization, and the prolonged high-angle shot collectively signify grief, injustice, and the sense of finality associated with death. At the level of second-order signification, these elements construct a cultural myth of systemic injustice, emphasizing the recurring pattern of wrongful deaths of Black individuals within an oppressive social structure.

b. *Dialog*

Dialogue, as a basic tool of verbal communication, is particularly suggestive of an individual's perception of themselves and others. The same applies to fictional dialogues, which mimic ordinary, spontaneous conversations to create a convincing exchange. Pragmatics draws on this similarity, applying pragmatic tools originally developed for natural talk – such as speech acts, implicature, relevance, and politeness – to the analysis of fictional dialogue (Čelhar & Kavalir,

2025).

The short film *Two Distant Strangers* narrates a time-loop phenomenon originating from a dream, which compels Carter to repeatedly struggle in his attempt to return home. Several dialogues are identified across key scenes that carry significant meaning within the narrative of *Two Distant Strangers*. At minute 2:20, Carter is visually depicted preparing to begin his daily activities, followed by the appearance of his partner, who invites him to have breakfast. This dialogue signifies the beginning of Carter's daily routine, marked by bodily movement and the presence of morning light. The dialogue is executed through a subjective camera perspective that introduces the female character into the frame.

At minute 5:39, Carter encounters a man in a suit and exchanges the dialogue "after you," indicating a polite social interaction between Carter and another individual. At minute 6:01, the marker of the time loop is introduced when Carter accidentally collides with another person and spills coffee. This scene becomes the initial conflict in which Carter encounters Officer Merk and begins to experience recurring dreams or time loops. Officer Merk's dialogue, "Is there a problem here?" followed by Carter's response, "No problem, just an offer to replace it," reflects the emergence of hostility and Officer Merk's apparent dislike toward Carter.

At minute 10:22, Carter once again passes by an individual, but in this iteration the coffee does not spill. Nevertheless, Carter continues to relive the cycle and interacts with Officer Merk. What distinguishes this scene is the presence of a woman who begins recording the incident. Officer Merk accuses Carter of possessing money from a drug transaction, which escalates into a physical confrontation and ultimately leads to Carter being shot. From minutes 11:45 to 13:20, Carter repeats his life using a different approach. He engages in dialogue that invites Perri to prepare breakfast together in an attempt to avoid Officer Merk. However, this sequence presents a plot twist, as the New York Police Department raids the apartment and shoots Carter despite him raising his hands in surrender.


In subsequent scenes, Carter continues to experience the time loop and repeatedly relive his life. At minute 15:54, Carter expresses frustration through the dialogue, "No, this keeps happening to me." At minute 17:00, Carter alters his

approach by directly confronting Officer Merk and explaining in detail the events that will occur next. Through assertive dialogue, Carter confidently points out and predicts each event. He explains that if the officer shoots someone, they will remain trapped within the same time loop. Despite this, Carter is once again shot by another officer. Upon regaining consciousness, he repeats the same dialogue with Officer Merk.

Between minutes 20:00 and 28:00, Carter believes he has achieved safety after forming a seemingly familiar relationship with Officer Merk. However, a final plot twist occurs when Officer Merk shoots Carter at the end of the story and states, “See you tomorrow, kid.” Carter’s final line, “No matter what, I will get back to my dog,” signifies his determination to continue reliving the same life until he discovers a way to escape the time loop.

Based on the dialogues presented, the denotative meaning of the film is reflected in the presence of a Black male character, Carter, a woman with whom he is acquainted, and a White police officer named Merk, who repeatedly attempts to kill Carter. Denotation highlights the roles of the main characters in conveying a narrative centered on injustice. The film incorporates various sound elements that express calmness, confusion, and frustration, emphasizing Carter’s inability to escape the time loop.

Table 8. Semiotic analysis of dialogue at minute 2:20


<p>Signifier:</p>  <p>Breakfast invitation dialogue and subjective camera introducing partner</p>	<p>Signified:</p> <p>Beginning of daily routine and domestic relationship</p>	
<p>Denotative Sign (First System):</p> <p>Morning routine and intimate domestic interaction</p>		
<p>Connotative Signifier:</p> <p>Subjective POV and warm domestic tone</p>		<p>Connotative Signified:</p> <p>Sense of normalcy and safety before disruption</p>
<p>Connotative Sign (Second System):</p> <p>Establishes a baseline of ordinary life later disrupted by systemic violence</p>		

The connotative meaning lies in the recurring time loop and the portrayal of police violence without justification. The depiction of a police officer who appears

familiar with Carter yet continues to shoot him underscores a profound sense of injustice. Officer Merk’s dialogue, “See you tomorrow,” delivered despite his awareness of the time loop, further reinforces this inequity. At the level of myth, the film suggests that the legal system does not provide equal protection to all individuals, particularly Black individuals. The film challenges the assumption that society offers equal opportunities to everyone, revealing instead that certain individuals experience systemic injustice due to a lack of power.

The breakfast invitation dialogue, combined with the use of a subjective point-of-view camera, signifies the beginning of a daily routine within an intimate domestic relationship. At the denotative level, the scene presents a morning routine and a warm interpersonal interaction in a private household setting. Connotatively, the subjective visual perspective and the gentle domestic tone function as signifiers of emotional closeness, familiarity, and comfort. These elements collectively construct a sense of normalcy and safety that frames the characters’ everyday life. Within the second-order signification, this established baseline of ordinary domesticity becomes crucial, as it later heightens the contrast with the disruption caused by systemic violence, thereby reinforcing the narrative’s broader socio-cultural critique.


Table 9. Semiotic analysis of dialogue at minute 5:39

<p>Signifier:</p>  <p>Dialogue: 'After you' during an encounter with a man in a suit</p>	<p>Signified: Polite social interaction</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (First System): Everyday urban courtesy</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier: Formal politeness between strangers</p>	<p>Connotative Signified: Carter is socially compliant and non-threatening</p>
<p>Connotative Sign (Second System): Contrasts later unjust suspicion toward Carter</p>	

The dialogue “After you” during an encounter with a man in a suit functions as a signifier of polite social interaction. At the denotative level, the exchange represents everyday urban courtesy between strangers. Connotatively, the formal

politeness signals Carter’s social compliance and non-threatening demeanor. At the level of second-order signification, this moment establishes a contrast that underscores the later emergence of unjust suspicion toward Carter, reinforcing the narrative’s critique of bias and misjudgment.

Table 10. Semiotic analysis of dialogue at minute 6:01

<p>Signifier:</p>  <p>Dialogue: 'Is there a problem here?' / 'No problem, just an offer to replace it'</p>	<p>Signified:</p> <p>Initial conflict with Officer Merk after coffee spill</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (First System):</p> <p>Misunderstanding between civilian and the police</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier:</p> <p>Hostile tone from an authority figure</p>	<p>Connotative Signified:</p> <p>Racialized suspicion and power imbalance</p>
<p>Connotative Sign (Second System):</p> <p>Beginning of recurring injustice within the time loop</p>	

The dialogue “Is there a problem here?” followed by “No problem, just an offer to replace it” serves as a signifier of the initial conflict between Carter and Officer Merk after the coffee spill. At the denotative level, the exchange depicts a misunderstanding between a civilian and a police officer. Connotatively, the hostile tone conveyed by the authority figure signals racialized suspicion and an underlying power imbalance. At the level of second-order signification, this interaction marks the beginning of recurring injustice within the time loop, establishing the cyclical nature of the narrative’s central conflict.

The accusation of drug money and the confrontation recorded by a bystander function as key signifiers of the escalation that culminates in Carter’s death. At the denotative level, the scene presents a police confrontation that ends in a fatal shooting. Connotatively, the presence of a smartphone recording signifies the public witnessing of police brutality, emphasizing how the event unfolds under the gaze of civilian documentation. At the level of second-order signification, this moment articulates a critique of systemic violence that persists despite the existence of public evidence, reinforcing the narrative’s broader commentary on injustice and accountability. The ringing sound or the feeling of a vibration from a

phone triggers responses and shapes how people interact with each other and the materials they use, it becomes clear that the engagements with smartphone technology are very complicated since they involve conscious and unconscious processes (Otrell-Cass, 2022).

Table 11. Semiotic analysis of dialogue at minute 10:22



<p>Signifier:</p>  <p>Accusation of drug money and confrontation recorded by bystander</p>	<p>Signified:</p> <p>Escalation into violence leading to Carter's death</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (First System): Police confrontation ending in shooting</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier: Presence of smartphone recording</p>	<p>Connotative Signified: Public witnessing of police brutality</p>
<p>Connotative Sign (Second System): Critique of systemic violence despite public evidence</p>	


Table 12. Semiotic analysis of dialogue at minutes 11:45–13:20

<p>Signifier:</p>  <p>Dialogue inviting breakfast and surrender gesture before the raid</p>	<p>Signified:</p> <p>Attempt to avoid confrontation yet still killed</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (First System): Police raid despite surrender</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier: Raised hands gesture</p>	<p>Connotative Signified: Failure of compliance to ensure safety</p>
<p>Connotative Sign (Second System): Myth of safety through obedience is challenged</p>	

The dialogue inviting breakfast alongside the surrender gesture before the raid functions as a signifier of an attempt to avoid confrontation. At the denotative level, the scene depicts a police raid that proceeds despite visible compliance. Connotatively, the raised hands gesture signifies the failure of obedience to guarantee safety, highlighting the fragility of compliance as a protective strategy. At the level of second-order signification, this moment challenges the cultural myth


of safety through obedience, reinforcing the narrative’s critique of systemic injustice.

Table 13. Semiotic analysis of dialogue at minute 15:54

<p>Signifier:</p>  <p>Dialogue: “what would you do if somebody was trying to kill you everyday?”</p>	<p>Signified: Expression of frustration within time loop</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (First System): Recognition of repeated events</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier: Emotional tone of despair</p>	<p>Connotative Signified: Psychological exhaustion and helplessness</p>
<p>Connotative Sign (Second System): Symbolizes repetitive trauma</p>	


The dialogue “What would you do if somebody was trying to kill you every day?” functions as a signifier of frustration within the time-loop narrative. At the denotative level, the line acknowledges the repetition of events and the character’s awareness of the recurring threat. Connotatively, the despairing emotional tone conveys psychological exhaustion and a profound sense of helplessness. At the level of second-order signification, the statement symbolizes repetitive trauma, reinforcing the narrative’s broader exploration of cyclical violence and its psychological impact.

Table 14. Semiotic analysis of dialogue at minute 17:00

<p>Signifier:</p>  <p>Carter predicts events and warns officer about loop</p>	<p>Signified: Attempt to break cycle through knowledge</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (First System): Confrontation using foresight</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier: Assertive explanatory dialogue</p>	<p>Connotative Signified: Rationality powerless against systemic force</p>
<p>Connotative Sign (Second System): Inevitability of injustice despite awareness</p>	

Carter’s prediction of events and his warning to the officer about the time loop function as a signifier of an attempt to break the cycle through knowledge. At the denotative level, the scene presents a confrontation in which foresight is used as a strategy to prevent the recurring outcome. Connotatively, the assertive and explanatory dialogue signifies the limits of rationality when confronted with systemic force. At the level of second-order signification, the moment underscores the inevitability of injustice despite awareness, reinforcing the narrative’s critique of structural power and recurring violence.

Table 15. Semiotic analysis of dialogue at minutes 20:00–28:00

<p>Signifier:</p>  <p>Dialogue: “coz it don’t matter how long it takes, or how many time it takes, I getting home to my dog”</p>	<p>Signified:</p> <p>Final repetition of time loop and persistence</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (First System):</p> <p>Cycle continues despite perceived safety</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier:</p> <p>Casual tone of officer</p>	<p>Connotative Signified:</p> <p>Normalization of violence and persistence of hope</p>
<p>Connotative Sign (Second System):</p> <p>Myth of systemic injustice and resilience</p>	

The dialogue “Cause it don’t matter how long it takes, or how many times it takes, I’m getting home to my dog” functions as a signifier of the final repetition of the time loop and the persistence of the cycle. At the denotative level, the statement indicates that the cycle continues despite the perception of safety. Connotatively, the officer’s casual tone suggests the normalization of violence while simultaneously highlighting the persistence of hope. At the level of second-order signification, the scene constructs a myth of systemic injustice intertwined with resilience, emphasizing the enduring tension between recurring harm and the desire to survive.

c. Sound Effects

The identification of sound effects reveals the roles of Carter, Perri, and Officer Merk in constructing a narrative that conveys the meaning of injustice. At

minute 02:07, Carter is visually depicted preparing to leave, accompanied by Perri’s voice heard from a distance in an off-screen position. Additional sound effects include objects moving in the bathroom and the sound of a toilet flush. These sound effects signify that Carter is physically alone while Perri is in the bathroom, yet interaction between the two characters is maintained through auditory cues. From minutes 3:00 to 4:45, sound effects include Perri accidentally knocking over a bottle until it breaks and the sounds of food preparation. In this sequence, the sound of a door opening indicates Carter’s departure from the apartment. At minute 4:50, a “phone line” sound effect is introduced to signify Carter’s interaction with his pet. From minutes 7:01 to 7:28, sound effects of footsteps and shouting are used to depict another man attempting to pursue someone but mistakenly targeting Carter. This is followed by the distant sound of police sirens. Between minutes 9:21 and 9:35, sound effects include the sound of a bottle breaking, a door closing, and the song “The Way It Is.”

These sound effects function as markers of the recurring time loop, indicating that similar situations will be repeated. This scene reinforces the cyclical nature of events experienced by Carter. From minutes 11:30 to 11:44, the sound effect of gunshots signifies Carter’s death, followed by bathroom-related sounds that signal the restart of his life. Between minutes 12:49 and 13:19, sound effects such as police shouting, gunfire, and a “reversed whoosh” are employed. The police shouting instills fear in Perri and heightens the dramatic tension. The “reversed whoosh” effect further intensifies the scene and abruptly halts the audio as a marker of Carter re-entering the time loop. From minutes 24:44 to 26:08, sound effects include the distressed sounds of Jeter, the dog, along with gunshots. In this moment, Jeter appears to sense that his owner has been shot, expressing sadness and loss. The gunfire causes Carter to collapse, forcing him to once again relive the same day.


Table 16. Semiotic analysis of sound effects at minute 02:07

<p>Signifier:</p> 	<p>Signified: Carter alone while Perri is in bathroom</p>
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Off-screen female voice, bathroom object movement, toilet flush	
Denotative Sign (First System): Auditory cues establishing spatial separation	
Connotative Signifier: Off-screen dialogue maintaining interaction	Connotative Signified: Emotional closeness despite physical separation
Connotative Sign (Second System): Domestic intimacy constructed through sound	

The off-screen female voice accompanied by the sounds of bathroom object movement and a toilet flush functions as a signifier of Carter’s presence alone while Perri remains in the bathroom. At the denotative level, these auditory cues establish spatial separation within the domestic setting. Connotatively, the off-screen dialogue maintains interpersonal interaction, signifying emotional closeness despite physical distance. At the level of second-order signification, the scene constructs domestic intimacy through sound, emphasizing how auditory elements sustain relational connection within private space.


Table 17. Semiotic analysis of sound effects at minutes 3:00–4:45

Signifier:  Bottle breaking, food preparation, door opening	Signified: Morning domestic activity and Carter leaving apartment
Denotative Sign (First System): Household routine and departure	
Connotative Signifier: Accidental noise and door transition	Connotative Signified: Fragility of normal routine
Connotative Sign (Second System): Ordinary life foreshadowing disruption	

The sounds of a bottle breaking, food preparation, and a door opening function as signifiers of morning domestic activity and Carter’s departure from the apartment. At the denotative level, these auditory cues depict a routine household setting and the transition from private space to the outside world. Connotatively, the accidental noise and the door’s movement signify the fragility of everyday normalcy, suggesting that routine stability can be easily disrupted. At the level of


second-order signification, these elements foreshadow the disruption of ordinary life, reinforcing the narrative’s anticipation of impending conflict.

Table 18. Semiotic analysis of sound effects at minute 4:50

Signifier:  Phone line sound effect	Signified: Interaction between Carter and his dog
Denotative Sign (First System): Remote communication	
Connotative Signifier: Technological mediation of affection	Connotative Signified: Emotional attachment to pet
Connotative Sign (Second System): Symbol of emotional grounding	


The phone line sound effect functions as a signifier of interaction between Carter and his dog. At the denotative level, the sound indicates remote communication facilitated by technology. Connotatively, this technological mediation signifies emotional attachment and affection toward the pet, highlighting the role of mediated communication in sustaining personal bonds. At the level of second-order signification, the moment positions this interaction as a symbol of emotional grounding, emphasizing the importance of companionship as a source of stability within the narrative.

Table 19. Semiotic analysis of sound effects at minutes 7:01–7:28

Signifier:  Footsteps, shouting, distant sirens	Signified: Mistaken pursuit and police presence
Denotative Sign (First System): Urban chase atmosphere	
Connotative Signifier: Shouting and sirens	Connotative Signified: Tension and misidentification
Connotative Sign (Second System): Urban threat targeting Carter	

Footsteps, shouting, and distant sirens function as signifiers of a mistaken pursuit and the presence of law enforcement. At the denotative level, these sounds construct an urban chase atmosphere that situates the event within a tense city environment. Connotatively, the combination of shouting and sirens signifies escalating tension and misidentification. At the level of second-order signification, these auditory elements frame the urban environment as a space of threat specifically directed toward Carter, reinforcing the narrative’s broader commentary on vulnerability and systemic risk.


Table 20. Semiotic analysis of sound effects at minutes 9:21–9:35

<p>Signifier:</p>  <p>Bottle breaking, door closing, song 'The Way It Is'</p>	<p>Signified:</p> <p>Repetition marker of time loop</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (First System):</p> <p>Recurring domestic event</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier:</p> <p>Repetition of identical sounds</p>	<p>Connotative Signified:</p> <p>Cyclical inevitability</p>
<p>Connotative Sign (Second System):</p> <p>Symbol of endless repetition</p>	

The sounds of a bottle breaking, a door closing, and the recurring song “The Way It Is” function as signifiers marking the repetition of the time loop. At the denotative level, these elements present a recurring domestic event that reappears across multiple iterations. Connotatively, the repetition of identical sounds signifies a sense of cyclical inevitability, emphasizing the inescapable recurrence of the same sequence of events. At the level of second-order signification, these auditory motifs operate as a symbol of endless repetition, reinforcing the narrative’s exploration of temporal entrapment.


Table 21. Semiotic analysis of sound effects at minutes 11:30–11:44

<p>Signifier:</p> 	<p>Signified:</p> <p>Death and restart of life</p>
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 <p style="text-align: center;">(gasp)</p>	
Gunshots followed by bathroom sounds	
Denotative Sign (First System): Violence followed by reset	
Connotative Signifier: Immediate transition between sounds	Connotative Signified: Cycle of death and rebirth
Connotative Sign (Second System): Time loop inevitability	


Gunshots followed by the sudden return of bathroom sounds function as a signifier of death and the immediate restart of life. At the denotative level, the sequence presents violence followed by a reset of the narrative timeline. Connotatively, the abrupt transition between these sounds signifies a cycle of death and rebirth, emphasizing the repetitive nature of the character’s experience. At the level of second-order signification, this auditory pattern reinforces the inevitability of the time loop, underscoring the narrative’s central theme of inescapable repetition.

Table 22. Semiotic analysis of sound effects at minutes 12:49–13:19

 <p style="text-align: center;">(Police) Mo!</p>	
Signifier: Police shouting, gunfire, reversed whoosh	
Signified: Raid and re-entry into time loop	
Denotative Sign (First System): Police confrontation and loop marker	
Connotative Signifier: Reversed whoosh stopping audio	Connotative Signified: Abrupt temporal disruption
Connotative Sign (Second System): Mechanism of looping reality	

Police shouting, gunfire, and a reversed whoosh sound function as signifiers of the raid and the re-entry into the time loop. At the denotative level, these sounds depict a police confrontation that serves as a marker of the loop’s recurrence. Connotatively, the reversed whoosh that abruptly halts the audio signifies a sudden temporal disruption, emphasizing the unnatural interruption of linear time. At the level of second-order signification, this auditory sequence operates as a mechanism of looping reality, reinforcing the narrative’s construction of cyclical temporality.

Table 23. Semiotic analysis of sound effects at minutes 24:44–26:08

<p>Signifier:</p> 	<p>Signified: Carter shot and dog sensing loss</p>
<p>Denotative Sign (First System): Gun violence and emotional reaction</p>	
<p>Connotative Signifier: Animal vocalization</p>	<p>Connotative Signified: Grief and loss</p>
<p>Connotative Sign (Second System): Emotional reinforcement of tragic cycle</p>	

Dog distress sounds combined with gunshots function as signifiers of Carter being shot and the dog sensing the loss. At the denotative level, these sounds depict gun violence accompanied by an immediate emotional reaction. Connotatively, the animal’s vocalization signifies grief and loss, intensifying the emotional resonance of the moment. At the level of second-order signification, this auditory pairing reinforces the tragic cycle, emphasizing the recurring emotional impact of the narrative’s central events.

d. Music Scoring

Film scoring functions as a narrative communication tool that enhances the storytelling process beyond visual representation alone. Through the integration of music, filmmakers are able to convey and reinforce visual messages, guiding the audience’s emotional and cognitive interpretation of a scene. Moreover, film scores serve to strengthen the meaning of cinematic moments by adding depth, nuance, and emotional resonance, thereby enriching the overall narrative experience and

ensuring a more cohesive and impactful delivery of the film’s intended message (Phetorant, 2020).

An analysis of the relationship between music and visual perception reveals the significant role of film scoring in shaping how audiences interpret cinematic imagery. Through cross-genre comparisons of scoring practices, it becomes evident that different musical approaches influence narrative tone and viewer engagement in distinct ways. Moreover, music functions as a powerful driver of emotion and audience interpretation, guiding responses to visual stimuli and enriching the overall meaning of a film’s narrative experience (Guo, 2022). Music scoring in films plays a crucial role in building tension and shaping atmospheric intensity, guiding audience anticipation and emotional response. Through the integration of visual elements, such as color grading, and audio design in the post-production stage, filmmakers are able to create a cohesive sensory experience that enhances narrative impact. In this context, music functions as a key element in reinforcing the emotional atmosphere of a film, amplifying fear, suspense, and psychological unease while supporting the overall cinematic expression (Ariani et al., 2021).

Table 24. Analysis results

Minute	Aspect	Level
Opening	A slow piano with minor chords depicts a calm situation with a negative connotation	effectively suited to convey the opening scene
3:10	The background song “Too Late for Tears” conveys a pleasant and romantic mood	It’s synchronized to support the conversation between Carter and Perri with a subtle, low tempo
5:13	The song “The Way It Is,” featuring a fast disco beat	The synchronization conveys Carter’s and Jeter’s anticipation of meeting.
6:50 – 8:07	Intense music with minor chords, amplified to build tension leading toward Carter’s death.	Adequate in quality to signify the tension of the situation.
9:04	Calming piano music accompanies Perri and Carter as they look at photos of Jeter, signifying confusion and curiosity.	Synchronised to support the sense of confusion caused by Carter repeatedly reliving his life.
11:20–11:44	The presence of suspenseful tones that shift the audience’s mood, indicating a transition between calmness and eeriness.	Appropriate for reinforcing an intense and oppressive atmosphere.
12:01–12:49	The music gradually intensifies,	Synchronized to indicate the

	accompanied by piano with sorrowful tones, signifying fear and sadness.	emergence of a tense sequence of actions.
13:27	The drum tempo indicates preparation for movement.	Effective in conveying Carter's panic as he attempts to urgently resolve the situation.
14:36	The drum tempo gradually comes to a halt.	Appropriate for expressing despair caused by continuous entrapment in the time loop.
14:44–15:42	Sad background music signifies frustration.	Suitable for representing the sense of resignation and frustration experienced by the character.
17:43	Piano tones that are sorrowful and mysterious.	Appropriate for indicating Officer Merk's confusion.
20:11	Rap music, as a characteristic genre, represents Black individuals in America, with a tempo aligned to the narrative pacing.	Suitable for signaling altered movement patterns and actions aligned with Carter's intentions.
25:57	A melancholic piano accompaniment follows a slow-motion tempo, depicting the moment when Carter is shot and dies again.	Appropriate for emphasizing a tense situation in which death is imminent.
26:58	The piano instrument abruptly stops, signaling that the time loop is about to repeat.	Suitable for conveying grief at the moment of death.
27:50	The song "The Way It Is" is replayed, indicating a condition of repetition and resignation.	Appropriate for signifying a sense of resignation in confronting life.

4.2 Sound Elements in Supporting Narrative and Cinematic Experience

Sound elements play a crucial role in supporting narrative development and shaping the cinematic experience. Each sound element is deliberately constructed to enhance the narrative structure of a film. Every sound element employed in a film carries implicit meanings that are often overlooked by audiences. Several sound elements identified in the film *Two Distant Strangers* contain expressions of confusion, fear, frustration, joy, sadness, and intense tension. *Two Distant Strangers* is a short film that depicts a time-loop condition in which the protagonist repeatedly relives his life after being fatally shot. The sound elements function as invisible communicators that convey profound meanings within the narrative (Rizali et al., 2021). Furthermore, the sound elements found in the short film generate a strong sense of environmental ambience.

In film, exposition is not solely conveyed through dialogue or visual imagery, but can also be effectively articulated through the use of sound and sound effects. Audio elements such as ambient sound, musical scoring, and designed sound effects play a crucial role in providing contextual information, clarifying spatial and temporal settings, and guiding the audience's interpretation of a scene. Through deliberate sound design—such as the use of environmental noise, reverberation, or distortion—filmmakers can implicitly communicate narrative cues, character psychology, and situational context without explicit verbal explanation (Annisa et al., n.d.).

The presence of background music that intensifies as the narrative approaches the shooting scene creates a powerful ambience. In this context, Carter is nearing death as Officer Merk begins to open fire. Each instance of death is accompanied by musical or instrumental sounds that evoke sadness, tension, and fear. According to Agusta (2024), music performed through instrumental arrangements can produce varied emotional impressions, such as anxiety and unease. Fundamentally, audience perception of musical instruments is influenced by differences in sound frequency and interval. This separation of sound frequencies allows the music to support the scene without interfering with dialogue.

The music that accompanies Carter as he awakens from his dream and re-enters the time loop conveys an ambience of frustration, tension, and resignation, as he is repeatedly forced to die and relive the same day. The musical elements used as background in the short film are consistently soft and subtle, making them difficult to consciously detect while still effectively establishing the intended ambience. Nurkhasanah (2025:33) states that music functions as sound or tonal arrangement with rhythm that demonstrates harmony, tempo, and auditory stimulation, thereby offering alternative perspectives to audiences. Soft instrumental music, in particular, generates a sense of calm. Pebriana and Nurhaswinda (2025) further argue that music can convey elements of optimism, hope, and tranquility. The presence of instrumental background music in the film effectively supports and reinforces the narrative meaning of the story.

4.3 The Application of Sound Elements in Enhancing the Quality of Storytelling in Film

The application of sound elements that can enhance the quality of storytelling in film requires careful consideration. In this context, the integration of sound elements within a narrative adds emotional depth to the story. Sound constitutes a form of experience that supports and reinforces narrative development. Background sound strengthens the screenplay by complementing visual representation and providing alternative perspectives for the audience. According to Manullang (2023), sound can influence audience perception and contribute to their understanding of the quality of storytelling in a film. When constructing a narrative, it is essential for directors to select sound elements that appropriately support the delivery of an engaging story. Muhlisiun (2024) argues that storytelling emphasizes the creation of meaningful narratives. In general, sound elements are employed to establish appropriate ambience effects. Sound and music are among the most critical components in enhancing the quality of storytelling in film, as they add creative value and effectively support the narrative being conveyed.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion of this study affirms that sound is one of the most essential elements in film, and its application can be differentiated into elements that are consciously perceived by the audience and elements that are not always consciously noticed. Although some viewers may not register subtle background sounds because their attention is focused on the narrative flow, these sounds play a crucial role as added value that reinforces dialogue and, more importantly, anchors the interpretation of sequences of visual signs. Within the framework of Roland Barthes' semiotics, the findings indicate that at the denotative level, key visuals such as the relationship between private and public space, the repetition of time loops, camera angles such as the high angle, hold duration, and character gestures provide direct information about situations and events, while ambience, dialogue, sound effects, and music scoring clarify spatial context, mark transitions, and shape the dramatic rhythm of scenes.

At the connotative level, visual audio synergy produces gripping affects of confusion, fear, frustration, joy, sadness, and tension. The ambience identified throughout the film *Two Distant Strangers* with an approximate duration of 28 minutes intensifies this emotional atmosphere, while the instrumental music and songs employed tend to signify lethal and frightening conditions, thereby reinforcing the dominance of negative emotions through musical composition and its attachment to visual imagery. At the myth level, the recurring pattern of violence and death, continuously reinforced by consistent auditory signifiers, naturalizes the idea of systemic injustice. Power is represented as a recurring threat, while victims are positioned as vulnerable subjects who can disappear without disrupting the rhythm of the city or the system. Thus, the film does not merely convey a story through images, but constructs social critique through a layered semiotic operation of denotation, connotation, and myth, in which sound functions as an ideological reinforcement of visual dominance and as a determinant of the direction of audience interpretation.

Based on these findings, future research is recommended to conduct comparative analyses between perceptible and imperceptible sound elements to highlight their similarities and differences, as well as to expand the object of study to other films by relating sound elements and visual constructs to real social contexts, thereby enriching and extending the understanding of sound as a narrative device in cinema.

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