

# Sound Aesthetics in Cinema: Bending Reality Through The Theory of Alienation

## Sinemada Ses Estetiği: Yabancılaşma Kuramı Bağlamında Gerçekliğin Bükülmesi

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### ABSTRACT

The presence of sound in cinema shares and assumes entirely the narrative power typically associated with visual imagery. A sound-based cinematic aesthetic not only shapes the viewer's perception but also enhances the emotional and conceptual depth of the narrative. The delicate aesthetic balance of sound design plays a crucial role in shaping storytelling, as cinema draws upon both visual and auditory elements in harmony, often referencing real-life experiences. This study offers an original analysis of the aesthetic use of sound in cinema through the lens of Bertolt Brecht's theory of alienation, focusing specifically on film *Memoria* (2021), directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul. *Memoria* becomes the subject of this inquiry due to its unique sound design, which leads the audience and its protagonist on a journey through abstract concepts such as identity, space, and memory, guided by an undefined sound. Brecht's alienation effect, originally developed for the theatre, lends itself to reinterpretation within multilayered narrative forms like cinema, where visual design and sound aesthetics can together foster critical distance. Brecht's alienation theory promotes a theatrical aesthetic in which the audience remains detached from the dramatic flow, maintaining a reflective and critical stance toward the narrative an approach that also translates meaningfully to the cinematic medium. Weerasethakul's *Memoria*, with its unconventional use of sound, constructs a cinematic atmosphere that not only tells a story but also challenges the perception of time, memory, and space anchoring these themes deeply in a quasi-realist framework. Simultaneously, this study investigates how Brecht's alienation theory can provoke critical engagement with fictional worlds through sound, by exploring the phenomenon of estrangement using Michel Chion's key concepts: acousmètre, anempathetic sound, sound bridge, and vococentrism. These theoretical tools enable a deeper reflection on how sound in cinema may disrupt narrative realism and generate estrangement in the audience. Thus, while analyzing the film's distinct sonic narrative, this study assumes that these concepts will also illuminate and enrich the broader discussion.

**Keywords:** Memoria, sound aesthetics, alienation theory, Bertolt Brecht, sound design, Michel Chion

### ÖZ

Sinemada sesin varlığı, görsel imajın anlatı gücünü paylaşan belki de kimi zaman tek başına sorumluluk alabilen bir niteliğe sahiptir. Ses üzerinden kurulan sinema estetiği, izleyicinin algısını şekillendirmekle kalmaz, aynı zamanda anlatının duygusal ve kavramsal derinliğini ve lezzetini de arttırabilir. Anlatının şekillenmesinde ses tasarımının incelikli estetik dengesi önemlidir, çünkü sinema hem görsel hem de işitsel unsurların ahenkli anlatımlarını gerçek yaşamdan referans alarak sunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, sinemada sesin estetik kullanımını Bertolt Brecht'in yabancılaşma kuramı ekseninde değerlendirerek, yönetmen Apichatpong Weerasethakul'un *Memoria* (2021) filmi üzerinden özgün bir analiz sunmaya çalışmaktadır. *Memoria*, izleyici ve ana karakterin duyabildiği tanımsız bir sesin peşine düşerken sorguladığı kimlik, mekan, bellek gibi geniş kavramları sorgulatmaya yönelik ses tasarımıyla sinematik ses kullanımında özel bir film olmasıyla bu çalışmaya konu olmaktadır. Brecht'in tiyatro için geliştirdiği yabancılaştırma etkisi, sinema gibi çok katmanlı anlatı sanatlarında hem görsel tasarım hem de ses estetiği aracılığıyla düşünsel bir mesafe yaratmak için yeniden yorumlanmaya açıktır. Brecht'in yabancılaştırma kuramı, izleyicinin mizansenin dramatik akışına kapılmadan, hikâyeye mesafeli durarak kendi eleştirel mesafesini koruması üzerine bir tiyatro estetiğidir ve aynı zamanda sinema alanında da yorumlanmaya olanak tanımaktadır. Weerasethakul'un *Memoria* filmi, sıra dışı işitsel kurgusuyla izleyiciye sadece bir hikâye anlatmanın ötesinde; gerçekte bağı kuvvetle tutan unsurlar olarak, bellek, zaman ve mekân algısını büken bir sinematik atmosfer sunmaktadır. Aynı zamanda bu çalışma, yabancılaştırma kuramının, sinemada ses aracılığıyla kurmaca dünyaya olan eleştirel bakışı nasıl tetiklediğine odaklanırken, yabancılaşma olgusunu Michel Chion'un acousmètre, anempathetic sound, sound-bridge ve vococentrism kavramları aracılığıyla ele almaya çalışmaktadır. Bu kavramlar, sinemada kullanılan ses tarzının anlatıdaki gerçekliği nasıl kirabileceği, bükebileceği ve izleyicide yabancılaşmayı nasıl üretebileceği üzerine düşünmeyi derinleştirebilecek niteliktedir. Dolayısıyla, *Memoria* filminin ayrılan sessel anlatısını analiz ederken, tartışmanın derinleşmesine de ışık tutacakları varsayılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Memoria, ses estetiği, yabancılaşma kuramı, Bertolt Brecht, film estetiği, Michel Chion

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## Introduction

*"We gestate in Sound and are born into Sight. Cinema gestated in Sight and was born into Sound."*  
(Murch, 1994, p. ix)

Cinema offers a fragmented narrative structure, setting it apart from other visual arts, including the performing arts. In cinema, the presence of off-screen sound and the strategic use of silence create perceptual shifts in the viewer, leading to distinctive viewing experiences. These elements do more than simply introduce difference; they guide the audience in following the narrative through an aesthetic system shaped by both on-screen and off-screen cinematographic<sup>1</sup> components. Sound in cinema, typically examined under the dual categories of diegetic<sup>2</sup> and non-diegetic<sup>3</sup> sound, forms a dramatic infrastructure that integrates closely with visual images. Yet cinematic sound encompasses multiple layers such as silence, dialogue, and ambient sound which must be carefully designed to align with the dramatic framework. Through the interplay of diegetic and non-diegetic sound, cinema constructs a sonic universe in harmony within its narrative.

Sounds in cinema are drawn from real-life references, yet their layered use can aestheticize the emotional process of the story. Aesthetic feeling is a subjective phenomenon, the product of mental constructions and imagined existences. Immanuel Kant links aesthetic emotion to the subject and the pleasure derived from it. Beauty, for Kant, is a disinterested pleasure, a sense of enjoyment detached from personal gain (Kant, 2006, p. 62). He emphasizes the mental and emotional filtering of feelings within aesthetic experience. According to Kant, the sense of the sublime distinguishes itself through the intensity of emotional perception. As an example, he describes the experience of encountering tall oak trees and isolated shadows in a sacred grove an encounter that evokes awe, curiosity, and fear, emotions associated with the sublime. These feelings transform into pleasure upon recognition of their source, becoming aesthetic in nature (Kant, 2017, pp 50–51). The sublime, deeply connected to beauty, encompasses a range of emotional responses and triggers interactions before one can define what is beautiful. Similarly, sound in cinema carries meanings beyond simply reaching the ear in expected and appropriate ways. Just as Kant suggests that pleasure results from the recognition of beauty, cinematic aesthetics emerge through the relationship between the viewer and the film and are open to multiple interpretations. Since the aesthetic or sublime impact of sound does not reach all audiences equally, it is essential to recognize the variability in how sound evokes appreciation or emotional elevation. Based on Kant's idea that pleasure is subjective, this study highlights the potential of sound whether contextual or detached to assume an aesthetic form within the film.

French composer, filmmaker, and theorist Michel Chion (1994) argues that sound in cinema makes the invisible audible, thus emphasizing the aesthetic role of film sound. In this sense, sound reshapes the viewer's cognitive map and as a design element, offers a space for individual interpretation of the film world. In the cinematic experience, sound is a subjective design object, and its

aesthetic presence cannot be overlooked. Even in the early years of cinema, films were never truly silent (Faden, 2001, p. 99). In the years before the technical synchronization of image and sound on film strips became possible, sound continued to exist through external accompaniment (Bottomore, 1999, p. 485). Early cinema represents a transitional period where the presence or absence of sound was not clearly defined, yet silence was never entirely dominant (Altman, 2004). In its earliest form, sound manifested as intertitles textual inserts that invited the audience to imagine a corresponding auditory experience. These intertitles were intended to transform into dialogue or monologue in the viewer's mind.

Beyond being a technical limitation, this approach also mentally included the viewer in the sonic atmosphere of the film. One of the core reasons behind this lies in cinema's reliance on real life references to construct its narrative. During the act of viewing, the audience does not operate independently from their lived experiences; instead, they possess the cognitive ability to mentally reconstruct familiar *mise-en-scène* elements based on their real-world knowledge. At this point, one of the theoretical approaches that brings cinema closest to the structure of theater is Bertolt Brecht's (1898–1956) concept of epic theatre<sup>4</sup>. A German playwright, poet, and theatre theorist, Brecht sought to establish a critical distance between the stage and the audience. He argued that theatrical representation should not lead to emotional immersion but rather evoke intellectual awareness in the viewer.

Through his theory of alienation, Brecht emphasized the importance of encouraging the audience to question the narrative instead of becoming absorbed in its dramatic flow. In this respect, his approach has made significant contributions to film theory as well. Brecht also directly participated in cinematic practice, most notably through his contribution to the screenplay of *Kuhle Wampe* (1932). In this work, he supported narrative forms that break cinematic representation and directly address the audience. This approach resonates with contemporary theorists such as Michel Chion, whose reflections on the perceptual and conceptual functions of sound reveal its potential to reconstruct cinematic dramatic structure. Together, these perspectives underline how sound in cinema can become a tool not only of storytelling, but also for critical distance and intellectual engagement. Another theorist who made significant contributions to the aesthetics of film sound is Béla Balázs, who emphasized the new artistic possibilities introduced by sound cinema in his early works *The Visible Man* (1924) and *The Spirit of Film* (1930). Balázs particularly underscored the differences between cinema and theatre by analyzing gestures and facial expressions in detail, stressing that speech and mimicry although produced similarly in both forms do not evoke the same effect on the audience. He says:

*"...in cinema, speech is a gesture and a direct visual expression of the face. Someone who sees speech learns something quite different from those who merely hear the words. During speech, the mouth can show far more than the words themselves can say."*  
(Balázs, 2013, p. 45)

1 Cinematographic components refer to the visual and technical elements used in filmmaking to shape the way a story is told on screen. These include camera angles, movement, framing, lighting, color, composition, depth of field, focus, and lens choice. Together, these components influence the film's mood, tone, and perspective, guiding how the audience interprets the narrative and connects with the characters. Cinematography is not just about capturing images it's about creating meaning through the visual language of cinema.

2 Diegetic sounds are organic sounds that occur within the scene, meaning that both the characters and the audience hear them simultaneously. Natural ambient sounds, dialogues, monologues, and environmental sounds fall under this category.

3 Non-diegetic sounds, on the other hand, are audio elements such as sound effects or music that are added in post-production. These sounds are distinct from those occurring within the scene and are not perceived by the characters.

4 Epic theatre is a form of theatre developed in the early 20th century by German playwright and theatre theorist Bertolt Brecht. It opposes the traditional dramatic structure and aims to encourage the audience to think critically. Unlike the Aristotelian dramatic model, epic theatre presents events in a narrative form. The goal of epic theatre is not to evoke emotional identification in the audience, but rather to prompt them to question the world around them (Brecht, 1994, p. 22).

According to Balázs, the magic of silent cinema did not lie in complete silence, but rather in its ability to create an imaginary sound world that gave meaning to the image and emphasized its aesthetic qualities (Balázs, 1985, p. 2). With the emergence of sound cinema, this imagined world was completed by the inclusion of real ambient sounds, thereby expanding cinema's expressive capacity. Balázs places particular emphasis on the phenomenon of silence, arguing that film is the only art form truly capable of representing silence (Balázs, 1985, pp. 2–3). Cinema, when necessary, can create intense dramatic impact by withholding sound entirely. For instance, a scene in which two characters gaze at each other in complete silence without uttering a single word can generate a heightened sense of tension in the viewer. Silence, therefore, becomes a powerful form of sound that strongly reinforces the connection between cinematic representation and real life.

Michel Chion conceptualizes the relationship between cinematic sound and real life through the term *audio-vision*. The sounds associated with images and movement in everyday life are those that individuals are accustomed to the sounds they have learned and thus come to expect. This type of sound is, fundamentally, learned behavior shaped by perceptual experience. In his book *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (1994), Chion elaborates on this dimension of sound in detail. In defining the foundational structure of cinematic sound, Chion attributes a unique significance to it, emphasizing that sound in cinema constitutes an *added value* (Chion, 1994, p. 5). Sound is not merely a sensory mechanism that accompanies the visual; it is an element that contributes meaningfully to the narrative. According to Chion, sound has a functional, informative role. However, when manipulated to diverge from the narrative structure embedded in the visual, sound begins to communicate something entirely different to the viewer (Chion, 1994, p. 7).

Chion's concept of *anempathetic sound* that remains emotionally indifferent to the scene can be traced back to the 1928 manifesto *A Statement on Sound*<sup>5</sup> by Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov, where it was theorized under the term counterpoint sound (Chion, 1994, p. 9; Eisenstein et al., 1928, pp. 1–2). This concept marks a departure from the idea of sound merely replicating or reinforcing the visual. Instead, it points to moments when sound-image-emotion synchronization is intentionally disrupted, allowing cinematic narration to restructure in new and often dissonant ways. Among the early theories of cinematic sound, the manifesto *A Statement on Sound*, stands as an early critical source in support of this proposition. These three Soviet filmmakers were acutely aware of the potential dangers posed by the new sound technology; however, they did not reject it outright. In their manifesto, they advocated for the use of *counterpoint sound*, a concept that resists simplistic synchronization between image and audio. This approach was partially realized in Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (USSR, 1938), particularly during the iconic battle sequence on the ice between the Novgorod army and the Teutonic Knights. The manifesto is especially significant considering that in the late 1920s, socialist realism had not yet overtaken the formalist aesthetic of early Soviet cinema (Eisenstein et al., 2014). At the time, many films were centered on what André Bazin would later critique as *cinematic plasticity* an emphasis on visual form and stylization. In this context, the use of sound in a naturalistic and synchronized structure posed unique aesthetic challenges for Soviet formalists. *Counterpoint sound* refers to sound that does not align emotionally with the visual image and may even generate an emotional dissonance. This technique assumes the task of creating a clash that activates the

viewer's sensory-motor response (Thompson, 1980, p. 115).

The Soviet filmmakers articulate this kind of oppositional relationship between sound and image in *A Statement on Sound* as follows:

"Instead of directly matching the image, sound should be used in a contrapuntal manner, clashing with the visual and generating new intellectual associations." (Eisenstein et al., 2014, p. 258)

A contradictory emotional effect of this kind expands the viewer's intellectual space and adds richness to the viewing experience. The structure that cinema has developed for the sake of control may, for this very reason, also trigger an excessive and at times accidental production process (Burch, 1981, pp. 108–110). In this context, sound like all other narrative elements in cinema can sometimes become so prominent within the *mise-en-scène*<sup>6</sup> that it takes initiative in shaping the narrative. However, what becomes evident is that cinema's limited capacity for control reveals itself precisely during the ruptures caused by the varied use of these cinematographic elements. The cinematic tools that serve to express narratives such as editing, *mise-en-scène*, sound, cinematography do not primarily aim to construct meaning but rather function as facilitators of narrative progression (Bordwell, 1979, p. 57).

Like other narrative components, film sound draws from everyday life and its functionality can shift; for this reason, sound deserves close analysis as a vital cinematographic element. The presence of sonic variety in cinema such as ambient sound, natural sound, silence, added external sounds, dialogue, monologue, and internal thought—has the potential to directly influence the narrative. Gilles Deleuze elaborated on his cinematic theories in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985). Deleuze argues that all elements in cinema are images in themselves, and that each constitutes an independent narrative mechanism (Deleuze, 2001, p. 1). However, it is the harmony and balance between them that allows the film's story to be presented in a way that connects with the audience. Serdar Öztürk addresses this idea in his book *Introduction to the Philosophy of Cinema* (2018):

"Cinema creates miracles by showing and making us hear what is otherwise impossible. In doing so, we sense that the universe is a vibration—as though it were a musical composition, like a cello—composed of rhythmic tremors, movement, light, and energy. Bergson's and Deleuze's idea that everything is an image comes to life in our minds; shadows become reality; the virtual becomes actual; the actual becomes virtual." (Öztürk, 2018, p. 330)

In this context, sound like every other narrative element is an image, and it can play a decisive role in evoking emotions in the viewer such as fear, excitement, curiosity, astonishment, or joy. The relationship between the virtual and the actual is explained as the transformation of unrealized but potential states (virtual) into concrete, realized forms (actual) over time. At the same time, something that has already been realized (actual) can revert to potential meanings (virtual) through intellectual or sensory associations. This bidirectional transformation becomes particularly tangible in cinema and the arts, where an image or sound can simultaneously carry an existing meaning while continually opening new layers of interpretation for the viewer. Thus, the work of art is not a fixed object but a dynamic field of meaning in a constant state of becoming.

All tools necessary for cinematic narration must exist within an or-

5 Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov, "A Statement," trans. and ed. Jay Leyda, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1949), 258. In cinema, this refers to the use of sound in a way that is discordant and emotionally contrasting, beyond its natural functionality and conventional codes of familiarity.

6 *Mise-en-scène* literally means "putting on stage" or "placing in the scene". In cinema, it refers to everything that appears in the frame and how it is arranged

ganic structure that anticipates harmony among them (Deleuze, 2001, pp. 19–24). Therefore, cinema tells stories through a synthesis of both auditory and visual images, and each image can undergo various evolutions throughout the viewer's intellectual journey, generating entirely new meanings. Films cause changes in the human brain during the act of viewing and trigger complex responses. Cognitive and sensory variations emerge in individuals during the viewing experience (Özbulduk Kılıç, 2022, p. 109). In this context, each viewing experience is unique, and viewers derive different interpretations and pleasures from cinematic images. Siegfried Kracauer refers to the *resonance effect* that films produce in the viewer. He implies that the movement within films acts as a psychological stimulus by triggering the viewer's muscle reflexes, motor impulses, and *kinesthetic*<sup>7</sup> responses (Kracauer, 2015, p. 273). This stimulus effect allows the viewer to occasionally take an external perspective on the *mise-en-scène*, creating opportunities for questioning and critique. Remaining immersed in events and situations carries the risk of forcing the viewer to see the narrative solely through the director's lens. If the design in both the visual and auditory domains is constructed in a way that reconfigures the viewer's connection to reality, the references taken from real life may be re-filtered by the viewer.

This study seeks to highlight how what is heard in cinema can distort fictional reality through sensory alienation, drawing attention to the possibility of redefinition along the axes of memory, belonging, and estrangement. It is important that any discussion developed through a film is contextualized with a filmic example, as cinema is an art form open to multiple perspectives. *Memoria*<sup>8</sup> (Weerasethakul, 2021) is a film distinguished by its use of sound, presenting a narrative in which sound design is treated with delicacy and where the protagonist, in following a mysterious sound, begins to question her own codes of identity and existence. Thus, sound holds a prominent cinematographic significance in *Memoria*. The film is selected as the analytical sample in this study not only for its differentiated sound design but also for its suitability in illustrating Michel Chion's concepts that resonate with alienation.

However, the foundational theoretical framework of this discussion is the alienation theory formulated by German playwright and theorist Bertolt Brecht, which constitutes the basis of epic theatre and invites the viewer to observe the narrative unfolding on stage from a critical distance. The *alienation theory* is based on the idea that the viewer should assess the onstage action without emotional identification or passive observation (Brecht, 1964, p.91). Brecht valued the viewer's ability not to empathize with characters but to question their actions and filter them through critical reflection. The theory centers on aesthetic strategies that interrupt the narrative flow, draw attention, and disrupt the illusion of naturalness (Brecht, 1964). The alienation effect can be achieved through techniques such as breaking the fourth wall, having the actor step out of character, employing songs in a musical style, inserting abrupt silences, or making surprising and emotionally dissonant sound choices. The emotional activation Kracauer defines as the "resonance effect" corresponds with Brecht's inclusion of the viewer in a sensory process of critical questioning. Fundamentally, maintaining the uniqueness of the viewing experience for each audience member, and the film be-

coming a subjective experience for every individual, is essential. Moreover, such alienation not only triggers critical thinking and questioning but may also lead, in the absence of real-life parallels, to a kind of metaphorical weakening of consciousness (Kracauer, 2015, p. 275).

In this context, the function of sound in cinema is not merely to serve as a secondary element that supports the visual narrative, but to act as a trigger for critical engagement through the aesthetic distance it establishes with the viewer. Brecht's theory of alienation demands that the audience approach the narrative not solely through emotional or empathetic involvement, but through an intellectual distance. Michel Chion's concepts of *acousmètre*, *anempathetic sound*, *sound bridge*, and *vococentrism* aim to explain how sound can construct this critical distance, while also defining how it becomes an aesthetic narrative device.

Particularly, the use of *anempathetic sound* that is emotionally disconnected from or contrary to the character's state of mind prevents the viewer from being blindly absorbed into the events, thereby translating Brecht's strategy of disrupting natural flow on stage into cinematic language. Kracauer's notion of the "resonance effect" can also be considered a tool that supports this distanced positioning, as such sound enables the viewer to break away from passive spectatorship and begin questioning both visual and auditory stimuli. Within this framework, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Memoria* (2021) can be seen as a contemporary cinematic example in which sound is constructed not only as a medium of hearing but also as a space for thinking and remembering, where *sensory alienation* comes to the fore. The use of sound in the film operates structurally to transform both the protagonist's relationship with memory and the viewer's participation in the process of meaning-making, making the film highly suitable for analysis through Chion's theoretical framework and Brecht's alienation effect.

### **Viewing Sound in Cinema Through Bertolt Brecht's Theory of Alienation**

There are numerous examples in cinema where alienation becomes evident. In Lars Von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), during the film's final scene, the moment after Selma (Björk) is hanged is marked by the complete removal of sound from the scene, leaving the audience in absolute silence. The abrupt silence accompanying Selma's swaying body produces a shock effect for the viewer, disorienting them by breaking away from expected sonic conventions. In *Funny Games* (2007), directed by Michael Haneke, the opening scene overlays an idyllic image of a happy family with the film's title in large red letters, accompanied by a heavy metal soundtrack that sharply contrasts with the mood. This non-diegetic sound, heard only by the audience and unknown to the characters, is used by the director as a technique to distance the viewer from the scene. It serves both to alienate the audience from the *mise-en-scène* and to foreshadow the film's underlying tension. Another example can be found in *Summer of 85* (2020) by François Ozon. In the disco scene, the two main characters, David and Alexis, are dancing to diegetic music when David places headphones on Alexis, letting him listen to a completely different, romantically toned track. This sound, inac-

7 Kinesthetic refers to the sense of movement, body position, and physical activity. It involves the awareness of muscles, joints, and body movement through internal sensations, rather than visual or auditory input. In learning or art, a *kinesthetic experience* engages the body learning by doing, touching, or moving. For example, a kinesthetic learner might understand a concept better by physically acting it out or manipulating objects. In cinema or performance, kinesthetic elements help convey emotion and meaning through actors' gestures, posture, or movement within a space.

8 *Memoria* (2021) is the first English-language film by Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul and presents a meditative story set in Colombia. The film stars Tilda Swinton as Jessica Holland, a character who attempts to connect with reality through sound. The producers of the film include Diana Bustamante, Simon Field, Keith Griffiths, Charles de Meaux, and Michael Weber. The cinematography is by Sayombhu Mukdeeprom, and the production design is by Angélica Perea. The film's sound design was created by Akritchalerm Kalayanamitr, with sound engineering by Raúl Locatelli and Diego Gómez. Edited by Lee Chatametikool, the 136-minute film offers a sound-space experience that traces the themes of memory, time, and existence. *Memoria* was awarded the Jury Prize at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival and was designed to be screened exclusively in physical cinemas.

cessible to the rest of the scene, disconnects the viewer from the setting and brings them closer to Alexis. Both Alexis and the viewer are drawn out of the scene, allowing the audience to follow the *mise-en-scène* through Alexis's emotional experience. Similarly, in *Arctic* (Joe Penna, 2018), the silence throughout the film caused by the protagonist Overgard's isolation in the snowy wilderness of Antarctica after a plane crash—serves to create distance between the audience, the character, and the *mise-en-scène*.

Sound holds vital narrative importance not only in cinema but also across many visual art forms. It continues to exist as an element that aestheticizes visual storytelling. In theatre a medium with a much longer history than cinema and one that closely parallels it through aspects such as performance, storytelling, visual and auditory design, and audience interaction sound also occupies a significant position. Elements such as acting, stage/set design, lighting, sound, decor, and costume, which can be considered shared tools of storytelling in both cinema and theatre, play a crucial and defining role in shaping the connection between the narrative and the audience. In cinema, what is seen is also heard, as the cinematic universe is designed to present both through a totality of images. Although Béla Balázs suggests that cuts in cinema, compared to theatre, imply a disadvantage in narrative continuity, he also notes that the layered use of sound in cinema enables the totality of images to become comprehensible and perceptible (Balázs, 2013, pp. 45–47).

The dramatic structures of films, shaped by references drawn from real life, create for the viewer a sense of both familiarity and novel encounter. Bold uses of sounds such as silence or wordlessness must maintain a sense of realism sufficiently to prevent the audience from becoming lost within the plot. This is because cinema's fragmented narrative structure, unlike real life, requires the viewer to keep the connections between *mise-en-scènes* actively alive in their mind. Brecht emphasized that the traditional Aristotelian dramatic structure and the concept of catharsis<sup>9</sup> rendered the audience passive, arguing that excessive empathy and identification with the characters on stage hindered the opportunity for critical reflection (Sokel, 1966, p. 17). According to the theory of alienation, viewers can approach the narrative unfolding on stage from a critical and intellectual perspective, participating emotionally and cognitively during the act of watching. Alienation disrupts the audience's passive position, as viewers tend to emotionally identify with the characters and share intense feelings such as excitement, sorrow, pain, and joy. In contrast, alienation proposes that the audience should engage with the narrative intellectually posing questions and approaching the events with mental distance, processing what unfolds through critical synthesis.

Viewing Brecht's narrative style which enables the viewer's intellectual emancipation and encourages questioning through the lens of cinema presents an approach that liberates the story from being merely "watched." According to Brecht, the aim of theatre is not to generate emotional identification, but to prompt the audience to question the world. In epic theatre, events are not presented as a continuous whole but rather in sequential scenes, often with shifts in time and space. Additionally, tools such as narrators, songs, placards, and off-stage commentary are used to create a constant sense of distance (the alienation effect) for the

viewer. In this way, the audience is encouraged not to be absorbed in the narrative but to observe it with a critical eye.

In both theatre and cinema, the audience functions as the "fourth wall,"<sup>10</sup> completing the three physical walls of the stage; in cinema, the screen represents this wall, assuming the bodily presence of the viewer behind it. Similarly, in cinema, cinematographic<sup>11</sup> elements possess distinctive narrative potential. The intentional use of visual and auditory components within the frame plays a vital role in establishing the semantic link between the audience and the story. Therefore, the visual and auditory images that comprise the cinematographic structure must be treated with precision in the design of a film. Audience identification with characters is one of the key issues of Brecht's theory of alienation as applied to cinema. While Brecht aimed to disrupt empathy, some contemporary theorists argue that the viewer-character relationship is already multilayered. Noël Carroll emphasizes that even though viewers appear to share characters' emotions, they maintain a certain degree of cognitive distance. According to Carroll, the cinema viewer may understand and sympathize with a character's situation, but this does not mean the viewer forgets their own identity and becomes the character (Carroll, 1996). From this perspective, the hypnotic state of empathy that Brecht feared rarely manifests in most films; audiences may feel sadness for a character while simultaneously being aware that the events are fictional.

Nevertheless, mainstream cinema often tries to suppress this cognitive awareness to maximize emotional catharsis. The Brechtian method, in contrast, seeks to foreground consciousness and regulate emotion. Carroll and other analytic aestheticians explore how Brecht's distancing techniques operate within viewer perception, asserting that these techniques influence not only emotional response but also the process of interpretation. In this sense, alienation functions as a valuable alert mechanism that disrupts habitual modes of perception. The Russian Formalist concept of *ostranenie* (defamiliarization) similarly emphasizes art's role in unsettling everyday perception to create new awareness (Shklovsky, 1917, p. 3). Aesthetic theorists such as Jacques Aumont, Alain Bergala, Michel Marie, and Marc Vernet argue that stylistic disorientation in modern cinema both visually and sonically does not alienate the viewer from the work but instead prompts reflection, transforming the viewer into an active interpreter. In their book *Aesthetics of Film* (1992), they contend that sound in cinema is not merely a supportive element but a structural agent that shapes narrative and adds layers of meaning. According to these authors, cinema is not only a visual medium but also one of "representation" through sound. Thus, sound plays a role in structuring the narrative that extends beyond atmosphere or emotion, warranting equal theoretical attention as the visual.

Discussing how sound is combined through montage, Aumont, Bergala, Marie, and Vernet highlight its significance from both technical (economic-technical factors) and aesthetic-ideological perspectives. They emphasize that sound is a tool that determines the rhythm and layers of narrative (Aumont et al., 1992). The act of watching a film presents the viewer with a seemingly natural flow, as the audiovisual universe of cinema mirrors real life in many ways. When audience expectations are shaped by references drawn from daily experience, the unconventional use of

9 *Katharsis* is a term used by Aristotle in his work *Poetics* to describe the effect that tragedy has on the audience. Derived from Greek, the concept means "purification," "cleansing," or "emotional release." According to Aristotle, tragedy evokes feelings of fear (*phobos*) and pity (*eleos*) in the audience, leading to a process of catharsis an emotional purification. Through watching the tragic events represented on stage, the audience is relieved of its own emotional burdens and reaches a state of inner balance (Aristotle, 2011).

10 The fourth wall is the imaginary barrier through which the audience observes the stage in traditional theatres with three enclosed sides. First articulated by Denis Diderot, the concept developed alongside the rise of the realism movement in 19th-century theatre (Wikipedia, 2025, accessed: 20.05.2025).

11 Cinematography encompasses the artistic and technical processes responsible for creating the visual narration of a film. Elements such as lighting, colour, camera angles, framing, movement, lens selection, depth of field, composition, and shot structure form the fundamental components of cinematographic storytelling (Brown, 2011).

sound in cinema offers possibilities that enable reflection, philosophical engagement, and reinterpretation of the film within the viewer's mind. Michel Chion discusses this unique feature of sound in detail in *Audio-Vision* (1993), emphasizing that sound, like gas, permeates the cinematic atmosphere. According to Chion, depending on how it is used, sound can create a sense of mystery or produce psychological depth by triggering surprise within the viewer's sensory-motor system.

Many of Chion's sound theories relate to how cinematic sound is experienced, pointing to its vital role in enriching the viewing experience both intellectually and emotionally. This approach, which also attributes aesthetic meaning to sound, has become increasingly relevant as cinema evolved into new narrative forms after the classical period. Chion redefined the presence of sound in cinema through his innovative perspectives, exploring its philosophical significance far beyond its traditional function as a complement or support to visual imagery. Chion's key concepts, discussed extensively in his works *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (1994), *The Voice in Cinema* (1999), and *Film: A Sound Art* (2009) such as *audio-vision*, *acousmètre*, *anempathetic sound*, *vococentrism*, and *sound-bridge*, have played a foundational role in defining the narrative ontology of sound in cinema. *Audio-vision*, Chion's core concept, proposes that sound and image must exist in balance within cinematic narration. Rather than merely supporting one another, sound and image together constitute the audiovisual whole that defines the cinematic universe (Chion, 1999).

While *audio-vision* involves emotional balance between sound and image, *anempathetic sound* represents a contrasting element sound that does not align with the emotional tone of the scene and is used to create alienation and distance for the viewer (Chion, 1994). Another concept, *sound-bridge*, enables smooth transitions between scenes. Its primary function is to reinforce or deliberately fragment the temporal and spatial continuity of the narrative through sound (Chion, 1994). This occurs when, for instance, the sound from a previous scene carries over into the next, or conversely, when the sound from an upcoming scene overlaps with the current one thus helping to structure time and space. The concept that most sharply reflects the alienation effect is *acousmètre*, which refers to a sound whose source is not visible within the frame but still supports, transforms, and gives meaning to the scene (Chion, 1994, p. 72). Off-screen sounds are part of the cinematic space even if they are not within the frame; although the audience does not see their source, they can still infer a reason for their presence (Bonitzer, 2011, p. 185). When the source of a sound is unseen, viewers often attribute more power to it. The *acousmatic* state of a sound continues as long as its source remains off-screen, and if the source is never revealed, the sound maintains its mystery. At this point, the viewer may momentarily detach from the scene and events, following them with a more critical gaze. The concealment of a sound source disrupts familiar expectations and acts as a sensory stimulus that produces estrangement.

Bertolt Brecht, in general, developed an approach that aimed to break the traditional cause-and-effect structure of classical narrative forms through a fragmented narrative. A similar approach can be observed in the film *Kuhle Wampe* (1932), directed by Bulgarian director Slatan Dudow and written by Brecht himself (Petrie, 2004, p.4). According to Brecht, narrative is a construct, and this is where his theory most closely aligns with cinema. In the Brechtian approach, sound is used not to reflect the psychological depth of a character, but rather as a tool to alienate the viewer from the process. For instance, dramatic music commonly used to describe a character's emotional state may be replaced with surprising and discordant sounds in Brechtian cinema (Krieg et al., 2019). In this way, when the viewer does not feel like a part of the story or one of the characters, they can distance them-

selves from empathetic emotions and evaluate the flow of the scene from a critical, external perspective. Unlike cinema, theatre presents a practice in which the audience and the narrative progression are consumed together in the same physical space and in a single instance. However, the parallels between this kind of effect proposed by Brecht for theatre and cinema are significant and constitute the focus of this study. Rather than highlighting the differences between the two practices or suggesting the superiority of one over the other, this study focuses on how sound design in cinema can reference Brecht's understanding. For example, the use of sound in contradiction to or delayed from the visual narrative corresponds to Chion's concept of *anempathetic sound*, which offers not comfort but discomfort to the viewer. This discomfort aligns with Brecht's goal of creating emotional interruption. Therefore, this creation of distance in auditory aesthetics is not merely a technical decision but also an ideological one for the director.

In relation to this ideological foundation, Noël Burch makes a similar comparison between theatre and cinema, discussing the role of cinematic elements that are either within or outside the frame in shaping the narrative. As elaborated in his book *Theory of Film Practice* (1981), in theatre, space is on the stage, and everything happens within it from the viewer's perspective. However, cinematic space is not limited to the four edges of the frame. It differs from theatrical space by encompassing both *in-space* and *off-space*, as Burch names them, or *in-screen* and *off-screen*, as Chion defines them, forming an integrated narrative structure. While *in-space* refers to the part of the image where the source of the sound is physically visible, *off-space* refers to the part that is not seen but can be sensed, perceived, and heard yet it remains part of the story world, contributing to a holistic structure. Burch summarizes this as follows:

"The theatre stage is limited, but the audience senses the existence of a world beyond the stage through the characters' glances, reactions, and sounds. In cinema, *off-space* especially allows the unseen to be felt through sound, thereby including what is outside the frame into the narrative." (Burch, 1981, pp. 20–26)

Noël Burch is one of the pioneering theorists who applied Brecht's ideas to cinema. In his work *Theory of Film Practice* (1973), Burch proposed a dialectical film narrative. The viewer should be able to reason about the story and generate questions during the viewing experience. The placement of images and sounds outside the frame can be integrated into the audience's perception of the narrative. According to Burch, elements such as image and sound in film do not necessarily have to merge harmoniously; on the contrary, they may be put into conflict with each other. Such conflict creates self-reflexivity that reveals the fictional structure of the film. Brecht argued that theatre should not be a device for emotionally manipulating the audience, but rather a platform that prompts them to question the world. For this reason, alienation creates a valuable space in which the audience transitions from being a passive observer to becoming an active thinker (Sanguinetti, 2001). As referenced through the concepts of Burch and Chion, the presence of sound in cinema means that the viewer maintains a certain distance from the narrative within this intellectual space. This distance activates the audience's objective judgments and suggests moving beyond the confines established by the director. While the director presents a world shaped by the sound design employed within the film universe, the viewer's ability to arrive at different interpretations always retains its significance because one of the premises of the phenomenon of art is that the individual creates new realms through their connection with the work (Dewey, 2005). John Dewey further states:

"Art is not a separate realm of experience, but a means by which individuals shape and re-shape their relationship with the world

and themselves.” (Dewey, 2005, p. 25)

In this context, alienation may also lead to a kind of epistemological rupture or break. The effect of epistemological rupture or break in cinema becomes possible through the discontinuity of sound narrative and the use of technical means to deliver reminder signals to the viewer. Most evidently, as seen in modern cinema, the increased use of silence beyond merely supporting visual imagery, the elevated significance of ambient sounds, the shaping of on-screen narratives through off-screen sounds, or the use of sound that contradicts emotions these all contribute to such ruptures and disconnections. Silence, one of the most powerful sonic tools in modern cinema, is the type of cinematic sound most capable of generating such breaks and ruptures. Silence, with its naturalness and its capacity to disrupt habits, holds a significant place in enabling epistemological ruptures through its ability to gradually increase the distance between the viewer and the story. In this respect, the potential of unfamiliar sound in cinema to create epistemological rupture is high. The likelihood that unfamiliar sound patterns may generate a “sensory uncertainty” in the viewer is particularly strong. Krieg, Rascaroli, and Wolfe state:

“Sound design, when stripped from its empathetic alignment with image, becomes a critical vector for narrative defamiliarization a sonic breach in otherwise seamless diegesis.” (Krieg et al., 2019, p. 113)

According to this understanding, sound can function not merely as an atmospheric or reality-constructing element, but also as a disruptive device. For example, as in Weerasethakul's *Memoria*, an uncanny environmental sound that clashes with the visual's pastoral serenity may reveal the psychological or political layers of the narrative. The source of an unseen yet constantly heard, ambiguous and unsettling sound evokes both curiosity and unease in the viewer, potentially preventing emotional immersion in the narrative. Instead of passively consuming the narrative, the viewer is prompted through an aesthetic alienation to engage in reflection and critical evaluation.

### **The Aesthetic of Auditory Alienation in the Film *Memoria***

*Memoria* (2021), directed by Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul and entirely shot in Colombia, is a meditative cinematic experience that significantly departs from conventional dramatic structure. The film's protagonist, Jessica Holland (Tilda Swinton), a Scottish woman, hears a mysterious, explosion-like sound at irregular intervals. The sound is so intense that it startles her wake from sleep or causes her to physically jolt during the day. At first, Jessica assumes there is construction going on in the neighboring house and attributes the sound to that source. However, the fact that the sound is perceptible only to her renders it increasingly enigmatic. A crucial point is that this sound is heard exclusively by Jessica and the audience. No other character in the film is aware of or reacts to the sound. In the opening sequence, Jessica abruptly gets out of bed at night, bewildered by what she has heard. In subsequent scenes, she attempts to describe the sound, stating that “it feels like it's coming from the core of the Earth.” As the film progresses, this sound gains an increasingly cosmic and introspective dimension within the narrative layers, ultimately resembling the voice of an ancient memory embedded in the Earth itself.

The film breaks away from conventional cause-and-effect based dramatic structures, presenting a fragmented design characterized by a slow pace and pastoral narrative style, thus offering internal dynamics that differ from classical cinema. The opening

sequence is silent, wordless, and tranquil, setting the atmospheric tone for the rest of the film. As the protagonist<sup>12</sup> Jessica searches for the source of a sound she hears seemingly by chance, she enters a stream of consciousness in which physical, spatial, and temporal boundaries begin to blur. Her inner unrest and the distant relationships she maintains with her social environment continuously push her into a state of alienation. In *Memoria*, Weerasethakul presents a character who, while tracing the origin of a sound, simultaneously questions her own memory, traumas, and sense of belonging. Throughout the film, memory transcends individual experience and transforms into a metaphysical connection with the land, the dead, and cultural memory. In this sense, *Memoria* poetically explores the modern human's disconnection from their roots, the personal and collective dimensions of the act of remembering, and how these are translated into a cinematic experience.

The director transforms the acousmatic sound into a subjective matter of the film, preventing the viewer from engaging in a traditional act of mystery-solving. The explosion sound that Jessica hears is a fully acousmatic element: its source is never in-space but is present and perceptible as off-space. Contrary to conventional narrative structures, the viewer continues to investigate the cause of the sound alongside Jessica. In a classical narrative film, such a sound would typically be explained as a sign of threat or as a symptom of the protagonist's health issue (such as hallucination or auditory disorder). However, throughout the film, the sound remains hidden and retains its mysteriousness; it almost becomes the subject of the film. Unlike conventional cinematic narratives, even by the end of the film, the source of the sound is never fully revealed, leaving it as part of Jessica's internal questioning and search. This emotional state created by the film is innovative for the audience: it never fully transforms into a defined emotion and never loses its sense of curiosity. This state of indecisiveness deliberately suspends the satisfaction typically offered by classical narrative and, in line with Brecht's aims, serves as a method to shift the viewer from a passive receiver to an active interpreter. Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Memoria* (2021) examines how sensory perception is redefined in cinema, and how sound can become not only an auditory but also an ontological experience. In the opening sequence, the viewer is placed within a triangle of mysterious and undefined silence and sound. The static and narrow angle shot in a parking lot, beginning with a single car alarm and then becoming more enigmatic with the alarms of multiple cars, creates a deep sense of ambiguity for the audience, while the slow panning of the camera induces a dystopian effect.

The use of *vococentric* sound, defined by Chion as the prioritization of the human voice in narration, is intentionally minimized in both the opening scene and the film overall. This de-prioritization emphasizes the practice of thinking through images and sounds. The alarm sounds in the opening and Jessica's silence place the viewer in a dilemma, thereby increasing the film's capacity to generate thought. While Jessica searches for the cause of a booming sound that echoes in her mind yet has no counterpart in the external world, she is drawn into a self-inquiry intertwined with themes such as memory, space, and identity. During this process, the viewer witnesses how sound can transform into a tool of alienation. The off-screen sound seemingly takes hold of Jessica's being and weakens her connection to the external world. Toward the end of the film, the alienation transforms into a kind of solitude, embedding the sonic universe firmly within the film's core narrative structure. Referring also to Chion, who argues that sound in audiovisual narratives need not only complement the image but may also possess a transformative power, the sound

12 Protagonist is the main character at the centre of the events in a narrative or dramatic structure. This character typically experiences and attempts to resolve the central conflicts of the story and is the figure with whom the audience or reader most often forms an emotional connection.

Jessica hears plays a primary role in defining her internal and mental cycle. In the film's opening scene, the integration of Jessica's silhouette with silence generates an intense sense of estrangement, heightening the viewer's curiosity and unease. The dynamic information-laden structure typical of many film openings is replaced by Jessica's slow, lethargic movements in bed, creating a calm yet uncertain atmosphere. In the shared language of image and sound, viewing the character from behind and maintaining prolonged silence signals the onset of an epistemological rupture within the film.

In *Memoria*, the explosion sound heard is not attached to any physical source and is temporally displaced, unsynchronized with the image. While the visual shows Jessica walking in silence, the sudden, loud sound creates a jarring rupture for the viewer. This sound breaks the viewer's trust in the visual moment and, as Chion suggests, offers a cinematic experience in which the auditory component reinterprets the visual. Throughout the film, a sound conceptualized by Chion as an *acousmêtre* heard only by Jessica and not by other characters or the audience is placed at the center of the narrative. This unseen source of sound functions less as an element of suspense and more as a representation of the character's internal universe. Due to its indefinability, the acousmatic sound holds almost a dominant force and directs the character. However, for the viewer, it is perceived as a sound that contradicts their sensory-motor mechanism a *counterpointal* or, in Chion's terms, an *anempathetic* sound that fails to align with the emotional context. The audience is left within their cognitive domain by the uncanniness of such a sound that contradicts the film's emotional tone and cannot be identified. This sort of discordance, which allows space for the viewer to think and generate their own philosophical interpretations, stands as one of the film's principal ontological ruptures. The sound is designed not merely with reference to its real-world function but as a constructed narrative element, offering a fundamentally different experience within the cinematic universe.

Chion implies that such a viewing experience positions these types of sounds as omniscient, omnipresent, and all-powerful until they are revealed (Chion, 1999). *Memoria* never fully reveals the source of the ambiguous sound, preserving its abstract influence throughout the film, thus transforming it into a metaphor for alienation and existential solitude.

The film also contains numerous moments that align with Chion's concept of the *anempathetic sound*. The use of sound discordant with the visual becomes the primary trigger of alienation and simultaneously emphasizes the dynamism of the internal voice. It is important to reiterate the two dominant forms of sonic alienation in the film: silence, natural but unconventional in cinema and the *anempathetic* sound that contradicts emotion, both serve as valuable mechanisms of surprise. The sound of an explosion that echoes in Jessica's mind during her tranquil nature walks generates a feeling of unease against the serene visuals. Nature, symbolizing peace, paradoxically exists within the film to accentuate its opposite. This contradiction prevents the viewer from emotionally immersing themselves in the narrative; Brecht's "alienation" effect is here established through auditory aesthetics. Even silence becomes an active *anempathetic* tool in *Memoria*: the extended silences following the explosion sound amplifies emotional void rather than providing calmness.

*Memoria* offers a dialogue structure that contradicts Chion's concept of *vococentrism*. The minimal use of dialogue is instead oriented toward guiding the viewer into the inner world of the most silent character, Jessica. Contrary to conventionally verbose dialogue or monologue driven films, *Memoria* targets the words and sentences formed in the viewer's mind. Silence here gains meaning. As one of cinema's most essential sound tools, silence is a

natural sound with a strong reference to real life. The sound embedded in Jessica's body transforms into an internal monologue, thereby disrupting subject-centered narrative. In this sense, *Memoria* reverses *vococentrism*, presenting a sound universe centered around silence. Furthermore, the continuity of sound between scenes creating *sound-bridges* highlights the film's lyrical narrative quality. These *sound-bridges*, which help construct the film's space-time continuum, showcase another function of sound. Sound not only ensures narrative continuity but also underscores Jessica's connection between memory and space. In the film, the character Hernán (Juan Pablo Urrego) continuously transforms, appearing in different places with different identities. Hernán, whom Jessica pursues, becomes, in fact, a newly formed character within her memory, emerging through her inner inquiry.

One of the film's significant scenes involves Jessica meeting Hernán, a sound designer, and attempting to define the sound and discover its source in his studio. While trying to describe the sound, she says: "... like a concrete ball dropped into a metal canister filled with sea water... bam!... and then it shrinks... probably in my head it's bigger... it has a different echo... more metallic... more layered... more earthy... like a rumble from the Earth's core." Here, the audience is being pushed outside the scene, because they, along with Jessica, are the only ones who hear the sound and thus cannot truly participate in something they already understand they are left in a purely passive position.

All the film's cinematic efforts to define what the sound is align with Brecht's proposal to deconstruct dramatic structure. Jessica's descriptions of the sound are fragmented within the viewer's mind as well. This scene, beyond *vococentrism*, foregrounds the primacy of gestures and facial expressions as defined by Balázs. As Jessica verbally conveys the sound to Hernán, she simultaneously generates new internal inquiries, and the viewer perceives the intensity of these inquiries through Jessica's increasingly expressionless face and the weakening of her dialogues with Hernán. She herself becomes uncertain about the sound's reality. Unable to match the sound to any of the dozens of rumble samples they listen to, Jessica's memory begins to fill with questions. Balázs described this situation as follows:

"Can we regard expression and indeed the visual itself as a particularly unique material of cinematic art? The actor on a theater stage also performs with their body, and the set on stage is, of course, there so that it can be seen. The gestures and facial expressions used by a speaking actor are different; they merely express the remainder. What must be said but cannot be expressed with words is supported by facial muscles and hands. However, facial expressions in cinema are neither a supplement nor a residual category, and this difference suggests not only that cinematic gestures are more detailed and distinct, but also that they point to an entirely different domain. For the speaking person unlike, for instance, a musician or a dancer brings to light another layer of the soul." (Balazs, 2013, p. 43)

At its core, the issue lies in the fact that if each viewer were to describe this sound, they would use different descriptions when speaking to Hernán, because the cinematic and sonic positions of the film evoke, trigger, and create emotional responses that vary from viewer to viewer. Chion's term *sound-bridge* refers to the preservation of sonic continuity across scene transitions, smoothing over temporal-spatial shifts. *Memoria* employs this technique not in the conventional sense, but rather in a more poetic, stream-of-consciousness style. For instance, a faint natural sound heard in one scene carries over into the next despite a change in setting, disrupting the linear progression of time and creating a sense of cyclical, circular temporality in the film. This formally reflects the film's relationship with memory; through sound, the boundaries between past and present, inner

and outer worlds are blurred. However, it is evident in the film's dramatic structure that Jessica experiences disjunctions between space and memory. The notion that the sound she hears also functions as a bridge across temporal-spatial dimensions is significant. When she returns to visit Hernán, she learns that no such person exists there; similarly, the dentist she claimed in conversation with her sister and brother-in-law had died the previous year is still alive; and she encounters different Hernán's in different times and places these are more than mere coincidences. The sound she hears serves as an intermediary. This questioning, which materializes as Jessica's search for selfhood, is accompanied by the one constant element: the identical explosive sound. Throughout the film, the sound remains the sole unchanging component, maintaining its presence consistently. It is fully *acousmatic* and tends to always keep the viewer's cognitive mechanism active. In its acousmatic form, it continues to stimulate the viewer's desire for mystery and intrigue. Such a search alienates the viewer, enabling them to undertake the journey of inquiry independently from Jessica.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

*Memoria* is a strong example of how sound in contemporary cinema can function not merely as emotional guidance but also as a force capable of generating epistemological ruptures. Reconsidered through Michel Chion's sound theories, the film constructs a defamiliarizing narrative via auditory aesthetics. When *Memoria* (2021) is analyzed through the lens of Chion's four key theories on cinematic sound (*acousmètre*, *anempathetic sound*, *sound bridge*, and *vococentrism*) reveals that sound functions not merely as an auditory element, but as a fundamental component that carries the philosophical core of the narrative. The film particularly leverages the potential of the acousmatic sound (*acousmètre*), compelling the viewer to reconsider their identification with both the narrative structure and the protagonist's subjective experience. The recurring, source-less "bam" sound that echoes throughout Jessica's environment and psyche exemplifies what Chion (1994) describes as an acousmatic presence an invisible yet dominant narrative force.

Through themes of mystery and semantic ambiguity, it reinterprets cinematic sound using different reflections of auditory presence. The unseen yet perceptible sound becomes central to the narrative; meaning is constructed not through dialogue, but through the absence and echo of sound. Even the dialogues themselves move beyond mere narration, becoming reflective and interrogative, reminding us that sound can serve as a reconstructive cinematic element. In this way, the film's sound design distances viewers from conventional narrative forms and transforms cinema into an auditory space of contemplation.

Bertolt Brecht's theory of alienation may initially appear to be an aesthetic confined to the theater, realized through direct interventions such as speaking to the audience or fragmented storytelling. However, the core aim of this theory is to liberate the audience from passive emotional immersion and guide them to observe the represented phenomenon with critical awareness an objective that is highly applicable to the art of cinema as well (Brecht, 1964, pp.17–18). Cinema, as a narrative form with the potential to reach large audiences, intrigued Brecht, yet also posed conceptual challenges due to its technical limitations such as its pre-recorded, edited nature that prevents live intervention (Glahn, 2009). Although Brecht's ideas may not have found a direct equivalent in cinema, they continue to inspire filmmakers who produce philosophically inclined works. Considering that conventional cinema still predominantly operates within Aristotelian storytelling frameworks, drawing viewers in and aiming for emotional satisfaction, films with alternative narrative textures stand out by using alienation as a tool for critical thought. In this

context, Brecht's legacy continues to thrive, particularly within the avant-garde film tradition.

Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Memoria* presents a contemporary and original example of Brechtian aesthetics. Without aiming to deliver any didactic message, *Memoria* creates an alienating effect on the viewer through a purely auditory experience. While the film demonstrates how sound can serve as a powerful aesthetic tool in cinema, it also points to its potential to transform audience perception. The acousmatic explosion sound that Jessica continuously hears surprises the viewer expecting to decode the film through classical narrative techniques and remains unresolved and memorable even at the end of the film. The frequent silences and minimal dialogue leave the viewer alone with themselves and the film for extended periods, functioning as "meaningful absences" and demanding active participation. Ultimately, *Memoria* offers the viewer an unconventional experience and, in return, demands an unconventional attitude: to become aware of one's own sensory and interpretive processes.

This immersive auditory estrangement is further deepened through the film's use of structural sound techniques, particularly the deployment of sound bridges that connect distinct spaces, times, and states of consciousness. For instance, the *sound bridge* structure that facilitates sensory transitions between spaces and temporalities is particularly evident between the studio scene and Jessica's encounter with Hernán in the countryside. Although these two scenes belong to distinct layers of time and consciousness, the continuity of auditory elements between them enables an experience of simultaneity between memory and the present. Jessica's encounters with two different versions of Hernán, one a young sound engineer, the other an elderly fisherman living in rural isolation, suggest that the character does not represent a fixed identity, but rather serves as a projection of sound within memory. These two Hernáns may in fact be temporal or experiential reflections of the same entity, each representing a threshold in Jessica's journey to make sense of the elusive "bam" sound. The multiplicity of Hernán can be interpreted not as a singular individual but as the embodiment of sound's ability to recall and transform.

As a pure form of Brecht's core objective, the aesthetic alienation function of sound in cinema is realized concretely in films like *Memoria*. An element such as the explosion sound goes beyond being a mere sound effect and comes to carry the narrative and emotional weight of the film; it can trigger both emotional and cognitive responses in the viewer. This demonstrates that Brecht's concept of alienation is not confined to rigid forms but can be reborn in different shapes. What Brecht sought to achieve through epic theatre in his time can still be accomplished today through the audiovisual language of cinema. Moreover, the new opportunities offered by technology and creativity allow for experiments in areas such as sound design that were not previously possible. The bodily jolt (through the low-frequency sound) and the subsequent intellectual echo produced in the viewer by *Memoria* is proof that even today's audience can still be taken out of their habitual comfort zone.

Brecht's theory of alienation continues to live on in cinema both theoretically and practically. The use of sound holds a special place in the contemporary application of this theory; as one of cinema's most subtle tools of manipulation, sound has the power to shape sensory perceptions and emotional reactions of the audience. Whether through Michel Chion's *acousmatic/anempathetic* approaches or Béla Balázs's techniques of silence and abstraction, choices made in the sound design can leave a strong alienating effect on the viewer and give rise to new aesthetic definitions. As discussed through the example of *Memoria*, sound can sometimes overshadow the image itself and become a narrative protagonist, thereby radically altering the way a viewer experienc-

es the film. The fact that so many meanings and emotions suggested by *Memoria* are conveyed not through direct dialogue but through sound and silence serves as a striking example of cinema's intellectual potential. As Brecht insisted, art is not merely to enchant but to awaken, and in today's cinema, auditory aesthetics continues to offer new avenues for such awakening (Koutsourakis, 2018).

In conclusion, *Memoria* offers a unique experimental ground that expands the aesthetic, narrative, and philosophical potential of sound in cinema. Through the theoretical lens of Michel Chion, the film treats sound as a layer of knowledge, memory, and existence. By employing acousmatic sound, it triggers the power of the unknown; through its anempathetic structure, it conveys the weight of solitude; with sound bridges, it establishes temporal continuity; and by destabilizing vococentrism, it exposes the limits of language. In this regard, *Memoria* stands as a cinematic masterpiece that materializes Chion's conceptual insights into the intellectual dimensions of sound.

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## Yapılandırılmış Özet

Modern sinema, yalnızca görsel bir anlatım biçimi değil, çok katmanlı bir deneyim alanı olarak biçimlenmiştir. Sinematografik anlatı; görüntü, ses, kurgu, ışık, mizansen ve kamera hareketleri gibi araçların bir araya gelişiyle inşa edilen bütünsel bir yapıdır. Bu araçların her biri, yalnızca teknik birer unsur değil, anlatının duygusal, düşünsel ve estetik boyutlarını yönlendiren aktif öğelerdir. Sinemanın anlatı gücü, izleyiciyi yalnızca bir hikâyeyi izlemeye değil, aynı zamanda hissetmeye, düşünmeye ve sorgulamaya yönlendirme kapasitesiyle anlam kazanır. Bu bağlamda, özellikle sesin sinematografik yapıda üstlendiği rol, anlatının algılanış biçimini köklü biçimde etkileyebilir. Aşağıda sunulan çözümleme, sesin bu anlatsal işlevini Bertolt Brecht'in yabancılaştırma kuramı ve Michel Chion'un ses estetiği yaklaşımları doğrultusunda değerlendirmektedir. Bu çalışma, sinemada sesin estetik bir öğe olarak yalnızca duymaya değil, aynı zamanda düşünmeye, sorgulamaya ve yabancılaşmaya alan açan bir yapıda nasıl işlevselleştiğini ele almaktadır. Özellikle Bertolt Brecht'in yabancılaştırma kuramı ile Michel Chion'un sinemasal ses kuramları arasında kurulan kavramsal yakınlık üzerinden, çağdaş sinemanın dikkat çekici örneklerinden biri olan Memoria (2021) filmi incelenmektedir. Sinema, parçalı anlatı yapısıyla tiyatrodan ve diğer görsel sanatlardan ayrılırken, sesin dramatik yapıya uyumlu ya da onunla çatışan biçimlerde kullanımı, izleyicinin algı pratiğinde sıçramalara neden olmakta ve bireysel farkındalık üretmektedir.

Immanuel Kant'ın estetik yargı anlayışına göre beğeni yargısı öznel temellidir ve hoşlanma hissi bireysel tecrübeyle şekillenir. Bu yaklaşım sinema deneyiminde sesin izleyici üzerindeki etkilerini anlamada önemlidir. Zira sinemada kullanılan sesler, yalnızca gerçekliği taklit eden doğal referanslar olmakla kalmaz; aynı zamanda bu gerçekliği bireysel bellekte dönüştürme, estetize etme ve yeni duygulanım katmanları oluşturma potansiyeline sahiptir. Bu durum, film izleme deneyiminin öznel doğasını ve her izleyicide farklı etkileşimler yaratarak anlamı bükme kapasitesini açığa çıkarır. Michel Chion'un ortaya koyduğu audio-vision (işitsel-görsel bütünlük), vococentrism (ses merkezcilik / insan sesinin önceliği), anempathetic sound (anempatik ses / duygusal olarak ilgisiz ses), acousmètre (akusmatik varlık / kaynağı görünmeyen ses) ve sound-bridge (ses köprüsü / sahneler arası ses geçişi için) gibi kavramlar, sesin sinemadaki geleneksel rolünü aşarak anlatının yapılandırılmasında aktif bir özneye dönüştüğünü ileri sürer. Özellikle anempatik ses, sahnedeki duygu durumuna tezat oluşturarak izleyiciyi duygusal akıştan koparıp düşünsel bir mesafeye davet eder. Chion'un teorik yaklaşımları, Brecht'in epik tiyatro anlayışında izleyicinin özdeşleşme sürecinden çıkarılması ve eleştirel bir bilinçle sahneye dışarıdan bakması gerektiği yönündeki yaklaşımıyla doğrudan örtüşmektedir. Sesin bu işlevi, sinema anlatısında yabancılaşma etkisinin en estetik biçimlerinden birini sunar.

Apichatpong Weerasethakul'un Memoria filmi, bu teorik çerçevenin somutlaştığı güçlü örneklerden biridir. Dolayısıyla çalışma, bu filmin katmanlı ses kullanımı ve ayrışan sessel özellikleri üzerinden bir inceleme amaçlamaktadır. Film, ana karakter Jessica Holland'ın yalnızca kendisinin duyduğu, kaynağı belirsiz bir patlama sesi etrafında örülmektedir. Bu sesin yalnızca karakter ve izleyici tarafından deneyimleniyor oluşu, filmi klasik anlatı kalıplarından ayırarak akusmatik bir boyuta taşır. Jessica'nın bu sesin izini sürme süreci, aynı zamanda kendi belleğiyle, kimliğiyle ve varoluşuyla yüzleşmesine vesile olur. Ses burada sadece işitilen bir fenomen değil; aynı zamanda karakterin içsel arayışını temsil eden, metafizik ve düşünsel bir rehber dönüşür. Filmin yapısı itibarıyla düşük diyalog yoğunluğu, uzun sessizlik anları ve pastoral görüntülerle çelişen tekinsiz sesler, izleyiciyi hem görsel hem işitsel düzlemde rahatsız ederek Brecht'in önerdiği eleştirel mesafeyi yaratır. Bu bağlamda sessizlik bile bir karşıt araç hâline gelerek izleyicinin beklenen duygusal tepkilerini boşa çıkarır ve düşünsel sorgulamalara zemin hazırlar. Film, klasik dramatik yapıyı parçalayan, zaman-mekân bütünlüğünü kıran ve belirsizlikleri ön plana çıkaran bir anlatı yapısına sahiptir. Bu anlatı biçimi, sesin anlatsal sürekliliği sağlama işlevinden çok, kırılmaları ve epistemolojik kopuşları mümkün kılan bir estetik araca dönüştürülmesine olanak tanır.

Memoria, sound-bridge ve acousmètre gibi tekniklerin estetik araçlar olarak kullanıldığı; sesin görselle çatıştığı, zamansal olarak yerinden edildiği ve izleyiciyle doğrudan özdeşleşmeye kapalı olduğu bir ses evreni sunar. Bu yapı, Brecht'in geleneksel empatiye dayalı izleme alışkanlıklarını kırmak için önerdiği teatral tekniklerin sinemaya uyarlanmış halidir. Sesin kaynağının görülmediği, ancak sürekli hissedildiği anlar, izleyiciyi olayların merkezinden uzaklaştırarak eleştirel bir gözle bakmaya zorlar. Weerasethakul'un filmi, bu anlamda, hem Brecht'in "dördüncü duvarı kırma" anlayışını hem de Chion'un sinema sesine yüklediği estetik işlevselliği yeniden düşünmeye çağırır. Öte yandan, sinema tarihinden seçilen diğer örneklerle de benzer yaklaşımlar desteklenmektedir. Haneke'nin Funny Games (2007) filminde heavy metal müzikle görüntü arasında kurulan zıtlık, Ozon'un Summer of 85 filminde kulaklık aracılığıyla kurulan bireysel ses deneyimi ya da Arctic filmindeki sözsüzlük stratejileri, sesin yabancılaştırıcı gücünü gösteren uygulamalardır. Tüm bu örneklerde olduğu gibi, Memoria da sesin geleneksel anlam kurucu rolünü kırarak, düşünceyi harekete geçiren bir estetik alan yaratmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, sinemada sesin yalnızca duyumsal bir unsur değil, aynı zamanda estetik, düşünsel ve eleştirel bir araç olarak da işlev gördüğünü savunur. Brecht'in yabancılaştırma kuramı ve Chion'un ses estetiği yaklaşımları, çağdaş sinemada sesin anlatıya nasıl yön verdiğini ve izleyiciyle kurulan ilişkiyi nasıl dönüştürdüğünü anlamada uyarıcı bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Memoria, bu bağlamda, sesin sinemada düşünsel bir rezonans alanı yaratma potansiyelini ortaya koyan, görsel-işitsel bir yabancılaşma deneyimidir. Filmdeki işitsel yapı, klasik sinemanın empatik akışına karşıt bir estetik sunarken, seyircinin yalnızca duymakla kalmayıp düşünmesini, sorgulamasını ve kendi belleğiyle ilişki kurmasını talep eder. Böylece ses, sinemada salt teknik bir unsur olmaktan çıkarak felsefi ve poetik bir anlam üretim aracına dönüşür.