

*Very good indeed.*

*A*

Francois Truffaut makes imaginative use of sound in his latest film, Fahrenheit 451. The most striking instance of its use is at the very outset of the film, where the credits are stated unprecedently by word. To my knowledge, this is the first time in the history of the cinema that a film has listed its credits in this manner. This works quite well with the filtered zooms to television (or "wall screen") antennas which accompany the credits visually. It is in characterizing this TV-oriented society that 451's sound track is most audibly effective.

Widespread use is made of the high-pitched unnerving sounds that populate Montag's world. The viewer is introduced to the machine-like fire department to the tune of clanging bells and wailing sirens, and to the emptiness of Montag's house as he first enters it by the sound of the TV before it is seen for the first time. Here we realize that something is wrong with Montag's life, but it is after he has returned home from a quietly frustrating day of book burning that Truffaut gives his first strong cue as to Montag's anxiety. He enters as an irritating high-pitched noise offends the viewer's ear. This noise continues as Montag finds his drugged wife unconscious and finally ends when he turns off the TV. Here sound has been used excellently; it is at least as effective in explaining the situation as the visuals.

The aftermath of this incident, in which the pumpers come to fix Linda up, is a good example of Truffaut's tasteful use of off-camera sound. While the doctors are pumping out his wife's stomach, Montag's drawn face is seen in another room. The sound is of the doctors' joking, forming an ironic counterpoint to the image. A further instance of the use of close-up ironically commented upon by sound is that of Linda's face as the sound of Montag turning

the pages of a forbidden book is heard. It is late at night, and she is asleep as he begins to discover the new world which later opens up to him. The growing split between Montag and his wife is emphasized here; he is reading books instead of remaining in bed with his wife where he belongs. Her face, again in close-up, reveals the irritation which will later lead her to report her husband as he is heard reading aloud in the next room.

In the developing stages of Montag's relationship with Clarisse, the school scene provides a striking example of the imaginative use of sound. As they enter the school, the chanting of children multiplying sets the scene. The very way in which the children chant is a product of the society's standardized impersonal way of life. Clarisse's encounter with the boys is made meaningful as her face is seen in close-up, and the sound of the boy's ringing footsteps as he runs from her are painfully evident on her face. Her sobs are ironically mixed with the children's chants as Clarisse reacts to the loss of her job and the larger loss of personal contact and love for which it stands. The high-pitched whine of the elevator as they leave the school places Montag and Clarisse within the context of their frustrating mechanized society as she asks him why <sup>he</sup> supports that society by burning books.

The sound of clanging bells at the fire house is used by Truffaut to support the continuity of a series of fast cuts while the firemen race out on a call. The martyrdom of Clarisse's friend, to whom the call is made, is made effective by the roar of the flames and the absence of any sound whatsoever from her as she dies. Montag is as fascinated by this scene as the viewer, and the sound

of the captain's frantic calls to him as we watch the woman die tell us that he is still within the inferno of her house.

Footsteps are used in many other parts of the film than the instance already mentioned. Often they are the symbols of the authoritarian society in which Montag lives. A good example is provided in the film's opening sequence as the unnamed man is preparing to leave his house. As he rushes frantically around gathering a few belongings together, the approach of the firemen is announced by sirens and their insistent, militant footsteps as they march from the fire engine to his apartment.

Conversations are used in several instances to explain or comment upon something that is not seen. When Montag asks a neighbor what became of Clarisse after she has fled from her house, the woman says she doesn't know, but that the people who lived there weren't like the rest because they didn't have a wall screen antenna. Instead of showing the antenna-less house, Truffaut has chosen to emphasize Clarisse's individuality by showing the roofs of all the surrounding houses, including Montag's, with their antennas.

During Montag's escape after he has murdered the captain, the high-pitched noise of the machines which propel the police in the air announces their arrival to Montag, who hides. The noise is heard before they are seen, and explains his action. The sound of the man chopping wood at Montag's grave at the home of the book people is symbolic of their hearty, care-free existence; it is a marked contrast to the continuous whining electronic sounds which characterized his life in the other society. A cut is made on sound in this sequence which work

in this closing sequence which works quite well. The leader of the book people is ~~inside~~ a building about to bite into an apple, and the cut to the interior is accompanied by the loud crunch as he bites into it. The apple is used elsewhere in this sequence (when Clarisse borrows one for a bite) as a symbol of this new society. The symbol's effectiveness is as much a result of the sound it makes when bitten into as its visual appearance. The sound has many of the same qualities as the woodchopping already mentioned.

451's musical score, by Bernard Herrmann, was magnificent. Particularly effective were the racing, up-tempe theme which accompanied the fire truck on its missions, and the love theme which appeared most strikingly with Clarisse as the viewer first saw her in the land of the book people. One outstanding instance of the former was heard when Truffaut cut abruptly from Montag's bedroom to the fire engine on call the next day. The music played the major role in jolting the viewer so completely.

*Roy Stetland*  
4/17/67