

### **Rationale:**

The main theme is the powerful vs the powerless. As the sound designer, the sounds and score will be designed to portray the gloominess of the corporate life. The use of harsh sounding diegetic and non diegetic sounds will create distortion and discomfort while in contrast, optimistic sounds will also be used to create positive emotions. Such sounds will reflect on the development of the plot and protagonist towards the main theme. The tone of the score would also vary along with the plot and the protagonist's journey. From dull, to lively sounding to signify the change of the character.

**Word Count: 100**

### **Commentary**

#### **Pre production:**

Research, testing sounds and generating ideas were conducted. The crew discussed ideas for diegetic and non diegetic sounds to build emotions, and link to the theme of power. My partner had already begun writing the screenplay and drawing initial storyboards, allowing me to generate ideas quickly, as I could visualise each scene and add test sounds to them [**Appendix 1: Screenplay**] [**Appendix 2: Scene ideas, detailed**]. The screenplay and storyboards allowed me to generate initial ideas on what sounds to add in specific scenes, how to transition them, effects etc [**Appendix 1:Screenplay**].

I've begun researching on films with unique sound design that created powerful emotions [**Appendix 3: Sound and score research, inspiration, ideas**] such as, Saving Private Ryan where sounds were used to create distortion and chaos in the beach scene [**Appendix: Saving Private Ryan**], the amputation in 127 Hours to create "pain" and "discomfort" [**Appendix: 127 hours**]. Inspired by those films, I brainstormed ideas [**Appendix: sound and score ideas**] such as city ambiances, white noise and extra volume on objects for quick montages [**Appendix: Shaun of the dead**], and dark ambiances for tension building [**Appendix: Zodiac**]. Through such sounds, dull and uncomfortable emotions can be imposed on the audiences. I also explored movie scores and hip hop music (hip hop to match the urban setting). I looked at scores of films with similar themes and genre conventions of power and the urban setting. The Dust Brothers [**Appendix: Dust Brothers**] [**Appendix: Marla**], Requiem for a Dream [**Appendix: Hope Overture**] and music from artists [**Appendix: Massive Attack**] [**Appendix: 6 underground**] all incorporate hip hop elements, reflecting on the hard times faced by the protagonists in those films. Incorporating similar styled scores into the film would have similar impact on the audiences. I also looked at the Trent Reznor's work [**Appendix: In Motion**]. The use of digital sounds reflected on the potential and danger of the

character with his programming skills, hence using such style on my film could have the same effect in the hacking scene.

Next, we began testing sounds and scores. Test shots of important scenes were made where I could test the scores and sound design. Using FL Studio and Garageband [**Appendix 5: FL Studio, score design**], I created basic orchestral scores for those key scenes. I ended up creating 3 different versions of the main score, from confused, dull, distorted sounding that would be used at the beginning, which then slowly transitions to more uplifting and optimistic styles which would be used at the end of the film to signify the change of the protagonist. I also set up the microphone to record foley sounds and put them on those test scenes to assess the sounds along with those scenes. My partner and I then discussed about the sounds and scores and decided which ones work best with which key scenes [**Appendix 4: Test sounds**]. Sounds that are feasible on my behalf with our resources and create the biggest impacts on film language and intended meanings. We focused mostly on the scores as they were fundamental to the plot and character development when testing the scenes earlier. Though we discussed about a hip hop main score, I disagreed and suggested an orchestral piece as it would be more effective in portraying emotions and meaning with natural sounding instruments. We also planned on the on-set sounds [**Appendix: Sounds to record on and off set**] [**Appendix: sound and score ideas**], to minimise anticipated problems, planned on the equipment, times and locations needed in order to capture the most realistic sounds (rush hour to capture traffic sounds). Locations of microphone placement for on-set recordings were considered too [**Appendix: Mic floor plans**] to ensure quality audio capture.

### **Production:**

During the shooting, I did recordings of ubiquitous sounds such as character movement, ambience, room-tone etc. Recording them externally and editing them into the film without making them sound unrealistic is impossible. The shooting went as planned, however, the capture sensitivity of the microphone was too strong which could not be lowered. Furthermore, it cannot be fixed in post production as reducing specific frequencies reduces the overall quality of the audio, thus making them sound unprofessional. We fixed the problem by adding a cloth over the microphone, making a significant difference [**Appendix 6: Mic setup**]. The impact on the quality was that no unwanted sounds were captured (which increases the quality of the film). When required, we also used our homemade stand as a boom mic to position the microphone closer to certain things to capture better audio e.g. enhanced city ambience [**Appendix 6: Mic setup**]. Such crucial executions took the professionalism of the sounds in the film to a higher level.

### **Post production:**

While editing, I worked on sound mixing and editing. I used Audacity to enhance or reduce frequencies of sounds to make them more clear, and iMovie to attach the sounds with the footages. I created 4 scores with virtual instruments and sample packs in FL Studio. The first being a plain, repetitive sounding but exciting paced, which fits the montages of the city. The style resembles how the protagonist's repetitive and monotonous life is trapped by society and work, to represent the harsh life that many people live in metropolises like Hong Kong. The second score was used in the hacking scene of the film, consisting of minor keys, slow paced chords, and a hip hop beat with complex sounding synths, the pessimistic melody suggests the emotions of the character at the time (Anger, sadness and anxiety). However, the melody of the score becomes more positive with an additional synth 2/3 of the score, suggesting hope and optimism. The synth counter points with the minor chords of the earlier part of the score, as it mostly uses major chords, and it is at a high frequency hence it can be heard in the background even at a soft volume. The use of such chords stands out amongst the other minor chords of the score to show how his emotions bounced from ambivalence to confidence. This score was important in this scene as it marks the transition and change of the protagonist, from a wage slave to being "conscious" and a "hero". Finally, the final passage begins right when he successfully hacks into the systems by including a repetition of the melody from the earlier passage. The use of orchestral instruments with major keys give off a sense of uplift, tranquility and optimism, symbolising the protagonist's change and the turning point of his journey. A person now free, who has defeated the big corporations. All these scores impacted on the audiences by inflecting on their emotions and giving them meaning behind the character and plot development through melody, tone and rhythm.

Other non diegetic sounds; swoosh effects made in FL Studio represents how "nothing" happens in the work life, making it very dull. The sounds of oceans represents the protagonist's escapism from reality and desire for change. Police sirens and loud music of neighbours (made in FL Studio with effects added with Audacity) portrays the protagonist's poor living conditions. A main problem that we encountered was that the scores were too long. Hence, we had to shorten the scores to the key parts to portray emotions and meaning most effectively. A minor problem was that the sound quality wasn't good for certain parts while doing on set recording. This was solved by asking the crew to re-shoot those scenes. As a sound designer, my role had a big impact on film language through the sounds and especially the score. Different sounds portraying the theme and setting of the film and representing different emotions and meaning that audiences could emphasise and learn along with the plot.

**Word Count: 1,198**

**Appendix:**

**[Appendix 1: Screenplay]**

- Dialogues are cut to shorten the length of screenplay for the appendix

**Screenplay**

EXT. STREETS - DAY

An office worker, JOHN walks up to his office building, looks up, shot of plane flying by, then looks back to the front and walks into the building. **(City ambience, sounds of traffic and police sirens, fade out as he walks into building, fade in audio of next scene)**

INT. OFFICE WORKPLACE - DAY

JOHN sitting on chair in the workplace, stares at a calendar with a beach image for a few seconds, then stares back into the blank screen of the desktop computer sitting in front of him. **(Sound of repetitive, surreal music playing in the background as office music, fade out and fade in sounds of oceans, then fade out slowly)**

EXT. PEDESRTIAN SREET - DAY

JOHN walking back home on the pedestrian pathway, he looks to another direction as he passes by a house of affluence, shot of an expensive car parked outside the house, and John looks back hopelessly and continues his journey home. **(Fade out of diegetic sounds, fade in non diegetic score # 1)**

EXT. ROOFTOP VIEW - DUSK

Time lapse of sunset view of the city. **(Non diegetic score playing)**

EXT. STREETS OF CITY - DUSK

Tracking shots of high end stores and neon lights in commercial district of the city. **(Non diegetic score playing)**

INT. RESIDENTIAL BUILDING STAIRS - DUSK

JOHN walking up the stairs facing down on the ground with aggressive loud music heard from other neighbours' apartments. **(Fade out non diegetic score, fade in diegetic blurred background music)**

INT. APARTMENT - DUSK **(Fade out diegetic background music)**

JOHN sitting on the touch in his living room, watching a TV show on a device while eating his cheap instant noodles dinner drinking a beer. He receives a call from his phone. **(Fade out TV show sounds, insert sounds of phone call and spoken dialogues)**

JOHN

Hello?

INT. OFFICE DESK - DUSK

Low angle mid shot of MR. ANDERSON sitting on an executive chair in front of his desk holding a piece of paper listing the employment details of JOHN while holding onto his cigar.

MR.ANDERSON

Hello, is this software engineer John Lee from the Hong Kong central branch.....

INT. APARTMENT - DUSK

MR.ANDERSON

(voice in background)

-your time here is finished, don't even bother coming back tomorrow...

**(Cut sounds of dialogues, play score # 2 softly in background, with sounds of typing, fade out score # 2)**

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

View of the building.

INT. OFFICE WORKPLACE - DAY

JOHN walks through the office workplace, looking nervous, tries not to get spotted by familiar co-workers. He enters his office room and immediately takes out his laptop to hack the company's servers. Senior manager is heard coming towards him from outside. Manager arrives at his door right when John is about to leave. **(Fade in score # 3 as he successfully hacks the computer, long pause of score # 3)**

MR.ANDERSON

(Looking at John, surprised)

John, what are you still doing here?

JOHN

(Nervous expression)

Mr. Anderson! I was just uh cleaning up the shelves, you know just to make sure the cube's.....

EXT. ROOFTOP VIEW - DUSK **(resume score # 3, higher volume)**

John stands on a rooftop of a building and looks out to the skyline view of the city. He puts on his sunglasses, and leaves the rooftop.

EXT. STREETS OF CITY - DUSK

Slow motion low angle tracking shot of high end street stores and neon signs throughout the city, fades to white slowly with voiceovers of news interviews about the recent hacking scandal of a major banking corporation.

**(fade in reporter sounds, sounds overlaying each other, volume increase and sudden cut to end the film)**

REPORTER #1

(background audio only)

... And stocks of one of the largest multinational banking corporation in the world has recently crashed drastically as well. How much would this affect its domestic and foreign investments?

REPORTER #2

(background audio only)

Given the catastrophic damage caused by this scandal, I'm afraid this would affect people and small businesses potentially at a global scale....

## [Appendix 2: Scene ideas, detailed]

### Sound Design and Music

- Based on storyboards

#### **Scene 1:**

##### Diegetic sounds:

- Cars moving, cars honking, police sirens
- City ambience
- People talking on mobile phones
- People talking in background (business partners)
- Sounds of protagonist walking (shoe sounds)

##### Non diegetic sounds:

- Score

##### Score:

- Fast paced bpm/ rhythm to the score to represent the rushed, busyness and impatience of the city life
- Hip hop type beat to the score to portray the city, urban life
- Similar to Dust Brothers' soundtrack from Fight Club, very abstract and complex melodies, also combines different sound effects. Which we could include sound effects of different parts of the city such as police sirens, scratching sounds etc. in the track (combining sound effects and music together)

#### **Scene 2:**

##### Diegetic sounds:

- Same as scene 1 as he is still in the city
- Sounds of trains (busy, dull and endless everyday routine), sounds of plane engine with plane flying above in the sky (represent his ambitions, his desire to break away from his ordinary routine in life)

##### Non diegetic sounds:

- Phone calls in background fading in as protagonist walks to building, making obvious transition between scenes and locations (so don't need to spend time to film protagonist going in the building and taking the elevator etc.)
- Paper, writing sounds, photocopy sounds (to simulate an office)
- Keyboard typing sounds (to show he is approaching a work environment)
- Blurred kind of sound effect to portray the dullness of workplace

##### Score:

- Score from scene 1 continues till here
- Hip hop beat goes away and the score proceeds as calmer, but dull sounding melody. Very plain instruments and sounds in the melody to represent the repetitive, unvaried routine in the workplace

#### **Scene 3:**

##### Diegetic sounds:

- Non diegetic sounds from scene 2 (office sounds)
- Sounds of protagonist murmuring with frustration, making sounds of hesitation
- Sound of brief case opening, and papers falling out
- Sounds of everyday object when fast paced cut transition to scene 4

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### Non diegetic sounds:

- None in this part
- Build up white noise sound when doing fast paced cut transition
- Blurred sounds when protagonist drops papers (to show that we are in his empty mind)

### Score:

- Score from scene 2 continues
- Score stops when brief case opens and protagonist drops all papers

### **Scene 4:**

#### Diegetic sounds:

- Keyboard typing
- Computer running sounds
- Sounds of code
- Office sounds (phone ringing, people talking, photocopy sounds etc.)

#### Non diegetic sounds:

- Ringing kind of sound in the background
- Abstract thoughts, feelings of protagonist

#### Score:

- None

### **Scene 5:**

#### Diegetic sounds:

- All office sounds fade out to softer volume
- Sounds focused only on protagonist's actions (the sound of his clothes moving, his sigh etc.)

#### Non diegetic sounds:

- Sounds of the beach fade in
- Sounds of birds chirping in the background fade in
- Sounds of waves crashing onto the rocks on the shore fade in
  - Portray his imagination, his dreams of a better life
- Score fades in (create emotions from audience, audience will have a sense of sympathy for the protagonist)

#### Score:

- Orchestral music fading in, a melody of nostalgia and melancholy. Slow paced, beautiful yet sad sounding. To represent his dreams of a better life but also to represent that he is far from achieving that, or perhaps that he couldn't even achieve it.
- Thomas Newman alike score

### **Scene 6:**

#### Diegetic sounds:

- City sounds and ambience
- Sounds of cars passing by (car honking, cars speeding etc.)
- Sounds of protagonist walking (shoe sounds)
- Sounds of police sirens (link back to the main plot of story of crime)
- People walking past the protagonist (shoe sounds)

#### Non diegetic sounds:

- Sounds of the beach and birds fade in again when he spots the car for about 10-20 seconds and fade back out. Represents his dreams.

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- Score from scene 5 slowly fades away at the start of scene 6. His "dream" score fades out because he is back in reality.

### Score:

- Score ends as if it hasn't ended yet
- Instruments hold onto a long note and score slowly fades out
- To represent all his dreams and goals put aside

### Scene 7:

#### Diegetic sounds:

- City ambience
- Sounds of people talking on the streets
- Sounds of light boards turning on
- Car sounds and ambience
- Traffic stop sounds
- Portray the materialistic life of the city

#### Non diegetic sounds:

- Jazz score playing in the background to represent the life of the city, the confusion, the rushed pace etc.

### Score:

- Jazz score with complex but abstract melody
- Fast paced to represent the city life
- Trumpet/ saxophone instruments with a drum beat in the background
- Similar to Whiplash score

### Scene 8:

#### Diegetic sounds:

- Sounds of protagonist walking up the stairs
- Loud music (in blurred effect) sound effect, as if someone in the apartment is having a rave
- Sounds of city (diegetic sounds from scene 7) fades to softer, and has that blurred effect as well, because the protagonist is inside his apartment
- Sound of protagonist reaching for his keys

#### Non diegetic sounds:

- Blurred sound effect again, portraying his empty thoughts and mind
- Jazz score fades out

### Score:

- Fade out

### Scene 9:

#### Diegetic sounds:

- Sound of the film playing in the laptop
- Sound of him eating dinner
- Loud music from neighbours can still be heard but at a low volume with blurred sound effect
- City sounds can still be heard but a low volume with blurred sound effect
- To portray his poor living conditions, always loud and uncomfortable

#### Non diegetic sounds:

- Main score of film fades in
- Diegetic sounds slowly fade to lower volume as the score fades in
- Bass frequency type ambience in the background



**Score:**

- Similar to the one in scene 5, the score that represents his ambitions and dreams
- Darker tone, create more sympathy on the audience
- More use of instruments to build more melody and make the sounds richer (to portray protagonist's hopes and inner motivation)

**[Appendix 3: Sound and score research, inspiration, ideas]**

**Inspiration**

Sound design:

**[Appendix: 127 hours]**

1. "127 Hours" arm cutting scene

- Unique sound design, a high pitched frequency noise in the background as he is cutting off his arm
- Such sharp sound gives off discomfort to the audience
- Uncomfortable sound combined what's shown on screen makes it overall very visually uncomfortable to the audience

**[Appendix: Saving Private Ryan]**

2. "Saving Private Ryan" beach scene

- "Blurred" sound in the background, all other diegetic sounds muted when an explosion temporarily deafens Captain Miller
- Blurred sound to portray his thoughts, inability to focus due to the chaotic situation
- Unable to hear, yet also gives audiences an insight on the chaotic situation and his emotions

**[Appendix: Shaun of the dead]**

3. "Shaun of the Dead" quick montage

- Whishing sounds when quick transitions happen in Shaun of the Dead, as if it creates a build up
- Transitions to the next scene smoothly and efficiently as well (doesn't require too much time)
- Sounds of objects being interacted with are also present
- Combination of sounds used to make the transition more smooth
- Build up sounds to the next scene

**[Appendix: Zodiac]**

4. "Zodiac" basement scene

- Dark ambient sounds in the background
- Sound effects to build tension
- Dark sounds to build tension as well, to create suspense, give off a horror vibe
- Cannot expect what comes next

Score:

Inspiration:

**[Appendix: Dust brothers]**

1. The Dust Brothers - Jack's Smirking Revenge (Fight Club Soundtrack)

The song includes an intro that consists of a hip hop/ trip hop beat. It overall has a very dark melody to it as well. Gives off a feeling of "giving everything up" and "losing something". It then breaks down into a piano type synth in the middle, with quite the phlegmatic tone to it. It finally then moves onto the beat again,

consisting of industrial sounds that is highly relatable to the theme of the film. Overall the mixture of hip hop and soundtrack goes great together along with the theme of the film, something to consider for our own film.

**[Appendix: Marla]**

2. The Dust Brothers - Marla (Fight Club Soundtrack)

This song starts off with a loop of a synth similar to the one used in Jack's Smirking Revenge. The overall tone/ melody gives off a very "typical day in the life" feeling. The repetitiveness portrays the boredom/ repetitiveness that the protagonist faces in his life working at the office in the movie. Such a simple melody gives off a powerful effect.

**[Appendix: In Motion]**

3. In Motion - Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross

The score that played in the background of the hacking scene of The Social Network movie. It comprises of many 8 bit, glitch, retro sounding synths which really sounds like the stereotypical sounds that computers produce, hence really matching the scene and the action of hacking by the protagonist. The track overall gives a very computer, digital world feel, which went really well with the scene. I could incorporate synths like that too in my score, especially for the hacking scene. **(LINK TO EVIDENCE OF COMMENTARY)**

**[Appendix: Hope Overture]**

4. Hope Overture - Clint Mansell

Great song that represents loss of hope, especially with that theme conveyed in the film. It consists of a hip hop type beat with orchestral violins along which makes a great contrast, but powerful effect. I like the use of violins along with the hip hop beat because it really suits the urban setting of the movie with the violins still able to create emotions and effects on the audiences through its minor keys. **(LINK TO EVIDENCE OF COMMENTARY)**

**[Appendix: 6 Underground]**

3. Sneaker Pimps - 6 Underground

A hip hop/ trip hop song that has a melody giving off a very dark but powerful tone as well. The blurred trumpet sounds in the background makes the song sound very much richer and gives it a very soundtrack sound a like as well. In addition, the overall melody of the song gives off a very powerful feeling, as if there has been success in something. Suitable for endings of movies.

**[Appendix: Massive attack]**

4. Massive Attack - Dissolved Girl

The ongoing synth right at the start to the end really creates a dark atmosphere of repetition, power. It then moves onto a trip hop beat throughout the song. The snare being blurred makes the song sound more mysterious. The bass in the background as well contributes to that factor as well. The guitar in the middle emphasises the darkness of the song. Song was also used in The Matrix, when Neo still has his headphones plugged in during his sleep. I think the song has high linkage to the theme of the film of bringing justice. A song that could be used for our score in our film as well.

**[Appendix: sound and score ideas]**

Ideas:

Sounds:

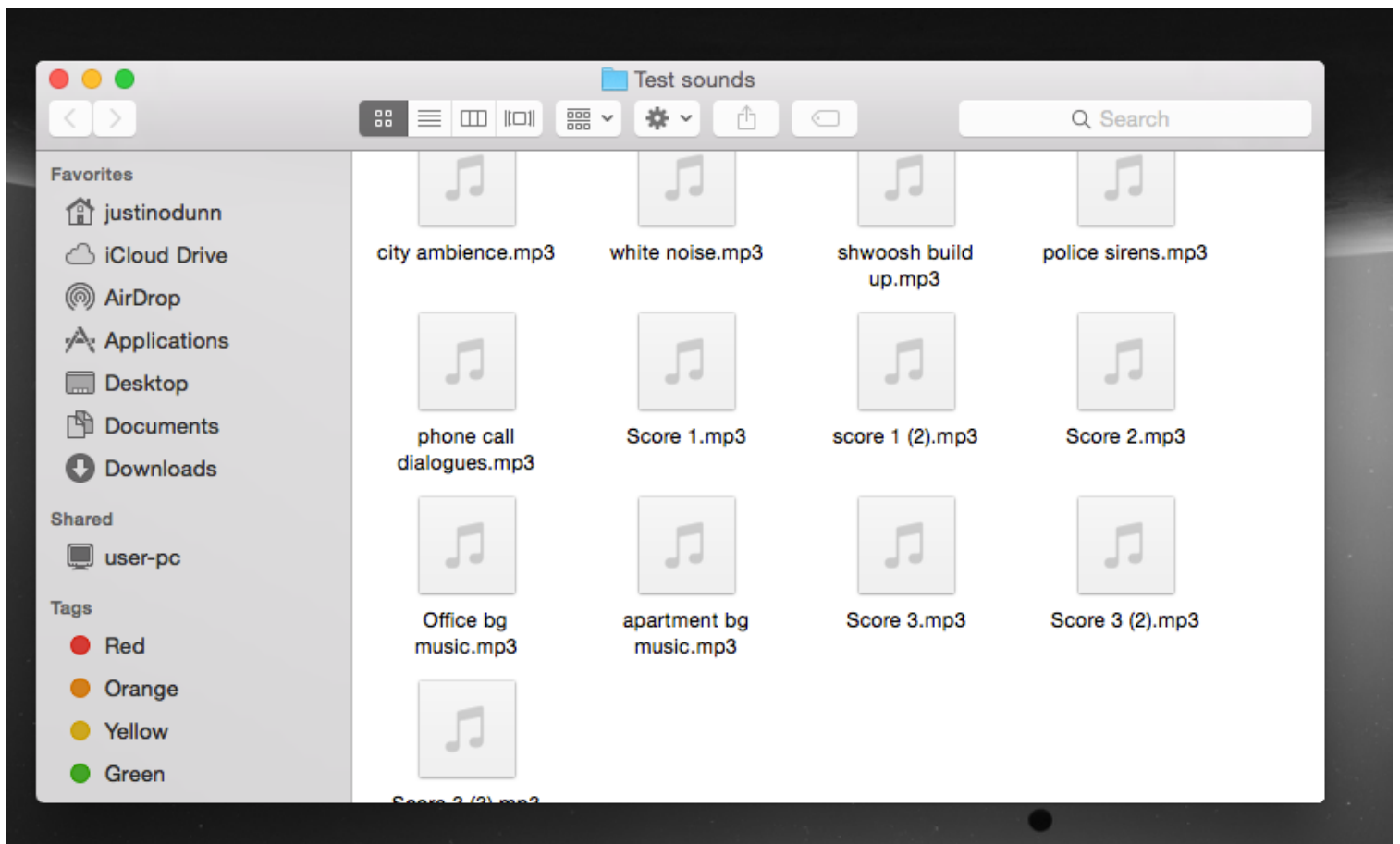
- Fast paced, build up white noise sounds when having quick montages/ sudden transitions to other scenes
- Non diegetic sounds (blurred all audio, certain sounds to make audience think from the perspective of the protagonist)
- Diegetic sounds such as police sirens (to represent crime, corruption)

- Urban city ambience (urban Hong Kong life)

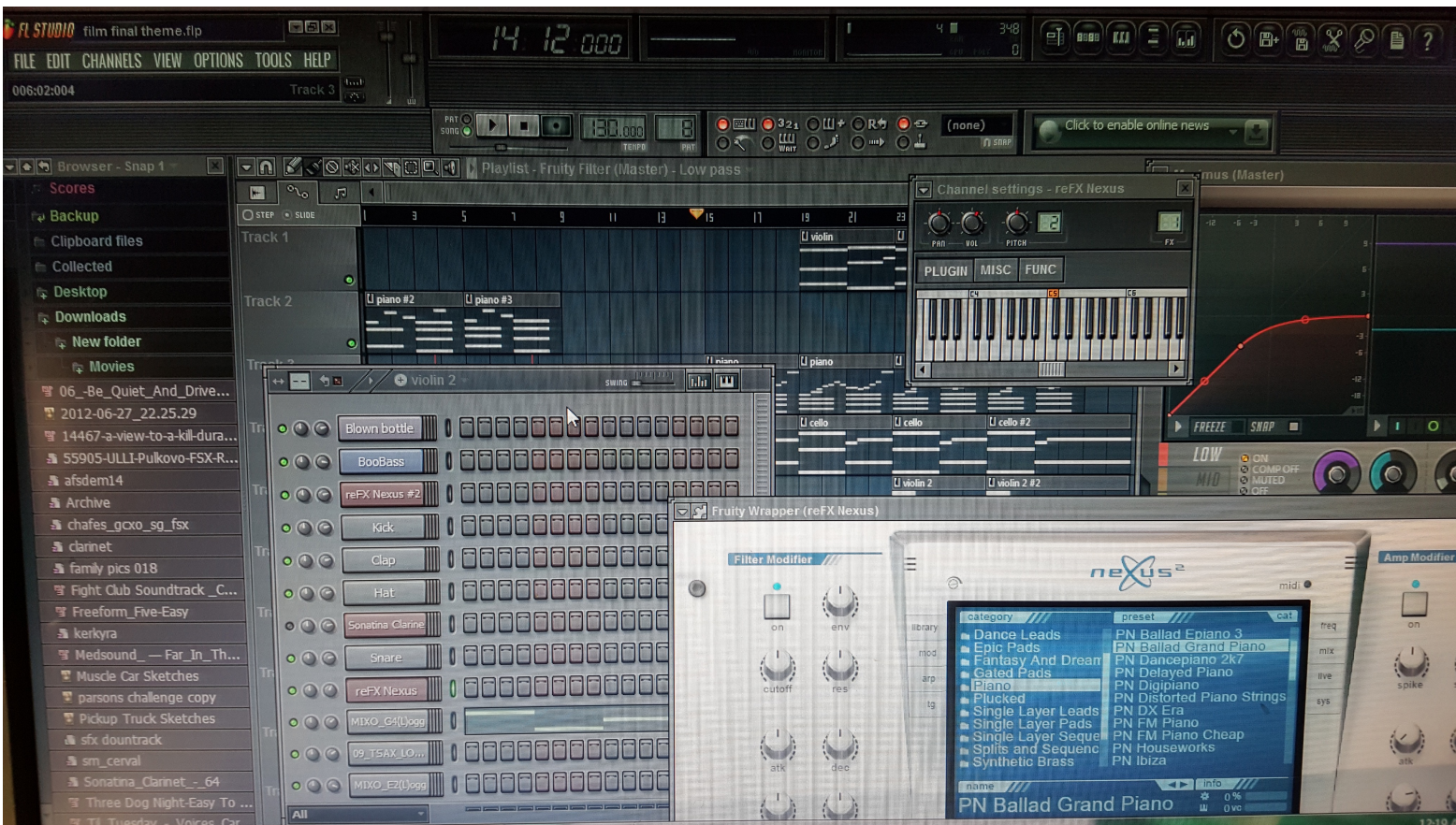
Score:

- A hip hop/ trip hop beat score could be used when portraying the protagonist's everyday life, life of repetition, boredom
- Hip hop score could also be used to portray the street life of Hong Kong (contrast between poverty and wealthy, capitalism)
- Another score could be just an orchestral piece, to portray the dull and depressed emotions that the protagonist feels everyday, the same piece could be played at the end when he brings justice to portray power, and restored balance
- Music could sound very tech like (like The Social Network's soundtrack) when protagonist is hacking

**[Appendix 4: Test sounds]**



[Appendix 5: FL Studio, score design]

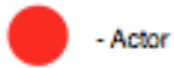
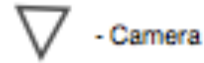
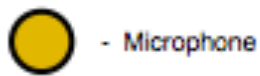


**[Appendix 6: Mic setup]**

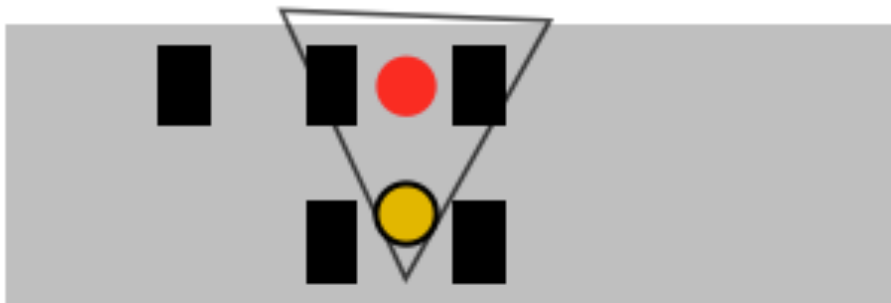


[Appendix: Mic floor plans]

**Keys:**



**Bus scene:**



**Office exterior scene:**



**Office interior scene:**



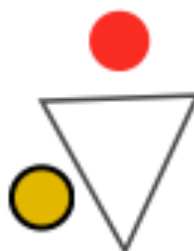
**Interaction with objects (close ups)**



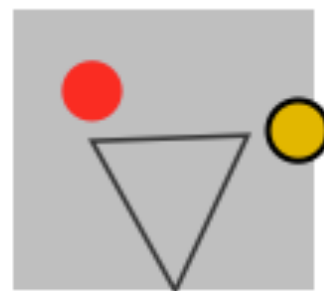
**Office cubicle scene**



**Walking home scene:**



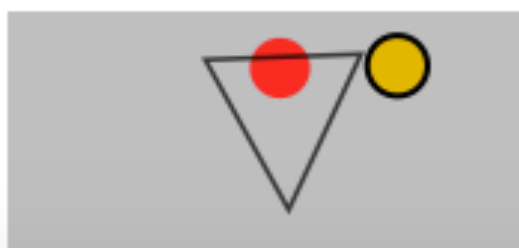
**Arriving home scene:**



**Phone scene:**



**Ending scene:**



**[Appendix: Sounds to record on and off set]**

**List of sounds to record on set:**

- City ambience
- Sounds of car traffic
- Interaction with objects in room (Boost frequencies for quick montage)
  - Brief case
  - Keyboard, mouse
  - Keys
- Character movement
  - Shoes
  - Clothes sounds
- White noise
- Sounds of vehicle moving (bus scene)
- Doors opening
- Voice recordings (John and Mr Anderson)
- Charlie Chaplin movie

**List of sounds to record off set / produce:**

- Voice overs (Extras such as Mr Anderson's voice on phone, sound of lady on the bus)
- Music score
  - Score 1 (Intro song)
  - Score 2 (Hacking scene)
  - Score 3 (Ending song)
  - Bus music (City montage)
  - Elevator music (Office scene)
- Elevator sounds and sound effects
- Office ambience
  - Voices
  - Telephone
  - Printers
- Ocean sounds (intro and office scene)
- Swoosh sound effects (For quick montage)
- Neighbour background music
- Phone ringtone
- Computer code sounds (hacking and climax scene)
- USB sound