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**Figure 1-16.** *Good Will Hunting*. Will and Sean on Boston Common: nondiegetic orchestral music near the end of the scene (transcription from the sound track).

kind of sound, either ambient sound that confirms and qualifies the physical space in the image or music that is somehow referential (in classical Hollywood cinema, it was a commonplace to insert a few bars of a national anthem or a song with relevant title or lyrics, such as “New York, New York” for a Manhattan skyline shot). Music that cites a theme or a musical texture that was heard earlier in the film as associated with a particular physical space is also common (a famous early example is the “Tara” theme in *Gone with the Wind* (1939)). Ambient sound in this situation can also be called “establishing sound,” but we should note that the term “establishing music” is not used.

In the typical dialogue scene, we expect effects and music to drop off gradually, in line with the gradual movement into the physical space and toward the intimacy of the characters’ conversation, at which point, of course, speech takes over and continues to dominate throughout, until the reestablishing (or other closing) shot, where conversation might cease and music or effects might make a final comment, a final spatial or narrative reference, or a transition into the next scene. In this scene from *Good Will Hunting*, as we have seen, effects do not drop back as much as they would normally, but we have also seen the narrative motivation for that atypical usage. The music, on the other hand, does serve a role as transition into the next scene (which it dominates, as is typical of montage sequences). Music, in fact, more often than not will enter—or rise in prominence if it is already been present, underscoring the dialogue—at the emotional crux of a conversation and then serve a double role: representing emotion but also acting in the formal function of transition sound.

## Summary

Almost all films are narrative, and their elements are ordered to present the narrative in particular ways. The classical model, which continues to dominate contemporary filmmaking, favors narrative clarity over fidelity to the real world. This preference extends to sound, as well as image, with the result that the sound track is often called on to shape our understanding of the image track, to interpret it for us. The individual sound track elements—speech, effects, and music—typically work in concert, but each has characteristic or conventional ways in which it contributes to narrative.

### EXERCISE 1: MASKING

Michel Chion promotes a simple but powerful tool to prove his point about **added value**—he calls it “masking,”<sup>11</sup> which is simply watching the image track of a scene without the sound, or, vice versa, listening to the sound track of a scene without the images.

Seeing the image track alone can alert one to both the richness and the ambiguity of the frame, but also to the rhythms of action within the frame and the rhythms of cutting (relative shot lengths and the transitions between shots). (See the sidebar for a composer’s take on this exercise.) Similarly, hearing the sound track by itself can bring out its “musical” qualities, the shifting of volume (loudness) in toto or relatively among the three sound track elements, textures (sharp, soft, metallic, dull, etc.), register (high, middle, low) emphases, and sound track rhythms.

When we return to normal audio-viewing after a masking exercise, we can see how, for example, many image track rhythms tend to be suppressed by sound track rhythms but others stand out when the rhythms are in sync, how (previously) disembodied speech is anchored by the images of people, how some sound effects are anchored by their sources (such as telephones), how effects or speech can create offscreen space, how visual and auditory backgrounding and foregrounding interact, and so on.

Because you have probably watched the conversation scene from *Catch Me If You Can* and the “Second Botched Meeting” from *Sleepless in Seattle* several times already in the course of reading this chapter, a masking exercise will not be very effective. (Recall that we already asked you to consider the sound track for the scene as if it were a piece of concert music or a CD track.) You might try audio and video masking for the next scene in each of the films: Hanratty discovers an important clue (DVD timing 01:06:29–01:07:50); Annie continues her conversation with Becky (DVD timing 01:12:03–01:14:45). On the other hand, you can turn masking into something of a game by choosing a DVD chapter at random from a movie you have not seen before and trying to guess how the sound track is shaped from the clues in the image track, or how the

*When well contrived, there is no question but that a musical score can be of enormous help to a picture. One can prove that point, laboratory-fashion, by showing an audience a climactic scene with the sound turned off and then once again with the sound track turned on.*

—Aaron Copland<sup>12</sup>

image track editing is likely to feel after the rhythms and balance (foregrounding/backgrounding) of the sound track are added.

#### EXERCISE 2: USING AN ANALYSIS CHECKLIST

From the "Second Botched Meeting" example, we can assemble a preliminary checklist for analysis of sound in a film or film scene. In the analysis of an entire film, of course, the statements we make will be much more general, but the processes and effects we are describing are no different: (a) presence or absence of sound track elements and balance between them, (b) design of the sound track (that is, how it is mapped out over time or how the balance changes over time), and (c) relation to the narrative (how are sound track elements tied to characters and action, and how does design of the sound track relate to the articulations of the narrative).

In the "Botched Meeting" example, we began with a synopsis of the film (genre, director, release year, summary of the plot with principal actors) to set a minimal context for the film and the scene being analyzed ("*Sleepless in Seattle*, a romantic comedy directed by . . ."). Moving down to the scene itself, we briefly described its action (synopsis of the scene) to set the framework of the narrative ("The sequence we are interested in . . ."), and provided a shot list to anchor the description in detail ("For reference, here is a shot list"). Next, to turn attention specifically to the sound track itself came a list of timings with description of the sound track elements and their balance ("First, we describe the sound track elements . . ."). The two lists—shot list and timings with descriptions—could easily be combined if a scene is not too complicated.

After that, the prose paragraphs describe and evaluate the sound track from different angles: This description and evaluation is necessary because the shot list and timings list gives mostly raw information for each individual shot—it is the prose paragraphs that tie this information together, that create something like a "story" of the sound track design. The first of the seven paragraphs evaluates speech as not dominant ("This is a modern, multitrack stereo sound track . . ."), and the second tests this idea by masking (that is, listening to the sound track as if it were a musical composition to help make a better determination about the balance; "As we think back over it, it is not hard to recognize . . ."). The third paragraph is devoted to the physical sources of sounds ("If we want to add more detail . . ."); whereas the fourth, fifth, and sixth paragraphs describe music's narrative functions, taking up, in turn, emotion and characterization, the external/internal opposition, and pacing ("The music, on the other hand, is clearly nondiegetic . . .," "Another way in which music clearly adds value . . .," "Finally, the pacing of the shots in the image track is quite fast . . ."). The seventh and final paragraph offers a summary ("Music adds affect, empathy, and subjectivity . . .").

Our checklist for scene analysis in terms of sound, then, looks like this:

1. Background and general information as needed for context. This might include genre, director, release year, principal actors, summary of the plot or story with attention to describing the context of the scene you are analyzing
2. Synopsis of the scene
3. Shot list
4. Description of the sound track elements and their balance
5. Description and evaluation of the sound track from different angles: physical sources of sounds, music's narrative functions (emotion and characterization, the external-internal opposition). Here we might also look more closely at sound and representation (What does sound tell us about the kind of person Annie is?, etc.)
6. If needed, a summary statement about the sound track in the scene

Here, in list form, is the sequence for the Boston Common scene from *Good Will Hunting*:

Background and general information: "*Good Will Hunting* (released in 1997) was jointly written . . ."

Scene synopsis: "Will has been assigned to therapy as part of probation . . ."

Shot list: "The following shot list does not include notes about sound . . ."

Continues shot list with some specialized information: "The prototypical scene design begins with a general view of the physical space . . ."

Description of sound track elements and balance: "Sound in the prologue section is muted: We hear . . ."

Description and evaluation of the sound track from different angles:

"The physical sources of sounds are kept very clear throughout . . ."

Continued: "Apart from its specific functions for this narrative, the sound does have characteristics that fit the expectations . . ."

Continued: "In the typical dialogue scene, we expect effects and music to drop off gradually . . ."

The analysis checklist is the basis for the analysis reports and reaction papers described in the interlude after Part I. We refine our methods of analysis in the intervening chapters to include a wide range of specific techniques in the sound track (such as sound advance, offscreen sound, etc.), common techniques and uses for music (audio dissolve, narrative reference, pacing, etc.), and music properties (in particular, diegetic/nondiegetic, synchronization/counterpoint, and empathetic/anempathetic).