Sound Contexts

We are taught the meaning of sounds mainly as children and thus are comfortable with the association of certain sounds in the context of certain words.

A dog barks

A mouse squeaks

A door creaks

A cow moos

Only the cow example uses a context that mimics the actual sound (**onomatopoeic**).

A dog more accurately 'woofs'. A door can squeak as much as a mouse, the reality is either known through visual cue, or either subjective or down to previous experience.

How often do we become alerted by a sound only to proclaim "what was that'? Was it a mouse... no it was the door!

Think about the characteristic qualities of your particular sound objects. Write down as many interpretations as you can think of. This is incredibly useful training for future spontaneous sound design as one can access a previously saved sound and adapt it with minimal effort to a given scenario in a different context.

I have used a 'crunch' sound in the same short film in context of eating and footsteps on gravel. Not one person picked up on that! It's wonderful that sounds are recyclable.

The ear is very forgiving when prompted with a visual cue. That's one reason maybe why we have difficulty in identifying the source of a sound from an object external to our field of vision.

Analyse your sound in terms of: **What they are** (Acoustics); **How they are perceived** (Psychoacoustics); **What they mean** (Semantics); **How they appeal** (Aesthetics).[1]

If you write down key words regarding your sound object in the terms of these different contexts you will begin to develop a broad range of adjectives and discover that two identical sounds can in fact have very different perceptions, meanings and appeal. Herein lies the confusion of categorization. However, the flipside is a wealth of flexibility available regarding sound design and implementation.

[1] Schafer, Murray. R. The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World. (Vermont, Destiny Books. 1994.) p.148.