

# MUSICAL FORM IN NON-NARRATIVE VIDEO

by

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Bachelor of Music  
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SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
ARCHITECTURE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF SCIENCE IN VISUAL STUDIES


at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

September 1986

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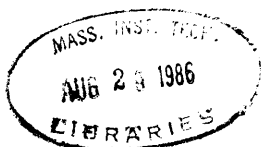
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Submitted to the Department of Architecture on June 17, 1986 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Visual Studies.

## Abstract

"Musical Form in Non-Narrative Video" explores musical structure as a model for visual form over time, specifically in the creation of artistic video.

Video is a medium in which sound and image coexist at the source as electronic signals, offering new possibilities of abstract synesthesia. Forms in which neither sight nor sound dominants facilitate a sensory experience of the content.

A musical model for abstract form supports an effort to free video from the forward-impelled, linear narrative; to create a form which can be experienced many times on multiple levels.

Musical parameters such as meter, dynamics and motivic development are correlated to visual parameters. Their application in my own videotapes is analyzed. Experimental form-generated pieces are outlined. "Aviary" and "Counterpoint" are video scores which present two different approaches to music-image composition.

A score system in which video and audio can be synchronized via SMPTE Time Code and MIDI Digital Audio Code is examined.

Increasing videodisc distribution opens an avenue for serious artistic applications of music-image composition for a home, concert and exhibition medium. The videodisc medium also breaks down the linear impulse in favor of viewer choice with accompanying demands for formal growth.

Thesis Supervisor: Otto Piene  
Title: Professor of Visual Design

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 Orientation and Goals	6
1.2 Organization	6
1.2.1 Part I: Musical Models for Video Composition	7
1.2.2 Part II: The Subconscious and Abstract Form	7
1.2.3 Part III: Final Project and Conclusions	8
1.3 Early Film and Early Video	8
1.3.1 Differences between Film and Television	9
1.4 Scoring for Video	10
<b>PART I. MUSICAL MODELS FOR VIDEO COMPOSITION</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2. MUSIC-IMAGE COMPOSITION</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 Theory of Music-Image Composition	12
2.2 Video Examples of Music-Image Composition	14
<b>3. MUSIC-IMAGE CORRELATIONS "COUNTERPOINT"</b>	<b>15</b>
3.1 "Counterpoint," Detailed Description	16
3.2 Music-Image Correlations	17
3.3 Examples of Theme in Music Videos	18
3.3.1 Theme in "Alarm X"	19
<b>4. MUSICAL PARAMETERS IN VISUAL SPACE THE STAGE ANALOGY</b>	<b>20</b>
4.1 The Stage Analogy: Musical Parameters in Visual Space	20
<b>5. THE ABSTRACT SCORE BEETHOVEN'S 'PASTORAL' SONATA</b>	<b>22</b>
5.1 Beethoven, Piano Sonata in D, Opus 28, " <i>Pastoral</i> "	22
5.1.1 Musical Analysis	22
5.1.2 Visual Analogies	25
5.1.3 Summary	28
<b>6. FUGUE</b>	<b>29</b>
6.1 Basic Fugue Properties and Their Visual Analogies	30
6.1.1 First Problem in Visual Fugue Making: Layering Video While Maintaining the Clarity of the Whole and the Parts	31
6.2 Physical Properties Related to Repeated Viewings	32
6.3 Second Problem in Visual Fugue Making: Countersubject and Non-Linear Content	33

6.4 Third Problem in Visual Fugue Making: 'Busy-ness'	35
6.5 If It's So Alien, Why Do It: a Summary	36
<b>7. INFORMATION AND FORM</b>	<b>37</b>
7.1 Information in Music, Still Images, Film/Video	37
7.2 Unconscious Impressions of Information	46
<b>PART II. THE SUBCONSCIOUS AND ABSTRACT FORM</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>8. THE SUBCONSCIOUS AND ABSTRACT FORM</b>	<b>50</b>
8.1 Connection Between the Subconscious and 20th Century Form	50
8.2 The Subconscious and Film and Video	53
8.3 Film's Influence on Music Composition	55
8.4 In Defense of Narrative	57
<b>9. DREAM AS A MODEL FOR FORM "PROJECTION" AND "ELISABETH'S DREAM"</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>10. MYTHOLOGY "AVIARY" AND "TEMPTATION OF THE ELBOW KISS"</b>	<b>59</b>
10.1 "Aviary" Description	59
10.1.1 "Aviary" Score	60
10.2 "Temptation of the Elbow Kiss"	61
<b>11. THOUGHT AS A MODEL FOR FORM "ADONA"</b>	<b>63</b>
11.1 Thought as a Score Model: "Adona"	63
<b>PART III. FINAL PROJECT CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>12. FINAL PROJECT</b>	<b>66</b>
12.1 Description of Final Project	66
12.2 Outline of Final Project	66
12.3 "Glass Masks"	69
12.3.1 The Imagery	69
12.3.2 The Soundtrack	70
12.3.3 Relationship of Soundtrack and Imagery	71
<b>13. THEORISTS AND PRACTICIONERS A 'XEROX CONVERSATION'</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>75</b>

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 3-1:</b>	"Alarm X," by Ellen Sebring	19
<b>Figure 5-1:</b>	Opening page, Beethoven, Sonata in D	23
<b>Figure 5-2:</b>	Analysis, Beethoven, Sonata in D	24
<b>Figure 7-1:</b>	How Information is Perceived in Music	40
<b>Figure 7-2:</b>	How Information is Perceived in Still Images	41
<b>Figure 7-3:</b>	How Information is Perceived in Film/Video	43

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Desire as expressed in music is fulfilled yet eternally unrequited. Movie stars as embodied by film are similar. Story is not the premium value.

Desire and information correlate: wanting to know more keeps us on the edge of our seats.

#### 1.1 Orientation and Goals

This thesis develops a compositional model for image and sound based on musical conventions of the western classical tradition. A music-like structure for film and video enhances the content or story through the physical coherence of the form.

Abstract form relies on the definition and manipulation of elements recognized and followed by the audience as they evolve. Abstract form differs from narrative form in that it is not necessarily linear - it is temporally flexible in the way it presents material.

#### 1.2 Organization

The thesis is organized into three major parts:  
Part 1: Musical Models for Video Composition  
Part 2: The Subconscious and Abstract Form  
Part 3: Final Project - Considerations and  
Conclusions

### **1.2.1 Part I: Musical Models for Video Composition**

Musical Models for Video Composition explores literal translations from music composition to image composition and subsequent issues of pure form.

Can form be extracted from one medium and reinterpreted in another? How do sound parameters correspond to visual space? How is 'time' expressed as form in music and film?

Two, three and four dimensions are the significant qualifiers of form. Film and video express visual form in time. The thesis attempts to provide a model for visual form, normally two dimensional, which includes the dimension of time.

### **1.2.2 Part II: The Subconscious and Abstract Form**

The Subconscious and Abstract Form explores an implied 'next layer' of abstract form: the subconscious associations upon which it depends.

The physical response which makes abstract structure successful depends on impression, memory and association.

Dream, mythology and thought are integral to abstract form; they can be models for form itself. Intuition can spontaneously evolve form within structural presets. The composer who generates both image and sound and/or image and sound which emanate from the same source create an intuitively unified field of expression. For example, in "Aviary" the subject from which both image and sound emanate is birds.

A visual model for this type of composition is a score, in which both images and sounds are represented.

Falling or jumping down the abyss in darkness creates space and silence: the opportunity to interact with subtler forces. Alice in Wonderland, Dorothy in Oz,

began their journeys with suspended belief. Film begins, in the darkened theater, with suspended belief. Film is a ticket to the extra-ordinary within the ordinary, a workplace for mythologies. The narrative can be comprised of a single raw emotion; a context for flying; desire met and crushed. These so-called stories might become a screenplay, a poem, a piece of music, a novel. To reach them in their more rough and immaterial form is the motivation of this semi-narrative, musically-inspired style.

### **1.2.3 Part III: Final Project and Conclusions**

The short videotapes created to test specific aspects of music-image composition fit together into one piece. The score for this videotape is presented here.

The content of the videotape results from investigations into form rather than vice versa. Conclusions about form-generated content are made. Conclusions about the suitability of the abstract model serving narrative are made. Observations about the mediums - film, video, videodisc, hybrids - and technical innovations and their influences on form are made.

### **1.3 Early Film and Early Video**

I often shoot with Super-8 film and edit with video, and so my interest in the question of medium. Throughout the thesis the words 'film' and 'video' recur. Sometimes they function similarly and appear together, or one implies the other as well; sometimes one or the other is referred to because they function differently. Some of their differences are examined below.

The journals of early filmmakers are apropos to current video concerns. Similar experimentation - pulling a genre out of wide-open possibilities - was



necessary. It is helpful to compare film and video as mediums. Much of filmic knowledge can be applied to video form; however experimental video bears little resemblance to standard film or even experimental film. Video as a medium must have subtle intrinsic qualities which set it apart from film. These qualities must be addressed and revealed by the structure, i.e., editing, camera work, content, perhaps most evident to date on broadcast television. The artist combining film and video into a hybrid product is particularly aware of their material differences.

### 1.3.1 Differences between Film and Television

<u>Film</u>	<u>Television</u>
big screen	small screen
looking up at film	looking down at video
the darkened, public theater	the day-lit bright box in the domestic setting
specific screenings bought and paid for	program flow available 24-hours a day
a quiet theater	a noisy, active household

Each circumstance listed above of film and video has resultant formal tenet. "Big screen; small screen" has meant greater detail in and dominance by the image in film. Video imagery is reduced to the barest minimum, the broad gesture that can be perceived in the small box.

"A quiet theater; a noisy, active household" has the opposite effect on the function of sound. Whereas the image dominates film, sound dominates in order to provide continuity in TV as the viewer moves freely through the domestic space.

Flow, segmentation, narrative: because television serves the narrative only vaguely, as concatenated segments, video seems to have unconsciously exploded the

surface narrative relationship altogether. Video has been television influenced perhaps because the medium itself gravitates toward a particular set of image formats. Overtly narrative video is rare.

Was early film the "big" statement: moving pictures for the masses, wide distribution? Is video the "small" statement - we do it, we are it, out of the normative broadcast and movies industries, back into our own hands?

#### **1.4 Scoring for Video**

A musical score represents lines for any number of instruments horizontally and represents vertically their composite effect.

Imagery can become another line or lines in this score, so that the structure is through-composed image and sound. Translation from visual image to score notation is not obvious, because a note is a considerably smaller unit than any one image.

However, with an electronic base for creating, compiling and editing both sounds and images, the ascendancy of either is no longer implied by the hardware. They can be intimately connected and complementary.

The sound-track can be more than a narrative support for story-telling pictures; pictures may do more than accompany fully-realized and independent music, as in opera or music videos. The model suggests a new form which is a coherent interplay of image and sound.

## **PART I**

### **MUSICAL MODELS FOR VIDEO COMPOSITION**

He is stillness itself, and then, with no perceptible transition, he is violent motion. He defies gravity and time, defines beauty as a state of perpetual fluidity which is one of the things that movies are all about.

Molly Haskell, "Misha"

## Chapter 2

### MUSIC-IMAGE COMPOSITION

#### 2.1 Theory of Music-Image Composition

Video can be an equal synthesis of sound and image. As a visual process existing over time, video can be created with musical form. I have edited a video piece, for example, in 4/4 time with "A-B-A" form. The transfer of musical techniques to video goes beyond intellectual experiment, but rather attempts to increase impact on the physical response of the viewer. It is possible to work with rhythm and thematic content in the sophisticated way music does to connect with and manipulate the internal rhythm, image and thematic memory in people. Building up response and expectation is the premise of musical form and one can draw on an evolved musical history to advance a new medium in its early stages. I am interested in disconnecting from content-dictated form in video/film sequences to test the success of musical techniques in affecting emotional/physical response - building drama, suspense, climax, tranquility, etc.

Meaning conveyed experientially rather than expositionally depends on a tightly knit form. Actors not only portray characters in a situation, they are also threads in the formal fabric which weaves together their story.

Music, as well as image, occurs in space. A sonata dances through aural space delineating a moving form; the performer shapes tones; the notes shape form as black dots on the page: a visual experience of the sonata translates from page to performer to aural space inside the mind. If listening to music evokes internal images does viewing moving-images evoke internal music?

There is no word for images which move in time. 'Movies', 'film', 'video' imply a genre complete with sound and content. My concern is to pull the screen composition out of context and subject it to abstract parameters of form that will implicitly support and suggest content.

I do not want to make abstract films, but to use abstract components to create and underscore stories in the same way crescendo, harmonic movement, phrasing and rhythm build the climax and denouement of a symphony.

Film sound tracks have a similar function: to underscore the action. Work has been done on synchronous movement of sound and image; however, I am removing the sound to give form to the image alone. Then visual form and the sound track become independent, but forceful allies.

In film two aspects conspire: two- and three-dimensional considerations of screen space and movement through time. A film-image vocabulary must consider two, three and four dimensions.

Film editing has been primarily devoted to edit matching and the illusion of "same space" as camera angle changes. Story-telling from this point of view is proficient.

My approach to editing began without film experience but with training as a musician/theorist and composer. Telling the story of a boy and a girl seemed to me like two lines of music in counterpoint; the story was like the 'exposition' and 'development' sections of a sonata. I worked with very little music and no location sound, as it seemed that the flickering movement of the image itself made its own sound. Story was not the primary motivation, but atmosphere created through the same physical pulls as music.

## **2.2 Video Examples of Music-Image Composition**

The following four chapters explore aspects of music-image correlation by selecting musical models and extrapolating videotapes from them. Each chapter begins with a description of the visual aspect of the videotape, followed by a discussion of the formal considerations and problems.

### Chapter 3

## MUSIC-IMAGE CORRELATIONS "COUNTERPOINT"

A woman drives a 1940s roadster down an empty highway. A man appears beside her and dissolves again. A ring appears on her finger and fades away. Counterpoint between lifetimes suggests that relationships occur in ever-varying configurations.

Counterpoint is played out between 3 characters - a woman and two men - whose movements represent melodic lines that interweave to form the fabric of the piece.

A man crosses the screen, left to right, followed by his brother. The woman dissolves in and out of the screen repeatedly. The figures draw in space like melodies, changing rhythm, volume, in a symphonic form. Their stories evolve in the abstract clarity of a musical composition.

Lifetimes in two different decades collide; time travel occurs when the frequencies of one period synchronize with another; the characters fall through decades.

"Counterpoint," a half-hour videotape, uses musical structure as a way of representing visual form in time.

### 3.1 "Counterpoint," Detailed Description

The half-hour videotape, "Counterpoint," explores the counterpoint between three characters - a woman and two men - in both musical and narrative terms. The video borrows musical parameters to define its visual structure.

Counterpoint occurs in the juxtaposition of two story lines: the lives of these characters during two separate lifetimes in the 1940s and 1980s, which normally occur simultaneously but out of sync, so that each is unconscious of the other. Each character represents a contrapuntal line; their intersection creates the harmony and texture of the piece. When synchronicity occurs the characters fall through lifetimes and decades.

The first step in realizing "Counterpoint" is to create a musical score which illustrates the counterpoint, then to let the characters grow through this structure. The mystery of time turbulence is visualized by shooting one decade in mirrors; appearances and disappearances of characters within the frame; ideosyncratic costumes, cars; in one episode the '80s woman receives a telephone call from the '40s man. Relationships recur in ever-varying configurations of male-female bonds, some communicated by gesture and detail, others played out fully.

"Counterpoint" organizes its narrative elements as a musical composition. The notation system of western classical music is a model for describing visual elements in time. Analogies are set up between musical parameters, such as 'dynamics,' which defines loudness and spatial qualities such as 'screen density,' where a full screen = forte and an empty screen = piano. Applying principles of musical composition to video structure frees the narrative from expository linear development and allows for abstract levels of form to work on the viewer, resulting in a hybrid sound/image expression.



Musical counterpoint evolved in the 15th century as an investigation into three-dimensionality and mirrored visual artists' investigations into optical perspective. In the videotape, three dimensions dissolve in response to the fourth dimension, time. Plotting time in space is the essence of this videotape.

The study of Counterpoint might be compared to the study of perspective. Both were important developments in Renaissance art. Both reflect the rise of three-dimensional thought.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.2 Music-Image Correlations

<u>Music</u>	<u>Image</u>
dynamics (pp --- ff)	screen density (empty screen --- full screen)
meter (ie., 3/4; 4/4)	editing images to meter <u>not</u> heard in the sound track (see opening of "Alarm X")
melodic phrasing	movement of a character through linear (horizontal) space
harmony	vertical relationship resulting from several coinciding characters or events, like melodic phrases
timbre/orchestration	combining various characters to enact themes (like scoring a melody for trumpet, flute, violin)
counterpoint	juxtaposition of movements within visual space; sources of movement possibilities are: woman, man I, man II, camera
form	overall form of piece, ie.: I. introduction

---

<sup>1</sup>Fux, Johann Joseph, *The Study of Counterpoint*, WW Norton and Co., New York, 1943, 1965

II. exposition of theme

III. development

IV. recapitulation

V. coda

There may also be slow movements,  
fast movements

In "Counterpoint"

overall commitment will be to  
two-part (A-B) rather than  
three-part (A-B-A) form to  
support the idea of two worlds  
vibrating slightly out of sync;  
three-part form implies a  
resolution, closer to linear  
narrative.

### **3.3 Examples of Theme in Music Videos**

Structural use of themes as observed in music videos:

Subject 1 and 2 are always together; subject 2 stands slightly behind subject 1; subject 1 is active, attentive to the camera, performing; subject 2 is passive, looking around, inactive.

This theme carries through all scenes of the music video, tying together disparate settings.

Jonathan Demme in NewOrder video "Perfect Kiss": activity of playing instruments is largely off-screen. Theme is to see close-ups of the musicians' faces as they perform. Tension arises between what you see and can't see but know is there, in fact is the focus of the action and the entire video (making music).

### 3.3.1 Theme in "Alarm X"



**Figure 3-1:** "Alarm X," by Ellen Sebring

The use of theme in the videotape "Alarm X": there are two characters, a man and a woman. The man's motion is linear; the woman's movement is circular, both in shooting and in how the characters move. Within the overall structure is the man and woman are presented as linear lives which eventually intersect just after a pivotal moment, a bit too late. The video cuts between the separate lives in order to link them up. A connection is perceived when the woman looks into the camera (or out of the screen), the man has his back to the audience, running away. Suddenly he turns and faces the camera and at that moment seems to recognize her.

## Chapter 4

### MUSICAL PARAMETERS IN VISUAL SPACE THE STAGE ANALOGY

A man crosses the screen, left to right, followed by his brother. The woman dissolves in and out of the screen in several different places. The figures draw in space like melodies, changing rhythm, volume, in a symphonic form.

shooting on stage in a volume, to fill the box of tv - or the rectangle of the screen - as visual space to be defined in 2 and 3 dimensions by musical notes

#### **4.1 The Stage Analogy: Musical Parameters in Visual Space**

Imagine a symphony hall, a stage filled in three-dimensional space with visual articulations equivalent to the melodies which might ensue.

Three characters, two men and one woman, are introduced on stage. They are players in the ensuing program, just as they are players on earth. They are presented as thematic motives for the composition. Their movements are formal and impersonal.

The three characters are treated as abstract points in space. Just as tones resonate with the life of the performer, so the fragility of individual beings emerges from the stiffened, programmed motions the characters are assigned. If observed from a great (omniscient) distance, human beings may appear every bit as programmed as the three "stage walkers"; their credibility and desire nonetheless shines through. Music as an abstract, yet physically-based system codifies these

relationships as interactive forces. The formal structure allows the subtle human interactions to surface.

1. Their movements through the space are visual analogies for lines of music.
2. They appear and reappear in different parts of the stage, delineating its, and therefore the television's, volume.
3. They appear in different configurations to each other, suggesting a geometry of interaction.
4. They draw paths of their own development. These are like musical lines in a score.
5. They intermingle. Body parts of one are matched to another.
6. They see each other alternately as formal fragments and with human passion. In a "Pygmalion" sequence two arrange the third as a statue-like figure.

The stage is used as a visual analogy for the dimensions of video. Both share the two-dimensional rectangular front plane and the three-dimensional box-like volume. In addition, the stage is an appropriate beginning for characters who appear and are aware of their roles. The pseudo-reality of film is immediately counteracted.

The uneasy relationship of stage and film is depicted in the film, "20th Century." A fading theatrical star, brilliant, literate and highly individualistic, chases his former wife, a pretty, non-verbal, wildly popular movie star in pursuit of repair to his damaged ego and finances. They plunge forward together, into the 20th century aboard the like-named train.

## Chapter 5

### THE ABSTRACT SCORE BEETHOVEN'S '*PASTORAL*' SONATA

An example of music analysis is used to determine literal visual analogies in order to derive a film score. More than one example should eventually be compared to see if the films retain qualities intrinsic to the original music.

The second theory tested is literal correlations between visual and musical constructs. Sound and image evoke different parameters as we perceive them in time. A single note cannot be called music (unless it evolves over time). The minimum for creating a harmonic base is a single chord (three notes) working more by repetition or default; at least two chords are normally required. A single image, on the other hand has historically comprised great volumes of work in painting, photography, a whole area of visual art. The information of a single image is obviously greater than in a single note. What about the moving-picture, the moving image?

#### **5.1 Beethoven, Piano Sonata in D, Opus 28, "*Pastoral*"**

##### **5.1.1 Musical Analysis**

Please note the reprint of the first page of the Piano Sonata in D Major, Opus 28, by Ludwig van Beethoven. Refer to the following page of visual analysis.

# SONATA

in D.

BEETHOVEN, Op. 28.

15. *Allegro.*

*p* *p* *cresc.* *sf* *p* *sf* *cresc.* *sf* *sf* *sf*

(*Ped. simile*)

A. B. 246.

Figure 5-1: Opening page, Beethoven, Sonata in D

**Allegro.**

D MAJOR

3  
4

I I<sup>7</sup> IV ii/IV I I<sup>b</sup> V I

p. p. p. p. p. p. p. p. p.

1 2 3 1 2 3 | 1 2 3 4 5 (6) | + + | 1 2 3 4

rhythmic/accent flow

1 2 3 4 5 6 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 | 1 1 1 1

+ 1 dissonant 7 (tonic) + + 1 1 1 1

transition

3 2

**Figure 5-2:** Analysis, Beethoven, Sonata in D



### 5.1.2 Visual Analogies

The exposition begins with and is dominated by a repeated pedal tone, *D*. A pedal tone implies something that is always there, against which other elements move in harmony and dissonance; implies the norm, the 'tonic' or 'home' territory: rest or resolution. Defines base form of meter: counts, static yet evolving according to overall melodic/harmonic flow.

Important features of pedal tone are:

- it is always there
- it counts a regular base duration
- it is static
- it represents 'home'
- it represents the norm
- it implies rest and resolution

Options are to translate the pedal tone principles into content: for example a normative situation between characters against which a conflict evolves. This, however, implies the role of the screen-writer and is a literary translation. If we stick to the musical model for visual and temporal space, pedal tone should be translated into abstract visual terms. Both realizations according to form and content, are possible and amenable.

Translating a regularly repeating pedal tone into visual space is perhaps most simply done through a regular physical movement, ie. walking. The rhythmic flow could be created through three characters moving together.

Three characters, Andy, Geoff and Ellen will represent on videotape different lines of the music.

#### Bar 1

Pedal tone = Geoff walking in triple meter (3/4), emphasizing the '1' of '123', '123', etc. In the most literal translation, he walks steadily emphasizing

either the first beat of each measure (123, 123, etc.), or the first beat of every two measures (123456, 123456, etc.).



In the first measure (3 beats, or steps) he is alone.

### Bar 2



Andy and Ellen enter as representations of the melodic lines. In the music they appear instantly and simultaneously. A piano attack begins percussively. Does this imply they should appear or dissolve suddenly into the frame rather than enter from the side, off camera? Does Geoff's walk move toward or away from them? In the music, the phrase (Geoff) starts in the first measure, joined by the upper parts (Andy and Ellen) in the second measure. If the first bar were a 'pick up' (lead in) measure, it could be said that Geoff walks toward the others. In this case, the theme actually starts in the first measure and is not a 'pick up'. Andy and Ellen must either appear together as a chord in the frame, or join Geoff in the direction he has already begun.

Their entrance is clearly articulated and simultaneous. The problem is how to sustain 3 beats after the attack which, on a piano, gently fades away. Musically this entrance is a 'pick up' which leads to the strong dissonant accent on the first beat of bar 3. The player crescendo's the pedal tone from bar 2 into bar 3, to counterbalance the piano's fade on the sustained notes.

The walker must crescendo slightly in bar 2, leading to an accent on the downbeat of bar 3. He will be more prominent visually than the two melody characters.

The two melody players dissolve into the screen together on the attack of bar 2. The two rhythmic kernels which must be conveyed are:  and a descending  as these are structural. The sustain could be, especially if the

actors were dancers, a sway, a still, a held touch. An accent could be a touch and release.

They appear together, still but gently moving toward each other in the same direction, touching on the downbeat of measure 3, releasing and swaying back for the next 4 beats as the tone dies away. They don't walk as they are moving but held over the beat (not articulating it). In the next measures, 5 and 6, the  pattern is reversed to  : a long touch and short release. In bars 7-10 the pattern dominates, changing configuration with the measures and peaking in the penultimate measure (9) of the phrase. Similar formats can be used to depict this.

The next consideration is the melodic shape of the phrase. The pedal point is simple: the pitch is unchanging. The upper voices, which may visually appear higher in the screen than the pedal point, dwell on intervals of the 3rd and 6th, which contribute to the sweetness or softness of the mood and diffuses the pure tonic element of the pedal tone. They never sound quite resolved though they are in correct harmony. Similarly, the pedal point directly delineates the meter while the melody enters on weaker beats (2nd half of 2 measure groups), sustaining and moving against the downbeat until the last 4 bars, which slide into resolution.

Thus our walker is the stoic constant, insisting upon the norm while the melodic characters float in and out of compliance in a rather delicate fashion. This implies a different emotional stance between the melodic characters, though there is a basic harmony between all three. They enter unsure and, in the last 4 bars, align themselves with the tenets of the proceeding development. The bass argues for home (tonic); the melodies play around and about, but in basic agreement. Their general motion is descending (from the opening 5th to the final 3rd/tonic). But the rising shape comprises only the conciliatory cadence measures (bar 7-10). They slide from above the tonic to below it and resolve to it metrically as well, in the last bars.

Visual implications can follow this path: pedal point walker 2/3rds down in the screen; melodic lines starting above, slipping down to below walker and climbing back up together, to meet at the end.

Content can also be implied: the walker is more stable, steadfast, unswerving. The melodic figures are lighter, more evanescent, playful, changeable, in sync with each other, anchored to and ultimately in need of the walker.

### **5.1.3 Summary**

Perhaps it is too painstakingly literal to generate this much imagery from a rather simple, almost automatic phrase on a piano. Differences in literal space become clear: a relatively effortless succession of repeated notes is necessary to continuously generate music for the listeners. A walking character on film, however may comprise an entire piece alone. The introduction of two new characters could quickly overwhelm. The amount of information in a single image, let alone moving images is far greater than in a single note.

Music exists by creating note relationships: even an endlessly repeated 'D' can only give us D major by default. We need at least one other note and preferably a chord to establish melody and harmony. A photographer would be defeated if each image had to exist in the context of others images.

In the effort to generate a fabric of visual composition, integrated enough to be rediscovered upon repeated screenings, musical models will have to be bent, temporally and in other ways. The approach from the musical model cannot impose subjugation of the visual's natural pace of "breath."

## Chapter 6

### FUGUE

1 - Fugue subject: walking to car/getting in/  
slamming door/starting engine/driving away

2 - Fugue on a Theme by Pudovkin

Actor in armchair alters his position, as if he  
had heard a knock

His tense, watching face

Taken by itself: the moving door handle

Close-up - the hand of the actor, slowly and  
fumblingly drawing the revolver

The slightly opening door

The actor aims the revolver

Through the door steps the boy with the puppies

This chapter will discuss a fugue model based on the simple sequence of getting into a car, starting it and driving away. A second fugue possibility, based on a shot sequence by V.I. Pudovkin, is suggested (but not analyzed) as an approach to a content or narratively-oriented fugue. While the first example, car fugue, has implications for visual structure, the Pudovkin fugue may generate new narrative.

### **6.1 Basic Fugue Properties and Their Visual Analogies**

Thematic development in visual form can be examined with the 'fugue' form, which establishes a deliberately-stated theme and manipulates it according to mathematically recognizable processes. The fugue subject is clearly stated in one solo voice; the subject is then stated in a second voice, the third voice, and finally, the fourth voice (in a four-voice fugue). When the 2nd voice comes in, the 1st voice continues with the countersubject. All following musical material is derived from various transformations of the fugue subject. These are as follows: Imitation: fragments of the subject are passed (imitated) between different voices. Inversion: subject or fragment of the subject moves in opposite direction. Retrograde: subject is reversed (end to beginning). Augmentation: subject is expanded in time. Diminution: subject is condensed in time. Fragmentation: bits of the subject are strung together to form lines of new material. Sequence: bits of material are repeated on different pitch levels.

It is possible to make some analogies in video editing to the above processes. For example:

- Subject walking to car/getting in/slamming door/starting engine/driving away
- Imitation fragments of subject are passed between voices, represented by several different actors performing the same subject
- Inversion change of direction - turn film upside down??
- Retrograde action happens in reverse - driving/stopping/turning off the engine/getting out/slamming door/walking away
- Augmentation slow motion
- Diminution tighter editing, i.e., just the percussive bits
- Fragmentation take bits of action and restructure into new action
- Sequence take bits of action and repeat them or mix them with similar bits from other characters

### **6.1.1 First Problem in Visual Fugue Making: Layering Video While Maintaining the Clarity of the Whole and the Parts**

Correlations related to editing are fairly clear cut. Editing can mimic musical processes in linear time structure. However, with the introduction of the 2nd fugue voice, the 1st fugue voice continues, stating the 'countersubject'. Here the analogy becomes difficult. In music, two melodies can run simultaneously; in film one image fills the screen completely, leaving no room for another sequence.

Possible solutions include the superimposition of two images or simulated continuity through intercutting two scenes. In the latter, lyricism is lost in what necessarily becomes a rhythmic interplay. The problem with superimposition is

that it renders both images vague in video. Alternatively, two 'lines' of video can be clearly seen only by splitting the screen into several parts. Again, the clarity of each image sequence is obscured, distracted by the action in the other sequence, rather than creating a harmonic whole which the eye meshes as the ear does music. Essentially the ear can hear a harmonious whole and at the same time distinct individual lines. Attention can be shifted at will from line to line or to the whole, based on the ability to 'foreground' and 'background' audio information without conflict.

## **6.2 Physical Properties Related to Repeated Viewings**

This brings up a point of motivation in the enterprise of creating the music-image analogy. One of the reasons music bears repeated hearing, in fact grows more beautiful as it becomes more familiar, is this phenomenon of distinct lines buried within a coherent whole. The ear listens to ever-varied combinations, discovering new information with each hearing.

A film, on the other hand, tends to have maximum impact on the first viewing, as the audience discovers it unfolding for the first time. With repeated viewings we might realize how much we have missed, but the emotional tone can be lost; we become less involved as we step back to look around at what is now familiar territory.

Perhaps it is important to examine literature, painting, photography, and other genres to find out how information is revealed and grasped by the viewer. Information which excites the senses - the ear, the eye - is what draws and locks us into the experience of these art forms.

Photographs, paintings, sculptures are unique, revealing objects, which take



on the impulses of their viewers. Few objects have the presence of the "Mona Lisa," a surprisingly small picture kept behind glass in the Louvre. Its integrity of form fascinates and perplexes; but what about the reciprocal energy its canvas and paint have absorbed from the years of penetration by the world's gaze. Are those levels of presence and felt by us too when we view it? The integrity of the object, with a physical dimension, involves more than what it conveys outward, but includes as well impulses the object receives.

Books, too, have a physicality which grows as they are carried from place to place, passed from reader to reader, loved more in one spot than another, footnoted, aged.

Movies, and frighteningly so video, do not physically age well. In fact, they begin to disappear. Their presence in bad copies is detrimental to viewing. They do not function as objects. How does this affect the experience, and the re-experience, of their form, since re-experience does not add to their beauty as it does to a physical object?

### **6.3 Second Problem in Visual Fugue Making: Countersubject and Non-Linear Content**

The fugal form should ideally result in a new fabric built on established or 'known' qualities and the pleasure of recognizing their manipulated, enmeshed reappearances. The music is built upon recognition and repetition. These same qualities, recognition and repetition, in film may be enervating. Is there enough interest in the action chosen as subject to bear repeating and fragmentation? The image implies a specific meaning which often is grasped instantly. Does a fabric of layered images take on new meanings?

Getting into a car, starting it and driving away is a finite action. It takes on importance when related to other events: where is the character coming from; where is he or she going? Blending the same action executed by several different characters only gives us a finite view of the ideosyncratic way in which they individually perform. Interest would grow if a relationship was implied between them, although they appear in separate scenes.

Without supplementary action such as narrative developments, or relationships implied in the layered events, we are left with repetition of an action. This becomes interesting when it leads to an abstract experience of the motions, of form itself. Driving away must take on significance in and of itself. The viewer must be led to dream through the action that appears on screen.

Perhaps the countersubject, which is where our discussion ran into its first problem, is a key here. Physically experiencing a well edited action has rewards, as in some car chase sequences, but not the infusive quality - the urge to dream, reflect, make associations and feel similar emotions - that music inspires. We want to see more. If the first character, a woman, drives off, she carries in her head the secrets of her action, the 'whys' and 'wheres', as well as her own freely moving thoughts and emotions. Cue the viewer into this internal realm to experience the full implications of the scene rather than a predictable and easily grasped formal exercise.

The countersubject might therefore be the woman's thoughts at the moment of action. In the fugue subject stated above, which is primarily percussive action, a dream-like countersubject of lyrical quality would be an appropriate foil: setting up an A-theme, B-theme contrast.

The moment of action has been preserved; linear, narrative development avoided, but richer content has been achieved. Again the concept that dream, subconscious and the inner-mind are sister elements to abstract form is supported.

#### **6.4 Third Problem in Visual Fugue Making: 'Busy-ness'**

As usual, the transfer from sound to image implies a time change. Images appear full of information. They take longer to grasp than a single note. If the video was cut literally to the tempo and duration of the music, the entire sequence would flash by in confusion. This could be an argument for repeated viewing, but not for the right reasons (in other words, repeated viewing should not be necessary just to make sense of it).

Another possibility would be to slow the entire sequence down. Eventually videodisc may give the option of choosing a viewing speed. If the images are convincingly molded, any speed should maintain a coherent effect. This is true of music, as the musician discovers during the learning of a new piece. An allegro can be slowed down to a lento tempo and it takes on the expressive qualities of another type of movement. As the piece is learned and speeded up, the same underlying relationships are maintained, but the overall interpretation moves toward broader phrasing. Groups of 16th-notes can, at a slow tempo, be heard as individual note relationships and intervals; at the fast tempo they lose importance as individual or intervallically-related notes and become equal parts of a multi-note run. They become the core parts of a beautifully balanced run which is heard as a movement between pivotal pitches. The expressive qualities of the slow performance are not lost but quietly contribute to the clarity of the run and the entire accelerated performance.

In the same way, the edited movement of several arms swinging at a fast tempo may be a flashing blur of an arm movement implied, which will become clear as it slows down. A videotape by Bill Viola is built on the concept of repeating a sequence. A shot of a Japanese fishery is replayed at increasing speeds. The

content and expressiveness changed with changing: from an abstract perception at very slow speeds to a gradual understanding of the scene as regular speed is reached.

A similar possibility in repeated imagery is to change camera framing. If the first images shown are close-ups, only a portion of the full information is given. 'Walking to the car' is seen as 'feet walking'. It will be obviously male or female, set in the city or country, young or old; mood - confident, fearful, eager - may be evident. In the repeated, now wider frame, the torso, clothing, perhaps face and setting are revealed and so on. It is a mechanical process, but could draw the viewer into the development.

### **6.5 If It's So Alien, Why Do It: a Summary**

The concept then, is to wrest the story, via its internal, emotional content, from one-line, linear development: to make it multi-linear, layered in depth as well as width; to make it stand up to repeated viewing; to make it experiential and physical; to make it inspire inner associations in the viewer.

## Chapter 7

### INFORMATION AND FORM

#### 7.1 Information in Music, Still Images, Film/Video

Music composition depends on establishing recognizable elements. A folk melody, the 'hook' in a pop song, a note or rhythmic pattern such as the opening major-3rd of Beethoven's 5th Symphony are patterns firmly established in the listener's mind. They are often repeated to reinforce the memory: pop and folk songs improve with repetition because they are gradually learned by the listener. In classical sonata-allegro form, the exposition is the first section of the work, which introduces the theme, repeats it, introduces the 2nd theme, and then repeats the 1st theme again. The development section which follows freely plays with the listener's knowledge of the theme and established key. In theme and variation form, the theme is stated slowly and deliberately, each phrase repeated, so the listener has time to absorb the basic pattern of melody, harmony and phrasing and will hear them through the ensuing elaborate variations.

The pleasure of listening to a classical composer such as Mozart is recognizing the patterns he establishes and anticipating them as the music progresses. Mozart plays with these expectations sometimes delivering, sometimes foiling, surprising, twisting, truncating or expanding and therefore engaging the listener in a continual monologue.

The first premise, therefore, is that abstract form in music is based on the manipulation of established elements.

The second premise is that interest is sustained by the reception of new

information. New information might only be that nothing appears to change, information which can cause the viewer/listener to perceive more subtle levels of change, cueing a new level of awareness. Once information has been absorbed and processed, the viewer waits for more. If nothing new is added or the viewer has assessed the situation and knows what to expect, the mind tends to turn off, the work falls flat.

Television advertising illustrates the communication of information through a curious combination of the recognizable with unexpected accoutrements. Oversimplified messages are repeated as often as possible (establishing a memorable motif) in constantly varied circumstances which feed new information and keep the viewer entranced. This may translate into commercials starring odd-looking people which the audience tries to comprehend and place; rapid editing as in car commercials which change direction and simulate speed as the viewer tries to keep up; long-dissolve edits so that more shots can be compacted into a brief time span; and other ideosyncrasies designed to make a simple message memorable. Catching attention is the bottom line for 15 or 30 second spots.

'New' information in video is analogous to the development section in classical music. Established motives are reprocessed in new ways. The mind is fascinated by their mutating forms.

In still images the juxtaposition of elements gives first the obvious and then ponderous information. Tension between elements is unresolved and enters deeper parts of the viewer's psyche as he or she tries to decode and process the information.

Film and video start with the still image but evolve differently, as new information enters the screen. Tension arises from the juxtaposition of a series of images rather than from the information in a single frame. In this way film

functions more like music: elements are established, the viewer identifies with them and then waits to see how they evolve.

FÜNFTHE SYMPHONIE  
VON  
L. VAN BEETHOVEN.


Dem Fürsten von Lobkowitz und dem Grafen Rasoumoffsky gewidmet.

Op. 67.

Allegro con brio. *f* - *con.*

The image shows a page of a musical score for the first movement of Beethoven's 5th Symphony. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. From top to bottom, the staves are labeled: Flauti (Flutes), Oboi (Oboes), Clarinetten in B (Clarinets in B-flat), Fagotti (Bassoons), Corni in Es (Horns in E-flat), Trombe in C (Trumpets in C), Timpani in C. G. (Timpani in C), Violine I. (Violin I), Violine II. (Violin II), Viola, Violoncello (Cello), and Bass. The music is written in 4/4 time and features a prominent rhythmic motif of three eighth notes followed by a quarter note, which is the 'fate' motif. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *f* and *con.*

Figure 7-1: How Information is Perceived in Music

(1) pitch and rhythmic and harmonic motive or theme stated, e.g.,   
from Beethoven's 5th Symphony

(2) Exposition Section: states and restates motive, establishing in aural memory

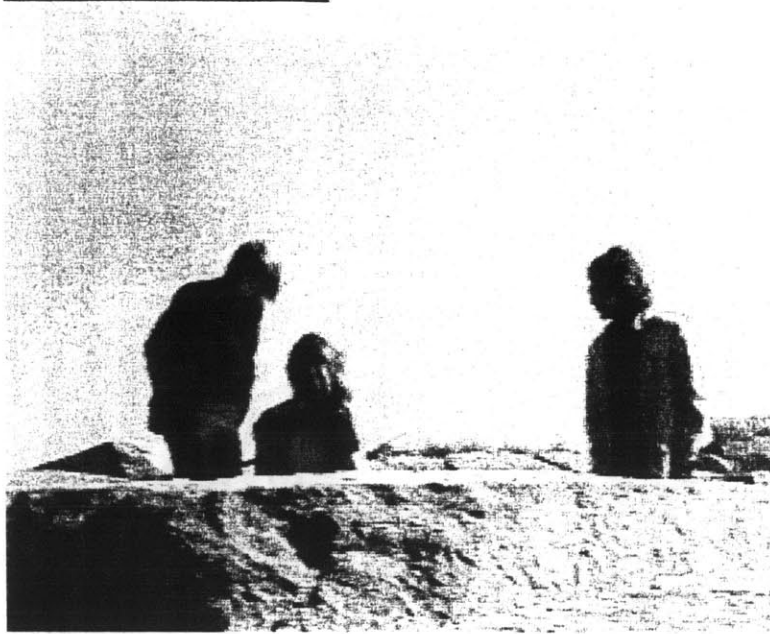
(3) Development Section: reconfigures and develops seed material from exposition





**Figure 7-2:** How Information is Perceived in Still Images

- (1) initial impact: cognition of essential elements and premise
- (2) study of details
- (3) try to resolve tension due to mixed messages; react to balance of objects  
(or other elements such as color) within space
- (4) assessment made but unresolved due to tension in elements





**Figure 7-3:** How Information is Perceived in Film/Video

(1) initial impact same as with still image (adding the element of sound):  
orientation to situation; less information should be given, pending development

(2) new information moves into the screen; information evolves temporally,  
like music

(3) less information than either still image or music is desirable in the image  
frames or sound track because it would preclude development and symbiosis: image  
or sound would then be complete alone

Information in movies and video can be revealed in a variety of ways:

dialogue  
facial expressions  
physical action  
music  
sounds  
edit style  
screen composition  
light/color  
connection of sequences

The maker creates a hierarchy of usage of the above elements.

In choosing to emphasize abstract elements of movies, choices about the narrative are (1) to reduce the narrative to mere subtle nuances in the imagery, similar to the 'single image'; (2) establish corresponding abstract elements reducing dependence on dialogue, increasing importance of image composition, tone, editing and sound.

In Jean Vigo's film, "l'Atalante," visual composition supports the narrative:

(1) A newly married couple live on a riverboat. The shots are parallel and linear, emphasizing the straight and unswerving nature of the husband in the marriage and his profession of guiding the boat up and down the narrow river channels.

(2) The couple goes to shore. A sharply diagonal shot introduces a magician on a bicycle. He succeeds in moving the wife from her husband's side. She becomes lost on land. The shots are crooked, softer and confusing. Unbending, the husband resumes his position on the barge.

(3) The chaotic, emotional old sailor who shares their boat searches for the wife and returns her to the unhappy husband.

(4) Husband and wife meet underwater, baptized in a new, more flowing and mature love.

Each character has a characteristic shot angle with moods ranging from straight and narrow to severely off-center chaos. While dialogue and action tell the story, the visual structure reflects and underscores it.

It is interesting to note that Vigo first made silent films (e.g., "Apropos de Nice") in which visual storytelling was essential.

If the hierarchy of narrative, visual elements and sound is shifted toward the more abstract elements, the narrative becomes a complement to a music-like whole. This occurs in moments of Jean Renoir's films, such as the dance sequence in the silent film "Nana" or the erotic short "Charleston." Movement, density and layers in the images and editing create the same excitement as music though totally silent.

Sound alone can rework the content of a visual sequence, for example different types of music and sound applied to the same scene would vastly change its meaning. Chris Marker's film, "Letter from Siberia" repeats the same visual clip three times with a different sound track.

Taken to an extreme, emphasizing one element to the deprivation of others undermines the format with what is, hopefully, an artistic intention. "Academy Award" is a 20-minute videotape consisting of a single still image of the empty stage accompanied by the sound track of the Academy Awards television presentation. Even if it is a comment on ennui and over-production, the viewer has processed the information within minutes leaving less incentive to watch than during the real Awards ceremony.

In the television broadcast several premises contribute to information gain and therefore 'watchability': a predetermined time slot - knowing when the program will end, approximately; real-time broadcast - finding out who wins as it happens; celebrity in full costume - study of details; mobility - the viewer can come and go, turn on and off.

Most of these factors are external factors related more to the viewing environment than to the program itself. The television program and videotape are both medium-specific, engaging qualities of time and presense which are non-filmic. A newsreel film of the academy awards happens far too late after the fact (tv is instant), and a film about them, such as "The Nomination" ends up being about something else, a story about an actor's quest for an academy award.

## **7.2 Unconscious Impressions of Information**

The conscious and unconscious mind work together to imprint and remember thematic elements, creating the possibility of formal structure. The idea that formal elements are imprinted is essential to the creation of an abstract visual form in moving pictures. Sound patterns are easily retained by listeners. Are image patterns similarly retained?

The moving image has a timing of its own and cannot be forced into strict metric patterns the way notes can. The motion of an arm sweeping across the screen or a person running have a physical integrity and pace like all things in nature. If strict metric associations between image and note is desired, it is probably more successful to use animated, artificially-generated images. These can be autonomous and flexible like notes, because they are free of the constraints of gravity and force. There is still value in the music-image analogy, however less literal, using natural images. This depends on how images are imprinted and remembered and on the value of repeating them: is information gained or is it mere redundancy?

Imprinting and memory depend on a physical impression of the movement. Sound envelops us in a purely physical manner: knowing, cognition are secondary levels of response.

These Bardic songs were rhythmically organized with great formal mastery into metrical patterns which insured that everyone was psychologically attuned to memorization and to easy recall. There was no ear illiteracy in pre-literate Greece.

... [the Greeks] "poetic" expression was a product of a collective psyche and mind. The mimetic form, a technique that exploited rhythm, meter and music, achieved the desired psychological response in the listener.<sup>2</sup>

When we 'see', however, we understand, cognize and quantify. We watch the movement of an arm across the screen, observe and store as much information about it as possible, trying to 'understand'. Do we respond to it physically as well?

Dance is the closest example of physical viewing. Musical models of visual form are related to dance but extend beyond this specific figure-based artform into a media form, which, for better or worse, encompasses elements of all artforms.

The method of our time is to use not a single but multiple models for exploration - the technique of suspended judgement is the discovery of the 20th century as the technique of invention was the discovery of the nineteenth.<sup>3</sup>

If the movement of an arm across the screen is remembered physically, then it can be repeated, for the repetition recalls a physical sensation even though the cognitive information about it has already been assimilated. Delicate balances such as the integral timing of each image versus the need for a collective flow (like 'meter' in music); the need to repeat versus boredom with the old image are issues that separate visual-music from music. What makes the analogy worthwhile is that

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<sup>2</sup>McLuhan, Marshall and Fiore, Quentin, *The Medium is the Massage*, Bantam Books, NY, Toronto, 1967, pages 113, 114.

<sup>3</sup>ibid, page 69.

they are experienced on a physical level. A physically-based response separates this abstract form from narratively-based form.

The video medium bears out theories about the electronic age. It demands a form that is comprehensive, assimilating elements from heretofore specialized artforms; form that is sense and perception-oriented rather than cognized and understood; and that is time-less and flowing; rather than finite and linear as in story-telling.

Bits of musical, visual, dance, novel, theater artforms bend to fit into a whole of additive and synthesized parts. The music-image analogy accommodates the need to synthesize forms toward a perceptively-oriented product, and reveals that literal application fails, because the music forms express a fragmented, linear and self-specific environment which cannot apply to the new technology.

The basic accomplishment has been to leave linear narrative dominance behind in favor of a simultaneous interactive fabric. A story does not begin and end in progressive increments.



## PART II

### THE SUBCONSCIOUS AND ABSTRACT FORM

The film is the art of imaginary objects in space obeying the dictates of science. It is the incarnation of the dream of its inventor...Film makes possible the realization of what cannot be realized in life.

To draw motion; to sketch motion [and] projects of the immediate future.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Vertov, Dziga, "Articles, journaux, projets," *Cahiers du Cinema*, Paris, 1972, page 19.

## Chapter 8

### THE SUBCONSCIOUS AND ABSTRACT FORM

#### 8.1 Connection Between the Subconscious and 20th Century Form

19th century narrative generated its own finite time and space. Fiction was concerned with specific characters and unique events which proceeded as if predestined to fulfill their fate. Choices critically affected the major part of a character's life. These choices - the momentary weakness, infidelity, lie, heroic gesture - had moral implications. Motivations and aspects of the subconscious were inferred from the events of the story. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are master storytellers who portray the psychological through their narratives poignantly, because they are so close to moving into the purely psychological realm. The resulting tension brings intensity to their works.

20th century semi-linear, semi-narrative form reverses the story: the presentation is stream-of-consciousness and subjective, derived from the subconscious mind as it perceives the events around it. It is from inner landscapes that the external 'stories' are inferred. Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, for example, are artists of the inner landscape.

First film and now video, as 20th century mediums, have supported this shift in narrative focus.

The telling of a story as a system of events that has already occurred is inherent in the form of the novel.

...it embodies the fictional distinction of then and now. The film cannot utilize this distinction because the fictional past tense has no cinematic equivalent.<sup>5</sup>

The specter of the individual and private lives is lost as communication grows: private lives and individual longings are replicated as cultural patterns. Chekov's "Three Sisters" longed for Moscow in their isolation. So luxurious an isolation is not part of the current 'information age' and they may have found their desires shared by many and the subject for prime-time television programming. This discovery in no way signifies a loss of identity; but rather a growth in communal understanding. A species generosity and view that all things are living therefore in sympathy with one another would be the positive end of the response. Individuals are finite composites of species characteristics.

Information pours on us, instantaneously and continuously. As soon as information is acquired, it is very rapidly replaced by still newer information. Our electrically-configured world has forced us to move from the habit of data classification to the mode of pattern recognition. We can no longer build serially, block-by-block, step-by-step, because instant communication insures that all factors of the environment and of experience coexist in a state of active interplay.<sup>6</sup>

It is no longer the unique story that is important, but the unique mind. The story could be one of many choices of the mind. It is not an irrevocable situation of fate, doomed to last a lifetime. As information and comprehension have speeded

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<sup>5</sup>Lawson, John, *Film the Creative Process*, Hill and Wang, NY, 1964, pages 210, 212.

<sup>6</sup>McLuhan, Marshall, *The Medium is the Message*, page 63.

up, many 'stories' might occur in a single lifetime, for example, statisticians predict an average of three marriages per American by the year 2000.

As our understanding of energy refines, we have begun to discover that events are determined by the power of the mind as opposed to the 19th century view that we only receive and clarify events that happen to us. As the mind is perceived to direct physical reality (rather than vice versa), personal choice achieves heightened status. Stories which could result from a choice may not ever have to happen as their consequences may be intuited, 'lived through' in the imagination. How? Because the flow of information and the instantaneousness of feedback increases the powers of intuition and projection.

Artists' work has forecast the shift in the arena of action much earlier than the worlds of politics and education. James Joyce's work comes particularly to mind. His novels of perception can be seen as models for new forms in other fields in their revival of oral tradition. Creating fields of awareness, memory and association, emotion, physical reaction, simultaneous layers, color, and a world perceived through the senses, they are comprehensive of good and evil and allow opposites to coexist.

As a model for music, Joyce's novels suggest a form easily achieved with the 20th century tools of the tape recorder and electronic instruments. American composer Charles Ives created with this form before these instruments became available. The model suggests that music consist of fields-of-sound rather than specific instrumental lines. The form is close to the way in which we hear and listen. We do not block sounds out by 'closing our ears', but sort them spatially according to area of initiation. This part of 3-dimensional hearing is critical to our physical orientation, balance and safety. Next, we order sounds according to which ones interest us. When we 'listen', we create, foregrounds and backgrounds, like in

computer structure. Those sounds we specifically listen to are placed in the foreground; those we hear are placed in the background.

Joyce's novels occasionally juxtapose several layers of language: language occurring in the environment and language occurring in the mind. A fabric of sound and meaning results. Charles Ives created spatially-inspired compositions. In one of his pieces he mimicked the effect of two marching bands, playing in different keys, approaching from opposite sides. The music grows loud and cacophonous as they pass each other and fades again into the distance.

This spatial model for musical form is consistent with the need to incorporate previously separate systems - music, literature, visual arts, dance and so on - as it integrates visual and aural perceptions. Just as the premise of this thesis is to discover how music can shape visual form, the way in which visual and video form can shape music should likewise be considered. Cross-pollination between mediums as they evolve through technical advances will help to define contemporary thought-processes and perception.

Meanwhile, the 'story' has become a pleasant diversion taking on a role similar to fairy tales: a fascinating and intense experience generally relegated to childhood and known to be make-believe.

## **8.2 The Subconscious and Film and Video**

Authors and filmmakers noted early-on the closeness of film reality to the mind. Yvette Biro writes:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Biro, Yvette, *Profane Mythology*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1982, page 116.

Early movies, understandably delighted in their ability to follow the actual movement of events, the natural passing of time. Only much later did the film reach that contracting-mimetic evocation that already included abstraction by stretching and shrinking real time processes. Then, a method of breaking up the present was born: the flashback technique...This was the first decisive step towards violating time's irreversibility.

Like the mind, film can make any association at any time. The image of the moment is reality in film; a reality which can jump through time and space or exist simultaneously in several times and spaces. Film's 'virtual present', as Suzanne Langer put it, has encouraged artists to portray various states of the mind. Known for her dreamlike films, Maya Deren wrote:<sup>8</sup>

My films might be called metaphysical...my films are concerned with meanings - ideas and concepts - not with matter.

In the following chapters, modes of the unconscious have been separated into the various states of dream, mythology, thought as they seem to specifically emerge in my work.

The subconscious is valuable in navigating through the conscious world. As I suggested in reference to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the tension between these two worlds when both are acutely active is often the strength of a work of art. Yvette Biro accurately describes this relationship:<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Deren, Maya, "A Statement of Principles," *Film Culture*, New York, Winter, 1961.

<sup>9</sup>Biro, Yvette, *Profane Mythology*, pages 103, 104.

The creative imagination in its most general sense - therefore including myths, the arts, and child's play - resembles dreams in that it is the principal regulator of the tension operating between our conscious and unconscious. And turning the unconscious into conscious means, in both cases, a progression from the general toward the concrete, making demonstrable and visible something impalpable and abstract.

Overcoming the unconscious, whether in dreams, play, or in mythical or artistic representation, also means turning the shapeless into sensory experience.... Making conscious is...a seeking out and finding of the hidden truth by means of the senses.

### **8.3 Film's Influence on Music Composition**

It is possible that film's freedom in time is what differentiates modern form from earlier linear models. We can visualize and draw the first three dimensions - length, width and depth - but graphing the fourth dimension - time - is only partially, if at all, possible. Physicist Gary Zukov attempts a graph of time in his book, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, which also incorporates movement backward through time. The diagram is not visually obvious, the way three-dimensional diagrams are. Even with written explanation, the graph and, especially, the movement backward in time is vague.

Film accomplishes this 'time travel' without our blinking an eye, i.e., in a manner that is intuitively clear to us. If we could cross-pollinate artforms, we may find a way to liberate time from the three-dimensional, linear mode still operable in music. Models of time as modular segments, like edit-segments in film, may apply

to music. Modular structure underlies time in the music of composers like Philip Glass. If rhythmic structure has been solved in this manner, however, it has been at the expense of pitch and melody. By melody I mean the extended expressiveness of the sustained tone, natural to instruments like the human voice. Italian aria optimally employs the voice; a modern composition should not do less, but rather more. I believe that form will depend on a new, non-linear understanding of time together with a spatial concept of pitch.

Electronic instruments are not naturally oriented towards keyboards. Early analog synthesizers depended on a set of knobs which generated and modulated tones. Keyboards were added to align synthesizers with compositional practice, e.g., rock concerts. Keyboard divisions of pitch into whole and half-step octaves makes spatial composition less obvious, though computer music composition does not have this problem and encourages spatial, flowing treatments.

Digital processing may hold a key to spatial composition, previewed in the music of Anton Webern, in which every detail of sound was intended to be heard. Digital recording allows for such fine distinction in sound levels that we may be able to place sounds around us in the spatially selective manner outlined above in reference to Joyce's novels. The composer can move the listener through an environment of sound by refocusing their attention as sound levels change. Attention (foreground) is on the loudest sound.

Feature films already make use of this type of sound manipulation. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson investigate how sound can move our attention through an image in their essay, "Fundamental Aesthetics of Sound in the Cinema," in Film Sound.<sup>10</sup> They describe the image of a busy resort, with a card

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<sup>10</sup>Bordwell, David and Thompson, Kristin, "Fundamental Aesthetics of Sound in the Cinema," *Film Sound*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1985., pages 194-195.



game in the foreground, ping-pong players in the background, along with other assorted activities. The loudest sound may initially be of the ping-pong game, focusing our attention there. This sound fades down as the sound of conversations between the card players fades up, and our attention moves to the area of the image where the card game takes place.

#### **8.4 In Defense of Narrative**

Much as the subconscious, non-narrative and non-linear style offers contemporary thought, the narrative is still an integral part of expression. As with the Italian aria mentioned above, we do not want to lose anything as we gain a more comprehensive approach.

Total abandonment of the story is as illusory as a total break with reality; as long as films are performed by people, they must give some order and sequence to human actions.<sup>11</sup>

Lawson argues that immersion in psychological dreams is a 20th century escape from reality and a rejection of responsibility. Though it may, as artists' work often does, initially appear a frivolous preoccupation, it is an exploration into an unescapable aspect of modern culture.

Narrative seems a long way from disappearing, but it may lose its position of dominance, to become one important element among many. The need to understand non-linear time and space, as taught to us in film and video, is a preoccupation with a current unknown, toward which the known - linear narrative - should bend.

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<sup>11</sup>Lawson, John, *Film: the Creative Process*, page 63.

## Chapter 9

### DREAM AS A MODEL FOR FORM "PROJECTION" AND "ELISABETH'S DREAM"

it [film] presents a virtual present,  
an order of direct apparition.  
That is the mode of dream.  
Suzanne Langer

Analogies between movies and dream consciousness are well documented: unreal image-composites created at the will of the maker, like the dreamer; instantaneous changes in time and space; suspension of real time. Dreamlike evocation was the manner of my first videotapes, "Projection" and "Elisabeth's Dream." Slowing down the imagery into a seamless flow, with voice-based soundtracks speaking as if inside the head, I sought to draw the viewer into the sensations of a dreamer.

"Projection", 1982, depicts out-of-body flight, sensualizing rather than describing the experience in order to bring the viewer gradually into a similar consciousness. Concrete form dissolves into pure light-energy at the end as the progression from the material to immaterial realms is accomplished.

"Elisabeth's Dream", 1983, overlays images onto a woman's body. The intimacy of the imagery on the skin suggests the physicality of dream and brings the images to life. The images, color photographs taken in Vienna, are psychological with archtypal references to sexuality, religion, time. The voice in the soundtrack speaks against the ticking of a clock. Again, the viewer is plunged into a intimate dreamworld.

## Chapter 10

### MYTHOLOGY

#### "AVIARY" AND "TEMPTATION OF THE ELBOW KISS"

Take the form of a bird and fly to a perfect  
place (island)  
center of the world

This chapter is based on the assumption that the whole is more than the sum of the parts. When both the creator of and the subject for the sound and image are one and the same an intuitively unified field exists in the work.

The fugue chapter deals with the whole and the parts as they are scored in music and might be scored in film, attempting to create a unified yet present whole and parts for moving-pictures. In "Aviary" extreme formal considerations recede into the background, in favor of a unified image and sound source.

"Aviary" treats mythology in a different way than "fugue." In fugue, mythology, dreams, the subconscious and thought patterns are the key to depth in repeated imagery. In "Aviary" mythology, dreams, fairy tale symbols are part of the imagery and overt content. The structure is therefore allegorical and not strictly real-time narrative. It is a through-composed 'symphony' on bird, flight and transformation.

#### 10.1 "Aviary" Description

"Aviary" is a 1/2-hour videotape combining a sculptural set, lighting, dance, and music drawn from images and sounds of birds. The piece will explore themes of flight, freedom and confinement, boundaries of earth and sky, human vs. animal

realms and enchantment - in the context of the aviary setting, the man-made house of birds. The work should eventually be staged as a performance.

"Aviary" is in five parts. The scrim walls of the set evoke an aviary through which the dancer moves. The set varies in transparency and color according to lighting effects which evoke various bird environments such as sky, forest, water. The story is mythical and based on transformation.

Computer-manipulated bird and environmental sounds form the basis of the electronic music.

The dancer is the mediating element between earth and sky, bird and human, and will dramatize a fairy tale based on human transformation into bird, exploring the man and animal relationship in a mythic setting.

### **10.1.1 "Aviary" Score**

#### **I. SKY**

outside, freedom. looking up. birds tiny dots in sky. shot outside at bird sanctuary.

Winter, barren.

Birds in small cages in pet shops, with signs.

#### **II. AVIARY**

The dancer walks through Aviary. A realistic depiction which transforms gradually into rich, Rousseau-like frames of birds.

Tropical color, bright, painterly, computer-enhanced.

Ends on Snowy Owls. Zooms into face of Snowy Owl. Mix with close up of the dancer's face.

### III. TUNNEL

Entrance through owl's eyes. Falling through abstract concentric circles.

### IV. ENCHANTED FOREST

Arrive at enchanted snow forest. Animals appear (polar bear, fox, galloping horse).

Lighting reveals sleeping dancer in center of scrim aviary.

The animals surround her. Bird flies over her.

Dancer wakes and rises. Cannot leave Aviary. When she touches walls lightning-like electricity flashes.

Finally she transforms into a bird. Dances as bird.

The walls fall.

### V. TUNNEL RETURN

Concentric circles and lighting accompany her dance around the fallen Aviary.

### VI. FLIGHT/SONG

Previous section merges with abstract interpretations of flight, equivalent to "song". Camera motion simulates flight. Dancer disappears eventually.

## **10.2 "Temptation of the Elbow Kiss"**

Truth itself wanders through the forests.

Werner Herzog<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Herzog, Werner, *Of Walking on Ice, Munich-Paris, 11/23 to 12/14, 1974*, Tanam Press, New York, 1980, page 48.

The bear is Natural Truth, or Looking Within...  
Bull Looks Back must Look-Within to Perceive  
himself for what he is

Seven Arrows, page 263

The "elbow kiss" is part of a children's fable: if a child kisses his or her own elbow, he or she will be transformed into the opposite sex. The tale addresses the lure of the unknown and transformation. In "Temptation of the Elbow Kiss" a woman enters the forest where "truth itself wanders," meets a bear, who is simultaneously a spirit guide and an incarnation of male sexuality. She begins the process of transformation toward bird and flight. The premise is that all physical phenomena are available to us once the decision is made to explore them in a grasp for broader vision. "Temptation of the Elbow Kiss" is about that moment of choice.

## Chapter 11

### THOUGHT AS A MODEL FOR FORM

#### "ADONA"

##### 11.1 Thought as a Score Model: "Adona"

"Adona" is a videotape which presents a narrative in the freely associative form of thought patterns.

It is the day-dream of a young woman, the content of which reveals a mysterious event, buried in shifting thoughts, memories, colors, sounds and emotions. The woman is the anchor in the present and we look through the subjective window of her mind to try to understand an event with the non-linear treatment the mind pursues: major events stored on the surface; minor events hidden away; vague but relevant memories; people and patterns of indirect association.

This web of perception suggests a narrative texture close to the way we actually experience events. It also suggests a rich visual and aural surface for a work of art, relying on painterly and poetic qualities. It could easily, as well, be adapted for interactive videodisc, which would allow for choices within the narrative.

The piece explores sound, editing techniques and visual textures to create atmosphere and tension.

The score might look like this:

Themes:

The woman	-----	-----	-----	----			
the event		-----	----	---			
the present	-----	-----		---			
the past		-----	-----				
the future				-----			
emotion/color		-----	-----	---			
time...							



**PART III**

**FINAL PROJECT**

**CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

I was never afraid of approaching my movies in a very naturalistic way, in terms of their shapes and styles. I don't think, in fact, that there are specific shapes and styles that have to be respected; you can do whatever you want.

And that freedom acts as an incentive to fly, and the flight is blind because you really let yourself go, like the automatic writing of the surrealist poets...It was a kind of compulsion.

Hector Babenco,  
director, *Pixote, Kiss of the Spider Woman*  
*AMERICAN FILM*, pg.13, April 1985

## Chapter 12

### FINAL PROJECT

#### 12.1 Description of Final Project

The video examples outlined in this thesis illustrate several versions of music-to-image transformation. They are compiled to create the final project, which explores extremes of form and content: intense, raw emotion, connection and sensuality versus distance, separation, abstract, geometric configurations of characters.

Formal considerations pushed to the extreme confronts problems in the musical model for imagery which a more intuitive approach might not invoke. It is useful to clarify these problems.

The final project has an overall movement out of the city and away from formal constraints toward the edge of life symbolized by the ocean. The videotape follows the mind as it travels from acceptable social and external forms to ungoverned and unrealized inner flights.

#### 12.2 Outline of Final Project

##### I. Introduction: On Stage

Three characters, two men and one woman, are introduced on stage. They represent thematic motives in the ensuing composition. Their movements are formal and impersonal.

1. Their movements through the space are visual analogies for lines of music.

2. They appear and reappear in different parts of the stage, delineating its, and therefore the television set's, volume.
3. They appear in different configurations, suggesting a geometry of interaction.
4. They draw paths of their own development. These are like musical lines in a score.
5. They intermingle. Body parts of one are matched to another.
6. They see each other alternately as formal bits and with human passion. In a "Pygmalion" sequence two arrange the third as a statue-like figure.

## II. Double Fugue

Two fugue subjects with different story-functions coincide.

### Car Fugue

Fugue Subject: each character (representing a fugue voice) walks to car, gets in, starts engine, drives away.

1. The three characters move separately towards the same place.
2. The action moves away from the city (representing form and civilization) toward the ocean.
3. Car travel creates a suspended mental space.
4. The fugue is created by applying imitation, inversion, retrograde, augmentation, diminution, fragmentation and sequence to the video edits.

### Fugue on a Theme by Pudovkin

This fugue is drawn from a seven-shot scene description by V.I. Pudovkin (for the film, *Beyond the Law*, appearing on page 159 of *Film Technique and Film Acting*). It is nested within the Car Fugue during the "suspended mental space" created while driving toward the sea. Its narrative function is to present an emotional context which juxtaposes the cool formal presence of the characters.

Fugue Subject:

1. Actor in armchair alters his position, as if he had heard a knock
2. His tense, watching face
3. Taken by itself: the moving door handle
4. Close-up - the hand of the actor, slowly and fumblingly drawing the revolver
5. The slightly opening door
6. The actor aims the revolver
7. Through the door steps the boy with the puppies

The actions listed above would be changed to appropriately incorporate the three characters in the videotape. The Pudovkin fugue differs from the car fugue in that it has an emotional and specifically narrative format: fugal manipulations would effect content, more than in the action-oriented car fugue.

III. Beethoven Sonata in D, the "Pastoral", Op. 28

This segment is like a dream of classical form. In an ideal world the three characters would come together in a sunny, positive balance. It moves one step beyond the dramatic content of the Pudovkin fugue toward dream. It is set in a field and proceeds according to the outline in Chapter 5.

IV. "Glass Masks"

"Glass Masks" is not based on a specific musical form, but experiments with the translation from musical to visual parameters. It is a study for the videotape, "Counterpoint."

The three characters are on the rocks at the ocean. This part of the videotape recapitulates the geometric configurations of the Introduction. The statue-like characters look out to sea. They are small from the ocean vantagepoint.

Formal qualities alternate with intimate gestures. Their gazes alternate between parallel looks out to sea, looks toward each other, and gazes which intersect at some point over the ocean. This point of intersection is a mystical point of creation.

This part of the project has been completed and is described in the following section.

### **12.3 "Glass Masks"**

"Glass Masks" is a visual music videotape which sets up visual correlations to musical parameters. Three characters represent formal elements moving through 2 and 3-dimensional space like musical lines. The formal configurations of the characters are juxtaposed against images of emotion and connection.

The videotape deals only with the poles or extremes of human interface: humans as 'bits' of life - fragments which are used in the composition of the piece - and humans as personal, feeling and touching individuals. The two poles are depicted visually. Formal sequences occur on rock cliffs; emotional sequences occur against the sea.

#### **12.3.1 The Imagery**

The images are stripped of all extraneous content so that movement through the 2-dimensional screen space and 3-dimensional background is clearly sensed by the viewer. It is important that movement is 'sensed' or felt by the viewer rather than perceived intellectually, if a musical analogy is to succeed.

Visual themes or 'motives' defined are: (1) statue-like figures in changing configurations on the rocks; (2) close ups of individual faces; (3) medium shots of torsos; (4) close ups of characters together.

Editing is structured around the presentation of these shots as themes, their recurrence and development. Tension grows out of the pacing. For example, the 'statue-like figures' sequence moves much faster the second time it is seen. The viewer has already absorbed it in the first presentation, and needs much less time to recall it the second time.

### **12.3.2 The Soundtrack**

The soundtrack is generated from a variety of glass sounds digitized to create keyboards on the Kurzweil 250 synthesizer. Recording was done digitally on the MacIntosh computer, using the 'Performer' program. This program records digital data directly as the Kurzweil is played. It relies on MIDI (musical instrument digital interface) in order to translate the performance into numerical data.

Compositional devices in "Glass Masks" depended largely on looped sounds. The sound of a bottle dropping and bouncing on the ground creates a loop in which the sound repeats, getting softer and dying away. Because of the keyboard organization of sounds on the Kurzweil, sounds are faster when higher and slower when lower. Therefore if an octave is pressed, the loops are at different speeds. Cross-rhythms between loops, therefore, became primary compositional factors.

The Kurzweil cannot modulate a looped sound, i.e., fade a sustained tone, such as the singing rim of the champaign glass, in and out. This creates some difficulty in the blending of lines. Some Kurzweil 'preset' instruments, such as the string section, have smooth fades and were introduced to help create smooth transitions. The addition of reverberation and delay also helped with this problem. Other Kurzweil preset instruments seemed to conflict with the clarity, natural resonances and subtle shifts in the glass tones.

### **12.3.3 Relationship of Soundtrack and Imagery**

The rocky beach was chosen for clear edges and flat planes which were further emphasized by shooting with long zooms in order to diminish depth of field. The rocky edges are sharp like glass. The relationships between the characters are fragile and easily broken. Purity and coolness are the tone, with the implication that the facade can and will break.

## Chapter 13

### THEORISTS AND PRACTICIONERS A 'XEROX CONVERSATION'

Reading a theorist like Marchall McLuhan I was struck by how Robert Wilson's work seemed to corroborate his theories. I noticed a recurrent effect, for the first time, during Wilson's theater piece, "civil Wars." I found myself imagining projects, solving problems, basically in a very creative and thoughtful state, but perhaps not properly attentive to the play. I found that other people had the same reaction and I began to think it was a good rather than inappropriate response.

I decided to juxtapose an interview with Robert Wilson and excerpts from McLuhan's "Medium is the Massage" in the spirit of McLuhan's "xerox books." I was then happy to find that we are not the "primitives of a new age" we suppose we are when I rediscovered the urgent voice of Dziga Vertov, already setting precedents in 1928.

#### Robert Wilson

They weren't intellectualizing, searching for levels of meaning - they doubtless didn't understand one thing. But they watched and listened and evidently drew enough from the surface to want to come back again and again.

...they looked at it like a big, slow-motion video...

Conventional theater imposes too much...The way I approach it you have what can be heard and what can be seen. You can relate one to the other, or both, or neither. I'm not going to impose a neat, packaged way of approaching the experience.

...

When you pare away everything, there is energy and time, I guess. But we so rarely even begin to pare.

...

Often things go by me in the theater so fast I can't understand them, can't enjoy



them. So in my own work I try to be kind to the audience and give them time to reflect on an image, to daydream, consider, whatever. Theater is meant to be pleasurable.

The idea of line comes back to the issue of the audience's approach. I like to think there are many lines through my works, and that different people will find the one that suits them. Maybe it's music, maybe it's text, maybe it's design, maybe it's a combination constantly shifting.

...I think of a radio drama and a silent movie, the one where anything and everything visual can, really must be, imagined, the other where anything and everything aural can be imagined. I work there. I try to find a line through the text and present it. I start thinking about almost every text with a pencil in my hand - for drawing diagrams of lines.

...are you building a theater of perception versus, and consciously so, a theater of comprehension? "Yes," said Wilson slowly, "that's a very good way of putting it." The Robert Wilson experience..., by Jeff McLaughlin, Boston Globe, Sunday, March 9, 1986, page 57

#### Marshall McLuhan

Until writing was invented, man lived in acoustic space: boundless, directionless, horizonless, in the dark of the mind, in the world of emotion, by primordial intuition, by terror. (page 46)

...

The phonetic alphabet forced the magic world of the ear to yield to the neutral world of the eye. The alphabet is a construct of fragmented bits and parts which have no semantic meaning in themselves, and which must be strung together in a line, bead-like, and in a prescribed order....

"Rationality" and logic came to depend on the presentation of connected and sequential facts or concepts. (page 44)

...

We now live in a global village... a simultaneous happening. We are back in acoustic space.

At the high speeds of electric communication, purely visual means of apprehending the world are no longer possible; they are just too slow to be relevant or effective. (page 63)

...

Television completes the cycle of the human sensorium. With the omnipresent ear and the moving eye, we have abolished writing, the specialized acoustical-visual metaphor that established the dynamics of Western civilization.

...But in all electric phenomena, the visual is only one component in a complex interplay...

In television, images are projected at you. You are the screen. The images wrap around you. You are the vanishing point. this creates a sort of inwardness, a sort of reverse perspective which has much in common with Oriental art. (page 125)

...  
Electric circuitry is Orientalizing the West. The contained, the distinct, the separate - our Western legacy - are being replaced by the flowing, the unified, the fused. (page 145)

Dziga Vertov

The Man with the Movie Camera

(A Visual Symphony) [19 March 1928]

"The Man with the Movie Camera" is an experiment in conveying visual phenomena without the aid of titles (a film without titles), scenario (a film without scenario), or the theater (a film without actors and sets). (page 7)

...  
My article "Kinopravda and Radiopravda" in Pravda several years back speaks about the Radio-Eye as an elimination of distances between people, as an opportunity for the workers of the whole world not only to see, but simultaneously hear one another.

The Kinoks' statement on Radio-Eye was hotly disputed in the press. But then the question was put aside as a matter of the distant future.

Already, in "A Sixth of the Earth", the titles have been replaced by contrapuntally constructed word-radio themes. "The Eleventh Year" is constructed as an audio-visual film. It is edited for both sound and images.

...  
The theoretical and practical research of the Kinoks (unlike the play cinema, which has been caught sleeping) has outpaced our technical possibilities, and now is waiting for the tardy technical basis of sound-film and television to catch up. (page 7)

*The Vertov Papers*, Dziga Vertov, *Film Comment*, Spr. 1972, (c) Film Comment Pub. Corp. reprinted in *APPARATUS*, ed. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Tanam Press, NY, 1980.

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