

Panel I3

Sala Emiciclo

Sound, Music and Animation

Luigi Allemano

Towards a Pedagogy of Animated Visual Music Composition



In 1986, the journal of the Association Internationale du Film d'Animation (ASIFA Montréal) published an article by Dr. William Moritz entitled *Towards an Aesthetic of Visual Music*. The essay can be seen as a sort of 'call-to-arms' for animation artists to advance the practice of visual music composition. "Traditional animation has produced the most successful Visual Music compositions..." claims Moritz, and indeed many recent examples of scholarly work, contemporary creative production and festival participation corroborate this assertion. Yet thirty years later there remains a dearth of curriculum within animation education to support the practice. Responding to Moritz's call, this paper proposes to sketch out a possible model for the pedagogy of animated visual music composition in contemporary digital arts education.

Central to Moritz's occasionally polemical critique of visual music in the late 20th century is the argument for the analysis of antecedents in the genre. From such analysis Moritz claims that a trace of aesthetic commonality may be found that might "render composition more effective or easier" (Moritz). While acknowledging the importance of historical and comparative analysis as a starting point for the development of any nascent art practice, this paper looks beyond aesthetic unity and challenges Moritz's second argument for a methodology based on trial-and-error experimentation. This paper proposes instead a practical curriculum of audio-visual composition based on materials, form, process and presentation.

Furthermore, this paper advocates for a praxis of animated visual music composition founded in true interdisciplinary activity and a corresponding teaching philosophy that espouses the education and empowerment of individual burgeoning digital artists to compose with animated images *and sound* concurrently and on equal ground. In advocating for the strength of traditional animation as the most successful instigator of visual music creation, Moritz seems to avoid the issue of illustration, or what Norman McLaren referred to the "free ride" (McWilliams 31) of animating images in relation to an existing piece of music. The great majority of animated works cited by Moritz are concerned primarily with the visualization of existing sound recordings. While this approach to visual music making is not problematic in and of itself, it has within it a bias towards visual thinking, one that sees the visual elements as the only plastic material in the process of audio-visual composition. In such a methodology, the visualized music takes on a characteristic of popular music videos, a characteristic that Michel Chion describes as paradoxical; the animated image becomes optional because the music is already "sufficient to itself" (Chion 166). The interpretation of music through animated images is therefore not the objective of the proposed curriculum because it tends to reinforce the delineation of traditionally separate disciplines between which an emerging practitioner must choose. Instead, the paper puts forward a methodology in which audiovisual composition involves the generating of animated image and sound concurrently, without subordination of one to the other, by an individual maker.

In his essay, Moritz highlights two obstacles confronting animators who seek to compose visual music: “the delusion of technology and the delusion of rhythm”. His claim about the delusion of rhythm might be interpreted as the often-simplistic syncretic relationship between image and sound in visual music. Indeed, pedagogy of the art form must consider more sophisticated audiovisual relationships, but not necessarily through the exploration of aesthetic equivalencies between art and music as Moritz suggests. Instead, this paper investigates the possibility of transposing compositional processes from the musical realm to the visual and vice versa, regardless of aesthetic outcomes.

As for the delusion of technology, the contemporary conditions for art making are vastly different from the pre-Internet era in which Moritz authored his essay. For better or worse, the design of digital tools has converged around a similar set of manipulation commands, functions and processing that is common to both image and sound data. It is this paradigm of convergence in digital art making that perhaps provides a new opportunity to reconsider technology less as a delusion of ‘instant creativity’ but rather as a tool that potentially overcomes historical procedural differences between the composition of the moving images and music.

In practical terms, teaching young animators the ‘rules’ and the craft of music composition would be a hugely daunting task. It may be more effective to consider animated visual music composition as a discipline unto itself, one that is inclusive of practitioners holding propensities for either the visuals or the music, or both. The challenge therein is to define the practice and to identify which activities comprise its fundamental ontology. Through examples of the author’s current research in the area, this paper proposes to do both.

Citations

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Norman McLaren: On the Creative Process. McWilliams, Donald, ed. National Film Board of Canada, 1991. Web. 27 Mar. 2012.

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Biography

Luigi Allemano, MAA
Assistant Professor, Film Animation Program
Concordia University, Montréal
luigi.allemano@concordia.ca

Luigi Allemano is an animation filmmaker, music composer and sound designer based in Montréal. Allemano's animation, music and sound design appear in more than sixty productions of the National Film Board of Canada, four of which have received Academy Award nominations. His latest work *Improvisation no.1: Cumulative Loops* was nominated for the Best Animated Film by Canada’s national film industry academy, the Canadian Screen Awards.

Since 2009, Allemano has held full-time faculty appointments at Concordia University's Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema where he heads the Film Animation Undergraduate Program and lectures on animation filmmaking, analog and digital animation techniques and sound for animation. Allemano's research interests include philosophy of improvisation

in visual art and music, methodologies of pre-cinematic animation and contemporary approaches to visual music composition.