1970

An Experiment in the Use of Graphics for Musical Interpretation

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Bachelor of Science Degree
Senior Research Project
Rochester Institute of Technology
1970
Equipment Used

Nikon Super 8 Zoom Motion Picture Camera
Minolta 120
Yashica 35 mm
Variable Frequency Strobe Light

Film Used

Tri-X 35 mm
High Contrast Copy Film
Kodabromide F-5 Photographic Paper
Super 8 Tri-X
Super 8 Kodachrome II Color Film
Music - The Pastoral Symphony by Leopold Stokowski
(Beethoven)
An Experiment in the Use of Graphics for Musical Interpretation

The contemplative stimulus of music is a quality uniquely inherent in its sound. Listening to music can stimulate the imagination and produce mental images. I have tried to translate on film a visual interpretation of selected music. In so doing, I have utilized the human form in a somewhat silhouetted situation to achieve some elements of my graphic interpretation. The incorporation of natural environmental objects, such as the sun, accentuation of movement and the positions of my graphic elements have been synchronized to the music which my graphics are representing.

The reflective quality I have attempted to attain suggests some intellectual questions. For example, the time-lapse sunset, accompanied by the deceleration of the music, could be interpreted as a life-to-death situation. Such interpretations may be accepted by the viewer, or he may simply enjoy listening to the music and watching the correlated filmed images without intellectual stimulation.

However the viewer accepts this experience, I have intended to portray on film a visual stimulus
in support of the emotional, vigorous and moody segments of the music I have chosen.

The first difficulties I encountered in producing this experimental film came in determining exactly how I would impart to the graphics the reflective quality of the music. After listening to the music, certain moods became apparent in different passages. A calm, serene movement might suggest a slow, undulating curve; a fast, exciting movement might be shown with short, closely spaced ripples. This process continued with decelerated and accelerated music.

In order to find the curves and pulsating images suggested by the music, I decided to use the female form for the majority of my subject matter. This format could produce a variety of still and moving images without change of subject matter.

I employed a number of devices to obtain the full graphic use of the female form. For example, back lighting of the figure produced a silhouetted form, and the use of high contrast film contributed an additional punch to the image. My experimentation with a close-up lens revealed a minute new world to me. I placed the camera so close to a color television screen that the only images it recorded were the small colored transmission dots.
Another close-up experiment was the filming of an eye from an inch away with heavy side lighting. This gave a quarter moon effect.

After becoming deeply involved in producing this film, my original concept of ten minute film began to overwhelm me. The amount of filming I have done to date, which is eighteen hundred feet of film, provided me with enough edited film for approximately a three minute segment. The cost and time factors became all important in the end. The time to film and edit forty-five seconds of film I estimate to be about thirty hours. This time included the separation of the junk film which did not reflect the mood of the music and the splicing in of "gems" which were bits of film that gave a dynamic quality to the sound.

Costs soared as I continued to experiment with motion picture film. For every one hundred feet of film purchased and processed I spent approximately ten dollars. This was only a part of the cost factor. Still film, strobe lights and studio costs were also expensive.

From the beginning of my concept of this film, I was interested in pure graphics. At first, my attempts were essentially failures. I filmed ballet dancers,
jumping porpoises and breaking waves. These films were not graphic enough and did not produce a satisfactory correlation to the music with adequate dynamics. Then I switched to shooting still photographs, aiming toward a high contrast result, which did give the desired graphic effect. When making motion pictures of these still pictures, I was able to manipulate further the movement of forms and space.

The whole musical movement I have tried to bring to visual life has a life quality of its own. It represents a struggle of life to death, violence and peace, convulsion and serenity. By the use of images and colored slides I have tried to present a graphic interpretation of the movements of the music.
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PROGRAM I

ENTER HAMLET     Fred Mogubgub, New York, 1965     4 minutes, color

The soliloquy from "Hamlet" spoken by Maurice Evans. With questionable relevance, each word is given its own picture. Mogubgub, from his pop-art lair, turns out a ceaseless capitulation to his times. In the retina's mad scramble to catch each word and image, on this paper-chase after the melancholy Dane, one can never stop to register the linear order of the past.

Winner of the Silver Lion of St. Mark at the Venice Film Festival.

RENAISSANCE     Walerian Borowszyk, Poland (Produced in France), 1963
10 minutes, Monochrome

This film is written, designed, and animated by Walerian Borowczyk. There is an explosion, the drawing-room is shattered. Slowly, with infinite effort, the casual objects of a life re-assemble themselves. A table, a basket, a brass trumpet, a stuffed owl, the family portrait compulsively clamber back into place with an unholy sabbath of rustlings and cracklings. The objects, autonomous, independent, claim a life of their own. But, as order is achieved, an alarm clock appears lugging a hand-grenade.

The sinister logic of what has happened imposes itself upon the once human setting. Inexplicably, this spiky thicket of affection and dread works its spell with a complete authority.

Walerian Borowczyk arrived at the Polish Film School in Lodz in the class of 1956 with Polanski, Lenica and others whose work in those years made the Polish cinema a legendary word throughout the world. In 1959 "Boro" moved to Parish, where he was given carte blanche at the remarkable animation studio of Cineastes Associes, and made a number of films, each totally different in theme and style, which established him as a unique talent.

Special Jury Prize, Tours Festival of the Short Film. Solvay Prize, Belgium. First Prize of the International Federation of Cine-Clubs.

THE RUNNING, JUMPING, AND STANDING
STILL FILM     Richard Lester, England, 1959     10 minutes, Monochrome

With Peter Sellers and his "Goon Show" troupe. Peter Sellers first became known as the leader of the pack whose "Goon Show" made history on the BBC radio through the fifties. Lester, a foot-loose American, became the director of its television broadcasts. "By 1959, I was back in London working for the "Goon Show" again. That's when I did THE RUNNING, JUMPING FILM. We had some film stock left over, so we decided to have some fun."
We'd done some of the gags for the show - like the scene with the boxing glove. We just reshot some of the gags, added others. All in a day and a half - and we had a good time doing it." (Dick Lester in an interview with George Bluestone, The Film Quarterly, 1966).

Lester has since given new forms to the feature-length film in THE KNACK and A HARD DAY'S NIGHT.

LES MISTONS '67  
Francois Truffaut, France, 1966  
18 minutes, B & W

From a story ("Virginales") by Maruice Pons. A founding editor of Cahiers du Cinema, the leading journal of film criticism, Truffaut was eager to begin making films. Completely familiar with all the classics of the cinema, he began directing with an unerring instinct. "I had not prepared anything, telling myself I did not know what one did to prepare the making of a film. In shooting I discovered that I was ready for cinema. For example, that I did not need too complicated a scenario. I have recently reworked my first films, shortening LES MISTONS by several minutes." (Truffaut, in an interview at the Annecy Retrospective of his work - "Cinema '67").

The two lovers, Gerard Blain and Bernadette Lafont, became the stars of many of the New Wave films to come, especially those by Claude Chabrol. It may be of interest to note that it is a scene shot by Chabrol (featuring J-C. Brialy, the "hero" of ALL BOYS ARE CALLED PATRICK) which LES MISTONS sees when they go to the movies. To signalize his first film, Truffaut "quotes" the 1895 film by Lumiere - L'ARROSEUR ARROSÉE - reproducing the gag of the gardener sprinkled by his own hose. THE 400 BLOWS and JULES AND JIM followed this film.

TWO CASTLES  
Bruno Bozzetto, Italy, 1962  
3 minutes, B & W

Bozzetto, 28 years old, is the head of an impressively large animation studio in Milan, Italy - 55, Via Melchiorre Gioia (55, the Street of Better Joy). A parable of the follies of human aggressiveness, in which Bozzetto employs the utmost economy of line and form - a little vignette on an erring knight.

THE FAT AND THE LEAN  
Roman Polanski, Poland (Produced in France), 1961  
15 minutes, B & W

Actors: Roman Polanski (the slave) and Andre Kateibach (the Master). After his first films at the Polish Film School in Lodz, Polanski made this while staying briefly in Paris in 1961. His talents as an actor (he played parts in 9 Polish productions) are best seen in this film.

Polanski chooses to prove, with each film, that in cinema he can do everything. He has, in writing his short films, created a literary form related to the work of Brecht and Beckett. If there is to be pantomime, very well, he will be a master at that - sketching in a whole commentary (tacitly, accurately, with literary flourishes) on what it means to be a pantomimist.
But primarily, he is driven by the challenge to activate all the resources of cinema. With his devotion to the technics of his complicated craft, he leads us from the most arbitrary fantasy to a reality situated on the level of play, in dramatic parables developed with a surprising lyricism. KNIFE IN THE WATER, REPULSION, and CUL DE SAC followed this film.

CORRIDA INTERDITE

Denys Colomb de Daunant, France, 1958  10 minutes, Color

The cinema provides a new formulation, a mode of presenting the real time of the endlessly repeated gestures of the bullfight and those single fatal moments towards which the matador is committed to move. Shooting the tens of thousands of feet of film required for slow motion, de Daunant followed the leading matadors of Spain through the course of a year. The simple basic concept, faithfully followed through, created a ballet weighted with the authority of a reality lived many times: the unchanging ritual of death in the afternoon.

INTERMISSION (5 to 15 minutes)

ALLURES

Jordan Belson, San Francisco, 1964  8 minutes, Color

Jodran Belson has worked in the field of the abstract color film since 1947. Following his first exhilarating forays into the field, his work has acquired an increasingly creative significance. The recipient of a Ford Foundation grant and a Guggenheim Fellowship, he has confirmed the role of cinema as the central form of kinetic art, going far toward fulfilling its potential. A voyage into the outer space of the psyche, images of the operation of cosmic forces over immense distance evoke a counterpoint of inner subliminal experience.

"there has been talk ever since the twenties of films that create visual music.' Why have these almost universally failed while Belson succeeds? The answer, I imagine, is partly just that Belson is a talented artist where others have been only ingenious experimenters. But I also think that he has been able to tap in on levels of perception that most film makers do not reach." (Ernest Callenbach, The Film Quarterly, 1966).

LA JETEE

Chris Marker, France, 1963  27 minutes, B & W


The observation deck at Orly Airport, Parish is "la jetee". The word also means "thrown, projected," and is the name of basic step, the leap, in ballet.
"The whole film takes place on a magic wave of reverie, of memory, of the imagination. "La Jette" is a voyage across Time and this is without doubt the most obvious reason for its fascination. By its very nature, the cinema is the most marvelously apt means for evoking the mind's capacity to inhabit different points in time. This is expressed not only through the story, but equally in the compelling beauty of the images, the warm lyricism of the music, the flow of words which play fully upon the different time structures.

And certainly, the sequential action of the photographs is fundamental; their static state corresponds to the stratification of memory. What is the cinema, if not above all the magic of images, be they twenty-four to the second or one to twenty-four seconds?

The six or seven seconds of live action assume all their symbolic and carnal value; life and love are identical in the movement on the bed of a girl who smiles at the sunlight and her man, her smile a flower blooming from the depths of our memory." (Marcel Martin, in Cinema, 1964).

Prix Jean Vigo (French Film Critics' Prize). Golden Ducat at Mannheim Festival.
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