

The poetry of things: anecdotes and mimesis in Visual Music

DIEGO GARRO

Keele University, School of Humanities – Music and Music Technology,

The Clockhouse, Keele ST5 5BG, UK

E-mail: d.garro@mus.keele.ac.uk

I. INTRODUCTION

Ten years into the third millennium, Visual Music is a discipline firmly rooted in the vast array of digital arts, more diversified than ever in myriads of creative streams, diverging, intersecting, existing in parallel artistic universes, often contiguous, unaware of each other, perhaps, yet under the common denominator of more and more sophisticated media technology. Computers and dedicated software applications, allow us to create, by means of sound and animation synthesis, audio-visuals entirely in the digital domain. In line with the spectro-morphological tradition of much of the electroacoustic repertoire, Visual Music works produced by artists of sonic arts provenance, are predominantly abstract, especially in terms of the imagery they resort to. Nonetheless, despite the ensuing non-representational idiom that typifies many Visual Music works, composers enjoyed the riveting opportunity to employ material, both audio and video, which possess clear *mimetic* potential (Emmerson 1986, p.17), intended here as the ability to imitate nature or refer to it, more or less faithfully and literally.

Composers working in the electronic media still enjoy the process of ‘capturing’ events from the real world and use them, with various strategies, as building blocks for time-based compositions. Therefore, before making their way into the darkness of computer-based studios, they still use microphones and video-cameras to harvest sounds, images, ideas, fragments, anecdotes to be thrown into the prolific cauldron of a compositional kitchen-laboratory-studio. There, a complex and often painstakingly long process of evaluation, analysis, manipulation and re-contextualisation of the materials can result in arrangements where the causal origin of the materials is more, or less, recognisable, yet their original *mise-en-scène* is often profoundly altered. I will posit that such radical alteration is both the result of the manipulation on the materials’ digitised representation, as much as it is a consequence of audio-visual montage. The discussion will stem from my particular perspective of an audio-visual composer of acousmatic origin; hence, a brief excursus on the use of mimesis in the sonic arts, next, will lead to the exploration of a few important aspects of Visual Music composition.

II. MIMESIS IN THE SONIC ARTS

Mimesis is a compositional device that is very dear to the tradition of Sonic Arts. In general terms, the use of sounds captured from reality (through sound recording) which subsequently undergo various degrees of manipulation, has always been accepted as a paramount means of artistic expression in Electroacoustic Music culture. Ambrose Field (2000, pp.36-40) utilises descriptors borrowed from literature and grammar (rhetoric, simile, personification, synecdoche) to demonstrate how mimesis can be utilised successfully in Electroacoustic composition, without the need of a narrative which may emerge from, and validate, the presence and role of mimetic materials.

Rajmil Fischman (2008, pp.111-116) provides a framework and terminology to address music which utilises mimetic discourse, and explores examples from the canon of Electroacoustic Music. Beyond the notable examples quote by Fischman, mimesis unsurprisingly still exercises an enormous power of attraction and is used extensively in contemporary productions; two examples from the recent acousmatic repertoire will be briefly discussed next.

In *Las Partículas Elementales* (2012), Chilean composer Federico Schumacher Ratti fashions sonic landscapes where familiar sounds of trickling water, snapping twigs, rustling plastic sheets, etc. are interspersed with broader anecdotal sequences featuring footsteps, rainstorms, street parades, police sirens and streams of splintering sounds shifting continuously across different ambiances. The piece is, clearly, more than a phonographic exercise, as it develops its own language based on the ambiguity of the ‘partículas,’ as both a sonic and a philosophical concept: a grain of sand, a drop of rain, a step, a person in the multitude, an event in the history of a troubled continent. Snippets of reality are assembled together like words in a poem and the audio mix is heightened into a composition of sonic verses¹.

Historia de la Pólvora - La Memoria del Tiempo, by Raúl Minsburg (2001) is a sonic photo-album that features “una mezcla extraña de imágenes ayudada por el timbre”². The *imágenes* used in the piece are musical (time stretched and granulated extracts, especially singing voices and Spanish guitar rasgeados), personal (whispered and echoed recording of a man’s speaking voice, in the first part, and a woman’s, in the second, more introspective part) as well as

¹ The brief notes to the composition feature the first stanza from the poem *Noción de Patria* (1962), by Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti, a personal and nostalgic view on the meaning of ‘homeland’.

² Minsburg’s own comment (<https://soundcloud.com/raulminsborg/historia-de-la-p-lvora>).

typically anecdotal (helicopters, in the first part, and what seems to be an outdoor processed recording of a stormy day in the second part). These mimetic fragments are introduced to elaborate on the concept of ‘memory’: sonic, individual, collective, voluntary and involuntary. They take the listener on a journey of re-evaluation of the experience of time (individual and historical). This electroacoustic work exists also in combination with a video track by Nicolás Testoni, which will be discussed in the following section.

III. MIMESIS IN VISUAL MUSIC

In a previous article (Garro, 2012) I pointed out that our definition of Visual Music would typically consider works that are non-narrative, but not necessarily non-representational. Notwithstanding that audio-visual narratives are mainly the concern of cinematography and drama, recent works from the Visual Music repertoire utilised, often extensively, real-world recognisability as part of their discourse. We would like to regard mimetic Visual Music, broadly speaking, as a time-based art, which utilises recognisable sounds and recognisable moving images purely as means for artistic expression. However, we need to contend with the ineluctable fact that the use of sound and, especially, images captured from reality, through camera filming and microphone recording, inevitably shifts the artefact towards much more powerful and ubiquitous mediatic experiences, such as cinematography, television, video documentary and amateur video making. The cultural, perceptual and cognitive force field created by these attractors is nearly impossible to elude as they are indwelt in our experience of audio-visual media constructs. *Narrative* is the inescapable source of this attraction. Hyde has pointed out that our “mediated audio-visual experience” is highly influenced by the idiomatic and sociological praxis of narrative cinema, television, streamed content on the Internet and, I would add for the generations born after the 2000s, videogames (Hyde 2011, p.174). Indeed, when we see any video-camera footage on a television set, computer display, portable device or large cinema screen, our first and foremost reaction will be the search of narrative validity: Why are those objects, people, landscape being shown? Where do they come from? Where are they going next? What is their story? Who/what is it about? Ergo, mimetic Visual Music continuously struggles to escape the gravitational pull of narrative. It must do so, as its purpose of existence lies in the artistic and idiomatic cracks found within the established languages of cinematography and phonography.

Steve Bird, for instance, composes audio-visuals of stunning pictorial beauty, often inspired by poetry. *One* (2010) utilises solely material of strong anecdotal connotation: sonic landscapes

featuring wind, rain, crackling fire, as well as images of countryside views (fig.1), close-ups of undulating grass and cereal crops, the silhouette of a woman walking on a crest of a hill in the distance.



Fig.1 : still frame from *One* (2010), by Steve Bird

The materials, both audio and video, are similarly manipulated by means of digital filters, alternatively emphasising or disguising aspects of their morphological or chromatic traits. Compositing is utilised extensively, as a visual counterpart to the mix of manifold audio textures, to combine multiple video streams into polyorama (Garro 2005, p.10) of otherworldly colour schemes. Yet, the materials' intrinsic mimetic qualities are surprisingly resistant to digital transformations. Bird, in fact, purposefully intertwines such materials in a slow-paced montage, not to tell a story of any value, but to develop a poetic concept of unity between men and things that happen to occupy the same region within a notional cosmological time-space grid³. In Bird's compositional theory and practice a novel exegesis of 'imagery' is introduced: *visual* imagery (the spatial domain of the 'frame'), *cinematic* imagery (the domain of cinematography, filming and montage techniques), *literary* imagery (the domain of poetry), and *sonic* imagery (the domain of sound anecdotes and landscapes). Processes of transference between these different categories are continuously utilised to construct metaphors, conflicts and intersections of harmonious congruence, all triggered by associative audio-visual interactions (Bird 2010, p.40)

Real life sonic and visual imagery can creatively be reassembled in digital timelines to evoke impressions and remembrance. Editing and processing are essential tools to transcend the causality of anecdotal materials, using them as pictures of a photo album: not a *story*, but a

³ This conceptual framework is the theme of *One* - the poem, also by Steve Bird, which is attached to 'One' – the audio-visual in the fashion of textual subtitle, or programme notes.

story about a story. Such meta-narratives can only be vaguely literal, in their reference to the real-life context to which they allude, as in *Historia de la Pólvara* – audiovisual composition (Minsburg – Testoni, 2011). After having commented on the soundtrack (see II. above), it is interesting to observe the sub-textual connotations introduced by the addition of the video track. Elemental sounds of water, heard in the final section of the soundtrack, are hinted at in the central part of the video (6:10-7:10), where we see footage of seawater.



Fig.2 : still frame from *Historia de la Pólvara* (2011) by Raul Minsburg (sound) and Nicolás Testoni (video)

However, the waves are sweepingly tinted in blood-red colour, a poetic reference to the brutal political events in Latin American twentieth century history, repeatedly hinted at throughout the video track. In another example of overtone/associational montage (Eisenstein 1949, pp.82-83) the sound of water particles (Minsburg – Testoni 2011, 8:10-9:40), which we would, in acousmatic listening mode, ascribe to wind or rain, is revealed thanks to the choice of video footage, as the sound of riot-control water cannons used ruthlessly against street protesters.

¿Te Acuerdas Hijo?, an audiovisual composition by Rajmil Fischman (2006), features heavily processed real-life images and utilizes extensively, in the visual domain, the equivalent of electroacoustic timbral mimesis (Emmerson 1986, pp.17-18), whereby materials, in this case solid surfaces and backgrounds, are made to behave like rippling water. Mimetic images such as water drops and, especially, human silhouettes, are combined with powerful sonic gestures of more ambiguous provenance, to conjure up a complex web of references to life anecdotes, progressively tracing back to their familial origins in the memory of the composer's father.

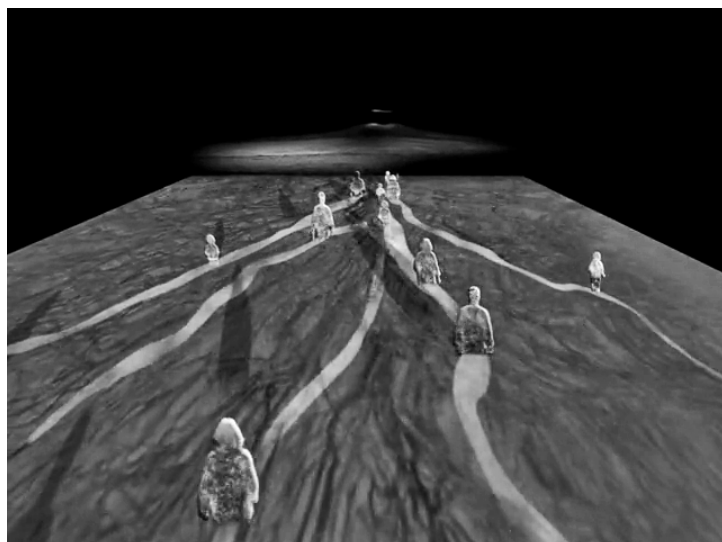


Fig.3 : still frame from *¿Te Acuerdas Hijo?* (2006), by Rajmil Fischman

This is yet another example in which mimetic material is arranged with syntactical methodologies borrowed from poetry, here taken to the ultimate consequence of incorporating animated verses from a medieval Spanish poem⁴. The underlying theme of the poem itself, an elegiac view of the past as exhortation to live a fruitful present, is reflected in the meta-narrative progressively unfolded in the work, which reveals itself as an audio-visual commentary on the convergence of life threads within family histories.

The examples quoted so far all use remembrance as a conceptual framework to disenfranchise powerful imagery, sonic, visual and literary, from their present-day contexts, pushing back their immediacy to create the discursive equivalent of audio reverberation: the relocation of a stimulus/idea into a space (physical / historical), which tells us more about that (physical / historical) space, and less about the origin of the stimulus/idea itself used to trigger the recollection and re-contextualisation process.

IV. THE VISUAL MUSIC LANGUAGE SPACE

The dichotomy between aural – and mimetic discourse in Electroacoustic Music (Emmerson 1986, p.17) can be transferred in the visual domain, where we could postulate the existence of a corresponding *ocular – mimetic* axis of discourse types (fig. 4a and 4b). The same concept can be carried to the combined audio-visual media, where we can posit an *aesthetic – mimetic* axis of discourse types (fig. 4c), whereby the term ‘aesthetic’ (from the Greek word αἰσθησις,

⁴ The poem in question is *Coplas on the Death of My Father*, by Jorge Manrique (1440-1479) and can be found in its entirety on <http://www.poesi.as/index1.htm>. Accessed on 29 October 2013.

‘sense’) incorporates discourses developed by means of materials, aural or ocular, which elicit the senses without retrieving from our memory any association with a real-life causal reference.



Fig.4a : continuum of sonic discourses



Fig.4b : continuum of visual discourses



Fig.4c : continuum of audio-visual discourses

Furthermore, as the *aesthetic – mimetic* continuum incorporates two axes, we may think of it as a two-dimensional plane of audio-visual discourse types (fig.5). Regions of such plane may thus indicate choices of material typology made during the composition of certain audio-visual works.

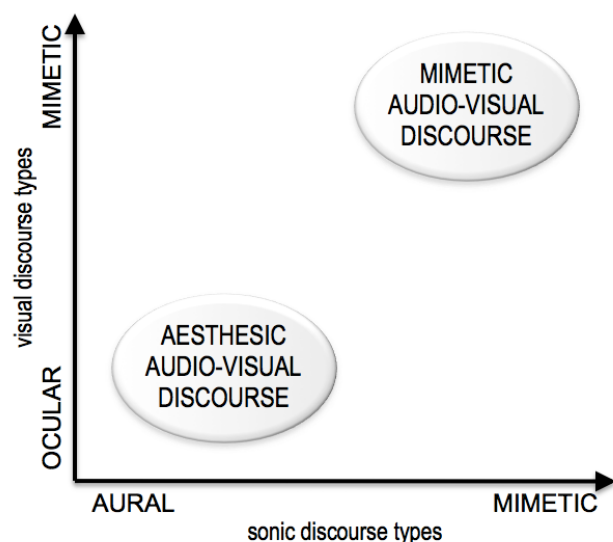


Fig.5 : plane of audio-visual discourse types

Consequently, Emmerson’s two-dimensional Electroacoustic Music language grid (1986, p.24) can be extended into a three-dimensional Visual Music language space (fig.6), where an axis of audio-visual syntax types (ibid, pp.20-24) is added to the plane of audio-visual discourse types.

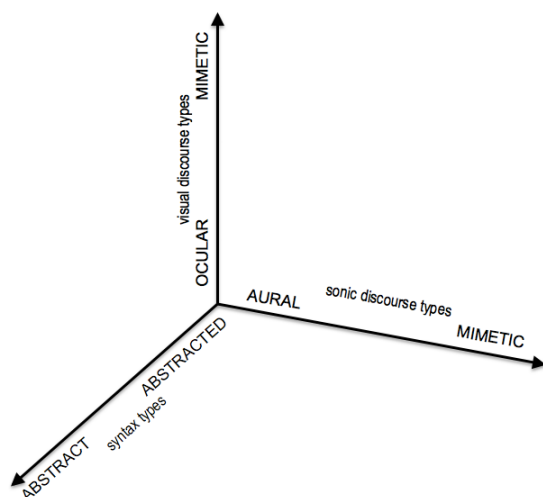


Fig.6 : Visual Music language space

As a matter of clarification, *Cryptices* (Barnett, 2011) utilises mimetic sounds and ocular visuals, whilst its syntax is abstracted from the material⁵. *In Absentia* (Quay, Quay and Stockhausen, 2000) employs aural sonic discourse, mimetic visuals, and its syntax can be considered partially abstract, as the film-makers created the video using Stockhausen's electroacoustic work, *Zwei Paare*, as a sonic storyboard of sorts. *Ut Infinitio Quod Ultra* (Willy, 2013) provides an example of aural/ocular (hence aesthetic) discourse, developed using abstract syntax, as the video track was realised starting from a fixed-camera filming take of a firework display. The latter imposed onto the work a certain temporal organisation of the visual events, the morphology of which was shaped by the composer by means of very heavy video filtering (fig.7). *Time and Tide* (Bird, 2010a) utilises a mimetic audio-visual discourse with abstract syntax.

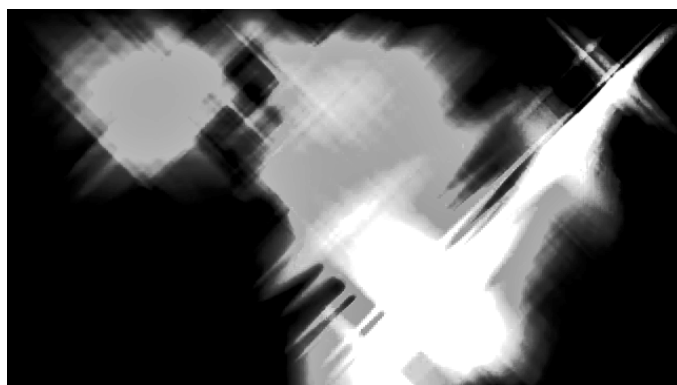


Fig.7 : still frame from *Ut Infinitio Quod Ultra* (2013), by Andy Willy

⁵ The reader is encouraged to imagine the corresponding three-dimensional areas, within the language space in fig. 3, where the following examples would be situated.

V. COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUES IN MIMETIC VISUAL MUSIC

Mimetic Visual Music avoids the attractive pull of cinematographic narrativity by means of important idiomatic traits discussed so far. Discernible editing gives the viewer unambiguous clues to the fact that the work being watched is not a film, in the traditional sense of the word, but rather an audio-visual composition which happens to utilise materials (camera footage, microphone recordings) that can be commonly found in cinematography.

V.1 Slow motion

Slow motion can shift real-life footage above (or aside) the strictly anecdotal, into a meta-narrative state typical of poetic expression. Such shift may well be caused by our culturally acquired response to cinema and television, where slow motion, accompanied with suitable atmospheric music, is often used to stress the dramatic and emotive intensity of a certain scene. Slow motion of an athlete's effort, accompanied by an epic or mournful soundtrack, for example, implies a reflective commentary on what the athlete's action is about, or even a transcendental view on a higher purpose (religious, patriotic) motivating the athlete's achievement. In audio-visual composition we can exploit this acquired response to disentangle real-life footage from representation and narrative⁶. It is interesting to note that whereas slowed down footage equates to visual poetry, decelerated mimetic sounds, with the ensuing downward-transposed spectrum, often acquire comical connotations. Furthermore, time-stretched real-life audio, whereby deceleration is carried out while preserving the original pitch, often comes across as archetypical electroacoustic stylistic trickery. These different interpretations of audio and visual slow motion usually inform audio-visual composers' practice. Thence, the original audio captured during filming is rarely used in combination with the corresponding slowed down footage. In most situations, instead, slow motion is montaged with sonic and/or musical assemblages that facilitate the type of sub-textual reflection implied by the images (see the welder scene in *Dammtor* - example 3).

V.2 Enhanced pictorial quality

⁶ Most real-life footage in my work *Dammtor* (see VI.) is considerably slowed down, sometimes to 20%-25% of the original speed.

An enhanced pictorial texture of the frames helps re-position mimetic material away from its narrative potential. Sonic artists are familiar with similar techniques used in sound installations and electroacoustic composition, whereby imposed emphasis on the dynamic range and/or spectral qualities of certain sonic streams encourage reduced listening modes (Chion 1990, p.29). Steve Bird (2010a and 2010b) utilises spectral manipulation of both camera-captured and microphone-captured materials to achieve similar ends. Pictorial heightening is used, to a lesser degree, in mainstream cinema too. In the Oscar-nominated film-documentary *Buena Vista Social Club* (Wenders, 1999), sharpening and mid-tone contrast are used to provide aesthetic character to the often sunlight-drenched images filmed in Cuba. Through these camera lighting and post-production techniques the ‘shot’ is put at the forefront of the discourse, possibly to elevate the work from the plane of a traditional documentary into a higher status of art-film. In the welder sequence of *Dammtor* (example 3, 1:30-4:40) the filmed footage underwent several passages of filtering and manipulation (fig.8), to bring out the pictorial and dynamic traits of the sparkles.

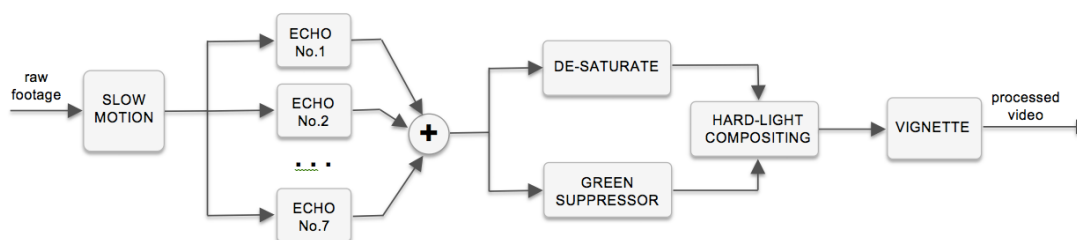


Fig.8 : *Dammtor* - video manipulations in the welder sequence

Dramatic slow motion, with a playback speed reduced to 25%, caused the individual sparkles to remain in the frame for longer. Consequently a video echo effect could be applied to enhance the light trails left by each individual sparkle: these were clusters of seven scattered video echo lines, with decays of 0.4sec each, approximately. The final texture, characterised by over-emphasis of the red hues and selective contrast, was achieved by hard-light compositing two copies of the processed video, one strongly de-saturated, the other with a chroma-key spill suppressor filter to reduce the green hues from the shot.

Radical geometrical motion editing of real-life images, such as in the first part of Pierre Paré-Blais's *Spiralling* (2009, 0:00-2:50), enables composers to utilise mimetic material (in this case photos of stairs treads, risers, handrails, balusters, and the hollow geometries of indoor building staircases) according to the principle of visual suspension (Hyde 2011, pp.173-174),

treating them as building blocks of a compositional language which French readers may wish to call Vidéo Concrète (ibid: 171).

V.3 Montage

The frequent synchronisation of video cuts and transitions with important sonic events in the soundtrack makes up what we may call *gestural montage*, a further extension of Eisenstein's theory (Eisenstein 1949, pp.82-83). Gestural montage is important in the arsenal of mimetic Visual Music composition, because it provides an effective syntactical device to marry video-transitions with sonic design, both supreme acts in their respective medium. Audio-video montage can also challenge cinematographic viewing strategies of mimetic material. For instance, non-continuity editing, provocatively utilised by Dada and French *Nouvelle Vague* film-makers, can be extended to the audio-visual domain. The real and quasi-real sounds utilised in the first section of *Spiralling* (Paré-Blais 2009, 0:00-2:50) have no logical attachment to the real and surreal images of spinning stair-like structures. The use of electroacoustic sounds, in particular, strengthens the aesthetic statement conveyed by non-continuity editing, allowing the composer to move, freely and fluently, into considerably more abstract audio visual languages in later sections of the work.

V.4 Granularization

I do not intend to examine granular synthesis techniques, where large numbers of overlapping grains are clustered to create novel sounds that often bear no resemblance to the original. Instead, I will focus on the subset technique, which I will call 'granularization' for brevity⁷. This is one of the most common techniques utilised in sound design, and it is often applied to mimetic sound materials, splicing recorded sounds into small chunks (grains) which may or may not be individually processed, typically by means of spatialisation, pitch transposition and more complex transformations utilising FFT data. Snippets of mimetic sounds, lasting anything between 50 and 200 msec, may still retain a certain level of source bonding (Smalley 1997, p.119) which, although progressively weaker, can be surprisingly resilient even when grain durations fall below such values. In electroacoustic culture, the pointillistic nature of granularized mimetic sounds represents an element of stylistic signage recognised by composers and audiences alike. Thus, granularization can be used to shift the impact of mimetic material away from their intrinsic anecdotal force field, taking advantage of the great

⁷ I will avoid the term 'granulation' for the sake of scientific accuracy, as granulation of substances, in chemistry, often refers to processes of agglomerations which would be misleading, if not outright erroneous, in the context of the present discussion.

flexibility offered by such a technique, if one considers the various granular parameters available to sound designers (grain duration, grain density, spatial scattering, pitch ranges, etc). Sounds can be torn apart and reconstructed progressively or suddenly, depending on the temporal profile of the aforementioned parameters. The audio-visual designer, especially that of electroacoustic provenance, will be interested in adopting the compositional paradigms, as well as the processing techniques, of granularization and apply them to both sounds and images. Visual granularization can be theorised drawing some, but not all, conceptual parallels from the known and trusted corresponding sound processing technique.

A detailed theorization of video granular techniques is beyond the purpose of this article; for now, it will suffice to indicate that visual grains would be short snippets of footage. Assuming conventional rates of 25 or 30 frames per second (typical in PAL or NTSC video standards, respectively) the smallest units we can address would be the time interval between two consecutive frames, i.e. 33-40ms. The smallest video grain would be a single frame which, so taken singly, would be a still picture, rather than moving image. Intriguingly, a few frames of a videoclip are sufficient to create grains which, although very short, can already provide the sensation of motion, albeit in short bursts. Unlike their sonic cousins, visual grains possess both a *temporal* size, i.e. duration, and a *geometrical* (spatial) size, which refers to the area of the video frame occupied by the visible subject of the grain itself. Visual grain density, or frequency, will refer to the number of grains per second included in a certain sequence.

In audio granular synthesis, overlapping grains can be combined using a variety of sophisticated techniques, such as convolutions or spectral averaging; in reality, audio grains are most often combined by means of simple mixing, i.e. digital summing the samples values. In video, the equivalent of mixing would be a combination of overlapping visual snippets by means of transparency, whereby two (or more) images can be seen, simultaneously, controlling the extent to which one can be seen through the other(s) by means of the alpha-channels data.

Despite the conceptual and computational similarities, the perceptual effects of audio mixing and visual transparency can be very different, an area which deserves further multi-disciplinary research. For instance, studies could be carried out to establish the degree of recognisability of granularized mimetic video, compared to granularized mimetic audio. Video grains can be overlapped, with visually striking results, by means of compositing techniques other than alpha-channel transparency. Compositing (or 'blending') modes can utilise both colour and brightness information on the original video clips to determine what algorithm will be used to calculate the pixel values of the resulting composited image (Wright 2010, pp.177-188).

Audio and video granularization were both applied in *Dammtor* (example 1, 0:08-0:38; example 2, 0:23 to end) to create a morphologically coherent set of materials, moving freely within the aesthetic - mimetic continuum. This technique proved to be particularly important to establish a stylistic iconography of the visual materials, which would otherwise be characterised primarily on the basis of their narrative potential. Small fragments of the order of magnitude of tens of milliseconds were extracted from familiar recognisable materials, such as human voice, whispers, images of sparkles from welding, a woman's face and eye close-up, as well as video footage related to train travel.

V.5 Visual silence

Hyde (2011, p.174) considers visual silence, the absence of changes in chroma on statistically significant parts of the frame, for statistically significant chunks of a work, as a central syntactical element to disentrall visual materials from established mediated experiences, and utilise them in a *concrète* fashion. My earlier, more abstract, Visual Music works (Garro 2004 and 2010) feature silence extensively as a device to frame moving and morphing shapes within a largely black background. The aim is to enhance their character as *objet audiovisuelle* (Garro 2005, p.18), i.e. entities possessing distinctive gestural behaviours, trusted with expressive roles within the compositional montage. In *Dammtor* the 'spatial' silence, related to each film-frame as a two-dimensional matrix of pixels, is employed to a lesser degree in the wide vignette-feathering of several sequences, especially the ones featuring granularized video (see example 2, 0:24-0:40). In these passages, the black oval-shaped contour surrounding the flickering images often occupies approximately 40% of the frame area. The long welder sequence (example 3, 0:32-4:25) often features vivid images of incandescent metal, immersed in surrounding darkness. Thus, silence represents a simple, yet efficient, method to weaken the inherent visual narrativity of mimetic materials, while strengthening their gestural role within the montage. Visual silence is also taken to its uttermost consequences in *Dammtor*, where entire sections of the work feature blank video (example 3, 0:05-1:05), while sounds alone, especially voices and whispers, are left to carry the entire weight of the work, in true acousmatic fashion. The viewer is forced to re-evaluate the centrality of the soundtrack in the equilibrium of the piece; in a reversal of Chion's postulate (1994, p.68), it is the moving image that 'seeks its place', within a discourse that is very strongly sonically driven.

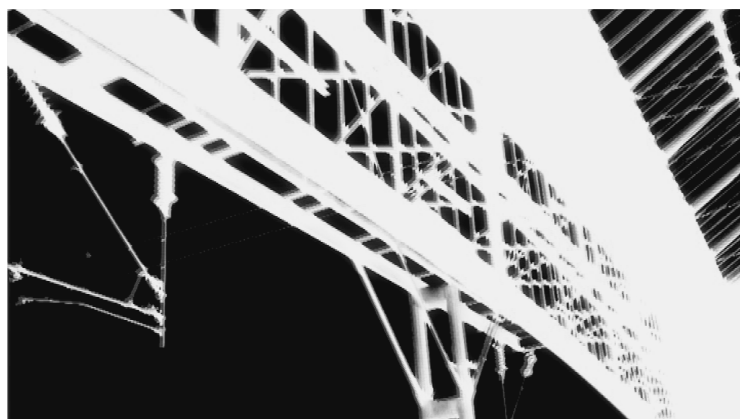
VI. MIMETIC DISCOURSE AND AUDIO VISUAL TECHNIQUES IN *DAMMTOR*⁸

Fig.9 : still frame from *Dammtor* (2013), by Diego Garro

Dammtor (Garro, 2013) is a Visual Music work produced in the Music Technology Laboratories at Keele University (UK). It is based on the poem of the same title by James Sheard (2010, p.5) and utilises sounds and video materials linked to the words, images, metaphors and overall spirit of the text. Recordings of various people reading and whispering passages from the poem feature predominantly in the montage. The author's voice is heard during the first section of the piece reading the entire poem. Three extracts from the work will be discussed next, to provide examples of mimetic discourse (Emmerson 1986, p.19) in Visual Music and also further general commentaries on compositional processes in this particular medium, in addition to what has already been presented in the previous section of this article.

In the composition of *Dammtor*, I considered, and indeed experimented with, techniques and sonic/visual solutions aimed at freeing mimetic materials from their real-life associations. However, possibly due to the specific dramaturgical references imposed by James Sheard's poem, I found myself embracing verisimilitude, rather than striving to move away from it. I also found that an unmitigated departure from narrativity is not only very difficult, but also not entirely desirable. Instead, I developed a language based on the arrangement of mimetic materials which considers their spectro-morphological phenomenology, their mimetic references and, obscurely, also their narrative potential. The framework I operated within allowed me no fruitful use of visual suspension (Hyde 2011, pp.173-174), the visual equivalent of reduced listening. On the contrary, the viewer is left to recognise sounds and images together with their causal relation to reality and the stories therein; yet the reality they mimic is

⁸ The reader is encouraged to download the audio-visual work from the Internet links provided, for study and research purposes, as well as resource to accompany this paper.

neither phonographical nor photographic because it is re-contextualised, fragmented and re-composed in the fashion of language in the verses of a poem.

VI. 1 *Dammtor* – example 1

The very first section of the work (example 01, 0:07-0:37) features phrases of pointillistic audio and video fragments, which are arranged in short sequences, each with its own cadential contour. Therefore, the opening of the film already provides the viewer with clear idiomatic reference: this is a work in which the design and the organisation of the materials stands at the core of the discourse; in particular, listeners who are familiar with the Electroacoustic repertoire will immediately recognise an extension into the audio-visual domain of archetypical Sonic Arts phraseology. The fragmented images can be regarded as the visual extension of the ‘grain’ concept, common in the Electroacoustic idiom, as discussed in section V.4.

Sounds and images are heavily edited, while the causal misalignment between the mimetic audio (train approaching a junction) and the visual anecdote (woman walking in slow motion) immediately challenges cinematic narrativity, in favour of a looser association between the materials. Thence, the attention of the viewer is, at least partially, removed from the images of reality implied by the mimetic material, and progressively focuses on their morphological treatment.

VI.2 *Dammtor* – example 2

A quasi-real virtual acoustic space (Fischman 2008, p.115) is constructed at the beginning of this section, using only sounds (blank video track) of ‘dry’ voices reading the poem, in combination with processed/reverberated voices echoing the narrator’s. The word “midnight” is synchronised with a cut from black to the night-time image of a train station roof. Spatial acoustic design and intellectual montage (Eisenstein 1949, pp. 82-83) illustrate the literary images evoked in the poem, compositionally, rather than cinematographically.

Two parallel morphing processes are integrated in 0:35-1:00; the images of rail-track masts and cables emerge from abstract, sinuous shapes, while the stream of rhythmical train clack unfolds from a sequence of percussive syllable fragments, extracted by means of sound granularization from the whispered recordings of the poem. The resolution of these processes represents one of the very few occasions whereby the anecdotes, evoked by both audio and video mimetic material, intersect almost to a diegetic point: the train clack is a nearly credible on-screen

sound for the images of rail-track masts as seen from a travelling train, aside from the obvious discrepancy in the settings of the acoustic space. This feeble cinematographic congruence, however, is almost immediately dispelled by the quick, radical transformation of both sounds and images. In the last few seconds of this sequence, both are quickly plunged back into audio-visual spectro-morphological alchemies, when the process of accumulation (0:35-1:08) finds its cadential resolution into a frantic counterpoint of audio and visual fragments.

VI.3 *Dammator* – example 3

The first minute of this sequence features only sounds, arranged in a conflict of acoustic spaces, as in example 2, and mimetic references. The “hissing shut” vocal gesture is overlapped with the sound of a door slamming closed, and then slid open immediately afterwards. This sonic metaphor triggers an entire anecdotal scene (again, sound only; blank video track) evoking the ambience of an elevator shaft, with glimpses of distant footsteps climbing a staircase as the elevator stops and the door slides open. This scene resolves into a further sliding and shutting of a large door, which is synched with a straight audio-video cut into the welder scene.

The welder scene itself challenges established diegetic relationships between sounds and images: mimetic material is continuously shifted out of synchrony and back in time with their real-life causality. We see the welder hands, but hear an abstract inharmonic continuant; we then see the sparkles of the welding torch, and indeed hear the hissing sound of its acetylene gas jet, but the latter quickly morphs into a gaseous texture and, in turn, into a breathy chordal sound. By the time the welder images are visible in full frame, the soundtrack has evolved into a musical landscape of intertwined textures.

Gestural montage is used several times in this example, both to cut between different sonic landscapes (0:17) and to match video and audio transitional or climatic events (1:07, 1:31, 2:33, 4:18).

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Mimetic Visual Music poses significant idiomatic challenges and fascinating creative opportunities for the audio-visual composers, both those with a background in the sonic arts and those coming from visual arts and experimental cinema. The practices of Visual Music

production often intersect those of Electroacoustic Music composition, while analysis of mimetic Visual Music tends to crosscut film theory. An audio-visual language disenthralled from the gravitational pull of narrativity, inevitably flirts with poetry and with its shifts from the *tale*, to more obscure meta-narratives. Reduced listening and visual suspension are important strategies in coding and decoding the message in much of Visual Music, but not necessarily for the subset of its repertoire that has been covered in this article.

Mimetic Visual Music can be traced back as a further development of experimental cinema strands and can find its aesthetic and historical locus in the advancement of those experiences, developing its language, integrating strategies that are commonplace in Electroacoustic culture, and putting *sound* at the very core of its aesthetic and technical credo.

BIBLIOGRAFY and REFERENCES

Buena Vista Social Club, 1999. [Video] Directed by Wim Wenders. Axiom Films International Ltd.

Chion, M. 1990. *Audio-Vision*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cryptices , 2011. [Video] Directed by Dave Barnett. Publication: Noviembre 2013.

Dammtor – example 1, 2013. [Video] Directed by Diego Garro.

<https://vimeo.com/77120597> (use the password: pensaste)

Dammtor – example 2, 2013. [Video] Directed by Diego Garro.

<https://vimeo.com/77119797> (use the password: pensaste)

Dammtor – example 3, 2013. [Video] Directed by Diego Garro.

<https://vimeo.com/77203158> (use the password: pensaste)

Eisenstein, S. 1949. *Film Form – Essays in Film Hystory*. Translated from Russian by J. Leyda. London: Dobson.

Emmerson, S. 1986. The relation of language to materials. In: S. Emmerson, ed. 1986. *The Language of Electroacoustic Music*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp.17–39.

Field, A. 2000. Simulation and Reality: The New Sonic Objects. In S. Emmerson, ed. 2000. *Music, Electronic Media and Culture*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp.36-55.

Fischman, R., 2008. Mimetic Space – Unravelled. *Organised Sound* 13(2). Cambridge University Press, pp.111–122.

Garro, D., 2005. A Glow on Pythagora's Curtain: A Composer's Perspective on Electroacoustic Music with Video. In: *Proceedings of the Electroacoustic Music Studies Network Conference 2005 (EMS05): Sound in Multimedia Contexts*. Montreal, 19 Octobre 2005. Available on <http://www.ems-network.org/spip.php?article169> [Last accessed on: 20/10/2014].

Garro, D., 2012. From Sonic Art to Visual Music: Divergences, convergences, intersections. *Organised Sound* 17(2). Cambridge University Press, pp.103-113.

Historia de la Pólvora – Historia del Instante, 2011. [Video] Directed by Nicolás Testoni, music by Raul Minsburg, R. Available on: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3qj9-zB-5M> [Last accessed on: 20/10/2014].

Hyde, J., 2012. *Musique Concrète* Thinking in Visual Music Practice: Audiovisual silence and noise, reduced listening and visual suspension. *Organised Sound* 17(2). Cambridge University Press, pp.170-178.

In Absentia, 2000. [Video] Directed by Stephen Quay y Timothy Quay. Music by Karlheinz Stockhausen. New York: Zeitgeist Films. Available on <http://vimeo.com/43784860>. [Last accessed on: 20/10/2014].

Minsburg, R. 2011. Historia de la Pólvara - La Memoria del Tiempo. Electroacoustic soundtrack. Available on: <https://soundcloud.com/raulminsburg/historia-de-la-p-lvara> [Last accessed on: 20/10/2014].

One, 2010. [Video] Directed by Steve Bird. In: Bird, S., 2010. Composing with images; a portfolio of audiovisual works exploring the compositional potential of associative sonic, visual and intellectual imagery. PhD dissertation. UK: Keele University. Available on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4jft4VKG-g> [Last accessed on: 29/10/2013].

Patah, 2010. [Video] Directed by Diego Garro. Available on <http://www.vimeo.com/14112798>. [Last accessed on: 20/10/2014].

Pointes Précaires, 2004. [Video] Directed by Diego Garro. Available on <http://vimeo.com/10863843> [Last accessed on: 29/10/2013].

Schumacher Ratti, F. Las Partículas Elementales, acousmatic composition for multi-channel audio. In: Various artists, Métamorphoses 2012 - 7th Biennial Acousmatic Composition Competition. Musiques & Recherches. Mix stéréophonique Available on: <https://soundcloud.com/federicoschumacherratti/particulas-elementales> [Last accessed on: 29/10/2013].

Sheard, J. 2010. *Dammtor*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Smalley, D., 1997. Spectromorphology: explaining sound shapes. *Organised Sound* 2(2). Cambridge University Press, pp.107–20.

Spiralling, 2009. [Video] Directed by Pierre Paré-Blais. Available on <http://vimeo.com/10932664> [Last accessed on: 20/10/2014].

¿Te Acuerdas Hijo?, 2006. [Video] Directed by Rajmil Fischman. Available on <http://vimeo.com/55093631> [Last accessed on: 20/10/2014].

Time & Tide, 2010. [Video] Directed by Steve Bird. In: Bird, S., 2010. Composing with images; a portfolio of audiovisual works exploring the compositional potential of associative sonic, visual and intellectual imagery. PhD dissertation. UK: Keele University. Available on <http://vimeo.com/1237979>. [Last accessed on: 20/10/2014].

Ut Infinitio Quod Ultra, 2013. [Video] Directed by Andy Willy. In Willy, A., 2013. A portfolio of audiovisual compositions consisting of *Sketches*, *Mutations*, *Emergence*, *Evolution*, *Insomnia*, *Xpressions*, and *Ut Infinitio Quod Ultra*. PhD Dissertation. UK: Keele University. Available on <http://vimeo.com/59062302> [Last accessed on: 20/10/2014].

Wright, S. 2010. *Digital Compositing for Film and Video*. 3^a ed. Waltham: Focal Press.