Composer's Note

ON *EFFACEMENT* BY MATTHEW GREENBAUM AND *SECOND THOUGHTS* BY DENNIS MILLER

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ABSTRACT

EFFACEMENT (2014), composed by Matthew Greenbaum, is scored for piano, video and electronic sound. It is one of a series of works combining live instrument and video animation and the third in a projected series. It can also be shown as an independent video, with the pianist Blair McMillen.

Second Thoughts was composed by Dennis Miller in 2000 and is intended for performance on DVD.

1. MY APPROACH TO VISUAL MUSIC

Visual Music has emerged as its own discipline in the last 20 years, having originated in early 20th century music and visual arts, particularly film. Significant figures include Marcel Duchamp, John Cage, the Italian Futurist Luigi Russolo, Man Ray, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky and Edgard Varese. Currently, the term "visual music" applies to works—usually digital—that closely combine abstract musical and visual ideas, such as the piece by Dennis Miller on tonight's program. But it also describes purely visual works that aspire to the condition of music through abstraction and formalization of structure and pattern. Recent innovations include sound and sculptures and environmental installations.

Visual music in the current sense of the term addresses a major problem of pure electronic music: the absence of a non-musical dimension. This problem has been addressed by the introduction of live performers into the electronic sound world, first by Bruno Maderna and later in Mario Davidovsky's Synchronisms. I have tried to extend this by introducing a visual dimension. My works tend to be marked by nostalgic surrealism and comedy (EFFACEMENT excepted), and depend on photo-collage as much as on computer animation. They lack high technological polish, and favor discarded and historical images as opposed to purely computer-generated imagery. As opposed to Davidovsky's Synchronisms, all of which have precise synchronization between live and pre-recorded sound, my works for video and instruments tend more and more to create sound environments that only occasionally coincide precisely with the acoustical instrument part.

2. *EFFACEMENT*

The piano part is written in conventional notation; and, other than the opening, requires no specific points of coordination with the video. However, if the pianist keeps the specified tempo for the first two minutes coordination with the video will be exact, or within an acceptable range of fluctuation. Toward the middle of the piece the piano is drowned out by the computer-generated sound; thus, the "effacement" of the title.

The video portion is based on Thomas Alva Edison's film, "Panorama water front and Brooklyn Bridge from East River" of 1903; courtesy of the Library of Congress. The film is 'defaced' through discoloration and distortion, and animation sequences are buried within the film's distorted texture.

The computer-generated sound is made entirely from the piano part, transformed through granular synthesis and other processes.

3. *SECOND THOUGHTS*: NOTES BY DENNIS MILLER

The work is in three sections, the first two of which dominate the form. The opening section explores the inside of a virtual object and depicts many of the surfaces and textures found therein. The second section moves into 3D space and presents different perspectives of the initial object, as well as adding a number of new elements that derive their form from the elements in the opening. The short, third section is a recap of the first and adds several minor variations to it. The music contributes an emotive element as well as an added layer of continuity to the piece.

Like previous works by this author, all visual elements were scripted using the POVray scene description language; no special effects or plug-ins were used. The musical material derives from both synthetic and acoustic sound sources.

Since the publication of Isaac Newton's Optiks in 1704 to the present day, artists, composers and authors have looked for imaginative links between music and imagery. Visual Music, which is defined as film, video and animation that is informed by processes drawn from music composition, is one such link and has been the focus of explorations by artists and composers for much of the past 100 years. Unlike traditional film, in which music is used to enhance or support a mood or feeling in the imagery, visual music emphasizes abstract imagery for which the mood or affect is guided by the music.

My work is based on the premise that music can serve as an organizing force for fine art, "experimental" animation. As both media are time based, principles that can be used to create formal continuity in a musical work

can be equally useful in creating unity in a sequence of abstract images. Techniques such as modulation, transposition, augmentation, diminution and other common compositional processes can be creatively employed in the visual domain, and the application of such techniques to guide the visual imagery is completely open to interpretation by the artist.

Modulation, for example, might mean a shift from one color palette to another, while transposition could be applied in a literal way by simply shifting the visual elements higher or lower on the screen or in a more imaginative and subtle approach. Many specific formal schemes can easily be brought to the visual realm – it's easy to consider a structure such as a canon or a fugue or a theme and variations as possible outlines for a mixed-media work. (These and other forms were used by Canadian animator Norman McLaren in a number of his works.) Carrying the idea further, a set of visual elements could even be serialized if deemed appropriate, a process used by American artist David Ehrlich in some of his early animations.

Rather than simply using the same technique in the music and the imagery simultaneously, however, I find it far more stimulating to vary the principles at work in an audiovisual composition so that a fundamental counterpoint is established between the two media. Creating a synchrony between the music and imagery is important to establish a connection in the mind of the viewer, but it is equally important to vary the relationship between the two. Oscar Fischinger, the premier Visual Music artist of the 20th century, spoke of music and image (to paraphrase) as like a "road alongside a river – at times they follow the same path and at times they must veer off and go their separate ways." This analogy is the driving force in my work.

4. AUTHOR'S PROFILE

Matthew Greenbaum

MATTHEW GREENBAUM was born in New York City in 1950. He studied composition with Stefan Wolpe and Mario Davidovsky and holds a Ph.D. from the CUNY Graduate Center.

Greenbaum's awards, fellowships and commissions include the Serge Koussevitzky Music Fund/Library of Congress, the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Meet the Composer, the Fromm Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund and the New York Foundation for the Arts and the Penn Council on the Arts.

Performances of his works include the Darmstadt Summer Festival, the Leningrad Spring Festival, the Jakart Festival (Indonesia), Hallische Musiktage, Ensemble SurPlus (Freiburg), Nuova Consonanza (Rome), Ensemble 21 (Odense), the Da Capo Chamber Players, Cygnus, Parnassus, Fred Sherry, Marc-Andr é Hamelin, David Holzman, Stephanie Griffin, the Momenta Quartet, Network for New Music, the New York New Music Ensemble, the Group for Contemporary Music, Orchestra 2001, Christopher Taylor and the Riverside Symphony, and the Houston Symphony.

His works are published by Tunbridge Music and the American Composers Alliance. Recordings are available from Antes and CRI. An all-Greenbaum recording is available on the Centaur label, and another, featuring NAMELESS for three sopranos and two chamber ensembles, will be released in Fall 2014 on Furious Artisans.

Dr. Greenbaum is a professor of composition at Temple University.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_Greenbaum

Dennis Miller

Dennis Miller received his Doctorate in Music Composition from Columbia University and is currently on the Music faculty of Northeastern University in Boston where he heads the Music Technology program and serves on the Multimedia Studies Steering Committee.

His mixed media works have been presented at numerous venues throughout the world, most recently the DeCordova Museum, the New York Digital Salon Traveling Exhibit, the 2005 Art in Motion screenings, Images du Nouveau Monde, CynetArts, Sonic Circuits, the Cuban International Festival of Music, and the 2004 New England Film and Video Festival. His work was also presented at the gala opening of the new Disney Hall in Los Angeles (2003) and at the SIGGRAPH 2001 in the Emerging Technologies gallery. Recent exhibits of his 3D still images include the Boston Computer Museum and the Biannual Conference on Art and Technology, as well as publication in Sonic Graphics: Seeing Sound (Rizzoli Books) and Art of the Digital Age (Thames and Hudson).

Miller's music and artworks are available at:
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