

Lecture

## THE VISUAL MUSIC OF MATTHEW GREENBAUM

MATTHEW GREENBAUM

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### ABSTRACT

私がアニメーション・ビデオに取り組み始めたのは、伝統的なオペラの限界を超え、小さな空間の中でアニメーションの登場人物たちに舞台の空間を提供するためである。メゾソプラノとアニメーション・ビデオのための *ROPE AND CHASM* はこうしたメディアを使った私の最初の作品であり、ニーチェの『ツァラトゥストラはこう語った』の一部に基づく。さらに、このメディアを用いて、テナーサクソンのための *BITS AND PIECES* など作曲し、同時に、楽器などを伴わないビジュアルのみのビジュアル音楽を制作した。ここで視覚的要素と音楽的動きの対位法は決定的に重要である。私にとって、共感覚的な効果の出現は非常に印象深く、音と視覚的要素それぞれのアタックのパターンは、しばしば目と耳によって統合された単一の対位法的テクスチャーとして解釈される。これらの作品で用いられているビジュアルの素材は、形態変化のアニメーションに加えて、私が住んでいるマンハッタン北のヨークビルの写真を大幅に処理したものがほとんどである。音の素材は、コンピュータによって合成された音、加工した環境音、私自身の作品を処理した音、そして加工した *MIDI* 楽器の音である。

I began working with video animation to get beyond the limitations of conventional opera, so that I could create animated characters a stage environment in a small space. My first piece in this medium was *ROPE AND CHASM*, a setting of parts of Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* for mezzo-soprano and video animation. I've gone on to compose other works in this medium, including *BITS AND PIECES* for tenor saxophone, as well as a number of works that are purely visual music. Counterpoint between visual and musical activity plays a crucial role; it struck me that there is an effect of synesthesia where attack patterns in each of the media are often interpreted by the eye and ear as a single contrapuntal texture. The visual materials in these pieces are almost always very reworked photographs of Yorkville in northern Manhattan, where I live, together with shape animation and sound materials

purely computer-generated sound, manipulated environmental sound, reworkings of my own instrumental pieces and an occasional refashioned *MIDI* instrument.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

I was born in 1950 in New York, where I still live. I studied with Stefan Wolpe, a great composer whose music should be better known. He was born in Berlin in 1902, was a refugee from Hitler, and had taken part in the Berlin Dada, the Anti-fascist left, and finally settled in New York, where he became an important figure in the new music community. I also studied with Mario Davidovsky, whose *Synchronisms*—works for acoustical instruments and pre-recorded electronic sound—were widely influential.

I began working with video animation to get beyond the limitations of conventional opera, so that I could create a stage environment and animated characters in a small space. My first piece in this medium was *ROPE AND CHASM*, a setting of parts of Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* for mezzo-soprano and video animation. Later works include *BITS AND PIECES* for tenor saxophone, and other works for solo instrument and video. I've also created a number of pieces of purely visual music.

Counterpoint between visual and musical activity plays a crucial role in all of these works. I was struck by the fact that there is an effect of synesthesia where attack patterns in each of the media are interpreted by the eye and ear as a single contrapuntal texture. In particular, dense textures in each medium seem to form a general contrapuntal web. My goal has been to create a unified perceptual field where one medium cannot be separated from the other.

Visual materials in these pieces are reworked photos, shape animation, and text animation. Sound materials include computer-generated music, manipulated environmental sound, reworkings of my own instrumental pieces and an occasional refashioned *MIDI* instrument.

## 2. A FEW GENERAL THOUGHTS ON THE CURRENT STATE OF NON-COMMERCIAL ART IN THE US

The notion of “contemporary music” has changed dramatically since my studies with these formidable composers and idealists, who believed that in the transcendent capacity of art, its rootedness in history, and the necessity of separating it from the world of commerce. That is why so many of us pursued university careers; at that time the university was regarded as a bastion of humanism and disinterested study. Unfortunately, many American universities have become indifferent or hostile to serious art, partially through the abuse of postmodern skepticism, and—more dangerously—because of an increasingly dominant corporate bureaucratic model.

On a less pessimistic note, the internet and social media—which have undermined totalitarian states and made knowledge universally and immediately accessible—have allowed composers, theorists and performers to form “affinity groups” that transcend national boundaries, and such impediments to distribution and communication as publishers, record companies and other ossified commercial entities. How to keep authentic culture alive and flourishing seems to be a universal and immediate problem.

### 3. SELECTED WORKS

#### 3.1. BITS AND PIECES

BITS AND PIECES (2012) for tenor sax and video) can be performed in four ways: for sax and video; for sax and electronic sound; for video alone; or for electronic sound alone. The electronic sound portion uses non-Western instrument samples (digeridoo, murchang, saron barong, etc.)

Visual elements include reworked stills of a fossil, a human eye, a mouth, teeth, and a few animated objects designed to be rather repulsive and intrusive, which serve to break through the impersonal and inorganic affect of computer animation and remind the viewer/listener of their possession of a human body.

The video material of AUTOMAT (2012) (ACA) is based on a series of photos of the East River Promenade and a former industrial area in Queens. Their hectic activation as video is supported by a similar process of reinterpretation of a few passages from my instrumental works. I was surprised to find that sections of

the work look like Abex paintings in motion, which adds another note of nostalgia, as does the fragmentary “DELICATESSEN” sign (and its subset “ESSE.” )

#### 3.2. TRANSCENDENTAL ASSEMBLY

TRANSCENDENTAL ASSEMBLY for solo electronic sound (2012) is an electronic reinterpretation of a previous work, WILD ROSE, LILY, DRY VANILLA for mezzo and chamber ensemble, on an incomplete poem of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great American Transcendentalist philosopher. The electronic version is a kind of multiplication of forces of the original chamber piece, and is meant to have the effect of crowds of voices in celebration. The original vocal line was mined for phonemes and pitch inflections, which were manipulated through time-stretching, transposition, and resonance to create a new speech vocabulary for the electronic version.

#### 3.3. WILD ROSE, LILY, DRY VANILLA

WILD ROSE, LILY, DRY VANILLA is a setting for mezzo and chamber ensemble of an incpomplet poem of Emerson, composed for the Cygnus Ensemble’s Emerson Bicentennial. It is scored for flute, oboe, violin, cello, banjo and guitar. The text is reminiscent of monologues in Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream; much of it sounds like a magical incantation, especially the litany of herbs and other plants at the conclusion

#### 3.4. HEADSHOT

HEADSHOT is based on a casual fifteen-second long video of the composer in a New York Starbucks. The composer’s head is targeted for ever-more extreme variations until the contents of the head overwhelm its form. The musical score is derived from the environmental sound of the video fragment and follows a parallel process of variation. There is no narrative in the conventional sense; the visual content is completely based on principles of musical development. However, there are a few dominant themes; aging; self-concealment and destruction; the unbridgeable chasm between one’s physical appearance and interior life. A fragment of Heraclitus appears in the middle of the work: “What we see when we are awake is death; what we see when we are asleep is sleep.” This is countered by the repeated word “Chai,” [*life*] in Hebrew.

#### 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? 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 Il-Greenbaum recording is available on the Centaur label. Greenbaum is also a video animation artist. Works in this medium include ROPE AND CHASM for mezzo and video animation, an hour-long setting of excerpts from Nietzsche's Also Sprach Zarathustra; AUTOMAT for video animation/electronic music, and BITS AND PIECES, for tenor sax and video animation.

Dr. Greenbaum is a professor of composition at Temple University.

### WILD ROSE, LILY, DRY VANILLA

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Where the fungus broad and red lifts its head  
Like poisoned loaf of elfin bread  
Where the aster grew with the social goldenrod  
In a chapel which the dew  
Made beautiful for God  
The maple street

In the houseless less wood  
O what would nature say  
She spared no speech today  
The fungus and the bullrush spoke  
Answered the pine tree and the oak  
The wizard South blew down the glen and  
Filled the straits and filled the wide,  
Each maple leaf turned up its silver side.  
All things shine in his damp ray  
And all we see are pictures high.  
Many a high hillside  
Which oaks of pride  
Climb to their tops  
And boys run out upon their leafy ropes.  
In the houseless wood  
Voices loud after  
Ev'ry shrub and grapeleaf rang with fairy laughter.  
I have heard them fall  
Like the strain of all King Oberon's minstrelsy  
Would hear the everlasting.  
And know the only strong you must worship fasting.

You must listen long  
Words of the air  
Which birds of the air  
Carry a loft below around  
To the isles of the deep  
To the snow capped steep  
To the thundercloud  
To the loud bazaar  
To the harem of Caliph and Kremlin of the Czar!  
Is the verse original?