

The State of the Art

**On Sound and Image as a Single Entity\***

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By Barry Spinello

The brain's mechanical apparatuses for seeing and hearing are apparently separate and fixed in place. But there is a huge interconnectivity possible between these two areas and it is this interconnectivity that should be of interest to artists making audiovisual work. Yet as we know, the breadth of possible interaction between sound and image has not lived up to its potential. Exploring this interconnectivity through audio-visual composition has fallen into a dependence upon very particular conventions of sound/image synchronization. The potential for this problem to arise was identified in the earliest days of the sound film, and the alternatives have been used only sparingly in the decades that followed. I suggest that positioning the making of sound and the making of image as aspects of the same process yields valuable insight into compositional practices for the creation of audio-visual art which, if more widely adopted, could result in a broader range of audiovisual exploration than exists today. With this in mind, I would like to address the following question: how might sound and image be conceived of, and composed, as a single entity?

Imagine the following scenario: the art object, be it a painting or composed piece of music, is not "the thing". The object is but a residue of "the

thing". The real "thing" is the interneural connectivity within the artist that caused the object to come into existence. So, when a spectator sees the object that the artist made, there is the possibility that a roughly equivalent set of interneural connections is built within the spectator that corresponds to the set of interneural connections in the painter during the act of creation. Thus the potential exists for the mind of the artist to become one with the mind of the perceiver through the art object itself. This suggestion brutally simplifies the process of experiencing a work of art. Yet the communication of two minds through the experience of art is fundamental to art's purpose. We get at each other's minds through the process of externalization that yields concrete artifacts within the world.

### **But how do these concrete artifacts get made?**

Let's imagine another scenario: the composer creates a piece of music through the motor act of playing a note, then playing another note, followed by a third note, etc. Similarly, a painting is composed by a similar process; one line follows another and so on. In either of these scenarios, a fraction of a second may occur between the discreet notes or markings being used as compositional elements. In that fraction of a second a myriad of interneural connections can come into play referencing the artist's history, training, feeling, personality, what was had for breakfast, etc. But one thing is clear - if a second note is to follow the first, the competing interneural activities must resolve into a single dominate

strain, which releases as the motor act of the next note.

We may be tempted to believe that if the artist is a musician, he or she is working primarily within the gestalt of hearing. That is to say, by training, custom and practice, the interneural connections within the artist circle primarily around the act of hearing. And we may hold similar beliefs regarding the painter's emphasis on the act of seeing. Such beliefs are founded upon the notion that we have separate worlds within us that are defined by our external sensory receptors, and that these worlds are fundamentally isolated along the lines of seeing, hearing, etc. So, within us we have these two seemingly separate worlds: the world of seeing, the world of hearing; the functionality of the eye, and that of the ear.

### **One World out of Many**

Music and paintings that are created separately can be played simultaneously, and when that happens they reinforce each other. Our powerful drive to seek associations between sound and image forces a certain measure of audiovisual synchronization when these elements are presented together. Countless movies have been strengthened in emotional content simply by playing a Bach track alongside the pictures. Inversely, music videos start with a coherent piece of music, written as music, to which pictures are then added. Fresh results can happen even when picture and sound are randomly combined. But the

synchronization of two different forms, created separately and with different tools, leaves painting within the gestalt of seeing, and music within the gestalt of hearing. This separation at the point of creation begs the point of a fundamental integration.

Perhaps what is needed to forge such an integration is a compositional practice based on the idea that our minds do NOT separate sensory information according to the five senses. Perhaps the potential integration between hearing and seeing is something inherent to the way we make sense of the world rather than something that needs to be forced. If we approach artistic disciplines in the same way, recognizing inherent similarities rather than emphasizing differences, we may move towards an art practice that understands the "audiovisual" as a single entity.

### **Towards a conclusion:**

Music and painting can't be treated as the same thing if the auditory and visual portions are created on different instruments. Similarly, the melding of sound and picture must come at the level of conception within the creator, not as an afterthought.

So here are some suggestions about how to avoid the trappings of sensory separation in audiovisual art:

1. Use a single program (like After Effects) in which both sound and picture can be manipulated or arranged using the same method (moving pixels) in the same time-line.

2. Start with the smallest jot of sound and the simplest impulse of picture. Move and arrange the pixels of sound and the pixels of picture in and around each other, frame by frame, according to your own personal aesthetic - a new audiovisual aesthetic that you must build from the ground-up within yourself.

3. Strive to proceed with sound and picture together, not relying even for a small passage on your wonderful capacity to make music, or your long history of drawing lines into picture. Rather, jump the track of the visual gestalt and steer off the custom of the audible gestalt to form a new interneural pathway. A pathway that integrates seeing and hearing at the level of creation... A pathway that, once achieved, can be absorbed by viewers so that each successive step towards the new audio-visual art form is solid, differentiated and additive.

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\* This essay is an abbreviated adaptation of an earlier version, available in full here: <http://www.auzgnosis.com/pgs/intoactn.htm>.

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**Bio:**

From 1967-72 Spinello made films without camera or tape recorder by handpainting sound and picture onto clear 16mm leader (see *Sonata for Pen, Brush and Ruler; Soundtrack; Six Loop Paintings*). The idea was to integrate both sound and picture in a single creative process, using the same tool.

Since 1972, Spinello has made documentary films, including the Academy Award nominated *A Day in the Life of Bonnie Consolo*.

Recently Spinello returned to the ideas of filmpainting, but now working completely on computers. *Towards an Art Form of the 21st Century* will be completed soon.