

A MEETING THAT CREATED
THE MOST WIDESPREAD
NEW HYBRID ART:
MUSIKON

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Abstract: Music and image first met in Antiquity and become an embryo of a hybrid, a new form of life that emerged, evolved, developed and matured with the advent of the cinema, afterwards with the advent of videoclips and knew its becoming in two experimental non narrative movie trilogies. From opera theatre to Indian musical film, from progressive rock to the greatest composers of the beginning of twentieth century, from the profound evolution of hybrid expression to the unification through the light wave vibration, the spiritual journey in a world that aspires towards liberation proposes the unification of matter and spirit in a new and definitive hybrid.

Keywords: music, image, cinema, new hybrid art form, Musikon, Godfrey Reggio, Ron Fricke.

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Hypothesis

I begin by proposing a simple exercise. Let's sit down comfortably, choose an instrumental music that we know well and that, every time we listen to it, induces a deep emotional response. We place the headphones on our ears, press the *play* button and close our eyes. We let music immerse us into ourselves, offering us sounds for the left ear, the heart, or the right ear, the mind. The road towards our essence is thus guarded by complex, meaningful vibrations. When the music has a majestic growth, sonority is amplified, each instrument goes toward a climax, everything gathers, as from the base to the top of a pyramid, we will choose, simultaneously with the musical climax, to open our eyes. At that moment a new and breathtaking dimension will crown the efforts of music to generate meaning, reason and form of the emotional charge. If we have the chance of a depth of field of vision, the static view steals our eye, while the fluid music leads us to that point discovered by Giotto, where all the lines meet – the perspective. The magical encounter between μουσικός (*mousikós*) and εικόν (*eikon*), music and image, led me to name it, with the fervor with which an entomologist names a newly discovered insect, *Musikon* – the art of image accompanied by music as well as music accompanied by image. If, however, the music is vocal-instrumental, for example a pop-rock piece, a third dimension joins in, the literary one – to the extent that the text of a pop-rock piece can be called so. The example of Bob Dylan, who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016, is clearly a recognition of the song text as a literary genre, but also a notable precedent. The dual hybrid form acquires a third dimension, that of language. Thus, ποίηση (*poesis*) joins the hybrid construction that becomes *Musikonesis*, a pompous term when it comes to the music videos of the last fifty years, but – in very few situations – unexpectedly appropriate, such as, for example, the film from which the *Yellow Submarine* (directed by George Dunning, 1968) video was extracted, whose artistic creation, from strange worlds to even strange characters, belongs to Czech cartoonist Hainz Edelmann. Another example of a ternary hybrid form with an indisputable artistic quality is the film *The Wall* (directed by Alan Parker, 1982), the artistic

concept belonging to cartoonist Gerald Scarfe. I chose as the main example two cinematic trilogies for whose documentaries I decided to see the films without pause, and for an exchange of ideas I called to this viewing a few students who were not aware of these films.

Evolution of the Musikon

Music and image have encountered one another since antiquity, in the form of the theatrical performance. It was a vivid, authentic image that unfolded before the spectator's eyes, symbolizing through scenography a world that had to be accepted in the key of the convention. The moment of significant change of direction happened during the Renaissance when the genre of opera music was born. The sets proposed the same convention, but the fact that the actors sang with difficult impositions the emotional score of some characters, made their feelings easier to perceive by the viewer. Even though he didn't always understand the words, he would follow the emotional meaning and reach to where he needed to go. An interesting parallel is the Indian musical film, the major genre of Bollywood film production. Starting from the premise that there are many dialects in India, and the film distribution takes place, even today, mainly through caravans that go from village to village, it became impossible to subtitle or dub the films in different dialects – as it would have been too much of an expense in relation to the receipts. The musical film, however, usually based on a love story and a baritone villain, where everyone sings and dances specifically, was relatively easy to understand even if it was interpreted in an unknown language. Unusual, I admit, the parallel between opera and Indian musical film, but it has, after all, its purpose.

In 1874, Russian composer Modest Musorgsky, a *music-loving* military man, wrote the *Paintings at an Exhibition* suite for piano – a work adapted for the symphony orchestra by his friend Maurice Ravel. The suite involved exploring an art gallery, the visitor stopping in front of each painting that addressed him through music, and the music symbolically recomposed the image. No one had tried anything like this before – the idea of music with a program, that is, the situation in which the composer mentions what the work refers to reducing the audience's freedom to imagine meanings according to the possibilities of each one, existed for more than a century – a satisfactory example is Beethoven's Symphony No. 6, *Pastoral*. What is astounding about *Paintings at an Exhibition* is the shape of the Musikon, the elliptical imagery, where the listener is challenged to *see* what he hears. It is like the mythical opening of the third eye, also called the eye of the mind, although it is equally of the heart, depending which hemisphere of the brain is activated first. In Musorgski, emotion (from music) provokes the mind (through imagination) to

recompose an image or, more complex, moving images. Thus, the paintings of the exhibition can be, at a certain point, high-definition LCD screens.

The end of the nineteenth century proposes, as is known, the emergence of the seventh art, at first rather an attraction of fairgrounds. The Lumière brothers' first films were very short, but they soon decided to put them together to form a longer material. Totally devoid of sound, these films impressed viewers enough not to have to evolve. As any miracle lasted a small number of days, a change became imperative. Whether viewers complained that the projection machine was too noisy (Cooke, 2010, p. 1), and that's when the musical component appeared to counteract from the screen the noise coming from behind it, or they complained that the actors in the film, wearing makeup around their eyes with eyeliner, looked like spectra that moved their mouths without uttering, a situation that scared the spectators to death, or a more digestible variant, namely the manager of a projection, during some trials, heard from a neighboring space a piano playing something unusually suited to the image on the screen.

Thus, almost three decades of *Musikon* were born, during which many experiments took place, from the French avant-garde to Russian monumentalism. Few people know that enough composers on the front line of the symphony have been seduced by the idea of the image accompanied by music. Camille de Saint Saens, Darius Milhaud, Eric Satie, Sergei Prokofiev are just a few who left behind music that proposed a new age. Thus, *Musikon* became a serious matter that acquired cultural pedigree. One aspect that still fascinates is the touring of cinematic caravans around the world. It was expensive to hire a pianist, to provide him with transportation, accommodation and meals for several years; the solution that would fit into the fairly tight budget was to hire local musicians. Consequently, a single film ended up having hundreds of different soundtracks in hundreds of exotic places. In Asia, for example, there were no instrumentalists trained in European music, so they played what music they knew, on the folk instruments they mastered. Imagine a film with Buster Keaton accompanied in Iran by a Persian violin and an *Oud* drum – there was an unimaginable diversity there, at a time when the term was most likely used in flora and fauna.

The non-narrative experiment – Musikon in a modernist key

The advent of synchronized sound broke the spell of music as a vibrant spectacle for a fixed image that repeats itself identically each time. The sound added first to the editing table, then in digital editing and mixing programs, has encountered in time increasingly meaningless music, void of meaning or compositional talent, a fad and repetitive present to the point of exasperation, in constant fear of plagiarism processes, which in the last decade has become a

particularly lucrative business. For this reason, melody disappeared from both film music and pop-rock songs. In the last hundred years, numerous experiments have been made regarding the interdependence between sound and image, complex constructions, sometimes ascensional, sometimes visceral.

Everything would change, take on a new meaning and create a new paradigm in 1982 with the premiere of the non-narrative experimental film *Kōyaanisqatsi* (directed by Godfrey Reggio). The exotic term, perceived by the American public as Asian or perhaps South American, is actually a word with complex meaning in the language of Hopi Native Americans, which expresses the life that has lost its balance. Based on aerial images, on time passes, on games of lights and shadows, *Kōyaanisqatsi* plunges into the world of repetitive matter, the value of things that cannot reach any point, that of dehumanization, of despiritualization, of a free fall towards nothing. A sequence shows a number of almost identical blocks of flats, which remind us of the communist blocks specific to all the cities of Romania. The aerial image presents them until, without any preparation, they begin to explode and collapse vertically, one floor collapsing over the other. An astounding controlled demolition of a small neighborhood suggests the only possible direction of matter: entropy. We are living in a time of reversal of values, of irrational stocks of toilet paper, a trend of the population in times of pandemic that sociologists cannot explain. *I am* is replaced by *I have*, *I become* is replaced by *I accumulate*, *I evolve* has collapsed in the world of carelessness. The chase for comfort eventually covers ground, and beyond comfort there is nothing left. *Kōyaanisqatsi* proposes, beyond the disturbing and at the same time astounding images, a new identity of the Musikon. The hiring of composer Philip Glass to create a soundtrack that is in the foreground for the entire duration of the film, without narration, dialogues or sound effects, suggested a whole new challenge for him. How can entropy be better expressed musically? What about the human ant show and the always present traffic jams? Or maybe the play of lights and time on the windows of the glass and steel buildings of corporations? Starting from scratch, the first companies in the world – founded in Seventeenth Century Holland – chose the hierarchy of the Catholic Church as an organizational model – does the Coca Cola CEO know that he is, in turn, a pseudo-pope? Philip Glass is one of the most representative composers of the genre of minimalist music, i.e. the construction of a coherent and profound musical language from few and repetitive elements. The themes of *Kōyaanisqatsi* are built on a four- or five-note motif that is repeated ostinato, sometimes even obsessively, and suggests the anxiety of the impossibility of escaping from the road sign that divide this world up and down, left and right, a network of meridians and parallels invented by man to measure things until there is nothing left to measure, map, catalogue. As the

human spirit cannot be measured, scanned, weighed, it means – of course – that it does not exist. A film created with limited resources that generated waves of frustrations for filmmakers, *Koyaanisqatsi* became an unexpected critical and public success, with the album with Philip Glass's music winning a Grammy Award and setting a sales record for this genre of film music. The effect of this film on the audience was that of a cold shower – the image and music conveyed a symbolic message encrypted and at the same time accessible to anyone, on different levels of meaning. It is a testament to the value of the Musikon hybrid as a generating force for untold but proposed meanings.

The interest in this non-narrative modality generated two more films, giving birth to the *Qatsi* trilogy, which I perceive as the trilogy of the decay of matter. Six years later, *Powaqqatsi* (directed by Godfrey Reggio, 1988) was released; translated from Hopi language: life in transformation. The general line of this second film in the trilogy is the industrial present in different parts of the world that provides a loaf of bread and demands much more in return. From Brazil to Africa, from Russia to Egypt, *Powaqqatsi* escapes from the north American space and searches for both questions and answers, proposing a diversity that aspires towards the same unity. Philip Glass returns with a musical continuity that links the first two parts of the trilogy to each other, masterfully developing the thematic material in profound evolution. The film was a moderate success, both critically and publicly, although many voices argued it would have deserved better. Fourteen years later, the last part of the trilogy appears, *Naqoyqatsi* (directed by Godfrey Reggio, 2002) – translated from Hopi: life in war. The film resorts to non-linear image creation techniques, compiling archival material with new images through visual effects already available in the period. Quite different from the first two parts of the trilogy, *Naqoyqatsi* is bleak, hopeless, generating anxiety and desolation. Using computer-generated images to suggest technological evolution and its possible devastating impact, the film is another step in the trilogy, but downward – or as we would say in Romanian from bad to *worse*. Philip Glass jubilates – the new theme allows him not to repeat himself compositionally, but at every moment looking towards the first two films, in order to develop new ideas whose shorter or longer stems are born from the thematic material common to the entire trilogy. In fact, Philip Glass's music unites the *Qatsi* world more efficiently and fluidly than the films themselves do. The trilogy of matter decides to descend into hell, just as Dante chose to give birth to the architecture, administration and rules of the Inferno – no one had ever done that before, not even the Church.

For documentaries I chose to see the three films without a break, and for an exchange of ideas I called for this viewing some students who had not seen the films. The impact was strong, but the common element remained concern rather

than hope. Acknowledging humanity's inexorable decay is a difficult meaning to digest. Equally, the absence of the narrator and the edited sounds provided complete freedom in regulating the fine-tuning between the rational and the emotional. However, no one has the real freedom to understand what they want – the direction is as clear as possible. This three-breath Musikon proved so effective that later it made it difficult to fall asleep after the screening.

All this would change because a new trilogy was born – that of the spirit. Specializing in the passage of time filming, Ron Fricke signed the image of the film *Koyaanisqatsi*, and was even hired to film the eruption of the Etna volcano for the creation of the planet Mustafar from *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* (directed by George Lucas, 2005) (Wikipedia, 2021). A pioneer of IMAX-format filming, Fricke made the film *Kronos* in 1985, a tribute to the passage of time in spiritual key, filmed with a washing machine sized device. It is amazing how he managed to adapt the camera equipment – especially dolly or cranes – to be able to reliably move the IMAX camera. The result was more than spectacular and generated the idea of a feature-length film. *Baraka* (directed by Ron Fricke, 1992) proposes an immersion in spirit by visiting the sacred places that have pushed us, for generations in a row, continuously search for meanings, to long for answers, to connect with the imperceptible neural network of the Earth that gave us life. From Angkor Wat in Cambodia to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, from the Great Mosque of Aman to the ruins of Ancient Egypt, from the Grand Canyon to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre – just a few of the points where the telluric energy turns into cosmic energy, and the united prayers of the faithful form an *egregore* that potentiates them. The music for this film belongs in part to composer Michael Stearns and is complemented by a carefully selected collection of different musical genres. Dead Can Dance's song *House of Seraphim* (YouTube, 2010) leads to one of the film's most emotional moments, the garbage dump sequence that expresses the complete opposite of grand temples. The sequence of Balinese incantation of the Monkey (YouTube, 2011) is extremely powerful in the nature of the ancient ritual that seems, somehow, more current than ever. The Musikon receives a new, electronic sonority, which Michael Stearns builds between the songs chosen by the director, intertwining them with each other and capturing their essence to envelop them with his music in a fluid, pulsating, vivid manner. The cinematography of this film is breathtaking, as if you had never seen anything like it before. The way the music accompanies it potentiates the cinematography, giving it 'carne', as Renaissance artists called the marble.

Quite unexpected was the appearance, twenty years later, of the sequel, *Samsara* (directed by Ron Fricke, 2011), which concludes the trilogy begun with *Kronos*, a medium-length film, afterward continued by *Baraka*. The relationship

between matter and spirit, the re-spiritualization of contemporary man trapped in the ever-moving swarm – hurried ants who know only what they need for survival – becomes the theme of this film. *Sagazan's Anguish* sequence (YouTube, 2014), created by actor Olivier de Sagazan, is one of the most powerful moments of both trilogies. The meaning of the *mandala* sequence is deep, clear and somehow painful, and the moment of the firearms world (YouTube, 2015) somehow shows us another look at human nature. Music and image don't intertwine like a DNA spiral, they are that spiral, wherever you look at it.

Conclusions

These six films evolved, sometimes regressed, but somehow made each photogram of the film no longer rely for sound on the magnetic strip of the perforations on the right, but directly from the heart of the celluloid. As if the light of the projection apparatus, meeting the music scattered on that image, vibration with vibration, would pass through it as if through a prism and would give birth to pure sound from light and movement. If we take in the right hand some white plasticine and in the left hand some black plasticine and we begin to knead them for a long time – the unrest of those who created the image and of those who created the music – mixing them we will only be able to get a grayish hue. If, however, we choose the red of the heart and the light blue of the mind, each moment of turmoil will give birth to different shades, but in the end we will have purple in our palms. The Musikon hybrid is purple, and this extremely rare color will hardly be obtained from some sea snails that live in the waters of Malta, in the time of the Roman Empire.

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Petru Mărgineanu, a graduate of the musical composition department of the National University of Music in Bucharest, composed the music for over fifty films, series and plays. He collaborated with directors such as Mircea Daneliuc, Nicolae Mărgineanu, Sergiu Nicolaescu, Șerban Marinescu, Radu Gabrea, Marius Th. Barna, Cristian Mungiu, Ovidiu Georgescu, Călin Peter Netzer, Cătălin Apostol or Gilles Chevalier and Michael Stone. He has won numerous awards for original film music, including three UCIN Awards (for *The Famous Paparazzo*, d. Nicolae Mărgineanu, 1999; *Maria*, d. Călin Peter Netzer, 2003; *I5*, d. Sergiu Nicolaescu, 2005) and an APTR award (for *Tenderness of Locusts*, TV, d. Dan Necșulea, 2003). In theatre, he collaborated with directors such as Radu Apostol, Cătălina Buzoianu, Răzvan Mazilu or Ana Mărgineanu. He is currently a PhD student in filmology at UNATC, under the scientific guidance of Professor Ovidiu Georgescu, PhD.