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A Probe into the World of Picture and Sound.

Black and White Counterpoints

Film by Josef and Jaroslav Kořán on the work of Milan Grygar.

As our world and our life in it is increasingly becoming more highly specialized, and not only in those spheres that are directly related to modern production processes but also in spheres of social and spiritual life, there arises the need to establish the most complex attitude to the world, the need to get to know the world in its unity and in its complexity. The art of the period of technical civilisation establishes such attitudes in a variety of ways, ranging from the creation and admiration of naive and primitive art, which conceives a unified world through eyes full of amazement and a mystical love for it, to those forms that try to find new manners and new media of artistic expression for this world with its wealth of meaning and symbols. Modern art trying to give Man the possibility of a novel appreciation of reality discovers, in its development, on the one side, such elements as, in its most varied appearances, and, on the other, instead of aiming at elemental universal systems seeks syntheses of the most diverging forms and manners of expression and furthermore the merger of different media. Man longs to find contact with the world through all the senses. He turns towards new means of communication which technology has brought into being and also to the as yet undeveloped possibilities of his sensibility.

Both these trends can be detected in the work of Milan Grygar. His work attracted attention anew from the middle of the sixties on when his creations in art found new dimensions of expression in sound that came into being during the realisation of the work of art and became connected with its presentation. Grygar has never sought for that expressive presentation of a work of art for which painters used to seek metaphorical expressions in dictionaries of music. A number of painters, among them in particular V. Kandinskij and F. Kupka, who worked with pure artistic forms and spoke of the tenor in a musical sense, stood on the very margin of the problem of musical compositions. Grygar, however, saw the problem differently. He was

not content with the outer forms and symbioses of such ways of artistic expression. He penetrated deeper and deeper into the two spheres in formulating the problems of his art. Grygar himself sees his work as a consecutive development of relations to the picture and to the world. A good many stimuli in the solution of these relations derive from Cubism, which was the first to include into the homological pictorial structure of the painting concrete objects of the world that exists before the painting. Grygar, however, is not only interested in that relation between the picture and what exists before the picture, he also tries to establish contact with what comes after it. One of his experimental works carried out at his exhibition in the House of Art in Brno in 1970 consisted in the artist standing behind a stretched paper, making holes for his hands into it and then beginning to draw on the paper from the other side. This act clearly shows one of the aspects of the problem of those drawings that develop spatial relations and follow them up by means of sound. In those drawings the paper on which Grygar draws is placed between two microphones picking up the sound of the process of drawing and all the sounds of the setting in which the drawing is being made. They arise through visual and sound effects.

The pen drawing or outlining the shape is joined by objects of different types of movements, different types of sounds. A spinning top, a bell, a chicken that can be wound up, a child's grinder, a screw - those are the most frequent objects that Grygar covered in Indian ink so that their movement left a mark, a drawing. The objects give out sounds and draw. The drawing, the original of which contains certain elements of chance, is not speculated in advance, is not an artistically valueless form as it might seem to the uninitiated. The drawings arise within the framework of Grygar's works of painting and the graphic arts into which these things are incorporated as suitable means of expression previously prepared in art forms generating pure artistic structures. The structure and system of Grygar's forms of art are so organic that they can be applied and used even in other than visual systems. Grygar's drawings have become scores and not only in the figurative meaning of the word but truly so, for they are meant for implementation in music and a number of concerts have already been based

on them. The score was used by Erhard Karkoschka of the Stuttgart Ensemble for New Music. In tracing the relation of the picture to the sound it is necessary to recall the effect of Grygar's pictures, which is often caused by a tension of structures. One group of Grygar's works of art of a recent period is composed of drawings on which almost identical geometrical patterns meet. The place of encounter is almost invisible. We can discover it only by the intuitive perception of roused signals that a sensitive eye evokes. This intuitive perception of forms rouses emotions and delight in the very process of perception. A similarly placed borderline where two systems of communication touch / drawing and resounding one and the same thing / brings about tension that produces a novel effect on our sensitivity.

The relations between auditive and visual media of artistic communication have become topics of broad interest of art and aesthetics in recent years. They are being treated from various aspects. The greatest number of questions is being raised by the problem of modern audio visual means such as film and television. For they are being used - and misused - in different manner, and the result is the interference with the development of the audio-visual sensitivity of the spectator-listener. In the history of film the discovery of sound film was a turning point that meant a basic change of film aesthetics. While the silent film as a homogeneous medium soon found its own style, for many theoreticians of film this has not yet been found in regard to sound. For they are of the opinion that the film makers do not show sufficient ability to create audio-visually, since the visual aspects predominate while the sound often remains a mere accompaniment. The insensitive form, created without organic relations between picture and sound, often reach a point where the sound interferes with the picture and the picture with the sound.

It would seem that composers and artists show greater sensitivity for mixed audio-visual media than film makers. F. Weiland, who dealt with the problem of picture and sound and published a

number of articles on this problem in Holland, says in an article published in Number 4 / 1972 of the journal Electronic Music Reports that when artists and musicians did not find film producers with similar interests, they began to make their own films. One of the composers who began to make films is Mauricio Kagel. The films Antithese, Solo and Match were made on the basis of scripts - scores. This manner of a joint record for the composition of the picture and of sound goes back to the projects of Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, carried out in the Bauhaus around the year 1923, according to which music and light compositions were made. The score was a joint one for the piano and the visual projection carried out with the aid of spotlights and masks changing and forming the picture in light. In mentioning these experiments and performances in son et lumière, one cannot omit Soviet art where there exists a long tradition of audio-visual work, nowadays carried out in university laboratories and by groups of kinetic art. The tradition goes right back to Russian art. One of the interesting creative contributions in this field was made by Skrjabin's experiments, in particular his composition Prometheus, for orchestra, piano, organ, choir and a colour piano. Prometheus was performed in Moscow in the year 1910. The colour piano had twelve colours in analogy to the twelve-tone system of music. The piano controlled the screening of coloured circles. Skrjabin intensified the picture by means of expressive music.

The Czech sculptor Zdeněk Pešánek likewise dealt with the problem of the colour piano. In the years 1922 - 1928 he produced several kinetic light sculptures founded on the principle of the colour piano. One of his models was shown on 13 April 1928 at a concert by Erwin Schulhoff in Prague, which included also works by A. Skrjabin. In other works by Pešánek, too, kinetic sculptures from the twenties, there appeared also sound apart from light and kinetic elements.

In modern art we find a whole series of works trying to combine

the picture with sound. An entirely new potentiality is opened up by television through its ability to transfer the visual picture, its record and new manipulation with it into the language of figures. By means of the computer new possibilities of generating picture and sound are attained.

One of the best-known and acknowledged producers, who is seeking for the unity of audio-visual expression in the sphere of the film, is the Canadian Norman McLaren, who has been working as an author of films for more than twenty years. His aim is to find a manner of expression typical of the film medium. McLaren, who began by making films in such a manner that he "wrote" in various ways on the film strip / these manners ranged from photo-chemical processes to mechanical ways, such as, for instance, scratching the film strip /, advanced to films in which the picture and the sound is reproduced from the same visual recording. The mention of this work aimed at a unified form that can be perceived in sound and visually leads us back to considering the film by the Kuran brothers on the work of Grygar.

The film *Black and White Counterpoints* is a record of how Grygar's acoustic drawings came into being. The drawings were made by affixing the paper on the drawing board between two microphones and placing on it one after another certain resounding objects derived from among those used on Grygar's drawings, as stated in the introduction. Grygar placed one after the other on the paper and set them in motion; as soon as they have played the role the author wished them to they were put away. The microphone records the sound of what is happening on the paper as well as recording the artist bringing the objects to the area of the drawing and the background sounds of the entire undertaking, including their being taken away. Those relations between the environment and the drawing, between the visible and the audial offer themselves to treatment in a film. The film *Black and White Counterpoints* is composed in four parts called Intonazioni, Contrapunte, Passagaglia and Rugg, i.e. names derived from musical composition. The film

Intonazioni is the basic record of the origin of the drawings. The objects produce the drawings and the sound. Contrapunto shows the original record of the drawings in historical analogy to Baroque art in confrontation with engravings representing musical instruments and music played on the harmonium. Passageggio like Contrapunto is a composed part of the film using cuts in such a manner as to get the sound gradually to bring to mind the pictures of the introductory part. Fuga brings the film to its conclusion - the pictures, records of how the drawings originated, are intermingled and stratified, the sound follows this inter-mixtures while increasing in intensity. The presentation of the film had to cope with a number of things that restricted the possibilities of the makers. This fact is most marked in the conception of the second part of the film entitled Contrapunto, which presents the historical parallel mentioned. The idea, the realisation that the pictures do not illustrate the sound, that the sound does not illustrate the picture, that the visual form has its auditive expression whereas the visual expression is of

of Grygar's work, and it seems to me that there was no need to prove this through another theme.

A more elemental conception of the film might well have contributed to a clearer solution and might have made the film producer capable of making more creative use of the relations between picture and sound.

It is our firm hope that there will be more such films, films with a different treatment - / for the road remains open /, films that are necessary not only for further work in film making where such discoveries and solutions can and should be made use of, but also for the spectator who needs art to open up a new path into the world for him and open the way for his capacities to perceive the world anew. To hear the visible, to see the audible is no paradox, but appending a name to the path of contemporary art seeking to discover sources and means of the complex forms of human sensibility.