



THE NOCTURNE VIDEOPOEMS

Nicolás Grandi and Lata Mani

Image and Text

The relation of image to text in videopoems is not one of correspondence. Conceived in Deleuzian terms as including the optical and the sonic (imsigns and sonsigns), the image does not “illustrate” the text. And the text is not intended to re-signify the image, to corral and certify its meaning. The challenge in videopoetry is achieving porosity between text and image, an integrated encounter in which neither determines nor overpowers the other. This makes it possible to access a composition in its plurality, in the combination and interplay of its layers. The text for *Nocturne I & II* suggested itself after the visual assembly was nearly complete. It arose in response to it; but as an epiphany that distilled (evocatively in *Nocturne I* and as a kind of a declaration in *Nocturne II*) the thinking that had guided the image-and-sound-making process in the first place. A recursive journey: return, re-turn, place, re-place, look, listen, edit, pause, repeat, re-start. At a certain point, the form coheres enough to convey the sensory experience intended, suggesting something of an arrival.

Sound

Sound was the starting point. The idea for *Nocturne* grew out the symphony of the night - crickets, frogs, the hoot of the occasional owl, the whistle of a security guard, dry leaves being scrunched underfoot, the whooshing wind sweeping sound and dispersing it. Hungarian composer Béla Bartók’s “The Night’s Music” from *Out of Doors* with its movements – its silences, the



choir of creatures, near and distant sounds, the human element – offered a means to contemplate a possible structure. The sound was composed as layers that continually discover, echo, extend, interrupt, morph or transform one into another, into silence, into digital frequencies entwined with nature's sounds. Sound is not a supplementary force, filler for the unease provoked by the sensation of emptiness in the face of the stand-alone image as in the horror vacui notion. On the contrary, it was seen as a source of the flow of things, the site for the development of the forces driving the work, for the minute composition of what French composer Michel Chion has termed audio-vision, that simultaneous experience of the heard and the seen.

Circle of Confusion

In the dark, the challenge of seeing contrasts with the accuracy of our hearing which is able to pick up minute noises and even their direction. A telephoto lens was used to “carve” into the darkness, to unveil what is not easily seen with human eyes. The telephoto enables one to play with the focal plane. The depth of field does not change abruptly. The transition

from sharp to out of focus is gradual and the region in which this occurs is called the circle of confusion. Prior to that circle, and beyond it, the image starts to blur. Playing with the circle of confusion allows rays of light to take different shapes, enabling transformations and discoveries within the image. A tiny spot of light can become an immense orange ball. And the black lines of a palm tree branch can dissolve completely, allowing us to discover a banner in the far distance and to read what it says.

Ensemble

In looking for a way to describe our collaboration, we found that the usual ways in which we name the different aspects of a working relationship (concept, script, director, camera, editor) did not quite express the synergy we had experienced. So even as we acknowledged Nicolás' expertise as the *sine qua non* of the collaboration, we moved away from a division of labour description to thinking about the quality of the experience and the principle at work, both in our process as well as in the final form of the videopoem (its composition, sound, editing etc.)

Ensemble seemed to capture this best: from the Latin word, *insimul*; in, in and *simul*, at the same time, in and at the same time. The word first proposed itself in its musical sense of a group singing or playing together but it had other meanings that broadened its appropriateness. This included simultaneity, shared space, performing together, each part being considered only in relation to the whole, elements connected by a series of relations. Ensemble signified our intent, the fluid, reciprocal energy of our collaboration and the layered yet integral multiplicity of the work.

Nocturne I: vimeo.com/66952917

Nocturne II: vimeo.com/63462567