



SYNTAX ROOT: LOOP,
OPENING NIGHT TALK BY MAXA ZOLLER
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**Some thoughts on:
Rick Silva's 'Supercollider' and Mark Amerika's 'Codework'
in the light of the historical film avant-garde**

In Rick Silva's *Supercollider* the quick succession of different shots of an interior create an explosion of perspectives a bit like a filmic version of a cubist painting. His non-linear editing method generates a sculptural quality: it illustrates the motto of this exhibition: from temporal montage to spatial montage. But I mean 'spatial' not in the way Lev Manovich talks about it - the digital combination of things within the image - but I am talking about the three-dimensional impression the moving images are giving us, which recalls the expanded cinema work of the late 60s and early 70s. Especially the work of the London Filmmakers' Coop were concerned with expanding the flat cinematic image into the third dimension. I am especially thinking of William Raban's *Angles of Incidence* from 1973 where quick shots of an interior create a dynamic sculptural spatial impression.

In *Supercollider* the editing is based on what Rick calls 'database documentary'. Meaning that the editing is not narrative, nor completely abstract, but it is 'interactive'. It is the result of a collaboration between the computer and the artist. Rick argues that 'frames are stitched together and edited one by one without regard to linear time. ... imagine if the video camera were to record the way the human mind remembers? Something like Supercollider may result, an impression of space and time just as ordered as it is chaotic; where fleeting pattern recognition is the default.'

Supercollider represents a non-linear temporal system, a system that is not representational but maybe internal, linked to memory, scattered and personal.

Temporal structures like repetition and loop date back to the 19th century, industrialisation era. Mechanical production, like the assembly line of the Ford factory created a new notion of time. The first film artists of the early 1920s used repetition and loop in their work to reveal the effect modernisation had on society. An overwhelmed half-robotic subject is depicted in a spinning, mechanical world in films like Leger's *Ballet Mechanique* or Man Rays *Retour à la Raison*.

On the other hand, the animation film was a great opportunity to work with moving evolving abstract forms. 'Moving Paintings' were very popular in Germany in the early 1920s. Artists like Viking Eggeling and Walter Ruttmann saw an analogy between moving painting and music. *Symphony Diagonal* by Eggeling and *Film is Rhythm* by Hans Richter borrowed the grammar of music and applied them to film. Like the 'theme' of a musical score a certain sequence is repeated again and again in order to create visual music.



Then, after the WWII pop art and minimalism made repetition and seriality paramount. Again, these systems were used politically *and* formally. The post-war disillusion and frustration with history, and the growing industrialisation of society were expressed in Becket's films for example. In the late 60s and early 70s, a new kind of experimental formal film language exploded in Europe and artists like LeGrice, Kren's *TV* and Heins' *Rohfilm* used repetition and the loop as an alternative temporal structure to the linear narrative of commercial cinema attacking its dream culture and ideology. Another example is the Japanese artist Taka Imura who made loop installations. He ran the looped film strip run in the exhibition space so the audience was aware of the physical length and material of the film.

With digital media there are new possibilities of challenging and disturbing conventional representation of time. Database and algorithm have replaced the physically linear long filmstrip.

Mark Amerika's *Codework* presents the idea of the 'digital thoughtograph'. Here, two different kind of shots are constantly looped and played against each other. The voice of the women says: 'The digital thoughtograph was someone who could dream things never thought before. All I have to do is go and capture the light of the world and digitally change it with whatever apparatus they have at their disposal and then construct alternative realities.'

Compared to Rick's work the result is much more dreamy, immersive, less aggressive, more painterly than sculptural. It reminds me of the computer work of Malcolm LeGrice or 60s San Francisco light shows and indeed with *Codework* Mark attempts to transport his performance-based VJ work into the gallery. In many ways *Codework* is different from the early visual music of Germany of the 1920s but in many ways it is also similar. Its rhythmic editing and the strong physical impact of the amazing colours make it a musical piece which conceptually and visually provides a bridge to the VJ event upstairs of the gallery.

That leads me to another idea: The emergence of the so-called gallery film in the 90s, used the loop in order to differentiate the art film from the cinema film. Films were often projected onto the wall of the gallery in a loop so the visitor could go and stay as long as he wanted and leave again at any point. The spectator could experience the film like a painting, there was no beginning and no end. Unlike video, film projection was lacking the sculptural presence and the commodity value of video art. But with the loop, film adopted the same temporal structure than painting, which makes it easier to 'consume' film within a museum context. Hence, the loop can also be used as a strategy to enter the institutional and economic art system.

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