

Utilising Historic Interplay and the Avant Gard Theory to Support to Narratives for New Technologies

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ABSTRACT

Game narratives, virtual environment narratives, hypertext stories, narrative websites and many interactive learning environments have a heritage that comes from the novel, theatre and fine art. Interactive designers also commonly utilise narrative theory. This paper is interpretational, but considers how some of the great narrative and media thinkers built theories and models on how media develops. This paper goes on to consider the ways in which the historic interplay between these media is also significant. The aim is to contextualise relationships between the development of new technologies and the changes in narrative techniques, and structures, that these technologies have enabled and liberated. The challenge for educators is to open student's minds to the richness this knowledge could bring to their work.

Keywords: narrative, motion graphics, hybrid medium, Motion graphic film story, Motion graphic design, Storytelling, moving image design, virtual reality, Soviet montage theory, Avant-Garde, Game theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is the second in a series of papers that considers relationships between the development of new technologies and the changes in narrative techniques, and structures, that these technologies have enabled. Films, game narratives, virtual environment narratives, hypertext stories, narrative websites and many interactive learning environments have a heritage that comes from the novel, theatre and fine art. Analysis of work demonstrates that many areas of these industries are engaging in this contextualisation, yet the IT education system is lagging in its understanding of the relevance. Design and visual communication is also becoming more significant as a mechanism through which to guide our users and audiences. Design, visual communication and narrative theory are significant not only within these specifically narrative media but are demonstrating potential to feed best practice in areas such as HCI.

No product design exists within a vacuum and most product design involves processes that engage in relevant heritage. History demonstrates that it is by understanding how forms of media have evolved that practitioners have best utilised what is known about process to feed new practice. To better understand the significance of this heritage educators should begin to contextualise, existing narrative models, patterns of media development and the historic levels of interplay that have occurred and been utilised to support the evolution of different storytelling and communication media.

It is by understanding the heritage and interplay between media such as the novel, theatre, graphic design, fine art and film that the potential for this knowledge to support new media development can be demonstrated. The relationship between fine art and film is of particular interest because of the levels of narrative experimentation that occurred. These papers are slices of a larger work that are to feed the development of a virtual motion graphic film (Scott 2011). For this reason the vein of this paper selects material that would support the contextualisation of a motion graphic film.

The challenge is on one level for practitioners and educators to consider how these types of processes could support their narrative praxis. On another level this paper is to challenge educators on how to open student's awareness of the emerging complexity in developing sophisticated content within the new narrative forms that are being developed. Games are now long past the Nickelodeons stage. Games today are moving further from up, down, left, right, fire, toward more sophisticated narratives with theme and complex story structures.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper is interpretational, considering how theory has fed practice, and analysis of practice has built theory; and how these models of development have been utilised to describe that which has occurred.

This paper links closely to its predecessor which began by investigating how Soviet Montage Theory supported the development of film language. The central question here is; if Eisenstein and Podovkin (Eisenstein, 1977) had access to motion graphic technologies or to virtual world technologies how would their theories have been applied?

Here it is again considered how theories conceived in the past can be explored now that the tools exist to test them. Akin to the preceding paper (Scott, 2015) this research is a combination of, on one level standing on this shoulders of one giants; and on a second level trying to look backwards to see forwards. Here however, some very different giants and very different contributions are discussed.

As is previously discussed it is emphasised that "contextualising digital processes into a historical framework is an essential part of this process" (Scott, 2015). Peter Lunenfeld supports this approach and writes in his preface to the book *Design Research Methods and Perspectives* by Laurel, (2003) "The importance of research into design process which includes traditional, historic and aesthetic studies of art and design cannot be overstated" (p. 11).

To me many of the most significant arguments are nested in the relationships between content, form and style. Jean-Luc Godard wrote "To me, style is just the outside of content, and the content the inside of style, like the outside and the inside of the human body – both go together, they can't be separated" (as cited in Dixon, 1997, p. 28).

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Both McLuhan's (1988) interest in the relationship between the medium and the message and Focillon's, *Life Forms in Art* (1948) support the notion that any given discipline in advanced stages of development operates within a communication system that suits it best.

The proceeding paper Utilising Soviet montage theory to Consider Future Narratives, Designed for New Technologies (Scott, 2015) demonstrates the significance of the theory that fed film making practice in the early days of cinema. This paper describes how Eisenstein and Pudovkin's related filmic technical research, writing and process demonstrated investigations into editing rhythms, juxtaposition, narrative sequencing, match-cuts, use of tone and other techniques to consider how film narrative could support storytelling. These techniques create effects that are as emotive as what is told in the story. Long before practitioners had the technology to easily build on the concept Eisenstein considered a concept he called internal montage, an idea based around utilising these techniques simultaneously rather than sequentially. He was not just before his time but before his technology. His thinking is evidence to support Marshall McLuhan's theories which anticipated the development of a new visual culture that would resurrect certain powers of perception, that he said had lain dormant (McLuhan, 1988).

This paper will demonstrate that at a time parallel to the Soviets the, avant-garde movement utilised ideas, methods, working processes and artefacts that could also support recent developments in internal montage. Findings from here have the potential to make a substantial contribution to the motion graphic film and contemporary narrative structures. It could be beneficial to first consider Focillon's theory in relation to the stages art forms go through.

The lag in academic interest and silo-ing of innovations from other creative endeavors is a phenomenon primarily apparent in the digital era. And whilst in relation to motion graphics Manovich described academics as "having remained blind to it" (Manovich, 2006, p.5) there is undoubtedly a cross over between fine art and a range of moving image disciplines.

3. FOCILLON; A MODEL ART AND IT?

This is evident even in relation to the Hollywood film, for example, Thomas Schatz who in *Hollywood Genres* (1981) contextualises and beautifully summarises art historian Henri Focillon's theory which describes the processes art forms go through up until form and content merge. A range of theorists are quoting Schatz's utilisation of this model in relation to film including Berry-Flint S. (1999) and Wells and Hardstaff (2008). Schatz describes Focillon's theory as, the continual reworking of the conventionalised form – whether it is architectural style or a genre of painting – generates a growing awareness of the conventions themselves.

Focillon's theory could equally be applied to an application, a game or a nonlinear film. This theory describes how a form passes through a series of stages. Firstly an experimental stage, during which its conventions are isolated and established. Then a classic stage in which the conventions reach their "equilibrium" and are mutually understood by artist and audience, an age of refinement during which certain formal and stylistic details embellish the form. Then, the baroque (or "mannerist" or "self-reflexive") stage, when the form and its embellishments are accentuated to the point where they themselves become the "substance" or "content" of the work (Schatz, 1981, p. 37). Then, arguably projects get bigger until the point that they become self-indulgent; a new technology emerges and the cycle starts over.

IT is full of life cycles: HCI cycles, system development life cycles and others. Practitioners commonly engage in the

evaluation of products and contextualisation is part of this process. There is however little evidence that IT educators are as strong as many disciplines at cross pollinating ideas with those of other creative disciplines. This may be because central to the function of IT is the solution to a user problem, this is often a business problem. Whilst IT products may often center around cognitive offloading and information storage, the importance of visual communication design and narrative are becoming increasingly apparent in the development of information based digital products. There are of course a whole raft of entertainment based products of which the basis is strongly narrative. Has the contextual basis slipped away because of the breath of the discipline and conversely the specialisations required to work in it? It must be acknowledged that information technologies provide some relevance to almost all other industries and yet much creative theory appears to be considered irrelevant to educators. There is however evidence of utilisation of this theory by practitioners. Some of these practitioners are discussed within this paper series.

4 INTERPLAY-PATTERNS

Within history there is evidence of the recurring notion that new crafts can destroy older crafts. For example Delaroche - on first seeing a daguerreotype in 1839 is said to have stated "From today painting is dead!" (Delaroche, 1839).

But photography did not destroy painting; arguably it liberated it from the pressure to create realism. This supports the argument that new arts encourage a level of inventiveness in older art forms. This is reflected not just in the relationship between photography and painting but also the mediation that occurred between theatre and film. With regard to the relationship between film and digital imagery. Monaco (1981) points out, that there is evidence to suggest that a surge in creativity can be a side effect of this challenge. He writes: "The close parallelism between the form of theatre and feature film could very well have meant disaster for the older art... Theatre responded to the challenge of film with a new vitality, and more interaction and between the two forms of art has proved to be one of the major sources of creative energy in the mid-twentieth century" (p. 37).

In considering that art forms go through stages and there is mediation between the new and the old, some patterns emerge, for example some structures appear never to get lost. The three part structure that is discussed in early theatre was passed on to the novel as it evolved, then later it was passed to film.

It is significant that the novel does communicate differently from film or theatre in that it uses prose in a way that theatre cannot and film uses another language again. Later in examining an advertisement that follows a traditional three part story structure but does so utilizing a series of techniques and language that can only be well utilised through film. But first it is more relevant to consider some of the mediation between theatre and film. The processes that supported this translation are significant.

4 INTERPLAY- THEATRE AND FILM

Most of us have ideas about what a good story is and yet it is something that is very difficult to define. Three-part narrative structures are deeply imbedded in Western culture, yet what makes one strong is surrounded by debate; these debates date back at least as far as Aristotle. With respect to Aristotle's ideas on storytelling Film theorist Bordwell (1987) writes, "the dust has not yet settled on all the controversies that surround them" (p. 3).

According to Aristotle's Poetics (335 B.C.), drama contains six elements: these include plot (mythos), character (ethos), theme or thought (dianoia), diction (lexis), lyric poetry melody (melos) and spectacle (opsis). "To Aristotle (as cited in Toberts and

Bywater, 1984, p. 38-39), plot is not only the most important part, but the first principle, and as it the soul of tragedy even characters come in second place.”

Whilst in the process of simplifying one could put forward an argument that in the early days of the feature film. Griffith (as cited in Monaco, 1981), made some of the biggest advancements in plot (mythos) with his early features, Chaplin (as cited in Monaco, 1981) some of the greatest advancements in characterization (ethos), and the Soviets found very inventive ways to explore theme or thought (dianoia) and diction (lexis), lyric poetry melody. To some degree all of the movements above explored a range of Aristotle’s elements. The avant-garde art movement is of particular interest in the way it connected poetry and melody (melos) to form. This will be discussed in more detail later. Let us first consider plot.

There are many books on screen writing and they appear to centre on plot. It is not uncommon for them to reference Greek tragedy or Aristotle. For example, Seger writes, “Whether it’s a Greek tragedy, a five act Shakespearean play, a four act dramatic series, or a seven act movie-of-the-week, a basic three act structure: beginning, middle, and end – or set-up, development and resolution” (Seger, 1987 p.4) has been used.

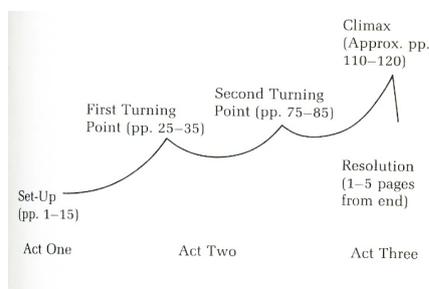


Figure 1: Seger’s diagram of a three part story structure (1987).

References to film’s historical relationship to theatre go beyond theory and the structure relating to the screen play and include currently used terms such as soundstage and staging. Other references are not so obvious to us today because in the evolution of film some references to stagecrafts have altered beyond recognition. For example Melie’s (1897) film set studio appeared to be based on a stage (Bordwell and Thompson, 2003). Eisenstein in 1934 also built a stage, although Bordwell described this as “a paradox: a theatre that tries to overcome the heritage of theatre” (Bordwell, 1987, p. 12). While the paradox is clear, it is significant that without these studios as stepping-stones, it is unlikely the studios of today would exist. This raises questions regarding what should be borrowed from dominant film and theatre, to support the development of the motion graphic film or the game? The suggestion here was that this would concern a far more complex interplay than merely borrowing story structure from dominant film. New platforms may be required before the answers are found.

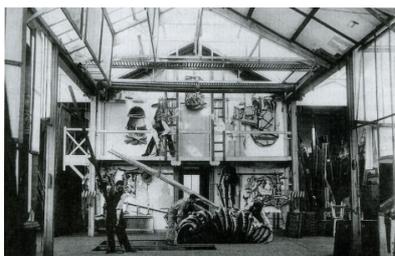


Figure 2: Melies (1897) film set references a stage.

5 INTERPLAY-THE NOVEL AND FILM

The techniques that emerged from the studio and from Eisenstein’s work affected the way of telling and the type of story told more than the three part structure itself. This can be best understood by examining an example.

Consider the British *Yellow Pages Hairdresser Advertisement* (2010). This advertisement is around 50 seconds in length and yet it follows a three part structure. The story opens with a young girl saying, “Uncle James, Mummy said to take me to the hairdresser’s.” Uncle James considers this a waste of money and gives the girl a terrible haircut himself. At around 12 seconds, the girl’s mother has arrived home, signifying the first turning point. She wants to know what happened.

The situation seems to get worse as Uncle James tries to dig his way out, blaming a bad hairdresser. The second turning point takes us to the last third of the advertisement. Uncle James uses the *Yellow Pages* to contact a hairdresser and make a plan. This builds to a climax in a scene that deals with the mother watching Uncle James through the hairdresser’s window. Here, James is visually trying to appear as though he is chastising the hairdresser for doing such a bad job, when in actual fact, he is verbally telling the hairdresser that he will pay her double if she fixes the haircut. This juxtaposition is a demonstration of a visual verbal contradiction that film language does best. This narrative provides an example of the marrying of content and form. This work also demonstrates a tiny example of a third meaning, this is resulting from the description of two opposing narratives. Audiences laugh at the realisation that Uncle James is sly. This story uses visual and audio elements and filmic language that will not work as a play and struggles to work with the written word.

To some degree films take more from the novel than from theatre. Many feature films are based on novels, not just because of their narrative structure but the two discipline share a number of other capabilities. Both novels and feature films are able to tell long stories in a highly condensed manner. Both the novel writer and the filmmaker can expand and shrink time at their will. A novel such as *One Hundred Years Solitude* (Marquez, 2003) can cover generations of people’s lives; or a novel such as *Ulysses* (Joyce 1922) is a book structured around a day in a life.

Both the film and the novel can jump backwards and forwards both in terms of simple flashback or the entire plot can be rearranged as in a Tarantino Film such as *Pulp Fiction* (1994). In the words of Jean-Luc Godard, “A story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end . . . but not necessarily in that order” (Godard Only Knows, 2000).

Both the novel and film can jump from place to place in an instant. Both the written word and a film can describe a characters thoughts, the written word however does this more directly. Similarly both the written word and a film deal with visual imagery; however the written word describes it whilst in a film it is a more direct reference to this imagery and can therefore better point to something else. A film can better play with other visual elements, sound and layers of opposing rhythms.

This demonstrates shifts in semiotic relationships icons, indexes symbols. . . Very advanced theory exists in many of these areas but how well this is being applied to new media is problematic. How are semiotic relationships altered within a game context? A game may give us some flexibility to control where audiences go and when, yet many user actions will result in a very predetermined set of events. How a game player is guided through a world will be controlled by another set of semiotics. In considering how these relationships work in the *Yellow Pages Advertisement* (2010), (a work that includes no motion graphics and follows conventional film style) this language is working

beyond plot, in that it portrays two themes and clever use of montage.

The first theme tells us that using the *Yellow Pages*, you can get your way out of anything. The second theme says, don't be a cheapskate, you'll pay more in the end. But what really makes this story work is the description of Uncle James. Uncle James is stupid enough to have landed himself into this situation, yet clever enough to get himself out of it. There is a contradiction/juxtaposition between what audiences see and what Uncle James is actually saying. This could also be described as conflict between the diegetic (recounting, telling or narrating) and mimetic (imitative representation).

This demonstrates something that both literature and theatre struggles to do, but film does well. Although this story may be driven by the script, the writer has used film techniques, such as juxtaposition, to the extent that these elements of form have become part of the substance of the work. This demonstrates a relationship between content and form that fits within the realm of Focillon's mannerist stage.

6 INTERPLAY-GRAPHS AND MOTION

The *British Yellow Pages Hairdresser Advertisement* (2010) is not typical of many advertisements in that it contains no motion graphics. Many advertisements are laden with moving graphics. Motion graphics is also common to website banner advertisements and information graphics and film and game titles.

But before going on to discuss motion graphics first consider what it is. There are lots of definitions of motion graphics, but for this paper motion graphics is defined as a hybrid medium that utilises design and formal content to communicate graphic, moving image solutions. The term formal content, includes material that is selected and processed through graphic, moving or conceptual relationships in response to a problem or theme. Aside from advertisements motion graphics are common in film titles and they are starting to be used in lots of other areas including the feature film. They usually differ from special effects in that they often use effects and type to explore and reexamine realism rather than to make the impossible real.

With respect to motion graphics, Wells and Hardstaff (2008) point out that computers can actually be used to generate imagery, (although so does special effects) They write: "It is possible that we are closing on the post photographic era where film will be viewed as an arcane medium of image generation" (p. 6). After stating the threat, they flip sides and describe how "other disciplines have in essence fed animation emancipating it" (p. 21). Their emancipated animation is a shift toward the motion graphic hybrid medium. They describe how a "disciplinary shift, more readily embracing illustration, graphic design, architecture, product design, fashion idioms, interaction design and medical imaging has occurred and re-imagined the form" (Wells and Hardstaff, 2008, p. 21). Motion graphics could equally be described as a means of liberating graphic design or film. Robbins (Drate et al., 2006), describes the beginning of motion graphics as the merging of graphic design and film, which coexisted, not really fusing until the advent of television.

Robbins notes that "5000 years ago the Egyptians used hieroglyphics, a set of symbols depicting an event." These symbols suggested motion. "In fact the Greek word hiero means to set in motion and glyph means symbolic character or sign" (Drate et al., 2006, p. 11). That human appreciation of moving imagery may have existed long before the technology allowed it to be, suggests our appreciation may be innate. This is again in alignment with Marshall McLuhan's theories which anticipated the development of a new visual culture that would resurrect

certain powers of perception, that he said had lain dormant (McLuhan, 1988).



Figure 3: Panathenaic Amphora, showing animated like forms.

Robbins (Drate et al., 2006) describes a history which takes us through the invention of the camera, Muybridge's recording of the motion of the horse in 1873 and a series of inventions leading up to the invention of cinematography in 1895 by brothers Auguste and Louis Lumiere. He points out that whilst Muybridge was showing his works in America, Toulouse-Lautrec was working at the lithographers developing posters for mass distribution to market the Moulin Rouge. At this point this paper is dipping into the world of fine art but before going too far down this track consider the work of Saul Bass.

One of the most significant connections between graphic design and film has been attributed to the work of Saul Bass. Here there is also an apparent link between his thinking and the Soviet montage theorists. Taking the Soviet idea that "it was necessary to destroy realism in order to approach reality" (Monaco, 1981, p. 327), when imagery is pulled apart to re-examine it, practitioners have the power to create links to other ideas. The potential to use metaphors. Through motion graphics provides practitioners with greater power to examine reality through the layering of information in order to mold and form our emotions. Whilst there is nothing particularly exciting in noticing that what the Soviets called montage a graphic designer may does something similar called collage (Eisenstein would call this internal montage) it is Saul Bass who has made the initial connections between the motion graphic form and storytelling content also commented on metaphor stating;

"My initial thoughts about what a title can do was to set mood and the prime underlying core of the film's story, to express the story in some metaphorical way" (Bass on Titles, 2010).

Bass describes how, "... I came to grips with what I consider the most challenging aspect of any creative endeavour and that is to deal with ordinary things, that we know so well that we cease to see them, deal with them in a way that allows us to understand them again, in a sense it's making the ordinary extraordinary. Nine Hours To Rama is about the nine hours that preceded the assassination of Mohandas Ghandi, by taking a clock - an ordinary object - and subjecting it to an unrelenting examination, I hoped to create an intensification of one's awareness of each moment. ..." life (Bass on Titles, 2010).

Without engaging in the debate (Coupland, 1998) surrounding who directed the shower scene in *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960), it is not debated that Bass storyboarded this scene and there is an

argument here that Bass graphical approach to montage may have had an influence on feature film editing.

7 INTERPLAY- FINE ART AND FILM

Those who write about motion graphics including Robbins (Drate et al., 2006), Frantz (2003), Sheffield (2007) and others tend to locate the origins of motion graphics with the work of Saul Bass and Pablo Ferro in the mid-1950s. Robbins does comment on a range of art forms including Art Nouveau, Cubism, Dadaism, Modernism and Expressionism that emerged parallel to cinema. He does not discuss how some of these artists were working with moving image sequences at a parallel time to the early developments in film.

Although there is a lot written about the experimental avant-garde animator's heritage, it is not written about in relation to motion graphics or any other new technologies. The heritage of early avant-garde is however well documented in the literature on fine art and film. For example a range of journals began to emerge at least as early as 1926 including Hunt's journal *Ray* (Candela, 2010), leading to a range of books covering the underground film movements. A work by Rees *A History of Experimental Film and Video* (Rees, 1999) follows the connection in avant-garde film and modern art from the invention of moving images to current times. Whilst tracking this relationship he writes about it as a medium with its own aesthetics and form.

There is evidence that some of the techniques and conceptual form normally associated with motion graphics actually emerged with these experimental animators. Further to this, some of these artists (or early designers) bridged over into advertising well before the 1950's. This discipline of short experimental animations akin to motion graphics, although not termed motion graphics, began to emerge at least as early as 1908.

Before going on to discuss the connection between the early experimental animations and motion graphics, consider the term avant-garde, and how this heritage may be engaged in considering the development of the motion graphic film. Akin to motion graphics, definitions of avant-garde film vary. O'Pray in his book *Avant-Garde Film* (O'Pray, 2003) discusses issues in respect to a selection of definitions of the avant-garde. He begins by acknowledging that "A. L. Rees and others settled for experimental" (O'Pray, 2003, p.5), but finds this definition problematic because of the range of examples of experimentation in dominant cinema. O'Pray goes on to discuss the political ideals associated with this heritage but also finds problems with the term "underground," referencing the aesthetics belonging to the avant-garde. Here he notes that Deren, Mekus and others used the term "poetic film" (p.5) but argues that a range of relevant films would be excluded by this definition.

Of interest there is some controversy as to whether or not Soviet montage theorists such as Eisenstein should be included as part of the avant-garde heritage and despite his own antipathy toward the label. O'Pray writes;

"Eisenstein's credentials were based on his formal experimentalism and radical and social political aims. For some, it is the merging of radical form and content (or signifier and signified) that identifies avant-gardism at its most successful and most potent" (O'Pray, 2003, p.28). This at least suggest that there is some interplay between Soviet montage and the avant-gard.

The range of definitions suggests a broad scope of work. The variety of work which is included in this scope also varies. Both the definitions and the scope of avant-garde heritage highlights tensions between realism and abstraction, as well as tensions

between that which is narrative and that which is non-narrative and style-centred, these tensions are shared by dominant film and motion graphics. To some degree, the initial decision to analyse the potential of Soviet montage theory in relation to the motion graphic film was because it sign-posted a logic that may support a bridge between these systems of narrating.

The relationship between these early experimental avant-garde animations and motion graphics is tempestuous. In some ways the goals of these artists are in opposition to the hybrid or mix of media seen in motion graphics today. Some of the themes explored by the experimental animators relate to concepts of purity. Rees describes this as, "stripping the image to pure graphic form, but ironically also nurturing a modernist variant of synaesthesia, purging the screen of overt human action while developing rhythmic interaction of basic symbols" (Rees, 1996, p.96).

This timeline of some experimental animations and avant-garde works (Scott, 2015) briefly describes some of the goals of the artists as well as the techniques they used.

Despite the philosophic differences, it is difficult to ignore the possibility of motion graphic heritage in this area. This connection can be demonstrated by looking briefly at some of the work of Len Lye. Beginning with Lye's short film *Tusalava* Jonathan Dennis points out that *Tusalava* is a circumspect "Polynesian word (a Samoan phrase: tusa lava) inferring that eventually everything is the same" (Dennis, 2000, p. 184). Lye described this work himself stating, "The primitive side of my brain must have communed with my innate self enough to have reached down into my body and come up with gene carried information which I expressed visually..." (Dennis, 2000, p.184). Art critic Roger Fry had written to Lye saying, "you really thought not of forms in themselves but of movements in time" (Dennis, 2000, p. 185). In contrast to this innate or pure treatment of form, *Tusalava* merges ideas from different cultures, with the name coming from Samoa and the images derived from Aboriginal representations of the witchetty grub (Dennis, 2000).

Later Lye's work also shows an early link between fine art and motion graphics in advertising. Dennis describes how Lye was unable to afford a camera or lights, causing him to find a solution by painting or scratching directly onto film or clear celluloid. In 1935, these costs were covered for a series of shorts by the The GPO Film Unit (a subdivision of the UK General Post Office) providing Lye was willing to carry an advertising message for the cheaper pass the post tests. These advertising films include: *A Colour Box* made in 1932 (as cited in Denis 2000), *Rainbow Dance* 1936 by Lye, (as cited in Denis 2000), and *Trade Tattoo* by Lye, 1937 (as cited in Denis 2000). In *Trade Tattoo* animated words and patterns combine with the live-action footage to create multilayered images. This work shows a use of hybrid media as well an early connection between fine art and the emergence of motion graphics in advertising. O'Pray cites an even earlier connection to advertising stating, "Oscar Fischinger made advertising films in the 1920's..." (O'Pray, 2003, p.2).

The experimental animators or filmmakers were however primarily fine artists, but they were using techniques including the use of type or imagery painting on or erasing off; layering of images; split-screen effects (multiple frame imagery); sometimes the mixing of different media (despite their purist ideas) and exploring kinetic effects. All of these techniques have been used in motion graphics. Although it is commonly stated that motion graphics started with Saul Bass, in actual fact the name motion graphics emerged with Saul Bass.

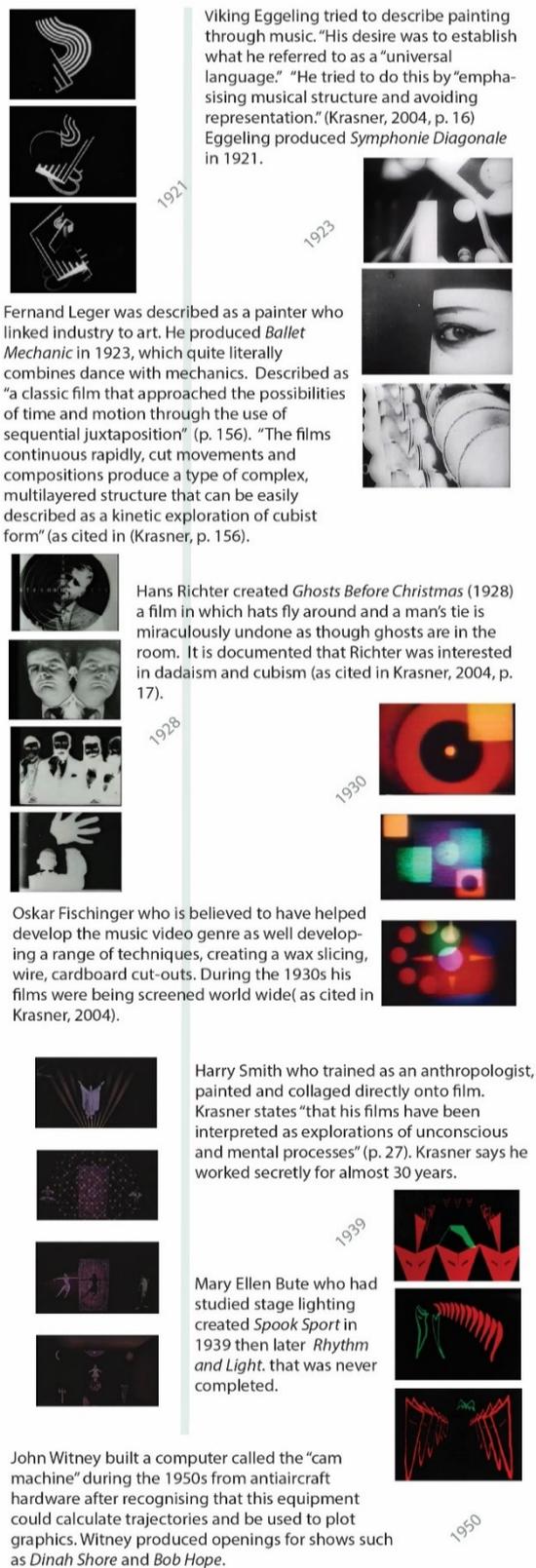


Figure 4: Timeline: examples of early experimental animations (Scott, 2011)

There are others that draw a link between motion graphics and the early experimental animations. Krasner goes as far as describing early motion graphics as a form of experimental filmmaking. He states, "Film title design evolved as a form of experimental filmmaking within the realm of the commercial motion pictures" (Krasner, 2004 p. 35). The work of the avant-garde filmmakers was well known in New York at the time and as Horak (2003) points out, they were commonly screened by the New York film society. He describes its popularity at this time stating, "Cinema 16 was the most successful film society of the twentieth century, presenting monthly film programs to its seven thousand members" (Horak, 2003, para. 3).

The nexus between Bass and the avant-garde animations is further supported by a recent world press article that claims Bass was closely in touch with the Bauhaus School, particularly with Professor Laszlo-Moholy Nagy. Nagy was one of the founders of the light art movement and a strong advocate of the integration of technology and industry into the arts (Berrakcolak, 2010).

Krasner (2004), supports the argument that Bass's work in the 1950s signifies a new market for these concepts and techniques, setting up the mood and creating a metaphor for the feature film story about to be told (Bass on Titles n.d.). Motion graphics continues to demonstrate a dominant conceptual and structural form. Bass's work also shows the development of motion graphic concepts relating to stories. This is not to say feature films do not carry conceptual form, but they tend to be driven by their relationship to the story. With motion graphics, the concept is a more dominant aspect of the medium often filling the place of the story.

8 WHOLE FORM-THE COMPUTER



Figure 5: Images from *Desperate Housewives* opening titles (Yu, 2010).

Remembering that the principles of the montage theorists were defined at a time when cutting was the only realistic form of transitioning from one shot to another, there is no reason why this thinking should not be applied in considering the toolbox of techniques through which elements can be combined today. At first the challenge appeared to be with understanding how design principles and elements create visual cohesion but later it became evident that this is just the part of the problem that relates to the style-centered third of the motion graphic film. Another third of the problem is the elements that drive the story.

Finally however, there is the structural third that holds the two narrative systems together. The solution may lie with the level of conceptual thinking with regard to ideas relating to the whole. To understand how this third element which could marry the two narrative systems, an understanding of the form of the structure of the whole, not just the form of the medium is required.

As I worked on my film it became clear that a massive montage collage with layers and layers of footage running simultaneously was never going to be anything but a mashup. I had discovered that for this new story medium the greatest challenge will be resolving the problems associated with the layering of content and effectively communicating through interweaving of simultaneous narrative lines, but the technique was struggling to work.

I required a creative shape in which the whole could reside. This thinking to some degree overlapped with Bordwell and Thompson's (2008) thinking but had to be different in a motion graphic context. To Bordwell and Thompson (2008), "Form is the specific system of patterned relationships that we perceive in an artwork" (p. 71). Bordwell and Thompson describe how "content, subject matter or abstract ideas take on the particular functions within any work." They apply this thinking to film. They are not as purely concerned with the function of editing as the montage theorists; their concept of form is based around how whole films function.

Structural elements that hold the form of the narrative together are something that are beginning to emerge in contemporary motion graphics. Works that create a cohesive whole by referencing structural forms appear most successful when this form relates back to the content. An example of motion graphics which utilises a structure to describe the mood of the show can be seen in the titles to *Desperate Housewives* (Yu, 2010), the titles flick through a history of fine art images depicting domestic women. Image styles include: Renaissance; Egyptian; Lichtenstein-style pop art; and 1950s domesticity. Despite the variation in the style of images, the credits resemble a pop-up book. This, combined with the Monty Python-style pivot-point transition from one shot to another adds to the emotional effect of the narrative communicating a sense of humour. This is what holds this work together. This use of a conceptual form often functions as a device through which to transition from one shot to another.

Another example of structural form relating to content can be seen in Cooper's opening titles to *Spider-Man 3* (Prologue, 2010). They start with the fast flipping pages of a comic book before the lines become a web through which imagery of the characters can be seen. In the opening credits to *Spider-Man 3* (Prologue, 2010), the web concept has developed into a structure that twists and turns in three-dimensional space through which shattered live footage of characters can be seen. This structure has become a means through which to control visuals within space.

I could go on to discuss how these developments are influencing conventional cinema and source examples of style centered films or a selection of feature films that demonstrate experimental plot structures and consider how this influence my motion graphic screenplay but this is beyond this paper.

For my motion graphic film I asked; how would a story that best uses motion graphic techniques unite content and form? Or how would a non-linear game-like story best unite content and form? Or how would a virtual world narrative best unite content and form? If computers are the medium and the medium is the message in telling a computer based story practitioners, technical filmmakers, motion graphic designers, game designers and others have shown evidence that they have engaged in that which the giants have shown us. Here we include McLuhan,

Focillon, Aristotle, Eisenstein, Lye and others. The goal is not to copy what they have done but to understand the processes and engage the mediation. It is not that this mediation is not occurring at all; there is substantial use of terms that come from art and literature that cross over to IT. Terms such as "interface metaphor", "design principles", are common and if you Googled Aristotle and the digital age you will find that recent articles are starting to appear, but the books and hard evidence of the praxis are yet to emerge. The literature is thin considering library shelves heave with film and art theory.

Educators need to start contextualizing what computers do best in relation to the arts. Ironically a recent discussion with database architect Adrian Hargreaves (A. Hargreaves, personal communication, April, 18 2016) raised ideas about how in constructing anything practitioners extract elements of information and construct them to support arguments. Computers have huge power in allowing the users to believe that they have the power to control information. In actual fact it is controlled by the selection and shape of what can be stored.

Future papers in this series will discuss how my motion graphic screenplay emerged and how the film itself is emerging. I hope to shift from theory to practice.



Figure 6. Through graphics we can read Harold's inner monologue. The film *Stranger Than Fiction*, "plays with the form as much as the content of the movie" (Helm, as cited in Doran, 2006).

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