Texture, time, and meaning: composing music for animation film and television through an improviser's perspective

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Music is an essential and intrinsic part of educational television programmes. Jazz and improvised music have taken a very significant role in this process. Between 2007 and 2009, I was commissioned to compose music for a series of twenty-five short animation films, featured as segments of a children's educational programme for the Portuguese public channel, RTP. In this article I reflect upon my practice and challenge established notions of jazz canonicity, aesthetics and meaning in animation.

Keywords: jazz, improvisation, film music, animation, television.

Textura, tiempo y el significado: la composición de música para películas de animación y televisión a través de la perspectiva de un improvisador

La música es una parte esencial e intrínseca de los programas educativos de televisión. El jazz y la música improvisada han tenido un papel muy importante en este proceso. Entre 2007 y 2009, me encargaron componer música para una serie de 25 cortometrajes de animación, presentados como segmentos de un programa educativo para niños para el canal público portugués, RTP. En este artículo reflexiono sobre mi práctica y cuestiono las nociones establecidas de canonicidad, estética y significado del jazz en la animación.

Palabras clave: jazz, improvisación, música para cine, animación, television.

Testura, denbora eta esanahia: animazio filmeetarako eta telebistarako musika konposizioa inprobisatzaile baten ikuspuntutik

Musika funtsezko eta berezko atala da telebistako hezkuntza-saioetan. Jazzak eta musika inprobisatuak oso eginkizun nabarmena hartu du prozesu honetan. 2007 eta 2009 urte bitartean RTP Portugalgo kate publikoan haurrentzat hezkuntza-saio baten atal gisa aurkezten ziren 25 animazio film laburrentzat musika egiteko enkargua jaso nuen. Artikulu honetan nire praktikaren inguruko hausnarketa egin eta animazioan jazzaren kanonizitateak, estetika eta esanahi nozioak zalantzan jartzen ditut.

Gako-hitzak: jazza, inprobisazioa, filmentzat musika, animazioa, telebista.

musikene

1. Opening credits

Talking elephants, walking trees, flying houses, lazy cuckoo clocks and stubborn pencils. Like improvised music, children's animation films are constantly challenging the boundaries of logic and pre-established rules. In both cases, textures, rhythm and narrative are repeatedly being defied to the limit, in order to stimulate the imagination of the listener and the viewer.

For several generations since the mid-1950s, television has had a crucial impact in the upbringing of children around the world. Music is an essential and intrinsic part of educational television programmes in the forms of both song and background score. Particularly in the latter case, it is mainly used to support a narrative by illustrating different moods, an action, a situation, or emphasise the presence of an object on screen. However, it also conveys social codes and moral values (Maloy, 2018). The repeated correlation between the use of recurrent musical mechanisms and specific types of characters or scenes has established a distinctive and universal musical vocabulary. As a result, music in children's television programmes has had a crucial role in informing the ways in which children perceive the world and assess situations, people and behaviours.
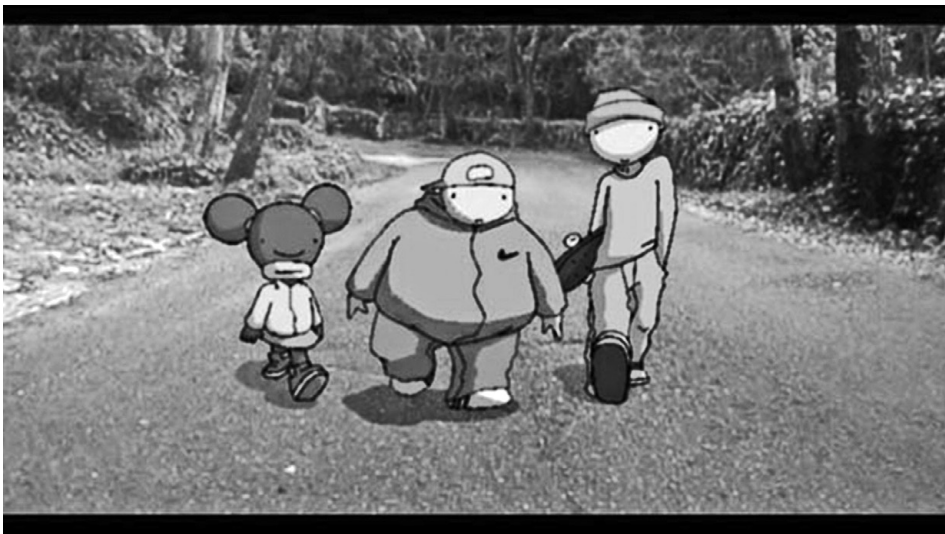

Fig. 1: Still from *Hissis* (Nuno Beato, 2003).

Jazz music has taken a very significant role in this process. Jazz in film and television can often trigger very particular notions of time and reality, in what Nicolas Pillai refers to as the "dissonant image" (2016, p. 12). And this quality has been quite evident ever since the very first sound-on-film cartoons were screened, such as Paul Terry's *Dinner Time* (1928) or David Fleischer's *Betty Boop* cartoon series (1930-1939). The malleability of improvised music, as well as its apparent arbitrariness, have produced perfect sonic matches to animation's very own logic. Improvised music has proven that it can be as flexible as the most chaotic and unrealistic narrative would demand. At the same time, it responds naturally to radical shifts of mood or constant diegetic swings. My experience in composing for animation started when I was first approached by an animation director, Nuno Beato, who saw one of my improvisation performances. Although visual pictorial representations can sometimes be significantly different from music pictorial representations, in the brief conversation we had afterwards, we quickly came to the conclusion that we were using similar processes, tools and metaphors in our own practices. As musician and as director, we both explored abrupt changes in the narrative rhythm, used a profusion of textures, and referred to those textures and moods by using analogous terms, such as "warm", "cold", "harsh", and "soft".

I was then commissioned as composer for his short film *Hissis* (2003), where I used two different approaches: songwriting for the final credits title song and incidental music for a number of scenes throughout the 26min film. That collaboration eventually evolved to other smaller projects where gradually I started to have a part in scriptwriting and Beato in supervising my compositions. This practice came to full fruition during the making of *Mi Vida En Tus Manos* (*My Life in Your Hands*, 2009). I wrote the script drawing from his original idea and my notes from a number of work meetings, and Beato stood literally at my side, directing me while I was trying different ideas on the guitar as the first dailies were being screened.
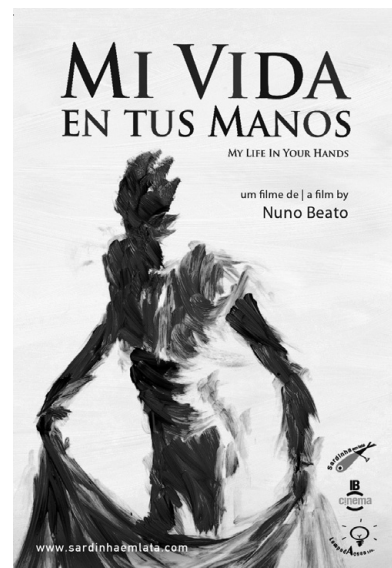

Fig. 2: Poster from *Mi Vida En Tus Manos* (Nuno Beato, 2009).

My collaboration with Beato soon draw the attention of other directors. And on that same year I was commissioned to compose for twenty-five short animated films, as part of RTP's[1] children programme *Ilha das Cores* (*Colour Island*, 2007-2009), loosely inspired on the *Sesame Street* template. This gave me the opportunity to work with a number of different directors, each one with a very personal vision for their films and a particular perception of the role of music in animation. I opted for a reactive methodology, where I recorded myself improvising for those short films as I saw them first-hand. The final scores resulted from listening to those recordings and, together with each director, adjusting details.

This quite immersive experience into the deep layers of composing music for animation, as well as the discussions around the subject with directors and other musicians, and my practice as musician in improvising music for silent film over the last fifteen years, triggered a series of critical reflections on jazz, improvised music, film and animation for children.

From the very start of this journey, I questioned what seemed to be very inflexible and long-established norms in composing for animation. Why was it that, in the main, fat or tall characters would be represented in music by particular instruments and melodic lines that would lead the audience to perceive them as clumsy? Why would I instinctively think of purely intense rhythmic patterns played predominantly by percussion instruments every time a scene would take place in a non-Western setting? What had informed my choice, when I opted for a minor chord to convey sadness, suspense or resentment, or a major chord to express happiness, prosperity or victory on screen?

I often questioned to what extent could I challenge musical preconceptions and clichés that have become important elements of a distinctive and universal musical vocabulary: the selection of instruments according to gender or size of the characters; the abundant use of rhythm to illustrate busier actions or unsophisticated landscapes and characters; the recurrence to well-known musical templates for endings or particular musical ornaments for comical purposes. In my mind, as an improviser used to challenge the norms of music making, I wanted to avoid merely replicating an established code of linking music with the moving image. A code that conveyed very precise moral meanings. A fat person climbing the stairs would "sound" like long glissandos on the trombone. A group of children playing in an improvised football pitch on a savanna or a Brazilian slum would be represented in music by a frantic ostinato on the congas or the cuica. Or the little pig who spent all of his money on cookies would be severely punished with a minor chord —never above C2— and cel-

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1. Public service broadcasting organisation of Portugal.

ebrated with a loud major chord the moment his capitalist conscience would advise him to invest his savings in a new oven, which eventually would allow him to make a profit from his own baking.

Throughout my years as an improviser for silent film and as a composer for animated film, I often question whether social and moral meanings could be conveyed not only by the narrative and the moving image, but that music could have a crucial role in emphasising —and to some extent authenticating sonically— those meanings. In order to understand that multi-layered process and fully appreciate the delicate craftsmanship of creating music for, and with, the screen, I felt that I needed to ask basic but essential questions. Why do films need music in the first place? Is music in film more than a sonic accompaniment and representation? Can music in film be more than functional? What is the tradition of jazz and improvised music in film, and animation and children's television shows? Is there a difference between the ways in which American and European film and television have perceived jazz and improvised music?

2. Back Story

At least twice in the history of Western cinema, aesthetic movements emerged advocating the exclusion of music in film. In the 1950s, Italian neorealism promoted the notion that cinema should drastically reduce the use of non-diegetic music (Dyer, 2006, p. 28), so that film would become more truthful to real life situations, which are not punctuated by musical commentary. In the Dogme 95 Manifesto, Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg retrieved the same notion and went even further: "Music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot" (Von Trier and Vinterberg, 1995). *Idioterne* (*The Idiots*, Lars Von Trier, 1998), *Mifunes Sidste Sang* (*Mifune*, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, 1999), and *Italiensk for begyndere* (*Italian for Beginners*, Lone Scherfig, 2000) are probably the best examples.

However, music was absolutely decisive to the works of Rossellini, De Sica, De Santis, Fellini and Visconti. Today, it is virtually impossible to fully appreciate —and to some extent, even conceive— the ending scene of De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*, 1948), without the deeply moving music score by Alessandro Cicognini; or Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*, 1945) without Renzo Rossellini's superb dramatic score for the opening scene; or the vital role that musical arrangements by Carlo Rustichelli have in Pasolini's *Mamma Roma* (1962) in defining Anna Magnani's central character; not to mention Nino Rota's pivotal scores for Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960) and *8½* (1963). In a surprising move, just five years after Dogme 95, militant Lars Von Trier would go on to direct a musical, *Dancer in*

the Dark (2000), featuring songs by Icelandic singer/songwriter Björk. In fact, music has been so essential to film that even in the pre-talkies era silent films would be screened — and sometimes shot — whilst live music was being played.

In my experience, although most directors think of music as a supplement to the image and narrative, they find that music is absolutely necessary for providing particular scenes with a certain mood or tone.

The "emotive function" of music in cinema has been profusely theorised. Claudia Gorbman suggests that the main function of music in cinema is to involve the viewer emotionally, disarming his critical thinking and placing him 'inside' the film (1998, p. 73). By setting specific moods and amplifying what is only suggested by the moving image, music provides the film with an "emotive function". Swedish composer Johnny Wingstedt establishes a hierarchy for music functions in film, divided into three different groups —"ideational meaning" (emotional, informative, descriptive); "interpersonal meaning" (emotional, guiding, rhetoric); and "textual meaning" (temporal and intermodal) (2008, p. 47). In both theories, music exists only to serve film, and does so in order to amplify emotion or add narrative layers. It would be hard to dispute the idea that music does have a decisive impact on the narrative structure. In fact, quite often music adds what film composer Leonard Rosenman calls "supra-reality" —it anticipates events, and offers the viewer access to a character's inner feelings or thoughts— which can be distinctive from his/her actions or discourse on screen (1968, p. 127). John Williams' famous low pitch contrabass short glissandos for the opening of Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) do anticipate danger whilst on screen we see a girl taking a peaceful night swim in the ocean. Jerry Goldsmith's quasi-impressionistic score for Paul Verhoeven's *Basic Instinct* (1992) is constantly revealing us the inner layers of a very complex female character.

However, an equally hard to dispute notion is the fact that music in film exists beyond its diegetic functions of merely serving narrative, setting and characters.

When we consider the full scope of the relationship between jazz music and film, we quickly realize how significant they were for each other's history and popularity. In the case of jazz music, the mainstream popular music of the 1920s-1940s, it provided sound film —a state of the art technology and the first mass, global, audio-visual experience— with its exciting, loud, romantic and modern sounds. In many cases, jazz and sound film presented themselves to the world as one sole multisensorial experience and the image and sound of a new and cosmopolitan world.

Fig. 3: Printed score for *Burglar or Sneaky Music*, in *Sam Fox Moving Picture Music, Vol. 2*, by J. S. Zamecnik, 1913.

During the silent film era, some accompanists would use score compilations specially designed for that purpose. Most popular in the 1910s and 1920s, compilations such as the *Remick Folio of Moving Picture Music,* by J. Bodewalt Lampe (1914), or the *Sam Fox Music Picture Music*, by J. S. Zamecnik (1913) would offer the accompanist a myriad of options for pictorial music that could match what was happening on screen. Titles like *American Indian Music*, *Burglar or Sneaky Music*, *Cowboy Music*, *African or Zulu*, *Argentina or South America*, *Austrian or German*, *Chinese*, *Parisian Life*, *Opening or Entrance*, *Children at Play*, *Sea Music*, *Mysterioso Pizzicato*, and *Wind Storm or Hurry*, attest to the fact that music was, indeed, functional and used in a double role: as pictorial reflection of the setting or action on screen, and as Foley —sound effects. Other accompanists would adventure themselves in improvising throughout the screenings (Sauer, 1999, p. 55). Without any recordings of those explorations, today we can only but speculate on the impact the moving image had in the development of improvised music. Nonetheless, it would be fair to assume that such strong visual stimuli informed indelibly those musical practices and the early beginnings of what was latter to be known as jazz music. Some artists —including myself—venture themselves today in improvising music for silent film, maybe partially in an attempt to go back to that very particular practice, before even pigeonholing itself into a music genre —jazz or free improvisation or any other classification. Some of those explorations result in written scores and albums. Bill Frisell's *Music for the Films of Buster Keaton, Go West* (Möbius Music, 1995), and Manchester based trio

GoGo Penguin's performances in 2015 of their live score for Godfrey Reggio's 1982 debut film *Koyaanisqatsi* perfectly illustrate this.

The relationship between jazz and film exploded in the 1930s and 1940s musicals and dancicals. Once again, music promoted film and film provided music with narrative and real, almost tangible, human faces. To many, this was the first —and sometimes only— way in which they would ever see popular artists such as Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday or Bennie Goodman. In some cases, movies would use mere insipid plots to showcase jazz stars of the time. *A Song is Born* — a 1948 Howard Hawks' remake of his 1941 *Ball of Fire* —is one such case. Danny Kaye's character — musicologist Professor Hobart Frisbee— comes to the conclusion that he has spent too much time secluded indoors in the house he shares with other world leading musicologists, including Professor Magenbruch, portrayed by Benny Goodman. He then decides it is time to do some fieldwork. For a considerable part of the film, we see Professor Frisbee roaming across all sorts of dodgy jazz clubs in town in order to collect notes for his research on how jazz was born. Interestingly, the set of artists showcased in that sequence reflect the various strands within jazz at the time: Tommy Dorsey, Louis Armstrong, Lionel Hampton, Charlie Barnet and Mel Powell.

On the one hand, cinema democratized America —black and white artists shared the same screen. On the other, film would remind everyone— and to some extent preserve —the role of African-Americans in society— often depicting them as lower-class and uneducated. Even pioneer attempts of presenting all-black cast productions, such as *Hallelujah!* (King Vidor, 1929), *Hearts in Dixie* (Paul Sloane, 1929), *The Green Pastures* (Marc Connelly and William Keighley, 1936), *Cabin in the Sky* (Vincente Minnelli, 1943), and *Stormy Weather* (Andrew L. Stone, 1944), may be seen today as nothing more than prejudiced ethnographic constructions (Naremore, 1992, p. 100) or, at best, mere tokenistic efforts from the major Hollywood studios.

Jazz was the designated soundtrack to illustrate the fringes of society in the 1950s and 1960s. On screen performances, such as Gerry Mulligan's Jazz Combo in *I Want to Live* (Robert Wise, 1958) and Chico Hamilton's quintet in *Sweet Smell of Success* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1957), or dominant music scores by Duke Ellington for *Paris Blues* (Martin Ritt, 1961), and Charles Mingus for *Shadows* (John Cassavetes, 1959), would serve as determinant sonic universes inhabited by misfits and outcasts.

Also, the French movement *nouvelle vague* 'new wave' would adopt jazz music as constant sonic backdrop to the lives of displaced and sometimes anachronist characters. *Nouvelle vague* revealed the music of a new generation of French jazz artists to the world. Through film, international audiences listened for the first time to the music of Martial Solal in Jean-Luc Godard's *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, 1960); Alain

Goraguer in Michel Gast's *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* (*I Spit on your graves*, 1959); and Barney Wilen in Roger Vadim's *Les liaisons dangereuses* (*Dangerous Liaisons*, 1959).

Correspondingly, jazz has also had an important presence in cinema in the form of biopics, through more or less romanticised versions of the lives of jazz artists. The tragic life of 1920s trumpet player Bix Beiderbecke alone would inspire two films —Howard Hawk's adaptation of Dorothy Baker's 1938 novel, *Young Man with the Horn* (1950); and Pupi Avati's *Bix, Un'ipotesi leggendaria* (*Bix: An Interpretation of a Legend*, 1991). In 2015, Don Cheadle directed and played the main character in *Miles Ahead*, focusing on one particular period in Miles Davis' life —the mid-seventies. And in Bertrand Tavernier's *Autour de Minuit* (*Round Midnight*, 1986), Dexter Gordon would portray a semi-autobiographical character in the role of Dale Turner, who is in fact a composite of two jazz legends: Lester Young and Bud Powell.

Jazz and cinema have had a long and successful love affair. Jazz music, as other music genres, does not limit itself to populate narratives and settings with sound or to serve as a purely emotive function in film. And unlike other music genres, jazz was born basically at the same time as cinema, a fact that has contributed to the unique relationship between both art forms. The history of western cinema is, in many aspects, the same of American and European jazz. Western film provides us with a very comprehensive set of visual documentations of the various aesthetic, social, racial and moral meanings that have been attributed to jazz throughout its history.

3. Prologue

Since the 1930s, jazz has also had a very prolific relationship with animation. Many early Warner Brothers cartoons served as embryonic music clips, in order to publicise Warner Brothers' back catalogue of music (Welles 2003, p. 26). The appearances of cartoon versions of Cab Calloway and Louis Armstrong on screen worked as a vehicle to promote their music and shows. Calloway co-starred with celebrity cartoon Betty Boop in two animated shorts, both produced by Max Fleisher and directed by Dave Fleischer: *Minnie the Moocher* (1932), as a singing walrus, and *The Old Man of the Mountain* (1933), doubling as a singing howl and the Old Man. Armstrong, who also starred in a Betty Boop series cartoon —*I'll Be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal You* (1932)— would, together with some of the biggest African-American jazz stars of the time —Cab Calloway, Fats Waller, and Jimmie Lunceford— be caricaturized in Friz Freleng's *Clean Pastures* (1937). As it happened with some Hollywood film productions between the 1930s and 1950s, jazz in American cartoons during the

same period represented more than music — the jazz world was also a social universe, and many times the setting for (mis)representations of race and lifestyle. In fact, *Clean Pastures* was intended to be a parody to the all-black cast production *The Green Pastures*. Its pastiche depiction of black culture (Goldmark, 2005, p. 97) and stereotyping of black urban communities (Weisenfeld, 2007, p. 3) resulted in its inclusion into the infamous Censored Eleven[2] list —a group of Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies cartoons by Warner Brothers withdrawn from distribution in 1968 for using ethnic stereotypes regarded as offensive. Warner Brothers used jazz abundantly as music, but also as a set of values, attitudes and codes to which characters would behave and be built upon. Looney Tunes 1957 cartoon *The Three Little Bops*, directed by Friz Freleng, is one of the various Warner Brothers' versions of the popular tale *The Three Little Pigs*. In this case —and riding the wave of popularity that West Coast jazz[3] and rock and roll were having at the time— the three little pigs, who 'one played the pipe and the other danced jigs', as the narrator says, are now a jazz trio, *i.e.* play modern instruments and modern music. And contrarily to the original tale, it is not the wolf's intention to eat them —he just wants to join their band. They will not allow it because his skills as trumpet player and his solos leave much to be desired. In the original tale the three little pigs outsmart the wolf by building a house he cannot destroy. In *The Three Little Bops*, not only they outsmart him, they also outperform him as jazz musicians and are much more capable of improvising. The 1970 Walt Disney animated feature musical comedy *The Aristocats*, where Paris streetwise stray cats are represented by Scat Cat and his jazz band, uses a similar representation of jazz musicians as characters who, as improvisers, are skilful in dealing with the adversity of everyday life in an urban environment.

Also, in children's television shows, jazz music and artists have had a significant presence. The music of Vince Guaraldi can be heard across seventeen television specials of Charles Schulz's *Peanuts* series (1959-2015), punctuating Charlie Brown's ordeals as a young boy. The house-band in *The Muppet Show* (1976-1981), Dr. Teeth and The Electric Mayhem, could be seen as a jazz-rock fusion band. English jazz drummer Ronnie Verrell played the drums for the frantic character Animal, who would defy Buddy Rich for a drum duel in 1981. And jazz legends, such as Dizzy

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2. Full list of titles include *Hittin' the Trail for Hallelujah Land* (Rudolf Ising, 1931), *Sunday Go to Meetin' Time* (Friz Freleng, 1936), *Clean Pastures* (Friz Freleng, 1937), *Uncle Tom's Bungalow* (Tex Avery, 1937), *Jungle Jitters* (Friz Freleng, 1938), *Isle of Pingo Pongo* (Tex Avery, 1938), *All This and Rabbit Stew* (Tex Avery, 1941), *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* (Bob Clampett, 1943), *Tin Pan Alley Cats* (Bob Clampett, 1943), *Angel Puss* (Chuck Jones, 1944), and *Goldilocks and the Jivin' Bears* (Friz Freleng, 1944).

3. Trumpet and flugelhorn player, Shorty Rodgers appears credited under "music by".

Gillespie, Cab Calloway and Jean "Toots" Thielemans, would perform in *Sesame Street* (1969-present).

In American animation and children's television shows, music is primarily functional. Songs or incidental music follow a traditional template of storytelling and established narrative structures. There is also the case of Japanese animation, which respects mainstream film making techniques, but it does so by exploring individualistic techniques and by challenging traditional Western narrative templates: action may stop for a few minutes to contemplate a visual detail; character's eyes are often hugely disproportionate; and sumptuous camera movements and shots prevail over narrative's logic or credibility. Extensive examples of these features can be found in anime classics such as *Akira* (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988), *Ghost in the Shell* (Mamoru Oshii, 1995), or the collaboration between French electronic music duo Daft Punk and director Kazuhisa Takenouchi *Interstella 5555: The 5tory of the 5ecret 5tar 5ystem* (2003).

In Europe there have been various cases where animation is intrinsically an experimental art form and where music is part of that exploration. During the post-1956 de-Stalinization period, with less scrutiny by censors, animation artists from Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia were able to develop experimental and *avant-garde* animation shorts, where music would also participate as part of the exploratory process (Moritz, 1997, p. 39). In Walerian Borowczyk and Jan Lenica's *Dom* (*House*, 1958), composer Włodzimierz Kotoński makes an interesting and innovative use of minimal serialism and electronic elements. But perhaps even more interesting is the fact that this happened one year before he wrote the first Polish piece of electronic music, *Etiuda na jedno uderzenie w talerz* (*Study on One Cymbal Stroke*), for tape (1959). *Dom*, as other shorts by Borowczyk and Lenica, challenges not only established norms of animation film formally and content-wise —by replacing the traditional narrative and the fairy—tale-like formula by new techniques of cut-out and collage —but also with a revolutionary use of music— non-narrative, atonal and in free form. It would be fair to assume that the music for *Dom* was used by Kotoński as an exploratory basis that eventually led to the establishment of a new period in the composer's work and a radical shift in Polish music (Jarocinski, 1965). Also, Dutch artist Gerrit van Dijk makes an interesting use of sound and music in his short animation films, particularly by often editing selected excerpts of music into a collage. For instance, in the 1988 short *Pas a Deux*, real and fictional random characters from popular culture form a string of different and unusual *pas de deux*, dancing to music excerpts from different dance music genres —tango, waltz, rock and roll, and synth-pop. In many of Gerrit's works, he is the one responsible for editing pre-recorded music, as part of his creative process of building a unique visual and audio patchwork.

4. Main Plot

As a performer and composer for film, I strongly identify with Gerrit van Dijk's method of collage, which is deeply rooted in the techniques used in visual arts by European modernists in the 1910s. The use of collage and cubist simulation of multi-perspective resonates with my own musical practice, where I often build a patchwork of different musical motifs and try to provide audiences with abundant overlaying of simultaneous musical ideas. That is one of the reasons why, when I first started developing live improvisation for silent film in 2003, I chose surrealist shorts, and particularly those by American visual artist Man Ray from his Dada and Surrealist period he developed in France. *Le Retour à la Raison* (*The Return to Reason*, 1923), *Emak-Bakia* (1926), *L'Etoile de Mer* (*The Sea Star*, 1928), and *Les Mystères du Château de Dé* (*The Mysteries of the Chateau of Dice*, 1929), provided me with moving images as stimuli that did not necessarily follow a logic narrative. Due to their sur-realist nature, absence of a coherent storyline and profuse utilization of collage and editing, I could use these films in order to create musical motifs that would align with their micro-narratives and visual segments or develop others that would be delib-erately detached from what was happening on screen. I could develop one single motif throughout the entire film and give it different nuances; play short, cut, random phrases; explore less-conventional uses of the guitar —detuning strings, using a violin bow, scratching and striking the guitar's body; or blend all these techniques together in the same performance.

Most improvisational exercises within the jazz tradition take written parts as suggestions which the musician can choose to follow closely or decide to take a rather different development. Whilst improvising for silent film, I take a very simi-lar approach —I perceive what is happening on screen as a dynamic visual score. Depending on various factors— if playing solo or with a band; the characteristics of the venue and audience; and the film itself —I will take different approaches, some-times to the same film, by choosing to illustrate closely the moving image or by opt-ing to contradict the visual stimuli. In *Le Retour à La Raison*, for instance, there is a rather strong and insistent visual motif: circular movements, round objects, springs, spinning geometric forms and carousels. In the past, I have opted to follow the motif, by essentially playing short melodic ostinatos, and in other occasions I have decided to contradict the visual motif by ignoring the film editing and alternating between long and short notes.

The same approach was taken when I performed for expressionist silent films, where narrative is dominant, such as Fritz Lang's 1921 *Der müde Tod: ein deutsches volkslied in 6 versen* (*Weary Death: A German Folk Story in Six Verses* or *Destiny*). The main plot, inspired by the Indian tale of Savitri from the *Mahabharata*, follows a

desperate woman who wishes to be reunited with her dead lover. However, Lang decided to include three other similar stories in the film, which happen in differ-ent historical and geographical contexts: The Story of the First Light, which takes place during Ramadan in a Middle Eastern city; The Story of the Second Light, dur-ing Carnival in Venice; and The Story of the Third Light, in rural China in the Chinese Empire period. My first performance with the film was in 2010, as a solo artist. My option at the time, was to contradict location and cultural identification. When, in September 2017, I decided to revisit the same film together with drummer Johnny Hunter and bassist Paul Baxter, we deliberately avoided any musical element which the audience could identify as being Middle Eastern, Italian or Chinese.

The use of musical clichés, as already mention apropos of the representation of African-Americans in 1930s and 1940s Hollywood film and animation, can eas-ily slip towards parody, ethnic stereotyping, and ethnographic misconceptions and constructions. We interpreted Lang's option to set the same story in different times and places as a way of showing how universal the story is, to the point where it could have taken place in Germany, Italy, China, or the Middle East. As result of that, our improvisation added different layers of narrative and imposed an interpretation. But in the end, is it not what jazz and free improvisers have done in the past? Although arguable, soloing in jazz and improvised music could be perceived as a musical practice where deconstructing structures, narrative, characters, time, space and meanings, is central.

After developing improvisation for silent film —first for non-narrative film and later to film where narrative was central— I had the opportunity to perform impro-vised music for sound animated film. In 2011, I was commissioned by the interna-tional animation film festival of Lisbon, Monstra Festival, to improvise for a selection of Gerrit van Dijk's shorts: *Sportflesh* (*Sports flesh*, 1979), *Letter for Carter* (1979), *Haast een Hand* (*He almost clutched his Hand*, 1982), *I move, so I am* (1997), *Citizen Kane* (2004), and *Uitverkocht* (*Out of stock*, Marie-José van der Linden & Gerrit van Dijk, 2006). A common feature to all six films is that they do not have any music, or when music appears it does so only briefly and as background. The challenge here was to improvise not only to moving image, but also to the films' sound —narra-tion, street sounds, background chatting and music, and Foley. On that occasion I was joined by drummer Joel Silva, bassist André Rosinha and saxophonist Dezidério Lázaro. Again, the experience of playing in the context of a jazz and improvised music session was quite useful. We negotiated our inputs around, over and, some-times, against the sounds and images from those films. Gerrit van Dijk has a very politicized filmography. Because we decided we would perform without any previous knowledge of the contents of the films, our performance was the result of our reac-tions to van Dijk's political criticism and to the other musicians' reactions to that. To

some extent, this was also a political performance, in the sense that the collective sound was the sum of each of our approvals or rejections to van Dijk's social and political criticism.

6. Action

Improvising for film —surrealist, impressionist, animation, silent and sound— has been essential to inform my skills and practice as composer for cinema and television. Although two very different worlds that demand distinctive skills and methods, I have approached composing for animation for both cinema and television using similar processes to when improvising for screen. My main focus has been on three central pillars: texture, time, and meaning.

By texture I refer to the properties of sound produced by the instruments —pitch, tone, counterpoint, polyphony, material (wood, steel, skin). Directors often use the term texture to refer to the properties of photography —contrast, colour, patterns. When improvising or composing for film and television, the term texture meets somewhere in the middle —it refers to the use I make of the sound produced by the instruments in order to sonically illustrate, comment, or create contrast to the moving image.

Fig. 4: Still from *Mi Vida En Tus Manos* (Nuno Beato, 2009).

For instance, in *Mi Vida En Tus Manos*, Beato used exclusively oil painting on glass. Each frame consisted of one stained glass. Oil painting provides the film with a very specific texture, which combined with the use of earth tones suggests a certain roughness to the touch. Because we wanted to amplify that sensorial perception, I instructed the bass player to deliberately play in such a way that he would produce a more scrubbing sound on the strings, which I duplicated on the guitar. Also, the film is set in Andalucía, with its arid and vast plains. In order to transport the viewer into that setting, we opted for long notes and pauses. The combination of a scrubbing sound on the strings, long notes and pauses, became my motif, from which I wrote some ideas to the score and to which we improvised.

The notion of time was also challenging. The film works in a diegetic crescendo, in a way that the events precipitate towards the end. This is accomplished visually by a faster editing rhythm, whereas in music we opted for gradually introducing higher pitch notes.

The film is clearly anti-bullfighting. The main character is a young boy who travels to a bullfight with his father, a fictional famous matador whom he idolises. In one dramatic sequence, the boy gets lost behind the scenes of the arena and spots the bull that is about to be killed by his father in a bullfight. They both stare at each other and the boy realises the fate the harmful bull is about to suffer. As I improvised for the first dailies, I understood that the film was a long lament. The meaning Beato and I decided to give the music was that of a musical poem to the death of innocent animals at human hands.

Animation for children's television, however, has a completely different target. In the case of the twenty-five shorts I composed for RTP's *Ilha das Cores*, they were targeted to children between four and ten years old. Although notions of texture, time and meaning still exist with the same level of com-

Fig. 5: Still from *2+3=5* (Ana Oliveira, 2009).

plexity, they should be clearer to the viewer: the synesthetic perception of texture should be immediate; the notion of time follows a very traditional fairy-tale narrative template; and the prevailing meaning of both image and sound should be nothing more than educational.

With, for instance, the short *2+3=5* (Ana Oliveira, 2009), the message basically resumes to the title. That leaves little room for improvising. Also, the fact that all the twenty-five shorts were thirty-one seconds or one minute long, diminished any chance of developing layers or nuances to a motif. However, the interesting element in *2+3=5* is Ana Oliveira's option for making each object a wind instrument —tuba, horn, trombone, euphonium, and clarinet— which meant I could create an open five-note chord. Each instrument has its own texture and timbre. Five characters —each one holding one of the five instruments— would dictate when each instrument would be played, and I would be left with meaning. Can chords have meaning? Is there an open five-note chord that communicates something close to the joy of playing in a band? I chose Gmaj11/C.

In other cases, I was confronted with the —seemingly— prevailing issues associated with racial stereotyping, some seventy years after Friz Freleng's *Clean Pastures*. When director Lorenzo Degl'Innocenti presented me with his short *Nacionalidade* (*Nationality*, 2009), the concept was to introduce different ethnicities, countries and

Fig. 6: Still from *Nacionalidade* (Lorenzo Degl'Innocenti, 2009).

city's names: Tomé from Maputo, Mozambique; Joana from Porto, Portugal; and Yen from Shanghai, China. How can you show different ethnicities through music without falling into misrepresentations of race and musical stereotyping? Again, in thirty-one seconds, it becomes rather difficult to state through music that musical stereotypes are wrong whilst presenting them at the same time. In the end, I offered a tongue in cheek solution, and used an Indian tabla as rhythmic background throughout the entire short.

7. Final credits

Every experience in animation and live improvisation for screen I have had, has triggered a deep critical reflection about my practices as musician and composer. The moving image opens new and fascinating avenues which, as musician, I would probably never imagine exploring. At the same time, that screen can work as a mirror, questioning us about the meaning of each note and pause. The moving image demands meaning from the music that was composed or is being improvised.

For an improviser, the moving image becomes a dynamic visual score. In jazz, some solos, passages and licks become canonized and part of every musician's vocabulary. As many popular jazz compositions are repeatedly compiled into Real Books and used as learning tools (Medbøe and Dias, 2014), recorded solos —and particular passages— are transcribed, learned and incorporated into any jazz improviser's voice. In cinema the same process occurs —memorable scenes, characters, and shots, but also the score that goes with them become part of our visual vocabulary, with its own code and values.

In an overwhelmingly mediatized world, where interactive audio-visual technology became part of our daily lives, it will be interesting to explore the ways in which new jazz artists —intrinsically used to operate through improvisation and reactiveness to new stimuli— will take the moving image as part of their practice. Dutch trio Tin Man and The Telephone have been exploring smartphone apps as interactive tools with their live audiences. Perhaps in the near future other similar attempts will come to life.

As it is impossible to fully understand the importance and the various meanings of jazz music in history without juxtaposing the music against its visual representations on screen, it is also fruitless to ignore today the importance that the moving image has on the creative and performative processes of contemporary jazz artists.

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