

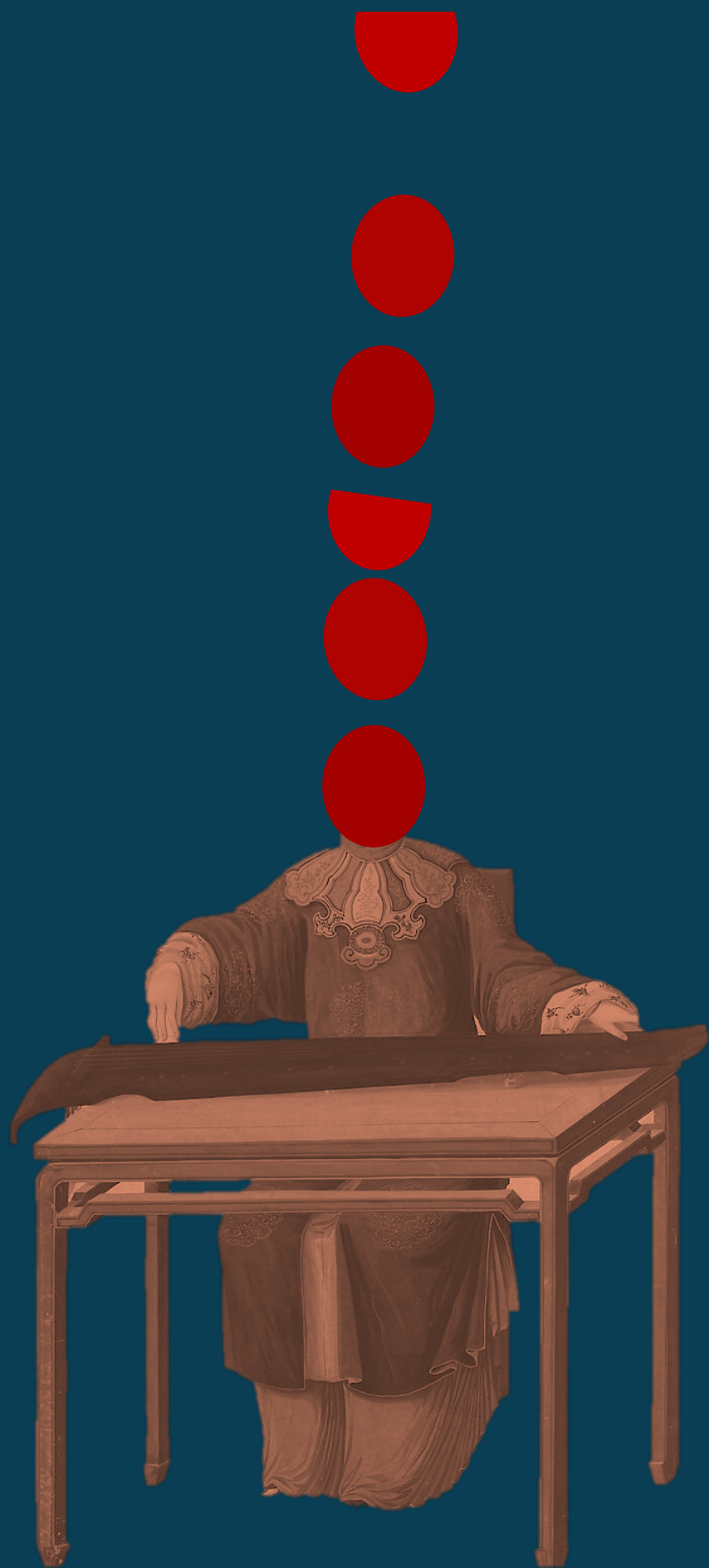
ON MUSIC FOR TWO POINT FIVE (and for ZWEI KOMMA FÜNF)

Which music should I choose for my videos? If the music is interesting, will it not detract from the images? If it is pleasant enough but meaningless, will it not lower the standard of the film? How can I relate musical dissonance and consonance, to colour contrasts and graphic tensions in my drawings? What important standards have been set by film and video makers whose work is to a large extent remembered for their score?

A melody that is instantly memorable is immediately attractive (or repulsive). To some listeners that attraction (or if it has to be the case, irritation, or dislike) wears off in time. Those who favour interesting rather than so-called beautiful or tuneful pieces, whatever the genre, will insist that melodies do not suffice to make the music they wish to hear. Unavoidably, what amount of dissonance and what level of experiment should belong to a composition, become topics for endless debates under the umbrella “interesting music”.

A serious composer, Balz Trümpy started writing in one of the twelve-tone idioms that served as prime avant-garde models to his generation. He became Luciano Berio's assistant in Rome. Yet, not unlike the artist Philip Guston, whose early abstract output was celebrated by critics, he questioned his adherence to a highly regarded formal style of composition. Guston declared that he had become “sick of all that purity”, and returned to figurative painting. Trümpy abandoned serialism because, in his view, “it lacks warmth” and, during his *secunda practica*, found fresh inspiration in Claudio Monteverdi. Possibly because he likes German Romantic poetry and wrote Lieder on poems by Eichendorff, he has been dubbed a Neo-Romantic. We laughed about the blunt dogmatic accusation, when I told him that a Cork Street gallery that had agreed to look at my visual efforts, dished out the very same insult, and advised me never to exhibit. Perhaps not such bad advice? Trümpy accepted my comment, that his music has more future than past, because he refrained from conforming to stylistic standards dominating the 1970s and 80s. Actually, which music typical of the 1980s has aged well?

Directors are subjected to the expectation that, if they try hard enough, they will find a score that best supports their film. This sometimes happens to their detriment. Bernard Herrmann's popular score for *Vertigo* incensed Hitchcock tremendously, as he resented the idea that the success of his film could be due to music. Other directors do not fear the competition. For good reasons, the soundtrack to Stanley Kubrick's 1968 science fiction masterwork: *2001: A Space Odyssey*, is as famous as the film itself. Who would have thought of combining images of satellites slowly rotating into outer space with ballroom dancing? Especially to the strains of Johann Strauss' tuneful *Blue Danube*? Kubrick dared a significant audiovisual montage, at once familiar and enigmatic.



Such a strong symbiosis between image and sound is rare. I am no Kubrick. No one walks into my Hollywood studio (I have no studio), playing a classic snippet I would never have thought of using for my latest movie, and I exclaim: "That's it!" I have to find a suitable piece by myself. This constant quandary over a pertinent musical choice leaves me no peace. Should I stop searching? Should I renounce adding a soundtrack to my videos? Peter Fischli and David Weiss 1987 art video *The Way Things Go* (*Der Lauf der Dinge*) features the recorded noises their objects made while being filmed, a self-explanatory, common-sense complement. Yet, a pirate version once published on YouTube, and regrettably no longer available there, replaced the original soundtrack with Khachaturian's frantic *Sabre Dance*. Both versions, though completely different, have an equally valid and enjoyable merit; I do not happen to prefer one.

Of course, like Kubrick, I could have stolen someone's score; he never paid Ligeti any copyright for playing *Atmosphères* in his *Space Odyssey*. Fortunately, I did not have to emulate that cheeky practice. Professor Shuishan Yu, who is not only an Art Historian specialised in architecture, but also an accomplished guqin player, was kind enough to let me use tracks from his albums of classical Chinese music. I hope that my interest in ancient Chinese art and philosophy, which in many ways must have influenced my drawings, will be perceptible when the slider-vids *Two Point Five* and *Zwei Komma Fünf* are played to the sound of Shuishan's recordings.

Probably composed in its original form before the Ming dynasty, the classic piece *Wild Geese Alighting on a Sand Bank* evokes the behaviour of majestic birds who, when they land on earth, relinquish their imposing mastery of the air. Though glorified by music, their landing is clumsy. It replaces a serene flight tentatively coming to an end. Bye bye, beauty. Geese nervously flap their wings. They hesitate before letting their feet touch the ground. Their movements are no longer perfectly synchronised; the sounds they make are not pretty. They may even slip and make a few stumbling steps, so as not to fall. Yet, this insecure contact with sand on a shore, has inspired guqin players to create shimmering glissandi, a shrill effect that blurs audible distinctions between played notes. Are the notes collapsing like dominos that fall together in a single row? Is this order or chaos? Familiar to us when played on a harp, the glissando technique forces a whole scale to be heard almost at once. So fast? Done. Back to the wild geese. We can swim a little, and we can walk a lot, but we can't fly without complicated devices. So why not also admire the geese when they walk, not just when they glide on water or soar in the sky? Those who praise their "elegant" flight, or think they do, will like film music: sensitive, self-indulgent, and as shallow as shallow pleases. When we listen to film music, we are spoiled with an engineered sound that smoothes orchestral corners and melts down the soloists' contributions to a thick sweet symphonic syrup; whereas, when we listen to a composition for guqin, such as *Wild Geese Alighting on a Sand Bank*, we have to hear the noise that the instrument makes while being played. Since: A) That noise cannot be taken away from an instrumental performance. B) It is (part of the) music, and C) Altering the soundtrack would mutilate the recorded performance.

Neither reverberating quivers from plucked or struck chords, nor bass wooden resonance may be “elegantly” edited away. Like other human activities, music can embellish reality, or it can investigate and interpret the significance of beauty.

The main tracks I chose for *Two Point Five* (and for *Zwei Komma Fünf*) are Shuishan's interpretations of *Wild Geese Alighting on a Sand Bank*. The reason why I believe that this choice is appropriate for my videos relates to the concept of flaw. Bird's droppings on sand may be touched up on a photographic print, an awkward motion in a bird's landing might be cut out by a film editor. However, the misguided thought that aspects of animal behaviour can be judged as natural deficiencies is either decadent or unenlightened. If we want to understand natural perfection, we should look for it in countless interrelations, not in isolated incidence. When a peacock throws a glamorous display to impress a peahen; he does not do it for himself. And like the peacock, the peahen, who is not much of a looker, does not suffer from self-admiring propensities. Balz Trümpy's mid-career crisis: either interesting but clinical sounds or more expressive but, by the same token, potentially conventional ones, does not apply to ancient guqin music. Sometimes harmonious and gentle, sometimes dark or strident, the music accommodates and resolves contrasts that cease to be perceived as opposites. Dissonance and consonance endlessly complement one another, almost without conflict. Repetitions with variations weave a musical score; colour pencils' markings cover primed paper. Patterns overlap; phrases and lines end conclusively or abruptly ... The paper is damaged; the score evinces weaknesses. There are so many artists who can draw so much better than I ever could. Yet, in spite of their considerable skills, they decide to package their work in compliance with specific norms. I prefer to own up to my limitations and celebrate my flaws, which is far from being a negative attitude. (Do not tell me, that the following anecdote is Neo-Romantic.)

An educated woman from a wealthy family, Hipparchia fell in love with Krates, the Cynic philosopher who taught her brother Metrokles. Hipparchia's parents asked Krates to dissuade her from marrying him. He willingly obliged, but could not make her change her mind. Krates then bared his shoulder to show Hipparchia his buckle, and he asked her if she still wanted to marry him. She said: yes.

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