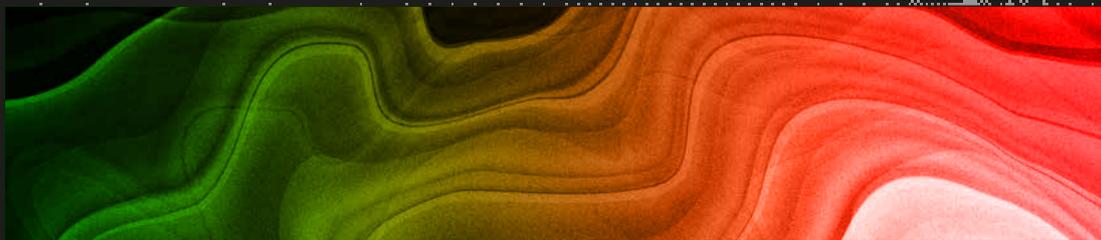


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Audio.Visual —On Visual Music and Related Media. Editorial

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**Audio.Visual—
On Visual Music and Related Media.
Editorial**

— Cornelia Lund, Holger Lund

The field of audiovisual creation is in constant expansion, with both artistic and commercial productions finding an increasing presence at festivals and concerts, in clubs, in art institutions, and even in theaters. A term often used in the context of audiovisuals is “visual music,” both as a historical reference and as a label for contemporary productions.

This volume is intended as a contribution to the discussion of audiovisual creation, as a look at the field that starts from the term “visual music.” *Audio.Visual—On Visual Music and Related Media* is divided into three parts. The first is dedicated to an academic discussion of visual music that both situates the genre historically and presents theoretical approaches for dealing with it. The central theme is gradually illuminated from the periphery inward—for example, from the perspectives of music video, expanded cinema, and games. We opted for this method so as to shed light on the phenomenon of visual music right at its points of contact with other audiovisual forms of production and so as to better define visual music by differentiating it from the other audiovisual genres. The individual contributions examine different aspects of visual music by means of examples. The second part of the book consists of shorter essays that again use examples to present, contextualize, and reflect on contemporary approaches to audiovisual creation. These texts view the topic from a variety of different angles: music, musicology, VJing, art, curating, festival direction, and software development. The authors provide insight into the state of the art of visual music both in the experimental field and on the club scene. Sections of images and graphics underpin the written content: they have been constructed using the principle of the remix, which often is a characteristic for visual music. The approaches and findings presented in the book can be substantiated on the accompanying DVD, which features both historical and contemporary examples of visual music.

So what exactly is visual music? The term was first used with some frequency in discussions of experimental and, especially, “absolute” film of the 1920s and 1930s. Accordingly, the presentation of visual music at exhibitions and in academic and theoretical discussions has mainly emphasized historical issues, such as the development of color instruments or experimental film before the 1960s.¹ Only rarely is a historical or theoretical link made to contemporary audiovisual productions and formats. Where this does occur, usually only a brief extract is presented from the available spectrum of contemporary productions that can be considered visual music. For example, the *Visual Music* exhibition held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in 2005² only in their supporting program included contemporary works that were more or less explicitly rooted in an art

¹ Kerry Brougher, Jeremy Strick, Ari Wiseman, Judith Zilczer (eds.). *Visual Music: Synaesthesia in Art and Music since 1900*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2005.

² *Visual Music: 1905–2005*, MOCA—The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in collaboration with Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, February 13–May 22, 2005.

context—such as those of Carsten Nicolai. By contrast, Mia Makela aka Solu has traced a conceptual path from historical visual music to a phenomenon that she dubs “live cinema.”³ She makes a sharp distinction between live cinema as an experimental format and VJing in clubs, which, however, can also be termed visual music ...

Contemporary visual music thus seems to be characterized by substantial diversity, as is evidenced, in fact, by this volume’s broad assortment of contributions, some of which directly contradict each other. Our concern was not to squeeze the complexity of the genre into a single theory, but to provide a space for diverse approaches, each determined by the individual perspective of its author. And so not only different methods of discussion, but also various desiderata emerge, for example there is no standard terminology for the field of audiovisual creation. In other words, we see this publication not so much as a “poetics” of visual music but more as a forum where its theoreticians and practitioners can exchange views with each other and—we hope—also with the reader.

The multifaceted nature of visual music was already evident in its early historical incarnations. These ranged from live performances with the ocular harpsichord through oscilloscope techniques to animated films. And the scope for variety has now been further extended by the new possibilities offered by advances in media technology, and by the ever-expanding array of digital visual and acoustic formats and techniques. Thus, we really prefer not to discuss “visual music”—and this is a basic theme underlying this book—as if it were a clearly defined genre. Nonetheless, the term can be useful as a description for audiovisual productions pursuing the basic objective of evenly balanced or equilibrated interplay between visual and acoustic components. These productions can involve cinematic images and music, or light projections and acoustic patterns, or even digital live drawing and field recordings—huge variations in technique and style are possible. Thus, it would seem that visual music is found in different places, and in very diverse contexts and formats. But there are also contexts and formats that particularly favor audiovisual interaction in the form of visual music: abstract visualization of music in animated film, for example, or live exchanges between musicians and visual artists.

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³ See *a mínima. new media art now* 22 (issue “Live Cinema”), 2007.