IMMOBILITÉ: COMPOSING FOR FILM IN PARALLEL

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Chad W. Mossholder
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The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the

Project of Chad W. Molsholder:

*Immobilité*: Composing for Film in Parallel

Greg Durbin, Chair
School of Theatre, Television, and Film

Peter Larlham
School of Theatre, Television, and Film

Joe Waters
School of Music and Dance

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my parents for their constant support and encouragement.
Instrumental music is so autonomous that it is far harder for it to dissolve into the film to the point where it becomes an organic part of it. Therefore its use will always involve some measure of compromise, because it is always illustrative. Furthermore, electronic music has exactly the capacity for being absorbed into the sound. It can be hidden behind other noises and remain indistinct; like the voice of nature, vague intimations . . . It can be like somebody breathing.

—Andrei Tarkovsky
ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT

*Immobilité*: Composing for Film in Parallel

by

Chad W. Mossholder

Master of Arts in Television, Film, and New Media Production
San Diego State University, 2012

Experimental films pave the way for new techniques which can later be applied to mainstream cinema. This also applies to the music scores that accompany them. It is important for us to push the boundaries of what is accepted and what is possible in our art.

This project report examines experimental music composition for the film, *Immobilité*, a film shot entirely using a mobile phone as the camera. This paper asks the question, is it possible to create a work of art, such as a film score, that would traditionally serve a supporting role and create it in such a way that it can also stand on its own as its own work of art without the film that it was created for. What techniques can help achieve this goal? The DVD containing clips from *Immobilité*, as well as the entire soundtrack, is available for listening/viewing at the Media Center of Love Library.
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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

During the spring of 1999 I was attending Kent State University, studying music and photography. I discovered a novel belonging to my roommate called The Kafka Chronicles. The novel was fantastic. It was ultra-modern, sexual, political, and full of surrealism. The book was written by Mark Amerika. Soon after, I found the internet labyrinth of writing Amerika had constructed, called GRAMMATRON. I found his art so elaborate and entrancing that I was compelled to contact him to let him know how much I appreciated his work.

I e-mailed Mark and to my surprise he e-mailed me back. He asked me about the electronic music I was writing and I sent him a CD of the music. After hearing it, he e-mailed me and said he would like to collaborate sometime. Sometime happened less than a year later as I landed my first job as a sound designer in the video games industry in Boulder, Colorado (where Mark lived). When Mark and I met up shortly after I arrived, he asked me if I would like to perform a live music show with him in Switzerland. That performance would be the first of our many artistic collaborations.

By the time Amerika created Immobilité, he and I were very comfortable with each other’s work. Our partnership was flowing effortlessly and to great result. Mark explained that Immobilité would be the first feature length film shot on a mobile phone video. I was excited to develop the first score composed for a mobile-phone feature film. The DVD containing clips from Immobilité, as well as the entire soundtrack, is available for listening/viewing at the Media Center of Love Library.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

When Mark approached me about composing music for his experimental film, Immobilité, I was both thrilled and daunted at the same time. How could I compose a new work that was not only for an experimental film, but for one that is produced using a new experimental medium? This film was going to be exhibited in museums throughout the
world, so the pressure to compose something original, unique, and also groundbreaking was overwhelming. I wanted to compose something that would accentuate Mark’s film, but at the same time stand on its own as a work of art. This was my primary problem. The music had to be a new work or art just like the film.

There is a problem that is inherent in all experimental works which is simply the act of breaking established standards and traditions. There are certain conventions that today’s movie-going audiences have come to expect. And when the filmmaker or the composer moves away from these conventions the audience is not always ready to travel down that road with them.

For instance, audiences expect a 1:1 correlation between the action on the screen and the mood of the score. If there is a sad moment on screen, the expectation for the composer is to create music to reinforce that feeling. There were a few artists who bucked this tradition and were able not only to break through this boundary, but excel wildly with both critics and audiences alike.

Sergei Eisenstein, a pioneer early experimental filmmaker, worried that when sound came into film it would not be used to expand the story but would rather be used in a redundant way, expressing to the listener/viewer what was all too plain upon the screen. He and his colleagues devised a form called “contrapunatal” or “asynchronous” music in an attempt to reveal something new in the film, rather than repeat what the screen was already showing.

Crucial to filmmaking in the last half-century has been what Eisenstein and his Soviet colleagues in 1928 called “contrapunatal” or “asynchronous” music, what French theorist Michel Chion in the 1980s called “anempathetic” music, what British musicologist Nicholas Cook in the late 1990s described as music that “contradicts” or “contests” the filmic image. To be sure, a fair amount of film music in recent years has held to classical-style conventions and helped make “excessively obvious” all that was transpiring in the filmic narrative. (Wierzbick 228)

This method is illustrated by Bernard Herrmann, a film composer who is most famous for his collaborative work with British Director Alfred Hitchcock. Herrmann was a master of expanding the story on screen with his scores. His music would delve into the psychology of the characters, presenting the audience with an extra layer of information, illuminating the characters’ inner thoughts, while visually the film explores other subjects. For example, in
Hitchcock’s film *Vertigo*, a detective named John “Scottie” Ferguson is hired to follow a man’s wife, Madeleine Elster. The man claims that his wife is possessed by a dead woman named Carlata Valdes. When Madeleine is first introduced, her musical theme is established. A long series of scenes begins in which Scotty trails the wife through her day. The scenes are scored with a somber music that is not Madeleine’s theme, whose theme is it? Later, when Madeleine sits in the Palace of the Legion of Honor (art gallery) in Lincoln Park, San Francisco, she is viewing a portrait of Carlotta. We realize that the “follow music” is actually Carlotta’s theme. In this situation Herrmann has played a reverse association on us. We understand that the detective is not following the wife, but that he is chasing a ghost. As the follow sequence progresses from this point on, the wife’s theme begins to enter and intermingle with Carlotta’s theme, leading up to the wife jumping into San Francisco Bay. Scotty dives in and pulls her out. When Madeline awakens at Scotty’s house, Madeleine’s theme has returned.

As Scotty continues his relationship with Madeleine, we mostly hear Madeleine’s theme and a strange variation on Carlotta’s theme. Why, when Madeleine falls into her “possessed” trances do we not hear Carlotta’s theme? The answer is revealed later that Madeleine was only pretending to be possessed. Herrmann would have been lying to us if he used Carlotta’s theme to score Madeleine. The depth of the psychology within the *Vertigo* score is impressive.


In “Carlotta’s Portrait,” heard during the first scene set in the art gallery of the Palace of the Legion of Honor as Madeleine stands looking at the picture of Carlotta Valdes, the chromatic melody played by the first flute has a compressed compass, all the pitches lying within the interval of a diminished fourth between G♯ and C. This melody can be seen to be a variant of the opening five notes of “Madeleine” (F♯–G–B–A–G), transposed up a tone, modally adjusted and prefaced by A (A–G♯–C–B–Bb–A). (20)

*Immobilité* not only breaks many conventions of traditional film but also of what is expected in an experimental film. It works against the viewer’s expectations. This creates quite a challenge to engage the viewer and then maintain the viewer’s attention.

In order to allow the creative process to take hold, I began by letting go and allowing myself to be guided through the world of the film, by watching and listening. I viewed the
film over and over again, absorbing its images, its texts, its subliminal content. Every time I journeyed into *Immobilité*’s deep interiors, I would lose myself in its dynamic environments and uniquely Amerikan surrealistic techno-language. And I would try to hear in my mind the score that was missing.

I looked forward to my daily walks through the film. Each exploration was a new meditation. And everything that I imagined the film would sound like on my previous walk would change. Though, at this point the only thing I was sure of was that I would not distinguish between the sound design of the film and the atmospheric score. It would be a work of music concrète. The idea that all sound is music has been a large part of my sound philosophy for a long time. In spirit, I’m a strict student of avant-garde composer John Cage who believed that all sound is music (see Cage, “The Future of Music Credo”).

One of my favorite stories of his is the one he tells of a music performance by Christian Wolff,

One day when the windows were open, Christian Wolff played one of his pieces at the piano. Sounds of traffic, boat horns, were heard not only during the silences in the music, but, being louder, were more easily heard than the piano sounds themselves. Afterward, someone asked Christian Wolff to play the piece again with the windows closed. Christian Wolff said he’d be glad to, but that it wasn’t really necessary, since the sounds of the environment were in no sense an interruption of those of the music. (Cage, *Indeterminacy*)

The next idea that occurred to me as I began composing the music was that Mark’s experiences, the images that he had captured on his filmmaking journey were leading me on new sonic excursions. In reading Mark’s production diaries I found the wonderful term, Dérive, one of the basic situationist practices, a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances (Debord). Dérives involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of a journey or a stroll.

And this led me to another term: psychogeography. Psychogeography was defined by Guy Debord as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals” or stating it in plainer terms, “It’s the active exploration of urban areas.” One definition is “a whole toy box full of playful, inventive strategies for exploring cities” and “just about
anything that takes pedestrians off their predictable paths and jolts them into a new awareness of the urban landscape” (“On Agglomeration”).

It's walking and paying attention. It's savouring the experience of places and people, instead of regarding them as obstacles blocking the path of A to B" ("Welcome to Hyperpsychogeography").

So, what is happening here? Mark Amerika uses the language of art-house foreign films to structure the narrative experience as a psychogeographical dérive. He captures all of the imagery on a mobile-phone signaling his adherence to movement which is the primary action in enacting a dérive, i.e., mobilizing oneself through the environment. He edits these mobile images into a film. I see what is essentially a remix of the original dérive. I experience the psychogeography of this new mobile-landscape. The psychogeography of the dérive slowly begins to inform my score. The score then becomes a brand new dérive, with a completely invisible psychogeography. Or maybe a completely interior psychogeography, that is not invisible at all, but rather very concrete inside the mind of the viewer.

This is when I understood that the film is composed of multiple psychogeographical environments. The mobile-phone captured environments, rich in their own meanings and psychogeography, and those of the score which would create new spaces informed by the original but traveling in parallel to them. This was another moment of breakthrough for me. Unlike scoring a traditional narrative film, I would not be composing “to” the picture but rather I would be composing in parallel to the picture, having internalized the psychogeography of the film on my own dérive through the film’s dérive. The score would move along towards the same end as the film but it would not mimic everything that appeared on the screen. It would in fact become its own sonic film full of new environments for the viewer/listener to explore. But, that being said it would have never been created without the film to begin with.

How appropriate in a world in which the copy is more valuable than the original that I should be able to dérive from the comfort of my studio chair. I wander effortlessly from a country road, cool beneath the lush rooftree into the private sitting room of a young women who greets me with an enthusiastic smile. She was expecting me; but how did she know I was coming? In a physical dérive the transitions between spaces are very interesting. When does the rural neighborhood become the industrial warehouse district? Is it abrupt? Is it a
slow fade or a dissolve? In an immobile dérive (one in which the viewer is stationary and watching as in a film) the transitions are just as interesting, but the distance between the spaces they bridge are unlimited or even abstract: traveling from a country road to a world of white text on a black screen is just as realistic as transitioning from Cornwall to Hawaii.

The soundtrack is also full of transitions, leading us from one space to the next in much the same way. Sometimes the transitions are abrupt. Sometimes they are so smooth you don’t realize you are in a new space until you’ve been there for some time. The transitions are not always in sync with the picture. You may find yourself visually walking down that country road and hearing birds, but birds that seem to exist within a completely different space than that of what you are seeing. As you are walking along this country road, the birds suddenly stop and you find yourself in a cold mechanical echoey space while visually you remain on that beautiful country road. You are experiencing two disparate psychogeographies at once. You are engaged in a multi-dimensional dérive. The psychogeography is pulling you in two different directions. And in the spirit of a true dérive, you follow your instincts following whichever path feel is right to you at the time. And this, we hope, leads you somewhere new and wondrous.

**STATEMENT OF SUB PROBLEMS**

One of the interesting problems I had in creating the score for *Immobilité* was the problem of collaborating over long distance. I was living in Austin, Texas, and the director, Mark Amerika, was living in Boulder, Colorado.

This is a problem that I had been dealing with for years working in my experimental electronic music group, Twine, in which my bandmate Greg Malcolm was living across the country in Baltimore, MD. We set up a common FTP server and exchanged audio files and music sessions. In this way we were able to collaborate on award winning electronic music while each was living on opposite sides of the country.

Mark and I dealt with the issue in a similar way. I would work on scenes from the film and upload them to a file-share where Mark could then download them and view them. He would make any notes, comments, and suggestions and e-mail them back to me.

One of the main differences between how Greg and I worked and how Mark and I worked was that Greg and I never actually met up for any work. Mark and I arranged for
finalizing meetings which really helped and elevated the level of communication between us. Over the course of the work Mark flew out to my studio in Austin about four times. These sessions were invaluable and really helped us both hone in on the project and get it to a polished state that we were both very happy with.

**GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The main goal of this project is to produce a music score for the film *Immobilité* as revolutionary as the film is itself. I ask myself what techniques are used in a contemporary film score and why would those techniques be inadequate for an experimental film like *Immobilité*.

I want to develop new techniques for approaching a score for an experimental film, techniques that differ from the cliché trappings of those used in the modern film score. I want to look at a way of creating an independent piece of art that works alongside another independent piece of art, the film. Like John Cage and choreographer Merce Cunningham before me, I was interested in the role indeterminacy plays in the collaborative creative process. Cage didn’t want to limit his music to the needs of the dance and Cunningham didn’t want to limit his dance by choreographing to a particular piece of music. Their solution was to create two independent artworks that shared only one common element: duration in time (*Points in Space*). However, in this project I want it to be informed by the film’s psychogeography and at the same time, have the score exist solidly and independently of the films.

The score for *Immobilité* asks the question, “Can a score live on its own or will it always be tied to work it was composed for?” I want to attempt to create an organic artwork that both serves its purpose enhancing and adding an extra layer to the film while at the same time, becomes an independent work of art in its own right.

**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**DAW (Digital Audio Workstation):** A Digital Audio Workstation or DAW is simply a software program that allows one to work with digital audio.

**Dérive:** A dérive is an unplanned excursion through an area in which the traveler is guided by his/her subconscious response to the surrounding textures, geography, architecture,
and ambience. The goal is to experience an entirely new experience. This concept was popular with the situationists and Guy Debord.

Electroacoustic Music: Sound that has been created acoustically but has been recorded via microphones to another medium. For instance, recording the sound of ocean waves into a computer and then manipulating that sound electronically.

Experimental: Something that is experimental is something that is attempting something new with an unknown outcome.

FTP (File Transfer Protocol): A method of transferring large digital files from computer to computer over the Internet.

Heterophony: “hetero” means many, “phony” means sounding together (Stockhausen).

Minimalism: Minimalism describes movements in various forms of art and design, especially visual art and music, where the work is set out to expose the essence, essentials, or identity of a subject through eliminating all non-essential forms, features, or concepts.

Parallelism: A situation in which two things travel towards the same goal parallel to each other.

Pro Tools: The current industry standard tool for arranging, editing, and composing sound on a computer.

Pro Tools Session: A Pro Tools Session is a project that is being worked on or has been completed using the Pro Tools environment.

Psychogeography: The study of the effect that surrounding environment has on an individual.

Score: Music written to accompany an artwork, be it film, theatre, television, etc.

Situationist: Relating to the theory or practical activity of constructing situations. One who engages in the construction of situations. A member of the Situationist International (Situationist International).

Delimitations

In this paper I will not be discussing the deep meanings in the images and texts of the film Immobilité. Nor will I be discussing the writing or production of the film itself. Those
subjects are addressed in Mark Amerika’s production diaries (*The postproduction of presence*) for the reader who wishes to go deeper into the work.

This paper will not involve any traditional music theory; though the score does utilize techniques such as harmony, melody, rhythm, and time they are not employed in a traditional way and discussing those techniques would be beyond the scope of this paper.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT**

*Immobilité* is the world’s first feature-length mobile phone art film. It contains within it the world’s first feature-length mobile phone art film score. The work has been shown in prestigious galleries and museums all over the world including:

- Tate Media Fall 2008 Program (London, UK, September 2008 [ongoing])
- Chelsea Art Museum (Project Room for New Media New York, New York, April 7-May 9, 2009)
- Denver Art Museum (Denver, CO, October 20, 2010-January 31, 2011)
- Streaming Museum (Liverpool, Melbourne, Milan, Seoul, Bangkok, BBC, April 8-May 9, 2009)
- National Museum of Contemporary Art (Athens, Greece, September 20-December 17, 2008)
- VI Seminário Internacional de Cinema e Audiovisual (Salvador, Brazil July 26-August 1, 2010)

The *Immobilité* website (Amerika, *Immobilite*) discusses the importance of the works.

Mark Amerika's *Immobilité* mashes up the language of “foreign films” with landscape painting and literary metafiction. The work was composed using an unscripted, improvisational method of acting and the mobile phone images are intentionally shot in an amateurish or DIY (do-it-yourself) style similar to the evolving forms of video distributed in social media environments such as YouTube. By interfacing this low-tech version of video making with more sophisticated forms of European art-house movies, Amerika both asks and answers the question “What is the future of cinema?” (“*Immobilité,*” *The Film*).
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE, FILMS
AND GENRES

LITERATURE ON PROJECT TOPIC

When considering literature in relation to composing a score for Immobilité, the first book I thought of was Invisible Cities by Italo Calvino. The book is essentially a series of stories in which various cities are described over time. The descriptions are concise but poetic. As I read the stories I imagined the sounds of the cities, of the spaces. And each city’s sounds had a different resonance. The book could be thought of as a composition of sound. How would the music transition from space to space with each city and then from city to city in the space of the book?

What were the common threads of sound between the cities, the sounds that connected the spaces across great distances and time? Each city had a different meter, a different tempo. This could all be captured from the book, read like a score. The notes, the instruments were all there, waiting to be performed. Once the text, the images, the actions, and the silences were transcribed into sound and music, then the book could be discarded. The music held on its own.

This is how I approached Immobilité. The score was already living within the film itself, within its texts, its images; I could extract it, manipulate it to my own ends, and if I wanted, let it live without the film as the film could in turn live without the score. But together they become something greater and more powerful. Like additive synthesis each combined waveform adds complexity to the sound.

Another powerful piece of literature that gave me inspiration was simply the opening sentence of Thomas Pynchon’s Gravity’s Rainbow, “A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now” (3).

A sense of space, a sense of drama; something familiar but with no comparison. In that single sentence an entire world opens up. Questions begin to fill my mind, where are they, what is screaming across the sky? How can it have happened before yet it has no
comparison? To create a space of such energy and mystery in which the sounds could both be familiar to the listener and yet have no comparison to anything they have heard before. Original yet familiar. In this way the listener can be lured by the familiar, becoming more receptive to the new. Recognizable guitar strums, birds singing or the sound of oars smacking the surface of a lake briskly pushing a boat and its passengers across the water manipulated by synthesizers. The listener would recognize in them the basic qualities that make those sounds what they are but would have no basis for comparison as the sounds are transformed. This is the power and beauty of electronic music.

**RELATED MUSIC THEORY: DEFINING THE MOMENT**

New means change the method; new methods change the experience, and new experiences change man. Whenever we hear sounds we are changed: we are no longer the same after hearing certain sounds, and this is the more the case when we hear organized sounds, sounds organized by another human being: music.

—Karlheinz Stockhausen

In 1971 Karlheinz Stockhausen gave a lecture on moment forming and integration in music which was filmed by Allied Artists, London. His ideas for defining moments in the experimental music are very much in line with cinematic scenes and transitions:

When certain characteristics remain constant for a while—in musical terms, when sounds occupy a particular region, a certain register, or stay within a particular dynamic, or maintain a certain average speed—then a moment is going on: these constant characteristics determine the moment. It may be a limited number of chords in the harmonic field, of intervals between pitches in the melody domain, a limitation of durations in the rhythmic structure, or timbres in the instrumental realization. And when these characteristics all of a sudden change, a new moment begins. If they change very slowly, the new moment comes into existence while the present moment is still continuing. (Stockhausen 63)

Here we have a scene followed by the transition to a new one. These techniques were employed in the creation of the score for *Immobilité*. Sounds are prolonged, rhythms repeated, noises evolve in a self-similar unfolding following the dérive of the film. And then there is a transitional moment when things suddenly change. And, as Stockhausen says, I often allow some elements of the previous moment to linger, to drift into the new moment creating the effect of a cinematic crossfade.

When all of these moments and transitions are put together we create a line. Stockhausen discusses the line and another technique he calls “Heterophony.”
Heterophony is a way of articulating sound-events around a line, which can be a melody or just a glissando. It means that more than one source, let's say voices and instruments, are following the same line, but not all at the same time: not synchronized to the same beat, or clock, or other timing device. So what you hear is the result of several lines trying to go in parallel, but interfering with one another to produce something that is no longer a clear line but a heterophonic event.

Now suppose this is not happening simply by chance, but in a very controlled way, as for example in folk music. Then I could define how thick the line and the melody may be at any given place; or I could go further and define an upper and lower limit within which the players are moving, so that this melody space will be more or less filled out. It's still a melody, but also heterophony: “hetero” means many, “phony” means sounding together. (65)

This is exactly what I am doing in Immobilité, composing in parallel to the line of the film. All of the sounds are woven around the line of the film, heading in the same direction, but as Stockhausen says, “not all at the same time: not synchronized to the same beat, or clock, or other timing device” (65). The score at times crashes into the film and other times it moves away from it. This oscillation in distance between the score and the film creates a wonderful dynamic tension, and takes the listener/viewer on a multi-dimensional dérivé in which his/her own ideas will germinate and grow.

The great Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky says, “For strictly speaking, the world as transformed by cinema and the world as transformed by music are parallel, and conflict with each other” (159). But I would say that they do not so much as conflict as they simply exist simultaneously to one another and may or may not be related to one another by varying degrees and at different times throughout the duration of the film.

“As soon as the sounds of the visible world, reflected by the screen, are removed from it, or that world is filled, for the sake of the image, with extraneous sounds that don't exist literally, or if the real sounds are distorted so that they no longer correspond with the image—then the film acquires a resonance” (Tarkovsky 162).

What would be more powerful in a film, the image of a bomb being dropped on a town with the literal sound of the massive explosion or the same image with the sound of a mother singing a lullaby to her baby as the flames explode and the buildings disappear into clouds of dust and debris? The second concept immediately alerts your brain that something is going on beyond what the eye is seeing. We are clued into the horror of the moment.
The simple act of replacing a literal sound with an imaginary sound can give new life and new meaning to a common scene. In *Immobilithé*, the viewer is presented with images that are familiar, though alien at the same time, and the score and sound are always working right alongside it, providing a soundscape that is both familiar and alien as well. And rarely is an image on screen allowed to align with the literal sound one would expect to hear from that image. Consequently, when I do allow that to happen, for instance, when the clock is ticking, or when the girls are rowing the boat across the water, suddenly those “real” moments feel hyper-real. In *Immobilithé*, these become “anchor” moments for the score, points where the viewer/listener can take a breather from the theoretical and relax in the “reality” of the space for a moment.

Tarkovsky identifies the problem with using orchestral instruments, even in abstract film:

Instrumental music is so autonomous that it is far harder for it to dissolve into the film to the point where it becomes an organic part of it. Therefore its use will always involve some measure of compromise, because it is always illustrative. Furthermore, electronic music has exactly the capacity for being absorbed into the sound. It can be hidden behind other noises and remain indistinct; like the voice of nature, vague intimations . . . . It can be like somebody breathing. (163)

This is not to say that acoustic instruments should not be used. I made use of a myriad of acoustic sounds, guitar, voice, bells and other recorded sound effects both natural and man made. But these sounds are manipulated digitally on the computer and/or with the use of analog signal processing equipment such as guitar pedals or modular synthesizers. This style of music composition is referred to as electroacoustic music composition (Truax). *Immobilithé* is essentially all electroacoustic music composed using digital music concreté techniques. Instead of recording sounds onto magnetic tape and then cutting and splicing the tape, I record digitally and cut and splice digitally on the computer in Pro Tools.

**THEMATICALLY RELATED FILMS AND GENRES**

The following films played a significant role in developing my ideas for the *Immobilithé* soundtrack.
**Bridges-Go-Round**

*Bridges Go-Round*, directed by Shirley Clarke, is an experimental film composed entirely of superimposed bridges shot around New York City. Clarke commissioned two different scores for the film. One from jazz musician Teo Macero and the other from the experimental music composer team Loui and Bebe Barron, who had just completed the very first all electronic feature length motion picture score for MGM’s *Forbidden Planet*. The ability to watch the same image with two completely different scores in invaluable. Each score works perfectly but each score also completely changes the film.

Macero’s score is composed of voice elements, piano, standup bass, trumpet, vibes percussion that coalesce into a fusion of free and cool jazz. The piece moves in and out of tonal and atonal moments with screeching outbursts of the trumpet to punctuate the end.

The Barrons’ piece is all electronic, consisting primarily of sounds generated by the Moog synthesizer and feedback processed with tape delay loops and reverb.

The differences are clear when watching the film with the different scores back to back. Macero’s score feels very rooted in the beat generation. It feels hip and authentically New York circa late 1950s. The music accentuates the atmosphere and the architecture of the bridges.

The Barrons’ piece is completely removed from reality. It feels otherworldly and alien. The music accentuates the abstract details of the bridges. The viewer becomes aware of the strange shapes created by the superimpositions of the bridges. Suddenly, this is no longer New York. It looks like New York but it can’t be. The music has removed the literal from the image. Whereas Macero’s score reinforces the literal if not in structure, in the quality of sounds produced by the acoustic instruments. I enjoy both scores, but my aesthetic tastes lean towards the Barrons’ interpretation of the film.

**An Owl Is an Owl Is an Owl**

*An Owl Is An Owl Is An Owl* is an experimental documentary by filmmaker Chris Marker. The film presents a series of short portraits of owls. The owls do various things ranging from staring motionless at the camera for a few seconds before turning its head away to staring at the camera for a few seconds without turning its head away to staring off screen for few seconds and then turning to look into the camera. The film is about three and a half
minutes long. The images themselves are wonderful on their own, but the soundtrack is what brings this piece to life. The music is composed of several voices repeating the title, “An owl is an owl is an owl” but starting with the statement, “I am an Owl.” Other phrases enter into the music but are hard to decipher due to the heavy processing of the speech.

Here is a beautiful example of taking a very familiar image and making it exciting and new by simply removing the expected sounds and environment from the picture. The over-processed voice that continually assures the viewer that these are owls raises the question, “But what are they really?” The owls seem to feign disinterest in us the viewer, but the soundtrack’s dismissiveness to the owls makes us feel otherwise. These owls harbor something special, something alien or supernatural. And we are compelled to watch until the end to find out what these owls really are.

**Sans Soleil**

*Sans Soleil*, directed by Chris Marker, is an experimental film that blurs the lines between fiction, travelogue, and documentary. An unknown woman reads from the letters she has received from a journalist who is obsessed with history, memory, technology and economic classes. He illustrates these through the extreme lifestyles of those living in Africa and those living in Japan.

In *Sans Soleil*, composer Michel Krasna subverts the expected. A scene of a boat traveling along the water is shown with the electronic oscillations of a synthesizer, or a Japanese parade of dancers all dressed in traditional garb is underscored by the alien twittering of an out-of-control sinusoidal audio-generating circuit.

Marker does allow the literal sounds to enter into scenes, but when he does they are rarely focused and accurate but usually slightly manipulated and surreal. Both techniques are applied in appropriate places in the film.

In *Immobilité* we also have a voice, but it is not a voiceover. The voice is a text which appears on title cards that appear between scenes and pull the viewer through the intricate and lush imagistic landscapes. What is the literal sound of a title card? Silence? Sometimes I was focused and accurate with the title cards.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

PREPRODUCTION

The preproduction for the *Immobilité* score consisted of watching and listening; watching the film itself, watching other experimental film and listening to their sounds, their music. Amongst the films that I watched that I found most important and insightful were: *Sans Soleil* (directed by Chris Marker in 1983), *Kumbha Mela—Same as It Ever Was* (directed by Albert Falzon/Brian Eno in 1943), *An Owl Is an Owl Is an Owl* (directed by Chris Marker in 1990), *Meshes of the Afternoon* (directed by Maya Deren in 1943), *The Very Eye of Night* (directed by Maya Deren in 1953), and *Heaven and Earth Magic* (directed by Hary Smith in 1962).

I listened to a lot of music including works by John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Brian Eno, Autechre, Pierre Schaeffer, Pierre Henry, Edgard Varèse, Philip Glass, and the Velvet Underground. All of this along with long conversations and exchanged e-mails with artist/director Mark Amerika helped to get me launched in the right direction.

The equipment that I would need for the score I already had in place. The score was composed and mixed in Pro Tools with a 96/IO running on a Apple G5 computer. Some compositional work was realized in Ableton Live, as well. I used a Sound Devices 702 digital recorder along with a variety of condenser and contact microphones for capturing non-electronic sounds. I used my old harmony electric guitar and my Fender Stratocaster for the guitar work in the score. A variety of software synthesizers and DSP plugins were used including: Waves Diamond Bundle; Native Instruments Reaktor, Kontakt (Sampler), Guitar Rig 2, Absynth 3; Izotope RX; Altiverb; and Max/MSP.

PRODUCTION

It is difficult to describe the actual writing process of the music. Each scene in *Immobilité* offered up new challenges that I attacked with varying techniques. The main technique that I use in my music composition is that of Music Concrète.
Music Concrète was invented by experimental composer Pierre Schaeffer. It is a form of music in which electroacoustic sounds are recorded and manipulated using magnetic tape. Though I do not use magnetic tape, the processes are the same in the digital world.

I capture sound using digital audio recorders instead of analog tape. I transfer the recordings to the computer and then into my Pro Tools session. Once the audio is in the session I can cut, copy and paste the sounds into my timeline; arranging the sounds like one would arrange images in a collage.

The digital composer has complete freedom to move and layer sounds anywhere within his/her timeline. And the computer offers the power of endless audition. You can experiment and undo your changes if you are unhappy with the results. This saves time and allows for breakthroughs to happen much more quickly while composing since there is no fear of ever destroying your work. You can always undo your changes or return to a previously saved version.

As if this power isn’t enough, the composer also has an almost infinite set of DSP (Digital Signal Processing) tools for manipulating the characteristics of the sound, be it pitch, time, amplitude, timbre, formats.

My sound philosophy is that the music should be a journey for the listener, the composer and the music as well. I like my pieces to travel through different spaces as they evolve. One method for achieving this effect is by constantly shifting the reverbs applied to the sounds. Reverb is the reflection of sound off of a surface. The size and quality of the reverb defines the space. For instance, a large cavern is hollow and echoey as sound bounces off of the rock walls, prolonging its life within the space.

Just having the music travel through a series of spaces is not enough. I like to set the individual sounds into different simultaneous spaces. For instance, I want to hear the sound of the voice resonating in a cavern while the guitar strums in a small bedroom space with the window open, allowing the wind and birds to leak into its sound space. An eerie drone occupies the lower frequencies, and it is cold and dry perhaps living in an anechoic chamber. As the piece progresses, that drone may move out of that chamber into the open air and become less tight sounding, the voice may venture into a bank vault creating an entirely new reverb signature, and the guitar seems to become submerged underwater as I apply that kind of reverb to it.
The added layers of interest enhance the composition. It’s like micro-composing in a photograph, where one makes sure that all of the details are absolutely correct before snapping the picture. I call it composing for effects. Not only am I composing and arranging the sounds in horizontal (temporal) and vertical (harmonic) space, I’m also composing and arranging the effects that move through the sounds. And the effects exist within the same temporal and harmonic space.

Another technique I use is to always make sure that I infuse the familiar with the unfamiliar. Most listeners are not all that open to new sounds. The human mind can tend to prefer the familiar. In order to counter this I like always to have some instrument that is familiar to the listener in the song. This helps to draw them into the composition. Once I have his or her attention I can let that sound drift away into the background and bring the new sounds, the really interesting sounds to the forefront.

The opening track of Immobilité is composed primarily of processed guitar. But the qualities of the guitar are unmistakable, allowing the listener into the music and into the film. The score weaves in and out of abstract sounds. But I always provide anchor points for the listener. In several spots in the film I allow the literal sounds of the film to come through; for instance, there is a scene in which the second hand of a clock continually ticks from two to three, as if it is stuck or skipping like a record. I bring in a natural clock tick sound here and match it to the rhythm hand. The effect anchors the viewer in what is already and extraordinary event.

At certain select moments throughout the score, the sounds are customized to defamiliarize the viewing/listening experience. For example, at one point in the film we see a wall clock and the second hand is ticking. We hear the clicking as if the working world is in perfect sync. But later on in the narrative, the ticking second hand reappears as a decontextualized sonic fragment that signals memory, broken recollection, and the arbitrary nature of clock time.

**POSTPRODUCTION**

Once the score was completed and all of my sounds and effects had been arranged in the timeline with the film, it was time to mix and master. Technically mixing is always happening during the compositional process. As I layer sounds in my timeline they are
naturally mixing together. So, what is meant by mixing is really fine tuning the mix. The process includes applying equalization to the different channels of the mix, adjusting volume curves and compressing to bring out the best dynamics, clarity and a wide range of frequencies.

After this process has been completed as a first pass I like to render out the mix and burn it to a CD. Then I listen to that mix on as many different systems as possible, hi-fi systems as well as inferior systems. This affords a good indication of what the mix is really sounding like and where adjustments need to be made.

The next step is to go back and make final adjustments to the mix. This process can really be never-ending as the tendency is to chase that perfect sound. At a certain point I declared the score finished and sent the completed soundtrack to Mark, who put it into his master timeline in Final Cut Pro. He rendered it out and created the DVDs that then went to exhibitions.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

When *Immobilité* was completed it began its touring life of galleries and museums. *Immobilité* has been exhibited in some of the most prestigious museums around the world. Mark Amerika created an amazing website to support the film. There have been numerous remixes of the film and audio work. An iPhone application was created that I consequently scored. So, to me the film has been a huge success.

We did not have the opportunity to do any live audio/video remix-performances of the work. That would have been a bonus. But, new projects fill our time as soon as current ones are completed, and so we must pick and choose where we spend our time.

**DÉRIVE**

I feel that this approach was very successful. By eschewing the impulses to attack the film as one would a traditional film in such ways as establishing themes for each character and redundantly supporting scenes with expected music styles, I opened up to the journey of the film. I let the film set me off on my own musical journey and I applied that to the film. Two separate artworks were created and still, they work together as whole.

I will certainly continue to use this method as guidance in composing for film. It’s very liberating and ultimately creates a more powerful score. Had I used traditional instruments and established themes, I feel I would have weakened what is on its own an incredibly strong film.

**COMPOSING IN PARALLEL**

The idea of composing in parallel was brand new to me when I started this project. I had never really thought about film and film music as separate entities coexisting in the same space. But, now that I have, I don’t think I can go back to the traditional way. Why would I want to interpret someone’s film with music? It just doesn’t make sense. As Merce Cunningham and John Cage discovered in their ballet for dancers and video camera, *Points in Space*, it wasn’t right for the choreographer to interpret the music nor for the music to
interpret the dance. I also feel that the director should not try to create his film to a specific score either. Both art forms deserve equal billing; as the soundtrack is released on CD without the film, there should be a version of each film without the soundtrack, so that one may enjoy the images alone.

**DEFINING THE MOMENT**

In applying Stockhausen’s theories of defining the moment I feel that the score was successful. The music tracks and the spaces that they occupy are clearly defined. And the spaces are all varied. I believe that the score can take the listener on an incredible journey through a good number of sonic spaces.

I do feel that I may have adhered too closely to the spaces of the film itself, though. I think I could have moved further away from the images of the film. I would have liked to present the listener/viewer with a greater challenge in their attempt to bridge the space between the score and the image.

I think using anchor points throughout the film was a good idea, but the moments are sometimes too clearly defined. I would have liked to have blurred the boundaries of the scenes more. It certainly works, but next time I would push it further.

**FINAL CONCLUSION**

My collaborations with Mark Amerika have been the most enjoyable, educational and rewarding of my career as a sound artist. Mark’s work is always that of the consummate artist, and I am privileged to be a part of it.

I have been composing music for over twenty years and I have always attempted to push the boundaries of what is considered music. I’ve done this by employing elements in music that sound engineers oftentimes go to great lengths to remove from music, such as static, hiss, noise and glitches. Many times I will take a first performance with its imperfections rather than do take after take after take, and I will make it work.

But when presented with a film I’ve tended to leave those ideas behind and fall back on what is expected, for fear of losing the audience. With Immobilité I was able to put my aesthetics and philosophies of sound in the forefront. It was incredibly liberating. What I’d like to try next, is to apply these concepts of space and composing in parallel to a traditional
narrative film. I think it could work, now. I’m not afraid to lose the audience. I think once they start to see the sights, they will be excited to go on the journey.

I’m in love with the wealth of ideas that can be delivered in experimental film and music. And the two together are a beautiful thing. I am continuing to work with Mark on new projects, and they are just as fresh and exciting as was *Immobilité*. 
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