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THE PROCESS OF COMPOSING REAL-TIME VISUALS

“For the first time in the history of the arts, in the history of culture, man found the means to take an impression of time... That is the sense in which the Lumiere films were the first to contain the seed of a new aesthetic principle. But immediately afterwards cinema turned aside from art, forced down a path that was safest from the point of view of philistine interest and profit. In the course of the following two decades almost the whole of world literature was screened, together with a huge number of theatrical plots. Cinema was exploited for the straightforward and seductive purpose of recording theatrical performance. Film took a wrong turn; and we have to accept the fact that the unfortunate results of that move are still with us.”¹

-Andrei Tarkovsky

The quote above is from Tarkovskys book “Sculpting in Time” which was published in the 80s. Now, 30 years later, his reflections seem still accurate. It is hard to even imagine what could pure visual language consist of in contemporary mainstream cinema. The search for such language is more fervent in the alternative scenes of visual cultures. Live cinema scene offers a wide range of propositions based on image rather than text, and thus offers an interesting window for the possibilities of pure visual communication. What kind of stories can be communicated without characters or dialogues or words?

Instead of text I have preferred to use a piece of music, a picture, a landscape, or perhaps a feeling as a starting point in my works. The creative flow has built up around that magnetic point, with the intention of communicating, not implicitly, but rather with atmosphere or a visual space. That visual space or state would then hopefully create the necessary emotional or unconscious response in the viewer. Surprisingly often this kind of subtle audiovisual communication has created the story for the viewer, even nothing has been said.

Kaamos Trilogy is a meditative piece, which centers on the concept of guru. Originating in Sanskrit, *gu* means darkness and *ru* means light; thus *gu-ru* is someone who finds light in the dark, metaphorically speaking. Kaamos Trilogy is an audiovisual fairy tale about illumination. I call it a fairy tale because it has a sort of wicked lesson or message in store, as stories for children often do. The video was shot during the dark winter period in the north, called *Kaamos* in Finnish. Two women traverse thru the forest in search of a spring famous for its water, which can cure from blindness. Until here the story is true. A friend of mine actually did take me to a spring, which was famous for its gift for recovering sight. It is called the Sacrifice spring.

The place felt truly magical while looking at the whirling sand tornados on the bottom of the spring. In the fairytale the two ladies drink this water, after which they are eager to bring the water back home. They start the journey, but the way is transforming and dissolving. The journey continues but doesn't lead anywhere but forward. There is no happy end, or end, or beginning. It is not a linear story but a circular one. What comes around goes around. That's the teaching of the fairy tale.

The concept of time in Tarkovskys films is intriguing -the slowness in some of his creations seems to affect the brainwaves in such a way that the images stay in the memory longer, perhaps forever. Watching his films can resemble more traversing spaces than following a linear story. This kind of "staying" in the picture has probably transpired into my live cinema work. In Kaamos Trilogy we stay in the same expanded, hovering, time frame. In a meditative, almost trance-like state we are going forward, endlessly. It is indeed the journey not the destination, which is the focal point of the piece.

In Kaamos Trilogy images dissolve into each other without cuts in between. At moments it seems that the digital matrix that contains the video pixels crumbles and disintegrates the pictorial constrictions that were clearly visible in the original video footage. The visuals simulate momentary take-

over of the visual field by the right brain side. Apparently the right brain side doesn't recognize boundaries between elements. At least, this is how a neuroscientist Jill Bolte Taylor explains it in her TED talk² about the experience of a stroke on the left side of her brain. She couldn't separate letters from paper any more or light switch from the wall. Neither could she talk or understand language. She was merging with the universe.

The video clips for Kaamos trilogy were mixed, processed and played with each other in Max/ Jitter software. The selection process included testing the video clips for seamless looping, as this is how they are presented. Their presentation time exceeds many times their actual duration. The video clips were modified and processed to the degree of losing connection with the original footage and adapting a more synthetic and symbolic appearance. These processings, which are mathematical calculations operated in the software, invite for infinite experimentation. This kind of experimentation also offers surprises: The fire at the end of the journey in Kaamos Trilogy is a mix between the footage of the sand from the bottom of the Sacrifice spring and the forest. The sand metamorphosed into a different element: from earth to fire. A process of digital alchemy. This kind of events might resemble the experiences of the early video makers in the 70s, who got enlightened by the “amazing” effects the first video synthesizers could produce, such as the feedback effect, which they had never seen before. They were blown away by the possibilities of electricity and some even believed that they found a key to a some sort of mystical universal system. Its interesting that the latest scientific discoveries have proved them right – the feedback loop seems to be one of the core concepts of life.³

The different video elements, which loop continuously, are composed together like various instruments for a musical performance, played simultaneously, and sometimes solo. The process is similar to the process of an electronic musician who prepares a concert. This becomes especially true if the visuals are mainly abstract, as the narration of abstractions is what music is all about.

Thus the study of composing and understanding how to build an abstract “journey” can be more productive than reading books about filmmaking. Except Tarkovsky, of course. He wrote about poetic logic in his films:

*“In my view poetic reasoning is closer to the laws by which thought develops, and thus to life itself, than is the logic of traditional drama. [...] The usual logic, that of linear sequentiality is uncomfortable like the proof of a geometry theorem.”*⁴

Stuart C. Hancock uses the Freudian term preconscious level, to describe the target for Tarkovskys communication. *“Rather than providing direct connections between scenes, events and images, Tarkovsky relied on the laws of associative linking to provide oblique relationships that, when added up, create a mood that strikes the viewer on a preconscious level.”*⁵

Especially this sentence in mind Kaamos Trilogy is dedicated to Tarkovsky. Instead of leading the viewer from one high point to the next it offers what Tarkovsky allows: time to stay in the image and have a preconscious or unconscious or even conscious connection to the work and the world which created it.

References:

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2. Jill Bolte, *My Stroke of Insight*, 2008.
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3. Gerkö Popping, *Feedback processes in the early Universe*, 2009
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4. Andrei Tarkovsky, p. 20, (see footnote n° 1).
5. Stuart C. Hancock, *Andrei Tarkovsky – Master of the Cinematic Image*, 1996.
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