Sound and Image:
Musical Compositions in Realization of Intermedia

SO Ka Wai

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Christopher KEYES
Hong Kong Baptist University
May 2010
Abstract

Sound and Image: 
Musical Compositions in Realization of Intermedia

Many composers and artists have been interested in the relationships between sound and image for centuries, which share common descriptions, such as color, brightness, rhythm and form. In the 19th and 20th century, with the aid of technologies, electric-light color organs were built to form such relationships. Alexander Scriabin use color organ to promote the relationship between music and color in Prometheus: A Poem of Fire in 1910. Since then more and more composers, such as the well-known French composer Olivier Messiaen, have started thinking both acoustically and visually. In addition, film technology has enabled artists to create abstract films connecting music and images, such as Walter Ruttmann’s Lichtspiel series and Oskar Fischinger’s Optical Poem (1938). After WWII, the development of computer technology is now used by virtually all artists in some form. In most recent decades, software is now one of the main tools with which to realize music with visual elements. Particularly, programming environments enable compositions in which sound and image interact with one another and this approach can be categorized as the genre of intermedia.

This thesis intends to realize connections between music and images through the creation of multi-modal compositions. Three topic-related works have been written: Oblivious Diary… for clarinet, live electronics and video; Placing a Star on a Sky for string quartet, live electronics and video and Con Fuoco Pointillism for tape and video. Besides an analysis of all three pieces, two important concepts of intermedia, visualization and sonification, will be also discussed. For a more rounded composition portfolio, three additional acoustic works in different genres are also included.