

1921 > 1989 Notes

In beginning my first work in 3-D computer video, I found that the basic spatial parameters of the computer were described by the Cartesian coordinates of X, Y, & Z (width, height, and depth). The symmetry of this lattice structure reminded me of the right angle orientation of Neoplasticism, especially the three dimensional constructions of Theo van Doesburg. The correspondence between the spatial model of the computer and the elegant simplicity of the reductivist formal devices of De Stijl suggested an interesting discipline for my first experiments with computer animation.

In researching the theories of De Stijl in order that I might be true to their ideal, I discovered that in the search for universal and immutable principles of art, Van Doesburg's thinking was in constant revolution, and that each edition of the journal De Stijl brought forth new definitions. In 1926, Van Doesburg found it necessary to supersede Neoplasticism with Elementarism declaring:

"As a result of a new orientation relative to the earlier attempts at renewal in life and art (including Futurism, Cubism, Expressionism, Dadaism, Neoplasticism, etc.), Elementarism has assimilated all truly modern elements (often ignored through one-sidedness).

"Elementarism is to be regarded, therefore, as the synthesis of the new plastic consciousness of the age. The "isms" of the last decades have mostly perished, either because of their one-sided, dogmatic limitations, or because of compromise or chauvinistic tendencies. They no longer have any force or value for renewal."

In order to work within the limits of De Stijl, it became useful to fix a particular date as a reference, and so the piece became *1921 > 1989*.

Michael Scroggins

When Michael Scroggins first came to me with quite detailed plans for his computer video work *1921 > 1989*, I was struck by the overriding importance of structure in the piece. While it was obviously in three large sections, the intricacies of the details of each section were such that they not only displayed specific characteristics which gave each sections its unique character, they also seemed to exhibit in visual terms the musical qualities of exposition, development, and expanded recapitulation, something akin to the classical sonata form. In addition, the precision of the timing of the movements called for composing a score that would catch the specific "hits" of the action. At the same

time, I realized that constantly “stinging” the images would quickly grow tedious; some sort of deflection from the obviously expected was occasionally necessary in this regard. Finally I saw that the limitations of images and colors, which were explored in great detail of variation, demanded a similar approach in the musical materials.

I decided to employ these observations in composing the music, and also to take the attitude of scoring to a preexistent choreography. I saw *1921 > 1989* as a dance, not of human dancers, but of plastic geometric entities, constantly reorganizing themselves in different ways. The music, then, was arrived at by considering the score as if I were composing music to a dance already created. The resulting work reflects these attitudes, moving from accompaniment to counterpoint and back again to a more synchronous style of scoring, thus reflecting the overall structure and plasticity of the piece and creating a unified whole.

Barry Schrader