

# VISUAL PHRASING

*Manifesting the Power of Musical Expression*

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Visual Phrasing: Manifesting the Power of Musical Expression

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## ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.

Minja Brković \_\_\_\_\_

October 2010

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To my guitar teacher and my mentor of music, Ross Hill, thank you for enlightening me with the beautiful art of the classical guitar.

To Jessica David, thank you for your assistance in capturing a contemplative moment within the performance.

To my dear family, you are my crew behind the scenes. Thank you for your enduring love, care and dedication. You are forever my stable ground.

## **PREAMBULAR NOTES**

A disk is located inside the back cover of this exegesis. It is an accompanying digital appendix document that holds additional background information, experimental moving image work referred to throughout the exegesis, as well as the work exhibited at the AUT Art & Design Festival, 2010.

This thesis comprises 80% practical work and 20% exegesis.

## PREFACE

*Phrasing* in music can be regarded in two ways: structuring the musical notes in groups of phrases when writing a piece of music; and, orchestrating the rhythmic flow of the notes and phrases when performing the music. This thesis is focused on the latter.

The term *musical expression* can also be regarded in two ways: how a composer creates emotion when writing a piece of music; and, how a performer can creatively interpret and therefore accentuate this emotion when playing the music. Again, this thesis is focused on the latter.

Phrasing is not the only way a performer can portray the expression of a piece of music. It is also through dynamics and tone that this expression can be created. When I perform, the phrasing is the structure I bring to my performance and within this structure I further apply personal dynamics and tone.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The performer can also improvise with tempo and accent, however, for conciseness, I refer to the elements of phrasing, dynamics and tone.

## ABSTRACT

### *Visual Phrasing: Manifesting the Power of Musical Expression*

Within the field of Visual Music there has been an ongoing search for visual aesthetics that possess a power of emotional expression comparable to music. This thesis focuses on exploring visual phrasing as a materialization of the qualities of musical expression. I experimented with immersing myself in the experience of listening to a piece of music, allowing my spontaneous responses to guide the movement of my hand. The experiment created a collection of over 1000 automatic drawings, representing visual data of my instinctive reactions to music. This exegesis presents an analysis of the experimental outcomes of the drawings' expressive qualities, as I have interpreted them, and proposes a notion of visual phrasing.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years I have been a passionate learner and performer of the classical guitar, and I would like to emphasise the word *performer*. I only have an average ear for music, but I possess a lot of musical feel. This feel permits me to heighten the emotive expression of a piece of music I play.

While performing, I bring a lot of artistic expression, or interpretation, to my performance.<sup>2</sup> However, instead of interpretation, I would like to use the word *response*, as within the context of my thesis, it emphasises spontaneity and acting in the spirit of the moment. It is an encounter where the music is calling and the performer is responding. That response encompasses the performer's orchestration of rhythmic flow, dynamics and tone.

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<sup>2</sup> The term *performance* should be regarded, not as a staged act to a live concert audience, but as an intimate and private performance of self-expression.

## CONCEPT AND CONTEXTS

This thesis is an exploration of my inner, responsive sensations to music, in search of an engaging visual aesthetic. It focuses on a search towards a *visual phrasing* as a materialization of the qualities of musical expression. One could ask – what is visual phrasing? Instead of articulating this term verbally, I would like an audience to be able to see it, but more importantly, to feel it. Therefore, a strongly visual articulation of the term is what I am searching for.

Jerrold Levinson is one of the key theorists within this thesis on the topic of expression within art and music. As Levinson (2006) states:

It seems undeniable that music has a certain power to induce sensations, feelings, and even moods in virtue of its basic musical properties ... Particular timbres, rhythms, intervals, dynamics, and tempi exemplify this power most clearly. ... The rise in heartbeat caused by rapid tempo, the discomfort occasioned by dissonant intervals, the kinetic impulses induced by dancing rhythms, the excitement produced by quick alterations of soft and loud, the relaxation engendered by a certain tone color or manner of articulation, are all familiar phenomena. (pp. 49-50)

The contextual framework of this thesis lies within the vast field of *Visual Music* – a term that “traces the history of a revolutionary idea: that fine art should attain the nonrepresentational aspects of music” (Rifkin & Strick, 2005, p. 7). Over the last century there have been many artists who have experimented with musical analogy to emulate “the emotional intensity, structural integrity, and aesthetic purity” present within music (Zilczer, 2005, p. 25). They have been exploring the relationship between musical notes, harmonies and structures, and strived to express these relationships in visual form through the application of colour, form and structure (2005). This thesis began in a similar manner – the aforementioned three elements were applied at the beginning of my practical research.

One such artist was Morgan Russell, who believed that colour has the same capabilities as music to provide the audience with the utmost ecstasies and delights. Russell derived ‘colour chords’ from the conventional colour wheel to create rhythmic colour compositions (Zilczer, 2005). Russell stated that “these ‘color rhythms’ somehow infuse a painting with the notion of time: they create the illusion that the picture develops, like a piece of music, within a span of time ...” (as quoted in Zilczer, 2005, p. 43). This is demonstrated in his painting *Cosmic Synchrony*, painted in 1914 (see fig. 1 on p. 17).

The painting consists of a very loose but complex structure, and there is an intriguing ambiguity where the colours seem to be very free flowing while also equally working within a specific composition. Its looseness and ambiguity enables viewers to develop their own perception of the music. Russell’s rhythmic use of colour patches conveys an illusion of pictorial development over time and creates motion that exudes powerful emotion (Zilczer, 2005).



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copyright reasons.

Fig. 1: *Cosmic Synchrony* (1914).  
Oil on canvas. Morgan Russell.

Len Lye has been another key artist, specifically influential in guiding the research focus. A book on his works and methods introduced the importance of portraying movement (Bouhours, Horrocks, Dennis, Lye, 2000). Being an experimental film-maker, Lye had a keen interest in the Art of Kinetics or Aesthetic Kinesthesia, and stated that the key element of Kinetic Art is *sensation pulsation* and the ability to visually convey these sensations.

To visually express the impulsive feelings, or sensations, music stimulated within him, Len Lye applied the method of doodling, as Bouhours (2000) explains:

Len Lye's work lines ... are sinuous, the starting point for complex convolutions. In his most abstract doodles, the line is the result of constant hand/paper contact. The point was to let the hand go where it would, to fish about for a habitual movement that ceases as soon as consciousness intervenes and reintroduces a fragment of reality. (p. 200)

The above findings brought forth the elements of line and movement as well as the method of freely drawing to music. It focused my practical research towards exploring their potential in orchestrating a compelling *sense of motion* – a concept I felt could lead to an engaging expression of emotion, similar to the compelling sense of motion present in Russell's *Cosmic Synchrony*. Alongside this, the words *sensation* and *impulsive* allowed the notion of feeling a piece of music to emerge. I found this a captivating avenue to explore as it resonated with my intuitive feel for music.

When I begin playing a piece of music, I do not have a planned out routine of how I am going to phrase the music or what kind of artistic expression I will bring to my performance. Instead, the expression I bring is strongly influenced by the sensations that are triggered in the moment of playing. The idea of spontaneously responding to these sensations intrigued me. I therefore began to focus my theoretical research on how an audience may perceive expression within a piece of instrumental music.

### *The persona*

The expression within music is conceived through the actions or gestures we hear in a passage of music. Levinson states that “music is often heard as, or heard as if, or imagined to be, the expression of emotion by an unspecified individual, whom we may call the music’s *persona*” (2006, p. 50). Edward T. Cone (1974) affirms that the musical persona “is the experiencing subject of the entire composition ... whose inner life the music communicates by means of symbolic gesture” (p. 94). This notion of the persona can also be applied to a visual mode of expression. As Cone explains:

In a wider context, one might say that the expressive power of every art depends on the communication of a certain kind of experience, and that each art in its own way projects the illusion of the existence of a personal subject through whose consciousness that experience is made known to the rest of us. ... A picture implies the presence of an observer – the artist’s persona, if you like – whose point of view we are invited to share. (p. 3)

### *Responding to the persona*

People can experience different emotional states in response to the same piece of music. Jenefer Robinson (2005) explains that every person possesses his or her own emotional memories and associations which they bring to the context of the music. She states that “the persona is partly constructed by the interpreter, and there may be as many personae posited for the work as there are different interpreters of it ...” (p. 259).

### *Responding through self-expression*

When playing the guitar, I identify with the persona I encounter, and respond to it through my artistic expression. I immerse myself so deeply in the moment of performing – feeling the music’s persona and responding – that I become the persona. In these moments, the performance becomes a method of self-expression.

### *Automatism*

Automatism, as a mode of self-expression, consists of procedures designed to limit the artist's voluntary control. It allows the artist to express his or her unconscious, resulting in a more powerful level of self-expression (Rodriguez, 2004). Pesonen (2008) explains that artists within the Surrealist movement were the first to apply automatic drawing within their artistic processes. In automatic drawing, rational control is taken over by spontaneous methods in order to express one's inner world.

André Masson, a French Surrealist painter, was one of the first to apply automatic drawing within his work. Pesonen deduces from Masson's writings that "the line in a drawing seems to be as free, expressive and intimate a feature as movement" (2008, pp. 89-90). When looking at one of Masson's works, *Automatic Drawing*, 1924 (see fig. 2 on p. 22), figures become visible within the intricate and complex flow of lines. However, Pesonen (2008) points out how the inner world of the artist is much more present in the quality of the line as opposed to the recognisable figures. These figures have very little significance in creating the meaning of the work. I return to the notion of the meaning of the work later in the exegesis.

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Fig. 2: *Automatic Drawing* (1924).  
Ink on paper. André Masson.

This research began in a formalistic manner. The exploration of the relationships between musical elements through colour, form and structure brought forth the expressive potential of line and movement. The notion of feeling a piece of music emerged, further encouraging the idea of responding to the sensations of the inner persona. Through exploring automatic drawing, the contextual framework of this thesis evolved and focused towards capturing and understanding the self-expressive, or the self-responsive experience, in the search for visual phrasing.

## METHOD

As mentioned, the practical research for this thesis began with the application of colour, form and structure. Being the three core elements used within any design practice, I kept their application very open and incorporated them in my experiments with no clear or intended preference. This was done to find which element, or combination of elements, or relative proportion of these elements, would bring the most captivating visual expression, or an aesthetic that, when viewed, would resonate with the emotive sensations I felt while listening to a piece of music.

Throughout the research process, the focus of my exploration shifted slightly within the search for a visual aesthetic that may possess a power of emotional expression comparable to music.

### *Initial experiments*

*Study in E Minor Visual* was one of my first experiments. Focusing on the music's mood, and its harmonic and rhythmic structure, I applied a very formulaic method to achieve a visual portrayal of the piece of music.<sup>3</sup> Following this was *Matrix 1*, which was an experiment that resulted in a visual representation of the structural role of instruments within the music.<sup>4</sup> *Matrix 2* focused on the energy or intensity a simple, structural placement of coloured forms can express (see fig. 3).<sup>5</sup>

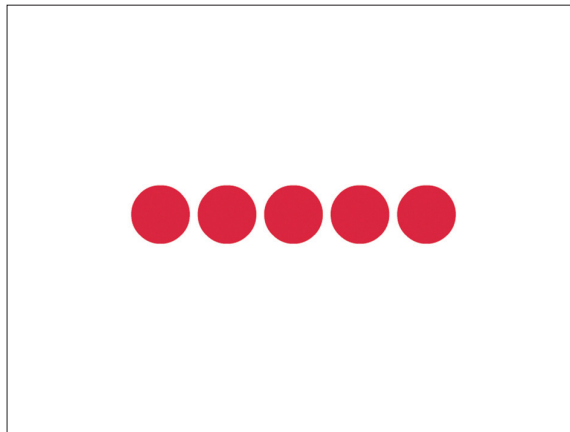


Fig. 3: *Matrix 2* [Moving image still at 10.3 sec].  
06, 2009.

*Matrix 2* brought forth aspects that proved to be crucial to the development of this thesis. Since I abstained from representing every single beat, note or instrument, the movie portrays spacious and gradual transitions that allow for freedom of interpretation or contemplation. Incidentally, when the movie is viewed with the sound fully muted, there seems to exist a *sense*

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<sup>3</sup> An extended analysis of the experiment *Study in E Minor Visual* can be found on p. 3 of the digital appendix.

<sup>4</sup> An extended analysis of the experiment *Matrix 1* can be found on p. 5 of the digital appendix. To view the experiment, please open the file 'Matrix 1.swf' on the disk.

<sup>5</sup> To view the experiment, please open the file 'Matrix 2.swf' on the disk. The accompanying soundtrack is a segment of *Elegant Gypsy Suite*, composed and recorded by Al di Meola (1977).



*of music*. I believe this is due to the presence of a constant pulse and an ongoing transition and motion of colour – a parallel to music where the sound is in constant motion.<sup>6</sup>

The above three experiments were created through drawing crisp, coloured forms on the computer. Strict, formulaic and mechanical methods were applied to get a clearer understanding of how the colours and forms could be arranged to work together. However, the emotive expression was obviously absent. I therefore had to rethink my approach and began to consider the free-flowing and ambiguous nature of music. I became intrigued by the thought of letting go of total control and not knowing what the final outcome would be.

### *Spontaneity*

A more spontaneous approach was called for, which resulted in a set of spontaneous experiments, one of the first being *Shape Play* (see fig. 4 on p. 26). I abandoned the clean and crisp finish of digital vector shapes and did not apply any formulaic system. The focus of the experiment was to express the characteristic *feel* of the music.<sup>7</sup> The movie was created through stop-motion photography of very simple, cut-out arrangements of coloured forms.<sup>8</sup>

The most successful part of this experiment is the presence of the jerky movement. It strongly emphasises the quirky and fun rhythm, and expresses the light-hearted, carefree nature of the music. The rougher making of the movie also contributes to this feel – it is not perfectly synchronised and the forms are loosely aligned.

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<sup>6</sup> We do not see sound move. However, as time is going by while we are listening, we can perceive, or sense, the sound of a single note as having a direction. We can think of this direction as an evolvment, progression or development; or as growth in knowledge or understanding of an experience. Even in a passage of silence – where notes are not being played – there is anticipation. Within an experience, growth and evolvment are ever present.

<sup>7</sup> For the *Study in E Minor Visual* I focused on expressing the music's mood, as opposed to its feel. The terms *mood* and *feel* hold a very similar meaning. To clarify their application within this thesis: *mood* refers to a frame of mind and experiencing a type of atmosphere; *feel* specifically refers to experiencing an automatic sensation within the body.

<sup>8</sup> To view the experiment, please open the file 'Shape Play.swf' on the disk. The accompanying soundtrack is a segment of *Elegant Gypsy Suite*, composed and recorded by Al di Meola (1977).

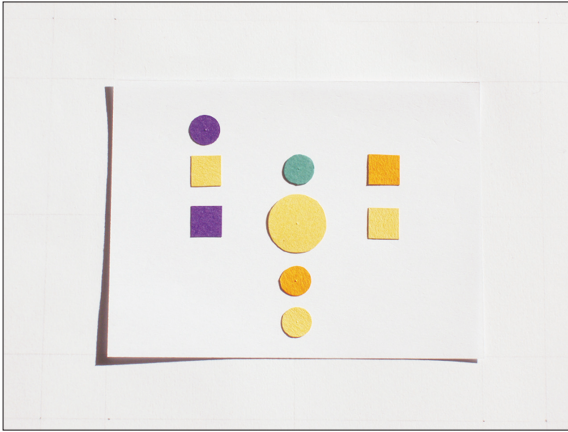


Fig. 4: *Shape Play* [Moving image still at 8.2 sec].  
05, 2009.

The initial steps in conducting *Shape Play* consisted of genuine *hand-made* elements, where physical contact was made between the work and the practitioner. This allowed me to be a lot more connected with the work and let my sensory experience of the music more actively guide the potential outcome.

For the experiment *Matrix 3*, I wanted to emulate the experience of listening to an orchestral performance. I aimed to compose a short piece of visual music without a backing soundtrack.<sup>9</sup> I photographed shiny, coloured pieces of card at an angle to achieve luminous, gradient transitions, which brought a captivating presence of constant motion, creating a sense of music – the same effect that first emerged within *Matrix 2*. The structure of *Matrix 3* includes an introduction, development, climax and ending. The grid of twelve colour areas enabled me to create relationships between those areas and establish a developing *sense of dialogue* throughout the composition, taking the audience on a visual journey (see fig. 5 on p. 27).

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<sup>9</sup> To view the experiment, please open the file 'Matrix 3.swf' on the disk.

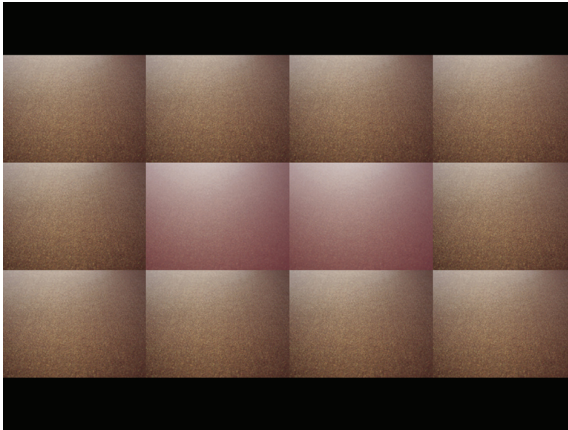


Fig. 5: *Matrix 3* [Moving image still at 22.2 sec].  
06, 2009.

### *Element of motion*

The experiments mentioned thus far consisted of different variables with different parameters, and no one type of experiment was yet deeply explored or analysed. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, this was done to see which elements would emerge as bringing the most engaging and expressive visual aesthetic. A grounded approach was followed to allow for and encourage an emergent to occur. Barney G. Glaser states: “The researcher must have patience and not force the data out of anxiety and impatience while waiting for the emergent” (1992, p. 4). Reflecting on the data thus far, there was a continuous reoccurrence of the element of motion within both my theoretical and practical research. The portrayal of movement emerged as a key aspect in conveying a sense of music and creating engaging, expressive effects. This raised a hovering thought: in terms of engaging the audience, is motion – or the perception of motion – the closest visual equivalent to expression in music?

### *Self-expression*

It is interesting that Glaser (1992) mentions the presence of anxiety and impatience. Within my practice I experienced these moods. I also felt a lot of frustration due to the lack of emotive expression in my work. And within any image-music combination, the music brought a more dominant and active role of emotive expression. I realised that before creating any piece of work, I preconceived a possible outcome and thoroughly planned, or forced, the steps I would take to achieve it. This method significantly restricted my musical feel to lead the research, and so I was encouraged to apply a much more subjective, self-reflective and self-immersed approach.

In my desire to create a visual form of expression that an audience can genuinely feel, as if feeling the expression within music, I had an insight that an effective manner of achieving this could be through self-expression of my sensations after listening to, or playing, a piece of music. Automatism and Len Lye's sensation pulsation doodling, or the automatic drawing process, emerged as appropriate methods in achieving an engaging, expressive aesthetic.

### *The process of automatic drawing*

I experimented with immersing myself in the experience of listening to a piece of music and allowed the sensations triggered by the music to completely guide the movement of my hand. This resulted in over 1000 automatic, expressive drawings, which represent visual data of my instinctive reactions, or spontaneous responses, to music.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the type of music I chose was purely classical guitar music as it allowed me to strongly associate with the experience of performing. This influenced my spontaneous responses, or drawings, as in my mind's eye I saw myself playing the music. The musical lines I heard were not just sounds – they became gestures.

When playing the guitar, the music I play triggers sensations within me and my instrument allows me to express these sensations through it. But the guitar has its limits, and can only physically be pushed so far without it breaking. I respect its limits – I respect what and how much it does allow me to do – and so I restrain myself. Through its limits, it psychologically and emotionally brings me to rest, and allows me to come to terms with my own limitations as a performer.

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<sup>10</sup> Further explanation of the automatic drawing experiment can be found on p. 7 of the digital appendix. To view a collection of the original drawings, please open the file 'Visual Phrasing Collection 1.pdf' on the disk.

Drawing also has limits, and throughout the drawing process I found that I could not completely express the emotion that I felt and wanted to express. This tension and frustration in not being able to express as much as I felt can be sensed when viewing the drawings.

I experimented within a moving image medium, to creatively orchestrate the drawings. By taking this approach, I have been (in part) consciously shaping the raw material from my automatic drawings, and turning their potential overly self-expressive (autobiographical) qualities into something that can be shared with the audience. The focus of the experimental movie clips was to explore the possibilities of *involvement* – encouraging viewers to bring their own interpretation, or expression, stimulating the growth of a relationship between their inner personae and the visuals.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> An extended analysis of the experimental movie clips of drawings can be found on p. 15 of the digital appendix.

## REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In the reflective analysis stage of the automatic drawing experiment, I dedicated a lot of time to viewing the drawings. The grounded approach was still ever present within the research as I did not try to force any outcome from looking at the drawings, nor was I determined to find something specific. I was simply observing and letting the drawings speak.

In my observations of the collection of drawings as a whole, I noticed the reoccurrence of a gestural element, which seemed to bring an engaging, expressive quality. As opposed to the non-gestural (see figs. 6 and 7 on pp. 32-33), the gestural drawings possess a lot of movement. This sense of movement is either very figurative and dance-like, or, strongly angular and directional. It portrays stretching, reaching, push and pull, and expresses a sense of longing and an inner turmoil (see figs. 8, 9 and 10 on pp. 34-36).

Within this gestural aesthetic, there are drawings with very solid and full strokes that appear confident and redeeming (see figs. 11, 12 and 13 on pp. 37-39). There are also drawings with very broken-up and deteriorating strokes. Some of them appear lonely and weak (see figs. 14 and 15 on pp. 40-41). Others possess a lot of tension or have reached their breaking point of anger (see fig. 16 on p. 42).

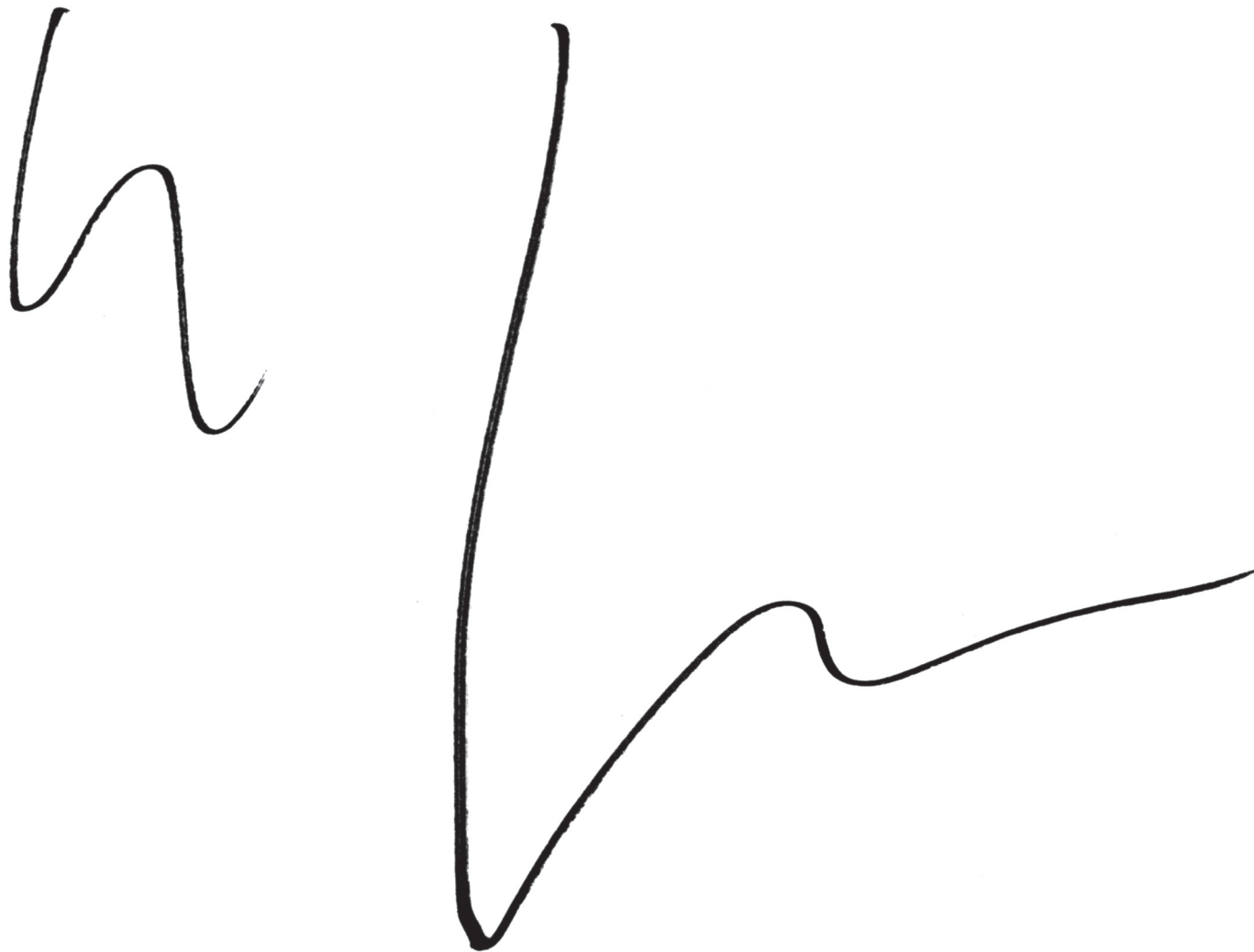


Fig. 6: *Andante: session 5, drawing 8* [Felt pen on paper]. 04, 2010.



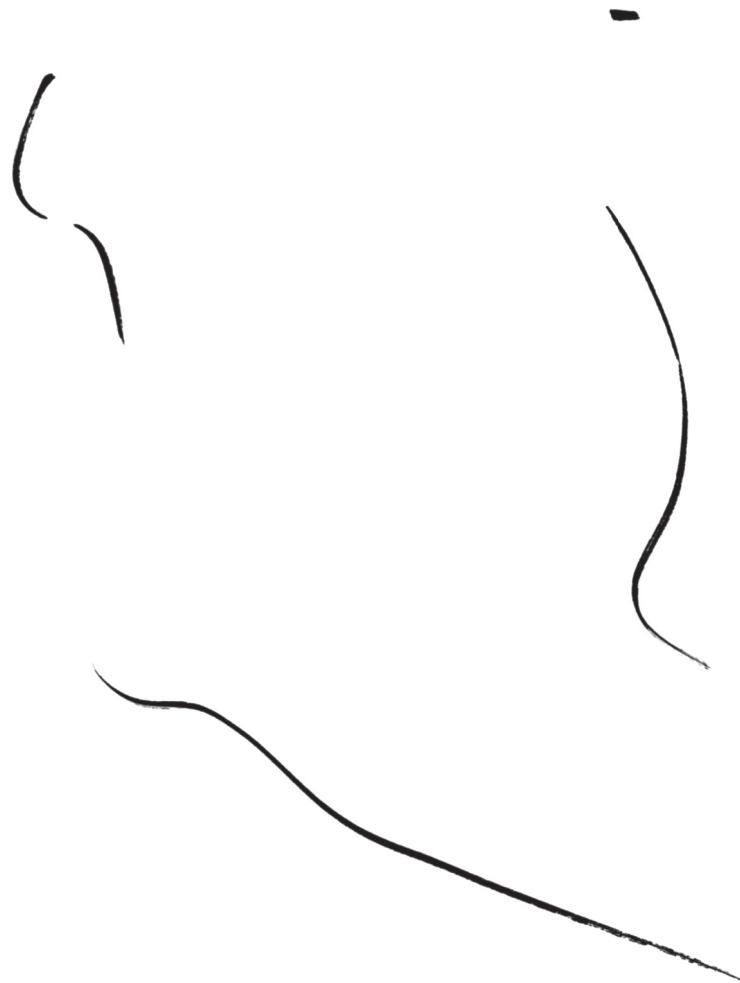


Fig. 7: *Andante: session 6, drawing 14* [Felt pen on paper]. 04, 2010.



Fig. 8: *Andante: session 14, drawing 7* [Felt pen on paper]. 05, 2010.

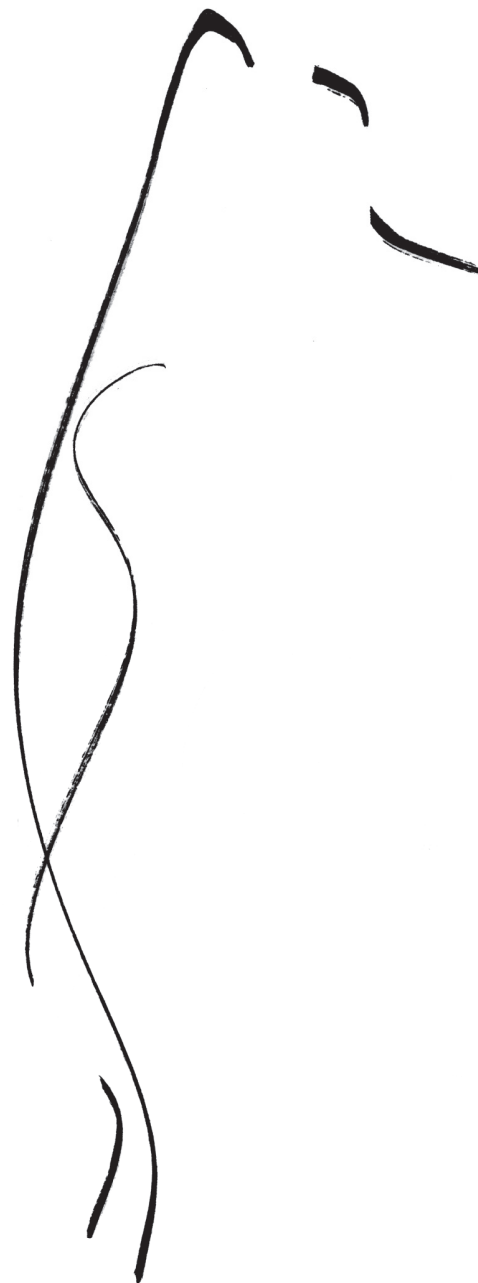


Fig. 9: *Andante: session 14, drawing 17* [Felt pen on paper]. 05, 2010.



Fig. 10: *Andante: session 15, drawing 11* [Felt pen on paper]. 05, 2010.



Fig. 11: *Andante: session 6, drawing 19* [Felt pen on paper]. 04, 2010.



Fig. 12: *Andante: session 12, drawing 2* [Felt pen on paper]. 05, 2010.



Fig. 13: *Andante: session 12, drawing 12* [Felt pen on paper]. 05, 2010.



Fig. 14: *Andante: session 5, drawing 1* [Felt pen on paper]. 04, 2010.





Fig. 15: *Andante: session 6, drawing 5* [Felt pen on paper]. 04, 2010.



Fig. 16: *Andante: session 14, drawing 12* [Felt pen on paper]. 05, 2010.

The element of texture plays an important role in conveying the aforementioned aesthetic properties. When relating visual texture to playing the guitar, I can emphatically connect it with musical tone or timbre (see figs. 17 and 18 on pp. 44-45). It can be described as the texture of the sound, or even the feel of the sound – is it warm and wholesome, or is it thin and twangy?

Along with texture, variance in visual weight<sup>12</sup> also adds to the drawings' expressive qualities, bringing an interplay of fragility and strength, or shyness and confidence. Some strokes appear very rushed and flustered (see figs. 19 and 20 on pp. 46-47), while with other strokes we can sense that more care was involved in the moment of creating them (see figs. 21 and 22 on pp. 48-49).

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<sup>12</sup> Visual weight relates to the overall amount of darkness and lightness across the whole area of a visual. Within the automatic drawing process, it more specifically suggests the pressure applied for every stroke as well as the angle the felt pen was held.



Fig. 17: *Andante: session 12, drawing 13* [Felt pen on paper]. 05, 2010.

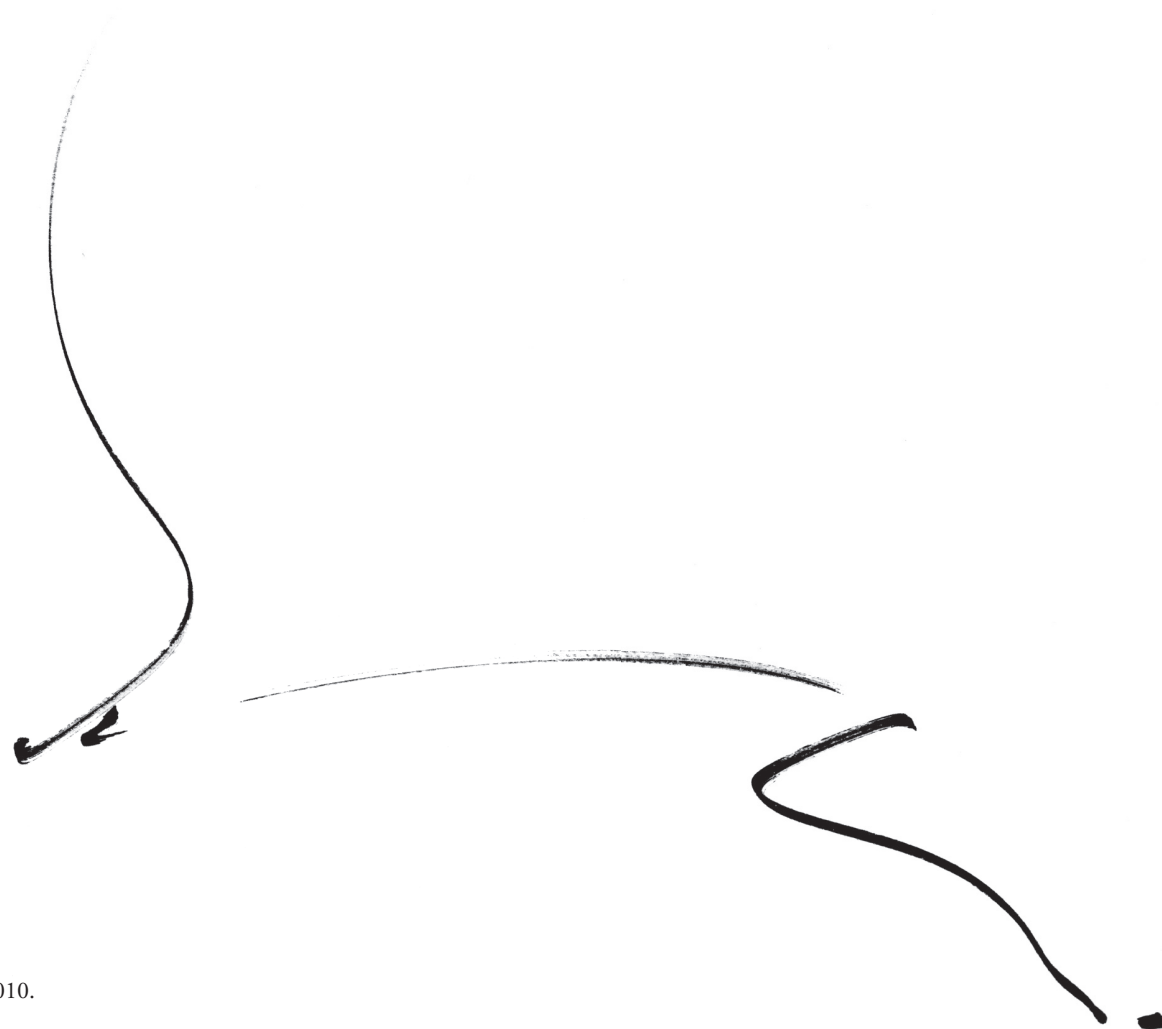


Fig. 18: *Andante: session 15, drawing 19* [Felt pen on paper]. 05, 2010.



Fig. 19: *Andante: session 26, drawing 19* [Felt pen on paper]. 05, 2010.



Fig. 20: *Andante: session 29, drawing 4* [Felt pen on paper]. 05, 2010.



Fig. 21: *Andante: session 27, drawing 15* [Felt pen on paper]. 05, 2010.





Fig. 22: *Andante: session 23, drawing 10* [Felt pen on paper]. 05, 2010.

However, the aforesaid analysis, although accurate and intriguing, is belittling to the value of, not just the drawings, but also the experience of creating the volume of drawings and reflecting on them. The automatic drawing process was a very accommodating and effective approach to capturing the complexity of my sensations and responses. Every time I view the drawings, something different stands out; something new emerges. The drawings are complex and they are ambiguous. My responses can never be the same as my relationship with them is constantly evolving. As the viewer, I don't just interpret the drawings – instead, it would be better to say, I interact and engage with them. This intricate, evolving relationship has to be experienced and felt to be understood.

The drawings represent so much more than a visual articulation of the movement within a musical passage. To reduce the presentation of the drawings to a strict portrayal of movement would be unjust and belittling to this complex experience.

## *Performativity*

Upon reflecting on my methods, the concept of *performing* became a crucial approach in creating material and establishing certain insights. More specifically, acting in the spirit of the moment brought with it a very elaborate experiential process. The moment begins with tension and anxiety. An open mind brings belief and the courage to act. This courage stimulates a sense of freedom and release, as Bolt (2004) mentions: “opportunities are seized in the heat of the moment. Decisions are made, not according to logical thought, but as a direct and felt response to handling elements” (p. 8). This process minimised the intrusion of preconceived ideas and strongly encouraged spontaneity and important findings to simply emerge within the thesis. Bolt also argues that “it is through process or practice that the outside world enters the work and the work casts its effects back into the world. In the dynamic productivity of the performative act, the work of art produces ontological effects” (p. 10).

This notion of the ‘performative act’ had a reoccurring presence throughout my practical research. Alongside the spontaneous act within the automatic drawing process, I carried out an experimental monologue, or self-dialogue, where I recorded myself freely speaking about my project. As I didn’t have a written-down outline of what I was going to say, in the voice recording there are a lot of thinking pauses and unpremeditated ideas. Nevertheless, in that moment of searching for what I was going to say next and trying to make sense of my thoughts, crucial realisations emerged.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Edited transcript of the voice recording:

“Currently, I am considering a moving image, to orchestrate them [the drawings] creatively within a moving image. And through viewing, I would like others to experience their expression – their visual expression – as if they were to experience the expression when listening to a piece of music.

It is very tempting, within a moving image medium, to create, or should I say, to portray, movement in a literal way. So if we take a curve, a curve forming itself would be the best example of a literal portrayal of movement. But I find that so belittling. That curve, when you view it on its own as it is, you could say time stands still in that moment. And it contains so much complexity and expression within itself without actually having to portray to the viewer that it is forming itself. So I guess it is coming down to an idea of involvement – involving the viewer to also respond to what they are seeing.

I find that, within a moving image, things often, when synchronised to music, anything that moves, moves very fast. And all the viewer can really do is just stand there and look at it. They are not allowed almost to do anything else but stare at it and let the figures or forms or colours just go past. Where is the time? We need time. A static image ...

Similarly, there were moments of freely written short passages, where I captured my ‘sparks’ of thought:

*Phrasing* could be described as a complex, evolving relationship with a piece of music or with the drawing process. Why and how is this relationship evolving? Over time, I am growing as a person, encountering different experiences, forming new memories and remembering old ones. Through practice, I am forming a deeper understanding of the experience and expanding my knowledge. The relationship is evolving as I am evolving.

I could have kept a designer’s journal. However, in my mind, the thought, “I have a journal”, forces the thought, “I must write in this journal”, which in turn forces me to think, “I must come up with something to write”. Therefore, I avoided this method and settled for writing on any available piece of scrap paper if, and whenever, a spontaneous thought emerged.

Through applying performative processes and an underlying grounded approach, opportunities to develop ideas flourished, and this thesis evolved beyond my anticipations and knowledge.

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... gives you that time, endless time, to contemplate what is there; to bring your own, in this case it would be, interpretation.

So maybe it is about slowing down the transitions, because the drawings are so complex. As automatically and instantaneously as the drawings were created, maybe now it is time to slow it down. Because there is so much that is going on in one stroke. So let’s slow it down and give the viewer the time to consider what is there and become involved with it. Slow down time and let things emerge.”

[To listen to the original voice recording, please open the file ‘Voice Recording 1.mp3’ on the disk].

## VISUAL PHRASING

After reading Polanyi's *The Tacit Dimension* (1966), two terms, or concepts, stood out: the first one being the *particulars*, and the second one being the *comprehensive entity*.

While looking at my drawings and considering how I could arrange, choreograph or orchestrate them within a moving image, I found myself focusing on a literal orchestration of movement. If I think about how I could direct the eye, strokes would move quickly in one direction and then stop; they would move up and down, left and right; slow down and speed up. These elements can be understood as the particulars. Similarly, if the term *visual phrasing* is taken literally, an audience might expect to see a visual conversation between visual elements – a literal *call* and *response*, or described in a more visual form, an *action* and a *reaction*. These notions can also be referred to as the particulars.

But what of the *comprehensive entity*? How can the particulars be shaped and integrated into a comprehensive entity without destroying it in the process? Polanyi advocates: “instead of observing them [the particulars] in themselves, we may be aware of them in their bearing on the

comprehensive entity which they constitute. ... it is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their joint meaning” (1966, p. 18).

So what is the comprehensive entity of the process? What of the comprehensive entity of visual phrasing? What is the comprehensive entity of this thesis?

I believe that the automatic drawing process is equivalent to the process of artistic expression within a performance – not knowing where the moment will go and just feeling it. Although to an outside audience the drawings may seem very random, it is not about what is in front of them. It is about the story, or experience, that lies underneath or within the collection of drawings, and the development within this experience. Through drawing, or responding to music, the focus of this thesis developed towards visually realising the musical expression of the artist, or of the performer, or, of myself. The research has become very personal and quite autobiographical – I have discovered many aspects of my character, how I approach life and the changes I would like to bring.

As for the entity of *visual phrasing* – what if the term is not taken literally? What if we do not merely expect to see a compilation of moving visual elements? I would like to propose the notion of visual phrasing as an event of evolving conversations. In my research, these conversations were brought to life within the act of drawing, self-dialogue and my guitar playing. They developed through repetition, the integration of and reflection on these acts. As a result, visual phrasing can be perceived as an experiential journey of moments that evolve and develop, and lead towards a discovery of the self.

The comprehensive entity of the thesis lies within this self-discovery. I have come to realise that through trust, self-belief and faith I can reach places I do not know or cannot see – I can achieve beyond my own expectations. The comprehensive entity of this thesis is about what I have achieved in knowledge, understanding and wisdom while pursuing the elusive outcomes. In transferring the freedom and spontaneity that I feel and pursue when playing the guitar to my design work, so much more is bound to come out of my endeavours.

This research has unveiled how an individual's character and inner persona can be developed and altered to the better. Others may read about my personal discoveries and hopefully be encouraged to pursue a similar journey – to undertake pathways they are unsure of. Their work will benefit from the personal growth, within that process.

*Final Exhibition: AUT Art & Design Festival*

*November 2010*



Fig. 23



Fig. 24

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The work presented at the exhibition can be viewed by opening the file 'Exhibition Piece.mov' on the disk.





Fig. 25

## EPILOGUE

At the beginning of the automatic drawing experiment I went through a tense period while struggling with my desire to understand and define each individual expression and performative moment. But in that struggle, the essence of the thesis reached its point of clarity, allowing a comprehensive entity to present itself. I came to realise the infinite possibilities that lay within the visually expressive outcomes. This brought forth a fear of the limitless – an intriguing concept, which also presents the notion of control versus freedom. However, I prefer to think of it as control and freedom.

At the beginning of my practical research, the initial processes consisted of tentative and carefully thought out practical procedures. In my development towards a more liberal and more spontaneous approach, I remained cautious and somewhat reserved, as I was a bit concerned of how personal the research was becoming. I felt I had to keep a sense of realism; hence I resisted being drowned by my own emotions.

And then it happened, in the spirit of the moment, I unclenched my fists and took a big brave step towards a freer, performative world of self-expression. In coming to know and grow within an unknown situation, the uncertainties of the freedom I was pursuing inevitably led me back to a point of timidity – a temporary limit, where I had to pause and reflect in order to understand the personal development taking place. The completion of this experimental thesis has given me a platform from which I can launch myself into an even more liberating, experimental mode with newfound confidence.

*Thursday, 9th December, 2010*

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