



The Labland Experience

History has its breaks, history goes on and from time to time, a new art form is born. One hundred years of cinema, fifty years of television, twenty five of music video: by the turn of the millenium, the total art dream, visual music, has become a reality. Of course, one could want to connect VJing with abstract experimental cinema, Oskar Fischinger's work for example, but this would be forgetting that fifteen years ago a wall collapsed in Berlin. Visual music is not a new fade, it's an art of the XXIst century.

Some of them were children, some of them teenagers, some of them young adults. In a city that was welding, grafting itself, little groups of pathfinders were discovering the multiple ways that will lead them to visual music. Musicians, programmers, typographers, graphic designers, video makers, the Pfadfinderei united in small groups; they merged. Within six years, the collective is formed, reinforcing and strengthening itself as a crystallizing snow flake does. By the end of 2002, they are seven.

In the meantime Berlin was becoming the capital of the burgeoning visual music art. An edgy techno scene was building itself up. Clubs were opening in unusual places. The gaps and voids left by the city's healing, like scar tissues, became spaces to be defined, screens for screenings to come. A town was transforming itself into a huge opencast working site. This particular architectural laboratory context could not be without influence on the work of the Pfadfinderei.

A last encounter was to make: two musicians called the Modeselektor. Since then, a close collaboration between sound and vision, music and movement could start. Within the frame of the Kurvenstar Bar and of the WMF club, the "Pfadselektor" had drawn the sketches, during the Lab.land parties, of their visual jam sessions process. Playing sounds and motion pictures live. Making a rhythm action painting. Performing another kind of dance, dancing the pictures. Finding a newer type of analogy. Drum and bass, forms and colours. The "Pfadselektor" reinvent synchronicity.

Every new technology brings its misunderstandings. The Pfadfinderei and the Modeselektor use computers, almost the same ones by the way: laptops. But nothing's automatic in their creative process. Like other artists, maybe more than others, they create their own instruments. For them, computers are only tools. By hijacking the Flash technology (formerly dedicated to the Internet) the Pfadfinderei have invented a visual interface in which each key corresponds to a shape or a pattern. Like a piano, this light keyboard is useless without a human hand to strike it. Not only composers, but also instrumentalists and instrument makers, these Pioneers are Pathfinders.

In promos, music comes first. The director has to make a visual concept of it. In movies it comes in second. The composer has to write a theme about

pictures. When it comes to visual music, sound and vision design become impossible to dissociate. The Pfadfinderei office is only a floor away from the Modeselektor studio. Only a few steps up, only a few steps down the stairway and they can have a talk, give each other a hand. They share the same building; it is not a surprise that their work has a great deal of coherence.

One of the specificity of the Pfadfinderei work is their constant effort to redefine our perception of the screen within its depth. Here, the frame is not only a surface but also a virtual three dimensional space. Instead of only attracting your eye inside the screen, the Labland pictures are coming out of it. Maybe that's why the main sensation given by these images is freedom. Beyond the striped fences of interdictions and the laws of gravity, Labland opens us a window to a whole musical universe.

Like notes on a music sheet, image fragments (shot, programmed or drawn) do compose a visual score. Themes, chorus, even melodies appear on the screen in response to the music. Rhythmic manipulations give every day's objects an odd poetry. As a response to the Modeselektor discreet samples, the Pfadfinderei, by distorting, twisting and warping space and time, are changing our outlook on ordinary things and sounds. An energetic wave transmutes a do-it-yourself session into a symphony of movement. Streetcars rails maintenance becomes a slow sparking dream rocked by a strident lullaby. The chirping of a flock of larks give birth to a squadron of spaceships.

Like a billboard covered with hundreds of posters, the successive Labland sequences present Berlin's

urban landscape as a superposition of multiple audiovisual layers. Birds take flight in a forest of virtual trees. A stroll in the park becomes a futurist project. Excavation work appears as an asphalt harvest. Poetic lecture of Berlin, Labland is an intimate documentary about a real and imaginary town. Underneath the concrete, the nature is always present. At the end of the road, another city is to be built.

When the Pfadfinderei / Modeselektor perform live together they interact not only with each other but also with the audience. In a visual music concert, a spontaneous energy is created. It's a mental and corporal experience. Labland is an invitation for your mind and body to think, feel and move. It is in a way, like architecture and choreography, an abstract art form. You can see and hear work, construction and destruction, past, present and future in it. And dance to it. But there's not only one possible interpretation. These sound-images need your eyes and ears to be revealed. On the screen, out of the speakers these are your own thoughts, sensations and moves.

As all other vanguard artistic forms, visual music is either a invention and a discover. It's a work in progress and a laboratory. But it's also a territory yet to be explored, a new land to discover. Thank you for joining the Labland experiment.