Ligetilines: Explaining Painting

He naturally seeks to apply the means of music to his own art. And from this results that modern desire for rhythm in painting, for mathematical, abstract construction, for repeated notes of colour, for setting colour in motion, and so on.[1]

The creation of the graphic score was guided by a dual purpose: to externalise my interpretation of the music, and to simplify the music for translation to movement. Differences in graphic representation between the *Dialogo* and *Capriccio* movements reflect opposite interpretive approaches, motivated in turn by the basic contrast of musical character. While the lyricism and harmonic shading of the *Dialogo* suggest the abstract, the virtuosic streaks of the *Capriccio* demand the literal realisation of line. *Dialogo* : shapes and gradients : : *Capriccio* : lines and vectors.

I deliberately chose large sheets (16" x 24") for the score, because this open canvas forced me to realise the music in bold shapes and vivid colours that defy the self-contained form of the Sonata in question. More important, these shapes combine with colours to objectify the musical gestures essential to the work.[2]

Choice of colours in the score was largely subjective. Darker shades often correspond to lower registers, and brighter to higher. The primary colours feature prominently throughout, not only as emphatic descriptors, but also as background to foreground images, in order to convey the textural atmosphere of the given passage. This last example is just one way in which colours clarify and reinforce relationships within the music. Complementary, split-complementary, and triadic colours derived from general colour theory, as well as the particularly significant theory of Wassily Kandinsky, inform how colours interact with one another.[3]

I will present the movements of the graphic score here in the order in which they were completed, so that a sense of the overall working process may supplement description of the images.[4] The *Capriccio* required a sketch, time-consuming duplication to large format, and detailed application of colour. Some time after the sketch attempt of the *Dialogo* was abandoned due to its overly complicated architectural nature, I determined that a freer approach would better enable the abstraction I desired, and finished the *Dialogo* within a few days.[5]

The *Capriccio* is read from left to right across sixteen pages, first along the horizontal top line until halfway through the piece, after which the notation continues along the bottom line. This layout of the score foremost emphasises the division of the *Capriccio* into two larger sections. The *Dialogo* is arranged according to the appearances of the main subject and

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[1] Arnold Schoenberg, *Arnold Schoenberg/Wassily Kandinsky: Letters, Pictures, and Documents*, edited by Jelena Hahl-Koch and translated by John C. Crawford, (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1984), 40.
[2] Both sketching and painting ascribed to the 'apply-by-gesture' process. For another objective view on gesture, see the section 'Mapping Musical Forces'.
[3] All applications of Kandinsky's theory derive from its presentation in Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, translation based on the Sadleir Translation with Considerable Re-translation by Francis Golffing, Michael Harrison, and Ferdinand Ostertag, (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2014), 43-67.
[4] All descriptions that follow refer to '*Ligeti Solo Cello Sonata*: Graphic Score (selected pages)'.
[5] See sketch 'top side—Dialogo 2'.

its response that constitute the melodic material for the movement. Accordingly, the score follows a less-defined trajectory. The first page is a complete entity, while the following four pages feature horizontal lines read left to right down the page.

In panel I-C, the two larger sections of the *Capriccio* are indicated by arrow 1, which points to the top horizontal line, and by arrow 2, which shows where the score continues after the middle section of the piece (at the top of page 16). But more important than the division of the movement into two formal parts is the *relationship between* those sections, made explicit by the very first figure of the top line and its near-exact inversion in the bottom line. Here Ligeti seems to play with rhetorical convention. While in the first section an initial outburst is met with stern opposition, (that does not subside in the higher register of the fourth figure), the second section begins with a declamation answered by a complimentary response. The reaction has changed; the second time the music exhibits discipline. These initial statements are terminated by brackets, which signify silence in the music. The use of brackets in the score was inspired by their use in mathematics to denote absolute value. No matter how transient, silences must be observed. Indeed, silences in the *Capriccio* are always marked with brackets; spaces left between images represent perceived—rather than defined—flexibility within the music.

These first three pages of the score are dominated by the breathless pursuance of line, meant to evoke the volatility of a racing pulse. Near exhaustion, straight-line vectors mark the insistence—damn the interval—with which the musical line penetrates downward through the registers of the cello. The spiral is denouement; with every turn and every shade darker, the energy of the line dissipates.

In the second section, the loss of energy is both more gradual and more discreet. The *ostinato* reiterates in three registers of the cello, each higher and quieter. These echoes into the stratosphere recall the rhetorical nature of the initial statements on the first page of the graphic score. Argument in the foreground introduces; perspectives gaining in distance transition. The graphic score shows how the fragments of the *ostinato* that chip off literally transform into the bubbling alternations that lead to familiar material.

The middle portion of the score (panel II-C) presents the contrast of modal melody that undergoes textural transformation. Detached, upended slurs support the thread of sound that travels through the watery medium of primary colour. After, amorphous note shapes whose layers move within tell just as much as the spaces between them.[6] The bottom line features pizzicato as the springboard for the high fluttering trill; simple semicircles disperse the resonance of the open strings.

In panel III-C, the violent energy of the bow stroke conjures the slashing of claws. The second half of the top line is a good example of a colour scheme based on the split-complimentary relationship. This colour scheme both emphasises the ascent of the bass-line by arpeggio pairs linked by whole-tone, and highlights the modal centrepiece of the progression. In the latter half of the piece, the graphic score shows how patterns in the music are related through compression of interval. To indulge in cliché: the harmonic minor mode evokes the gradually sloping contour and arid colouring of a dune.

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[6] This gesture of the graphic score is what the choreographer referred to as 'underground'; see the section 'Cogitations on Collaboration'.

These final three pages (panel IV-C) are the most diverse of the *Capriccio*. Muted colours hung by fluorescent green thread—all surrounded by grey—transmit the strangeness of inversion in the music. It is a familiar gesture only in shape; now it is foreign and other. This meandering is confronted by arpeggios, first cutting from the top in confident strokes of primary colour that then succumb to their frenzied mirror image. The music fights for breath between the arpeggios, and frantically gasps before the vertiginous break with sanity. Debilitating streaks of yellow and blue displace the red and yellow flecks of anger. Icarus flies too close to the sun, and plummets to his violent end on the jagged rocks that jut from the sea.[7]

At bottom the ricochet molecule decays to silence blue then green, which yet has the potential for motion.[8] Seizing on this potential, the line springs forth into the persistent hemiola that stretches, and then contracts, right up to the blue and yellow stalemate. Silence yields to the final two gestures of the *Capriccio*: the jump onto the vault and the rebound, flame to the sky.

It is telling that the majority of the *Capriccio* pencil sketch was darkened with pen before paint was applied; the *Dialogo* saw no such outlining. While the *Capriccio* top and its bottom alter-images show the overall linear progression of the music, the *Dialogo* shows the musical transition of perspective. The background of the *Dialogo* first page (panel 1D) immediately differentiates it from the *Capriccio* score, and sets a precedent for the first movement: relationships between corresponding elements are of greater significance than the elements themselves. As counterpoint gradually tinges the lyrical melodies, the graphic score transitions from representation of a unified space to sequential representation.

Single secondary-colour sponge strokes at the corners and centre of the first page represent the pizzicato-glissando chords; their placement reflects how these chords frame the main melodic interest of the movement. The choice of brackets for the first melodic subject follows a rationale both visual and semiotic. While I desired a simple shape that could visually enact the growth and dissipation of the musical phrase, I also required a universally recognisable sign system that could expand and contract as necessary to accommodate harmonic and/or contrapuntal embellishment of that melodic subject over the course of the movement. Brackets make explicit the logic of musical syntax: where statements begin and end (or how they are left incomplete, begun afresh, and elided together). The visual effect of this shape is intensified by the juxtaposition of blue and yellow, which highlights the fundamental half-tone conflict in the melody between the second and third scale degrees.

Space contained *within* these brackets visually contrasts with space *between* the independent melodic shapes that represent the three subsections of the answer to the first subject. Each of these independent shapes serves as a template for the brush strokes that later accrue, providing the volume for the portrayal of harmonic activity within. Taking the subject and its answer together, all three primary colours are represented. Following the juxtaposition

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[7] Anthony Gritten and Elaine King assert that 'Topics are at their most powerful when the reflection of an item of contemporary life is least in evidence, and the musical gesture refers most directly, even unconsciously, to the mythic world of cultural signification.' Anthony Gritten and Elaine King, 'Introduction' in *Music and Gesture*, ix-xxv (Burlington: Ashgate), xxiii.

[8] See *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 57-60.

of blue and yellow, red serves as the basis of the answer colour group, which progresses from brighter to darker.

Panel II-D introduces the threads of harmony that begin to join the melodic subsections of the answer together. Each different harmony corresponds to a different segment of thread. The first red subsection in particular literally shows how harmony affects the listener's perception of musical colour, as the red shows through pastel shades. These threads of harmony compare to the vertical harmonic pillars and the literal interlocking of stretto found on panel III-D. Where the stretto voices overlap, their colours bleed together.

Interaction of shape and colour produces an anomaly in the middle figure of the top line (panel III-D). This is the only instance in the whole movement in which one melodic element imitates the distinct figuration of another element. The four-semiquaver figure associated with the third melodic subsection of the answer assumes a significantly different contour for inclusion in the context of the second melodic subject (hence the shape of the third in the colour of the second). This occurrence in the graphic score proves that inner emotional intent may persevere, even as its outward projection changes. Emotion : colour : : motion : shape. In the final line of the score, strokes of pizzicato-glissando alternate with worlds of resonance that issue from the low D.

Beyond establishing the means of music-dance communication, the completed graphic score enhanced my understanding of the music by directly challenging my overly analytical yet 'blind' interpretation. And by drawing me to an investigation of synaesthesia, the graphic score helped to generate the trajectory (also informed by the counterpart of musical forces) that culminated in collaboration.