Analogies: When I Draw a Song for a Film

Assoc. Prof. Dejan Grba, D.A.
New Media, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of the Arts in Belgrade
Digital Art PhD Program, Interdisciplinary Studies, University of the Arts in Belgrade
http://dejangrba.dyndns.org; http://www.digitalartprogram.info
dejan.grba@gmail.com

1. Project Description

1.1 Concept

Analogies explore the blending of unrelated cognitive paths into the matrices of new meaning through abstraction, comparison and analogy-making [1]. The project was sparked by acknowledging the distinctive joy with which I associate certain songs to the films where I had heard them (not necessarily for the first time) and vice versa, in recalling the films for some songs played in them. Although we all share this associative pleasure, its affinities and qualities are highly individual.

From the initial pool of about 50, I selected 31 independently produced songs with the strongest associative links to the films in which they appear as diegetic or non-diegetic music. I discarded the composed film scores and the musicals, in which the associations are trivial, more calculated and less open for idiosyncratic affect.

1.2 Procedure

I visualized the songs using the mechanical energy of their own sounds. Sound is a vibration that propagates as a wave of pressure and particle displacement through a transmission medium. The medium can be air, water or solid material of the speaker driver whose expansion/compression creates a set of lateral forces that are absorbed by the body of the loudspeaker. Separated from the loudspeaker casing and played loud enough, a speaker driver will move sideways so it can be used for drawing. Lars Hansen based his project *Spiderbytes* [2] on this phenomenon, but never went beyond a well-rounded proof of technical concept.

I drew *Analogies* by playing specific, precisely contextualized music over a light, down-facing wireless speaker with a single pen attached to its side. This asymmetrical and unstable setup does not aspire to the accuracy and reproducibility of scientific experiments. Rather, it is essentially generative and flexible, allowing for complex creative decisions on the type of paper and pen, pen pressure and angle, and strength of the pen-speaker bond. It can be tuned up to repeatedly produce similar drawings of the same song.

Each drawing was generated by playing a single entry from a playlist of all 31 songs with matched volumes. The originally produced drawings range from 25 to 125mm in

length so they were scaled up to 270% in order to reveal their visual dynamics and graphic subtlety.

1.3 Motivation

Analogies were inspired by a number of generative and sound art projects, especially by Mary Ellen Bute's *Abstronic* (1952), William Anastasi's *Subway Drawings* (1968-1970), Yoshimasa Kato & Yuichi Ito's *White Lives on Speaker* (2007), Evan Roth's *Graffiti Analysis* (2010), Stefan Tiefengraber's *Delivery Graphic* (2013-2014) and Mogens Jacobsen's *Probabilistic Audio Dice Roll* (2015).

The project is dedicated to the work of Paul Schrader who summed up its approach with the observation: *The more I've made films and written, the more I realize that less and less you need to do, and that telling people stuff, or preaching to people, is really not what we should be doing in the arts. What an artist should be doing is investigation through implication and association* [3].

1.4 Installation

The initial installation set features framed drawings in a linear arrangement following the playlist order from right to left. The songs play continuously on the wall-mounted tablet over the speakers, and the visitors can select and run any preferred song. The projected video documents the drawing process and presents the film instances of all songs.

At GA2017, the installation features two images that summarily represent the project: a composite of all drawings aligned to their origin point (Image 1), and a composite of all drawings aligned to the relative center (Image 2).

Alternatively, the installation features the animations of the two image composites, with respective soundtracks: one created by mixing all 31 songs aligned at the beginning, and one by mixing all 31 songs with aligned mid-time points.

2. Images

1. Dejan Grba, Analogies 1-31, Origin Point Composite.
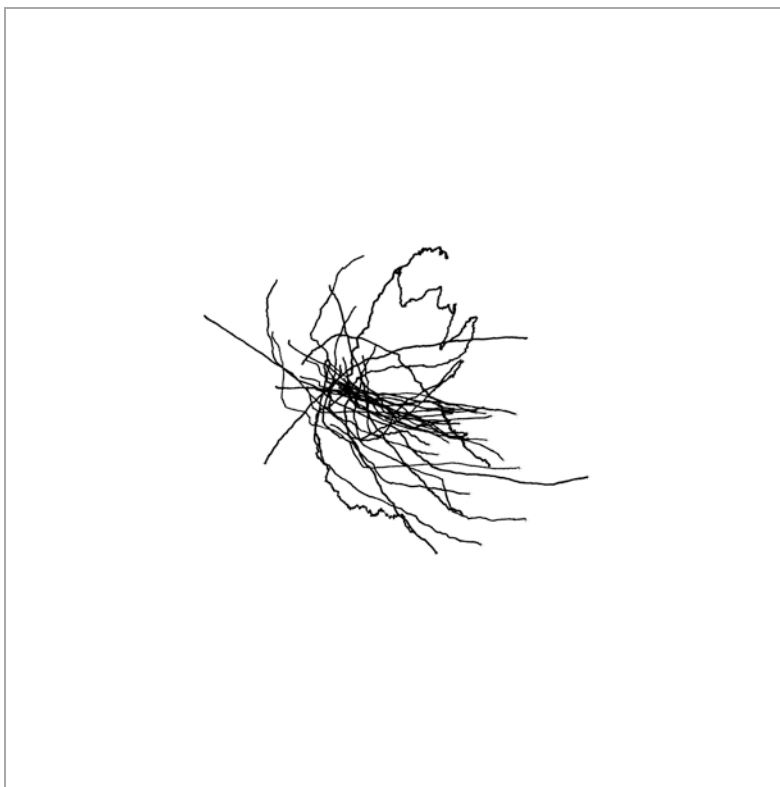
2. Dejan Grba, Analogies 1-31, Relative Center Composite.

References

[1] Grba, Dejan "Get Lucky: Cognitive Aspects of Generative Art." *XIX Generative Art Conference Proceedings*, edited by Celestino Sodu. Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice, (2015): 200-213. http://dejangrba.dyndns.org/lectures/en/2015-get-lucky.php.

[2] Hansen, Lars Lundehave. 2011. "Spiderbytes." Hans Larsen. https://vimeo.com/137579997.

[3] Schrader, Paul. "Audio Commentary." *Hardcore*. Limited Edition Blu-Ray. Directed by Paul Schrader. Twilight Time, Auburn, WA, 2016.