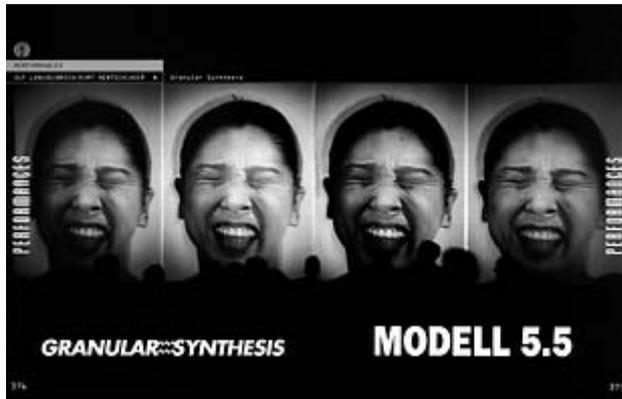


## Granular Synthesis

ULF LANGHEINRICH / KURT HENTSCHLÄGER



1. GRANULAR SYNTHESIS is a work in progress that was launched in 1992, its field of operation being reflected in the constitutive connection of complexity and time seen from the angle of the semantics involved in production aesthetics.

1.1 "It is the concept of the organization of energy in time that is the key to all changes in life for me." Woody Vasulka, the American pioneer of media art, said something along these lines in a 1974 interview. Present-day models are oriented to events in an organism where processes are not organized around a concept of physical energy, but around pieces of information. If we abandon the classic definition of the terms, energy and information are synonymous today.

1.1.1 As is generally known, information is a quantity that only gains importance in the decoding process. Information is also a measure for the complexity of the patterns offered by perception. The complexity and information found in the structure of a message are synonymous. Complexity emerges if, in a coherent quantity of elements, "restrictions inherent to the interlinking capacity of the elements no longer allow every single element to be linked with any other element at any time." (Niklas Luhmann: Soziale Systeme). Thus, limited time necessitates selection.

The conditions of selection have to be put in order and emphasized. Normally, this guarantees the reflexiveness of the selective process. Selection is definitely a concept of time because the correlation between complexity and selection can only be attained in time.

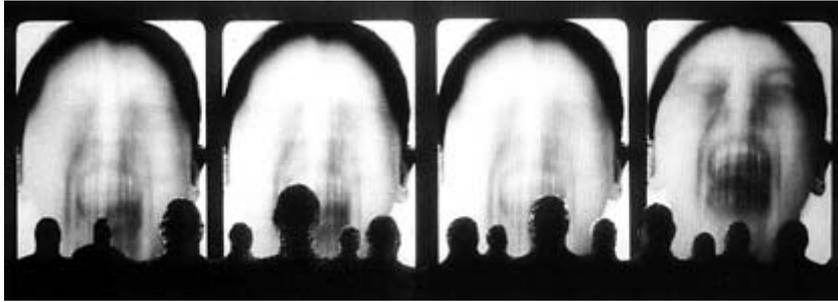
2. For GRANULAR SYNTHESIS, AV recordings are the basic material -sequences of images and sounds. (The motif: views of a sound-producing female performer's head). According to the method of "correlated variations" (S. Mills), which is the basis of all experimental aesthetics, so-called "grains" (spectra of moments) are extracted from the data material and packed into time cells. The aesthetic-experimental modifications used for the destruction of known perceptual quantities within time result from the process of partial limitation (filtering. etc.). Inversion, as well as the transposition of messages in the context of contrasting semantic and aesthetic information on the one hand, and corresponding visual and auditive messages on the other hand, and finally, the systematic and selective intensification of the dynamic force represented by auditive and visual perceptual thresholds. The packed cells are organized parallel on several autonomous levels according to certain parameters. Thus, in the presentation of a performance limited in time, "an audiovisual flow related to an on-line driven rhythmical grid is produced." (Ulf Langheinrich) Very high and low frequencies from loud electronic sound masses, together with the visual impressions, aim at the emotional disposition of the recipients. A transformation process develops at the site of the performance and unwinds simultaneously on various mutually conditioning levels of aggregation.

2.1 In a declaration from 1942 in which he referred to the discussion about the abolition of the dividing line between mimetic and non-mimetic sounds, John Cage recalled "their qualities, which are expressive rather than interpretative ... " (for the original quote. cf. For More New Sounds). In 1952, he used this approach in his works "Imaginary Landscape No. 5" and "William Mix". The latter is a dense accumulation of minute sound fragments from different sources and was written for a tape that runs at a speed of 38 cms per second.

The concept of the "optical tape" emerged as early as the sixties, the decade that saw the beginnings of video art: it was used for a videotape with a musical structure. In interviews, Bill Viola, who appeared on the video scene eight years after Nam June Paik, has stressed that he does not want to be characterized as a video artist any longer. He sees himself as an artist using video as a tool.

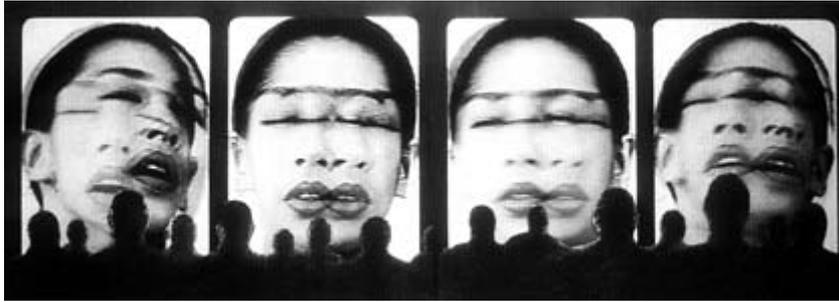
2.1.1 The art system is a social system. Thus, it is part of society: at the same time, this means that, despite all systemic autonomy, there is a transitive relationship with other social systems. As such, it is connected to the basic temporal structures of society as a whole. On the one hand, its elements (actions, events) depend on the irreversibility of time, on the other hand, however, they also rest on the impact of structures recording time reversibly. In the latter case, time-oriented discussions on cognitive expectation structures of psychics systems may ensue. The art system is a nonlinear, dynamic, temporalized system, which has to be fast and hot; while maintaining its autopoiesis, it is capable of learning compatible structures and is characterized by the semantics of reflective production (the reproduction of its event-like elements), which have to meet the tempo requirements.

3. GRANULAR SYNTHESIS by Hentschläger/Langheinrich stands for dependence on a sophisticated internal arrangement, which at the same time requires more dependence on environmental information — a consequence of evolutionary development.



## FRANKENSTEIN TECHNO DRUG

What Granular Synthesis put up for discussion is the (re)construction of subjectivity in the media space. Their work strikingly reminds us of the Frankenstein myth, which has recently seen various attempts at cineastic revival. Unlike Frankenstein's efforts to create a real human with the help of all conceivable technical means, i.e. to rationalize nature and then transform rationality back to nature, Granular Synthesis use their granular synthesis technique to subtract the appearance of the human body from its own corporeality. The grammar of their work is easy to describe - the movements and sounds of a human face and head turning left and right, bowing back and forth while screaming, eyes opening and closing, mouth opening and closing etc. — are recorded on video and then dismantled into single frames, which are then remounted into sound-and-image collages with the help of the computer. Thus, they transform Frankenstein's practice into bloodless surgery on screen. The physical element in which they are basically interested, is the aesthetic surface of bodily expression. The model has no history, no biography. It remains its mere countenance, warming up to the rhythm of reproduction and repetition. What is up for discussion here is a present-day figure of alienation, a constructed way of throwing everything personal off kilter: the capacity to express oneself is separated from the ability to experience and from the amount of experience available. While Francis Bacon's grimaces obtain their expressiveness from the traces of suffering and despair, the expressional intensity of "Model 5", which almost goes beyond what is humanly possible, is totally unfounded. However, the amount of energy produced by the rotating grimaces, with eyes protruding and staccato screams, makes the desired experience of immediacy and currency perceptible, even though it merely stays on the surface of a technophile grammar. Comparable with techno concerts and drug-stimulated levels of experience, the performances by Granular Synthesis produce an emotional formula for experienceability and self-discovery beyond scenarios of Realpolitik. Wherever the ideas of subjectivity and individuality become more and more difficult to establish and experience in our society, the ability to create and intensify aesthetic expression turns into an outlet for a kind of subjective experience. The authenticity of the result reflects the fact that the desire for individual experiences is genuine. However, this does not change what is at stake here — a form of alter ego, which can be generalized and is collectively enjoyed and conveyed in techno beat.



Thus, the fascinating side of the work of Granular Synthesis also comes from the constant reproduction and availability of the illusion that subjectivity is reconstructed within the media space. In this respect our information age harks back to the industrial era, at least from the perspective of our desire. Aesthetically, this nostalgia is conveyed on the musical level, the roots of which can be imagined in the hard beat associated with industrial work, physically akin to the loud hammering of machines. It would be worthwhile following up on the question as to what extent our susceptibility for aesthetic elements from the industrial era — as they manifest themselves acoustically and visually in techno music in the shape of a carefully arranged mega-factory experience — can be seen as an expression of our wish to make up for our present situation of unemployment and lost parameters to define subjectivity. The aesthetic reversion to the sounds of a factory, the topicality of the Frankenstein myth concerned with a producible personality, as well as moaning and groaning as experienceable particles, suggest a space in which what is personal can be experienced, but — in our reality — this space only seems to exist in the media.

If we consider how present-day Realpolitik stages the reconquered figures of subjectivity and personality, the manifest fictionalization reflected by Granular Synthesis seems to be the less dangerous and more contemporary way of dealing with this question. This is in opposition to the prevailing practice of lending credibility to a personal experience via narration, which means that any kind of expression is interpreted as a reaction to a certain reality. The two artists rely on what the impact indicates. Thus, expressiveness is no longer the consequence of an emotional situation, but a surrogate which has to be created so as to enable the experience of identity.

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