

The Influence of Music on Painting and Animation

Jennifer Gilbert
BACVA 3



*Figure 1: Fischinger's Collage of Kandinsky and Disney Figures, ca. 1940
(Image taken from Moritz [2004])*

Contents

Abstract	- 3 -
Introduction.....	- 3 -
Synaesthesia.....	- 6 -
Synaesthesia in Art	- 7 -
The Artists.....	- 9 -
The influence of music on each artist	- 11 -
The influence of music on abstract art.....	- 17 -
The influence of music on composition.....	- 23 -
Fantasia	- 25 -
Conclusion	- 29 -
Critical Analysis.....	- 31 -
References.....	- 34 -
Image Sources	- 36 -
Appendix.....	- 37 -

Abstract

This essay explores the subject of art influenced by music. It aims to place the subject in historical context, and explore a few ways in which music has influenced painting and animation. Comparisons are made between Wassily Kandinsky, Oskar Fischinger and contemporary artist, Jane Mackay. The essay explores ways in which music has influenced their work, and discusses similarities and differences between them.

Introduction

As a result of the invention of photography and film; technologies that capture “real” images, some artists steered away from realistically representing life in their art and began to draw their influences from different sources, for example experiences, emotion or music. This is known as non objective or abstract art, where painters aspire to create an experience for the viewer, or create a painting that describes their own experience. Rather than the artist inflicting meanings on the viewer, a viewer can take their own meaning and experiences from the art. A painting doesn’t necessarily have to be understood, just experienced. Artists no longer have to include objects into their work to enable them to paint in certain colours, they can be aesthetically creative.

Throughout history, people have been trying to find links between music and art, and understand the relationship they have with each other. As early as Greek philosophy, people have discussed whether the colour of music was a physical quality that could be measured. Philosophers, mathematicians and scientists like Aristotle and Pythagoras believed that there must be a correlation between the musical scale and the spectrum of colours in the rainbow (Moritz, <http://www.awn.com>). In the seventeenth century, Sir Isaac Newton assumed that musical tones and colour tones had frequencies in common. Newton took the colour wheel that he formed, and then matched the musical notes in an octave to fall between each colour (Virtual Colour Museum, <http://www.colorsystem.com/>). In the eighteenth century, people began to invent and

experiment with colour organs. These were inventions that projected coloured lights to represent sound or accompany music. More recently, Kandinsky regarded music as an art form, and in the same way that a symphony is a composition of various instruments and notes; believed that painting is a composition full of different colours and shapes. The interest in this connection is still occupying scientists, psychologists and artists today.

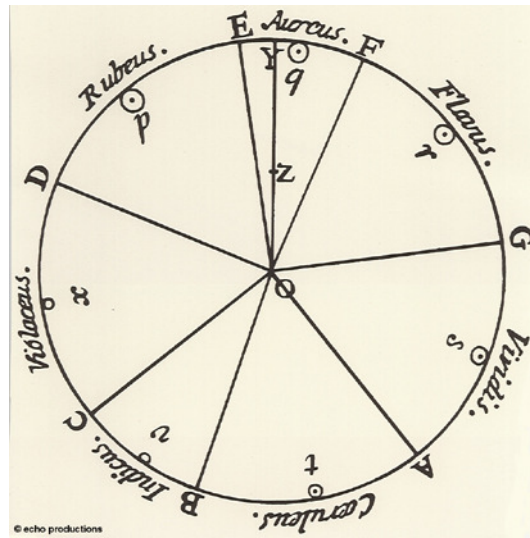


Figure 2: Sir Isaac Newton believed that musical and colour tones had frequencies in common. Newton matched the musical notes in an octave to fall between each colour in a colour wheel. (Image taken from Virtual Colour Museum, <http://www.colorsystem.com/>)

In this essay I want to discuss the affect that music has had on painting and animation. The best way to illustrate this is to look at some artists. Figure three shows a timeline constructed to highlight certain artworks and artists that in the author’s opinion were influenced by music. For the purposes of this study, two artists that will be concentrated on are Wassily Kandinsky and Oskar Fischinger. These artists have been chosen because they were innovators of their time. A contemporary artist will also be researched, to look at the similarities and differences between them in terms of their work and the composition, colour, rational etc.

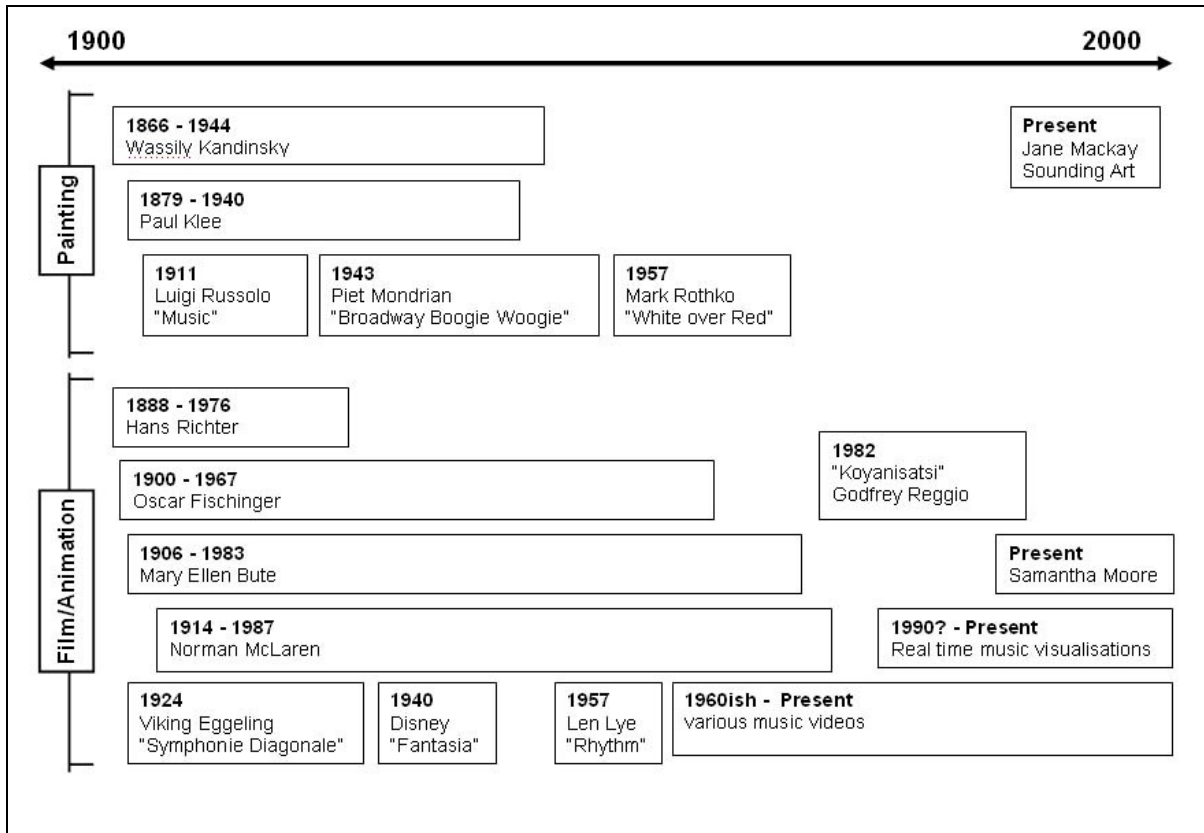


Figure 3: Timeline showing artists and artworks influenced by music dating from the beginning of the twentieth century to present day.

Synaesthesia

Firstly the author will look into synaesthesia as this is a possible link between music and art. Synaesthesia is a neurological condition in which two or more of the five senses are involuntarily linked together. There are many variations of synaesthesia; I will briefly describe a few of them;

- Grapheme-colour synaesthesia is where letters or numbers are associated with particular colours
- Music-colour synaesthesia or synthetic synaesthesia is where sounds evoke colours and images. Sometimes this is called coloured hearing.
- Lexical-gustatory synaesthesia is where tastes are experienced when spoken words are heard.

Synaesthetic experiences are usually driven or induced by symbolic representations such as letters, numbers or words. This is usually called the inducing stimulus. The resulting experience is called the concurrent perception, and this could be colour, taste, shape or texture. It is widely believed that synaesthetes are born with the condition, and it tends to run in families. However it can occur as a result of a stroke, or as a result of using hallucinogenic drugs like LSD.

Synaesthetic experiences are not necessarily the same for each person. For example, artist and synaesthete Jane Mackay had differing experiences to her sister:

I can remember very early on arguing with my sister about the days of the week and their colours. She is also a synaesthete and her colours were different from mine. If someone had said to us the days of the week aren't coloured, we would have thought what a funny point of view.

The odd thing was we couldn't agree on the colours. My Wednesday was and still is a lemony yellow. Her Wednesday was a sort of muddy green. It seemed to me quite ridiculous that Wednesday could be any colour other than yellow.

Wednesday is a yellow word (Clerizo cited Mackay, <http://observer.guardian.co.uk>).

For the purpose of this essay, the author will be focusing on the type of synaesthesia that links sight and sound, this is sometimes called synthetic synaesthesia or coloured hearing. It is usually uni-directional, so although sounds may evoke colour, colour may not necessarily evoke sounds.

Synaesthesia in Art

When discussing synaesthesia in art, you can either discuss art created as a result of personal synaesthetic experiences, or art created to provoke a synaesthetic experience in a non synaesthetic viewer. Art created by synaesthetes might involve listening to a piece of music, and describing it by painting what they hear, or creating a painting based on the images that were evoked whilst listening to music. This kind of art may also evoke a synaesthetic experience in the viewer, but this may not be the intention. It is simply to create, using the synaesthetic experience as a basis for their art. Kandinsky is famous for producing artworks that describe music, although it is debatable as to whether or not he was a true synaesthete; this is discussed in greater depth later in the essay. Contemporary artist Jane Mackay is a synaesthete, and her paintings are based on the images she visualises whilst listening to classical music.

Art designed to produce a synaesthetic experience in the viewer does not necessarily have to be created by a synaesthete. There is a wide range of media produced that is designed to do this. Possibly the most famous being Disney's *Fantasia*, although there are discussions as to whether or not it was intended to have a synaesthetic effect. A present day example of this kind of synaesthetic art would be real time systems designed to visualise music; for example the visualisations on Windows Media Player. Another example might be the work of VJs. A VJ manipulates video clips in a similar fashion to the way that a DJ would mix music. They often perform their live visuals in nightclubs, or at festivals to accompany music.

The difference between the two kinds of synaesthetic art described above would be the presence of music. If the art was created by a synaesthete and described their particular experience, there would be no reason to include the music with the finished piece if there was no intention of producing a synaesthetic experience for the viewer. However, if the art is designed to evoke a synaesthetic experience for non synaesthetes the music would have to be included within the piece to explain or describe the visuals; otherwise the art would just resemble any other piece of abstract art.

There are two schools of thought about synaesthesia; some believe that synaesthesia is something that can be learned, and that it stems from childhood memories like coloured fridge magnet letters for example. Others are adamant that it is purely a neurological condition that can be shown medically. The author thinks that non synaesthetes can associate different notes with particular colours, and that everyone if given a while to sit and think about music and colour could link the two; for example if a piece of music or a particular sound was played to them, they could decide on a colour that it represented. Maybe this link would be a result of things they have seen before, or things they have experienced. This relationship may possibly be more about describing a colour that explains what the listener feels when they hear the music. It is possible for someone to develop a relationship between colours and sound, however true synaesthesia is completely different. It is something that doesn't have to be worked at, it comes naturally and involuntarily to the synaesthete.

Various people have tried to explain synaesthesia, some simply concluding that synaesthetes are crazy. Ramachandran and Hubbard (2001) performed a test to try and find proof of synaesthesia. They determined that one out of every two hundred college people is synaesthetic. The test they formed involved using diagrams similar to those shown in figure four. A matrix of fives was created, with some figure twos placed amongst them, for example in a triangle shape. The test determines whether the synaesthetes literally see the numbers as colours, for example, fives as red, and twos as green. If this is the case, then when showed the diagram, they would see a red triangle as shown in the second diagram. To non synaesthetes however, the figure twos are a lot

harder to spot, and it would take a few minutes to work out where they are and recognise that they are organised in a triangle.

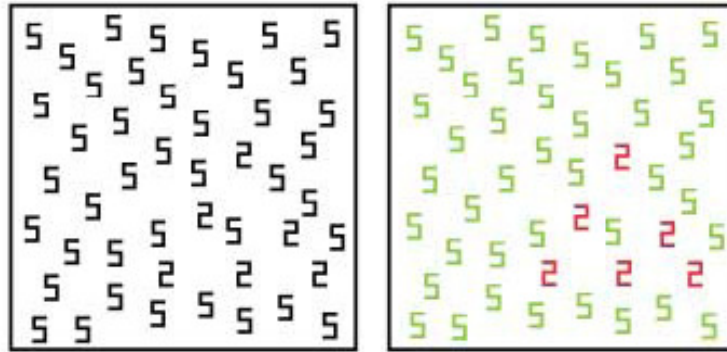


Figure 4: Twos among a matrix of fives. Diagrams used as a test for synaesthesia by V.S. Ramachandran and E.M. Hubbard.

(Image taken from Ramachandran and Hubbard [2001])

This is a diagnostic test—a very sensitive marker for synaesthesia. The results show that synaesthetes are not crazy, it's not a metaphor, nor is it just a memory association. This is the first experiment since the time of Francis Galton 100 years ago to show clearly that synaesthesia is an authentic sensory phenomenon (Romano cited Ramachandran, <http://www.neurologyreviews.com>).

Although this test just focuses on one kind of synaesthesia, it is helpful to understand the way in which synaesthetic people would see things. It is also useful because Dr Ramachandran believes that the experiment shows that synaesthesia is authentic, not just a memory association or metaphors. The author does not see any reason then, why if one kind of synaesthesia is possible, not to believe that others can exist too.

The Artists

Now the author will go on to discuss two artists in particular who were influenced by music in their work.

The first is Wassily Kandinsky. He was born in Russia in 1866 and died in 1944. At the age of thirty he moved to Munich to study painting. Kandinsky believed that painting was

a religious activity that revealed higher truths and experiences. He had a revolutionary approach to painting and was amongst the first artists to produce abstract pieces. Some critics suggest that he invented abstract art. The meaning of abstract art may be interpreted in more than one way, but within this essay, the intended meaning is art that is non objective, and non representational in the way that colour and form are used.

The second artist I will be discussing is Oscar Fischinger. He was born in 1900 in Germany and died in Los Angeles in 1967. Fischinger had a technical education, and also a love of music. He had an apprenticeship as an organ builder but this business was eventually closed because of world war one, so Fischinger applied his skills and was employed as an engineer. Around 1920, Fischinger was convinced to become an abstract film maker and in 1922, he gave up his engineering job and moved to Munich to become a full time film maker. Fischinger produced animated films that were usually abstract and were accompanied by music.

These two artists have been chosen in particular because in the author's opinion they were both innovative in their work. Kandinsky in particular was innovative in the way that he painted by deciding to paint non-objectively. Fischinger may have been influenced by Kandinsky's abstract work so this would be an interesting comparison to make. Fischinger's Films have been described as animated Kandinsky, and it is reported that Kandinsky enjoyed a screening of Fischinger's "Composition in Blue" in Paris (Leslie, <http://www.tate.org.uk>). These two artists will also give the author the opportunity to compare two different art forms; painting and animation and explore how they have both been influenced by music.

As well as looking at Kandinsky and Fischinger, their work will be compared with a present day example. For this comparison, the author has chosen an artist called Jane Mackay. Jane Mackay trained as a doctor and worked as a GP, but in 1999 gave that up to become a full time artist. She now has a studio in London where she paints. Jane Mackay is synaesthetic, she has a neurological condition in which sounds, words and numbers evoke images. She uses her condition to inspire her work by painting images

that are evoked whilst listening to classical music. The author made contact with Jane Mackay and she agreed to help with this essay by answering a few questions about her condition and her work.

The influence of music on each artist

Kandinsky associated colours with musical notes and regarded painting as the same activity as musical composition. He compared his abstract paintings to music without words, so there is no doubt that he was influenced by music. Kandinsky describes here the way in which he creates his works of art:

Each work arises technically in a way similar to that in which the cosmos arose – through catastrophes, which from the chaotic roaring of instruments, finally created a symphony, the music of the spheres (Blake, (2001 cited Kandinsky), p.50).

He explains how he paints with musical and scientific metaphors. This quote also emphasises how highly Kandinsky rates painting, comparing it to the creation of the planets. It is believed that Kandinsky did not have synaesthesia, although, he clearly was influenced by music in his art as he regarded the two as the same thing. He formed his own theories about colours and lines etc and used it to create and explain his paintings.

Kandinsky wanted his paintings to be meaningful, but he wanted the meaning to come from the combination of colour, shapes and the movement of the lines within the painting. Kandinsky analysed the elements that made up his paintings and decided what they each meant. In his book *Point and Line to Plane*, Kandinsky documents his theories and ideas about what each element of a painting means and symbolises. When writing about the nature of the line, Kandinsky goes on to explain how the idea can correspond directly to other forms of art expression, for example music:

What a musical line is, is well known. Most musical instruments are of linear character. The pitch of the various instruments corresponds to the width of the line: a very fine line represents the sound produced by the violin, flute, piccolo; a

somewhat thicker line represents the tone of the viola, clarinet; and the lines become more broad via the deep toned instruments, finally culminating in the broadest line representing the deepest tones produced by the bass-viol or the tuba.

Aside from its width, the line is produced in its colour variations by the diversified chromatic character of different instruments (Kandinsky, 1982, p.561).

So Kandinsky argued that the width of a line corresponds to the tone of a sound, whilst the colour corresponds to the particular note played on the instrument. He would have used these ideas along with others to discern what each element of his composition meant.

Kandinsky thought it was particularly interesting that to represent music graphically, it is the standard to simply use a combination of points and lines. The figure three shows how Kandinsky has analysed a section of musical notation and translated it to represent the same thing using points and lines. So here Kandinsky clearly is analysing music and going on to represent it visually. He did this in his book *Point and Line to Plane*, however this was not his intention for his paintings.

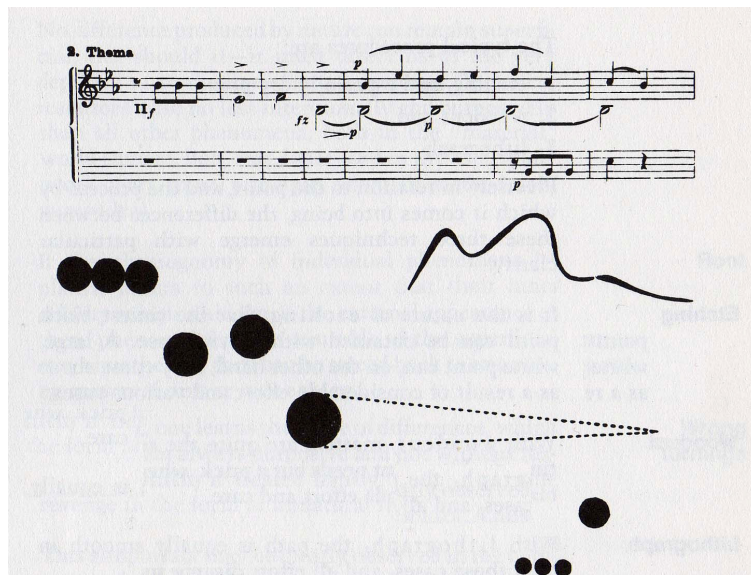


Figure 5: Kandinsky translated music graphically using points and lines. (Image taken from [Kandinsky1982])

Although music was for Kandinsky a powerful model for non representation, this produced a second order imperative to avoid the representation of music (Kahn, 1999, p.106).

Kandinsky did not want to represent music in his paintings. He wrote in one of his lectures that he did not want to “paint music”. By this, he meant that he did not want his paintings to represent a particular piece of music. Music was his inspiration, and he equated music with painting, but he did not intend to compose his paintings to illustrate a piece of music.

Fischinger had a strong musical background. He had been doing an apprenticeship with an organ builder, and at the same time he had also been taking violin lessons. He always had a love of music and painting. Fischinger said that “On the wings of music, faster progress was possible” (Fischinger, <http://www.oscarfischinger.org>). The author believes that Fischinger used music to develop and push forward his work. In the following quote, Fischinger explains how the addition of music to his work added to its effectiveness, and also how it helped it to be better understood:

The flood of feeling created through music intensified the feeling and effectiveness of this graphic cinematic expression, and helped to make understandable the absolute film. Under the guidance of music, which was already highly developed there came the speedy discovery of new laws – the application of acoustical laws to optical expression was possible. As in new dance, new motions and rhythms sprang out of the music – and rhythms became more and more important. (Fischinger, <http://www.oscarfischinger.org>)

Here it is evident that Fischinger was influenced by music. He explains how the music he used enabled him to discover new laws by analysing acoustical laws and expressing them visually. This is an innovative way of producing abstract films; taking the laws of one discipline, and applying them to another to create something new. The author also thinks it is interesting that Fischinger realised that to make his work more understandable to the public, he needed to include the music in the film. He realised that for people to understand and accept his abstract animation, he needed to associate it with something that people already recognised and understood.

Dr William Moritz (1941 – 2004) was an animation scholar and author who wrote a lot about Oskar Fischinger; he said this:

Oskar never intended to illustrate music; he only used music (which is, of course, abstract sound art) as a parallel to make it easier for audiences to accept his radical abstract kinetic art. When one hears music, no one asks what it is supposed to represent, but many people scorned abstract painting because it didn't look like recognisable objects. Oskar dealt with both sound and image so well that it truly became visual music (Moritz, 2004, p.38).

So perhaps Fischinger only used music to accompany his animation to enable it to be properly understood, or accepted in a culture that was not used to abstract art. Moritz said that Fischinger never meant to illustrate music, but the author does think that he used the music as a basis for his animation. For example in “Composition in Blue” (1935), the colours and the timing illustrate the music so well that the author finds it hard to believe that this wasn't his intention. Moritz also says that sometimes Fischinger screened his films silently to already sympathetic audiences, the author thinks that if he wasn't influenced by the music, he wouldn't have synchronised his animation in the first place. It could also be argued that because Fischinger's work represented the music, (which Moritz argues is abstract sound art) that it wasn't purely abstract anyway, as purely abstract work does not represent anything.

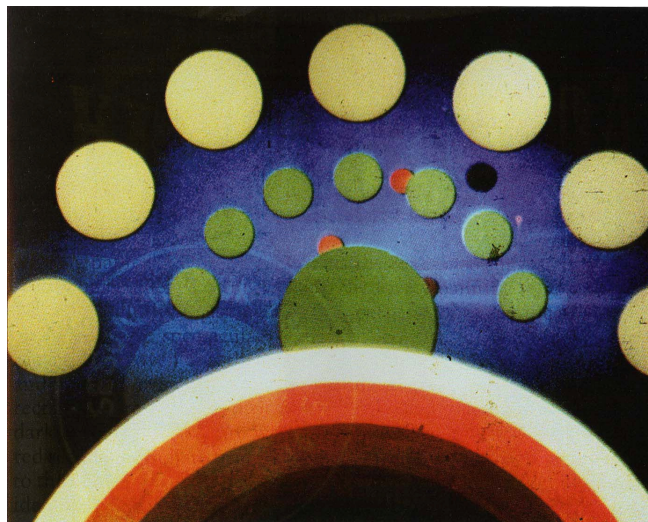


Figure 6: A still from Fischinger's film *Composition in Blue* (1935)
(Image taken from Moritz [2004])

The way that each artist differs here, is how they regard the music in relation to their art. Kandinsky saw painting and musical composition as the same activity, this suggests that when he was painting, he was composing music; not being inspired by somebody else's music, but creating his own. This differs to Fischinger as he uses pieces of well known music to animate to. The music illustrates his abstract animation enabling it to be better understood. So Fischinger didn't use animation as a medium for creating music but used music to explain his animation.

Jane Mackay's work is influenced by music; as she listens to music and then goes on to paint the images that were evoked whilst listening. Jane Mackay is also a musician; she plays the oboe and sings, so also has a strong musical background. This is what Jane Mackay said when asked if the music she based her work on influenced the colour or the composition most:

I never listen to music actually while I'm painting. That's too distracting. The music that evokes the paintings produces colour, shape, texture, 3-dimensions, movement (sometimes directional), time or timelessness etc. Sometimes colour is the most important, sometimes shapes, sometimes neither (Personal Communication, January 30th, 2007).

In this sense that she is similar to Fischinger, as she is basing her paintings on pieces of music already composed, but she differs, because she doesn't paint music literally like perhaps Fischinger does, but paints an overall feeling that the music evokes encompassed in one painting.

Kandinsky claimed to be synaesthetic, although many doubt that he was. The author believes that maybe he formed rules and relationships between music and sound, and therefore some would say that he had a form of learned synaesthesia. When I asked Jane Mackay about Kandinsky, she said:

Though I love his work I personally think it was doubtful that Kandinsky was a synaesthete (Personal Communication, January 30th, 2007).

There is no way to prove that Kandinsky was or was not synaesthetic but it is interesting to hear the opinion of a synaesthetic artist today. I don't believe that he had a natural synaesthesia that was an involuntary neurological condition, but I do think that he associated different colours with different notes etc. In his book "On the Spiritual in Art", Kandinsky wrote about synaesthesia and wrote in particular about one synaesthete who associated colours with taste. He said that you might associate a bright yellow with a sour affect, but he doubted that this was a general system for this type of synaesthesia because there are not many blue foods! (Kandinsky, 1982, p.158) I think writing about this kind of thing would suggest that Kandinsky was not synaesthetic.

The author does not believe that Fischinger was synaesthetic. He is sometimes referred to as a synaesthetic artist, although this is referring to his work being synaesthetic and not himself personally. Maybe he created the second type of synaesthetic art that was referred to earlier. Art that is designed to evoke a synaesthetic experience in the viewer, this can be created by either synaesthetic or non synaesthetic artists.

Jane Mackay was asked whether she heard the same piece of music when she looked back at a painting that was inspired by a particular piece of music; this was her response:

When I look at a completed painting of my own I get feelings and emotions, of energy/satisfaction etc, if it has gone well. I don't 'hear the painting' if that's what you mean; i.e. I don't have reverse synaesthesia. My synaesthesia isn't to do with feelings and emotions: it's a neurological response to sound over which I have little control (Personal Communication, January 30th, 2007).

This response suggests that Mackay's work is not at all designed to evoke a synaesthetic experience for the viewer which Fischinger's is perhaps meant to do; it simply describes the images evoked in her mind when she is listening to music. She does not hear the same piece of music when she looks back at the painting, but she does see the same images each time she hears that piece of music. Kandinsky believed that when he painted he was creating music, so the author thinks that when he viewed his paintings again, he would hear or be thinking about the same sounds that he was trying to create when he was painting.

The influence of music on abstract art

Kandinsky supposedly returned to his studio one day to find a painting of his turned on its side. He couldn't work out what it was, and so abstract art was created! This how the art historians claim Kandinsky was introduced to abstract art. As mentioned briefly before, it is believed that Kandinsky was amongst the first to paint abstract works of art. However, Kandinsky's work is not all abstract; it was only in 1910 that Kandinsky is reported to have painted his first abstract painting.

Many of Kandinsky's early paintings are representational. Some say that during this time he was still searching for his own style. The paintings before 1910 were all objective; he painted things like landscapes, his village church and even his own dining room. In 1909, Kandinsky began to give some of his paintings titles associated with music; Improvisations and Compositions. At that time, these paintings were still objective, but gradually the objects in the paintings became more and more simplified and abstracted until in his later paintings he abandoned using objects at all in his work as he thought that they stopped the viewer from realising the true beauty of the art.

It is arguable as to when Kandinsky painted his first truly abstract painting. Figure seven is a painting by Kandinsky in 1911, it is entitled Composition 4. Some regard this as an abstract painting but many disagree.



*Figure 7: Composition IV (1911) by Kandinsky.
(Image taken from Le Targat [1988])*

Kandinsky's intention for this painting was for the viewer's first impression to be an emotional and perhaps even a spiritual one. He wanted viewers to be struck by the colours, forms and composition, and to simply appreciate their beauty. He wanted the viewers to experience the painting rather than just see it, and to realise the feelings that the painting evoked whilst viewing it. Perhaps, in a similar way to the way you would experience and appreciate a piece of music.

When the painting is analysed, it is clear that it is actually based on nature. It is not entirely a non objective painting as reality is represented using bold colours and shapes. There are Cossacks, mountains, boats and a castle all represented in the painting, so it is perhaps not as abstract as originally thought upon the first impression. Because of this, the painting can be appreciated on two levels; the aesthetic level, where the emotional impact of the colours and forms are appreciated, and the intellectual level, when the representational aspects of the painting are deciphered and reasoned. If you did not study

the painting and analyse what it represents, then the painting would be regarded as an abstract piece, as it is not immediately clear as to what the painting illustrates.

In fact, this was Kandinsky's aim for the painting. He wanted viewers to gradually recognise objects whilst they were looking. It wasn't his intention for the viewer to recognise them all at once. Once Composition 4 has been studied, and the different aspects have been identified, it is very hard to going back to just appreciating the colours and forms, because now they are connected with the objects that they represent. It is more difficult to take your own meanings and interpretations of the painting. The following is what Kandinsky wrote about Composition 4:

The whole composition is intended to produce a very bright effect, with many sweet colours, which often run into one another (resolution), while the yellow, too, is cold. The juxtaposition of this bright-sweet-cold tone with angular movement (battle) is the principle contrast in the picture (Kandinsky, 1982, p.384).

Kandinsky admitted that he had struggled for years to master abstract form, and that he was unable to experience purely abstract imagery without bridging the gap by means of objects. He also said that objects were important to him because they each had a certain spiritual sound, and that this served as material for all sorts of art. He thought that the objects represented in his paintings should not be recognised all at once, so that the viewer could experience their spiritual overtones one by one. Because of this, Kandinsky "dissolved" some objects more than others in the same painting. Evidence can be seen of this in Composition 4 (Vergo, 1986, p.14).

At the time, Kandinsky's paintings were not accepted, as they were thought of as abstract, and therefore meaningless. People struggled to recognise that the paintings were not completely abstract and that they actually contained many representational forms. Fischinger was said to have been influenced by Kandinsky's work. He also used abstract imagery in his work but as mentioned before, he realised that for his art to be accepted, he needed to first associate it with something that was already accepted.

When Fischinger was nineteen, he was preparing a lecture on Shakespeare's Twelfth Night for a club that he was part of called the Friends of Literature club. To support this lecture, he analysed the text graphically. He did this by describing the feelings and emotions of the work using curves and lines displayed along a horizontal line. Fischinger met a theatre critic at the club called Dr Bernhard Diebold who encouraged Fischinger to transfer these images to film so that the element of time could be included to better explain his ideas. Diebold then suggested that the films would then become abstract visual music, and would be their own art form, separate from the text that inspired them (Moritz, 2004, p.7). This led Fischinger to go on to make abstract films. So unlike Kandinsky, Fischinger originally set out to produce non objective films instead of arriving at them by developing his work.

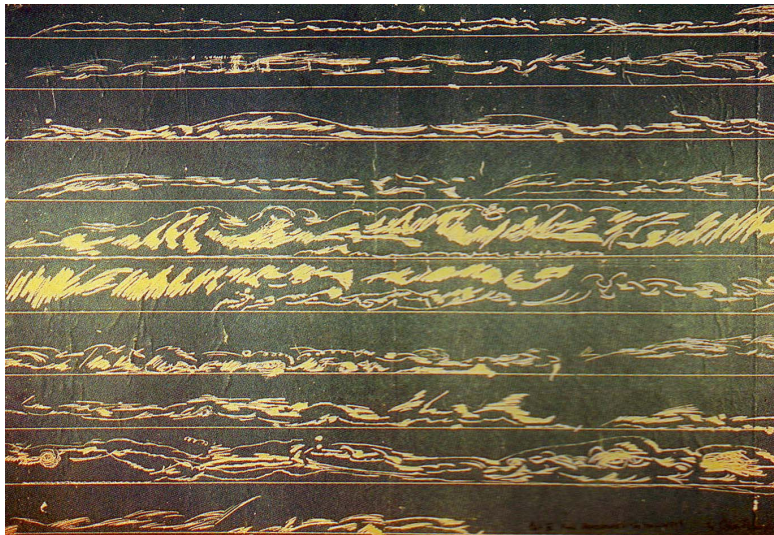


Figure 8: Fischinger's interpretation of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. He analysed the emotions present throughout the text, and presented them graphically along a timeline using curves and lines. (Image taken from Moritz [2004])

To produce his abstract films, Fischinger experimented with wax and many other substances to create animations. He invented and created a machine that would slice sections of a wax model and photograph a frame of the newly cut wax each time a slice was taken away. He made several animations using the wax slicing machine, and even sold machines to other animators.

Fischinger's main aim was to create abstract films; however, he did also produce animations that were representational. An example of a representational animation is *Spiritual Constructions* (1927). It is a surrealist film that is in silhouette. It depicts two drunken men that morph into various different objects and forms. In an article written by Dr William Moritz, called "The Importance of being Fischinger" Moritz says this:

Fischinger was opposed in theory to representational imagery. In the spirit of non-objective art, he maintained, correctly, that his (major) films were absolute experiences in and of themselves, not representations of some other objects or experiences. Because of this he would never have shown (or even discussed) things like *Pierette* or the advertising films on any program of his "works"; nor, I believe, would he have shown *Spiritual Constructions*, *Munich to Berlin*, or *Swiss Rivers and Landscapes*, regardless of how good these pictures might now seem in the context of independent cinema (<http://www.centerforvisualmusic.org>).

This quote suggests that the more representational films that Fischinger created were simply produced in order to make money to support himself, his family and his work. It suggests that he doesn't consider them works of art, and doesn't rate them in comparison to the absolute animation that he also created. Fischinger believed in animating for animations sake, and true creation, as in creating a completely new experience rather than representing something that had already happened.



*Figure 9: Collage created by Fischinger in about 1940. He used reproduced images of Kandinsky's work and Disney figures.
(Image taken from Moritz [2004])*

Fischinger made the collage pictured above by taking cuttings of Kandinsky's work from old Guggenheim Foundation catalogues, and using Mickey and Minnie Mouse figures cut from comics and story books. He placed the figures in positions where they appear to be shocked and disgusted by the abstract painting. He used the collage to parody the reaction that many people had to abstract work. The collage was created at about the same time that Disney's *Fantasia* was released; the collage not only parodies the public's reaction to abstract work, but also Disney's reaction. Disney when producing *Fantasia* decided that they were not going to use completely abstract images in the animation because they thought that the viewers would not understand it. Fischinger was employed to work on *Fantasia*, but this difference of opinion amongst others caused him to leave the studio and disassociate his name with the film.

Jane Mackay paints abstract paintings although some also have representational imagery in them. The images that Jane Mackay sees whilst listening to music are abstract shapes, forms and colours, and this is shown through her painting. The following image is a painting by Jane Mackay called *Proms Party*. It has abstract shapes and colours in it, but it is representative of the Royal Albert Hall, where she was painting. She has simplified the shapes somewhat, but they are not completely non representational.



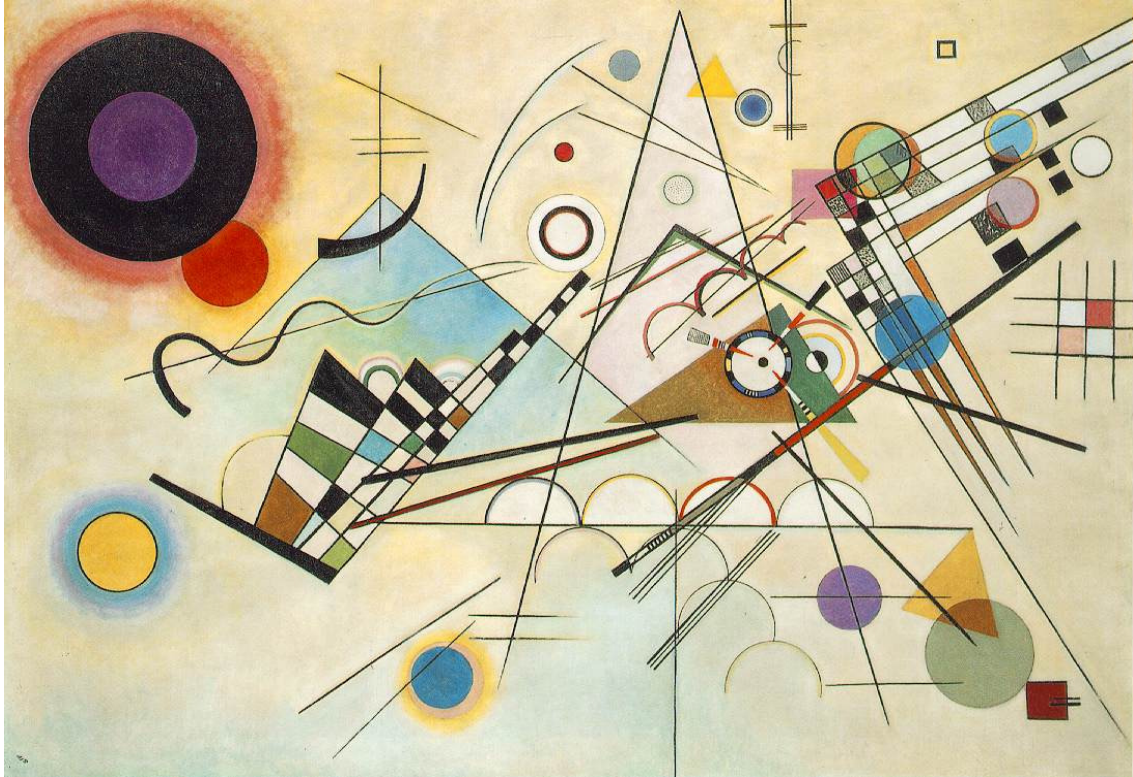
*Figure 10: Proms Party. A synaesthetic painting by Jane Mackay.
(Image taken from Mackay [<http://www.soundingart.com/>])*

The influence of music on composition

In his book *On the Spiritual in Art*, and also in *Point and Line to Plane*, Kandinsky wrote about the theory behind his art. The author believes he documented his thoughts because he wanted people to understand and think about the reasons and method behind his work. He wanted to defend his art, and demonstrate to people that it wasn't meaningless. In "On the Spiritual in Art", Kandinsky writes about colours and forms, their meanings and the relationship they have with each other.

The value of many colours is reinforced by certain forms and weakened by others. At all events, sharp colours have a stronger sound in sharp forms (e.g., yellow in a triangle). The effect of deeper colours is emphasized by rounded forms (e.g., blue in a circle). Of course, it is clear on the one hand that the incompatibility of certain forms and certain colours should be regarded not as something "disharmonious," but conversely, as offering new possibilities –i.e., also [a form of] harmony (Kandinsky, 1982, p.163).

Here, Kandinsky describes to his readers his thinking behind colours and shapes. Kandinsky has formed a relationship between colours and forms by equating aspects of each. He regards yellow as a sharp colour; probably as a result of learned synaesthesia and the association of yellow with lemons. He then equates yellow with triangles as he regards triangles as sharp forms. He says that therefore if you have a yellow filled triangle, the effect is made stronger, but if you put the yellow inside a circle, the effect is then weakened because rounded forms emphasise deeper colours. Kandinsky would have used these concepts in his paintings by using combinations of the rules depending on what effect or sound he wanted to describe. Some of these concepts are evident in his painting *Composition 8*, shown below.



*Figure 11: Composition VIII (1923) Kandinsky.
(Image taken from Le Targat [1988])*

Composition 8 is the painting that many regard as Kandinsky's first entirely abstract piece as there are no obvious representational images, only geometrical forms and colours. After reading the theories behind shapes and colours, you can start to try and understand the composition. There are many triangles represented, two of them are yellow filled triangles, which Kandinsky believes have a strong sharp and harmonious sound. In the lower left of the painting, two circles can be seen, a yellow circle with a blue outline, and a blue circle with a yellow outline. These compliment each other and also provide contrast. In "On the Spiritual in Art", Kandinsky talks about yellow being a warm eccentric colour, and blue as a cold, concentric colour. He goes on to say that the warmth or coldness of a colour is due to its inclination toward yellow or blue.

You could go on to analyse the painting using the theories that Kandinsky documented in his books, however it is extremely difficult to understand the painting without reading all about what each element means. It is possible though, to look at the painting and derive

your own meanings from it. Kandinsky planned his Compositions meticulously, and designed every last detail in sketches. Personally, the author cannot look at this painting, and associate it with music in any way, other than if I was to generally describe the painting as eventful, energetic etc, and then equate it to music. Jane Mackay was asked what she thought of Kandinsky's Composition 8 because a synaesthetic artist may have a different opinion of the piece. She was asked whether the painting conveyed a certain feeling, emotion or mood and she said that she couldn't pinpoint anything in particular, but said that she does think that it radiates energy.

This method of formulating a set of rules to work by was not the case for Fischinger. In 1932, Fischinger realised that the abstract images that he was using in his films were very similar to the images that were generated by sound on the optical soundtrack. Fischinger wanted to discern what kinds of sounds were typical for particular primary shapes. He performed a series of experiments, in some cases actually drawing on the soundtrack. Previous to this, Fischinger may have based his images on existing objects, simplifying them beyond recognition. It is reported that whilst working on one film, Fischinger took inspiration for the choreography from rococo architectural motifs and then simplified or abstracted the motifs to their inner geometrical structures (Moritz, 2004, p.39).

Fantasia

Perhaps one of the most well known animations to be inspired by music is Disney's Fantasia, originally released in 1940. Fischinger was employed by Disney to work on Fantasia, but after many disagreements he left Disney, and refused to let his name be associated with the animation.

Fantasia is made up of eight separate animations which accompany pieces of music played by the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Leopold Stokowski. Deems Taylor, an art critic introduces each piece of animation. At the beginning of the film, he describes

what the film is about, and how Disney went about making it, he also introduces Fantasia as “a new form of entertainment”.

The music was helping the idea more than anyone realised, by giving a structure and a development of thematic material that, in itself, carried the audience along. Possibly lesser music would have lacked the strength to sustain so much picture footage; certainly when fantasia is run without sound it seems vague and lacking in purpose or direction (Thomas and Johnson, 1995, p.510).

Here, the importance of the music to Fantasia is stressed. The music is given the credit for carrying the audience along. This differs to Disney’s previous animations in which the main characters or the plot carry the audience along. The author thinks it is interesting how the artists used the themes and structure of the music to base the animation on. They relied on the music so much, that they say that without the music, the animation lacks direction and purpose. This differs to Fischinger’s use of music in his animation; as he regarded his animations as an art form in their own right. Sometimes he would screen his animations silently to audiences that were sympathetic to abstract art. Disney would clearly not do this, as it is thought that the music is integral to the animation.

Deems Taylor goes on to explain about the different kinds of music in the film. He explains that there are three kinds of music; one that tells a definite story, one that has no specific plot but describes pictures, and one that exists simply for its own sake.

The number that opens the Fantasia program, the “Toccata and Fugue”, is music of this third kind, what we call “absolute music” even the title has no meaning beyond a description of the form of the music (Deems Taylor, Fantasia).

It is interesting here, that Taylor mentions “absolute music” meaning music that exists simply for its own sake. Fischinger had been working to achieve what he called “absolute film” in which, the film was a new experience in and of itself, not representing an experience that had already happened. A parallel can be made here between “absolute film” and “absolute music”. Each concept claiming that they exist purely for their own sake and that they are experiences in and of themselves. The principles of each concept are the same, but one places the emphasis on the music, and the other on the visuals. As

quoted earlier, “Fantasia being vague and lacking in purpose or direction when played without music” would not be the case if the visuals were created as absolute film. The difference between the absolute music of “Toccata and Fugue”, and the films that Fischinger created, would be that Disney created visuals that vaguely resembled what was happening in the music, for example, when the string section plays, bows and string like images are described and hinted at with the visuals. Fischinger’s films however, are not representative at all.

Fischinger, true to character, believed that there should be no representational content in Fantasia. Disney’s opinion of this was quite different; he thought that for the film to be accepted, people needed to recognise the images and be able to relate them to the music. Even in the third kind of music that Taylor introduces as “absolute music” Disney believed that there still needed to be representational content there for the viewers to understand the animation. Here, Dr William Moritz quotes Walt Disney from a transcript of a story meeting on the 28th February 1939:

Everything that has been done in the past on this kind of stuff has been cubes and different shapes moving around to the music. It has been fascinating. From the experience we have had here with our crowd – they went crazy about it! If we can go a little further here and get some clever designs, the thing will be a great hit. I would like to see it sort of near abstract, as they call it – not pure, And new (Moritz, 2004 (cited Disney, 1939) p.84).

So like Fischinger used music as a means of explaining his animation in order for people to understand it, Disney here, is concerned about the film being understood and accepted as he wants it to be a big hit. He believes that by adding “clever designs” he is taking the idea further, and building on what has already been done, namely Fishchinger’s animation. Fischinger left Disney in the October of 1939, the author believes this difference of opinion was one of the many reasons that Fischinger decided to leave. It would also explain why he didn’t want his name associated with the film, just as he didn’t regard the representational animations he had previously made to be real works of art.

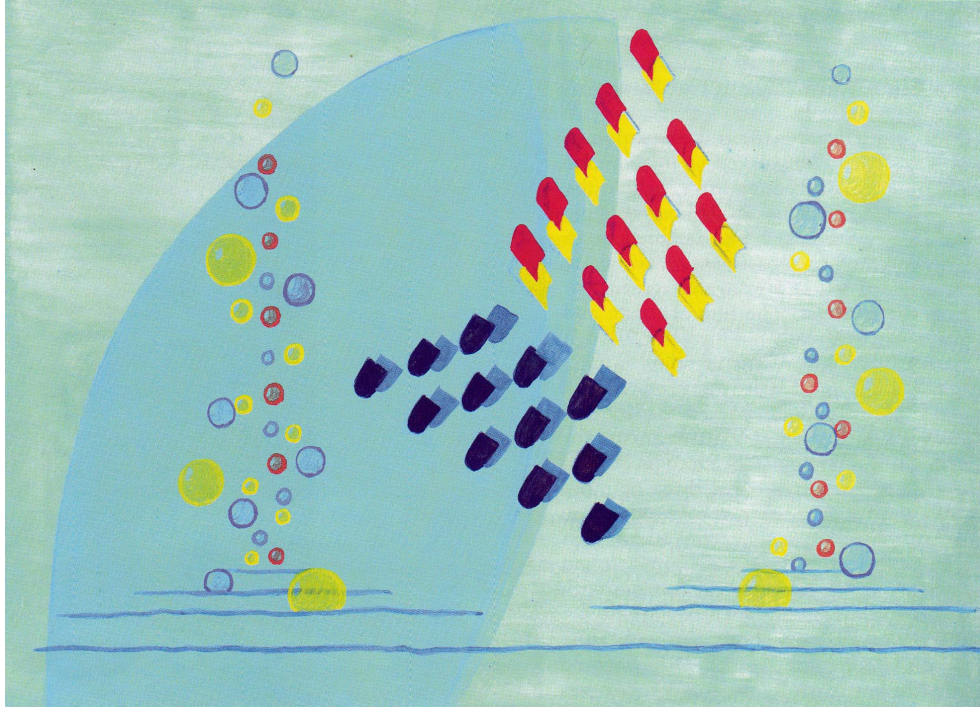


Figure 12: An original sketch by Fischinger for the wave sequence in Fantasia. Most of Fischinger's work was never used in the final film as it was too abstract and did not conform to what Disney wanted. (Image taken from Moritz [2004])

In 1936, Fischinger is reported to have contacted Leopold Stokowski about obtaining rights to use the Stokowski Bach arrangements in order to work on a collaborative feature length animation. In 1937, Stokowski began working with Disney on “The sorcerer’s apprentice” which then developed into a feature length animation that was later named “Fantasia”. Fischinger believed that Stokowski sold his idea of the feature length animation to Disney without giving Fischinger any credit for the idea. Fischinger only worked on Fantasia for nine months. He must have found it a real struggle as he believed that Disney was producing what was originally his idea. He thought that they were not taking into account any of his ideas or suggestions without completely reworking and adapting them. Fischinger wrote this in a letter to his friend about his time at Disney:

I worked on this film for nine months; then through some “behind the back” talks and intrigue (something very big at the Disney studios) I was demoted to an entirely different department, and three months later I left Disney again, agreeing to call off the contract. The film “Tocatta and Fugue by Bach” is really not my work, though my work may be present at some points; rather it is the most inartistic product of a factory. Many people worked on it, and whenever I put out

an idea for suggestion for this film, it was immediately cut to pieces and killed, or often it took two, three or more months until a suggestion took hold in the minds of some people connected with it who had their say. One thing I definitely found out: that no true work of art can be made with that procedure used in the Disney Studio (Moritz, 2004, p.85).

Fischinger was clearly unhappy about his time at Disney. Maybe he was just not used to working with such a big group of artists who all had their own opinions. Disney was obviously working from a business point of view as well as an artistic one whilst making the film as he was conscious of it being accepted, making money and being “a big hit”. Fischinger on the other hand was more interested in making a work of art; he didn’t like to compromise his beliefs about his images and visuals in order to make something popular or accepted by a general audience. Although he used music as a means of his art being understood, he never changed his art to suit the audience. Fischinger once referred to Fantasia as being a “tasteless product” (Moritz, 2004, p.87).

At the beginning of Fantasia, Deems Taylor said this:

What you're going to see are the designs and pictures and stories that music inspired in the minds and imaginations of a group of artists (Deems Taylor, Fantasia).

This suggests that Fantasia is not intended to produce a synaesthetic experience in the viewer as some would believe, but it simply is intended to portray the images that were inspired by the music. In that respect, the work could be compared to Jane Mackay’s. The only difference being that one is produced by a synaesthete. Jane Mackay said that although she thinks that Fantasia is quite fun, it is not a good representation of what synaesthesia might be like to a non synaesthete.

Conclusion

Music and art are similar concepts as they are both trying to explain and express ideas through abstract mediums. There are many similarities between the two; they are both

creative, both require design and both can be interpreted in different ways by the audience. Also, both have sets of rules that can be used, broken or created to produce something new. There are many ways that music has influenced art and only a few have been explored in this essay. Artists are influenced by music in various ways, whether they are synaesthetic or not. Some use music as a basis for creating their art, or some use their art in order to express musical ideas. Some aim to describe personal synaesthetic experiences and some aim to try and emulate the synaesthetic experience for the viewer. However, even if artists have been influenced by music in the same way, for example synaesthetically, the way that each artist would execute the idea would be different.

With animation and music, time passing is integral to the art form, whereas a painting is an idea encapsulated in one image instantaneously. Maybe this is why Kandinsky when creating paintings like *Composition 4* for example, was keen for the viewer to look at the painting and gradually come to recognise more elements of the painting the longer they looked at it.

Colour is objective; it can mean different things to different people. With this in mind, it would be impossible to link all music influenced art. Synaesthetes will rarely have the similar experiences to each other; the same sounds may evoke completely different colours in different synaesthetes. Kandinsky formed rules that he used to paint by, but even if this was the case with other artists too, many would disagree with them. The viewers that see Kandinsky's paintings may not realise the rules he used to paint by, and therefore may derive their own meanings anyway.

It would be difficult to agree with Kandinsky when he said that "our hearing of colours is so precise that it would be perhaps impossible to find anyone who would try to represent his impression of bright yellow by means of the bottom register of the piano, or describe dark matter as being a soprano voice." Indeed, what this demonstrates is that most synaesthetic systems within the arts rarely reflect the possible complexity of the experience of actual synaesthetes (Kahn, 1999, p.122).

The author agrees with Kandinsky here, when he says that most people would associate yellow with high notes, and deeper colours with much lower notes. This however, is a generalised idea and the author disagrees with Kandinsky when he says that our hearing of colours is precise. This maybe is the beginnings of learned synaesthesia, which people then might add to with their experiences or memories. The author agrees with Kahn, when he says that synaesthetic systems rarely reflect the complexity of the actual synaesthetic experience. It would be impossible to do this, as each synaesthete is different. Jane Mackay said that she doesn't actually listen to music at the same time as painting, as it is too distracting, this suggests that even her own art does not reflect the complexity of her experiences. Synaesthesia is an extremely difficult thing for a non synaesthete to imagine and completely understand, and is probably equally difficult for synaesthetes to imagine life without synaesthesia. This fact maybe inhibits the task of reflecting the possible complexity of the condition.

It is evident from this essay that the subject of music influencing art has been of interest, and inspired many artists, scientists and psychologists throughout history. It continues to interest them today, and the author would be interested to see how the subject develops and expands in the future both scientifically and artistically. This essay could be used as a precursor to further investigation and studies in the area.

Critical Analysis

Originally when I started this project, I had intended to write an essay about how visual media had been influenced by music, dating from the beginning of the twentieth century until to the present day. I was going to include various painters, animators and film makers and look at the subject from a historical perspective producing an overview of the subject. I soon realised that by using this approach, I would be researching into a vast amount of information, but with not much detail. I adapted the essay to concentrate on fewer artists and artworks. By doing this, I was able to research with more detail into each artist, but also look into the aesthetic aspects of the subject as well, rather than just

the historical. I think this was a successful change, I have found the research extremely interesting, and I have learnt a lot from it.

The two main artists that I chose to research into were Kandinsky and Fischinger. This was an interesting comparison to make because it enabled me to look into both painting and animation and compare how both art forms have been influenced by music. It was also interesting because I believe they were influenced by each others work, and I was able to find out some of their opinions of each other's work.

At the beginning of this project, I set about finding a contemporary artist to compare with Kandinsky and Fischinger. I decided upon Jane Mackay as she was a synaesthetic artist. In order to make the essay stronger; I decided to try and find some primary sources of information on the subject. I contacted Jane Mackay and asked whether she would help with the project by means of a phone interview or a visit to her studio. She agreed to help via email by answering a few questions. This was a really interesting part of the project as she was able to tell me about her condition, and also give me opinions of other work and artists that were influenced by music. It also enabled me to ask specific questions relating to my research. I think the essay would have been stronger if I had been able to get in contact with two or more present day artists, perhaps a painter and an animator. I did approach a second artist who was also a composer, but I had no response. It would have been interesting to find out about his work and see how it relates or differs to the other artists I researched into.

I have learnt a lot as a result of writing this essay. I have always been interested in Kandinsky and how he was influenced by music, but I now understand in more depth the ways in which he was influenced by music, and how he relates music to his work. I also can now see how he has influenced other artists, and how his work has been important to the development of abstract art. At the beginning of this project, I was aware of synaesthesia, but it has been really interesting to find out more information on the subject, and see how the condition is used to express ideas artistically.

My major project is an animation that will be edited to music. Although it is a character based piece and not abstract, I feel that some aspects learnt and discussed in this essay can be applied to my animation. For example, I could experiment with using colour to match the music, using aspects of learned synaesthesia. In the future I will continue to study this subject, and will hopefully be able to apply the knowledge learnt to future projects, whether they are paintings, animations or films.

If I had more time to work on this project, there are certain things I would add to the project. I would have liked to carry out some experiments to gather information about the subject. It would have been interesting to carry out some experiments similar to the test using the matrix of fives. An experiment in which people listen to a sound, and then choose a colour from a selection to best describe the sound would have been interesting to carry out. If the experiment was done with a group of non synaesthetes, it would have been useful to research into learned synaesthesia; I could look for trends and patterns in the data collected. It would also be interesting to find out and write about people's opinions of the paintings and animations discussed in the essay.

If I was to do this project again, I would definitely try and find another contemporary artist to include in the essay. I think I would also make the subject narrower in terms of what I include in the essay, I would concentrate on one particular aspect of the subject, for example how sound relates to colour. However, I think what I have achieved within the given time constraints has been successful. I have enjoyed the project and have gained a lot from the research. I realise that this essay in no way covers the whole subject of visual media influenced by music, but I do hope that it gives an introduction to the subject as a whole, places the subject in historical context, and gives a detailed insight to a few particular areas of the subject. I hope that by reading this essay, animators will learn about the similarities and differences in Kandinsky and Fischinger's work, how they were both influenced by music in different ways, and how their work is relevant to artists today.

References

Literature:

1. BLAKE, R. 2001. *Essential Modern Art*. Bath: Parragon.
2. KANDINSKY, W. 1982. *Complete Writings on Art*. London: Faber and Faber Limited.
3. KAHN, D. 1999. *Noise, Water, Meat, A History of Sound in the Arts*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
4. MORITZ, W. 2004. *Optical Poetry, The Life and Work of Oskar Fischinger*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
5. RAMACHANDRAN, V.S. and HUBBARD, E.M. 2001. Synaesthesia—A Window Into Perception, Thought and Language. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. 8 (12), 3-34.
6. THOMAS, F. AND JOHNSTON, O. 1995. *The Illusion of Life, Disney Animation*. New York: Disney Editions.
7. VERGO, P. 1986. *Kandinsky Cossacks*. London: Tate Gallery Publications.

Films:

8. FANTASIA, 1940. Film. USA: Disney.

Websites:

9. CLERIZO, M. 2002. *Seeing is believing*. [online]. The Observer. Available from: http://observer.guardian.co.uk/magazine/story/0,11913,772060,00.html#article_continue

[Accessed 12 March 2007].

10. FISCHINGER, O. 1947. *My Statements are in My Work* [online]. Available from:
<http://www.oskarfischinger.org/MyStatements.htm>

[Accessed 12 March 2007].

11. JUSTIN ROMANO, C. 2002. *The Mind's Eye – Neuroscience, Synesthesia, and Art* [online]. Available from:
http://www.neurologyreviews.com/jul02/nr_jul02_mindseye.html

[Accessed 13 March 2007].

12. LESLIE, E. 2006. Where Abstraction and Comics Collide. [online]. Tate Online. Available from: <http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue7/fischinger.htm>

[Accessed 13 March 2007]

13. MORITZ, W. 1976. *The Importance of Being Fischinger* [online]. Available from: <http://www.centerforvisualmusic.org/library/ImportBF.htm>

[Accessed 12 March 2007].

14. MORITZ, W. 1997. *The Dream of Colour Music, And Machines That Made it Possible* [online]. Animation World Magazine. Available from:
<http://www.awn.com/mag/issue2.1/articles/moritz2.1.html>

[Accessed 12 March 2007]

15. Virtual Colour Museum. *Isaac Newton*. [online]. Echo Productions
<http://www.colorsystem.com/>

[Accessed 12 March 2007].

Image Sources

Figures 1, 6, 8, 9 & 12:

Images taken from MORITZ, W. 2004. *Optical Poetry, The Life and Work of Oskar Fischinger*. Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press.

Figure 2

Image taken from Virtual Colour Museum. *Isaac Newton*. [online]. Echo Productions <http://www.colorsystem.com/> [Accessed 12 March 2007].

Figure 4

Image taken from RAMACHANDRAN, V.S. and HUBBARD, E.M. 2001. Synaesthesia—A Window Into Perception, Thought and Language. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. 8 (12), 3-34.

Figure 5

Image taken from KANDINSKY, W. 1982. *Complete Writings on Art*. London, UK: Faber and Faber Limited.

Figures 7 & 11

Images taken from LE TARGAT, F. 1988. *Kandinsky*. London, UK: Academy Editions

Figure 10

Image taken from MACKAY, J. *Sounding Art* [online]. Available from: <http://www.soundingart.com/view.aspx?Id=465> [Accessed 12 March 2007].

Appendix

Emailed responses from Jane Mackay

- When you have produced paintings inspired by music, and then view the painting or listen to the music individually, are the feelings and emotions evoked still the same? Do you hear a particular piece of music whilst viewing your paintings? When you look at other artists work do you imagine what they might have been listening to?

Yes, music gives me feelings and emotions. When I look at a completed painting of my own I get feelings and emotions, of energy/satisfaction etc, if it has gone well. I don't 'hear the painting' if that's what you mean; i.e. I don't have reverse synaesthesia. My synaesthesia isn't to do with feelings and emotions: it's a neurological response to sound over which I have little control. re your last Q: perhaps, sometimes if it's not obvious from the title or painting commentary.

- Does the music you listen to whilst painting, influence the colour or the composition most?

I never listen to music actually while I'm painting. That's too distracting. The music that evokes the paintings produces colour, shape, texture, 3-dimensions, movement (sometimes directional), time or timelessness etc. Sometimes colour is the most important, sometimes shapes, sometimes neither.

- Kandinsky argued that the width of a line corresponds to the tone of a sound, whilst the colour corresponds to the note played on the instrument. Do you have a set of “rules” when you paint? For example do you associate certain colours with particular instruments or notes?

No, I don't have a set of rules. By the way, though I love his work I personally think it was doubtful that Kandinsky was a synaesthete.

- When looking at Kandinsky's Composition VIII, what sort of music is suggested to you, and what sounds do you hear or imagine?

I don't hear any sounds. As I said, I don't have 'reverse' synaesthesia. I only get images from sounds, not vice versa.

- Does the painting convey a particular feeling, emotion or mood?

No, I can't pinpoint anything in particular. I think it radiates energy though.

- Do you have any personal associations with the combination of colours used in the painting? What do they mean to you?

No, not with the combination. Individual colours remind me of specific things.