

Loss, Memory, Spectacle, Redemption: A Hermeneutic Approach to Dier's Videopoem *Todos esos momentos se perderan (All Those Moments Will Be Lost In Time) 2011*

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for Roberto Simanowsky

Was it a pure “romantic” attraction?

One. In 1985, I produced my first Vancouver videopoem. I had moved there from Montreal in '83 and found myself in another country. I remember writing . . . *here in the land of abundant symmetrical logs on manicured beaches* . . . But I soon discovered a different Vancouver. I noticed the proliferation of graffiti, especially on the downtown east side. One day, I took my ¾” JVC KY-3000 and began “collecting” them from the surfaces that were presented to me. The tragic, the comic, the undecipherable, the paradoxical, the exhortations for *real life* experiences, I captured what I could. Laying these out on a time-track, I began to select and juxtapose them into a four-minute videopoem, *Sign Language*. So graffiti has a definite personal meaning for me.

Two. A few years ago, Brady Olson and Patrick Campbell, two students in my “Word and Image” course, produced an “epic” 13-minute videopoem in which they used every surface they could imagine, an elevator, a moveable type billboard, concrete lots, a 20-ft banner, a paper coffee cup, a page in a library book (!) to re-create each line of a 16-line poem they “conspired to write as an expression of passion for the written word” (For the duration of the work they used Beethoven's Sonata No. 14 in C sharp minor.) Thus they performed; thus they assembled their videopoem.

So, yes, I was immediately attracted to Dier's videopoem.

I have written elsewhere that the “poetry” in a videopoem, due to the nature/medium-specificity of its hybrid form, can only belong to the exclusive domain of the *relationships* between the text (voiced or displayed), the image and the soundtrack. In other words, the “poetry” in a videopoem is *not* the privileged “text”ⁱ – it is the *moment of intersection* between the text, image and sound. It is here, at specific points in time in the unfolding of the poetic experience that the relationships are perceived by the viewer as *metaphorical* juxtapositions.

In Dier's *Todos esos momentos se perderan*, its four *movements* are noteworthy.

The title or dedication screen that opens this videopoem appropriates the last words of the dying replicant Roy Batty in the sci-fi film *Blade Runner*ⁱⁱ to serve as a metaphor for an “other” sorrow, the removal of graffiti.

In the work that follows, Dier reinterprets, re-contextualizes “All those moments . . .” to refer to the “moments” of graffiti execution as well as the moments of public perception of these “objects”.

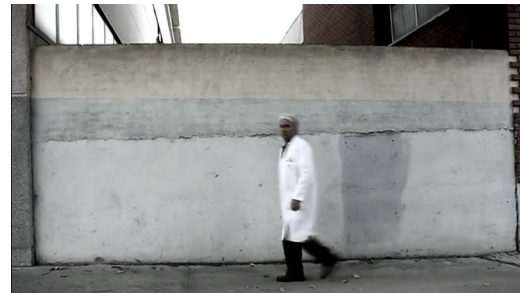
All those... moments ...
will be lost in time,
like tears ... in ... rain.
Time ... to die ...

[...]
Todos esos momentos
se perderán en el tiempo
como lágrimas
en la lluvia.
Es hora de morir

The text of this famous soliloquy (42000 results for “tears in rain soliloquy” in Google) is presented as a typewriter-style formatted 5-line “poem”, the pauses in the (voiced) delivery rendered as line-breaks, rather than ellipses.

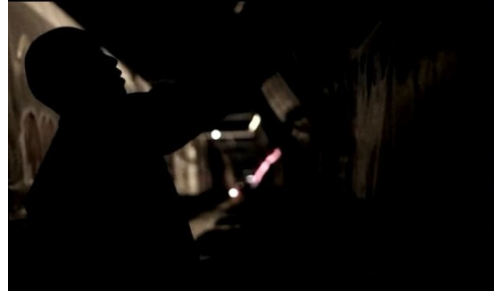
And for good reason. Above these lines appears that common symbol of intentional omission [. . .] the ellipsis in square brackets. Whether these marks alert the viewer to a pre-existent object, event or speech, removed for the sake of brevity, the three dots, framed as it were, reminds me of the ideal purpose of concrete poetry – towards pure visual meaningⁱⁱⁱ. The something-that-was-intentionally-removed signifies every instance of human loss; in Dier’s notes to the work, it is the “marks on the walls”, including the remains, the traces that they signify “that something which had value for someone”.

The work begins with 37 seconds of ten separate shots of walls where graffiti has been removed; the sombre tone of this passage is supported by two consecutive four-bar phrases of minimal piano. The rhythm of the poem’s unfolding here is ponderous.^{iv} As each phrase “describes” a gradual rise and fall, the poetic meaning of the passage becomes clear: we are not only witnessing the instantiation of loss but the inevitable futility of graffiti, as both a form of personal expression and the desire for political change.



Significantly, the ten shots of painted-over graffiti are not devoid of human content; oblivious passers-by, involuntarily disconnected from the “hidden” surrounding expressions, turn their attention instead to the camera pointed in their direction.

Silencing the subversive performance of the graffiti artist eliminates more than the inconvenient grievance of the *misguided*; poetically, it is a metaphor delineating a power struggle in which the individual voice is stifled in favour of conformity. Dier’s videopoem likens this absence of voice with a kind of death, the muted walls a testament to that most fundamental motivation on *both* sides of the struggle, *Desire*.



Context established, the second movement fades up from black with Roy Batty's voice delivering the soliloquy, beginning with "I've seen things . . ."

This *pregnant* phrase, followed by what can only be described as every individual's personal "flash" of memory – ". . . attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion . . . c-beams glitter(ing) in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate . . ." – are presented with purposeful night shots focalizing *flashes* of street lights, car lights, a series of images dominated by an enveloping solemnity.



The third movement arrives mid-point in the work: Batty recites "All those moments . . . will be lost . . ." The complete recital of "All those moments . . ." (*TODOS*) is represented by Dier's performance of spray painting, word-by-word, the last words of the dying Batty, on various wall surfaces. Here, finally, is the "psychogeographic activism" proclaimed by the Situationists^v as the appropriate *material* response to the "spectacle" of modern society in which "authentic social life has been replaced with its representation". Dier refers to this "representation" on his blog (Dier.Es) as "the uniformity and *zombification* of the citizen-consumer".

Dier has extracted "All those moments . . .", one of the most emotive specimens of dialogue from a sci-fi "film noir" that depicted a dystopia more in keeping with the changing times in urban, hip-hop Madrid. And yet, the appropriation of the text is as cold-blooded as one can get. The melodramatic crescendos of the original *Blade Runner* soundtrack have been surgically removed and replaced by another, the otherworldly, melancholy "*Oregon*" by The Cinematic Orchestra, Britain's electronic jazz group. A curious saxophone is added to the slow, plodding motif, melding into the last words, "time to die . . ." and, without missing a beat, escorting us through to the last note, an almost imperceptible high note that lasts . . . a moment.



The fourth and last movement returns to the walls that have now been painted over; if the opening salvo of ten shots were a nod to the “universal” state of affairs – the hand of capitalism in the establishment of a consumer-driven society, repression, censorship, overcrowding, etc. – the effects of silencing the individual is brought home in the before-and-after images of Dier’s dissemination of . . . words. Only the facts.

I write, therefore I exist. A simple affirmation that one has the right to be *there*.

And yet, Dier will have to admit, there’s something to be said for the ironic flipside of graffiti removal: that it *is* itself an art, albeit subconscious, replacing graffiti with abstraction; that it *represents*, day-by-day, the urban vision of the fleeting present with its traces, never invisible, the gestures of imperfect memory.^{vi} Indeed, the emergence of “interventionist public art” has seemed to alter the views of some cities’ official position on “opening” public spaces to individual expression.^{vii}

Ultimately, my question for a videopoem, for the poetic experience is one that I favour over others: “Where is the poetry in this work?”

In *Todos esos momentos se perderán*, Dier succeeded in discovering the *collaborative properties*^{viii} of the elements of text, image and sound. (Not all texts, images and soundtracks can be said to have “collaborative properties”; a previously published poem, for example, may arrive complete-in-itself.) The text is appropriated and bifurcated so that its *relationship* to the images (supported by a soundtrack that is itself an appropriation) presents to the viewer a metaphor extended and redrawn through key “moments” in the unfolding of the work. The words of the spoken text are translated to Spanish before they are “enacted”, emphasizing their adaptation and service to the *real world*.

The rhythm of the work is discernible in the uniform succession of images whose “tone” is accented by the soundtrack. Similarly, the predetermined “movements” provide a structure from which we can glean the *meaning* of the work: from the universal to the particular, from the collective subconscious to the individual conscious act of intervention, the viewer is “moved” from phase to phase, from argument to

acquiescence. The redemption is also self-reflexive; the medium-specificity of this hybrid genre of videopoetry is its ability to record and preserve the poetic vision that emerges from juxtapositions and syntheses of its elements. As the unwitting passers-by glare at us, we are made to realize that the muted walls bear memories of something that had value for someone.

– Tom Konyves

i

Address to the Colloquium: Zebra Poetry Film Festival, Berlin 2012, p.3 <http://tinyurl.com/md5obqn>

ii

“Tears in Rain” soliloquy from the film Blade Runner (1982)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjzMBGUwo>

iii

Concrete Poetry in Digital Media, Roberto Simanowsky, <http://pages.citebite.com/q2q9e0i5t0wwd>

iv

VIDEPOETRY:A MANIFESTO, Tom Konyves, <http://pages.citebite.com/i2t9o1v1r0eqh>

v

The organization of social revolutionaries and avant-garde artists established in 1957 and led by a member of the former offshoot group of concrete poets, *the Lettrists*, writer and filmmaker Guy Debord. See “Art and Resistance” <http://tinyurl.com/mb74hdz>

Dier owes much to the Situationists; Guy Debord wrote one of graffiti’s best-known lines: “Ne Travaillez Jamais!” (Don’t Ever Work!) on a wall in Paris, in 1952. (It was a rallying cry during the ’68 riots.) In 2010, Marianne Heier and Marco Vaglieri wrote, on the same wall, “Travaillez Toujours!” (Work Always!) as a bitter commentary to the failure of Debord’s exhortation. Dier’s ten-year (and counting) public sign project, VOTA DIER (Vote for Dier) can be seen all over the map, on the oddest structures – on the Osborne Spanish Bull (with an arrow!) is one of my favourites. Dier’s “persona” – the invisible man – is a conceptual stamp on the foot of the electoral process...

vi

In his notes to the work, Dier directs us to watch Matt McCormick’s “[The Subconscious Art of Graffiti Removal](#)”, the 2002 documentary that makes a case for recognizing authorized erasure as the legitimate offspring of abstract expressionism, Russian suprematism, constructivism, neo-Dada, etc.

vii

Text-based (sanctioned) expression in public spaces brings to mind the projections of British artist, Martin Firrell whose “interventions” are endorsed by major cultural institutions. My favourite is his 2008 digital text projection on the dome of St. Paul’s Cathedral: <http://www.stpauls.co.uk/questionmarkarchive/>. Here is an enlightening interview with Firrell:
<http://tinyurl.com/kkydcbf>

viii

cf. Address to E-Poetry Festival, London, UK, 2013, p.2. <http://tinyurl.com/lhjmw85>