



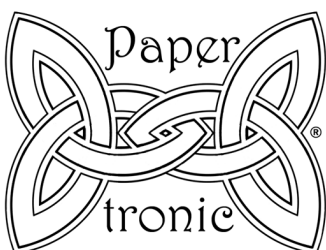
IMAGES & SOUNDS

Audiovisual Language

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Chapter 5 Imagination and Technique: Audiovisual Composing

Exploring Materials that could support Audiovisual Composing



Images and Sounds is a
Papertronic book
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Images and Sounds Audiovisual Language Chapter 5 Backstory 2

Exploring Materials that could support Audiovisual Composing

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In *Images and Sounds Audiovisual Language* (chapter 5 *Imagination and Technique: Audiovisual Composing: Video Essays, Letters, Portraits and Poems*) the Communication and Social Skills project explored how teachers and students could be supported in the process of composing in images and sounds by developing a pack of mixed media materials. This backstory provides a more detailed description of the contents of this audiovisual composing 'starter pack'.

During the late nineteen seventies the Communication and Social Skills team were commissioned to produce a 'starter pack' for the implementation of audiovisual methods into the curriculum. Although the findings from the ten pilot schools, in the earlier phase of the project, confirmed that this kind of teaching methodology could develop a wide range of transferable skills; much of the success relied upon audiovisual composing skills provided by the research team. The starter pack was intended to provide such skills for teachers and learners.

Within the teaching profession, the lack of expertise in audiovisual composing was a major concern. With hindsight the only solution to this problem would have been to prepare teacher trainers to provide pre- and in-service teacher training in this area. However, this would only have provided half of the solution; the other half would have been the development of a complete curriculum in audiovisual composing, for young people from 5-18, running alongside the acquisition of written composing.

However, implementing teacher training programmes and a comprehensive school curriculum for audiovisual composing would require greater vision, and will, than was available at that time. The scale of such an enterprise was not tenable. So the production of distance learning packs was seen as a cost-effective solution to a simpler problem of just providing some basic skills for video work. The transferable skills were still seen as the key issue, with these packs helping to maintain motivation as teachers and learners gained some skills in audiovisual composing.

Designing the materials

The pack of materials entitled *Hands On* went through many transformations. These were stimulated by a number of factors resulting from the specific interests of the different constituencies. During the pilot project we had started to develop ways in which young learners could use audiovisual composing for educational purposes; but we were still very influenced by our previous experiences in professional media publications, although we tried to modify the production processes to better serve the needs of the learners' creative use of audiovisual composing.

If the three-layered generative framework for audiovisual composing, described in *Images and Sounds Audiovisual Language* had been developed, at that time, it would have led to a different kind of approach to the development of the distance learning packs. The agenda of the project consultative committee to deliver a pragmatic teaching support tool for communication and social skills prioritized the methodology, rather than the composing process, which placed a different emphasis on any potential design of the materials. The financial constraints of the publishers to reign in costs and maximize income impacted on what was practically possible. The same actors (authors, financial sponsors, and publishers), with the same plot and storyline, that lies behind most innovative and creative endeavours.

The intentions of the distance learning pack *Hands On* was to introduce ways of organizing learning through the use of audiovisual composing. Based on small group work that called into play a wide range of abilities, skills and sensitivities. The challenges were to consider how audiovisual composing might be taught; what sorts of strategies would be needed to create stories about school subjects using images and sounds; what level of competency in audiovisual composing together with technical skills would be required; what content should be used and what age and ability range should be addressed?

The commissioners left the design and content of the materials to the research team; but they thought that they should be aimed at the average and below average ability fourteen year olds. This was on the grounds that they would soon be leaving school and would need competent communication and social skills for gaining and maintaining employment. They also accepted that audiovisual composing broadens the communication base available to these young people (adding audiovisual to written composing) allowing them to express what they know about topics in different ways, thus increasing motivation towards learning.

Initially, a broad spread of subjects was considered so that insights could be gained into how audiovisual composing could be used, in a range of different disciplines. However, after lengthy discussions, it was finally agreed that the materials should be general, rather than subject specific. Exercises would be designed that specifically develop competency in audiovisual composing, together with skills in audiovisual recording techniques. Once these skills have been learnt it was thought that they could then be applied to any subject.

The final version of the distance learning pack *Hands On* contained a teacher's handbook, pupil workbooks, videotape comprising 'ready-made' audiovisual compositions, graphics and slides.

Hands On was structured around four areas: the *process* of using audiovisual teaching and learning techniques in the classroom addressing various communication, social, and production activities; the *medium* that looked at how audiovisual compositions are created and how ideas and feelings can be expressed in recorded images and sounds; the provision of *exemplar materials* providing conventions and techniques for constructing audiovisual compositions; and *guidelines* on how to assess progress,

together with ways of evaluating the audiovisual compositions for the quality of ideas and the ways in which they are expressed.

The learning materials provided flexible, enabling strategies that acted as springboards for generative audiovisual composing. Audiovisual exemplars were used, which gave an opportunity to see and understand various composing and recording techniques. They were interdisciplinary and multi-layered; but it was made clear that they were intended to provide guidance, not form prescriptions.

The process of using audiovisual teaching and learning techniques in the classroom

A simple, structure for making audiovisual composing work in the classroom was provided by describing a series of activities that would contribute to the production of an audiovisual composition. The framework comprised the use of *discussion*, where working in small groups learners would talk to each other, discovering each other's specific interests in the subject themes (whether given by the teacher or chosen by the learners). Collectively, they would be guided to take decisions on approach, contents and form for their audiovisual composition (for instance, video-essay, video-document, video-record or video-diary). The teachers and students were also guided in organizing research activities and collecting relevant materials for their selected field of study.

A Teachers' Manual was provided to guide teachers through the process, however, the intention of the packs was that the young learners would be self-organizing. The guidance for teachers comprised recommendations for small group work engaged in audiovisual composing, suggesting, for instance, that a group 'could - list all ideas put forward and consider each one in turn, then note all decisions, making sure that there is agreement on each one, and appoint a person to take responsibility for carrying out the decisions'. Many other suggestions were made for teachers regarding ways that would be constructive for young learners to approach this first stage in audiovisual composing.

Research followed the initial discussions and it was explained that this activity is often continuous within audiovisual composing occurring at many stages of the process. However, it is crucial to plan research activities immediately after initial discussions to gather the material that will be needed to start audiovisual composing. Seeking out information builds confidence and the skills for undertaking independent action. Secondary sources such as books, magazines and commercially produced materials were discussed, together with primary sources covering surveys, interviews and correspondence dealing with requests for information or interviews. The information and guidance provided on the teachers' role and action points covering the process of research were fairly typical for this kind of activity.

When the research material has been gathered, the small groups of learners can begin the *storyboard* transforming the information that they have collected by documenting a preliminary structure for their audiovisual composition, as sketched ideas for the images and written notes describing the sounds. Specimen storyboards were provided with explanations on their use. It was suggested that groups should

engage in four activities, at this stage: analyzing the written and visual material gathered in research; deciding on what material should be included; creating an initial shape for the intended video piece and organizing responsibilities for summarizing research material into a script; and finally, scriptwriting and planning the technical procedures for recording.

In the context of this particular pack, this activity of *scriptwriting* was seen as giving final form to the contents, for instance: dramatic dialogue, presenters scripts, commentary for voice-overs, demonstration or interview preparation: including a plan of how the video piece would be recorded. Many types of writing were considered at this stage: for example, factual writing for linking research findings (as voice-over commentary or on-screen presentations); questions for interviews; technical descriptions for a demonstrator; and imaginative writing for dramatic sequences. The young learners were completing a blueprint for their audiovisual composition. They needed to revise and re-shape the storyboard suggestions, further adapt the research material and carry out redrafting. It was in this part of the process that research findings (in the form of prose, statistics, or poems) were re-worked in the script in another presentational form: providing a transformation from one type of discourse to another. It was further suggested that, at this time, the students should take into account the technical plans - how the written script would be recorded. Shot numbers should be accurate; camera instructions ought clearly indicate how each image (frame – or sequence of frames) could be recorded - providing the type of shot and any camera movement on shot, relevant to the script.

Usually professional production processes begin with a written script and it is the director and designer who will turn the script into a storyboard, if necessary. However, when using audiovisual composing with young learners, it became clear that it was useful if they could consider the shape of their audiovisual composition by first creating a representation of their ideas as pictures with accompanying notes on what might comprise the sound. The detailed writing developed out of the storyboard. Ordering the activities in this way tended to prevent over-verbalization achieving a more balanced blend of imagery and sound.

Once the storyboard / script was completed the next activity was *producing the visuals* and *rehearsing the script*. This activity was set within the context of the technical possibilities of the day. This pack of materials was produced before colour camcorders or digitization. This was significant because recording audiovisual compositions might be through audiotape and a set of photographic slides, Super Eight film, or black and white video. Each of these technologies required slightly different audiovisual approaches. Each of these techniques was covered separately.

It was suggested that for tape-slide compositions movement could be created through the order of the slides and the use of dissolve techniques (using two or more slide projectors). Slides could be created from photographs of pictures, dramas played out photographing selected plot points and photographic documentaries capturing processes, activities and events. Sound tracks could be made, which combined voice, music and sound effects and played with the still images.

Super Eight films were problematic in that it was not possible to view what was recorded and then re-record, if necessary. There was also a time gap between recording the images and seeing them. Sound could also present difficulties when recording 'real' time dramas or documentaries. This was explained and Super Eight film was recommended for animation where image creation could be very successful with a sound track played at the same time as the images.

There were two possibilities for video compositions. The first was recording on analogue video cameras wire-linked to bulky video recorders, shooting in sequence because there was no access to analogue editing suites. Secondly, using small educational television studios where two or three video cameras would be used simultaneously and video editing would occur 'live' through the vision mixer while recording. A number of tips were provided for recording video and creating audiovisual compositions.

Whatever the technology being used, it was suggested that audiovisual composing could begin by creatively employing a series of still pictures, which told an audiovisual story. These could either be created by the learners, or sourced from existing visual materials from, for example, magazines or books. When using drama it was suggested that the students could develop simple dramatic scenarios, considering sets, props, costumes and masks. They should rehearse the performers whether presenting oral commentaries, conducting interviews, demonstrating how an object works, or acting for a drama. Pre-recorded sound tracks (comprising voice-overs, music and sound effects) could be recorded at this time. All these activities were covered in the pupil workbooks and guidance for teachers was available in the teachers' manual.

The next activity involved the *recording* processes taking into account the different media that could be used. Common areas were covered, for instance, preparing the space where the recording will take place and organizing the performers and any technical crew, together with creating a lighting plan where applicable, rehearsing the camerawork for the performances and managing the recording. The various technical and performance roles were covered, for example, actors, presenters, sound and camera operators and director, with notes on the ways in which the plans - script or storyboard - informed the activity.

Following the recording stage should come the process of *editing*; but this was omitted in the packs because the young participants could not get access to editing facilities. As a way of overcoming this problem it was necessary to shoot video in sequence and where editing was seen in the accompanying videotapes it occurred 'live' in small three camera CCTV studios. It seems strange writing this at the beginning of the twenty-first century with digital video editing, to realize that in the late nineteen seventies / early eighties analogue editing meant that editing suites were not available in schools.

Editing is such a crucial part of audiovisual composing; but without access to such facilities, the conceptual aspect of editing was dealt with in the storyboard and sequential shooting. Today, Lego has brought out software video editing for eight-year-olds in its Lego Studios pack and Apple Mac offers *iMovie*, with PC computers

providing *Moviemaker*. This editing software is designed for the domestic market and is being used by young learners with availability to computers.

The final activity was concerned with *viewing* and *evaluating* the audiovisual compositions created by the small groups of learners. This was set within the context of the importance of developing critical thinking and the capacity to carry out self-assessment. Reviewing the work during the process enabled reflective responses for on-going activities. The pack provided advice on the preparation required for viewing the video compositions, for instance, organizing an audience, introducing the audiovisual story and managing the technical aspects of playback. The pack also dealt with evaluation and covered eliciting a response from an audience, assessing accuracy, clarity and impact, gauging relative strengths and weaknesses in the various stages of the process and noting implications for future work. Guidance was provided for teachers on how to organize this work and how to intervene positively.

This structure comprising - discussion, research, storyboarding, scripting, producing visuals and rehearsing the script, recording, viewing and evaluating the final audiovisual composition - provided a sequence of activities that underpinned the making of audiovisual compositions. Specific communication and social skills related to each stage of this process was available in the Appendix of the book *Communication and Social Skills* and in the Teachers' Manual in the *Hands On* pack.

As part of the process of using audiovisual teaching and learning techniques in the classroom the materials also dealt with evaluation, the process of appraisal and progression. This contained both teacher evaluations of the audiovisual composing (process) and audiovisual composition (product), and peer reviews. For each stage in the process (discussion, research, storyboarding, scripting, producing visuals and rehearsing the script, recording, viewing and evaluating the audiovisual compositions) guidance was provided, under three headings: a guide to observation; possible diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses; and action points and intervention.

The pathways for appraisal and progression were only designed for formative assessment: not summative assessment. Formative assessment will be necessary if audiovisual composition is accepted as a legitimate composing process alongside written composition, within educational settings. Marking audiovisual compositions is not complicated because it is possible to follow the same principles as those used for written composition: analyzing the quality of the content to see how well the questions have been addressed, as reflected in the research that has been undertaken; then considering the form and how articulately the content has been expressed.

The medium – audiovisual composing and recording

This part of the pack covered basic understandings surrounding audiovisual composing. At that time I hadn't developed a generative three-layered framework for audiovisual composing otherwise that would have underpinned the approach for the design of the materials. In the following description aspects of this framework were implicit, but the layers were not differentiated nor the concepts and processes made explicit and this is an inherent weakness. Without such a framework it is difficult to

fully comprehend audiovisual composing from the point of view of developing practical skills.

The processes for sound and images were dealt with separately, before briefly explaining the relationships between sounds and images. Sound was explained by examining the roles and functions of speech, music and sound effects. An account was provided of how speaking, music and sound effects could be seen and heard 'live' on-screen. For instance, in a scene where two characters were engaged in a dramatic dialogue, sitting at a table in a restaurant, with a musician playing a piano in the background, when suddenly the telephone rings on the bar. Or alternatively, speaking, music and sound effects could also be part of a post production soundtrack with, for example, the spoken voice-over of an un-seen narrator, music used for creating tension and the sound of broken glass used metaphorically.

'Live' or pre-recorded 'voice-over' speech was elaborated by encouraging an exploration of the diverse discourses employed by, for instance, reporters, actors, presenters, narrators, interviewers and demonstrators; as they draw on various sources, as for example, prose, poetry, factual explanations, reports, questions and answers, written dialogues and verbal improvisations. Music whether 'live' or as 'sound track' covered vocal and instrumental music, taking many forms, for instance, popular, classical, folk and jazz. Music was explored as compositions in its own terms; and as an accompaniment to images creating moods, atmospheres, tension and resolution. It was explained that sound effects could be 'live' for instance, starting a car engine, on camera; or background sound, for example, birdsong, forming part of a pre-recorded sound track. Sound effects could be natural - thunder and rain, or manmade - bells ringing and doors banging. Attention was also drawn to another category of sound that was creatively produced for specific effects. These could include abstract tapping on a hard surface creating tension or an imaginary sound created for a character or object that does not exist, as such, in the natural or functional manmade world.

Composing using images is a complex process so thinking about images was closely related to familiar visual representations. The packs explained the potential of graphics - still picture sequences that could make a story. Such picture sequences could comprise visual contents from, for instance, fine art, graphics, graphs, charts and photographs sourced from books and magazines, or produced by the learners themselves. With regard to recording live-action audiovisual stories, it was suggested that learners could use presenters, interviewers, demonstrators and actors, performing within scenes constructed in a classroom or school hall. These performance spaces could include, for instance, the use of sets, furniture and props (both real and constructed objects); and, for example, models of dwellings, transport and animals. If it was possible to leave the school grounds, the starter pack materials discussed the values of recording in 'real' environments, using exterior locations, for instance, streets, forests and markets: and interior locations such as specific spaces within houses, factories, laundrettes and cafés, as mises-en-scene for recording factual documentary or fictional dramatic stories.

As a way of learning to combine images and sounds and to enable a balance between them an example of a storyboard was supplied. Basically it was divided into four unequal columns. On the far left there was a narrow column for shot numbers, which

helped young learners structure their sequences for shooting. Next to this there was a slightly wider column for camera instructions providing an opportunity for describing shot size, angle and movement. The third column was used for containing the shot sketches and subsequently the sequencing of images. The final column was designated for a description of the sound. Here it was possible to provide the commentary or dramatic dialogue, with information on the kinds of speech 'live' or 'voice over' that might be used, together with any music or sound effects. A glance at the storyboard showed what images and sounds were going together; and how they were going to be recorded.

Teachers' handbook

The teachers' handbook provided guidance on the *process* of using audiovisual teaching and learning techniques in the classroom. Relevant advice was given on each of the stages of the process – discussion, research, storyboard / scriptwriting, producing the visuals and rehearsing the script, recording, editing, viewing and evaluation.

It also supplied information on *audiovisual composing*, which covered ideas on how to use images and sounds to create audiovisual compositions, together with further information about recording techniques. Shot descriptions were provided both in pictorial and written forms: as were the camera movements of panning, tilting, tracking and zooming. Camera angles were described in words and pictures. The editing process - combining shots using various transitions was covered for schools that could use editing, including for instance, cuts, mixes and fades. The opportunity for editing was limited in the nineteen seventies, unlike today with digital editing available on a computer for everyone. The various roles, which make up a creative video production team, were identified, for instance, director, production assistants, performers (presenters, interviewers and interviewees, actors and musicians), and camera and sound operators. However, flexibility was suggested in the use of these roles to enable generative audiovisual composing and collaborative group work: for educational purposes these roles may not need to be defined in this way at all; with young people exchanging roles and tasks, during the production process, widening their overall experience.

The teachers' handbook provided an overview of the *pupil materials* providing advice on how to guide the learners' use of them.

Pupil materials

The pupil materials comprised workbooks, videotape (containing audiovisual materials linked to the workbook) and a set of graphics and slides.

It is important to remember that these materials were designed in the late nineteen seventies. At that time video production in school and domestic situations was in its infancy. Portable video was analogue (black and white) with a lead connected between a heavy camera and video recorder: a far cry from today's digital camcorder or mobile phone. Many young people only had access to tape-slide facilities, however,

with dual projection and sensitive shooting the pupils could create a sense of movement within their compositions. Other schools used 8mm film cameras, which presented some restrictions with, for instance: no opportunity for instant replay and re-shooting, if necessary; delays in waiting for developed film to be returned to school; as well as extra costs because, unlike video, film cannot be re-used. The pack of materials took these various recording facilities into account, supplying general advice on creating audiovisual compositions, for different types of equipment.

Developing training materials for generative audiovisual composing was challenging given the school timetable restraints and very limited technical facilities by today's standard. Looking at it now it seems quaint that some effects were created physically, which today can be achieved electronically. The use of a small television studio is also a little archaic given the mobility of modern video cameras, cameras in smart phones and digital editing. At the time, because of the less user-friendly equipment, the opportunity to utilize educational studios was very useful. These small facilities were still available from an earlier educational technology period, which had placed an emphasis on producing local learning materials for teachers. Such recording spaces often came with some technical assistance and in some cases provided opportunities for recording in colour.

Within that technological and historical context, the pupil workbook was divided into four parts, which corresponded with an accompanying video. The four parts were determined by the presumed complexity of production, starting with the simplest. The first part suggested that learners should construct a short audiovisual story by creating, or finding, an appropriate series of still images. The still picture sequences could use voice-over techniques with music and sound effects, if sound mixing was available. Movement is fundamental in audiovisual composing. To make the static images dynamic a number of solutions were proposed. For tape slide, it was recommended that continuity could be achieved by cutting or dissolving pictures that worked together (dissolving was achieved with the use of more than one projector as in diaporama's). For video, it was suggested that moving the camera over the images - zooming, panning and dissolving one image into the next could create movement.

The second part explored the use of presenters, interviewers and demonstrators in the process of creating audiovisual stories. Two versions were developed with a group of learners, the first one is similar to the way in which these formats are used by broadcasters and the other one was more experimental. When given a free choice of form, to create their own 'voice' the pupils choose to express the kinds of experiences they sensed in the process of interviewing rather than placing the emphasis on the traditional talking heads.

The third part explored drama techniques used in audiovisual composing, but modified so that they were less complicated. A word of caution was supplied about the differences between theatre and screen drama. Switching on a video camera in front of a stage performance rarely worked.¹ Dramatic sequences were mediated by the recording process in audiovisual compositions.

¹ The differences between a dramatic scene appearing on a stage, or on a screen, is described in Chapter 2 The Role of the Arts in Audiovisual Composing.

Creating and capturing drama was considered difficult for beginners: the placement of a camera in relation to the action; camera movement to capture the performance; understanding how space and time is cut up, manipulated and sequenced together again; requires knowledge and experience. These factors resulted in the development of an audiovisual composition using drama with little physical movement, relying on static tableaux and symbolic dissolves, combining still pictures and objects with dramatic action, as a way of overcoming the complex expertise required for realizing a fully blown drama.

A restricted dramatic activity was suggested as an enabling structure that would aid the first steps in shooting drama and could provide a foundation for further more complex work. It was considered that this might be a way of avoiding disappointment with the final audiovisual composition. With hindsight, I am not sure that these materials could have achieved this, but at the time the intentions were well meant. Straightforward advice was provided on the use of costumes, masks, props and sets: with some consideration given to such dramatic elements, as timing and pace, creating climaxes and releasing tension.

The fourth part covered making audiovisual stories in outside locations. The materials explored a range of techniques comprising, for instance, documentary practices, dramatic narrative and dialogue, live sound and voice-over commentary. The use of poetry, music and still picture sequences attempted to broaden expectations of what could be used when creating audiovisual stories, which were shot in various interior and exterior locations.

Each part of the workbook contained explanatory notes on the sample audiovisual composition supplied on the videotape, together with storyboard scripts for the pupils to make into audiovisual compositions. Each example was produced using tape-slide, one camera video and multi-camera small studio video showing how the various recording equipment could capture audiovisual composing.

Critique of Hands On

The educational materials, *Hands On*, were problematic in a number of ways. There was limited time and budget to produce this pack and limited recording facilities for the students to engage in audiovisual composing by today's standard: and the period of production, late nineteen seventies, is reflected in the content, visual look and style, making it very dated. Without the digital advancements that make editing so accessible and easy today; it was impractical to include the important role that editing plays in audiovisual composing and story making. Those schools with analogue video equipment did not have access to analogue editing, so they had to shoot in sequence. Schools making use of small educational television studios learnt to 'edit' by vision mixing 'live'. Schools using 8mm film found the process expensive and as a result, often shot one take, in sequence, offering very limited choice at the editing stage. The editing in the case of tape-slide production was again linked very closely to the shooting decisions. So, in effect, the narrative structures were decided and contained

within the shooting activity, which in fact incorporated an initial process of 'editing' occurring at the storyboard stage.

There were a number of unresolved issues that influenced the final output; but two in particular are quite significant. The first was to do with the presenter in the materials. Should it have been a professional presenter, or the pupil that was selected by the participants? The other issue is concerned with the graphics that were supplied as part of the pack of materials. The consultative committee, and in particular the arts advisers, were concerned about using the children's own art work in the published pack. They felt that we might be suggesting that these were exemplars, in some way, and attempting to set particular criteria and standards for child art in schools. So a professional graphic artist was employed who worked on the children's ideas. Subsequently, there have been many questions raised about the wisdom of that decision because something of the children's participation in the process was lost.

However, given these caveats, the pack of materials remain as a record of an historical moment in using audiovisual composing in education; and as such provides an insight to those pre-digital times.

Challenges and conclusions

In the beginning of the description of '*Hands On*' I explained how it was an enormously difficult task to teach audiovisual composing through distance learning packs. The outcome, though interesting in many ways, bore that out. The '*Hands On*' pack of materials did break new ground in attempting to provide generative audiovisual composing leading to the creation of audiovisual compositions and stories. But in many ways the exemplars were far too difficult for beginners. In an attempt to provide enabling strategies rather than simple instruction; in trying to open up, rather than restrict; the pack of materials did not really meet the needs of teachers and students starting the process of audiovisual composing.

The remaining legacy is in a historical document, which demonstrates what young people could do with the technology that was available in the nineteen seventies and how that influenced the kinds of audiovisual forms that evolved. The contents, in terms of the subject matter, also relate to the psyche of the time.