

Mach Schau!:* The contribution of The Beatles to the development of Visual Music in *Magical Mystery Tour

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The Beatles are recognized mainly by their successful musical production and business in the global music industry. However, their use of visual and audio-visual expressions forms a constant and important catalyst for their wide outreach and sales, as their music acquired a visual dimension, functional primarily for promotional purposes. The early training of the Beatles in Hamburg, where they met a high-level photographer Astrid Kirchherr, and were required to 'make a show' in the clubs (*Mach Schau!*), contributed to their treatment of the visual act as a vehicle for experimentation distinctly from the mass-marketing strategy. As a result, they produced video-art such as *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967), among many other audio-visual forms for TV and feature films. The specific experimentation in this 'failure' film with the music *Flying* is contextually analyzed within the framework of contemporary achievements in visual music.

Keywords: The Beatles, visual music, video-art, audio-visual development, *Magical Mystery Tour*, *Flying*.

Introduction

The initial influence globally exerted by rock 'n roll music through the film industry can be accounted by the screening in 1955 of the film *Blackboard Jungle* (Brooks 1955). It offered the opportunity for teenagers to repeatedly hear Bill Haley & His Comets (at the beginning and at the end of the film), and eventually see the emotion of this new music in the subsequent films *Rock Around the Clock* (Sears 1956), *Don't Knock the Rock* (Sears 1956), *The Girl Can't Help It* (Tashlin 1956), and all the Elvis films to follow. The onset of rock 'n roll happened simultaneously in different parts of the world where these films could be seen, such as in Caracas, Venezuela, where the local history of rock 'n roll starts

with the films (Montiel Cupello 2004: 9), as well as in Liverpool, UK. In Paul McCartney's own words:

Once, George and I had gone to see the film *The Blackboard Jungle*. It starred Vic Morrow, which was good, but more importantly it had Bill Haley's 'Rock Around The Clock' as its theme tune. The first time I heard that, shivers went up my spine, so we *had* to go and see the film, just for the title song. (The Beatles 2000: 21)

In this case, the audio-visual media through film and television, was effective in providing a global dissemination of rock 'n roll music at the will of the viewer, richer in its contents than the radio, and cheaper and more frequently accessible than a live performance.

The Beatles' use of visual and audio-visual expressions will be outlined to understand their significance as a constant characteristic of their musical output and as an important catalyst for their global expansion. They succeeded in extending the artistic and commercial possibilities of the visual and audio-visual media to new territories, with a diverse menu in the use of identifying, iconographic and symbolic elements. Despite the almost exclusive function of this medium for promotion and increase of sales, The Beatles allowed themselves under special historic circumstances to experiment with video-art, providing a result in the film *Magical Mystery Tour* of the visualization of the piece *Flying* which constitutes an important contribution to the art of visual music.

Beatles in Audio

The Beatles are recognized for an astonishing production of music in songs performed by the group in live concerts, songs recorded and published as single records, LP records, EP records, songbooks. All their recorded material has been published in musical notation (The Beatles 1989), and their influence has lasted more than fifty years with re-releases in compact discs, digital downloads and in streaming. Their music coexists with versions made by other artists in 'revival' groups and in arrangements of a great variety of styles. They have been an unprecedented, worldwide success in sales numbers, distinctions, awards, world records and lately, as subject-matter of academic research with many books, articles and 'gossip' books about them.

Their only instrumental piece recorded for Parlophone, *Flying*, and first composition by all four members of the group (Dowlding 1989: 195), does not belong to their star list, nor does the double EP release with a color booklet, the *Magical Mystery Tour* soundtrack album that contains it, with the exceptions of the tracks *I am the Walrus* and *Fool on the Hill* (Spitz 2005: 732). The appalling rejection that the experimental TV film suffered from almost all critics after its screening in black and white by BBC1 on Boxing Day, December 26th, 1967,

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seems to have been transferred onto the music by critics and musicologists alike, despite of its overwhelming financial success in sales (Everett 1999: 132), (Spitz 2005: 733): N° 2 in the British singles charts (with Hello Goodbye at N° 1), and N° 1 for eight weeks in its US album version with the singles from 1967 (Dowlding 1989: 191). The wheels of the Beatles' market-machinery worked equally well regardless of its admitted 'official' disastrous lunacy. Perhaps part of the market success was due to its packaging with a 24-page colorful booklet, adding the visual component which could only be delivered by TV with no commercial video technology yet available. To John Lennon, "*Magical Mystery Tour* is one of my favourite albums, because it was so weird" (The Beatles 2000: 273), and was the "...top TV show." (Dowlding 1989: 193).

Flying is a slow twelve-bar blues with no lyrics, instrumented for guitars, bass, drums, maracas, Mellotron and chanting by all four (Everett 1999: 142). With only one exception in the references examined, the composition has been considered as the worst music from the group, a failure, and this paper will attempt to understand it from a visual perspective to reassess its historical value. Neil Aspinall, schoolmate and road manager of the group, points out:

There was a whole flying sequence, a beautiful little tune where clouds all change colour, but in black and white there are obviously no colour changes. So I could understand why an audience would say, 'What's this?' and be a bit disappointed. (The Beatles 2000: 274)

Beatles in Visual

From their early engagements with Hamburg clubs from August 17th, 1960 (MacDonald 2005: 399), the scruffy young lads from the English North Country made contact with Astrid Kirchherr (The Beatles 2000: 50), a refined and sensitive photographer, and with her circle of artistic friends who were attracted by the boys' energetic shows and by the social contrast of savoring the underworld of Hamburg's St. Pauli district. This fortunate interaction between The Beatles and the German artists around Astrid was a key element for the musicians to visually grow and mature, despite of coming from different social and cultural representations and being war enemies just a decade and a half behind.

Apart from the intense musical training they underwent, the close friendship resulted in a series of portrait photographs of the band by Astrid, (The Beatles 2000: 52), as well as individual takes. In the second trip to Germany from April 1st, 1961 (MacDonald 2005: 400), further polishing for the group took place by Astrid in defining their mop-top hairstyle and the all-black leather outfits with cowboy boots (The Beatles 2000: 58). Their mop-top was to become an unmistakable, identifying visual-card for the Beatles. It also established for a decade

the long-hair look for young men: a visual, differentiating reference for the young generation.

The faces and body figures of the Fab Four appeared in all the UK album covers, whether on their own (*Please Please Me*, *With the Beatles*, *A Hard Day's Night*, *Beatles for Sale*, *Help!*, *Rubber Soul*); within a more complex context, drawings, disguise or collage (*Revolver*, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, *Magical Mystery Tour*, *Yellow Submarine*, *Abbey Road*, *Let It Be*), and in the LP collections of released singles (*A Collection of Beatles Oldies*, *Hey Jude*) (Russell 2006: 41-156). The only exception, of course, is the white album (*The Beatles*), which made the intention of having no cover at all: "After the elaborate Sgt. Pepper sleeve The Beatles decided to have the simplest possible plain white sleeve..." (Russell 2006: 118). American albums maintained throughout the same facial iconography as well as nearly all post-Beatles releases, adding another important visual symbol in three albums (*20 Greatest Hits*, *Past Masters • Volume One*, *Past Masters • Volume Two*) (Russell 2006: 244, 259, 269), which is the name 'Beatles' with a large 'T', the 'drop-T' logo drawn on the bass drum by Ivor Arbiter which has become a font called 'Bootle' by Northern Fonts (Font Meme 2016).

There are three boring exceptions of post-Beatles albums releases with no trace of coherent visual iconography: *The Beatles Historic Sessions* (1981), *The Beatles collection* (1978) and *The Beatles "Rarities"* (1979), the second one saved by including the Beatles signatures on a plain blue cover (Russell 2006: 32, 179, 181).

Iconographic developments and influences from the album covers, from objects converted into Beatles-symbolic items to font styles, must be mentioned as additions to the visual system created around The Beatles, apart from their omnipresent four faces: The absurdity of a yellow submarine flying in midair, and to a lesser extent the flying glove and the fonts used in the title of this film. The zebra-crossing from the cover photograph of the *Abbey Road* album, that has become a significant Beatles-related touristic attraction for London, incorporating in its essence the action of crossing it, the movement from left to right of a straight row of people. The renaming of left-handed streets in cities around the world, usually designated as an 'English street' that becomes a local 'Abbey Road' (see the 'Abbey Road-World Project' in Soveb 2015). The NHS eyeglasses that John Lennon used, with its transformation into the round-lens of the hippie era with its reuse in the face of Harry Potter. The military jackets worn by the four Beatles in the album cover of *Sgt. Pepper's*, turning fashionable all military gear even within the strong counter-war period of the late Sixties. The droopy moustache grown by Paul to cover a scar and adopted by all four in the cover of *Sgt. Pepper's* (The Beatles 2000: 236-237). The shift towards the culture of India

as a whole, stemming from the cross-over by George Harrison with the classical music of India in the hands of Ravi Shankar on the sitar, (The Beatles 2000: 233), which included clothing, sandals, jewelry and longer hair.

The enhanced visual expression around 1967, helped produce a new façade for the group as well as the famous cover of the album *Sgt. Pepper*. The difference in the state of mind was influenced by the popularized consuming of LSD at the times and was part of the psychedelic-hippie language of colors, flowers, liquids, germs, live light-shows, within a complex, symbolic culture specially involving music (MacDonald 2005: 185-193). Imaginary visual associations to the text of Beatles' songs were edited in the *Beatles Illustrated Lyrics* by Alan Aldridge (1969), with different artists and styles within a visual aesthetic stemming partially from the *Yellow Submarine* cartoon film.

The Beatles were constantly in photographic sessions, always the four together in multiple sceneries, positions, costumes and roles. There is an extensive list of magazines, newspapers, books and book covers that contain largely many Beatles photographs (Hill 2004, Clifford 1991, The Beatles 2000), with their faces or figures always present in an exact fashion as in the album covers, to remind us of their music and performances.

Summing up, we have from The Beatles an extraordinary production of music, rich and varied, accompanied by a huge amount of still-visual information of which contents and subject-matter is limited mostly to their four faces for obvious promotional intentions. The exceptions to this fixed tendency, in the various forms mentioned above, become the interesting aspects of their visual output. As Womack and Davis express it: "The myth-making machinery of fame and fortune..." would not allow The Beatles to "...explore different artistic [...] forms" as in the case of the surreal 'butcher' LP-cover for the US release of *Yesterday...and Today*, withdrawn after five days (Womack and Davis 2006: 103).

Beatles in Audio-Visual

The time element in this medium makes it possible for the simultaneous perception of music, with multiple forms of moving visuals. The live show at any concert of The Beatles was already an audio-visual performance, be it recorded or not. It was their main impact activity as a group of young musicians in Liverpool and Germany in the early Sixties, until their last concert on August 29th, 1966 in San Francisco (MacDonald 2005: 436).

On their first trip to Hamburg referred above, The Beatles were under a contract with Bruno Koshmider to perform in a small, depressing club, the Indra Cabaret, which he had planned to turn "...into a balls-out rock 'n roll club, optimally another Kaiserkeller. All the place needed was a hot British band to gener-

ate a buzz, ..." (Spitz 2005: 208). Despite a large repertoire of rock 'n roll songs, the Beatles' stiffness in their stage act did not help attracting any clients to walk into the club. It was not until their English representative Allan Williams exhorted them to 'make a show' (Spitz 2005: 209), or the local manager Willi Limpinsel shouted *Mach Schau!* (Lewisohn 2013: 359), followed by Koschmider incessantly repeating *Mach Schau! Mach Schau!*, that The Beatles learnt the formula of performing on stage which in a few weeks crowded the place (Spitz 2005: 209):

Once agonizingly inert, the Beatles now leaped off the stage in bursts of manic exhilaration. They were in perpetual motion, and in no time they transformed their sorry sets into something primitive and exciting. (Spitz 2005: 210)

Their shows included an increase in volume, "frisky stage pranks", becoming more "agitators" than music performers, playing many long sets with short or no breaks every night of the week, where a song could be extended in time or changed on every performance "which made it so exciting to watch", "their shows [were] insanely unpredictable." (Spitz 2005: 212, 213, 217).

The Beatles were moved to The Kaiserkeller on October 4th, 1960 (MacDonald 2005: 397), after the Indra club was closed down due to complaints of loudness from the neighbors (Spitz 2005: 214). Here they had to compete against other English groups which sharpened their act further: first Derry and the Seniors and then Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, playing for six hours each band alternating between each other every hour (The Beatles 2000: 48). Amphetamines, free beer and the adrenaline from long stands worked into the craziness of these performances, in John's words:

The things we used to do! We used to break the stage down – that was long before The Who came out and broke things; we used to leave guitars playing on stage with no people there. We'd be so drunk, we used to smash the machinery. [...] 'We will brake the stage, we will wear a toilet seat round our neck, we will go on naked.' (The Beatles 2000: 50)

The experience of performing so much time together in Germany, the acquired consciousness of presenting a live, impacting audio-visual show (*Mach Schau!*) in addition to just playing music, and the increase in repertoire of loud, hard rock 'n roll with black leather jackets, matured The Beatles as a band with a new sound, new look, new show. When they went back to England on December 1st, 1960, they took the Mersey scene by surprise with a famous gig at the Litherland Ballroom on December 27, 1960, which established them as "Liverpool's most exciting group" (MacDonald 2005: 398). George Harrison adds:

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He [Wooler] tried us out one night and put an ad in a paper: 'Direct from Hamburg: The Beatles'. And we probably looked German, too; very different from all the other groups, with our leather jackets. We looked funny and we played differently. We went down a bomb. (The Beatles 2000: 56)

A simple icon that was linked directly to their music was the movement of Paul's head, rapidly shaking left to right, associated with a high oooh! in the melody of some songs (e.g.: *She Loves You*), and with the high and loud screaming from the crowd triggered by it (MacDonald 2005: 85). Similarly, the bow in appreciation to the public became a Beatles' characterization in gesture and dance, with the accompanying tidy, matching suits on. Although The Beatles were physically very active in their stage performances as well as running around in their films, dancing was not a priority. Nonetheless, there is a wonderful exception right at the end of *Magical Mystery Tour*, a big ball dancing in quartet!

The audio-visual production of The Beatles as a whole is numerous and abundant with remarkable achievements. Most of it was intended as part of a promotional machinery guided by Epstein, but in a lesser extent and nevertheless important, the audio-visual media provided an opportunity outside this industrial music system for uncompromised creativeness, true experimentation and political expression.

After Brian Epstein signed up with The Beatles as their manager on January 24th, 1962, he started to arrange constant radio and TV appearances on top of the intense concert-touring schedule of the band. During the years to come, the number of monthly concerts progressively diminished and, in the other hand, radio and TV dates, as well as studio recording-time increased (MacDonald 2005: 404-436). Their first TV appearance was the filming of a performance at The Cavern by Granada TV (Manchester) on August 22nd, 1962. Step by step, Epstein masterfully worked out a marketing strategy to conquer USA and in the first of the two TV live concerts and interviews in the Ed Sullivan Show, New York, in February 9th and 16th, 1964, The Beatles accomplished a record-breaking estimated audience of 73 million.

In the promotional agenda for the release of the single *Paperback Writer* and *Rain* in June, 1966, The Beatles were too busy touring Germany, Japan and the Philippines, as well as recording *Revolver* (MacDonald 2005: 434), so as a replacement for their absence at the ensuing Ed Sullivan Show, they sent a promotional film of the songs recorded on May 19th, 1966, becoming the first video-clips. George remembered: "...so I suppose in a way we invented MTV." (The Beatles 2000: 214). The clip of *Paperback Writer* showed their silent faces standing in a garden, then they appear lip-syncing and playing the song with their guitars unplugged but no drum kit for Ringo, in the similar face-marketing

as explained above. The innovation achieved with this solution to scheduling, that is, the binding of music to a visual counterpart, became in 1981 the standard MTV cable-TV music channel and in 2005, the YouTube phenomenon through the internet, where in both cases all music needs to be seen as well as heard, magnified today by the audio-visual communication through Internet and cell phones that dictates our complete behavior in society. In a certain way, it closed the 'blind-music era' of listening to radio- and recorded-music without its visual presence. (Mendoza 2008: 60).

They stretched the concept further into a 'global happening' through the recently-installed satellite-TV communication, when they appeared in the BBC's *Our World* global TV broadcast in June 25th, 1967, with an estimated audience of 400 million, as they recorded live the last tracks of *All You Need is Love* (MacDonald 2005: 407, 416, 443). This magnificent happening involved the viewers around the world participating live, not in a concert but in a recording session.

Since The Beatles had stopped touring for a year and their recorded music could not be reproduced live, being studio-products, John confirmed that, "...if stage shows were to be out, we wanted something to replace them. Television was the obvious answer" (The Beatles 2000: 272). A week after Epstein's death on August 27th, 1967, McCartney directed the group into making a film all by themselves, *Magical Mystery Tour*, which became the last outstanding achievement for TV with an estimated 20 million audience in England (Spitz 2005: 734).

Beatles audio-visuals in motion pictures consisted of four feature films: *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), *Help!* (1965), *Yellow Submarine* (1968) and *Let It Be* (1970). *Yellow Submarine* is a beautiful animated movie which

...featured little actual input from the band. [...] ...[they] contributed four new songs, a few script alterations, and a brief appearance at the end of the movie. Yet the finished product clearly exceeded their expectations. (Womack and Davis 2006: 105)

The other three films functioned as an efficient vehicle for the promotion of their music, as it was discussed in the 'Introduction', with visual exposition of the four Beatles in actual performances in different situations or in multiple activities, speeded-up, as nonsense movements to fill up the time-space of the images while the music was being heard. *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!* have their own particular 'excuse' plots but, more importantly, become at the same time 'fictional' documentaries in high quality from which the viewer can appreciate the context, surroundings and technology in a given time-placement of the Beatles development, in which the music was happening. In the other hand, *Let It Be* is a 'real' documentary of the group's final stages before breaking up. It contains at the end

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footage of the Roof-top concert on January 30th, 1969 (MacDonald 2005: 454), which, as a musical happening in a London street and because of its innovative location, deserved to be separately mentioned. The performance of 'roof-top' concerts has become another Beatles' distinctive icon duplicated by many artists (see the Rooftop Concert Series 2010). There exists many takes on film of their performances, but one stands out as a documentary of special interest because of the record-breaking attendance of 55.600 fans screaming in the midst of Beatlemania: *The Beatles at Shea Stadium* (August 15th, 1965), overdubbed on January 5th, 1966, because no music could be heard in the whole concert due to the screaming (MacDonald 2005: 454, 425, 429).

The Beatles participated as actors in many third-party films, specially Ringo Starr (Clifford 191: 172-179), and they also worked as producers and directors. Important artistic visual expressions by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, well outside of the frame of face-marketing, were the political happenings as the 'Bed-In' for peace in a hotel room in Amsterdam and later in Montreal (March, 25th-31st; May 25th-June 2nd, 1969), the 'War is over..' posters in eleven cities (December 16th, 1969), and a daring lithograph exhibition raided by the police on January 16th, 1970. (MacDonald 2005: 455, 457, 462, 463).

Beatles in Visual Music

The two Beatles' feature films, *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Help!* (1965), posed an interesting challenge for its director Richard Lester in the tradition of film musicals or musical films (Gammond 1993: 404, 497). He was surrounded by two monumentally successful pictures and their corresponding soundtrack LP's: *West Side Story* (1961) and *The Sound of Music* (1964) (Gammond 1993: 406), consistently high in the music LP charts in the UK for the times of the Beatles' filming (MacDonald 2005: 417, 423). He may have asked himself, how to portray music on screen, an abstract concept and structure in time, in other ways that does not involve representing the musicians performing it?

Common answers that fill MTV and YouTube music-videos, is to describe in moving images the concrete, real contents of the lyrics, if that is the case of the music, or just to put anything on the moving visuals that coincide rhythmically with the time structure of the music, specially in the form as of loops, graphical representations of pitches from left to right in growing lines or geometric objects. A last resource is to visualize the ambiance or mood that the music stimulates in the perception of the director, since this sensation can be widely different in every listener. Apart from the plot in the film *A Hard Day's Night*, Lester approached the song parts with the customary 'face and figure' style of marketing, but tried to escape from it through a non-performance appearance of the four

Beatles running around. He instead increased the speed of their nonsense movements, synchronic with the music and hence escaped reality as such. In this way, these parts of the film become musical in essence for its tendency towards unreal or abstraction—the world where music belongs. There are two brief moments in which visual abstraction is almost achieved in the visualization of *Can't Buy Me Love* when they step outside and shout "Free!" (Lester 1964: 36:37-41, 36:43-46), but he does not repeat such adventure again in the whole film. In *Help!*, Lester unfortunately did not extend this innovation, falling short of producing a professional nonsense-sequence of beautiful sceneries à la James Bond for face-market purposes.

The question is the core of visual music: "...the purposely search for the close connection between the music and the moving visuals" (Mendoza 2008: 51), in order to achieve the translation and visualization of music structures. Additionally,

[it] ...has been a long-standing challenge to artists, theorists and entertainers, producing in the process many symbolic and personal solutions, theories, instruments and devices, entertainment and art. (Mendoza 2008: 51)

This sensation happens naturally to some people with 'synesthesia': "...a neurological phenomenon that occurs when a stimulus in one sense modality immediately evokes a sensation in another sense modality." (van Campen 1993: 1). It includes seeing colors when music is heard. "Similar experiences have been reported in healthy individuals using mescaline and LSD..." (Robertson and Sagiv 2005: 3).

In the production of visual music in the history of Western culture, there have been concentrated peaks, a rich example being around the turn of the 20th Century: composers like Aleksandr Scriabin, Olivier Messiaen, composers-painters such as George Gerschwin and Arnold Schönberg, painters such as Wassily Kandinsky and painter-musician as Paul Klee, seeking the parallels between music and visual arts (Düchting 2005: 9). One of the main search lines for translation has been through rhythmic coincidence, visual abstraction and the color-note match following Newton's "...formulas to equate the vibration of sound waves to a corresponding wavelength of light" in 1704 (Cytowic 2002: 7). For a brief outline of the development of visual music, see the 'AVIA Project' (Mendoza 2013).

In another major peak of visual music, the psychedelia from mid 1965, the LSD-induced synesthesia characterized the live, liquid light-shows with most rock concerts, among many other expressions of the hippie aesthetics reigning. The film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick 1968), included a considerable long ending of audio-visual color-trance to György Ligeti's *Atmosphère*: its visual

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abstraction (namely 'special-effects') in the 'stargate corridor' sequence was conceived by Douglas Trumbull using John Whitney's techniques, (Brougher et al 2005: 133), opening a window of promotion for the first time in a feature film to the visual music work that James and John Whitney had been producing, among many other lesser-known visual music artists. The ending of Antonioni's *Zabris-kie Point* (1970), after a visual delight of dessert landscapes, reaches abstraction through a moving-collage of exploding household appliances to the music of Pink Floyd, when it becomes longer than reality would expect it to be, and it is then assumed as artistically by the viewer.

Flying from the film *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967), had the working title 'Aerial Tour Instrumental' (Everett 1999: 142), and was produced by filming from an airplane different and wide landscape sceneries from Iceland slowly moving and shifting (The Beatles 2000: 274), and by applying different monochrome color changes. The sequence is introduced in the film by inviting the guests in the bus to look to the right as an alternative from the boring English countryside on the left, as traces of Jaynes' 'Bicameral Mind' concepts of 1976 (Jaynes 1993).

Its near-to-abstraction visuals are maintained for the whole length of the music composition (McCartney 1967: 17:52-19:45), reaching an ending with only plain colors and no image at all (McCartney 1967: 19:14-31), to the sound of pure electronic music "put together by Lennon and Starr using tape loops." (Dowling 1989: 196). Using images of recognizable clouds, the film then jumps back to reality. Clouds, a favorite tool for visual music videos, had been used before in the film as a short transition from the end of *Fool on a Hill* (McCartney 1967: 8:39-50), and at the beach-to-sky sequence (McCartney 1967: 43:46-51), as *Ankündigung* and reiteration procedures used in contemporary composition. Other real-to-abstract alterations to be noticed, are the short color changes of the group playing in *I am the Walrus* (McCartney 1967: 26:43-44 and 26:47-48), as well as in *Blue Jay Way* (McCartney 1967: 39:38-42), with addition of super imposed images. In feature films today, abstract visual music continues to be commonly inserted in openings and transition passages, and specially when a mental disturbance or acid-trips are to be portrayed. They always appear in short sequences lest their lack of objective, semantic understanding may loose the viewer's interest.

As a *déjà vu* of the wild *Mach Schau* times in the Hamburg clubs, the Beatles dared to include a battered strip-tease in a club to the music of crazier-than-crazy friends, the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band, having finally a Beatles' audio-visual product in all their history without them performing their music! It radically contrasts to the following formal, kitschy and glamorous ball-room dancing in the final sequence (McCartney 1967: 48:15-50:45), two social sides of the

same coin. The end is a real big show on stage with the seldom image of the Beatles, not performing but dancing together in a line of four to the music of *Your mother should know*.

The music of *Flying*, far from being another Beatles' chart-buster, is a subdued, timid, light "beautiful little tune" (The Beatles 2000: 274), but perfectly functional for the empty mood of the visuals that it served: no Beatles faces nor figures nor symbols, no musicians performing, no lyrics to represent, no senseless running around at double speed pretending to be funny, no promotional marketing. For the harmonic structure, they borrowed the blues sequence, common in their rock days, to detach the music even further away from any sign of detectable Beatles' current styles. The video-art *Flying*, as it should be righteously addressed, is a complete and utter exception to the whole Beatles output and in this light, it is unique, highly innovative and original.

It needs to be asked: Which came first, the music or the visuals? Where did they get the ideas from to submerge in visual abstraction? Disney's *Fantasia* (1940), a half-toned but equally important stepping-stone of visual music's history with the influence of Oskar Fischinger, does not seem to have left any trace of influence in them. McCartney and Antonioni had met in London in 1966 to share the former's home-movie takes (MacDonald 2005: 256), but the present paper lacks referential materials on their relationship and possible mutual influences. Similarly and most importantly, the *liaison* between Kubrick and the Beatles, if any, has not been established in this research despite the fact that they were filming at the same time in England (Spitz 2005: 724), and "...the color-filtered aerial shots of Iceland..." were "...supposedly outtakes from [Kubrick's] *Dr. Strange-love*." (Everett: 1999: 131).

The whole film had many technical errors which assigns it the subtitle, in George's words, of an "elaborate home movie. We just had fun." (The Beatles 2000: 274). It was rough and unprofessional, hard to match to the highest standards set by the Beatles in music. It was a beginning, it was an experiment, sincere and direct. It was a show, the Beatles were '*machschaung*' high on LSD this time on film and it was fun for all of them after Epstein death, being free from the cardboard-puppet role that the market machinery had dressed them all these years. (The Beatles 2000: 274). The author of this paper remembers watching it in London on Boxing Day as a fourteen-year old hippie in a room full with friends in a party mood, and 'it was just a big laugh'.

One of its faults was the name *Flying*, since it describes simply the way it was made, slightly abolishing with it its wonderful 'ballet' abstraction, although the name may be also associated with the 'high' experience of the LSD-trip.

Second, its length (52:36) was not enough for a feature film so it could not be distributed to cinemas, nor was it short enough for a promo clip, unless the

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idea was being stretched to become a promo clip for an album or for a soundtrack album: "*Magical Mystery Tour* was way ahead of its time. It is one long music video." (Dowlding 1989: 193). No, it was not another promotional audio-visual at all. There was no VHS, Betamax, DVD at the times so the film would find no place to be seen but only once through a TV program. The head of BBC1, Paul Fox, admitted "...I saw it four times before I began to understand it", finding moments to be "...quite fascinating..." and "[he] thought it was worth showing." (Spitz 2005: 734). Although the offer for it was a meager £9,000, Paul accepted it, stating "Sod it, that's not really the important thing." (Spitz 2005: 734).

The problem of screening visual music is still a major format inconvenience, since public screenings of a series of short, abstract videos can be stressing to viewers. The Internet video formats are usually in low-resolution for their visual demands and the artists are reluctant to sell DVD's or post them in full lest they be grabbed for any other use. Congresses and video festivals seem to be the only platforms available to appreciate this art today.

The third fatal error, on behalf of the BBC, was to show it in black and white, in which case *Flying* was destroyed. Ringo stands out in the whole film as a natural, gifted actor, whose later career in films supersedes the other three Beatles by far. He was the director of photography in *Magical Mystery Tour* and stated:

In a weird way, I certainly feel it stood the test of time, but I can see that somebody watching it in black and white would lose so much of it – it would make no sense (especially the aerial ballet shot). (The Beatles 2000: 274)

Fourth and last, Paul had his hands tied-up with the only screening possible through the BBC of the most bizarre, unconventional product they had ever made. The temptation of grabbing with it an audience of 20 million on a traditional British family-day included a dangerous contrast and its resultant rejection of which the four Beatles were not seemingly aware of in their 'fun' condition, a mortal media-jump into social/cultural free-fall. It had only been four years back in 1963, that Nam June Paik within the *fluxus* movement in Germany, had his 'Exposition of Music – Electronic Television' in Wuppertal. "The relation between video and television was not a productive interchange during the first years of the existence of video." (Martin and Grosenick 2006: 8, 9). Paul, being the man in charge of all, resumed on this problem: "At the same time I'm quite proud of it. It was daring, even though back then it was certainly shown at the wrong time to the wrong audience." (The Beatles 2000: 274).

A deeper look then was only taken by Keith Dewhurst of *The Guardian* (MacDonald 2005: 255), and Ian MacDonald's thoughts remain perhaps as the most reflective commentary on the film:

...the subversive agenda of *Magical Mystery Tour* – sending up consumerism, show-biz, and the clichés of the media – was very much their version of the counterculture's view of mainstream society. (MacDonald 2005: 256)

Critics and musicologist maintain to the day an unfair negative assessment of *Magical Mystery Tour* and even worse on *Flying* (e.g.: Riley 2002: 240), forgetting that it was not music, but 'visual music' within video-art.

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