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SONATA FILM

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SONATA FILM

by

VICTOR L. JENDRAS

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Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Sonata Film

written by Victor L. Jendras
has been approved for the Department of Art and Art
History



(Professor Luis Valdovino)



(Professor Phil Solomon)



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The final copy of this Thesis has been examined
by the signatories, and we find that both the
content and the form meet acceptable standards
of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

ABSTRACT

Jendras, Victor L. (M.F.A. Fine Arts)

Sonata Film

Thesis directed by Professor Luis Valdovino

The motion picture *Elegy Quartet* is a sixteen-millimeter film that follows the four-part sonata form of structure borrowed from music. It is a spatial and temporal record of the eminent destruction of the Sibell Wolle building, sister building to the previously abandoned and razed Hunter Science building.

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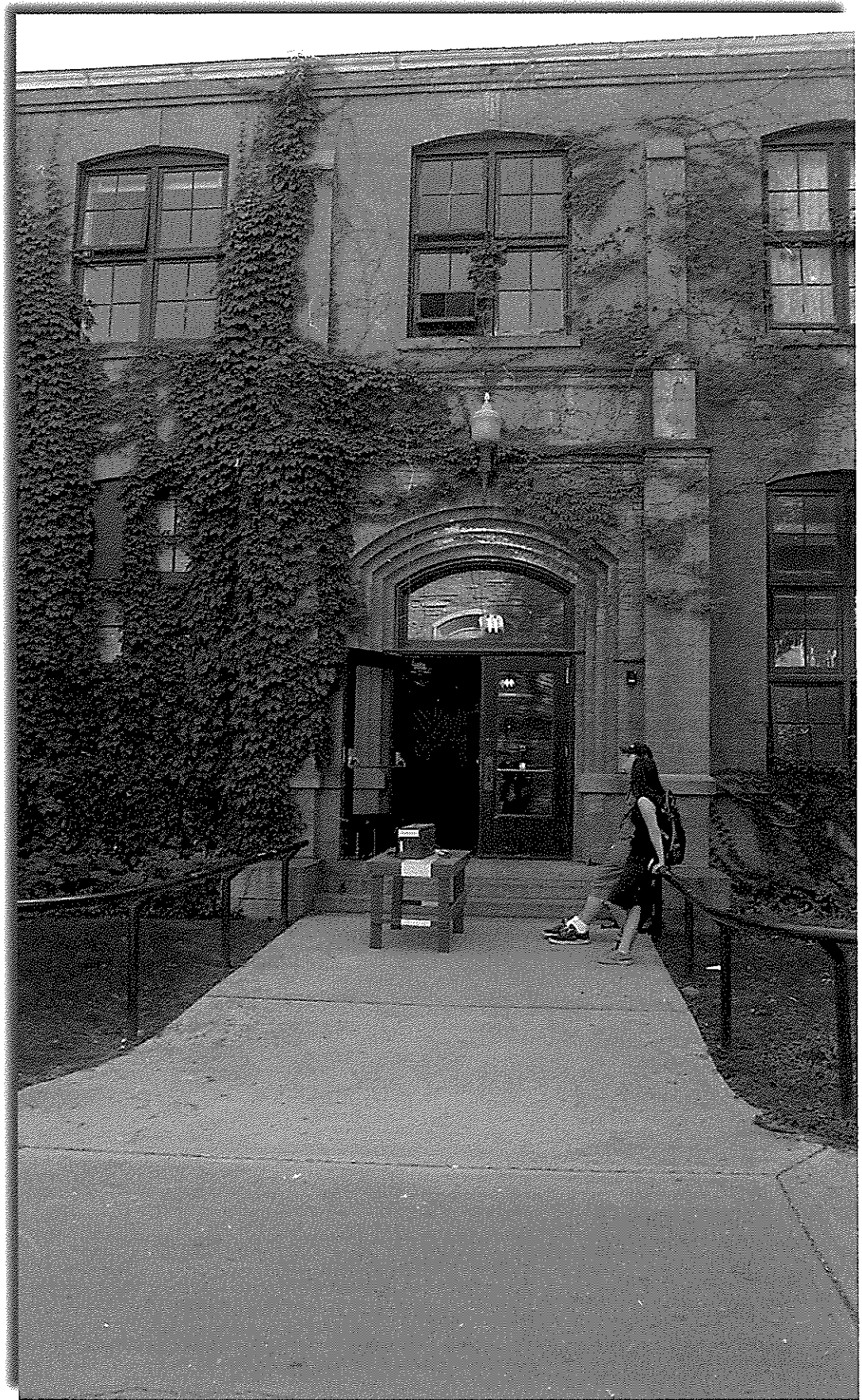
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DVD of *Elegy Quartet* ©2007 attached

DVD of excerpts from
'Elegy Quartet' ©2007 attached

DVD of *Hunter Slide Show* ©2001 attached

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I. The Picture Preceding These Pages

The picture preceding these pages was taken shortly before the old Hunter Science Building was razed from existence. The picture was taken sometime in the fall of the first year of the second millennia. Demolition of the Hunter Science Building, which previously occupied the site on which the Atlas Building now resides, began on December 23, 2001. Until that time, it stood next to the condemned and also soon to be demolished Sibell Wollé Building.

In the picture, Hunter's door is open to what seems a vast and concrete ocean on which glows a very patriotic table and two students who remain forever in that spot in time and space. The table is very patriotic because it is painted red, white, and blue — although you can't tell that from the picture because it is in black and white. Hunter's open door is at once an invite and also a screaming port of entry to a harbor for vessels who would sail on a cement sea. But, the sea has no waves. It is in the call of death that follows a storm. It was a storm of desertion, as the harbor was abandoned; the doorway inlet now a

fading exit. A flood of history in the guise of cement sea-going vessels deserted the harbor.

The Hunter Science building housed collections of the University Museum, classrooms and office of the Film Studies Department, offices of the Sociology Department, and one centrally scheduled classroom. According to the University space database the total assignable square footage (a.s.f.) was 37, 641 contained within 52,442 gross square feet of building envelope. The Hunter Science Building was originally known as the Engineering Shops Building. The University proposed the shops in 1907 as part of a package that included a museum, law, and science building, and a new power plant. State Legislature appropriated \$100,000 for the construction of all the buildings except the power plant that year. \$35,000 of this appropriation was set aside for the Engineering Shops Building. It was completed in 1908 for a cost of \$32,132 (1).

In the photograph, one of the vessels on the sea of concrete is Noah Arnold, and he is looking at the power plant that is not in the picture, so you can't see it. The other student is Samantha Grabowski, and she is saying something to Noah that has nothing, or

very little, to do with Hunter's 93-year life which will shortly end. She has no idea that Hunter received no less than two major additions and over thirty remodels, many of which were executed in very haphazard ways (2).

Ivy grows on it too. That is in the picture, so you can see that. If you look very closely, you can also see that Noah is smoking a cigarette. You weren't supposed to smoke in Hunter because there were a lot of combustibles in there. The idea was, if one of the combustibles combusted, then the harbor would burn to death; but as it turned out, Hunter would instead be beaten out of existence by wrecking balls of doom.

We saved a brick or two from poor old Hunter, but I don't know what happened to them. You can see the bricks of Hunter in the photograph too. The ivy covers some of them, but there's plenty to go around. And, unlike Noah's cigarette, you don't have to look too hard to see them.

The nice thing is that Hunter is still there all covered with ivy. And Noah and Sam (we called her that for short) are still out front having a conversation that has nothing, or very little, to do with the significant deterioration of key structural and

mechanical elements of Hunter which were found in 1990. Particular disrepair had infested the 1916 addition, but they wouldn't be talking about that either. You also can't see Sam's face because she turned away from the camera.

II. The Motion Picture

Elegy Quartet is a sixteen-millimeter film in four parts. It was shot on black and white negative Kodak film stock. The camera negative was force-processed three stops in order to render a useful image. The negative was printed to Eastman Kodak 7302 black and white positive release film. The film and subsequent prints were processed in 100-foot sections. These elements were all inter-positives or inter-negatives, for they were all intended to be re-photographed onto a single 35mm positive release film. Time and financial constraints forced the final composite to be digital.

Each section is a basis of 109 feet of 16mm film more or less as shot inside the halls and rooms of Sibell Wolle. In the case of the second and third movements, heavy superimposition and multiple dissolves create contrapuntal visual textures similar to the structuring of melody and counter-melody in musical forms.

In both the second and third parts there are no less than four individual "melodies" in vision developing together. Empty passageways, abandoned

rooms, and deserted remnants of human occupancy litter the ephemeral loneliness imposed by Sibell Wolle's abandonment.

The first and fourth movements use hard cuts with some superimposition layering. Each layer was edited in such a way as to create the coherent poly-optic texture. "As shot" refers not to the order or original length of each shot, but to the image and duration in time of its specific condition in that particular space and time.

Borrowing so heavily from musical inspiration in compositional form and structure, the overall structure of the film ought to, following, be of some musical form:

Film and music are continuity arts. They share kin senses of rhythm and tempo. They share corollary aesthetics with respect to "tone" - the ephemeral divisions of the "rainbow" woven, as the mind receives color in viewing film, and those tones of music more sharply parceling time (3).

Hence, it is both suitable and appropriate to apply a musical form to a visual one. *Elegy Quartet* is a visual piece of music.

The first movement is disjointed, messy, random, confused, and chaotic. From the perspective of Sibell Wolle, the people are vanishing, and the building

cannot understand why it has been slated for destruction. The building's panic is the central theme of the first movement. Following the musical form adopted, the first part is fast-paced, through which I use Soviet Montage and fast camera movement to capture the panic of the building. I cannot imagine that Sibell Wolle was happy about being deserted, left for dead.

The second movement introduces the first elements of order or calm. Organ music of my own composition lends toward that direction. Though the direction we are headed in is still unclear, there is a foreboding shadow that looms over the desolate structure, and a general feeling of chaos still persists. Desks are out of place in hallways, and an assortment of paper and other rubbish litters the floor. The people are gone. Repetition of specific images is used in keeping with the musical form, examining in slower tempo the statements of the first movement, wherein the jump cut is used to make it appear as though people are vanishing. In the second movement, only the ethereal memory of human presence remains.

The third movement breaks everything down one step further by employing close-ups of the building

fixtures: hinges, knobs, electrical outlets, etc. It is an examination and testimony of the beings that did remain. All the little pieces that hold a building together and help it function the way it was intended scream a lament for the past. Faces of agony waiting for execution sound the memories of their actions, but we see no action. The hinge creaks but doesn't move; we hear the water from the faucet, but the sound is only a shadow. The sounds of these fixtures are the calls and cries of anguish, and they are the memories the building retains.

The fourth movement springs directly from the white noise and light of the building's death shudders. All the way through the film, white has been the outside force seemingly waiting to clear the image of Sibell Wolle away. It is the sound of static and the whiteness of light that are coming to erase the building. Even in the first movement, in the long shot of the hallway as human forms are wisped by static bursts on the soundtrack with flash-frames (camera stops), whiteness looms heavily through the double doors on the outside of the building. Light is trying to get in, trying to illuminate the dark corners of the aged structure. But light hasn't won the battle

yet. The film had to be force-processed three full stops in order to render a usable image on the negative.

The center of the first movement is the main theme of the jump cut and white noise and light as the figures are wisped away by the jump cut to oblivion. This footage measured in its original statement in the first part is 25 feet in length, or 1,000 frames. However, the beginning of the fourth movement restates this theme in negative, rather than in positive, first. Further, this recapitulation of abandonment takes the form of a fugue. Upon the negative image comes the same footage printed reverse in negative, upside-down, flipped, and then also layered over the positive original repeated frame from the first movement. The contrapuntal re-examination creates the inter-woven poly-optic texture using the simplest devised also found in the musical fugal form: imitation, canon, inversion, augmentation, and diminution. Aaron Copland describes beautifully the characteristics of these devices where music is concerned:

Imitation is the simplest device of all. Anyone who has ever sung a round in school will know the meaning of imitation. Playing a kind of "follow the leader" musical game,

one voice imitates what another voice does. When used incidentally during the course of the piece, this device is referred to as "imitation." The simplest imitation sets up an illusion of many-voiced music, although only one melody is actually sounded. The imitation need not start on the same note with which the original begins. In such a case, we speak of imitation "at the fourth" above or at "the second below," indicating the pitch at which the entrance of the imitating voice was made.

Canon is merely a more elaborate species of imitation, in which the imitation is carried out logically from the beginning of a piece to the end. In other words, canon may be spoken of as a form, whereas imitation is always a device.

Augmentation is easily explained. When you augment a theme, you double the time value of the notes, thereby making the theme twice as slow as it originally was. A quarter note becomes a half, a half note a whole, etc.

Diminution is the opposite of augmentation. It consists of halving the note values, so that the theme moves twice as fast as originally. A whole note becomes a half, a half becomes a quarter, etc.

Cancrizans, or crab motion, as the name implies, means the melody read backward. In other words, A-B-C-D becomes D-C-B-A. Here, again, the mere mechanical application of the device does not always produce musical results.

Most *fugues* are written in three or four voices. Five-voiced fugues are rarer, and two voiced rarer still. Once a certain number of voices are adopted, they are held throughout. They are not, however continuously present in the fugue, for a well-written fugue implies breathing spaces in each melodic line. So, in a four-voiced

fugue, the listener seldom hears more than three voices at a time (4).

It is through the means of optical step printing wherein film frames are doubled or skipped thus affecting the duration of the shot that the application of the above contrapuntal forms can be best seen. If a frame can be a note, then it is easy to apply any of the above devices. Also, multiple passes on the contact printer can achieve similar effects like unto inversion, imitation, or even canon. It is first a question of assigning visual voices, and then the above devices can be put to use.

Elegy Quartet was voiced for black and white visions, and black and white sounds overall. For the opening of the fourth movement, the general voices of the overall film are modified slightly, and the recapitulation of abandonment is done in fugal form. The aforementioned devices are applied cinematically; however, the original footage is inverted. This is more recognizable visually than musically because the image the first movement centered around was in positive. The start of the fourth movement is in negative; hence, the inversion becomes the main statement of the fourth movement.

This main theme is then sent into imitation, becoming a canon in form as the negative sequence is layered over itself out of synch. Under that combination, the third voice evinces with an augmented rate. It is slowed and becomes the bass image. Next, the original inversion is inverted again. The negative image of the hall repeats, only this time it is upside down and backwards (*Cancrizan*).

Following this new development, the positive image begins to slide in at double its original tempo (*Diminution*). These visual voices conflict in the fugal devices until finally the empty hall resolves the madness. The human forms vanishing from the first statement in the first movement become empty specters filled with whiteness. They are vacant echoes of the vanished vessels of history and future. This is the answer to the panic screams of the first movement, the despair of the second, and the agony of the third. Almost maniacal order bursts forth from the overwhelming whiteness and the agonizing shudders of impending loneliness destruction. It is an end, a release, an acceptance.

Elegy is a motion picture record of how the condemned building feels. If it were a sixteen-

millimeter film print, it would be six hundred eighteen feet twelve frames in length, or total twenty-four thousand seven hundred thirty-two frames. It is not a film print, so it is thirteen minutes and forty-five seconds of time and space recorded in such a way that it will always be just as it was. The fleeing ships become specters and memory haunts in loneliness, awaiting death. Only the empty hall in positive is clear. Even though the very bricks of the building scream for life in fast cut and jump cut montage, the return to the hall in positive, but empty, is the natural resolution to the chaos of the fugue beginning. And, in the end, in the final shot, even the bricks are overcome by white.

III. A Return to the Picture Preceding These Pages

Also not in the picture is Hunter's sister, Sibell Wolle. This is important because only a little way from Hunter along the stagnant shores of the cement sea, this other harbor would be destroyed. Sam and Noah aren't talking about that either.

I wonder if Sibell Wolle shuddered at all watching in such proximity as her brother was erased from her side. Did she have any inkling that she would sufferingly follow? The same desertion she witnessed befall Hunter would inevitably precurse her own demise.

Hunter and Sibell Wolle looked very much alike, although Hunter was only 37,641 a.s.f. and Sibell Wolle was a little over 73,000 a.s.f. Also, all the haphazard renovations Hunter endured turned it into something of a structural Frankenstein creation. Sibell Wolle remained more or less sane in regard to her hallways, floors, and ceilings. That is, until all the ships sailed away, taking the histories and futures with them. Then, it seems to me, poor old Sibell Wolle went slightly mad.

"Where did everybody go?"

All the ways a building has with which to scream, shout, and maybe even cry were let loose. Papers litter the floors, and other items of use are strewn in forgetful entropy. Scattered are the remains of human vessels who once maneuvered there. Faucets and electrical outlets still offer electricity, but knowing they won't be called on again to serve, their silence is a chorus cry of agony.

The film, *Elegy Quartet*, at 24,732 frames, is a spatial and temporal record of the abandonment of the harbor on the cement sea just a little ways down the concrete coast from where poor old Hunter was obliterated. The ships all left there, too.

None of this can be seen too well in the picture preceding these pages.

IV. Overall Form: A Return to Musical Devices

Elegy Quartet, besides being thirteen minutes and forty-five seconds in duration, is also six hundred twelve frames in length, including all four movements. It is also a film in four parts. It follows the sonata form -- or structure -- borrowed from music:

Three or four separate movements comprise the sonata as a whole. There are examples of two-movement, and, more recently, one-movement sonatas, but these are exceptional. The most obvious distinction between movements is one of tempo: in the three movement species, it is fast - slow - fast; and in the four-movement sonata, it is usually fast - slow - moderately fast - very fast.

People generally want to know what it is that makes these three or four movements belong together. No one has come forward with a completely satisfactory answer to that question. Custom and familiarity make them seem to belong together (5).

The first movement of *Elegy Quartet* is in Sonata-Allegro form; A-B-A, wherein A is the exposition, B is the development, and finally A is repeated as the recapitulation. It is interesting to note that the central exposition of the fourth movement is primarily a fugal imitation, inversion, augmentation, etc. of the developmental section of the first movement -- the hallway shot in which people are flashed into oblivion

by the use of white, static, and the jump cut. The quick cutting and fast camera moves, along with like zooms in nature, comprise the exposition and recapitulation.

The second movement is usually the slowest of all the movements, "but there is no such thing as a slow-movement form" (6). Without a clear formula to use, and since the fourth movement will be fugal, the second movement of *Elegy Quartet* is a requiem done in canon form. The four voices – excluding the organ for it exists in conjunction with the visual voices rather than contrapuntally – are the inside and outside of the building in positive and negative at the same time. However, each element is exposed so that the negative follows its respective positive on about the fourth beat, or a close approximation of such. Each element passes through in its entirety logically from beginning to end.

The third movement is usually a minuet or scherzo. In the earlier works of Haydn and Mozart, it is the minuet; in later times the scherzo. In either case, it is the A-B-A, three-part form of the sectional variety (7).

This form differs from the three-part sonata wherein the recapitulation is often a direct repetition, whereas sonata form, which was developed later,

usually modifies the main theme for the recapitulation.

The third movement of *Elegy Quartet* is another canon similar to the second movement, but recognizably more uncomfortable. The same contrapuntal visual textures are employed, but via close-ups, their proximity induces a sense of pressure.

This pressure is finally released at the dawn of the fourth movement. The third movement may well be death throes, as all the places people's hands touched now lay dormant. Locks, knobs, switches, pipes, vents, etc. — these are the arteries and veins of the building, but they are also the only beings that remain. These comprise the A sections. The B section is primarily the intruding whiteness and electrical lights, finally finishing with the shuddering hinge, fire alarm, and broken thermostat — thus returning to A.

There has been detailed discussion of the fourth movement hitherto so there is no need to restate the fugal culmination from movements two and three beginning in the beginning of the fourth. Suffice it to say that the fugal devices used in the second and

third must now be brought thematically to terms with the exposition and development of the first.

In the four-part sonata form,

The fourth movement, or finale, as it is often called, is almost always in either extended or rondo form or in sonata allegro form. Thus it is only the first movement of the sonata that presents an entirely new physiognomy for us (8).

So, in the A-B-A, exposition-development-recapitulation lends us its methods and luxuries again. However, since the finale must have something to do with the price of tea in China (so to speak), *Elegy Quartet's* finale uses the developmental melodies from the first movement as its A section. Further, as has been described earlier, the opening exposition of the fourth movement is fugal. The B section is the terror in the creaming bricks and windows. The final resolution — which is also the recapitulation — is the hall in positive devoid of human presence. Only the empty building remains.

En Masse, it is evident that *Elegy Quartet* follows the sonata four-movement form. Parts two and three are similar enough that they can only be fully understood side by side. Movement one is in its already evinced *sonata allegro* form could exist on its

own, but not very successfully. There is little examination — if any — of the way Sibell Wolle feels after being deserted. Movements two, three, and four take care of that — particularly two and three, which ruminate in self-pity and anguish, further developing the perceptions a building could have ... and possibly does.

It should be pointed out before closing:

Of course, it must not be forgotten that when we speak of sonata form we are not discussing only the form to be found in pieces that are called sonatas, for the meaning of the term is much more widespread than that. Every symphony, for example, is a sonata for orchestra; every concerto a sonata for a solo instrument and orchestra. The usage of the term sonata itself is generally confined to compositions for a solo instrument, with or without piano accompaniment; but, as may easily be seen, that is not nearly broad enough to include the varied applications of what is, in fact, sonata form to different mediums (9).

Elegy Quartet is so named because it is voiced for four voices only. It is not a symphony because it is not broad enough, nor does it contain enough different voices. Here I speak of visual voices. Sound in film (even the organ music) works in conjunction, and since conjunction is not thought of here as contrapuntal, the sound is not a separate voice, but a support for the picture. In keeping, I used a simple

but perfectly elegant formula: sound plus picture equals 100%. With this formula, neither sound nor picture becomes too far distant so as to function contrapuntally.

Film is a visual texture first and foremost. Sound should only be used for underlying emphasis. This emphasis can be contrapuntal and a great deal of fine movie-making has gone on utilizing contrasting sound and picture. This does not happen in *Elegy Quartet*. Similar to the leit-motif, certain visual rhythms and texture are always identified with specific sounds and types of sound. Low tones for darker visions, and static as the enveloping whiteness seeks the building's erasure. When the picture is heavy, the sound must be light to make way for it. When the picture is thin, the sound must be thick to compensate.

Thus, sound in this specific film is not a separate voice. The voices are visual, not acoustic — hence the terms I have used: *poly-optic*, for example, in place of *polyphonic*.

As to specifically why the sonata form was employed, suffice it to say this: there exist forms that have been known to function adequately, but this

is not the sole justification. Content is one matter, and form is another. Both can exist separately and distinctly, but function best together. A form is empty without content, and content has no direction without form. When dealing with the idea of a building as a being, it is difficult, perhaps, for the spectator to identify as he or she would in a film of typical narrative engines with living beings similar to their own selves. Therefore, an accepted form (sonata) can be used to organize the content (how the building feels) so that the spectator can more easily come to sympathize with the perspective adopted by the camera. The camera necessarily sympathizes with the agony of condemnation Sibell Wolle experiences in the film. Further, this screaming structure cannot be heard in anger, or fear, or horror, unless through the film, *Elegy Quartet*. The film evinces this emotion. Through emotions of fear, angst, agony, terror, etc. the spectator can identify with what is really just a collection of bricks, halls, nails, doors, screws, knobs, etc. — inanimate and unfeeling items that hold no memory; ultimately just things. It is the camera that amplifies the building's perceptions so that the spectator can identify with it. Using the form of the

sonata lends form to what would otherwise be uninterpretable content. Buildings do not exist as humans.

Or, perhaps it is impossible for a human to understand a building's sense of self. Even if it had no sense of self, how would we know? And, if we cannot know whether to tell if a building is a being, then how to tell if it isn't would be an equal mystery.

Sonata structure allows an arcing progression to portray the different stages of the building's emotions in abandonment and contemplation awaiting ultimate demise. Anger, fear, despair, and final acceptance are each examined in the four movements in the auspice of what and how a building might feel and remember. The fugal forms were chosen to echo the idea of multiple layers of existence in time and space (histories and futures) throughout the lifetime of the Sibell Wolle building.

V. In Closing: A Final Return
to
The Picture Preceding These Pages

The motion picture, *Elegy Quartet*, as previously stated, is 24,732 frames in length or 618 feet and 12 frames, or 13:45 minutes and seconds of time, depending how you look at it. It exists as a portrait of something you can't see. If you were to pause, and look at poor old Sibell Wolle for a moment from the deck of your history and future concrete sea-going vessel, you probably wouldn't even notice the terrified windows and doors open in agony, silently flailing for a firmer hold on life.

Sibell Wolle is 73,000 a.s.f. It is a construction of bricks, glass, steel girders, concrete blocks, etc. Some time ago it was a harbor for the vessels that float on cement. It is empty now. I think it knows that. I think it also knows what's coming, because it saw what happened to Hunter.

Hunter was 37,641 a.s.f. It was brick and mortar, too. You can see that in the picture preceding these pages. What you can't see in the picture preceding these pages is that Hunter isn't there anymore. In the

film, you can see the screaming bricks of Sibell
Wolle. Sibell Wolle is still there at the time these
pages are being typed. In a few months, it won't be.
It is not there in such a way that you can see the
screaming walls and hallways of the deserted harbor
for passing histories and futures. Looking at it from
afloat the concrete ocean, you will only see a
building.

R.I.P. HUNTER AND SIBELL WOLLE

GONE NOW
THE
OLD WRECKS!

Epilogue

"You know, I think I'll take a walk through old Hunter and smoke a cigarette," Noah says to Sam (that's what we called her for short). "You know," he says again, "Just to say goodbye."

That's what happened right after the photograph preceding these pages was taken.

Then the cement sea was empty, and only stagnant non-existent waves of concrete that did not look anything like waves at all lapped in static eternity the masonry harbor of vanished histories and futures. There was some cigarette smoke, too.

Endnotes

- 1.) University of Colorado at Boulder pg 1-3
- 2.) University of Colorado at Boulder pg 4
- 3.) Brakhage, Stan pg 7
- 4.) Copland, Aaron pg 104 - 107
- 5.) Copland, Aaron pg 112 - 115
- 6.) Copland, Aaron pg 112 - 115
- 7.) Copland, Aaron pg 111
- 8.) Copland, Aaron pg 110
- 9.) Copland, Aaron pg 109

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No alligators were harmed in the production of this thesis. Two very old friends, however, were abandoned and completely obliterated.

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