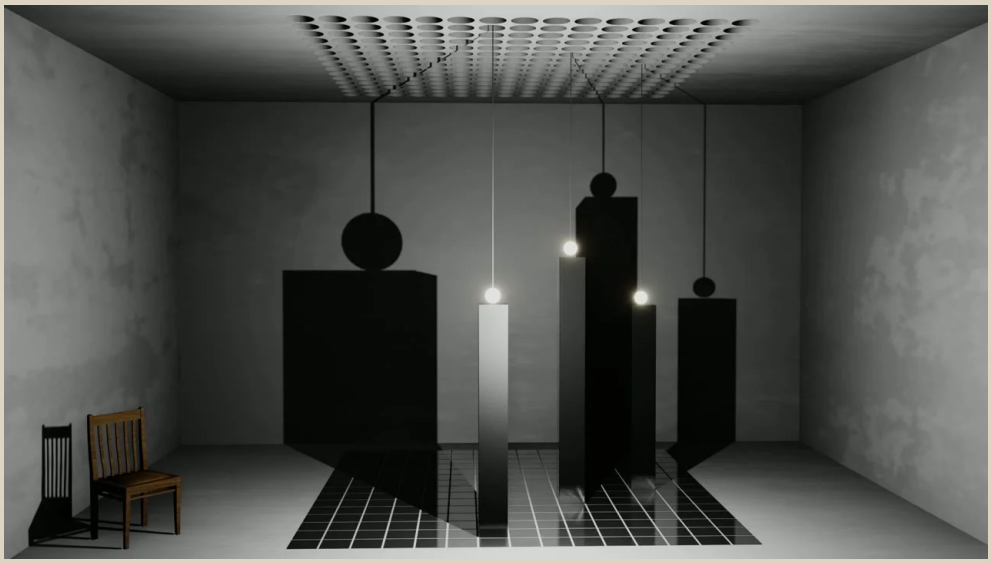
CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ

Transcendental Aestheticism

Film and piece for piano, Research on Tensions #24



Arnaud Quercy

AQC0211 · CR-000211

Art Quam Anima Publishing New York

Transcendental Aestheticism

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TECHNICAL DETAILS

Medium	Digital film
Duration	1 min 00 s
Image	1920 × 1080 px, 30 fps
Date	2020
Location	France
Certificate of Authenticity	N°20211231-0018
Catalogue Number	AQC0211
Collection	Research on Tensions

PROVENANCE

Origin: Arnaud Quercy, Paris, France, 2020

DESCRIPTION

« My senses were sharp and awaken. I could perceive all things. Moving bodies, cubes and spheres extended in a dance of my analytical judgements. It was obvious they wouldn't add any further content to my conceptions. Yet, shadows recurred to something external to my starting conception to complete their definition. My experience itself was a synthesis of intuitions, augmentative and finally revealed the light. » — Arnaud Quercy

Arnaud Quercy conceives the film, the music and the text as a moving triptych. The three pieces form one single work, and each element is central to the other two. You may focus on one of them, for instance the moving cubes and lights, and let the other two, the music and the text, fold in towards it. When you are ready to move on, focus on the next part, the music for instance, and let the text and the film fold in, and so on.

The work is an interpretation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and more precisely of the Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, whose first part, the Transcendental Aesthetic, sets out a theory of pure sensible intuition: space and time are not things we find in the world, they are the forms through which we perceive anything at all.

The music

Transcendental Aestheticism is a one-minute piece for solo piano, number 24 in Arnaud Quercy's series *Research on Tensions*, recorded in Paris on 5 October 2020 with the composer at the piano. In his words, it is "an abstract deployment of harmonic arguments and rhythmic responses in support of the transcendental ideality of space and time."

The score (22 bars, Adagio, quarter note = 70) shows how this works. The piece opens *dolce* on a small gesture, a triplet rising to a sustained, dissonant note, answered by a short, sharp chord marked *fz*. This argument and its response come back throughout. Twice, the calm is broken by *con brio* passages: hammered staccato chords in fast repeated rhythm, then sweeping arpeggios in groups of six and seven running across the keyboard, from *mf* to *ff*. Between them come *leggiero* and *legato* passages, lighter lines, grace notes and wide leaps between registers. The piece ends where it began, on the opening *dolce* gesture, held on a long final note: the mind returns to its starting point, enriched by what it has gone through.

The film

The whole film takes place in a single bare room with concrete walls, a ceiling pierced with a regular grid of round holes and a tiled floor. A single wooden chair stands in the left corner, the only familiar object in the room: it gives the scale and invites the viewer to look, alone. Everything is black, white and grey.

The film opens on tall pillars and a few small lights hanging on thin wires; behind them, on the back wall, large black silhouettes of blocks topped with spheres are the enlarged shadows of the pillars and the lights. Every black shape on the walls and ceiling in the film is a shadow. The blocks sink into the floor and the room empties, leaving a few spheres and points of light floating in the air. Then the ceiling comes alive: hundreds of lights come down on their wires through the holes in the ceiling, each throwing a large black disc of shadow onto the walls and ceiling. Together they form a line, then a slanted plane, a twisting ribbon, a pyramid, a square grid of light. Over a skyline of stepped black blocks, the lights bend into a great luminous arc, then into a shallow bowl hanging under the cloud of their

own shadows. The room empties again; the blocks and pillars come back. The lights gather into a pyramid with a blinding core at its centre, the room goes dark around a single bright glow, and a curtain of wires falls over a floor of light. The cubes return, and the cycle starts again.

The movements follow the music closely: the quiet *dolce* passages go with the empty room and the slow blocks, while the *con brio* outbursts set off the lights and their sudden changes of form.

Reading the film with Kant

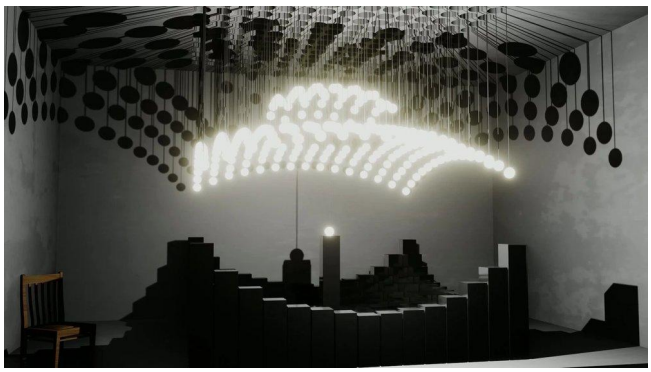
The text gives the key. The cubes and spheres are moving bodies that the mind already understands: shape and extension are contained in the very idea of a body, so seeing them adds nothing new, an analytic judgement in Kant's terms. The shadows, however, need something outside the object, a light, to be what they are: they require a synthesis. In the film this is literally true, since the shadows of the glowing balls are made by another, invisible light. It is only when the lights appear, when the experience becomes a synthesis of intuitions, that the room is finally revealed. The empty room itself, which comes back between each figure, is pure space, the form in which all the figures appear.

Technique

Arnaud Quercy builds the scene in Blender with the EEVEE render engine, renders it as a sequence of 1,800 frames at 30 frames per second, and finishes the film in After Effects. He composes the music in Cubase and engraves the score in Finale. The soundtrack joins the piano to room sound effects.

The light that casts its own shadow. The glowing balls do not light the room. In EEVEE, an emissive material glows, here with a bloom effect, but sends no light and casts no shadow on the walls. The whole room is lit by a single invisible point lamp of 500 W with a radius of zero, so with perfectly sharp shadows, fixed for the whole film. It stands at the open front of the room, in the middle and at mid-height, almost in line with the camera, like a projector. Each hanging object is one mesh made of a glowing ball and its long grey wire, which rises through the holes in the ceiling. The emission material keeps a shadow mode, so the balls block the lamp's light; close to the lamp, they throw large, sharp, dark discs onto the back wall and the ceiling. Arnaud Quercy uses this trick on purpose to change the physics of emission: in reality a source of light cannot cast its own shadow, but here the cloud of black discs is the shadow of the glowing balls themselves. The lights cast a shadow because the real light is somewhere else, outside them. This is exactly the text: the shadows "recurred to something external to my starting conception to complete their definition."

IMAGES







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Transcendental Aestheticism 360

THEMATIC ELEMENTS

Arnaud Quercy Transcendental Aestheticism Research on Tensions Kant Critique of Pure Reason Transcendental Aesthetic solo piano digital film 3D animation Blender light and shadow

TECHNICAL NOTES

Type	Artwork
Image resolution	1280x720 px

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AQC0211 · CR-000211
ISSN: applied for — U.S. ISSN Center, Library of Congress
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Published by Art Quam Anima Publishing New York,
an assumed name of AQA Publishing LLC
c/o Northwest Registered Agent, 418 Broadway Ste N
Albany, NY 12207, USA
+1 917-764-5470
NY DOS ID 7624376 · Assumed Name ID 7658709
publishing.artquamanima.com
First published: 2026-02-18 · Last updated: 2026-11-21
Persistent URI: https://publishing.artquamanima.com/en/catalogs/2020/11/transcendental-aestheticism-1tqz.pdf