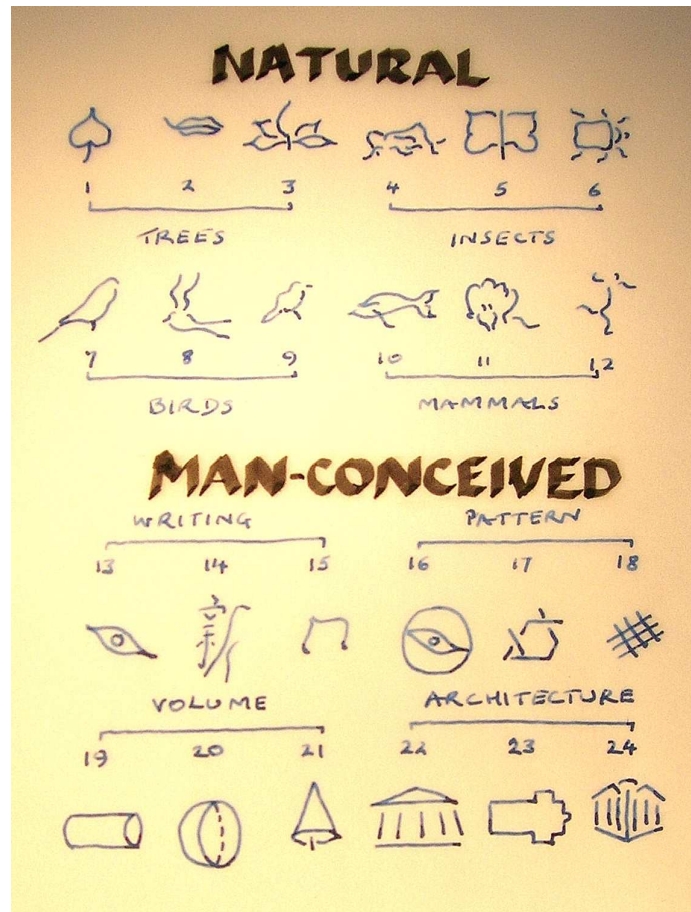


SFORZINDA

The seeds for *Sforzinda* were several. I had been wanting to make a film with Egyptian hieroglyphs, transcribing a sequence of them frame by frame, but I knew that by itself this would produce a frenetic dance of figures on the projected screen. (I had attempted this in Standard 8 mm with *Film in which you can read Ezra Pound's Canto 94 very fast* by transcribing all the words of the canto frame by frame [i.e. one word/ideogram per frame].) What I required therefore was a means of imposing a pattern on the sequence of images. One way would have been to take a short series of images and to repeat it any times, introducing variations by rearranging the order, inserting pauses, and by other means. Such a film could not only be an exercise in film rhythm, but an exercise in memory as well, such as Hollis Frampton's *Zorns Lemma*. The series could be taught to the spectator and variations on it would create new patterns. Realizing the limited nature of such an exercise, I was attracted to the idea of giving the images some meaning or 'value'. So from an initial conception of a film made purely of true hieroglyphs, the writing of an indecipherable signature, so to speak, I arrived at a point where they would be used to say something; nor, since I proposed to invent the images, would they be the authentic ancient writing.

I should also mention another factor in the film's genesis. I had discovered that bleach diluted to a certain degree could remove the yellow and magenta dyes from film emulsion to leave a pure cyan base. Because this base responded much more easily to engraving than the ordinary 3-colour emulsion it was ideal material with which to make a handwritten film.

So, what sequence of images should I choose? I quickly realized that there could be two sets, one from the natural world, and one from that created by man. That there were twelve each was somewhat arbitrary, but related to the number of frames projected per second (24 at sound speed). After a certain amount of research, I came up with these images.



In choosing a set of images, I saw that this was an opportunity to set out the essentials of an ideal world, to list its achievements. Thus the first twelve illustrate the principle of natural balance, the food chain that goes from plants to insects to birds/mammals to man, and of natural diversity, which is the key to balance.

The second set also emphasize the principle of diversity, this time in human achievement. Writing (images 13 to 15) seemed to me fundamental to the human world, to civilization. The other three triads of pattern, volume and architecture honour the visual arts: pattern, or abstract art, complements volume, a key element in the Classical conception of an ideal figurative art (the sphere, cylinder and cone were, in Cezanne's estimation, the three primary forms for painters); architecture is volume applied to pattern. I put architecture in an emphatic position at the end because it is a *sine qua non* of civilization, the most physical assertion of mankind's intelligence in the face of natural processes.

While engaged on selection of the images, I was reading Pound's *Cantos*. Not wholly consciously, nor slavishly, I made *Sforzinda* as a homage to Pound's system of

aesthetics. There are three Poundian images in the sequence. One is number 11, Gaudier-Brzeska's drawing of a large cat, which so eloquently exemplifies Pound's idea of 'form in the stone', the form that exists in the mind waiting to be carved or inscribed in essentials, whether on paper, stone or any other medium [When I wrote this I should have added film as I was specializing in incising directly onto the celluloid strip]. (The image is used as a chapter-motif in Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era*.) Another is number 14, the 'make it new' ideogram that Tching wrote on his bath tub in *Canto 53*. It was the ideogram, of course, that Pound saw as a triumphant marriage of idea and object – Chinese ideograms made sense to the man with no knowledge of Chinese but endowed with an acute sense of form. (Or so he thought. See *Essay on the Chinese Written Character* by Ernest Fenollosa, whose publication Pound oversaw.) The third, number 21, shows the Vorticist version of Confucius' 'unwobbling pivot' that is one of the key ideograms of the *Cantos*, just as Kung (i.e. Confucius) is one of the key figures. To these images with particular Poundian references, I should add that the triad of leaves are, as indeed all the first twelve images, 'signatures in nature, oak leaf never plane leaf' (*Canto 87*).

Pound's long poem was written to enunciate the principles of an ideal order. In this he was profoundly influenced by Renaissance attempts to conceive the ideal city. It was in this spirit that in 1464 Antonio Filarete published his diagram – perhaps ideogram – of an ideal city and called it SFORZINDA.

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