Symphony for the Jersey Shore

Proposal from Earth Environmental Group to produce a videotape about the coastline of New Jersey. Earth Group members include Video Artist: Paul Ryan, Sound Artist: David Dunn, Author: Jean Gardner.

Objective:

The objective of this proposal is to produce and distribute a twenty-eight minute video work of art that interprets the Jersey Shore as a multispecies habitat. The proposed tape:

1. is part of a series of video interpretations of natural sites in the Hudson River/Mid-Atlantic Coast Bioregion,
2. will be produced according to a methodology designed for understanding ecology,
3. will be accompanied by a guide to facilitate using the tape to impact current discussions of how to achieve an ecologically sustainable role for humans on the Jersey Shore.

Because most of its coastal habitats are dominated by humans, New Jersey appears to have a monospecies shoreline. This symphony will use video to unconceal and celebrate non-human habitats from Cape May to what poet Robert Lowell called "the unforgivable landscape" at the mouth of the Hudson. Evidence of human dissonance with coastal ecology will be integrated into the tape. The expectation is that this project will make a contribution toward reconnecting humans with Jersey's multispecies shoreline.

A dozen types of non-human habitats, characteristic of the shoreline, have been identified and will be featured in the video.

1. Low Marsh
2. High Marsh
3. Beach
4. Dunes
5. Eel Grass
6. Cedar Forest
7. Seaweed Beds
8. Oak Gum Forest
9. Tidal Slough
10. Holly Forest
11. Sedge Islands
12. Mudflats

Based on such texts as Bennett's book, *New Jersey Coastwalks* (Bennett: 1987), characteristic examples of each of these types will be selected. These habitats will be taken as major themes for the Symphony for the Jersey Shore.

By definition, a symphony establishes order amid complex variety. To establish such order, a method of composition is necessary. This proposal is based on The Earthscore Method of composition, originated by the artist, Paul Ryan, who will be making the Jersey tape. A description of this method follows.

1. The Earthscore Method was designed specifically for understanding ecological systems. The ecology is understood as a complex, interrelated system. The method uses a sophisticated phenomenological and semiotic system to understand ecosystems. Fundamental to this method are the three comprehensive phenomenological categories described by Charles Peirce.

2. The Earthscore Method uses a self-organizing, cybernetic approach to communications. In principle, this method can be used to develop a

consensus among concerned parties about appropriate policy and practices regarding ecosystems. The artist has articulated this possibility in a design for a television channel dedicated to the Hudson Basin.

3. The Earthscore Method allows any musical idiom to be used in conjunction with the video. The normal music-video hybrid starts with the music and then finds the video to "illustrate" the meaning of the music. The Earthscore Method starts with the phenomenology of the ecological system itself and edits the video in order to allow many musical interpretations of the phenomena. Once the tape is edited in this way, it is then possible to interpret the ecology for any musical audience.

4. The Earthscore Method is teachable. The teachability of the method means that, in the future, other individuals or groups could produce a series of Symphonies for the Jersey Shore. The guide that accompanies the tape will explain the method so that it can be used by others. In the future, workshops could also be offered.

The Symphony for the Jersey Shore will be ordered in the following way. Six "corridors of perception" will be selected. By corridor of perception, I mean a strip with a continuous line of sight, transversal to the coastline that contains at least two distinct habitats with transitional ecotones between them.

Examples: A) beach/dunes B) seaweed bed/low marsh/high marsh. Each strip of ecotones will be presented phenomenologically in thirty-six, six-second video passages. Each passage will have a four/four measure with a second and a half to each beat. The thirty-six passages will include twelve of firstness, twelve of secondness, and twelve of thirdness. These passages will be edited in various combinations, all with a dissolve edit on the fourth, transitional measure. The

remaining six minutes plus will be edited to interrelate the six strips with the coastline as a whole and the human presence. Satellite photography of the coastline will be used to supply overall context. Close attention will be paid to tidal changes. Underwater video will be taken where appropriate. The tape will have upward of 250 dissolve edits.

The Symphony for the Jersey Shore is part of a series of video interpretations of sites in the Hudson River/Atlantic Coastline Bioregion. The series includes completed productions about The Hudson Estuary, The Great Falls in Paterson, The Bronx River Waterfall, a Stand of Trees in Inwood Park, Horseshoe Crabs Laying Eggs in Jamaica Bay, and The Clay Pit Pond on Staten Island.

The sound track will be produced by sound artist, David Dunn. Dunn will record microorganisms in the salt marsh characteristic of the Jersey Shore using digital hydrophonic equipment. These recordings will then be modulated in accord with firstness, secondness, and thirdness. In the event other musical groups, such as the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra or jazz groups, express an interest in producing an original sound track for the video, both the method and the rights will be made available to them.

The guide will describe the ecology of each site phenomenologically, using the same categories as used in the video. These categories will help video viewers, site visitors, and decision makers understand the relationships between the unique qualities of the different sites, the facts about them and their context. This understanding will also be helpful in facilitating use of the tape in discussion groups and in the ongoing effort to develop a sustainable human presence on the coast of New Jersey.

The schedule is to do the taping while the Atlantic flyway is being used in the spring or the fall. Choice will depend on schedule and weather. After the initial taping, six months will be needed to edit the final product, produce the sound track, and publish the guide.

Distribution of the tape and guide will be directed at reinforcing existing concern for the Jersey Shore and at stimulating new interest. Organizations such as the National Audubon Society and the American Littoral Society have indicated that they will review the tape for inclusion in their programs. Gateway National Recreation Area, Project Use, Clean Water Fund, the Youth Environmental Society, Rider College, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, the New Jersey Marine Science Consortium and related groups will be approached to determine if the tape can be useful for their programs. I will make myself available for presentations of the tape and discussions of the shore. Public Television in Philadelphia and New York will be approached as well as the Television Network in New Jersey. Cable systems will likewise be approached.

Earth Environmental Group is a non-profit arts and education collaborative dedicated to increasing public awareness of natural and architectural environments. Over the past twelve years the collaborative has carried out extensive field investigation and research into New York City's bioregion. Studies have been conducted of vegetation, geology, wildlife, natural history, and human habitation. The findings of the Earth Environmental Group have been presented to the public in pamphlets, posters, filmstrips, radio programs, video, multimedia shows, and workshops.