

the sep of wərdz to kəm

THE SHAPE OF WORDS TO COME

Richy Carey
Lauren Printy Currie, Tom Varley, Tom Walker

LICHTSPIEL: OPUS I (1921)

Walther Ruttmann
New Score composed by Richy Carey

A concert of absolute film and contemporary soundfilm works examining moving image as a musical medium, exploring both the historic role and future potential of video as musical composition. Supported by the Goethe Institute.

St. Cecilia's Hall

The Cowgate

Edinburgh

EHI 1NQ

7:30pm
Monday 11th
August 2014
Free Entry



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

t h e j e p o f w ə r d z t o k ə m

t h e s h a p e o f w o r d s t o c o m e

I think there is something fundamentally lacking about the way we talk about video work, which is manifest in how we describe the action of engaging with it. We will always say we *watch* film, rarely would anyone say we *listen* to film, but actually we are doing something more than both. This ontological relationship between the object and ourselves is negotiated in some way by the language we use to mediate it. So how should we talk about it?

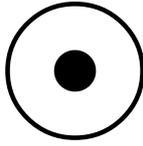
Parallel conversations are a good place to start. In *the Shape of Words to Come* Lauren Printy Currie, Tom Varley, Tom Walker and I address certain aspects of our current audiovisual vernacular that relate to both sonic and visual compositional intention. Various philosophical, historical and contextual issues have all played their part in the conversation, but *shape* has become the central point of investigation. Shape is one of the primary value judgements used in dealing with both visual and aural aesthetics, but audiovisual work is invariably presented through rectangles, even though the sound is recognised as an unframable force. As an audiovisual composer, I invited the other artists, in whose work I'd seen parallels to my own, to respond to the idea of shape as a musical function through filmed images. I then edited and constructed these images into my *soundfilm* compositional process; a method of making music whereby the visual is woven into the work as a musical timbre from the outset.

Finding a space to perform these soundfilms presented problems. A cinema space would focus the audience on the visual material and detract from the visual as a musical function in much the same way as a gallery space would. As such, a concert space was needed that underlined the musicality of the works and engaged the performative aspect of the visual. After a few conversations I came across St. Cecilia's Hall in Edinburgh, the oldest music hall in Scotland and one that, as an oval space, demands that the screen stand apart from the wall on the stage, presenting it as one uncomfortable shape within another.

St. Cecilia's has also added a historical weight to the soundfilm process' place within visual-music history. In the film world, this history has a fairly firm date of conception within the absolute film movement, in particular the first performance of *Lichtspiel: Opus I* by Walther Ruttmann in Munich, 1921. This early abstract cinema work was created as visual music, as painted *shapes* interacted through musical form; counterpoint, harmony, rhythms. Originally performed with a commissioned score by Max Butting, Ruttmann himself played cello at its premier.

In showing both these works in the same concert, I aim to present film as a musical agency and in doing so question both the role and potential of video as musical composition.

Richy Carey



Here is a problem: the lack of a transitive verb for experiencing the audiovisual, "*more than seeing, more than hearing: _____ing?*"

Circling?

I chose the circle. Ring, loop, round, group. When you increase the number of sides of any shape, accumulatively you reach a circle, all shapes are embraced by it. Ultimately it is the symbol of unity, infinity, democracy. Men are represented by square symbols, women by circular symbols. It's one of those unexplainable affinities. I try to frame the fondness.

I spanned an item of my own clothing and used items to hand, as props. Some from my bag, some all around. An 'S', a motion of splayed circles, a logo becoming emblematic. All plurality and scrolled like too much time spent on YouTube. There is the overwhelming sense of finding the origins of these actions, finding a starting point beyond, I was asked to. Knowing why lies in the gestures that embody a sense of repetition, simply, I drew a circle around it. In a state similar to tracing, I sampled footage and I was there in the shot, looking. I was chasing, circling, searching; to childhood perhaps, memory and a place marked by a gesture, a woman's face. Within a circle you could say, '*here I was born and here I died*'.

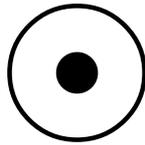
This shaping of perception, visibility, and space, brings to mind Mona Hatoum's *Self-Erasing Drawing* (1979) representing geo-politics in material form. It's so bare, so spare, so

unspecified, it's so abstract. A motor is assembled to a central pivot and two metal arms, one inscribes a circle into the sand and the other erases that circle. It chases, it erases. She says, 'a sense of existence accentuated by the fear of disappearance'. I say, '*here I was born and here I died*'.

Like images, like gestures, a circle has become the means by which you can return, to the past, to Heidegger, to Mona Hatoum. Here lies a problem: If your past is returned to you - what sound would that make?

I chose the circle. I did not know whether I moved towards it, or whether I was driven there, whether I had created it, or whether it created me.

Lauren Printy Currie



physicality of movement between two notes becomes marked in the visual. Ultimately this passage approaches the tangential decision of movement around the circle at both a macro and micro level.

... the line is the start of ...

I approached this shape from two perspectives. The first being no matter where you join the circle you are presented with two completely symmetrical paths that lead back to your point of departure, with the gradient of this movement changing at a constant rate all the way around the circumference. The main harmony of this movement is built around this notion, using the circle of fifths, with one path leading up in fifths and the other down in fourths; leaving from G, passing each other at C sharp (the opposite side of the circle, the tritone) and meeting again at the G.

The second deals more closely with the idea of the splitting of the path. The rhythms that grow at the beginning of the movement, and return throughout, come from pushing and pulling the harmonic wave of a G and an F sharp together through the quartertone and beyond. That flexing dissonance results in beautiful pulses, altering the perceived metre of the music. These perceived pulses return at other points in the rhythm of the melody, as each line is time- stretched separately from the next, throwing up alternating congruent beats.

The visual tracks deal with these notions as well as introducing the author into the path decision, voiced both visually in her reflection on the screen and in the vocal harmony through the physical circling of lips. The text and corresponding imagery has been cut from Lauren's previous work and reinterpreted as a narration of this voyage into and around the circle. The dance of the harmonic structure, the



If I were to choose any shape for the work it would be the parallelogram. Firstly as the shape that railing bars contort to when filmed at high speed and secondly as something close to but slightly removed from conventional notions of 'the frame'. The parallelogram is a shape that implies and active skewing of things.

In responding to your original brief I've become interested in how our day-to-day experiences are frequently expressed and mediated through our regular engagement with available technology and industry. In a sense I want to investigate how processes and devices that we consider to be commonplace such as smart phones and traffic lights provide us with a vocabulary through which we interpret and live out our everyday experiences in the city.

*I want to learn to read mundane objects and images in terms of the mechanisms and shapes that constitute them, to understand them as a language, as an expression of something broader; to factorise them. In his experimental films *Lichtspiel Opus 1* (1921) and *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Grosstadt* (1927) Walter Ruttmann presents prosaic structures such as car manufacturing, railway lines and window shutters in terms of their inherent meter and tempo. The sublime geometry of train wheels, typewriter keys and tunnel arches become symbols of progression, the unstoppable intertwining of community and machinery, of the body and mathematics, towards a more prosperous future. Through this very Modernist lens the abstract shapes and lines of 'Opus 1' can be read as schematic interpretations of things such as car headlamps, railing bars and the emerging light at the end of a subway tunnel. In response to this the footage I've provided you with focuses on structures such as escalators, the bridge at Charing Cross and new road markings made for the Commonwealth games.*

Similarly to Ruttmann, I wanted the logic of the camera and of the subject matter to dictate the means of transformation and so

I've attempted to utilise the natural functions and limitations of the iphone as transformative agents. Everything from the iphone's poor resolution and low frame rate (30 fps) to its automatic focusing tool provide the means of abstraction, sometimes turning the camera on its side to render objects unrecognisable. I also chose to retain the portrait aspect ratio when presenting the footage to you firstly because of its instant identification with 'iphone' and secondly in an attempt to relocate the work away from any conventional reading of it as 'cinema'.

In 'Berlin' cogs, shutters, tram signals and factory workers are filmed in extreme close up, becoming abstract in their dislocation from the rest of the scene. However, Ruttmann always explains this machinery in terms of its social function, we are always shown the operator flipping the switch or winding the handle, in 'Opus 1' the human hand can be read in the unevenness of the paint and in the finger marks on the glass. The processes of labour are always made clear. With this in mind I wanted to use a device that implies a direct relationship to the human body in its very design and function. Presenting it as such, I deliberately allowed the iphone's shadow to be seen and allowed my feet to slip into shot.

*I've also become interested in the ways in which our interpretation and experience of the world become heavily mediated by modern technology and industry, in how we express ourselves within these given infrastructures. I recently re-read Reyner Banham's *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (1971). In this book Banham declares "I learnt to drive in order to read Los Angeles in the original" In other words our complicity with mainstream culture does not necessarily falsify our experiences, instead we have to define our identity in relation to it and through utilisation of it. In this way the particular formatting capabilities of an iphone camera become significant to the way we commonly document and experience the world on a day-to-day basis and so here I've decided to use the grammar of the iphone in order to explore this relationship.*

Tom Walker



The parallelogram has been an apparent shape in Western music for centuries, particularly evident in 16thC fugal tradition. The dynamism of the shape itself though seems inherently musical, with its direct linearity and pervasive sense of motion.

With this passage constructed almost entirely on the iPhone, I used Yamaha's *Tenori-on* and Brian Eno's *Bloom* visual music apps to build a score that echoed Tom's investigations into commonplace technological mediation of our environment. The *Tenori-on* track is doubled but time stretched in its repetition to approach the 'active skewing' of the frame. This track, along with others, is gradually fed into a degenerating bit-crusher, which degrades the resolution of the sonic imagery in much the same way as the iPhone's camera does through the visual track. Repetition and chance are part of the nature of the *Tenori-on* and seem a fitting aural counterpart to Tom's visual shapes.

A *fugato* passage is introduced that approaches the intrusive sonic properties of phone interference, an almost ever-present danger in our current audiovisual engagements.

The parallelogram speaks of familiarity and movement, action and structure, direction and intention. I asked the group to respond to three shapes, as I felt drawn towards their intrinsic musicality. The parallelogram then, unlike the others, is more than just the shape of particular *musical* form, but an analogy for the nature of music as form.



1.

An Experimental Study of Apparent Behaviour (1944) by Fritz Heider and Marianne Simmel was a landmark study in the field of interpersonal perception. The experiment was designed to study the psychological processes involved in perceiving other individuals, their behaviour and their personal qualities. The authors of the research, Fritz Heider and Marianne Simmel, asked groups of test subjects to interpret film footage of three flat, black, geometric shapes (a large triangle, a small triangle and a circle) moving in various directions and at various speeds across an illuminated white field. The only other figure in the field was a rectangle, a section of which could be opened and closed like a door.

The research shows that, despite the objectively abstract nature of the animated shapes, virtually all of the subjects tested interpreted their movements as the actions of animate beings, specifically of people, with personality-traits, emotions and motivations. The experiment's results showed a striking uniformity in the subjects' interpretation of the individual shapes' characteristics and the film's 'narrative' - The quotation below was included in the published research as a representative example of the interpretation commonly made by the group:

A man has planned to meet a girl and the girl comes along with another man. The first man tells the second to go; the second tells the first, and he shakes his head. Then the two men have a fight, and the girl starts to go into the room to get out of the way and hesitates and finally goes in. She apparently does not want to be with the first man. The first man follows her into the room after having left the second in a rather weakened condition leaning on the wall outside the room. The girl gets worried and races from one corner to the other in the far part of the room. Man number one, after being rather silent for a while, makes several approaches at her; but she gets to the corner across from the door, just as man number two is trying to open it. He evidently got banged around and is still weak from his efforts to open the door. The girl gets out of the room in a sudden dash just as man number two gets the door open. The two chase around the outside of the room together, followed by man number one. But they finally elude him and get away. The first man goes back and tries to open his door, but he is so blinded by rage and frustration

that he cannot open it. So he butts it open and in a really mad dash around the room he breaks in first one wall and then another.

2.

I've been contemplating whether and, if so, in what way contributing largely unedited 'found-footage' to this project differs from simply suggesting to Richy that he might want to google "Heider-Simmel-experiment" as I think the search results might be of interest to him; I've been contemplating whether I can legitimately consider myself an active agent in a collaborative process. Someone suggested to me that I might want to google "Heider-Simmel" because they felt that the experiment condenses many of the preoccupations of my artistic practice, all relating to a broad theme of *the interrelatedness of abstraction and symbolic communication*. With a tiny bit of *artistic license*, I think the Heider-Simmel-experiment can be shown to be connected to much more than just the psychological processes the original study was designed to investigate. Amongst other things I think the experiment is connected to: semiotics (the study of signs and symbols and their interpretation); relates to the psychological phenomenon of pareidolia (where a random stimulus is perceived as significant: for example, a rabbit on the surface of the moon, a face in the clouds, an apparition of the Virgin Mary on a piece of toast); and, as much in terms of its visual similarity to, say, Kazimir Malevich's Russian Suprematism as anything else, has something to say to the rhetoric surrounding pure abstraction in artists' manifestos and statements from the early part of the 20th Century, which propound a (seemingly sincere, retrospectively spurious, but nevertheless compelling) belief in the capacity of fundamental shape, colour and form to embody utopian ideals and essential, extra-linguistic emotions.

I have been determined to use the Heider-Simmel film as the basis for an 'original' work. I have been jealously guarding the YouTube rip in a folder on my desktop labeled 'to do'. When I first saw the film its multiple connections with my own work made it feel like a gift, but it has become an encumbrance; all of my attempts to borrow from it have ended in aborted works, far less interesting than the original footage. Attempting to borrow has been a long and frustrating process, so I have decided to steal. I hope that offering the film as my contribution to this collaboration allows it to become something else. I hope that I can feel like an active collaborator in the process that moves this film from scientific context into a cultural context. I hope I can take the video file from the to-do folder and save it somewhere else.

Tom Varley



When I teach songwriting I usually start with this exercise: Think of a word, any word, and repeat it out loud over, and over and over again. Keep repeating the word until the end of the exercise. Very quickly the word will start to lose its meaning and the sound will take on a musical form. It has its own rhythm, its own metre, its own *shape*. Now, having constructed the shape of this word in our mind, begin again but this time using dynamics of pitch and volume, create a musical form using the repetition of the word that reflects its inherent shape. I do this both to try and negate any issues of prosody that invariably occur in the early stages songwriting and to draw attention to the musicality of language itself. What gives a word its shape is its phonetic structure.

The International Phonetic Alphabet has influenced a lot of the work I have made over the last year or so, as a language within a language, of latent symbols within symbols. The rhythm of this movement is made of reconstituting the fragmented phonics of the shapes of investigation back into their English arrangement. In previous conversations Tom talked of this film's relationship to his interest in ideas of the logographic (and as such phonetic) and pictographic. Music for film relies heavily on a similar psychological projection and attachment as pictography does. As far back as 1947 Adorno and Eisler were lambasting composers' reliance on convention when scoring for film. Here, I've tried to draw attention to our expectation of form. It has become so commonplace to stress on screen violence with contrapuntal, "beautiful" music that it is no longer shocking. The original force that was generated between the audiovisual discord dissipates over time

much like the meaning of a word can, driving us to reevaluate its function. I first became interested in the way vowels interact when I was signing in harmony with an Australian friend. I found I was forced to change my vowel sounds to match his to create a true harmony. Here I have tried to create clashes through the vowels alone, a small violence within a larger harmony.

I am still searching for the word I set out to find, but think I'm beginning to see the shape of what it might sound like.

Lichtspiel: Opus I

Walther Rutmann

New Score by Richy Carey

Sound film is still waiting to emerge – because the mere reproduction of the spoken word, with the conventions of silent film still in force, would have no artistic merit and preclude any further development. We don't want that any more than I would have wanted mere 'mechanic photography' in the cityscape of Berlin... My efforts were geared towards developing a complete art form. Now that we regard the basic issues of silent film as solved, it would be wrong to assume that embedding acoustic events would suffice to make sound film. Such a synchronism of sound and image would be untenable and might even achieve the opposite of the task at hand: instead of heightening the illusion, weaken it. Sound film (...) sets its own technical and artistic terms, still largely unknown in their implications and potentialities.

Walther Ruttman, Compilation of Excerpts from Interviews and Articles 1927 -1937

As I have mentioned earlier, Walther Ruttman's *Lichtspiel: Opus I* seemed like the most natural counterpart to *the Shape of Words to Come*. His comments on our understanding of film as music read as relevant now as they did when he first wrote them, with the complex potential of sound film a long way from being fully explored. As an ardent modernist I am certain he would have welcomed my new score for his film, though likely not the showing of his work almost 100 years on from its creation.

With this in mind I was keen to create a contemporary score that was far removed from Max Butting's original serialist one. However, understanding how and where Ruttman intended the music to synchronise with the visual was vital to composing a true sound film. The Goethe Institute provided me with a copy of the string quintet score onto which Ruttman had hand drawn markings of synchrony. I used this to inform the music I wrote, however I resisted imitating the form of Butting's, instead approaching the soundtrack with an alternative vigor and expressiveness that was afforded to me through contemporary recording techniques.

I decided to write for a modern quintet, with each instrument representing a different form of visual music. The iPhone, in particular the Tenori-on, Bloom and modAxis apps that were used, are obviously indicative of the post-millennial understanding of visual music, whereby form is created through direct visual engagement with the instrument. The digitally modeled ARP Odyssey Mk II synth is analogous with the mid 1970s-80s explorations into digital audiovisual synchrony. The guitar makes reference to the *Visual Music* movement *a la* the *Joshua Light Show*, whilst the cello is a nod to that of the original butting score, which Ruttman himself played at it's premier. The percussion tracks reference our deep-rooted, yet currently linguistically inexpressible understanding of the audiovisual. Particularly, the West African understanding of Djembe, to a Western listener only a drum, but in the original, the drum, dance and music exist in a hypostatic relationship which is closer to my *soundfilm* understanding of the audiovisual.

Unlike my soundfilm works however, my music for *Lichtspiel: Opus I* is reactive to the visual, rather than fundamentally intrinsic to it. Still, I feel it important to exhibit the parallels between historic and contemporary visual music, to highlight how little progress we have made in 100 years without an appropriate language with which to investigate it.

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Richy Carey

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L i c h t s p i e l : O p u s I

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