

Beatrice Gibson

Crippled Symmetries

30.07.15 – 04.10.15

Crippled Symmetries is a new exhibition by artist Beatrice Gibson that brings together a new film commission *Solo for Rich Man* and an earlier piece *F for Fibonacci*. This recent body of work signals a new direction in Gibson's practice, exploring the possible relationship between abstraction in twentieth century music and abstraction in finance.

Solo for Rich Man and *F for Fibonacci* both take American author William Gaddis' epic modernist masterpiece, *JR* (1975), as their departure point. *JR* tells the story of a precocious 11 year-old capitalist who, with the unwitting help of his school's resident composer, creates the single greatest financial empire the decade has seen, spun largely from the invisible confines of the school pay phone. An eerily prescient, social satire, *JR* turns the American dream on its head.

In *Solo for Rich Man* Gaddis' novel is overlaid onto contemporary London. Working with composer Anton Lukoszevics and a group of children from east London, the film orientates around an experimental music workshop, inspired by radical educators and composers Brian Dennis and John Paynter. Staged within Shoreditch Adventure Playground – a site rooted to progressive models of learning and delineating a space for risk-taking – the film's location echoes both the methodology used in its making alongside those deployed in unregulated financial markets. The film is structured around five musical pieces performed by Anton and a young boy called George, including the work of Fluxus artist George Maciunas and Chieko Shiomi's

COLLECTIVE

Disappearing Music for Face.

In *F for Fibonacci*, ostensibly a preface to *Solo For Rich Man*, Beatrice worked closely with another 11 year-old boy: Clay Barnard Chodzko, commissioning him to design an office using the computer game *Minecraft* intended for his own fictional character, the screwball super hero, Mr Money. This digital landscape is used as the primary backdrop for the film, in which Beatrice and Clay's conversation unfolds. Both films explore what it means to grow up in a society beset by abstraction. In each we watch as the 11 year-old subject effects a hostile take-over of the film, establishing themselves clearly as lead protagonist in an unsettling embodiment of the child-led models deployed in the films' making.

Beatrice Gibson lives and works in London. Recent solo exhibitions include *Solo for Rich Man*, Laura Bartlett Gallery, London, *Statements*, Art Basel, Basel (2015), *The Tiger's Mind, Re-iterated*, CAC Brétigny, Brétigny (2013), and *The Tiger's Mind*, The Showroom, London (2012). She recently won the 17th Baloise Art Prize awarded at Basel 2015 for *Solo for Rich Man* and has twice won the Rotterdam International Film Festival Tiger Award for short film.



Striking Coins Irene Revell

There is a 1969 episode of the BBC television programme *Music in Schools* entitled 'A New Sound'¹ that found its way recently onto YouTube. A class from Shoreditch School "compose a sound picture based on ideas associated with heat", led by Brian Dennis, a composer whose pioneering work in school music education, though perhaps less influential, sits alongside that of John Paynter, one of the key references in Beatrice Gibson's film *Solo for Rich Man*. Evidence of a national broadcast media working in consort with a state education system that would seek to institute such an avant-garde propels a near-morbid fascination (viewed to date some 40,000 times) when seen from a disappointing future.

Gibson's contemporary protagonists are equally transfixing, yet shot of any such nostalgia in a film that is as fluidly unreserved as the BBC document is politely awkward; a meditation on the convergent abstraction of contemporary musical composition and finance through the paradigm of the child, ultimate amateur and/or shrewdest of speculator.

The adventure playground in Shoreditch Park offers both the location and the cast, George and his colleagues. And through a workshop organised there by Gibson and composer Anton Lukoszevics, links the artist's interests in the parallel histories of the adventure playground movement and that of Paynter and Dennis. Five ensuing performances (and their negotiation) form the basis of the final film - two by or with Lukoszevics, three Fluxus works from the 1960s.

Fluxus 'co-ordinator' George Maciunas' eponymous score from 1962 inaugurates us – like a birthing, at first only sound – into this new world, immediately adjacent to his *Solo for Balloons*. Maciunas returned repeatedly to making events, sound, from the objects and methods of capitalism, most notably systems of measurement and charting.² As a founder of the Fluxus movement he embodied

a deeper contradiction, that his series of networked possibilities were so intertwined with the advances of 20th century capitalism – international postal networks, mass civilian transport and so on. The film casts his figure and a second George into the complexity at stake. "Do you like money? I like feedback too." The sound of deflating balloons / the sound of buildings collapsing.

The Controlled Accident

Within Fluxus John Cage is perhaps the best known for the gathering-together of such multiply authored musical works, for instance, as live performance in his Musicircus where works somehow function with and against each other through chance introductions. Yet Gibson's enduring interest in filmmaker Maya Deren and her notion of the 'controlled accident' provides a better insight into the film's structure.

"By 'controlled accident' I mean the maintenance of a delicate balance between what is there spontaneously and naturally as evidence of the independent life of actuality and the persons and activities that are independently introduced into the scene."³ Maya Deren³

Gibson expands outwards beyond Deren's discussion of the image to include "how key compositional parameters are decided on during a production process... the film is really just the result of a set of decisions that are left to unfold on their own terms, just one possible iteration of a set of production parameters."⁴ Hence points of reference that are circuitous between music, sound and image; a chance kaleidoscope; neither the performer, composer / composition, nor the filmmaker, but a dialogue between all elements; not so much a film about music as a composition itself.

The plot is no less a part of this, aleatory through the agency of the individual children. George takes the limelight to become the capitalist schoolboy – assuming his role as, or mirroring, the protagonist of William Gaddis' novel *JR* (1975) through his independent

actions. Even the colours play between introduction and independence, the intertitles speak back to blue-red-purple painted wood, t-shirts, Western font, George, the cowboy of Wall Street, the letters grow like Pinocchio's nose.

'Indeterminate' outcomes are assumed to be neutral, as if interchangeable: that is to say, divorced of any relation to social and political context. Herein lies one of the limits of the utopian 'open score' – a limit that perhaps Paynter's work was countering. Moreover the 'controlled accident' as taken up by Gibson in the 'scoring' of her films, proposes a rich counterpoint with its already assumed specificity. For Deren's text, a Long Island beach in 1944.⁵ For Gibson, Shoreditch Park in 2015, lurid Spring green: far from neutral, the ultimate bomb site / adventure playground / coal face of gentrification. George is framed in that very first image by Gainsborough Studios, famous for Hitchcock and now transformed for luxury living. Might the film camera itself be playing anachronistically, as much as these pedagogical histories, as much as any critique of global finance? Nearly swallowed up by the youthful city workers in their new playground: "Bailout, Bankruptcy, Bankster," like a round, a lyric, these recitations, "Bullshit, Business, Buy-back. Capitalism." George raises his 99, replete with chocolate flake, as if to toast.

Between music and life

The third historical work, *Disappearing Music for Face* (1966), is by Ongaku co-founder Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi, inaugurated into Fluxus during her years in New York when Maciunas published her *Events and Games* (1964).⁶ Shiomi is a composer invested in the human body's relation to space and time, rather than in the making of sound per se, illustrated here by her minimal instruction, 'change gradually from a smile to no smile', George's performance providing a meditation on the figure of the boy, between languid and twitching. With their interlacing throughout, it is impossible to extract sound from image, yet the precise power of the soundtrack is never clearer than in Shiomi's silence, where

the pink nerviness of the image produces an addict-like desire to cut back to the scraping bow, clanking coinage.

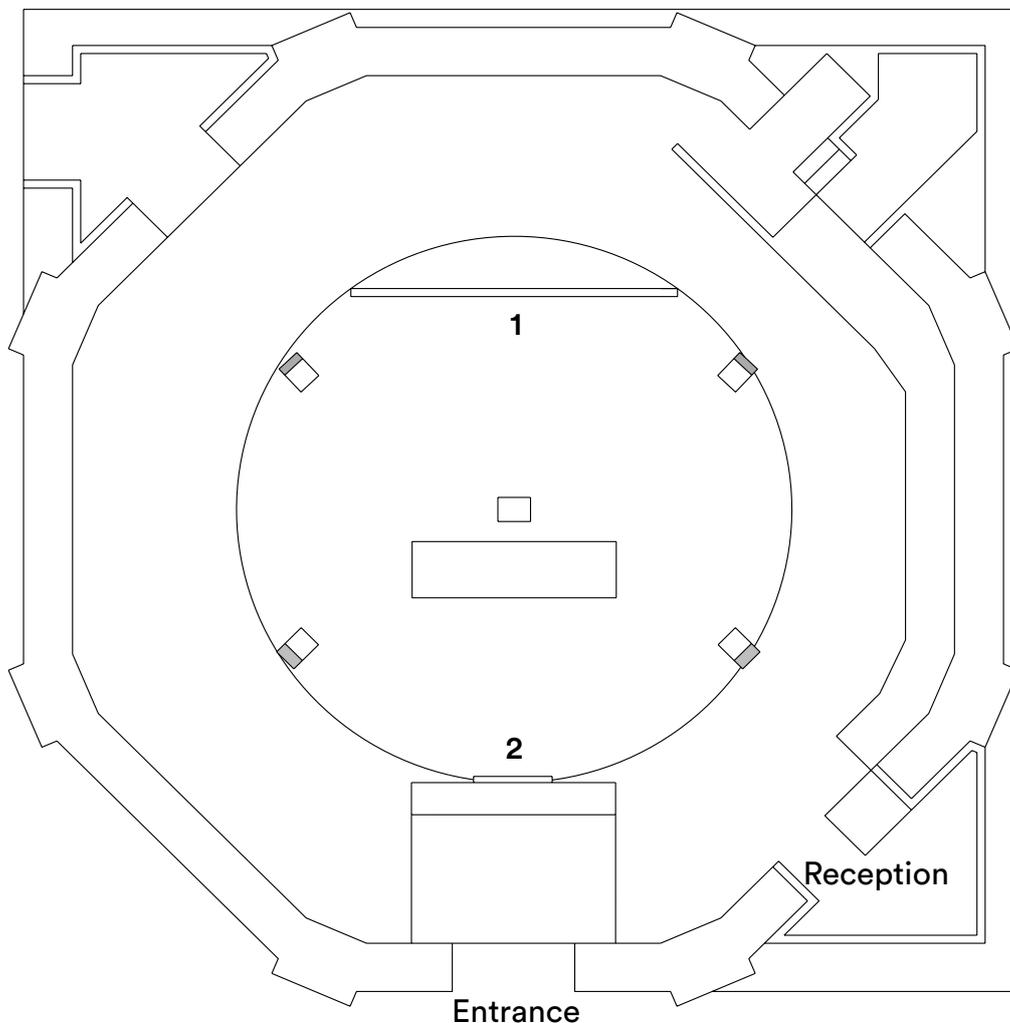
Whilst the majority of the film's words are put to work in the spinal list intermittently recited by George ("Haircut, Hawk, Hedgefund"), the lyrical drives abundantly through image. Cut to black screen and the heavy resistance of multiple cello strings, a shot that seems to never fully focus but follows frenetically the hand of the player as it swells back and forth. Then cut to ear and head, a short crop, feet of the children as they listen framing the action, are the action played by Lukoszevieve's bow, unclear if swaying in time or fidgeting. A pleasure somehow both ambivalent yet sheer: the ice cream toast; paint both energetic and peeling; the hyperbolic exuberance of the final scene, never-ending drum roll and party lights, for one.

Endnotes

1. *Music in Schools*, 'A New Sound', url: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hsigOnPJTtA> (23/07/2015)
2. Lely, J. and Saunders, J., *Word Events: Perspectives on Verbal Notation*, (London: Continuum, 2012)
3. Deren, M., 'Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality', in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Adams Stiney, P. (New York: Anthology of Film Archives, 1960/1978)
4. Interview with Beatrice Gibson (unpublished, 2015)
5. Deren's example in her text resembles her 1944 film *At Land* (in which John Cage appears)
6. Yoshimoto, M., *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists In New York*, (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2005)

With thanks to Lotte Juul Petersen and Wysing Arts Centre.

Irene Revell is Director of Electra, an organisation that curates, commissions and produces projects by artists working across sound, moving image and performance. Projects include *The Multiversal Score*, Wysing Arts Centre (2015), *Someone Else Can Clean Up This Mess*, Flat Time House (2014); *Her Noise: Feminisms and the Sonic*, Tate Modern (2012). She is also a member of the Cinenova Working Group and Visiting Curator on the MA Sound Arts at London College of Communication.



1. *Solo for Rich Man*, 16 mm and DV transferred to HD, sound (surround), 15 minutes, 2015. Starts approximately on the hour, playing every 15 minutes.

2. *F for Fibonacci*, 16 mm and 35 mm transferred to HD, sound (stereo), 16 minutes 26 seconds, 2014.

Solo for Rich Man is a co-commission between Collective, Grazer Kunstverein and Film London Artists' Moving Image Network and Arts Council England, supported by LUX, On & For Production and Somesuch. The exhibition is part of Edinburgh Art Festival.

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