Interview with Beatrice Gibson, December 2012

Eve Smith: Would you talk me through how the project developed? It began with the intention of publishing a book, informed by the first public discussions, but when did it become clear that a film would develop alongside all of this other activity?

Beatrice Gibson: Will Holder and I began discussing the possibility of a book as early as 2009 really. We shared an interest in experimental musical notation and speech or conversation as models for production and were interested in cementing that interest formally. London based artist, Philomene Pirecki invited us both to do something for her wonderful series *Occasionals*, and we devised an event called *Prologue*, basically using the form of the public conversation to set out ideas for a future book.

The next event was a conversation we had at the Serpentine Gallery, in the context of my film, *The Future's Getting Old Like The Rest Of Us,* showing there. We invited John Tilbury to have a conversation about notation and I suggested doing a close reading of a score as a kind of editorial device. John brought *The Tiger's Mind* to the table and it really blew us both away, for different reasons. He said back then, it was a can of worms and he was certainly right about that! That conversation subsequently became the book's Preface.

Following that we decided to deploy the score as a production structure for the book. In other words, we wanted to make a book that was both *about* a score as well as an *enactment* of it, in formal terms. Consequently we invited six artists over a two-year period, to have three week-long conversations. Each participant adopted a character from the score and the topic of the conversations began with their own production. Questions like: can a score be applied to a conversation?, can speech be used as instrumentation?, how does all this related to the printed page?, get relayed back to the page?, what does it mean to use the idea of character to actually develop work?, what is improvisation? and so on.

At some point in the middle of all this The Showroom commissioned me to make a new film in relation to the project and it occurred to me that this whole thing was already set up so why not use the film as a resource to support its continuation and vice versa: use it to support and develop the film, in particular its script.

The book is described as a form of scoring of voices. Would you talk about the editorial process of moving from spoken word to printed matter as a collective?

This is maybe more a question for Will really. Obviously a big concern of both his and mine, was trying to get some of the ideas we were talking about – notation, activation, characterisation – to resonate in print, on the printed page. The transcriptions of our conversations try to deal with this: they are not straightforward transcriptions: the book presents polyvocality formally as well as in subject matter. You can't tell who is saying what but you do feel a crowd, rather than singular voices, and that is effected through the various typographic devices the book deploys. One of the interests that Will and I share is in typographic experiments in modernist literature – figures like B.S. Johnson for example – and how they might relate to scoring, whether people like Johnson were engaged in a similar political pursuit almost, whether these experiments in form had any connection.

In terms of the collective editorial process, ultimately the book really fell to a singular author. And that was Will. In the end somebody has to take responsibility.

How did Cardew's score inform the film's production structure? Is _The Tiger's Mind_ a re-enactment of Cardew's score, an improvisation in the form of a film as he intended the score to be 'played'?

Cardew's score informs the film's production structure in lot of ways really. Firstly I suppose it's not, – well, actually the different participants used it differently – but in relation to the film, or for me personally, it's not used literally as a set of instructions to follow or as something to be played. For me, it's much more metaphorical than that, my use of it is more descriptive than prescriptive let's say. It's examined as a potential model for production, as a model for the composition of film, so for how a film might actually be made, but also, later on of course, for how it might also be viewed or seen.

I think that production wise, the score informs the film slightly differently from the way it informs the book. What happened was I became tired of words! There was just too much talking and I wasn't happy with the kind of the speech that we were producing, specifically in relation to a script for a film. I mean, I think that the content being produced was interesting – it certainly seemed to work in print form – but I simply couldn't imagine it making for an interesting film, not one that I'd want to make anyway: not enough explosions, or gun fights or chases!

So I decided to change track a bit. I was interested in challenging my previous scripting methodologies. Both _A Necessary Music_ and _The Future's Getting Old Like The Rest Of Us_ had deployed similar strategies – the setting up of open-ended compositional structures that deployed conversation or speech as a means to produce scripts – and I was interested in rocking that boat a bit. I wanted to get beyond words. I felt like I was drowning in them. So I invited the participants, still in character, to develop the film's production components: its props, narration, soundtrack, foley, and 'special

effects. The idea was to talk to each other in a different way, through objects, to try to talk in a way that went beyond words.

One of the reasons that I find Cardew's original score *The Tigers Mind* so amazing I think, is that it doesn't present a world of dry verbal exchange. What it does is to notate feelings, the feelings between people, exactly all the things that can't really be spoken, captured and put on the page. The characters do and experience lots of wonderful things: they wrestle, grapple, climb trees, blow dust in each others' eyes. They tumble headfirst in to a world of feeling and sense. So, my film tries to think about the score not just as a way to   direct production but also as model for representation.

Another thing that I find totally amazing about Cardew's score is what it implies or complicates in relation to issues around documentary and fiction. It's both a portrait of a set of existing relations between musicians - the original members of AMM, - so it's a documentary, but at the same time it's completely made up, the proposal of a totally fictional world. So it sits in this super weird place between document and fantasy and I think that's really extraordinary and really compelling. I think that it offers a really interesting model of self-reflexivity that is somehow still relevant in 2012, as opposed to 1960. Unlike a more Brechtian or B.S. Johnson type self-reflexivity, fourth walls don't tumble in Cardew's score, *The Tiger's Mind*, fiction isn't broken down. It's the opposite. We get plunged headfirst into its construction.

Given the way that these days it's fictions that tend to shape our landscapes - with politicians creating stories for example that start to define real events – personally, I'd rather make up my own stories than have them imposed upon me. And I think that *The Tiger's Mind* suggests that is possible.

So I think this is where my current interest in narrative comes from and why *The Tiger's Mind* is so intriguing to me as a model. The more formal or compositional approach in my filmmaking, this is what it's trying to get at – the idea that we might be the author of our own worlds rather than living in ones imposed upon us.

In terms of authorship, how do you understand the film as a departure from the original score?

I think that what's interesting is that the film is clearly *not* an enactment of Cardew's score. It's something else. I'm its author. But it also contains a multiplicity of authorships within it. The set, the narration, the sound, the foley, the special effects, are authored by the artists that produced them and they have their own lives outside of the film that extends beyond the roles the film (perhaps violently) squeezes them into. Celine (Condorelli) currently has an exhibition of her pieces commissioned by Pavilion in Leeds. Here they are sculptures first and foremost. Not simply props. Likewise at the different iterations of *this* exhibition coming up at Index in Stockholm and CAC Brétigny in Paris, other participants' work, Jesse and Will and Alex's practices, will take a more central role and my film perhaps recede a bit. Its characters will retaliate. So, ultimately I think, both Cardew and I as authors haunt the proceedings, let's say,and *that* is maybe where the trouble lies, the worms in the can. It's that, that has made everything has been so difficult but it's also what has made it so interesting.

The film has been co-commissioned by three publicly-funded organisations across Europe (The Showroom, CAC Brétigny and Index, Stockholm). Are you interested in the effect that *The Tiger's Mind* may make upon these institutions and their respective structures, working practices and ways of thinking?

I am interested in that yes – in how the same issues will reverberate at a more institutional level. And certainly in how the film and book's exhibition and distribution can be scored in the same manner as their production has been. But I'm not quite as embedded in it (thankfully!) and as the shows haven't happened yet I think it's almost too early to reflect on.

The six characters in *The Tiger's Mind* 'battle' each other for control of the film. This sounds intense, hinting at something revolutionary perhaps. Did this tension derive from Cardew's score itself, or did this develop through improvisation as the project progressed?

Well, antagonism in a revolutionary sense is certainly built into Cardew's score, in part because you can read it as a history of improvisation as a form of collectivity. That necessarily implies a multiplicity of voices, sometimes harmonious, sometimes contesting one another. If you think of an improv session, musically, it's complicated: instruments and noises clash, knock up against each other, find rhythm and then break apart again. So it's a much more interesting model for working together or being together, let's say, than community, which implies consensus and harmony, in an almost Christian sense, in the sense of communing. That's quite a singular idea whereas improv suggests something more democratic maybe, more polyvocal. So yes, the film perhaps nods toward an idea of tension that it perceives as positive, or looks at in a utopian way.

But there's a flipside that complicates things! The film also has a very dystopian, murderous sense of tension, and that derived from the experience of really producing it . During the film's production this antagonism was experienced as much more real than simply a utopian theoretical idea. It was actually a very difficult process, very demanding and very fraught, it certainly wasn't smooth, and it required a lot of communication about roles, responsibilities and assumptions. It wasn't always successful, and more often than not I think it failed, in fact it I'd say it failed spectacularly, well for me at least. So the tension in the film is also a very real portrait of that, of what happened as I personally experienced it (I can't speak for the others!).

The author's voice, in that sense, is also really a lament about the failure of the endeavour, its impossibility. The film tries to stand up and deal honestly with that. So it is, in part, a seething indictment of the collective endeavour! I mean I basically kill all the characters including myself! Or at least I think I do. It's never really clear. I think ultimately, in that sense, the battle depicted in film is much less utopian than the original score implies.

How did the introduction of the crime thriller genre come about?

The crime thriller genre came about in part as a humorous nod to the difficulties inherent to the collective process but largely in relation to a strange link in my mind between the investigative ethic of AMM (coming out of a kind of 1960s self-centred politics, of the kind outlined by Adam Curtis) and the writings of Gertrude Stein.

Curtis talks about a moment in the 1960s, when in the face of increasing state violence and repression, and fuelled by the ideas of psychoanalysis, people started to turn to a radical new idea that in order to change society, you had to change yourself. It was an idea encapsulated by the slogan 'there is a policeman in your head'. So these hippie movements sprung up everywhere that were orientated around ideas of radical self transformation, *Gestalt, The Human Potential Movement* for example, and they were massively popular.

AMM was born around the same time, in mid 1960's and I think, as an endeavour in a musical sense, it maybe mirrors some of this logic. The documentation around AMM, there's a lot of stuff written by Cardew amongst others that touches on the idea of a kind of searching self, except in the form of the musician, with sound as the medium of the experiment. AMM seems to be a lot about this idea of a shifting self, existing within in a web of (musical) relationships. In his book on AMM,Eddie (Prévost) uses the term self-invention and John (Tilbury), in our own book, repeatedly describes the characters in *The Tiger's Mind* as somehow 'psycho-philosophical'. So I think that there is a way in which AMM can be read as kind of musical gestalt, an investigation of the (Tiger's!) mind in the present tense of performance.

Gertrude Stein was also fascinated by perception and by the idea of the present. She developed something she called 'the continuous present' in her writings. For Stein, story is replaced by perception. Her plays are about the perceptual experience of the play itself, rather than the act of storytelling. Stein thought of plays as landscapes and she defined landscapes as a collection of things and people placed in relation to one another - often voices. Of course at the centre of her landscape is the viewer, or the reader, who in the absence of a discernible story, has to do the enquiring, has to make sense of things, . Fittingly Stein was obsessed with detective stories and crime thrillers and you can feel the logic of detection at play in her writing. Writer and reader are both often placed in the role of detective.

So, long story cut short: the detective genre or the crime thriller came about as a kind of nod to the perceptual explorations of Stein and AMM, the idea of investigation and more crucially perhaps as a kind of metaphor for the type of active viewer, spectator or participant that both Stein's writing and *The Tiger's Mind* propose: the detecting one. Of course the other reason that the genre seemed fitting was in relationship to authorship and my reclaiming of it. I think that in all of my films, collectivity ultimately gives way or concedes to authorship. If the film laments the failure or the impossibility of the collective endeavour and becomes about that, it does so through the figure of the author, who aggressively re-imposes herself onto the chaos of the other characters. In the end there is an author. And what she does is violent, sinister and criminal.

By giving a voice or a 'character' to the different elements in a film production (props, sound, etc.) you offer the viewer a way of re-thinking how we understand the relations between objects and subjects. To what extent do you consider the viewer of the film as a participant too?

I definitely think of the audience as a kind of participant or as, as much a character as anything or anyone else in the film. In the interpretation notes to the original score Cardew also suggests something similar I think, or at least suggests that players may be assigned characters by other players without their knowing. I think about the idea of the active viewer very much in relation to notation and the kinds of proposals that it makes for ideas around

spectatorship. (Experimental) notation is really fascinating on that level. And in relation to this I think that it's really all about language and about how language works. What experimental scores like *The Tiger's Mind* do, is offer up a kind of linguistic abstraction. Unlike traditional musical notation in which a certain symbol corresponds directly to a note, i.e. 'this means that', with experimental notation, 'this' could mean any number of things. Meaning isn't fixed. Rather it's up to the viewer, the reader, or the musician to decide. And I think as John (Tilbury) puts it, that's what *The Tiger's Mind* is all about: about using one's imagination.

So I'm interested in how that might relate to my films and to narrative construction within them. I'm interested in how a certain linguistic ambiguity might be applied to their structure: going as far as the idea that one person might even see a totally different film to another. I'd like my films to be an invitation to imagine.

Certain shots in the film are particularly beautiful - would you talk about the idea of 'beauty as an alibi' or beauty as a political tool? Do you use beauty as a means to a particular end?

That's a can of worms question I think – the idea of use and beauty. Let's just say I'm interested in the language of cinema, or film as one that a large number of people can easily read and engage with. And that I don't distrust beauty (or high production values) or find beauty inherently spectacular and therefore bad, or anything like that. Quite the opposite. I think that it can be the reason that someone stays standing in the room and *that* has value. John (Tilbury) always says: '*Whatever you do, it has be worth someone's while to get out of bed and come and hear you play.*'

I've also thought a lot about something Cardew says: '*Notation is a way of making people move*' and I've been thinking about movement in lots of ways really: firstly movement as physical movement, as a kind choreographing of the social, in the way the score brings together a group of readers. Secondly movement as interpretive movement, so as in perceptual movement or shifting, the way the score produces imagination by asking you to interpret the many possible worlds contained within it, and then maybe the last one, that I suppose relates to this idea of beauty, movement in the emotional sense, as in to be moved by something. I find the score *The Tiger's Mind* very moving. It's the kind of insignificant little thing that exists in the world that makes me want to get out of bed in the morning. Film and cinema often have the same effect on me. I'm interested in that, in how it works, in what it means.

Agatha is an earlier of your films, based on a dream that Cardew recorded in 1967. It asks how we might communicate without speech, a theme that is continued by *The Tiger's Mind* that suggests alternative ways of communicating through doing and being together. Would you say something about Agatha's status as a 'footnote' to *The Tigers Mind* in the exhibition here at The Showroom?

Well actually *Agatha* really is a footnote to the whole project in a very literal sense. It has a funny story: on day one of *conversation one* when we are trying to think about assigning characters from the score, in Stuttgart, Celine (Condorelli) and John (Tilbury) were discussing the Tiger and so we were looking at Cardew's interpretation notes. (The original score comes with a set of character notes like a script or a play). So in the interpretation notes it says '*The Tiger should be on guard against manliness*.' And we were really thrown by that, why would the Tiger have to be on guard against manliness?

Was Cardew a feminist? Did this reveal a whole other aspect to his character as yet uncovered by scholarship?

We spent almost three hours discussing this and John introduced this extraordinary little story into the mix: *The Story of Agatha*, in which beings from another planet, indeterminate in respect to gender, make love or have sex through music. It's a very erotic little tale. They inhabit a planet without speech, in which other languages or ways of communicating take the place of speech: colour changing, sharing liquids, making music and so on. After three hours of discussing this we realised that actually it was a typo. The word wasn't 'manliness' it was 'manginess'. Which is kind of hilarious. But it was certainly the most productive error I think I've ever been a part of. *The Story of Agatha* subsequently became a footnote, in the form an insert, to the book, and even the smaller film. I couldn't get the story out of mind and I wanted to make something more low key, with friends, with no crew, with a smaller budget.

I tend to embark on these kinds of productions that are just epic in scale and I've been trying to think of ways to break that down so that smaller related productions might happen along on the way. Sometimes that has taken the form of performances, here it became a smaller film. As you mention it's also a thematic footnote and in some ways it prefigures some the themes that I would later take up (unknowingly really) in the film *The Tiger's Mind*: a language beyond speech, ways of talking or being together that circumvent words.

The Story of Agatha is also metaphor for an improvised form of production that goes beyond language: a utopian place beyond words. So it's also quite self-reflexive on that level, but again, and like the film *The Tiger's Mind*, in a way the doesn't break down the narrative, but rather its contained within it. So its prefigures *The Tiger's Mind* formally as well or even goes beyond it in that way. It's about itself and yet it's utterly fictional. Will (Holder) once said to me that Marguerite Duras had said, that for her, one had to see film as a representation of knowledge, cinema had to disappear. Well I'd say *Agatha, The Tiger's Mind*, they maybe point to the opposite idea, that cinema should stick around and knowledge should be contained within its characters.