Composing visual music: human traces, from an animator's perspective

Research Portfolio (REF)
Dr Julie Watkins

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Originality

This multi-component output is original as it expands on the concept of visual music to include embodied visceral affect and a broader visual arts context, which underpin the development of a new visual and expanded visual music and an original framework for composing. This work contributes to a less explored area of research focusing on composing visual music in the twenty-first century, helping to reframe visual music in terms of how it is perceived, how it is created and how it is displayed.

Rigour

This multi-component output examined existing practices within embodied interaction with sound and image. Over six years of interdiscplinary practice, several methodologies and modes of knowledge (know-how, know-what and know-that) were blended using the framework of Practice as Research, through iteratively creating, widely sharing and evaluating the work and undertaking further theoretical research, as evidenced below. The overarching methodology was to pursue two diametrically opposite modes of composition. Starting from the aspiration to create a universal language by synthesising visuals and audio in a meaningful way was evaluated against starting from the premise of expressivity and phenomenological experiences. This culminated in a framework for composition that frees visual music from musical structures, and offers a phenomenological approach to visual music composition that could be particularly apposite for artists, animators and performers.

Significance

In Watkins' PhD viva Joe King, artist film/maker at the Royal College of Art, and Susan Broadhurst, Professor of Performance and Technology at Brunel University London, recognised that the framework is an original contribution to the field that expands the concept of visual music. Collectively the journal articles, conference papers, installations and films of this multi-component output have been widely disseminated, adding knowledge to creative communities via international journals of contemporary artistic practice and research and in international communities concerned with film, art, music, dance, theatre and the sciences.

300 word statement
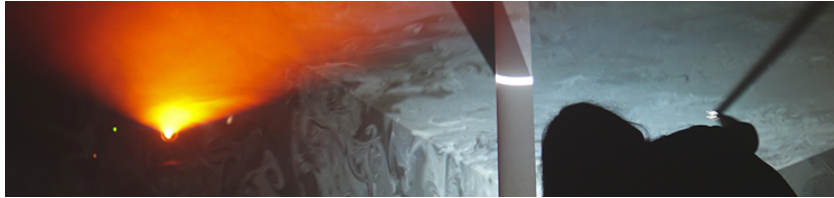Multi-component D-Journal Article

Contents

🟢 EMOTION IN ABSTRACT ANIMATION: DESIGNING A NEW FORM OF VISUAL MUSIC

📅 16th - 18th April   📍 Stephen Lawrence Gallery

Singing Light (Watkins, 2018) Photo Luca Portik

Emotion in Abstract Animation: designing a new form of visual music by Julie Watkins will feature *Singing Light-1 and Singing Light-2.*

Julie Watkins is a PhD Candidate and Senior Lecturer in Film and Television at the University of Greenwich

Singing Light-1 will be installed in the Television Studio. In a dark spacious room, a projector throws strong white animations onto the black walls and white flags. A fine haze fills the air. Looking at the walls and flags you see shapes animating as if responding to a voice, but if you step into the animation and look back in the direction of the projector the light forms ever-changing tunnels. Draw your fingers through the mist, touch the light and create shadows, as if touching a running stream. *Singing Light-2* will be transposed in the Gallery by being projected on to multiple translucent screens, allowing a different journey.
Singing Light is sung wordlessly and fused with abstract animation through composing motion, using audio-image units, sound and space and celebrating the human voice. It develops a methodology for creating pieces that afford s*oft fascination*.

Singing Light is the result of a framework I developed for composing visual music from an animator's perspective, to create non-narrative visual music with emotional impact. The significance of the framework is that visual music is freed from musical structures, which opens the visual music composition framework to artists,
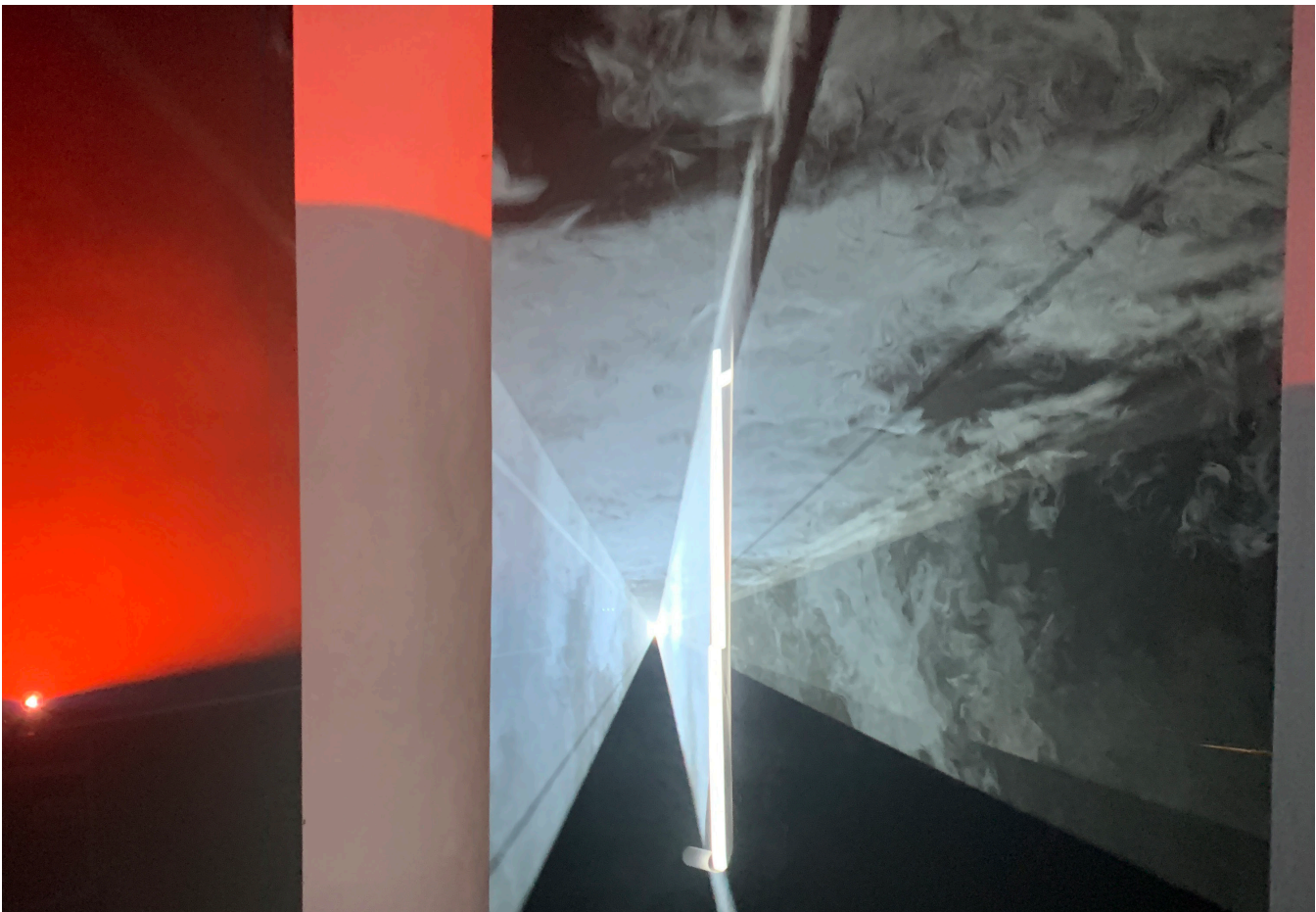
Emotion in Abstract Animation exhibition page on the Stephen Lawrence Gallery website
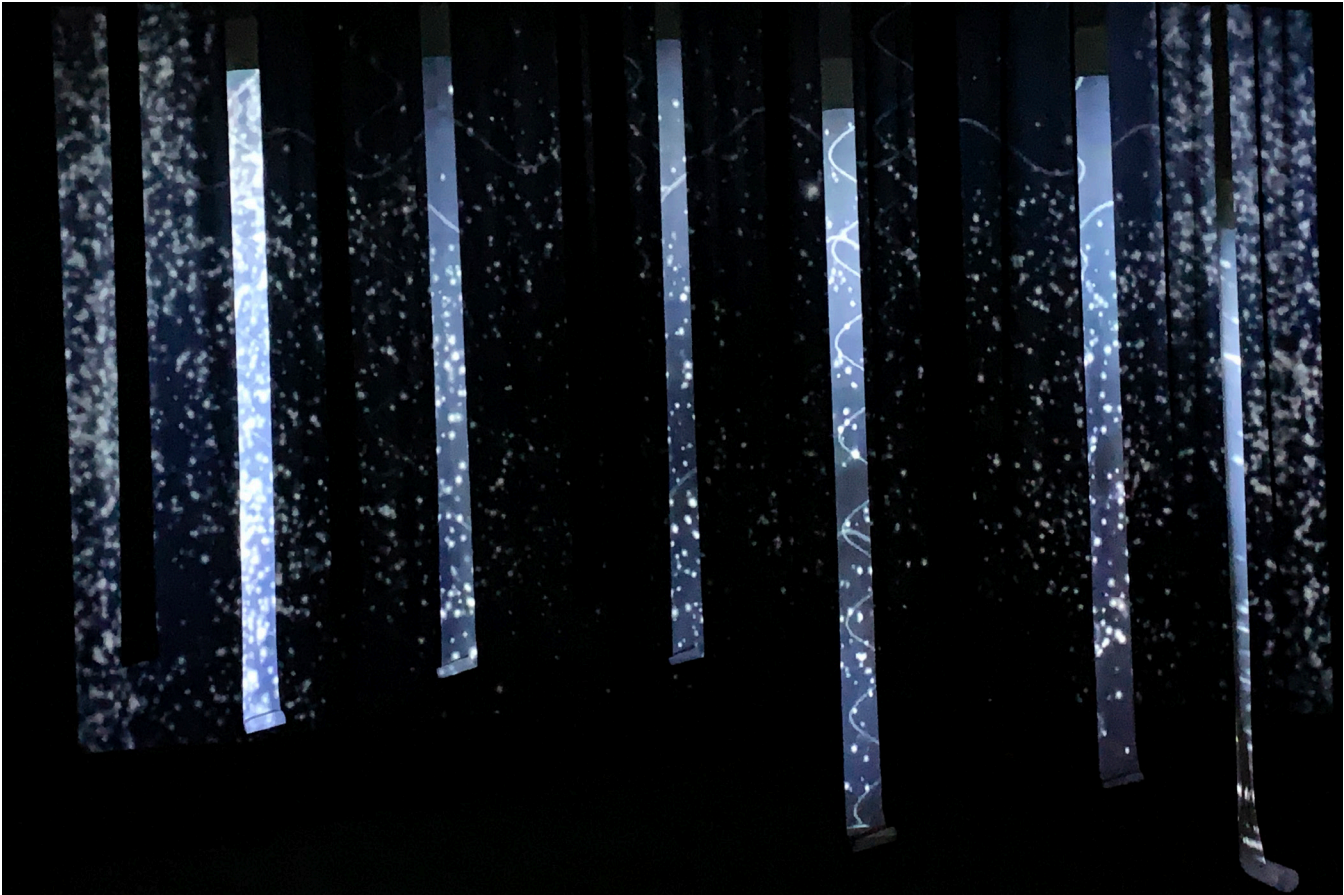
For more information visit:
http://www.greenwichunigalleries.co.uk/emotion-in-abstract-animation-designing-a-new-form-of-visual-music/

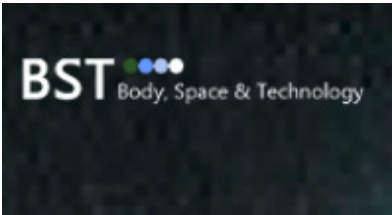Participants inside *Singing Light 1* in Emotion in Abstract Animation 2019 Photo Watkins

The participants' view inside *Singing Light 1* in Emotion in Abstract Animation 2019 Photo Watkins

*Singing Light 1* in Emotion in Abstract Animation 2019 Photo Watkins

Singing Light 2 in Emotion in Abstract Animation 2019 Stephen Lawrence Gallery Photo Watkins

Body, Space & Technology (*BST*) is a leading journal of contemporary artistic practice and research and joined the OLH platform in Summer 2017. Since it launched in 2000, *BST* has built a strong reputation for scholarly quality and innovation, as well as fostering a global academic community around its published content. *BST* publishes research into artistic practice that engages with digital technologies, particularly as these relate to bodily interaction and creativity, and in multi-disciplinary perspectives.

Body, Space & Technology, now in its nineteenth year of publication, is a leading on-line interdisciplinary, journal publishing on all aspects of contemporary arts practice.

The EBSCO indexed journal publishes non-themed refereed articles, artist-led perspectives on their practice, together with a wide range of reviews of books, performances, installations, design, as well as visual and sonic art. It also reports on related conferences, symposia and other arts based events. BST has moved to a new platform at the Open Library of the Humanities and the latest issue together with all material from previous issues is available on the Journal's web-site: www.bstjournal.com
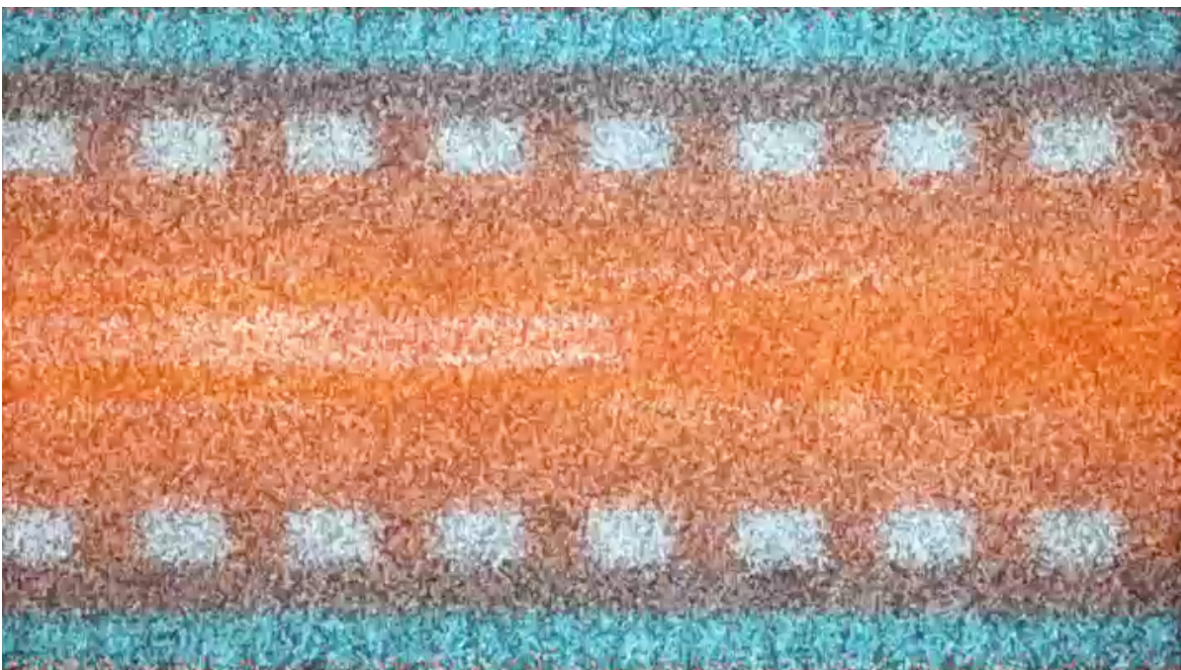
*Body, Space & Technology,*15 cover by Watkins, J., 2015. *Variation 6*

BST ●●○○
Body, Space & Technology

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Papers

Animacy, Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Visual Music: Enhancing appreciation of abstracted animation through wordless song

Author: Julie Watkins ✉

Abstract

This paper will discuss the exploration of key musical and visual parameters with the aim of enhancing the appreciation of Abstracted Animation [1] with varying degrees of animacy. A series of animations were created in response to multiple, wordless, sung, close variations of a song. Carefully delineated, visual parameters and a mapping of visual to audio relationships of the animations afforded insights into key audio–visual intersections and suggested future directions.

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Papers

An Investigation into Composing Visual Music Today

Author: Julie Watkins ✉

Abstract

This paper will discuss an ongoing investigation into developing methodologies for composing new abstract visual music pieces. This practice-based research is historicised in relation to seminal artists whose works have helped to form the canon of visual music and composers, theorists and scientists whose work touches on the same problematic domain. This investigation highlights both the key seminal influences underpinning the new work and the innovations embodied within it. The methodologies developed through creating several visual music pieces over three years are carefully delineated, affording insights into key intersections of abstract visual music, the idea of

BST Body, Space & Technology

Reading: Composing Visual Music: Visual Music Practice at
the Intersection of Technology, Audio-visua...

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Papers

Composing Visual Music: Visual Music Practice at the Intersection of Technology, Audio-visual Rhythms and Human Traces

Author: Julie Watkins ✉

Abstract

Creators of visual music face the challenge of retaining their own artistic impetus amidst an overwhelming choice of instruments, aesthetics, practice, techniques and technologies brought about by the impinging presence of a vast sea of data and tools. Navigating the data-driven ephemerality of artistic technology and its market-driven constraints by utilising strategies similar to composer Ron Kuivila's (1998) for getting 'under', 'over' and 'into' will be examined with the aim of elucidating methodologies for creating works that other artistic practitioners may find useful.

Leading pioneers of visual music were, of necessity, innovators of technology as well as visual musicians and artists. There is an intrinsic tension between developing new technology in order to re-imagine how music can be made visible and technological pioneers succumbing to the fascination of exploring the technology itself. Understanding aspects of perception, such as rhythm, is key to developing new technologies and processes in ways that avoid this pitfall and keep the experience of visual music central. Audio-visual synchronisation and rhythm are vital to create, in the seminal computer artist John Whitney's words: 'an art that should look like music sounds' (1980: front dust jacket).

Integrating the body, human traces and especially the human voice into visual music compositions underpins the key objective which is to create work that is non-narrative, 'abstracted animation'1 (Watkins, 2015), and yet suffused with human presence and emotion. Visual music can be perceived as overly repetitive, cold and alienating if it seems to embody a purely mechanical alignment of music to image, or if it seems disengaged from both human emotions and natural imagery.

This paper is part of an on-going investigation into developing methodologies for composing new abstract visual music pieces and, ultimately, parameters for a visual musical instrument.

Held annually in July, EVA London is one of the international Electronic Visualisation & the Arts conferences. The first EVA conference was held in 1990, with the intention to create a space for people using or interested in the new technologies to share their experiences and network in a friendly, collaborative atmosphere. EVA London's focus is on the development and application of visualisation technologies to various domains, including art, music, dance, theatre and the sciences.
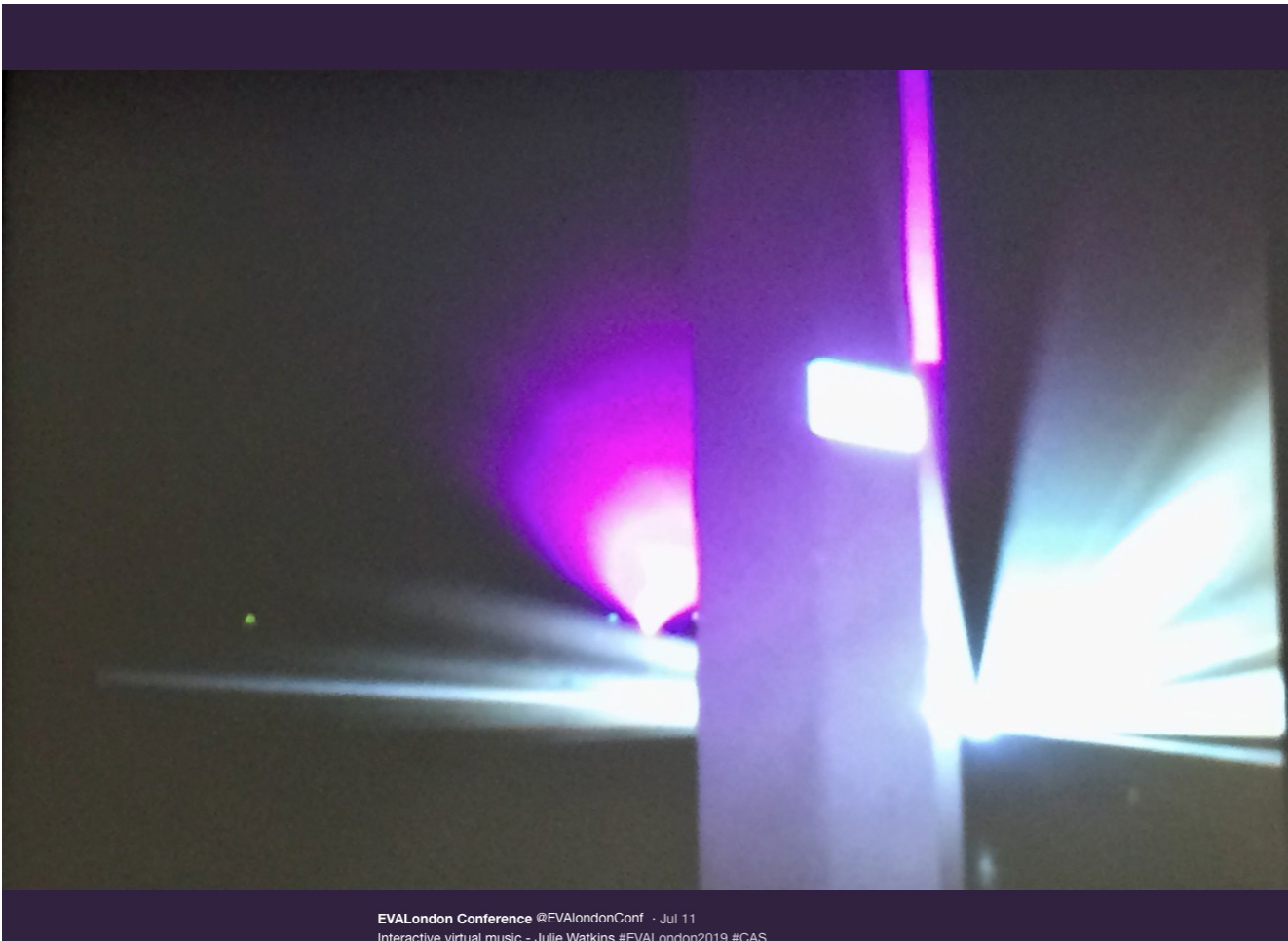
EVA London:

•   has a focus on visualisation for the arts and culture – interpreted broadly to include its implications, effects, and consequent strategies and policies

•   covers the burgeoning creative uses of digital media for works of art and creative productions

•   is a networking event for groups and projects, including European projects and groups

•   includes a free-of-charge Research Workshop for MA, MSc and PhD students and others, to share their research in a friendly and informal setting

•   is inspiring and informative, collaborative and friendly

EVA London is a conference of the Computer Arts Society (CAS), a specialist group of the BCS Chartered Institute for IT. It is sponsored and supported by these organisations.
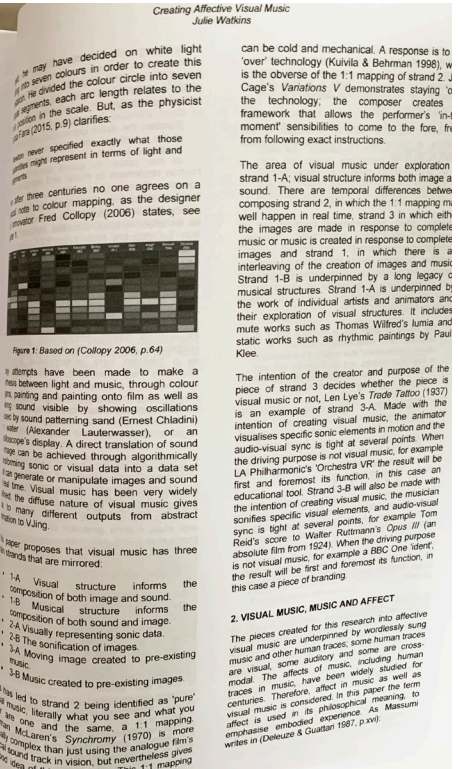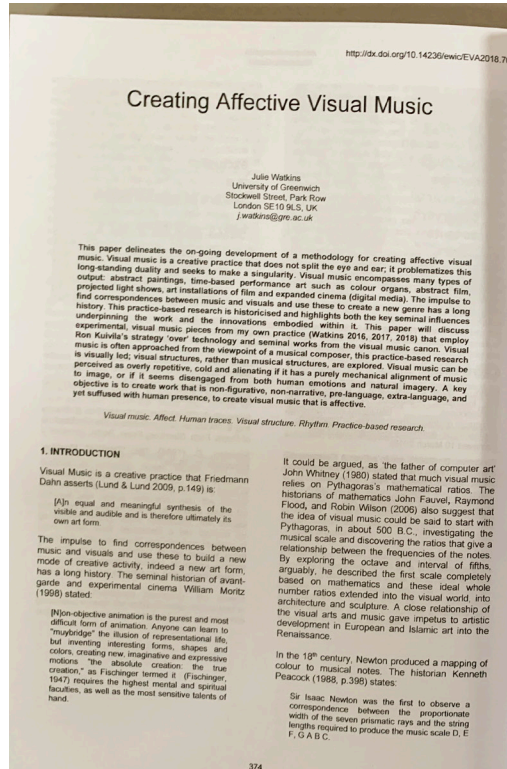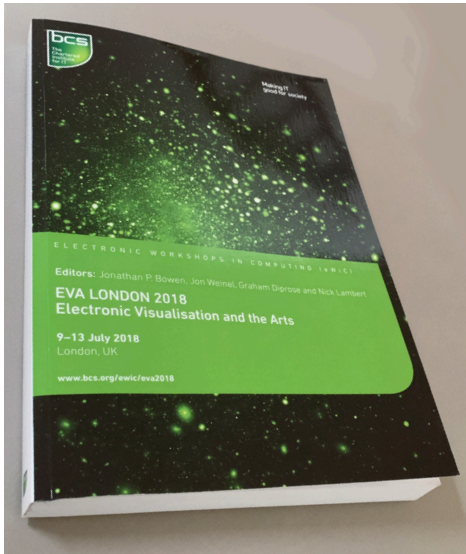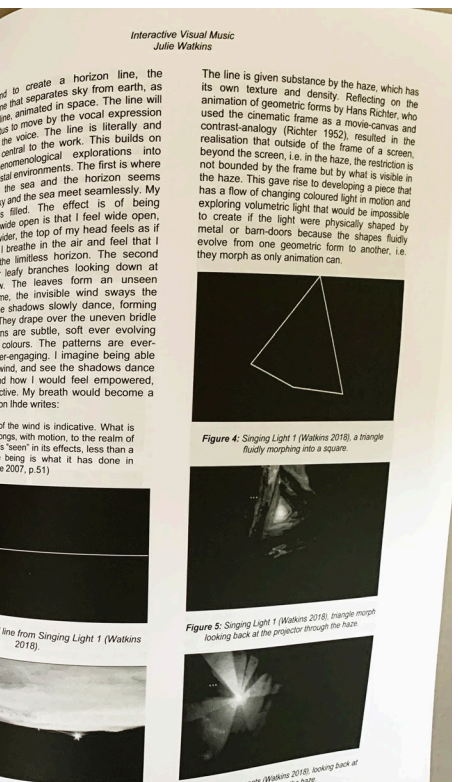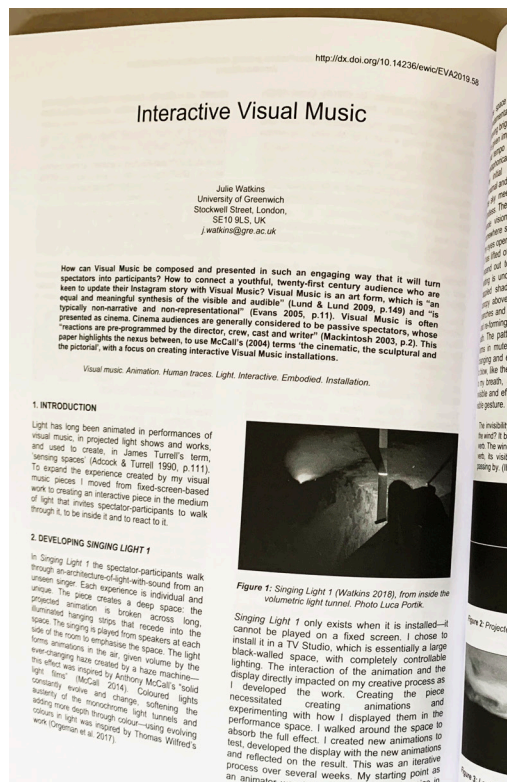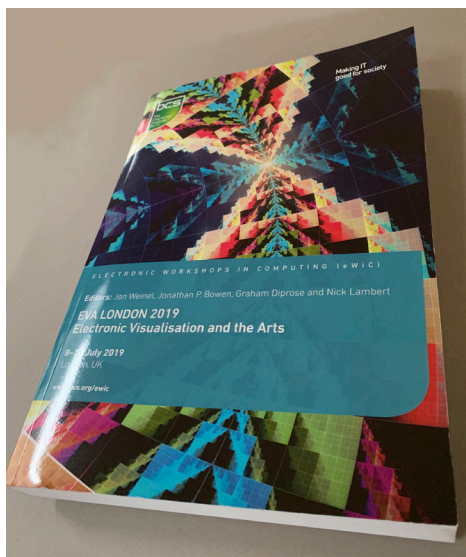
For more information visit: http://www.eva-london.org/about/

Images from: https://twitter.com/EVAlondonConf
EVALondon Conference@EVAlondonConf - Jul 11
Interactive visual music - Julie Watkins #EVALondon2019 #CAS

Creating Affective Visual Music published online and in print by the international Electronic Visualisation & the Arts conference 2018

Interactive Visual Music published online and in print by the international Electronic Visualisation & the Arts conference 2019

Creating Affective Visual Music

Authors: Watkins Julie
Publication date (Print): July 2018
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Conference theme: Electronic Visualisation and the Arts
Conference date: 9 - 13 July 2018
Keywords: Visual music, Affect, Human traces, Visual structure, Rhythm, Practice-based research

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Abstract

This paper delineates the on-going development of a methodology for creating affective visual music. Visual music is a creative practice that does not split the eye and ear; it problematizes this long-standing duality and seeks to make a singularity. Visual music encompasses many types of output: abstract paintings, time-based performance art such as colour organs, abstract film, projected light shows, art installations of film and expanded cinema (digital media). The impulse to find correspondences between music and visuals and use these to create a new genre has a long history. This practice-based research is historicised and highlights both the key seminal influences underpinning the work and the innovations embodied within it. This paper will discuss experimental, visual music pieces from my own practice (Watkins 2016, 2017, 2018) that employ Ron Kuivila's strategy 'over' technology and seminal works from the visual music canon. Visual music is often approached from the viewpoint of a musical composer, this practice-based research is visually led; visual structures, rather than musical structures, are explored. Visual music can be perceived as overly repetitive, cold and alienating if it has a purely mechanical alignment of music to image, or if it seems disengaged from both human emotions and natural imagery. A key objective is to create work that is non-figurative, non-narrative, pre-language, extra-language, and yet suffused with human presence, to create visual music that is affective.

Presented and published online and in print 2018
Read the full article at: http://dx.doi.org/10.14236/ewic/EVA2018.70

RECORD | ABSTRACT | ARTICLE

Interactive Visual Music

Authors: Julie Watkins
Publication date (Print): July 2019
Conference name: Proceedings of EVA London 2019 (EVA 2019)
Conference theme: Electronic Visualisation and the Arts
Conference date: 8 - 11 July 2019
Keywords: Visual music, Animation, Human traces, Light, Interactive, Embodied, Installation

Read this article at

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Abstract

How can Visual Music be composed and presented in such an engaging way that it will turn spectators into participants? How to connect a youthful, twenty-first century audience who are keen to update their Instagram story with Visual Music? Visual Music is an art form, which is "an equal and meaningful synthesis of the visible and audible" (Lund & Lund 2009, p.149) and "is typically non-narrative and non-representational" (Evans 2005, p.11). Visual Music is often presented as cinema. Cinema audiences are generally considered to be passive spectators, whose "reactions are pre-programmed by the director, crew, cast and writer" (Mackintosh 2003, p.2). This paper highlights the nexus between, to use McCall's (2004) terms 'the cinematic, the sculptural and the pictorial', with a focus on creating interactive Visual Music installations.

Presented and published online and in print 2019
Read the full article at: http://dx.doi.org/10.14236/ewic/EVA2019.58

Presenting *Songs Series Animacy* at DHRA Dublin City University 2015: a Paper, an Installation, a permanent record on Vimeo & in book of Abstracts

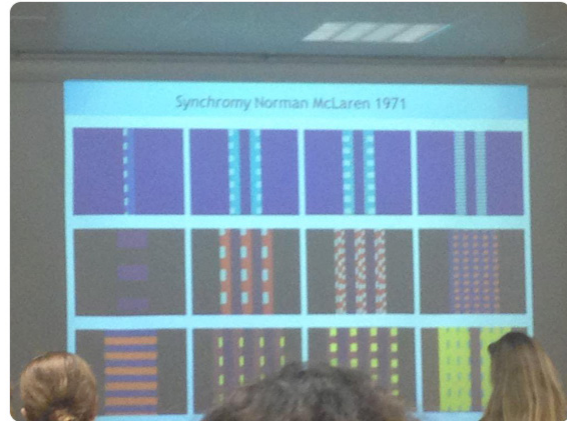## Song Series Animacy

A pilot study to refine parameters

More *Variations* are on display in the conference
I welcome feedback:
j.watkins@gre.ac.uk.

Conference Paper *Songs Series Animacy* presented at DRHA 2015

DRHA @drha2015 — Follow

sonic arts session at #drha2015 Julie Watkins 'Song Series Animacy' The dots & bars represent different notes

Synchromy Norman McLaren 1971

6:55 AM - 1 Sep 2015 from Dublin City, Ireland

Dr Stacey Pitsillides @RestInPixels — Follow

Julie Watkins, discussing Song Series Animation, sonics, anthropomorphism & visual narrative @cpdaUoG #DRHA2015

6:56 AM - 1 Sep 2015
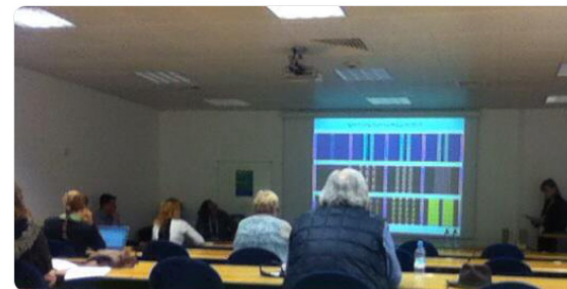
Film *Songs Series Animacy* 2015 looping all evening on two screens in Dublin City University theatre at DRHA 2015

DRHA Retweeted

School of Design @SchoolDesignUoG · 1 Sep 2015
Visual sound. j Watkins present high quality research @drha2015 @DublinCityUni #cpdaUog based @UniofGreenwich

From https://twitter.com/drha2015

Abstracts of DRHA Dublin 2015
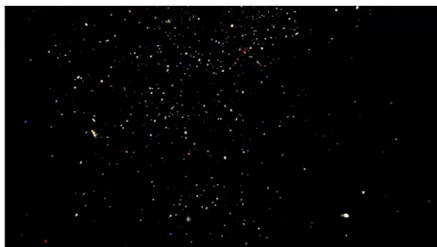
Song Series Animacy

Julie watkins

Song Series Animacy is a practice-based research project exploring the relationship between motion with intention (1) created in response to the emotion of song and embodied in speed (2), vocal quality (3) and mode. Animacy, the phenomenon of the pattern of movement of 2-D geometric shapes giving the subjective impression that the shape is alive, has long been studied by both animators (4) and neuroscientists (5).

The paper will discuss the development of this investigation through the production of a series of Animacies in response to multiple, wordless, sung variations of two songs. The musical parameters have been chosen that elicit emotional, physiological and psychological responses: the mode, percussive quality and tempo (6). To encapsulate the main emotive

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Song Series Animacy Variations 1-9
julie 1001 · 53 views

To see *Song Series Animacy* 2015 visit Vimeo
https://vimeo.com/user5379534

https://issuu.com/christopherpressler/docs/abstracts

Presenting conference paper *Audio-visual composition: an investigation of how best to compose no-figurative gestural visual music* at SOUND/MAGE at the University of Greenwich 2016:
a Paper, two Installations in the Stephen Lawrence Gallery, London UoG and a permanent record of the visual music

Top images: presenting paper, bottom left Waterfall Installation showing *Ambience 1, Ambience 2 and Ambience 3* 2016, bottom right solo Multi-layered Installation of *Ambience 1-2-3* 2016, both in Stephen Lawrence Gallery project space.
For more information visit http://www.gre.ac.uk/ach/events/soundimage/conference-archive

Presenting conference paper *An investigation into evoking poetic and restorative places with visual music* at DHRA University of Brighton 2016:
a Paper, presentation of *Ambience 1, Reservoir* and a permanent record of the visual music compositions on Vimeo

Presenting paper and Ambience 1 at DRHA University of Brighton 2016

Presenting conference paper *Data ache and visual music practice meditated by instrument design* at DHRA University of Plymouth 2017:
a Paper, presentation of *Ambience 1* and *Ambience 2* and a permanent record of the visual music compositions on Vimeo & paper in the book of Abstracts
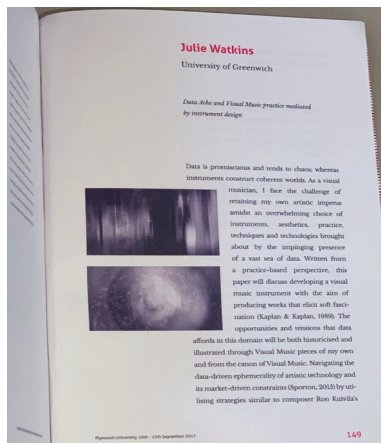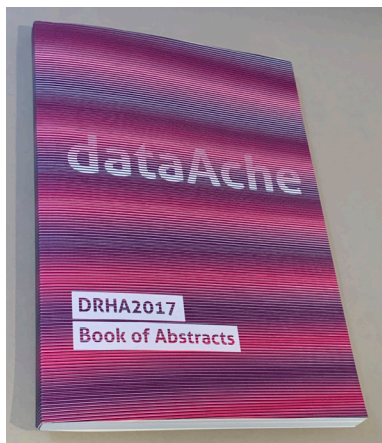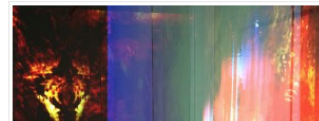

Data ache and visual music practice meditated by instrument design
in Abstracts of DRHA 2017 University of Plymouth
To see the films *Ambience 1, Ambience 2 and Ambience 3* visit Vimeo
https://vimeo.com/user5379534
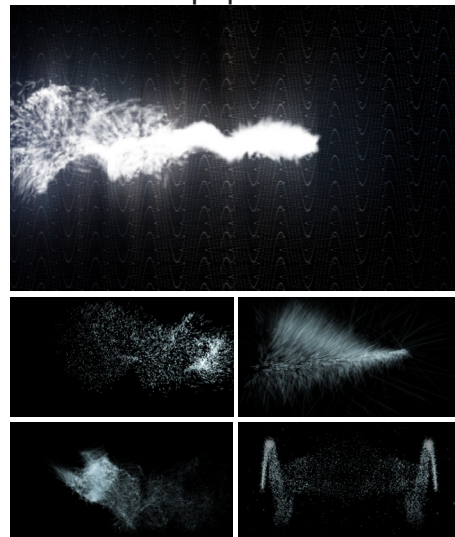
Ambience 1 2016

Presenting conference paper *Singing Light: creating affective visual music* at Seeing Sound at Bath Spa University 2018:
a Paper, presentation of *Sky 2* 2018 and a permanent record of the visual music composition on Vimeo & paper in Abstracts online

From the Abstract online at http://www.seeingsound.co.uk/2018-papers/

From http://www.seeingsound.co.uk/2018-photos/
For more information visit http://www.seeingsound.co.uk/2018

Stills from *Sky 2* 2018
Presented with the paper

Interactive installation of *Singing Light 1* 2018 at SOUND/MAGE 2018 London, at the University of Greenwich
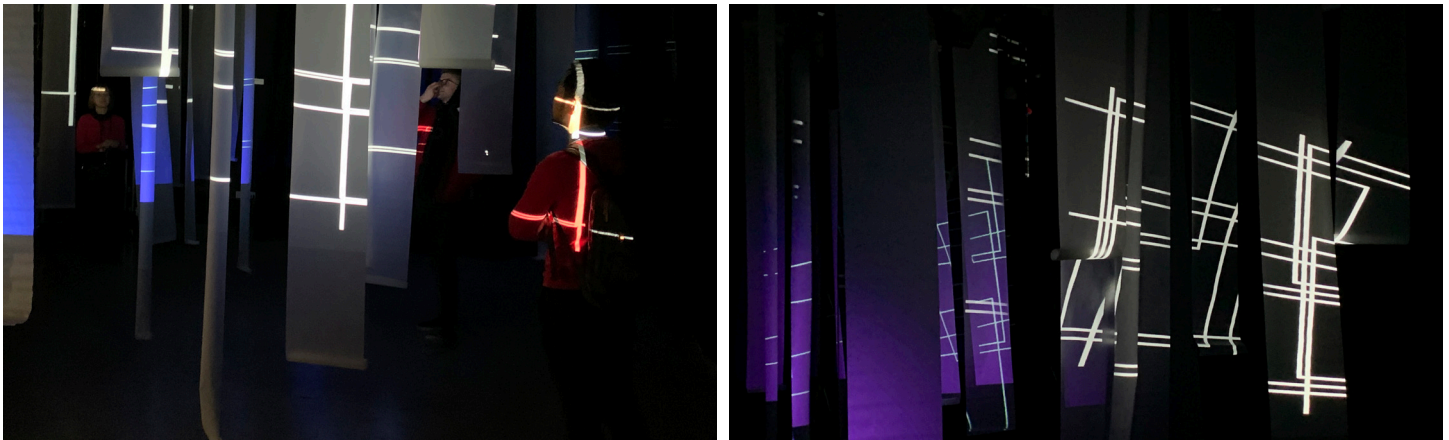

Participants (top and left images) and Watkins (bottom right image) interacting with *Singing Light 1* interactive installation November 10th and 11th 2018 at SOUND/IMAGE 2018 at the University of Greenwich Photos by Luca Portika for SOUND/IMAGE 2018
Documentation video available on Vimeo https://vimeo.com/user5379534
For more information visit http://www.gre.ac.uk/ach/events/soundimage/conference-archive

Interactive installation of *Singing Light 2* 2019 at SOUND/MAGE 2019 London, at the University of Greenwich

Participants interacting with *Singing Light 2* (left image) and opposite view of installation (right image) interactive installation November 9th and 10th 2019 at SOUND/IMAGE 2019 at the University of Greenwich
Photos by Julie Watkins for SOUND/IMAGE 2018
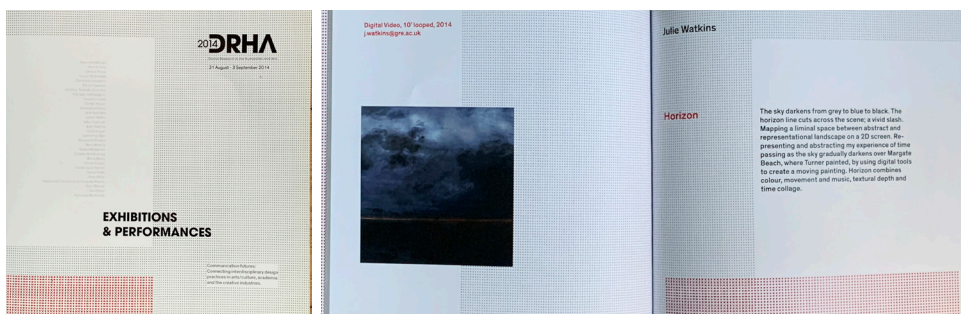Documentation video available on Vimeo https://vimeo.com/user5379534

Fixed Screen Installation of *Horizon* 2014 at DRHA 2014, in the Stephen Lawrence Gallery, London UoG

Horizon 2014
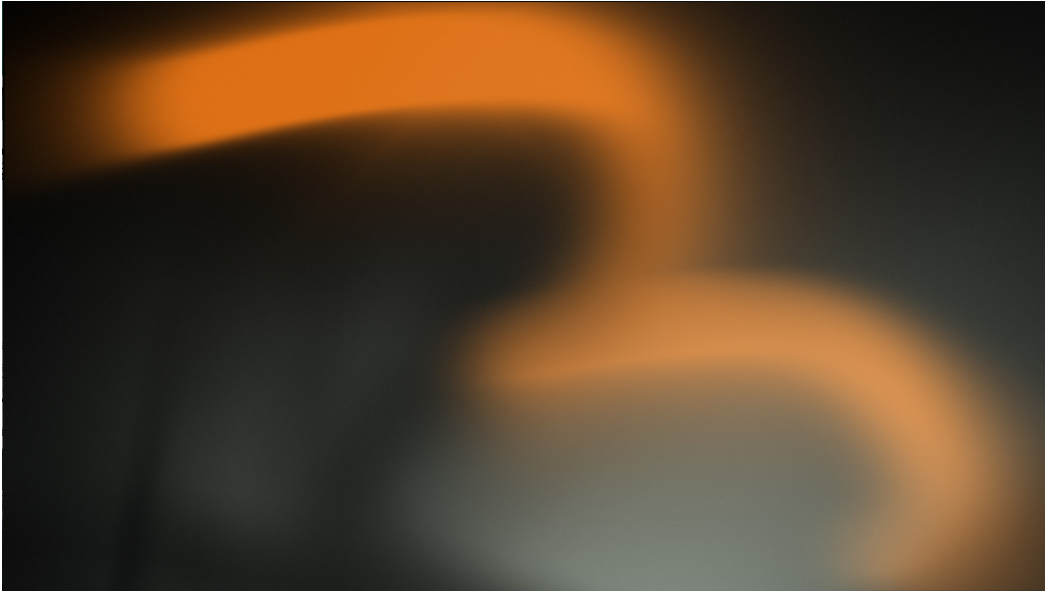*Horizon* 2014 is available on Vimeo https://vimeo.com/user5379534
For more information visit http://drha.uk/2014/about/

Horizon 2014 documented in DRHA 2014 book of Exhibitions & Performances published in print and online

Fixed Screen Installation of *Shadow Sounds* 2015 at SOUND/MAGE 2015 in the Stephen Lawrence Gallery, London UoG

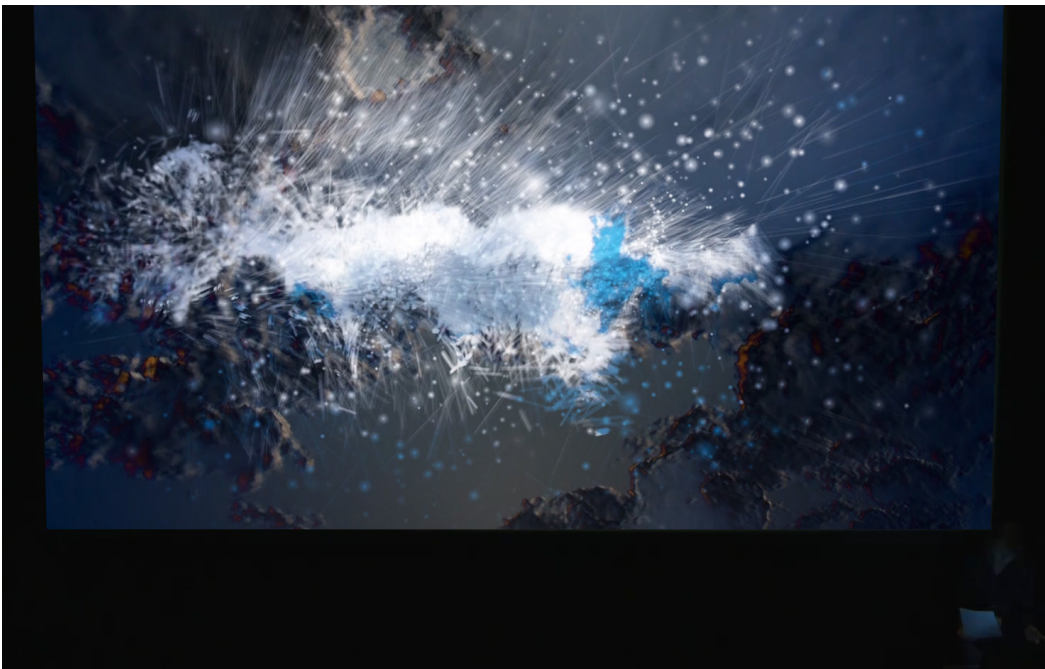*Shadow Sounds* 2015 is available on Vimeo
https://vimeo.com/user5379534
For more information visit
http://www.gre.ac.uk/ach/events/soundimage/conference-archive

***Sky* 2017 at SOUND/MAGE 2017 in the theatre at UoG**

Julie Watkins photo of *Sky* 2017 during presentation in the theatre

Sky 2017 is available on Vimeo
https://vimeo.com/user5379534
For more information visit
http://www.gre.ac.uk/ach/events/soundimage/conference-archive