



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

UOA C13

ARCHITECTURE, BUILT
ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING



RESEARCHER

Jules Rawlinson

OUTPUT TITLE

A Requiem for Edward Snowden

OUTPUT TYPE


Audio-visual Composition & Performance

DATE OF PERFORMANCE

2014 – 2016

FIG. 1

Promotional poster for Edinburgh Festival Fringe, 2015. Design Jules Rawlinson.



A REQUIEM FOR EDWARD SNOWDEN

A digital opera by
Matthew Collings
and Jules Rawlinson

8pm 20-22 August 2015
Stockbridge Church (Venue 317)
Tickets: £10/£7 conc/£6 students

Magnetic North^o made in SCOTLAND fringe The Edinburgh Festival
07 - 31 August 2015



Links to output:

Short edit:

https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/A+Requiem+for+Edward+Snowden/1_335w9s6f

Trailer:

https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/A+Requiem+for+Edward+Snowden+-+Trailer/1_o35uek5b

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.7488/dc9d7b09-217c-45b8-a8ca-125f50890cf4>

01 / STATEMENT

A Requiem for Edward Snowden is a 50-minute audio-visual work by Matthew Collings and Jules Rawlinson which addresses surveillance, data privacy, loss of faith, moral choice, and personal sacrifice in an environment where we are totally reliant on electronic communication and daily routines; and in which our privacy is routinely compromised.

The work is performed by a chamber trio comprising violin, cello and clarinet, with live electronics and live visuals.

The work is multi-layered and textured, both sonically and visually, and includes computer generated, fixed-media and live captured imagery, manipulated in real-time.

This output makes an original contribution to performance practice knowledge about audio-visual 'comprovisation' (fixed composition with open or improvised elements) using audio-visual narratives of surveillance and sousveillance.

In addition, it makes an original contribution in terms of experimenting with distributed agency in respect of sound-image production. Collings and Rawlinson worked in the studio together in a series of twelve day-long sessions over an initial period of 6 weeks to develop a set of prototype audio-visual sketches that could be arranged for the full ensemble.

These sketches explored cryptographic treatment of live camera input, masking, displacement and distortion together with representations of data, networks, street-level surveillance and drone footage. These studio sessions focused on the opportunities that each of these offered for combination and manipulation and for congruence and contrast with the audio part. For example, visual congruence might be demonstrated by threaded clusters of computer-generated strokes responding to audio feature tracking and represent the slow, detuned glissandi of the string part.

The main outputs from this work are seven performances in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Utrecht, a digital release on Denovali Records, and contributions to an international conference in Edinburgh and a national conference in Aberdeen.

FIG. 2
Performance at Reid Hall,
Edinburgh, October 2014.
Photo courtesy of Chris Scott.



FIG. 3
Performance at Reid Hall,
Edinburgh, October 2014.
Photo courtesy of Chris Scott.



02 / RESEARCH DIMENSIONS

A Requiem for Edward Snowden is a 50-minute audio-visual work by Matthew Collings and Jules Rawlinson which addresses surveillance, data privacy, loss of faith, moral choice, and personal sacrifice in an environment where we are totally reliant on electronic communication and daily routines; and in which our privacy is routinely compromised.

The main outputs from this work are seven performances in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Utrecht, a digital release on Denovali Records, and contributions to an international conference in Edinburgh and a national conference in Aberdeen.

Informed by Edward Snowden's leak of NSA documents in 2013, this practice-led research examines audio-visual narratives of surveillance and sousveillance and approaches to developing integrated audio-visual composition and performance, including distributed agency in respect of sound-image production.

The work is performed by a chamber trio comprising violin, cello and clarinet, with live electronics and live visuals. The work is multi-layered and textured, both sonically and visually, and includes computer generated, fixed-media and live captured imagery, manipulated in real-time.

Rawlinson created and performed the visual elements and contributed to the sound design and musical score. The music was chiefly composed by Collings with input from the performers, who could see the effect that their playing had on the visual display and subsequently modify their playing, which in turn influenced the visuals.

'With clouds of data shifting across the screen, endless shots of surveillance cameras and even the trio of live musicians themselves being surreptitiously filmed, [*A Requiem for Edward Snowden*] makes its points in often poetic, indirect ways.'

David Kettle,
The Scotsman, 22 August 2015.

'[*A Requiem for Edward Snowden*] brings together an urgent and affecting piece of music with a smart set of projected visuals... Together, music and images urge us to meditate on the fates of people such as Snowden (in enforced exile in Russia), Julian Assange (still holed up in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London) and Chelsea Manning (rotting in a military prison in the US). More than that, they provide a chilling commentary upon our surveillance society.'

Mark Brown,
The Herald, 1 November 2015.

'A hectic montage of everyday surveillance footage and violated cryptography.'

The Wire, July 2016.



FIG. 4
Performance at
Werkspoorkathedraal,
Culturele Zondag Uitfeest,
Utrecht, September 2015.
Copyright Jelmer de Haas.

FIG. 5
Performance at Reid Hall,
Edinburgh, October 2014.
Photo courtesy of Chris Scott.



03 / ORIGINALITY

The main contribution in developing the visuals for *A Requiem for Edward Snowden* revolve around performance practice relating to audio-visual ‘comprovisation’ (fixed composition with open or improvised elements) and audio-visual narratives of surveillance.

Innovative visual elements include creation, composing and processing of:

- 2 and 3-dimensional computer-generated audio-reactive geometries with machine-listening analysis of frequency and amplitude of audio signals generated by the musicians and electronic sound.
- Fixed-media material in the form of public domain images and video relevant to the themes of the work, together with Rawlinson’s original photography and footage.
- Live video-capture of the performers using multiple high-definition web cameras providing different focus and angles.

The research provided a model for how audiences could be encouraged to question their relationships with mobile devices and social media, and to consider how their personal information might be used, and by whom.

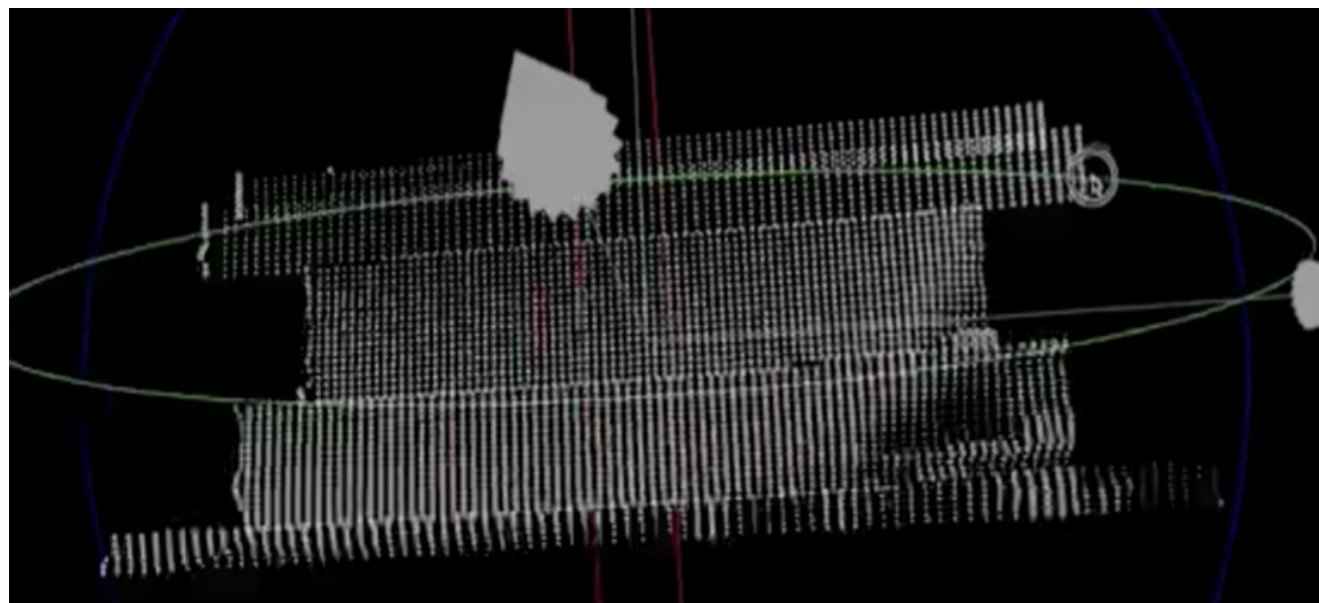


FIGS. 6-8
Performance at CCA, Glasgow,
March 2015. Photos courtesy
of Alex Woodward.



FIGS. 9-10

Audio-reactive prototypes, April 2014. Images by Jules Rawlinson.



04 / RIGOUR

Early studio sessions explored cryptographic treatment of live camera input, masking, displacement and distortion, together with representations of data, networks, street-level surveillance and drone footage.

Subsequent intensive and regular studio sessions involved rehearsals, live camera work and video recordings. With each public performance visual material was recorded that could be folded into the next, providing additional layers of complexity while also serving to illustrate the concept of data collection.

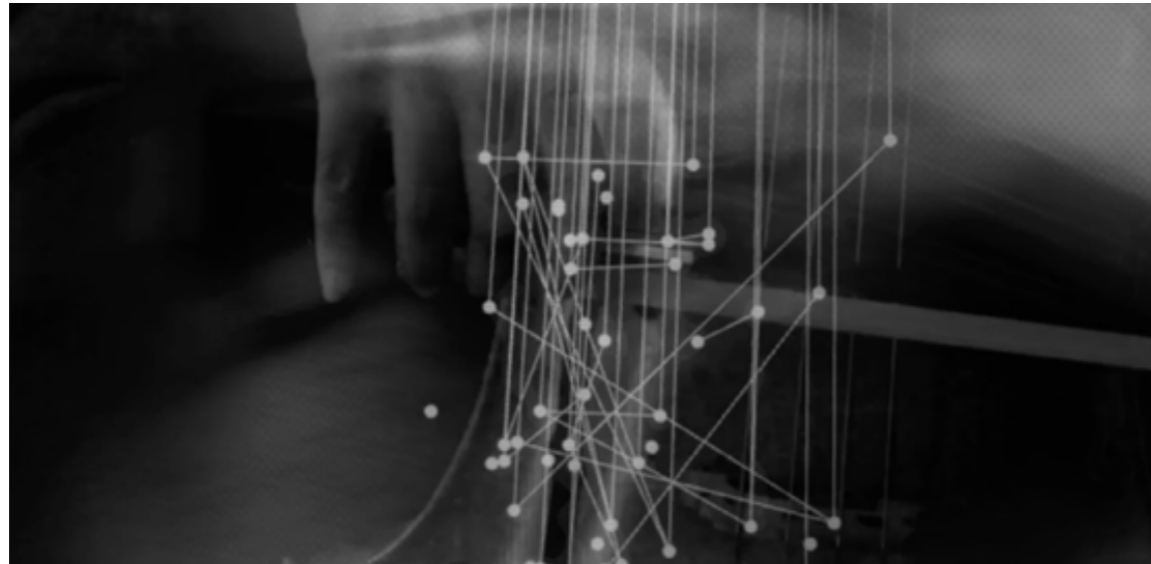
Work with an external producer (Nick Bone at Magnetic North) for the third set of performances led to new insights on the dramaturgy of the work. Feedback from reviews suggested more critical exploration of the visual material leading to additional creation and curation of material based on social media (specifically Facebook profiles and 'empty' hotel rooms) and consideration of narrative.

Time spent rehearsing the work with the Lunatree Ensemble in Utrecht, together with confidence in established performance practice, allowed for the development of new approaches in the visuals, in particular parallel processing chains for a single input across two channels.

The production of the fixed-media releases and digital download introduced further refinements in audio-visual relationships, including the design of printed artwork.

FIGS. 11–16

Frame exports from fixed media
digital download, March 2016.
Images by Jules Rawlinson.



05 / SIGNIFICANCE



FIG. 17
CD and LP artwork, March 2016.
Design and photo Jules
Rawlinson.

The initial performance of *A Requiem for Edward Snowden* was one of 55 projects out of 291 applications selected for support with an Artist's Bursary by Creative Scotland.

Support was also provided by New Media Scotland's Alt-W Fund. The first performance was made to a capacity audience at Edinburgh University's Reid Hall on 11 October 2014.

Additional performances & presentations:

- Released on CD, LP and digital formats by Denovali Records (FIG. 17) April 2016 and includes a full visual download, which blends live material with studio revisions and performance. The release was reviewed by *The Wire* magazine in July 2016. See Appendix, page 18.
- CCA, Glasgow, as part of the *Cryptic Nights* season, 5 March 2015.
- Creative Scotland's *Made In Scotland* showcase at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 20–22 August 2015.
- Collings and Rawlinson were invited to speak about the work at the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) Summer School on Privacy and Identity Management, held at the University of Edinburgh, August 2015.
- Werkspoorkathedraal, Utrecht, as part of the *Gaudeamus Muziekweek* and *Uitfeest* events on 6 September 2015, and this same event was also the opening of the *For Cryin' Out Loud: Music and Politics Conference* at the University of Utrecht.
- *Sound Festival* at Aberdeen Arts Centre, Aberdeen, 23 October 2015. The team was invited to speak about the nature of their collaboration for the Video and New Music Workshop at the *In Cahoots Conference* which ran in parallel with *Sound Festival*.

06 / APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Media weblinks

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160407112049/http://www.wow247.co.uk/2015/08/24/music-review-a-requiem-for-edward-snowden/>

<http://www.alledinburghtheatre.com/a-requiem-for-edward-snowden-edfringe-2015-review/>

http://www.heraldscotland.com/arts_ents/13928516.The_Sound_Festival_review__Impressively_diverse

Appendix 2: Publicity pages

<https://www.madeinscotlandshowcase.com/shows/a-requiem-for-edward-snowden/>

<https://www.magneticnorth.org.uk/productions/all-productions/a-requiem-for-edward-snowden>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150908203025/>



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