Picnoleptic seamless

Our reassuring belief in a unified reality betrays a rather more fragmented truth, in which what appears to be constituted by its own essence is more likely to be rendered by the cuts, breaks and interruptions between discrete parts, each one too small to fully grasp.

Swapping skills and materials, the artists behind *Stage Fright* formed a web of exchange and quotation, with each artist applying his or her processes and methodologies to the products of the others. Videos shot by Laura Buckley were selected and cut by Haroon Mirza according to their visual and audio shapes. The resulting samples were then given to Dave MacLean, who juxtaposed them based on their sound values alone; composing an audio track whose corresponding visual sequence was the result of chance, albeit within carefully set-out parameters. This process momentarily segregated the sensory registers of audiovisual material—image and sound—allowing each, in turn, a guiding role before bringing them together again in the finished videos. The resulting animated montages consist of extremely brief clips that operate independently of their original sources and are infused with the preferences, styles and speeds of the three collaborators. At this point, the web of exchange developed a feedback loop in which the videos were handed back to Buckley, who has staged them in an installation typical of her aesthetic of geometric constructions and plain industrial materials.

The recording, editing and sequencing technologies used in the making of *Stage Fright* have produced richly patterned films that rely on the rapid sequencing and repetition of very short clips—too short, in fact, to be clearly or distinctly comprehended. Their rapid-fire pace begs the viewer to keep up, charmed and baffled by the intensity of the rhythm—a feat that seems within reach until the spell is broken by the comedy of a sample taken so entirely out of context as to be ridiculous, its outlandishness snapping their attention back to the physical surroundings and prosaic straight edges of the here and now.

While it might be methodologically driven by an ethos of collaboration and synthesis, *Stage Fright*, with its staccato videos and exact sculptural lines, evinces an aesthetic of striking fragmentation. This paradox of togetherness and separation—flow and interruption—corresponds to the conflicted nature of consciousness, whose sense of a unified temporality, impressions of smoothness and

illusions of identity mask an altogether different reality in which multiplicity and fragmentation rule, and meaning is generated by endings; by the little deaths of image, sound and text.

In his 1988 text *Pure War*, Paul Virilio alludes to the notion of 'picnolepsy', in relation to the fragmentation of both the external world and inner mental life that characterise our era. Due in part to technologies of speed and warfare, the ubiquitous and rhythmic shattering of identity that picnolepsy refers to, is in fact essential to existence. For Virilio, it is interruption, not continuation, which constitutes the whole. From the physical (sleeping) to the existential (death), interruptions produce knowledge and duration; they constitute a life, an idea, a thing. Picnolepsy opens the gates for individual consciousness, vision and works of art to be admitted to the regime of interruption:

> "Epilepsy is little death and picnolepsy, tiny death. What is living, present, conscious, here, is only so because there's an infinity of little deaths, little accidents, little breaks, little cuts in the soundtrack, as William Burroughs would say, in the sound track and the visual track of what's lived. [...] Our vision is a montage, a montage of temporalities which are the product not only of the powers that be, but of the technologies that organise time."[1]

The apparent seamlessness of individual consciousness and the seeming unity of a work of art mask the shattered reality of their constitutive processes and components. There is a fundamentally unresolved identity at play in the making of *Stage Fright*, with Mirza extracting fragments of Buckley's artistic voice, offering them to MacLean to integrate the two blind, before returning them to Buckley for a final synthetic chorus. Such behind-the-scenes exchanges and shared authorship, while revealing a strong sense of trust, also hint at the fundamental—or perhaps rather metaphysical—disconnections implicit in any group, process or product.

—Ellen Mara De Wachter

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[1] Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer. *Pure War*. Semiotext(e). 1998. P. 40