

Rokeby interview with Laura Buckley, Haroon Mirza, and Dave Maclean/ “Hugo Paris” about their project Stage Fright.

Note: *If I were to select a title for this interview, I would call it:*

“Buckley and Her Bitches present everyday sounds, elements of percussion, wit of the staircase, sex celling, non-Transformer toys, and dance music.

VK: The linear trajectory regarding the production of Stage Fright begins with the visual medium of Laura's videos. Laura, can you tell me more about the everydayness you are capturing? Also, do you look for scenes that contain a particular audio/melodic quality?

LB: I'm capturing sound in two ways, as my films document everyday activity as well as my studio practice which consists of the manipulation of materials in both the studio and non-studio environment. It goes between a deliberate gesture or action and something incidental in the background (John Cage).

My first films were silent. As I got further into editing, I began to enjoy sound. My editing is quite abrupt and fast moving, and I began working with this kind of random percussion. I worked with the sounds of falling and tearing, which led to more aggressive actions like whipping. Much of my footage is documenting failure, building things up to watch them collapse. The background voices bring an emotional element contrasting with the material sounds.

VK: Is Haroon selecting audio clips on his own or do you give him some instruction regarding the audio bits that you find most appealing?

LB: Both. I preselected some clips which Haroon then edited. The clips were mainly short and consisted of one action. Haroon then edited them further to reduce and refine to a more singular sound/noise.

VK: Haroon, what audio moments in Laura's short visual narratives grab your attention and why?

HM: I found the clips to have quite a musical quality in that many of them seemed to have an element of percussion. For example there is one clip of protective plastic being removed from a square of acetate that renders a very piercing sound reminiscent of contemporary electronic music. I'm attracted to it not because of its auditory quality per se but rather because it's an analogue sound that could be mistaken for an electronic sound. Many of the sounds produced by the dropping, moving, or the placing of acetate has this electro-percussive feel, which inevitably puts the 'music' within the realms of a particular genre. I don't think Dave nor I would normally try to produce music of that nature so there's a significant element of experimentation involved. Most of the clips have been edited down to a fraction of their original length and it's unexpected how musical everyday sounds can be.

VK: Dave, at what point do you start addressing the material? From the very beginning with Laura's original footage or do you wait until Haroon edits it and passes it on to you?

DM: Haroon edited the raw footage Laura gave him into snippets of sound/visuals. Then I sat down with a computer program and started to put the parts together to a bpm click in a semi-random order. The process is much the same as music production, or even making a collage...moving the samples around until the composition starts to take shape.

VK: Haroon and Dave, regarding the line *I don't think Dave or I would normally try to produce music of that nature so there's a significant element of experimentation involved*—what kind of music do/would you normally produce? For example, Dave, you are in band...

HM: Well I think it's important to clarify the distinctions between what Dave and I do as individuals as this is the first time we've collaborated. Perhaps Dave would be better speaking for himself, but I would say

he writes unconventional music through traditional production processes. Whereas I add pattern and structure to noise through sculptural means to flirt with the idea of music.

DM: The band I'm in is called Django Django (www.myspace.com/djangotime). The band has a huge amount of influences from acid house to sixties garage and eighties pop. The link between this piece and Django Django is the production style I use when I'm recording with the band. The computer program used is pretty much the same...only with the art piece I'm moving around video files as well as audio.

VK: Under what context were you drawn to work with one another?

HM: I like Dave and Laura very much as individuals. Maybe this is because I like what they do as artists or maybe because I enjoy their company. Either way, I feel we have become collaborators in quite an organic way. A little like how liquid bubbles attract each other and merge; the surface tension and discrepancies in air pressure of bubbles might make a good metaphor for how we each think about our work and where we want to take it. However, the most important thing is the utmost respect for each others' work.

LB: Curiosity, admiration, trust. Relinquishing control. It is bringing a whole other dimension into my individual practice. As Haroon said, we came together quite gradually and naturally. I jumped at the opportunity of working with them both.

VK: And if you were a band rather than a trio of collaborative multimedia artists, what kind of music do you think you would make?

HM: Dave would be our band leader and would probably do most within that scenario, so what ever Dave says...I used to enjoy playing on keyboards and whenever I did venture into making 'proper' music it was of the tech-y house variety. It's unlikely that I'd go there now but I do love something that sounds good on the dance floor. I think our band would be like Pugwall!

LB: Cole Porter/My Bloody Valentine...up and down, but mainly down. Melody and distortion.

VK: What would you call yourselves?

DM: I'd call it one of these:

Three Men and a Man

Bus

Travel Rug

Sex

Hue and Cry

VK: I like the first and last ones the most. Sex is pretty good, too. How long did it take you to come up with those?

DM: Hue and Cry is a real band! Somewhat of a comedy reference in Scotland!

I've always wanted to start a band called Sex. Our first album would be called *Sex Cells*...the follow up *Sex Cells Out*.

HM: I like Hue and Cry. Maybe we can buy the rights off them as they must all be working LiDL by now.

LB: The Wit of the Staircase - translation of the French phrase which describes the feeling of leaving an argument and thinking of a really good response after the event, (as one would have ascended the stairs to bed).

Either that or Buckley and her Bitches.

VK: Ha, I am somewhat obsessed with "wit of the staircase" or what is usually referred to here in the US as staircase humor. I suffer from it quite a bit and an architect and I are attempting to write a play about this. We keep re-writing it.

LM: Yep, its a familiar feeling. I used the phrase as a title for a flick book I made last year for Material Presence at 176.

VK: Haroon, you create "self-governing sound sculptures" that are largely composed of vintage furniture/objects and older technology. Your hand in the reinvention of these pieces becomes absent once they come to life and start making music. Thus, I imagine your relationship to these sculptures can be a bit like Frankenstein's to his monster..sometimes. It is quite unpredictable what kind of music/sound your sculptures will make. The extended definition of *spirit d'escalier* (wit of the staircase) is that it is "the pattern you cannot complete till afterwards it suddenly comes to you when it's too late...It's over when it's over." Do you ever wish you could go back to your completed pieces and rewire/restructure them differently to be more like you planned? Or are you content with their randomness?

HM: I'm content with the randomness if I can truly achieve it. Seldom do I think of rewiring something. It's best (for me) when I have no idea how something is going to turn out. I like the idea that my work is always unfolding and has a sense of investigation and experimentation. I imagine, or rather hope, the aesthetic of my assemblages denote this sensibility in the same way as the Fischli and Weiss photographs and video works such as 'The Way of Things' might do. So it's more rewarding when there is a process of discovery taking place and I can present that in its raw yet formalised form. Of course sometimes I repeat things that work well and it's not so rewarding but I generally get excited about something new I might discover. The more inadvertent it is the better. So in that sense the wit is replaced by the unknown.

LB: I often think about potentials of communication, to what degree something is implied or suggested. How much we put across, or keep back for ourselves. Its like leaving a situation and feeling you haven't said enough, or perhaps you fear you've said too much.

DM: I'm more into toilet humor than staircase humor.

VK: Haroon, I also wonder if utilizing the aesthetic of old household items allows for you to revisit technologically-induced situations that you were originally passive in? When you were younger, say, before you were a professional artist, would you hear the phone ring and recognize it as a human trying to make contact but imagine/wish it was something else that caused it? I'm curious about your relationship with objects that emitted "unnoticeable" and occasionally Pavlovian sounds before you developed this unconventional relationship with them.

HM: I never experienced a phantasmal relationship to objects if that's what you're asking. Maybe in the context of playing with toys, I might have adopted a sofa as a mountain for my cars to drive on. Speaking of toy cars, I would often not be content with my toys so would transform them in a non-"Transformer" sense. For example, I once made a toy Ferrari Testorosa into a speedboat and another time I made my sister's speaking doll say things she wasn't supposed to. Maybe a more significant childhood behaviour was to listen to the ticking of my dads indicator and look out for moments where it synchronised with the flashing on another vehicle ahead. Later on, as a teenager, I became fascinated by ambient sounds synchronising: the phone might ring at the same tempo as someone hammering a nail next door. This fascination might have been amplified by taking up Djing and learning how to beat mix.

VK: Dave, you consider Arthur Russell one of your main influences. I was recently at the WFMU record fair here in New York and was surprised to learn the number of music nerds who were unfamiliar with his work. Furthermore, it is really hard to find his work on vinyl. How were you originally introduced to his music and what about him appeals to you the most?

DM: It's a funny thing about Arthur Russell— he's still quite unknown, yet the people who do know about him have a real love for his music. I only got into him about 5 or 6 years ago when some of his stuff got rereleased, but I soon realised that I knew a lot of his records like 'Loose Joints' and 'Dinosaur L' but never knew they were his because he's used so many different names. And yes those 12" were hard to get (eBay is good). I think the reason I like him so much is because he made pop music and dance music that sounds totally out there...but wasn't afraid to make quite avant-garde records either. He just wanted to do it all and didn't care about critical acclaim, selling records, or becoming famous.

VK: Haroon, the sounds you have selected for Stage Fright are the kind that DJ Hell or Aphex Twin would appreciate for composing purposes. Your past orchestral installations sound rather glitchy and tech-y, too. It is in no way soft, but you also have a soft side for precious music like The Nutcracker soundtrack. Will there come a day when your sculptures will reveal a softer sound (if not already) or is that for your personal listening only?

HM: I'm into quite a variety of music and I won't deny dabbling with Tchaikovsky any less than I would deny listening to Richard D. James; both have their time and place yet neither are something I listen to a lot. I'm conscious that Stage Fright will have the Aphex sound to it but like I mentioned earlier, it's more a product of the collaborative process than aesthetic intent and also more because of its structure than the individual samples I've selected. Some previous works I have made have been quite glitchy and dark at times but I have also created works that are soft and subtle. They maybe electronic but still a very different sound to DJ Hell or Aphex Twin. I would say the musical element in my work is more influenced by artists such as Alva Noto + Ryuichi Sakamoto, Max Richter and Philip Glass, which suggests a more piano sound than an electronic sound.

VK: Laura, I can easily envision your work on a larger scale. One large enough to, say, fill the Turbine Hall. Do you think about the potential of working with much larger spaces and if one was offered to you today, what do you think you would do with it?

LB: This is something I have been thinking about a lot. My installation work so far has been made up of modular components, numerous structures that house or support projections within a space. The structures have been relative to human scale, and have not exceeded me in size. I have been refracting the projected image around the entire interior by projection through rotating supports. This encompassing gesture has led me to consider creating a large scale structure for the viewer to physically enter. So this work will involve a more singular film installation, where the film is back projected to form one of the structure's walls, and it is reflected and bounced around the inside of the construction, along with the reflection of the viewer. I am exploring how by physically entering the structure and experiencing it from within could further enhance the viewer's perception of the work.

VK: Right, as you put it, you "expose the process of making and presenting work." It is clean and geometric, but also rather beautiful and confusing. Viewers may even feel like they have stumbled upon a private moment that does not belong to them when experiencing your installations. Do you view your practice as "productive activity" (in the Russian productivist sense of the word) or do you look at it more as producing an experience for viewers?

LM: By exposing these 'private moments', intimate actions of creation in and out of the studio, I am including the viewer in the creation process. I choose to keep in the revealing hand movements and shadowed figures in the background. This demystification of the work is further advanced with the inclusion of equipment as an integral part of the installation, a common thread running through Haroon's work also. Rather than taping down cables and hiding the technology, it is celebrated, the leads forming line drawings through the space, connecting various elements.

All artistic output produces an experience of sorts for viewers, I guess I am interested in heightening this experience sensually. And I do this in the most simple and minimal way possible.