

Daily Tiger / 36th International Rotterdam Film Festival **Interview with Bastiaan Tichler**

For those unfamiliar with your work, could you give a short description of the kind of work you produce?

Well I work with film and video. I embrace techniques and production modes derived from cinema, they can serve as potent and expressive tools, not only as reference points but also as tools to create new ways of expression. My films have a tendency to oscillate between experimental documentary, fiction and video art. I try to draw the focus towards what is human in my subjects, always striving to achieve intimacy. Central have been juxtapositions between nature, science and culture, past, present and future. I guess there is an ongoing quest for subjectivity, to discover personal point of views and forms of self expression in an increasingly global society.

The suggestion of relationships between different images, or between contrasting images and sounds plays a significant part in your work. Is this something that fascinates you?

Absolutely, even in my photography based works there is always present this idea of multiple point of views. Counterpoints to sort of speak. I'm interested in what starts to emerge between these counterpoints. I guess an extended version of montage, where you have two images/sounds but the one that starts to emerge from the correlation between the two images/sounds is far more interesting than either one on its own. I tend to also have a tendency to think of large temporal arches, also to juxtapose "opposites" in order to gain tensions, to raise further questions.

That's why I find it slightly difficult when I get requests to exhibit let's say one part of Contrapuntal of either Beatbox or Batbox, since they are really made in a process of dialogue, they all question one another's view of the world.

Would you consider your two previous works Swan Song and Contrapuntal to be nostalgic works?

Swan Song is certainly nostalgic, it is the product of a personal loss, so there was really no other way to make the film and stay true to what drove me to make the film in the first place. I guess Contrapuntal is fundamentally quite nostalgic too, as its also rooted in the idea of some kind of loss, a loss in communication. Nevertheless Contrapuntal is more of a hybrid, there is also quite a bit humour and irony there.

Would you say Batbox/Beatbox is a logical progression from your earlier work?

Definitely. In my previous work I had focused in one way or another on sound and music as a cultural phenomenon, as a tool to construct or equally deconstruct cultural and personal identities. I've always regarded sound and music almost as a compass, something that has the ability to root you somewhere. With Batbox I wanted to go further, to a more primordial state, where sound was used as a similar tool.

So I became particularly interested in how various animals and particularly bats use echolocation, sonar sounds as tools to navigate and locate themselves geographically. These are techniques that humans have tried to study for centuries without ever fully understanding its complex mechanisms.

What inspired you to make Batbox/Beatbox?

As I said I started to research bats echolocation, and came across quite a curiosity in the process, a website that had music made out of bat sonar sounds. The association to beatboxing was immediately made. I had been thinking already of beatboxing as a "coded" musical language, but for the project started to think more broadly of the subculture beatboxing belongs to, and how anyone who associates oneself with any musical subculture actually uses sound as a tool to navigate, locate oneself socially. Most interestingly beatboxing and hip hop culture in general is the result of urban space, it was created in the streets of New York out of necessity, which only re-inforced the link between sounds relation to ones habitat.

Additionally I could not ignore the relation sound has to movement. Indeed it is the echolocation sound that determines the flight patterns of the bats, so it only made sense to include also the breakdancers in Beatbox as a reflection of Batbox.

By juxtaposing bat sonar and human beatboxing you suggest a correlation. This is solidly reinforced by the subtitle of the Beatbox part – Alternate Take. What came first: bats or vocal artists? And when did the idea to link the two together first take shape?

There never was Batbox without Beatbox or vice versa, the idea of the project came to be piece by piece as a whole. Due to very practical reasons we shot Batbox first in the fall of 2006 and Beatbox in the spring of 2007. The post production of Batbox took place while I was making preparations for Beatbox in New York

How did you get in contact with the Bristol University?

Well, first of all I looked into European Universities where they had a department for research related to bats bioacoustics. And came across two, Erlangen University in Germany and Bristol University. Researcher Jon Flanders from Bristol University was very responsive to the project, so our collaboration started to take place through the exchange of emails, and finally materialized by simply co-ordinating his schedules to my schedules. The shoot took eventually place in Dorset in England, where Flanders conducts his research on foraging grounds, in the natural habitat of various bat species.

And Vocab and the other vocalists and breakdancers?

I spent six months in an artist residency in New York realizing the project. During this time I just went to various beatboxing events, b'boy and b'girl practices and competitions etc. basically tried to get a grip of what was going on within this subculture that was totally alien to me beforehand. I guess I was hoping I would encounter not only talented individuals, brilliant performers, but essentially real people who go on about their daily business in the same city, and to whom their artform is a way to engage with their surroundings. Some sort of community, that has absolutely nothing to do with the way hip hop and everything related to it is portrayed in the media.

A key event was the subway series, an event organized by beatboxer Kid Lucky and his mates. Basically the event takes place in a subway cart. As long as you are there on the set time you are a part of it. Everyone is free to improvise, there's beatboxing, dancing, rhyming, spoken word etc. Vocab performed her poetry on one of these events, and I immediately asked her to be in the film, essentially commissioned her to write a piece around the themes that were central to my film.

As far as the beatboxers, Kid Lucky and Shockwave I simply got in touch with after seeing them perform a couple of times. I realized they had strong individual identities and had a very open and experimental take on beatboxing. They are vocally very different, and have a completely different repertoire of sounds. So I guess I was really hoping they would complement each other.

I could actually go on forever, there is a special story on how I found all the performers that are in the film. The youngest dancer, Saalim is truly amazing I think. He was actually only 16 at the time of the shoot, so I had to have a lot of long phone conversations with his father about everything.

What are your expectations for the live musical performance inspired by bat sonar during the premiere of Batbox/Beatbox?

The duet is titled 'Variations on a theme – duet for greater horseshoe bat and beatboxer'. It is a score produced while making the films Batbox/Beatbox. Essentially I had the beatboxers duet with a recording of a greater horseshoe bat sonar recorded in Dorset while shooting Batbox. The score was then transcribed by Aarne Riikonen.

I'm really looking forward to the interpretation of the score by pianist Jia Qu and percussionist Job Verweijen. I'm sure it will be an interesting rendition to say the least. Last time it was performed in Helsinki by a violinist and a drummer. It's exciting how the piece can take on further variations through the interpretation of other musicians. To see how the aural vocabulary of the original score can morph.

In the end the score becomes another way for the two films to be in dialogue, to intertwine.

