

**Interview with Reece Straw, Radar / Loughborough University Arts
November 2016**

What does ‘the Weird’ mean to you and your work?

I have always thought that all art is, or should be, weird in some way; that it is in fact a necessary, vital quality. If it wasn't weird it wouldn't be doing its job properly – it wouldn't be questioning or challenging. It has been interesting to think of my practice within the context of the (still emerging) genre of the (New) Weird. The work is in part a response to key phrases associated with the Weird: its exploration of ‘the sub-cultural and dissident’ and its questioning of ‘identity, individualism and social organisation.’ I like the idea of exploring these ideas within the university, a place of both social cohesion and dissent.

What ideas and contexts have you been working with for the commissioned work?

I've been thinking about the university as an institution that encourages and requires students to be both ‘free thinkers’ at the same time as being part of the wider ‘student body’. There's a paradox of belonging and not belonging, of being both together and separate.

I'd like to test this position by working with student groups who will perform a series of orchestrated, synchronised movements and song. Structured movement and choral singing are suggestive of the choreographed, synchronised elements of religious ritual; the work will reference the mass spectacle events of the GDR and North Korea, as well as the rites and costumes of alternative occult and utopian movements, such as Kindred of the Kibbo Kift, George Gurdjieff's Movements and Rudolf Steiner's Eurythmy. By specifically examining this blurred boundary between a dramatic performance and a liturgical drama, I hope to rethink ways in which ritualised group actions can shift an individual's and a group's status, suggesting a fluxing state of perpetual becoming in which the participants are suspended between points of departure and arrival.

Within the context of Radar focus on artist engaging with research, do you think this has had an effect on the direction your work for the future?

It has been really interesting to develop the work within the multifarious network of people and groups that is the university. My conversations with people at Loughborough University has certainly shaped the way the work has developed. This isn't necessarily different to how I usually work, which is often very research-heavy and which often sees a blurring of the boundary between research and practice, as well as engaging with different, varied individuals and groups. I'm excited by the collaborative aspect of this approach, as well as the cross-fertilisation of ideas between artists and academics in other fields (and between artists and gymnasts, for that matter...)

What are your ‘must-see’ work(s)/event(s) over the weekend?

It all sounds fascinating, but I'm particularly looking forward to seeing works by Joey Holder, Tai Shani, Reactor (live work and curated screenings) and Sidsel Christensen - Sidsel and I have collaborated several times in the past.