

Boško Blagojević: So I played your 8-4 9-5 10-6 11-7 mix [2007] for some students the other day. It felt a little perverse. It's a work mix, right? For listening to at work?

Seth Price: I didn't have a particular use in mind. I was thinking about work days, where different sets of working hours represent different kinds of work and different cultural areas: a union job, an office job, an art gallery, a boutique... But it's true, I liked the fact that the track could be played perfectly, start to finish, during an 8-hour work day, so yes, a work mix, why not.

BB: Then the piece takes only its form from the eight hour work day? You worked on it for a long time, yes?

SP: I spent a while tinkering with it, yes. It was something to work on in the edges and margins. Like a vacation from my real work.

BB: I guess the mixtape has become something of a vernacular form, something "everyone can do," maybe now more than ever. Though the texture of your particular piece is really worked -- it's extensively mixed and edited, it shows quite explicitly the work that has accrued over the time you've worked on it, as well as the range of the music it features and samples. It's a bit more professional in this sense, closer to what a DJ might produce rather than an amateur or casual music lover. Yet it's also related to this notion of leisure, of a more leisurely type of work.

SP: And the spread of music, the way it appears everywhere, in stores and hotels and restaurants and waiting rooms. These are workplaces, but also places of consumption, and music somehow greases that boundary.

BB: There is both an industry and a culture of tremendous material and technical means built to support something that is formally quite immaterial. Why do you think this is? Why is music this social grease as you say?

SP: I don't know. Why would it be different from writing, something else that is immaterial? Maybe because music is tied to so many other, more material, areas: performance, fashion, bodies, ritual. Being always in-between makes it easy to project on to. You can talk about the way something moves and is contextualized, what it represents, as a way of discussing other things.

BB: Is it productive likewise to think about future contexts for work? The "contamination, borrowing, stealing and horizontal blur" that happens to culture, but only in time. Like making the 8-4... mix available online, making it especially attractive for this kind of thing.

SP: You can't ever really know whether anyone gets anything out of your work. I'm not sure what the appeal is of a single 8-hour long track. There's an element of frustration, maybe, in that piece. For me, also.

BB: The first time I listened to it I remember copying the file from a cd you gave me; I remember listening to the disc reader working very fast and hard, and thinking the piece had already begun in a way. Is a useful work satisfying, then?

SP: I don't know whether a compilation of music is "useful." That may be the wrong word. It does function in some way. Or you could say the artwork takes place within an existing structure, which is an interesting fold in the production, which makes it satisfying.

BB: Why dance music?

SP: It's kind of a universal solvent.

BB: It sounds a bit sinister when you put it that way. What is it that is dissolved?

SP: It's funny, the sanctity of contracts seems like a fundamental part of society, the basis of law and property, and some people would argue that the power to enforce contracts is about all that government's good for, but the art world seems to run without contracts.

BB: Perhaps someone like Seth Siegelaub would say this efficiency comes at the expense of certain players in the field, maybe artists themselves. What do you think about a project like Creative Commons, this attempt at a kind of legislation of cultural production?

SP: I don't know too much about it, but I'm in favor of it.

BB: How would you characterize your relationship to copyright? Maybe this is one of those questions that you get asked a lot in various ways.

SP: I work next to it, I guess. It's there, I am aware of it.

BB: But there is also some kind of emotional copyright you manage quite well, right? Like your friendships with Joan Jonas or Martha Rosler, out of which you've developed works from materials which they've shared with you.

SP: Friendship and cooperation were very important in those cases, but I don't know what you mean by emotional copyright.

BB: Ok maybe we'll return to this emotional thing. But "working next to copyright" is an interesting way to put it. You actually work a lot, something I didn't imagine before we met. I always thought of you as this kind of post-studio artist, but you actually spend quite a lot of time in there. Working?

SP: 'In there' meaning my studio? But even if it were just writing, or some other "post-studio" work, I would still think of that as time spent working. I don't know what I do here... I do spend time here. You say you saw me working a lot, while you were working here?

BB: A lot of the time you are on the computer, designing a show poster, or laying out some other graphic intended for print. Or emailing. But other times it would be silk screening, making knots, moving or "working" the vacuum forms. Maybe the one constant in your studio is the music playing -- except when you'd be working on video, on *Redistribution* [2007—].

SP: Yes.

BB: Would it be unfair to say your working practice is organized by time? Like clock-in and clock-out. But maybe that's vulgar.

SP: I think you saw me working exclusively within the conditions of the studio and the 8-hour day because of our working relationship. We met at my studio on particular days, and you were paid by the hour, and that required me to be there. And at times that was difficult! I remember being embarrassed when I'd arrive late to find you already there, reading a book. Otherwise, the kind of time organization you're talking about became less important when I left my job. Working for yourself does mean it's difficult to clock out, and when you produce in a lot of different ways it becomes possible to always work. To have a work for any occasion. "Evenings and weekends" can cease to exist as a category. But this is nothing to complain about, it's a privilege, because ironically it comes out of being the master of one's time. I guess I mean that when work is harnessed to autonomy and self-expression it can lead to a diffusion of work into every part of life.

BB: Do you think this diffusion of work is especially particular to art making or cultural production? Maybe it has something to do with the sporulating of telecommunications technologies.

SP: Yes. A PC is like a needle's eye through which you draw so many previously disparate activities: shopping for groceries, reading the paper, chatting with friends, watching television, paying the bills. The most banal activities. "The lumber of life." Conversations like this one, where writing and speaking are rubbed together.

And remotely stored information, with access everywhere, removes the need for a particular site. It becomes like checking your reflection, where you don't need to be in front of the bedroom mirror, you do it on the street, you adjust your hair as you pass a storefront or a car window.

BB: So leisure and work become likewise dispersed as you've said. If the idea of leisure time for notable masses of people emerges in the 19th century, is this perhaps some kind of unforeseen fulfillment of leisure's actual promise?

SP: I don't know. What would the actual promise be?

BB: That this original separation of work and leisure time evolves to the situation today -- when we live with an expanded notion for what constitutes work in everyday life; always working but in many gradients of intensity or purpose.

SP: I don't know who 'we' is. I do feel like that, but, like I said, in this case it has to be seen as a privilege.

BB: It was quite strange for me to hear you say earlier how you adjusted your schedule when I was assisting in your studio. Don't you think this catch-all "artists assistant" work is kind of strange and particular to the art world? Some artists run studios like factories and employ craftspeople and technical workers and so on. But your studio isn't really like that. Two of your walls are lined with books.

SP: I have friends who run big studios, but who then take on all the responsibilities that come with it: providing health care for their employees, buying lunch. I know an artist who pays for his assistant's gym membership. It's true that you're running a small business, to some extent. At least, the government likes it that way, the tax code starts to nudge it in that direction.

I do like the idea of working with someone, but I can't stand the regularity, the scheduled aspect, which ends up making me a poor manager. I get nervous just going to the movies, having to show up at a particular time at a particular place, it feels like running to catch a bus... I make it to the movies about three times a year.

BB: But what was the last movie you made it to at the cinema?

SP: I think it was *Notorious*, in January.

BB: This looked really appealing to me from the trailer.

SP: It was fine. It was what was playing. I like to walk by and if something's playing just then, I go in. I've gone by theaters a few times since then, but nothing was about to start.

BB: Is that a way of saying yes?

SP: I can't remember. It was pretty good.

BB: I meant about this thing you do, just walking into whatever is playing. I like it. It seems like an affirmation of some kind -- like saying "yes."

SP: Maybe. I do miss a lot of movies that way.

BB: There is always video, I guess. I don't make it to the movies enough myself, but I'm interested in these things that bring us together in material space. Work seems to do this too, in

a way. I got to know you, for instance, like this. Maybe I'm just thinking about ordering principles for getting together. Things like music or sport. When was it that you wrote the *Sports* piece?

SP: I think in 2003... It came out of the script for the video *Folksong & Documentary*[2004], or else the script came out of the text. Anyway, they loosely go together. There was also a painting. I had printed out the script in large letters on pieces of paper to hold up so James Kendi could read them out-loud for the camera. We ended up just having him repeat what I said off-camera, and I cut up the printed sentences and taped them on a canvas. I have it somewhere.

BB: Maybe you should photograph it for our conversation. We'll have to figure out pictures at some point. *Sports* may have been the first work of yours I've encountered, probably because it's on the Internet. The first line is quite striking. I was always convinced this New Conservativism was about being an artist.

SP: That first line is kind of a joke: "Everyone's all: what are you up to? Oh, work, work, work." It's the word "all" that makes it funny. But what do you mean that "New Conservativism" was about being an artist?

BB: This thing about always working. Being an agent in this free market of ideas.

SP: Would you say that's a good thing?

BB: I felt like this is what you were talking about with tax codes nudging you towards being a kind of business owner, a manager. Maybe it's bad if we still believe in "great works," or the artist as some kind of singular genius. Or if we go to Kant for our aesthetics. What do you think?

SP: I wonder if it is good or bad to believe in great works or genius... Maybe good. I'm not familiar with Kant's aesthetics.

BB: Maybe, I don't know if it's good or bad either. Such decisions seem so final. They divide people. I really like *Sports*, though. I like it especially in relation to your other texts because the voice here seems a bit ambiguous. Some of your turns of phrase are very funny, like you're miming something. But the piece also moves to these first-person declaratives where you describe yourself as an artist. It's hard not to hear your voice at these moments.

SP: Yes, I like that piece. The title, and the final bit about the behavior of people and countries.

BB: I'd like to talk more about nationalism with you, but for now maybe let's get back to the 10-6... mix. Music brings people together too, after all. How did it start?

SP: I was collecting great songs, and for some reason it was all dance music! Dance music from the last thirty-five years or so, electronic dance music. This went on for a couple of years, and

I'd stick each track to the previous one so I could organize them in one place. And then I wanted to mix the tracks together, that whole DJ thing, so it kept expanding.

With the *Title Variable* pieces [2001—], I already had a structure for working with music, and it offered a way to consider why I was accumulating dance music, what the form would be, how to frame those things. On the other hand, the compilations had so far focused on very specific historical niches, odd pockets of music that didn't fit, so 'dance music' seemed too broad. But the more I thought about it, the more it fit the project, because these compilations were supposed to be frameworks for thinking about how production and distribution change over time, and "8-4..." comes out of just those sorts of changes, it could only be a product of its moment. Partly this is because of the way that "dance music" fills any space and cannibalizes any genre, and plays well anywhere that consumption or production happen. Also the way that everyone's now invited to take on the DJ role, not the performance aspect or "reading the crowd," but the ease of sharing a notion of taste, the distribution of taste. And finally there was something about availability, the availability of mixing software, and of music itself. Infinite music, music taken for granted.

File sharing was originally the spark behind the *Title Variable* piece: fishing for disparate parts, manipulating them, repackaging them as a kind of expression of taste, although an ambiguous one. But because I started the piece in 2001, it developed right alongside iTunes and the iTunes store and the iPod, and the mainstreaming of filesharing, and the shuffle function, and the "mix" as a list of references, as information pure and simple. The mix is a different kind of structure from when I started, when I wasn't aware of those things, when they didn't really exist yet. Of course, eight hours' worth is kind of a potlatch. Excessive sharing. But that's what's happening now, excessive sharing.

BB: I think "potlatch" is a very articulate way to describe what is going on in this piece, and perhaps this cultural moment in general. Why is it that this piece could only be a product of this moment, as you say? Is there something endemic to dance music on file sharing networks, or couldn't you have done something similar in 2001 or 2002 when *Title Variable* was coming together?

SP: In part it's cultural visibility. The playlist as a form, the DJ as a role, even the recent popularity of disco. But the difference between this and the first compilations has to do with the banal and stupid fact of technological progress, the increased availability of techniques to consumers. It's the ease of distributing such a huge file, of course, either online via increased bandwidth, or on an mp3 disc. But even the ability to produce such a file is recent. In 2001 it would have been difficult for me to edit an 8-hour track as a single document, to encode it as an mp3, to burn that to a disc, to play it on a stereo that understands mp3s. Back then it wasn't common to own a CD burner. In fact, I didn't even own a computer yet. I know this is all just the constant boring march of technology, but one of the things I was interested in with this project is the technology around music production, and so much production now seems to touch on these factors. Like the episode when Madonna's people leaked some LP track to file sharing networks, but when you downloaded it you just heard a voice repeating 'this is what illegal

downloading sounds like." Somebody made that track for her! That song. I wonder how it fits into her discography. Maybe it's been remixed by people, or otherwise used.

BB: What was your studio time like before the computer?

SP: I got a studio at the end of 2002, when I started sharing with Mike Smith, and then I got a computer. Before that I'd work wherever I was living. Mostly I was making music, recording to ADAT. I'd also work after-hours at EAI [Electronic Arts Intermix], where I had a job. I made several videos there, going tape to tape. I think they got Final Cut Pro in 2001 or something. EAI was crucial in a lot of ways. Before I worked there I didn't even have an email account, so that already felt like moving up in the world, like: "there aren't benefits, but they're hooking me up with email!" It was helpful just to be in an office, to learn work habits, get used to scheduling, understand how to deal with vendors by phone, all that business protocol. I'm really grateful for that.

BB: Were Mike's tapes at EAI as well, is that how you got to know him?

SP: Yes, Mike would come around the office, and we edited something together. As an editor you spend a lot of time just sitting with the client in a little room. We became friends.

BB: But this mix, like others in the *Title Variable* piece, has a text: [*For a Friend*](#) [2008], which was available as a little book at Reena Spaulings. It's only an excerpt of something longer, am I remembering that correctly?

SP: In a way. I've added to it and rewritten it for another context. I had the idea that it could be considered as a piece of a potentially endless dialogue.

BB: I don't think the term is yours, but I remember always thinking about your texts as "open works" or something like this. I forget where it was, but I did read about you saying something like a piece of writing in our time should never have to be finished, and that you feel quite free to enter a previously published text and change things around.

SP: That's right.

BB: I'm wondering when you started thinking about this particular way of working.

SP: I think after I started making the music compilations, maybe after I wrote *Dispersion*[2002]. Those pieces existed online in addition to their physical manifestations, and they were fluid. As drafts in progress they'd been stored on my hard drive; now there was a switch in storage location, from my drive to a remote server, but the way they were called up on-screen remained the same, because computers conceal distance. So there was no good reason not to continue to treat them as drafts to be administered. I think this was also after I started my website, which

puts you in that frame of mind, that all this fairly personal material is naturally subject to a process of constant administration.

BB: What do you think happens to "publishing" in the situation you're describing?

SP: I think it's more or less the same.

BB: Isn't there a finality in publishing, the end of "administering" the text as you say? I like this thought, what you said earlier -- the author as an administrator.

SP: Maybe it's only that the word publishing seems not to fit.

BB: In the very first volley between the two voices, there is this pointing to this marking of time on a piece of work. "On a Sunday morning. . ." What I'd like to get to is something that I've been driving at and trying to understand a bit more about the way this idea functions, especially in a situation where the concept of a work's arrival is a bit exploded -- like this constantly evolving or unraveling text.

SP: Right. Say more.

BB: I asked you something similar at Reena Spaulings last fall, when you showed *Redistribution* in New York for the first time. Now I want to try and approach it a little differently, in light of what's been accruing here. It's difficult in some way because I'm thinking my way through the question. I'm wondering if there some way to think about this work that is continuously being administered -- expanded or contracted or changed -- but is also marked by time? The vacuum forms with the years on them, for example, are marked. But *Redistribution*, to take another example, is marked too, isn't it?

SP: It is, in the sense that there are different versions that wind up in different places, different archives. The first version, for example, is now owned by someone. It's frozen, it's no longer mine. And of course that makes me want to alter the piece and therefore take it back, bring it back into flux! Reclaim it. The question is what happens later, maybe years later. The question of which version to show, things like that.

BB: To reclaim: a kind of resistance, then? It reminds me of the two "friends," in *For a Friend*, talking about this culture of modification, "the DIY shit."

SP: There's something there about spoken and written languages, the way they come together. It's true in a literal or illustrative way with the dialogue, which has to do with the way people cross-pollinate language forms now. A journalist might write an op-ed using phrases taken from casual conversation, which might themselves be neologisms borrowed from text messaging, which then leak into TV news monologues, and go back and forth, on and on. But maybe this is even true of the *Redistribution* piece, in a broader way. I'm not sure. Anyway, as I said, it's

rubbing spoken language against written language. They're drawn through the eye of the needle together, so they mix.

BB: It's a bit alienating, the way the two voices come together. It's also familiar. They are always disagreeing but likewise refusing to really argue, to take positions. They seem to qualify everything they say.

SP: Maybe I'm a little like that. Yes, something there made the dialogue go well with the 8-hour dance song. They both feel like they could simply limp on into infinity.

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