

SETH PRICE by REENA SPAULINGS

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REENA SPAULINGS: Alright, this is Seth Price for *Interview* ... Reena Spaulings versus Seth Price. Got any questions for Seth, Emily?

RS: Umm ... do you?

RS: Well, I guess we're going to talk about Seth's new book, *How to Disappear in America*. Um, it came out this year and it's published by the Leopard Press.

RS: How did you write it?

RS: Yeah, how did you write it?

SETH PRICE: Well, I ... I was collecting these—I don't know what you would call them—treatises, or, like, manuals on how to “go to ground”; how to shake off pursuers, or the government; law; abusive spouses. And basically start over. And I guess ... I found some from the seventies, these little mimeographed pamphlets. So it's been around for a while, probably even longer than that. But, you know, the genre's kind of changed now that there are all kinds of perceived digital threats, and satellites, and lasers.

RS: Drones.

RS: But they do talk about that. There's some

of the stuff in there, must be newer.

SP: Yeah.

RS: Because—

SP: I think there's five texts in there—

RS: Yeah.

SP: —that are reshuffled.

RS: I assumed you had gotten them off the Internet.

SP: Yeah.

RS: Even the pamphlets? The little mimeographs?

SP: No, those I just found in bookstores. Those aren't in there.

RS: And what kind of, um, culture is this? Um, is it a kind of a squatter, lefty underground anti-global thing? Or ...

SP: I don't know.

RS: Cause when I think of this kind of informa-

tion I think of the Weather Underground and things like that.

RS: Yeah, and like, protest culture.

RS: Or the Unabomber.

SP: But you see, I think the Unabomber is quite different from the Weather Underground, I think it's more on the other end of the spectrum. It's more anti-government, in terms of a libertarian philosophy.

RS: Yeah, it seems to come out of—I mean, it comes out of like an individual urge to, to get rid of your self. Like, to not ... not necessarily disappear into a larger context of other people but to really—

SP: Yeah, it's hard to say... There's one passage in there where they talk about a particular area in, I think, Nevada— and they give longitude and latitude—as being a good place to... to hide in, really. And I think it was because it doesn't get patrolled by satellites as much, or something.

RS: Right.

SP: So that's a real vision of ... actual escape.

RS: Yeah. But it also keeps stressing that if you're a criminal, don't even try, because they're going to find you.

SP: Yeah, some ethic.

RS: That there's some kind of ethic.

RS: There's a lot of morals in there.

RS: Yeah.

RS: There's a lot of kind of shout-outs to, you know, abused women and sort of threats against abusive men and things like that.



Bill Ayers

RS: And it's a very strange ... like, the voice of the author has a very strange feeling to it.

RS: Who's the author, speaking of?

SP: I don't know ... The longest of the texts that I borrowed from is posted anonymously on the Internet. And with the kind of urging for anybody to take it and, uh, circulate it.

RS: And also elaborate upon it? Because I—at one point, I got the impression that there were things being inserted in there.

SP: That's right.

RS: Maybe not even by you, by—just because it's on the Internet, like, Wiki-style or something.

SP: I think it was re-posted by the original author. But I'm not sure exactly, who knows... You're right, it's impossible to know. I've added my bit, so ...

RS: Your little bit is the beginning.

SP: And throughout.

RS: Oh, you added things throughout?

SP: Yes, I took away a lot of information, and I added a lot of, um, kind of idiosyncratic language.

RS: Oh really?

SP: Yeah.

RS: So in terms of your making of this book, um- [RINGING SOUND]

RS: Oops. [BACKGROUND NOISE, DOOR OPENS]

RS: I don't know how to pause this thing.

SP: It's alright. We can keep going.

RS: Yeah, so ... How did you make this, I guess? Or as an author [DOOR SLAMS] ... as an author ... how would you describe your function as an author of this book? What did you do, I guess? You took this stuff, found it—

SP: I adapted it ...

RS: You adapted it.

SP: ... For a specific context. Because it comes out in, primarily, an art world context, you know—

RS: Yeah.

SP: —because of who I am ... It's not even something that might appear as a work of experimental fiction in some poetry-oriented bookshop, or something, though that would be great. But it's not going to be perceived in that context. Although the nice thing is that if it goes on Amazon as-is— and it has an ISBN and everything—who knows who would order it, and for what purpose. It doesn't refer directly to art, or myself, or any other context. You could then take it any way you want it.

RS: But do you think of it more as a re-distribution of the information or is it also a re-writing?

SP: I would think—I think it's re-writing.

RS: Yeah. It's also re-packaging.

SP: Yeah, to re-package ... of course, that's already enough. And, um, I *have* seen that some of those Internet texts have already been translated to print; one of those texts that says, “anybody can take this and recirculate it.” Fernando just showed me this, like—that one of those texts was just reprinted as a little pamphlet by, uh, Eva. [*Vanishing Point*, Susanne Bürner, Toastink Agency, 2006]

RS: Eva Svennung.

SP: So it's something that happens; and hers looks and feels completely different from mine, in part because, as you say, I “adapted” or rewrote it.

RS: Mmhmm.

SP: It's nice that the text can have different packagings.

RS: What kind of discussions did you have with the designer, Joseph? [Logan?]

SP: Um ... we looked at—I think we all wanted a small book. Something that wasn't intimidating, that you might want to touch.

RS: This is one of your ... art.

SP: Yeah, it's one of those figures. I gave him a bunch and he picked that one.

RS: Yeah, on the cover there's a little—

RS: It's a symbol.

RS: Reproduction of an artwork, by you. It's—



RS: It's a hand.

RS: In the negative space of the image you can see one hand passing a set of keys to another hand.

RS: Oh yeah.

RS: It looks like a little dancing figure.

RS: It looks like a dancing little man.

SP: Yeah, that's why I like those. They look like those Matisse cut-outs.

RS: Yeah! They do. Or it has this sort of UPS ...

SP: Those colors! [LAUGHS] Also, it sort of looks like a falling figure, in that context. The idea of disappearing. It looks like somebody's just been submerged under the waves or something.

RS: But it also looks like it could be the symbol for a particular press that put out these kinds of books.

RS: It's like your Penguin.

RS: Yeah, it's like your Penguin.

SP: Yeah. Definitely. It's a monogram.

RS: Yeah, it looks like a monogram.

RS: But the image is—where did you get the image from?

SP: Um, those images of hands passing keys... I think I found them in different places, in, like, real estate advertisements, or, um ...

RS: So, handing over a property. Or exchange of property.

SP: Yeah, you know the way a key is used metaphorically ... in something like an advertisement.

RS: Yeah, but it also ... yeah, I mean—

SP: It could also be like—

RS: Knowledge.

SP: Knowledge, or it could be passing on something to the next generation. You know, a 401K, or something.

RS: Or a secret.

SP: A secret. [EVERYONE LAUGHS] Yeah, that's pretty corny.

RS: So how do you think about publishing? Or the work you've done on this book in relation to the stuff you do in galleries? Your object-making.

SP: How do I think about it?

RS: Well, just the relation between this kind of practice and, let's say, making a video, or sculptures.

SP: The relationship? What do you mean?

RS: [EVERYONE LAUGHS] Um, well Emily today said she thought there was something

very literary about the way you work in art, in general, when you're making things or making images.

SP: Literary ...

RS: [TO EMILY] And I wasn't sure what you meant by that, but ...

RS: Yeah, I'm not a hundred percent sure what I mean, either. But I guess ... I have to think about that.

RS: Well, writing has to do with codes and information.

RS: Well, code for sure is often embedded into your [SETH'S] work. And there's often this game of hide-and-seek or information disappearing into the sculptures and stuff. And I mean, it's a super literal connection between a person disappearing in America. But I just thought that the whole idea of this kind of act of getting away with something, getting away with making a book you haven't authored—that you have authored in a way but you haven't written yourself—it just reminds of me of certain sort of literary tricks like ...

SP: Well, it's interesting, one way to disappear in America that the book seems to talk about has to do with renouncing the world of work and gainful employment and contracts, including marriage, and documentation. That's been associated with artists, too. But you know, another way to disappear in America would be to throw yourself into production.

RS: Yeah. Totally.

SP: And the way things are encouraged to function... I don't know, that's a kind of question that comes up also if you're an artist. About how much to produce, what to produce, where to put it. What to do with it. You know, how much do you follow the codes of essentially turning into a very good, uh, small business. [LAUGHS]

RS: Right, exactly. [PHONE RINGS] Let's wait for the thing to stop ringing. [SOUND OF ANSWERING MACHINE VOICE – RS LAUGHS]

SP: What is that?

RS: That's me.

SP: Ah.

RS: But, um ... But I was also thinking about this idea of private property in America. I mean, it's a very American thing, this particular relationship.

SP: To property?

RS: Well, to property and to all land that's privately owned, that's why it's even an issue. To go out and live in the woods, for instance. [PAUSE] Maybe that's not so important, but ... [EVERYONE LAUGHS]. Okay, so let's forget about that.

RS: Well, Seth was just talking about production, disappearing into production. And, well, I think that a lot of the work that you do and other—certain others do—is ... I mean, there's a really kind of ... it's hard to say where the production starts and when it stops. Not in terms of work versus free time, but just in terms of what you're actually doing. For example, looking at things on the Internet—is that already production?

SP: Well, it is for the government... You can write off your DSL because you're gathering images. The government's perfectly happy with that.

RS: With gathering images?

SP: With allowing you to, for tax purposes, write off your Internet. That becomes the first step in your production.

RS: Ah.

SP: But that's one way to—everything disappears into work, that way.

RS: That's true.

RS: Well, at one point there were artists who would actually toil with a chisel and a paint brush and produce things with their artistic skills. And then this other idea came along that, well, all I have to do is choose something and re-present it in an artistic context, which is exactly what you're doing with this information. So I guess there's a connection to that whole history, the ready-made.

SP: It's funny how it seems like the painter used to be this refined person of leisure. Refined man of leisure. Almost decadent, elegant, learned. And the sculptor would be the person covered with—

RS (BOTH): Dust!

SP: —dust, all floured on, covered with labor and matter. And... I don't think those categories are still offered. [LAUGHS]

RS: Now the painter is the brutish ... beast.

SP: That's a nice green snake.

RS: Yeah, that is a nice green snake.

RS: It matches the green tea can.

RS: Yeah. [LAUGHS] But um, does this inform new ... Do you feel like this is kind of a new set of ideas for you?

SP: Which ideas?

RS: Like getting into this culture of survivalist—this sort of survivalist, anti-government culture.

SP: Uh, I thought it was interesting.

RS: Yeah.

SP: But I've done all I wanted to, with it.

RS: Right.

SP: Which isn't much. [EVERYONE LAUGHS]

RS: I wonder if there's a difference between that old idea of the death of the author and something more like ... the disappearance of the author. What do you think about that, Seth? [LAUGHS]

SP: [LAUGHS] The difference between the death of the author and the disappearance of the author?

RS: Yeah, Roland Barthes' whole idea of this post-structural kind of, you know, the producer, the author, is somehow a dead idea. But this book—it doesn't say anything about death, it's all about disappearance. I'm wondering if that can be a new idea of an author, somehow. Disappearing.

SP: Disappearing author?

RS: Mmhmm.

SP: Well ... unless it means you get more and more authors ... Like, a company might realize that it can never control the fact that your average kid is downloading its music for free. But what it can control, maybe, is then charging that kid to post back her own private remixes or arrangements of that material. So that the material is now free, but since everybody can "be a DJ", or whatever, those people will then happily pay to publish their own remixed shit back on the Warner Bros. website.

RS: Right.

SP: Yeah ... that doesn't answer your question.
[EVERYONE LAUGHS]

RS: But don't authors disappear all the time?
Like in popular culture, like this *Gossip Girl*
situation, for instance. Like nobody knows if
that's a real person or ...

SP: Really? I thought that was a real person.

RS: Well, that's just—

SP: Like the Hardy Boys or something?

RS: Yeah, at first I thought it was written by
committee, like the Hardy Boys is. It's written
by the company, basically. By a kind of team
that's on salary, and goes under the name
Franklin W. Dixon ... or whatever it is.

SP: I think you've got the name exactly right.

RS: [LAUGHS]

SP: [LAUGHS] "Or whatever it is... I don't
know what it is ... I don't have the full collec-
tion..." [EVERYONE LAUGHS]

RS: I'm missing one or two.

RS: No, when I was a kid in school, our teacher
in third or fourth grade asked us all to write a
letter to our favorite author. And I chose that
guy, the Hardy Boys author. And I got this re-
ally crazy letter back saying there is no Frank-
lin W. Dixon, these books are written by many
people. And that always stuck with me.

SP: Well, maybe that's why I didn't put my
name on the front of the book...

RS: Is it on the spine?

SP: Yeah.

RS: It is on the spine. But your name could also



be ... like who ... it is your real name, but it is
the kind of name that could be—it could be a
fictional name.

SP: Yeah—

RS: It has an anonymous—

SP: Kelley [WALKER?] told me it was tacky for
an artist to have that name. [LAUGHTER] I
used to, um—

RS: I think it has an anonymous ring to it.

SP: I used to sign my videos—when I was just
doing these videos—with, sometimes, "Set
Price."

RS: Well, this reminds me a little bit of like,
Richard Prince, this—the book.

RS: Because it says 'America' on it?

RS: Well, yeah, it says 'America' and 'disappear.'
Because he's also ...

RS: He's also an author-artist ...

RS: But he's also the kind of guy that there are
anecdotes floating around about, and I could

imagine that that might happen with you, too. Like, he was born on a plane over the Bermuda Triangle.

RS: And he lives somewhere upstate, we can't see him, he's invisible.

RS: Yeah. And then he shows up, he's so elusive ... It's like—

SP: He seems pretty visible, and not elusive.

RS: Right, but then there's this other idea of him and his art that is about this elusive quality. And I think—I mean, I think that you have that, too. Maybe not in the—I don't think that you're similar artists at all. But there's something about this ...

RS: Yeah. There's just something about that, like, not being able to pin down ...

SP: What can't you pin down?

RS: I don't know. I think that—I don't think it's really about exactly what it is you can't pin down, it's more like an aura of ... [BANGING SOUND] ... it's the poltergeist upstairs. It's like an aura of ... John, help me.

RS: I don't know what you're talking about. [LAUGHS]

SP: Auras?

RS: Sorry.

RS: No, no.

RS: No, but I mean—

RS: Well, but anyway, your function as an author in this book is to re-package and re-distribute. And it's definitely not the old idea of the author.

SP: I don't know, I think you can also say that I sat on this for 3 years trying to figure out what to do, and it comes from a Word document that I went through, and did a lot of editing and cutting and writing and—

RS: And reading.

SP: Less reading than writing.

RS: You didn't read it?

SP: Well ... [DOORBELL RINGS, LAUGHTER] There wasn't anything to read really, until I made it. For me.

RS: There wasn't anything to read until you made it?

SP: Well, there wasn't a text... It was four or five different things and—

RS: Right, right.

SP: It didn't feel like I needed to read them all individually, not until they were all assembled.

RS: Between two covers.



SP: Yeah... Until it looked like a book.

RS: So it's not—you wouldn't call it a ready-made book?

RS: A readymade text?

SP: It wouldn't occur to me to call it that.

RS: ...“Assisted”?

SP: [LAUGHS] “Assisted readymade”? I'm not going to argue with that, but I wouldn't... I mean, does anyone use those words for real? Like, outside of—

RS: “Readymade”?

RS: I think I know a couple artists who use those words all the time.

SP: About their own work?

RS (BOTH): Yes.

RS: Claire Fontaine.

SP: Oh, right, readymade artist ...

RS: Yeah.

RS: [PHONE VIBRATES] It's a very distracting interview.

SP: Isn't it funny how you think about somebody so differently if their name is spelled L-E-E, or if it's L-E-I-G-H?

RS: Yeah.

SP: It's like a whole different vibe.

RS: Who's Leigh?

SP: That person that just called.

RS: Yeah, my friend Leigh. She was named after her father, but his name was spelled L-E-E, and then ...

SP: Right. Moving up in the world.

RS: [LAUGHS] Yeah. But um ...

RS: Did you have any favorite parts in there?

SP: Um ... I can't really remember anything.

RS: I'm sure you didn't read this thing.

SP: I did. But not—

RS: I did read most of it ... last night.

SP: You know, I read it in a really scattershot way.

RS: I like some of the lingo, like, “going off and coming back on?” Off and on, this whole thing?

SP: Oh yeah, well, that last sentence, I wrote the last one: “And all.” And I may have written that too, I can't remember now ...

RS: Ah, I like that.

RS: I like the part about the police, what they will expect you to do.

SP: Yeah.

RS: “They will expect you to ...”

SP: Well, yeah, I certainly forced the hand of the writer in that part, by repeating, like—

RS: Right.

SP: And it doesn't quite go, grammatically, but...

RS: No, it's very weird, grammatically.

SP: I was definitely trying to ... flesh out some of that weird idiosyncrasy that was already in the language.

RS: Yeah, I also noticed a couple things like that. I also like, in the beginning, how you jump from how to destroy the enemies' automobile to going into your own house and destroying your own photographs.

SP: Yeah. [LAUGHS] That wasn't in the original—

RS: That seemed like a jump-cut somehow.

SP: That was ... Yeah, see, this is where the task of the author comes in. Where the author is born again.

RS: [LAUGHS]

RS: But before you've been writing about this kind of *dispersion*, you wrote about, um, re-distributed, or re-mixed, or re-covered material. And now you're doing it.

SP: Yeah.

RS: Are you writing anything right now?

SP: Well, for this book.

RS: A new book?

SP: Yeah. A catalogue for the—it's coming out this fall.

RS: For the Cologne show?

SP: Yeah. And the Zurich show. So I'm finishing up some stuff for that. John, you read some of that.

RS: Yeah, the dialogue.

SP: Yeah, that stupid dialogue.

RS: So you're going to use that, that's great.

RS: Oh, yeah, I remember you talking about that.

RS: I don't know, should I stop, or ...

SP: I don't think we have a thousand words yet.

RS: We don't?

SP: [LAUGHS]

RS: I think we do.

SP: Yeah.

RS: Maybe we can, um, fix it up later. Like, add some stuff, or whatever.

SP: You guys are going to have to go through and remove all the references to 'John' and 'Emily'.

RS: And 'Seth'.

SP: ... That expression 'you guys' won't work, either ... I should be addressing a singular subject.

RS: *You!*

[END TAPE]

