

Real Cheating

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PARKETT 75 2005

excerpt

A Conversation with SETH PRICE

DB: What made you write the four articles about production technology?

SP: The articles are just one aspect of the project, along with the different editions of the records, the different designs, the fact that you buy them, the art part—the cheap product part. The articles are the critical frame for the argument. Like a press release. And they're the part with no form.

DB: Is the project personal? Is it music you like?

SP: It started as a personal interest, but the music isn't necessarily music I like—although I grew to like it. It came out of trying to figure out some of the things that make a product end up the way it does, rather than some other way. It seemed that those things could be seen really clearly in the ways that

digital tools altered music production. That led to looking at music from the last twenty-five years or so. Within that, certain historical moments seemed emblematic of shifts in production, and the albums present those moments. The music itself, as tracks you actually listen to, is sort of incidental.

DB: In *UNIQUE SOURCE. ALL NATURAL SUICIDE GANG* (2005), your text about the implications of sampler technology, you suddenly start to talk about graffiti. What's the relationship between the two?

SP: There's no rational link. I was thinking about them at the same time, that's the link. I was looking at this academic sampler music, and the way that it came out of dense theory and serious consideration, and I wanted the essay to reflect some of that seriousness. At the same time, I wasn't interested in

arranging it in a logical way. So you can think about similarities between the way things are reproduced—the sampling of a human voice, or the idea of somebody's graffiti being multiplied across the city—but it's difficult to map too closely. You go between the desire for research, the idea that you can grasp something historically or theoretically, and on the other hand, an idea more similar to poetry, where there's another concept of understanding.

DB: The way sampling and graffiti come together is similar to how in poetry unexpected images meet each other and produce, for a second, a surprising other image.

SP: Right. But you have to be willing to allow yourself to enter into it. The *UNIQUE SOURCE* essay goes the farthest in that direction, but even with the *EARLY VIDEO GAME SOUNDTRACKS* (2001) piece, *In* magazine wouldn't publish it unless I removed the Reyner Banham quote about air conditioning. It didn't matter, I put it back later. The essays aren't ever finished.

DB: I once described your work as a "terrorism of form." Although all of it is serious, it's constantly undermined by skepticism, as if the author believes in nothing. Do you imitate, or fake, real interests?

SP: No. It's all interesting in some way, it has to be. But this is a context where it's understood that anything is fair game. In art you can investigate problems without having to worry about expertise. Some people talk about the artist as a professional, or say it's important to always be an amateur, but I don't think those categories exist in art. I don't think art has a place for some idea of mastery. At the same time, the artist is supposed to be some kind of expert, which makes for a productive confusion.

DB: And sometimes you invent the context. In the *UNIQUE SOURCE* text, you say: "Collecting and illegally redistributing material has no professional dimension; the person who compiles a mix tape for a friend is not an amateur." It sounds good, but what does it mean? Aren't you cheating? It doesn't mean anything.

SP: I don't think that's true.

DB: It's posing. Everything sounds meaningful because it's seemingly contextualized, but the context you imply sometimes doesn't exist. This isn't a value judgment; I actually like it. It seems to me that you're doing real research, real poetry, and real cheating. Take Marcel Broodthaers: each time you think you understand his work, it slips away. He describes the process of how meaning tries to come into existence.

SP: But art is cheating to begin with.