

ART OF CONVERSATION

A no news paper

2020 Sampler

6 SELECTED CONVERSATIONS

A NO NEWS
NEWSPAPER!

A OF C

Stephen Butler x Matt Berninger

Hannah Perry x Ed Fornieles

SAMPLER

Zhang Enli
x
Neil Wenman

Erwin Wurm x Peter Morgan

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Ryan Gander x Cory Arcangel

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Toby Ziegler x Richard Russell

ART OF CONVERSATION
SAMPLER ISSUE 2020
A NO NEWS NEWSPAPER!
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1-4

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EVERYTHING IS RECORDED, 2018 HACKNEY ARTS CENTRE, SAVOY CINEMA, LONDON

RICHARD RUSSEL & TOBY ZIEGLER

Richard Russell producer and musician and Toby Ziegler artist at Toby's studio in Kilburn London having a conversation about their work together, mistakes, and digital with analogue.

RR If it is really highly rated, I feel there is a monstrosity that goes with that, a monstrosity that goes with success.

TZ At an individual level?

RR I don't think people achieve it totally by accident and whilst people don't have it at the forefront of their minds, people will pursue the work creatively first and then the success comes if they do it well. But I still think there is something monstrous in success that is connected to the success.

TZ When you talk about the work existing as some pure thing it all seems a bit nonsensical to me, because it's not one work if no one sees or hears it. It's a conversation and surely you want to be having that conversation with someone, not just having it with yourself?



So I think it's a bit of a tangled thing, like ego and adulation, but at the same time you want to be in a conversation with the society you are part of, you want your work to be useful for the times that you are living.

RR Are there a lot of visual artists who are discovered when they are older?

TZ Yes there are but usually they've had some level of recognition at some point, I mean it's quite hard to keep going if absolutely no one gives a fuck, but there are quite a few artists who don't peak till later or have a purple patch much later on in their life.

RR I mean it wouldn't really make any sense with visual art or music if you only get to be good when you were young.

TZ It would make more sense that you could only be good if you were old.

YOUTH culture is still pretty young though?

RR The whole thing in itself? Yes, sure.

TZ That might explain why there are not so many 80 year old musical legends knocking about, but I also suppose a lot of them die.

RR I also think a lot of older musicians stop developing; they get into the whole repetition thing. The legendary bands go around playing their hits, they are capitalising on the music they produced when they were young.

TZ I don't know if there is a musical equivalent of a museum? As an artist you want your work to end up in a museum because it is visible to lots of people and it's not part of any market. It's a fairly innocent space where people can go see work and no one is immediately trying to sell it. But there is also this idea that the museum is the death of the cultural object, like culture, if you think about bacteria, culture being this thing that is alive, a kind of climate, as soon as you put something in a museum you are taking it out of context and to some extent it becomes this secluded thing; it stops being part of that climate.

RR 'Museum piece' has always been an insult in music, not necessarily in

a way that is useful anymore...

TZ Also I think museums are changing now. It is not the same as it was 100 years ago when they had these clinical spaces that displayed objects.

But changing the subject, it was very exciting to collaborate with you on this project

[Toby and Richard worked on this art/music project Everything Is Recorded earlier this year at Hackney Arts Centre, Savoy Cinema]. I've done several projects that have taken the work out of the gallery context, a different context, and a different space. But what we did was more than just a space, it was a set of conditions with a social element, it was a massive collaboration between lots of people.

RR I think it introduced us to something that was 'site specific'. That is not really a thing for musicians. My record was also site specific; I didn't know I was making that record, I just knew I had a space that was different to any space I've had before, with more room for musicians and in a private yet central location, so a lot of people came through.

TZ We found this space specifically to do the project. Projections upstairs from a CCTV feed from downstairs, where I made this installation, also the stage. In the daytime when the band were rehearsing there you could come and watch the live feed upstairs and in the evenings they opened up the space downstairs for a series of gigs. But it was a very odd experience being in the space.

Upstairs there were three enormous screens and one of them projected these videos that I had made for the music and the other two had these live feeds to the CCTV of downstairs. If you had headphones on you could hear music from the video and if you took them off you could just hear this rumbling bass coming through the floor of the band playing downstairs but it still took a while to put the things together. It took a while to understand what you were watching on the screens was related to the noise, it was quite an uncanny experience.

RR There has been very unusual feedback to the whole thing. People really seemed to get a lot from it, some sort of feeling that it really took them by surprise, they didn't know exactly what it was. It was a lot to do with the music and partly to do with what you were doing. Some of it was quite inseparable, dependent on what you were there to see. I felt like there were elements of what you were doing that were seeping into everything and that was a big part of the reason that they got something special from it. As well as the fact it was a combination of something – a group of people who had worked for years at different things and at different times but there was an incredible respect between everyone so it had a bit of a celebratory feel about it.

I definitely feel that the event was operating on lines that were more from the art world than the music world. Because that was done well, they got a slightly different feeling from the experience but didn't necessarily know why. It was a real triumph without having to ram it down people's throats.



RICHARD RUSSEL & TOBY ZIEGLER

"I mean it's quite hard to keep going if absolutely no one gives a fuck"

TZ Also the way people discovered it seemed quite ambiguous. It didn't necessarily feel like something that was being framed as art but also it wasn't like a normal gig, it was a thing people stumbled across. There wasn't a commercial gallery that was fronting it, it happened quite organically, between you and me. It was self-commissioned.

RR That's why it was what it was. Because we have a pretty deep understanding of each other, of the work and beyond the work.

The attempt to do something like this in a more contrived way would normally produce contrived results you wouldn't get the same feeling from it at all.

TZ There was a lot of serendipity as well; like the space was just extraordinary, it was such a fucking coup.

RR Well you described that space exactly, way before we saw it. Quite extraordinary. That was really something, incredible.

The starting point for it... I value your feedback even just on music and I've always played stuff to you and we listened to stuff we were recording in Dorset and you said there was something you had been working on visually that connected to the music and it wasn't even what we were there to talk about, it had a completely natural evolution into what it became.

It's like - bands that were and are really great, one of the reasons we respond to their music is because we are responding to the people who are making the music and their friendships and relationships. There was a communication between the people that really meant something, you are actually hearing people's relationships, feelings being expressed and it is these feelings that you are actually connecting to.

That was always something with family music. You have people who grew up together singing so when you are listening to the Jackson Five or the Carpenters it means so much when you hear it.

TZ I think there's an analogy between what you do and what I do, the digital and the analogue as well. I think this has been more obvious in music than it has in art. In music there has been a strong digital element since the 70's.

RR That grew and developed and evolved, possibly went as far as it could.

That now has led back to a kind of integration. So the things that feel the most important now are where there is integration between analogue and digital.

There was a moment when digital was new enough that it was exciting enough to just be doing that and just making music. When

RR So did you not have a defined medium?

TZ I always made sculptures and paintings and sometimes installations. But I think... I suppose I thought of myself as someone who was originally turned on by painting but I had reached a point with painting, I just didn't know how to do it anymore, it just felt loaded and so macho.

So I started using the computer as a way of totally stamping out that idea of an autographic or expressive gesture. I was making 3D models and digital images. And then trying to make them by hand stamping out all idiosyncrasies; I was trying to turn myself into a machine.

I think for me I adopted digital technologies as a way to try and filter something, to create a kind of breach between conception and execution.



But then what happened was gradually it became a foil, I was doing this incredibly laborious very mechanical work, taking these very schematic ways of making and eventually it became a foil, something to retailate against and I found I was able to do these things that are much more hybrid and they go back and forth from digital to analogue.

Making sculptures in clay, then 3D printing them, then casting them and the paintings as well, they have digital fingerprints on them.

RR I want to have all the upside of these things, because it is difficult to make stuff that really feels progressive. It is hard and I feel like if you don't have access to the full range of tools it just gets harder. People who are recording in a knowingly retro way are just shutting themselves off from things that will help them do more interesting things, but also if you are just recording with a laptop you are also missing out on a whole load of things. I can also see it is quite confusing to do it that way unless you have the experience and focus needed.

This again comes back to being a bit older. I wouldn't have known how to put these things together when I was younger; it's only now I can. I

"An informed bad review, rare as it is, is by far the most useful thing"

I started making rave music that's all there was. There wasn't any non-computer component, that's all it was and that was all it needed to be. There wasn't any consideration for anything else because that was the only way you made tunes. I feel like now it is really difficult to really be pushing things forward just using digital. Someone like Frank Ocean who is still pushing things, part of that is blending some quite traditional technologies with current ones.

TZ For me it's definitely the case that digital tools are just another set of tools alongside all the other ones and I don't want to throw the others out, just because I've got a 3D printer it doesn't mean I want to discard all the other things in this vocabulary.

But it's funny how for me adopting Photoshop initially and then 3D modelling was a decision that came from a complete crisis. After I left art school I didn't know how to make an artistic gesture. There was too much history and too many clichés

am not going to use anything but a computer to capture and sequence all this stuff because I've got hundreds of hours of material. I wouldn't have been able to make this without a computer. This couldn't have existed just with tape, the analogue side of it from the drum machines to the mixing desk to the mics.

TZ And the performers...

RR Yes, and the performers.

I had a shock today as we were mastering this new E.P which has led on from the shows we did.

We had a vibe from the shows and we started recording again and we started some new things. One of the things we recorded of the show was Computer Love. We did a basic cover at the show of Computer Love by Zapp/Roger Troutman but we incorporated a bit of Computer Love by Kraftwerk. It's a bit of an in joke; Computer Love and Computer

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RICHARD RUSSEL & TOBY ZIEGLER

Love. It was quite fun and then we went to record it; we finished the recording and went to master it today.

When you are mastering an E.P or album you are closely AB'ing things together to try and ensure some sort of continuity to what you are listening to. In the studio you record one song at a time, but when you go to master you look as the whole album or E.P. as one thing. Obviously, things are going to be different but you want to make sure you put the whole thing on. You want to make sure it works on the same level; nothing jumps out (unless that is something you want).

But there was something about the recording of Computer Love I couldn't get to grips with sonically. And what it turned out to be, the recording of Computer Love was totally analogue; there was no digital element to it.

TZ Are you going to go back to it? Introduce something?

RR No I think the only digital element is the title (Laughter)

TZ A good artist makes really shit work.

RR A good artist can make mistakes.

TZ And I think it's really important to make those mistakes in public.

RR Why?

TZ For me it's only through people seeing and responding to my work that I know what I've done. I really don't know until a lot later. Also, the most useful reviews I have ever had have been bad ones.

RR An informed bad review, rare as it is, is by far the most useful thing.

A good review is not that useful and most bad reviews are not that useful and sometimes are annoying. But an informed bad review, I had one of those once and it was extremely...

TZ Just the one. (Laughter)

RR Yeah, well maybe two that I can think of, where people have understood the work and they have pointed out something about the work I hadn't seen.

Because if I had seen it I might have done it differently and that is really useful, but it is rare.

RR I made a record with XXXXXX and there was one reviewer, who said -

It got great review by the way - but there was one reviewer who said "This guy is really interesting, the guy producing it is really interesting, the vocal is interesting, and the music is really interesting but not all the music loves the vocals". That was a bit of a turning point for me. I remember in the making of the record with XXXX he was really open to new sounding things and was always pushing for more synth and more digital and he was always pushing that. He loved it, but I don't think it always loved him.

So it is not enough to say - to be a really great collaborator - to say "Oh they loved it, let's do some more of that". You actually have to be a bit more thoughtful about the connection between sounds and the people. For people to be excited by something is not enough if you have a feeling. Because I had a feeling at the time, that's why it was a great bit of criticism. They had seen something I had felt but I hadn't pushed it.

What bad reviews have you had that have been useful?

TZ There was one really early on. It helped me realise that all of the process and thought that I was putting into the work wasn't necessarily obvious and when you walked in cold it was something quite different, quite slick. There was a lot that was invisible and while I didn't want it to look laboured, I didn't want it to look cold or slick. But you just come to realise that what you think you are making and what someone is receiving can be so different.

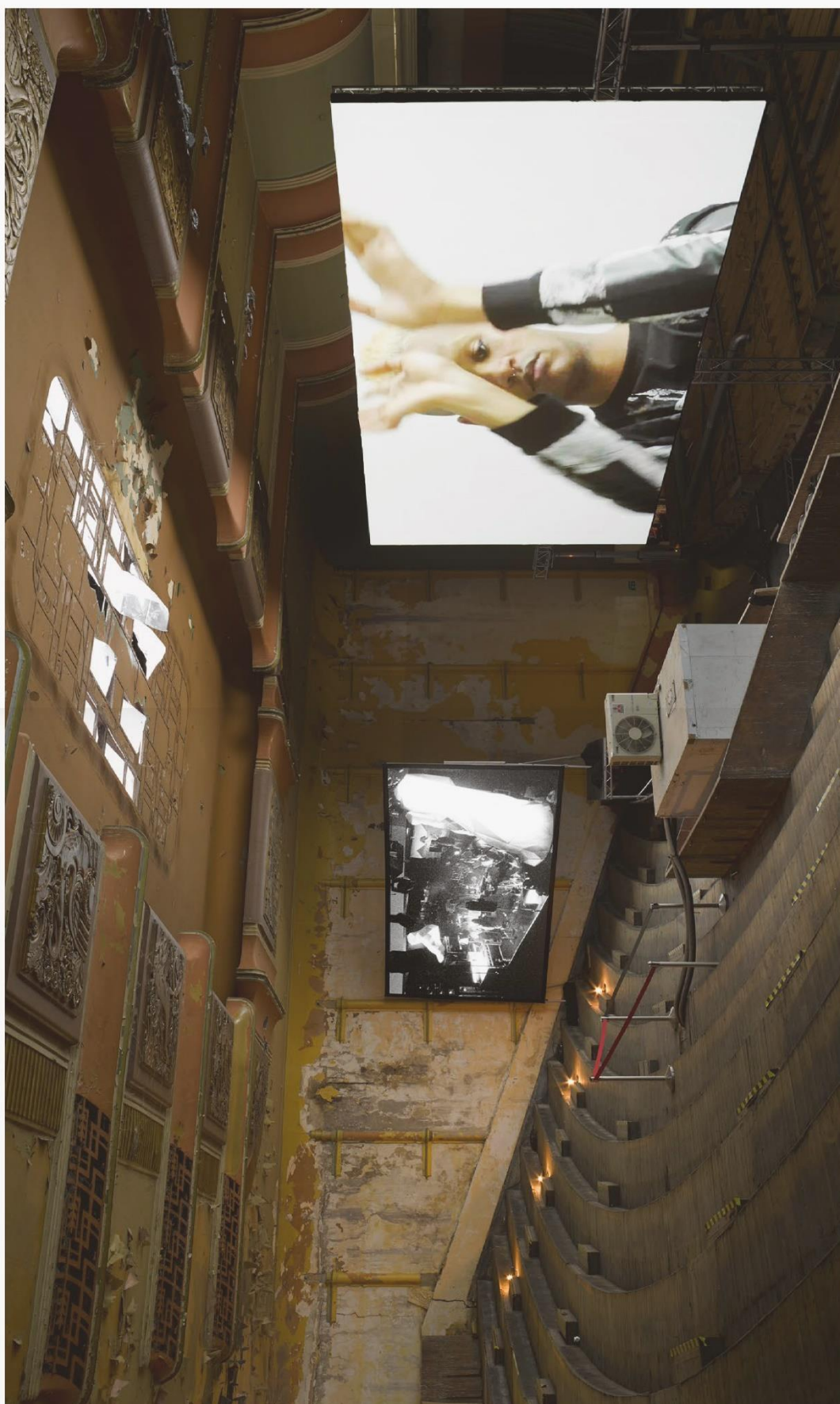
Something that I thought of as conceptual was being received as graphic, so it made me rethink.

I made a video for the show based on one of the tunes and you totally remixed/remade it. Someone is coming on Friday to help see if the video can still work for this totally new tune.

I've got to say I've got some reservations about this. I think it might work. I think the shows have informed what you are doing now. There's a real atmosphere that the shows had that has obviously informed what you are doing now. And the way that I made that video was very much responding to something that was pretty digital, it had a massive B2B in it. And it might make it more interesting because what I made was a completely CGI video with little clips of live footage dropped into it. But essentially it was these 3D animations of landscapes that I'd been making over the last 15 years that I used in paintings.

I also dropped in all these 3D models of my sculptures. It was kind of 'looting the archive' to create a walk through, and now I think it might be interesting to juxtapose with something that very analogue. It remains to be seen, so that's what we're doing on Friday.

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