

Transcribed excerpts from discussion on Remixes project at The White Swan, York (Theo Burt, Richard Sides & Tim Wright, 22 Dec 2013) and excerpts from written conversation (Theo Burt & Richard Sides, 22nd Jan 2014).

Tim Wright: What was the question?

Theo Burt: Yeah.

Richard Sides: I don't know, if I was you I don't know if I would want the thing to go that way but – do you actually like that music?

TW: You should ask questions you want to ask really.

RS: But you did say that's a good question.

TB: I don't know, let's just see if it's interesting once we get onto it.

TW: Surely it's interesting, you chose to make remixes with that music for a reason didn't you? What is that reason?

TB: Not a specific reason, no.

TW: Why choose those tracks then?

TB: Why choose anything? Why choose a preset on a synth?

RS: Did you think those were – from the quality of them, or that they – obviously they don't get deemed intellectual music in the same way as –

TW: Coldplay.



RS: – other music. Yeah but that's the thing, what's music? Is it just cultural activity then?

TB: They're despised by some people.

RS: They're pop and you're doing something experimental.

TB: You'd make a distinction between pop and experimental?

RS: No I wouldn't.

TW: But you just did.

RS: But, you know, they're established in a separate context from the context you're doing the work in.

TB: I just see it just as there's a kind of music that is unfashionable with a certain group of people who engage with a particular culture. And that unfashionableness, might also contain some intellectual elitism, class snobbery, or –

TW: The horrible thing for me is that it could be perceived as being ironic in some way.

TB: Yeah and it was on a couple of blogs, when I released Summer Mix, which is annoying, but –

RS: Well that's the straight up question for that one then, is it an ironic – thing?

TB: No.

TW: Trying to make something 'experimental' out of something –

RS: Or is it the other way round, being ironic towards being experimental?

TB: I think there is an irony, there's an irony that –

RS: To me it seems more ironic about the idea of process art

TB: Yeah.

RS: It's more ironic towards that than it is towards the content.

TB: Well it might be that people who would never listen to this music might listen to it after it's been processed, and suddenly have a different opinion about it. I guess there's a contrast between process stuff like Sol LeWitt who's seen as super conceptual modernist on one side, and on the other side is Eric Prydz –

TW: What is Eric Prydz associated with?

TB: – associated with commercial clubbing, Ministry of Sound style, whatever.

TW: From what I can see, it's not Ministry of Sound it's leotards.



TB: Ah that's just one video.

TW: But that's why he's super-famous, it might not be why he gets recognised for his music.

RS: It's Ibiza.

TW: It's not just Ibiza, it's kind of pan-European gym music.

TB: Yeah but again old class cultural elitism cuts through, in that Ibiza now is somewhere that a lot of the people that consider themselves part of an 'intellectual' class would hate the idea of going.

RS: But that's why I'm saying meta, because I think you're being intellectual about it, to be honest.

TB: Fine.

RS: You're doing something that you don't want to be seen as redundant, this is not just a cynical gesture, you're actually saying like, take this seriously as a piece of art.

TB: I didn't really think about it originally.

RS: But engaging in what you just said, it takes this practical idea of Sol LeWitt's conceptual tinkering, but is it really serious, what is it to do that? That's what I think's more redundant.

TW: Is there humour in what you're doing?

TB: That's not the reason I'm doing it, but I do –

TW: Is there humour?

TB: No ones actually giving me a chance to say anything.

RS: We're just grilling it 'cause it's a shit project.

TB: Yeah the two things together, process art, Eric Prydz, might entertain me a little bit, but that wasn't why I did it in the first place. There's lots of things – there's no one reason I did it.

TW: Another thing you could argue is that the original recordings were probably, the mastered versions are probably the absolute pinnacle of the craft of mastering trance, pop-dance music.

TB: Yeah yeah I think Prydz is brilliant, I think some of it is almost like noise music, material, and he does some amazing stuff with compression.

TW: You're playing with the real cream of –

RS: Yeah I don't think you can say it's low meets high art, because I don't think that's true.

TB: I not saying that's how I consider it! I'm saying that some people still implicitly hold these ideas. Christ, I'm not saying that. I was saying that idea is ridiculous. So you've already totally misunderstood me there.

RS: Yeah but that's what I mean, you're not saying you're engaging with it *because* of that ridiculous notion. It's on all levels isn't it?

TB: Well that's not the reason I'm doing it, but I can't help if it ends up ridiculing people who hold those positions.

RS: Yeah, but that's after the fact.

TB: Yeah yeah it's after the fact, I would agree.

TW: But you are cutting something up very specifically aren't you, you're cutting up very specific cultural references.

TB: Yeah but to be honest, this is what Richard was saying, and it was the reason I didn't want to write anything about it for the journal originally, because I didn't want to disambiguate it. So maybe I still won't write this down, I don't know. It isn't one statement, I hate the idea of putting something so explicitly.

RS: Well you shouldn't have done that then, you should get someone to write something as a creative response to it.

TB: Yeah I know, I know, I probably should have. But I ran out of time.

Theo Burt: In your music (and it may crop up in my work too) you seem to end up disrupting ideas of 'value'. Even if these are more unconscious ideas or tastes we have, music seems to be a very intense carrier of ideas of 'value'. Musical taste often seems to be used as a tool to position ourselves in relation to other people/the world. And I often encounter (implicit) strong opinions about what music has 'value' and what has no 'value' or shit 'values'. And this sense of what 'value' lies where may even seem like an objective reality. By playing with this, a lot of your music work seems to raise conflicts that force people to confront the subjectivity of these ideas, or if they refuse to accept this, might produce feelings of anger haha.

Richard Sides: That's a point that I think has some truth to it. But, perhaps that's to do with the way different cultures digest things. Like the way sex is less of a deal in some countries than others. It's not fair to say one is more developed than the other, just that some things come with histories and it's more or less acceptable to play with them. I guess that histories define different value systems. I am completely bound to my own history and even if I, or you, think that something is being subverted it could just as easily be seen as pompous, or irrelevant. Which brings us to taste and that everything one does is driven by taste, and perhaps subjectivity for that matter, if they can be seen as different things...

TB: But I think it's when certain opinions (for example about what represents 'value' in music) are perceived as an objective truth that things can start to get nasty. I still think there's a lot to be said for making things that disrupt your subjective reality, highlight it etc. I like the idea of collapsing strong symbols into a more material experience, cutting some of the connections, creating space for new ones etc.

RS: I think I understand your work in a way where there's a lot about exploring the aesthetics of production. I get that from it and I like that nuance.

TB: I don't know if that comes into this work, maybe it does.

RS: It takes something that's an existing production and it applies a different kind of production, like an algorithmic computer.

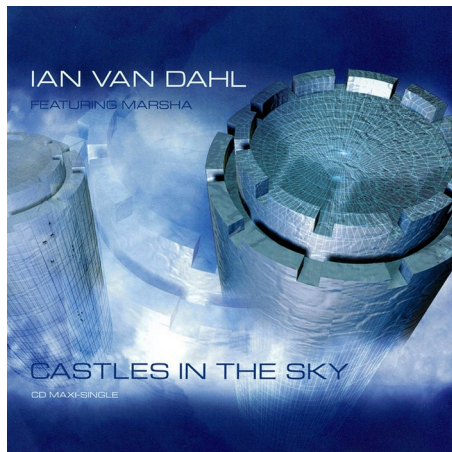
TW: Well it's like manipulating the arrangement rather than production isn't it? You're not actually manipulating the quality of the audio in any way are you?

TB: But I guess that is about production, but yeah in a more structural sense.

RS: But I imagine that your ideal track would sound like Eric Prydz, but the reason that you chose Eric Prydz is not completely arbitrary, to you, to your way of working.

TB: Yeah, but then you get down to the nub that I can't explain any further which is that sometimes some things that I hear make me feel a certain way and I have a particular feeling, emotional or whatever about them, but I can't go any further than that really.

TW: But you picked big iconic tracks didn't you, like Castles in the Sky.



TB: Some of them, yeah yeah.

RS: But Castles in the Sky is one of my favourite tracks, but that's because of how, that's how we relate.

TB: But I heard these tracks in the past and now I associate them with certain feelings.

TW: So is it basically a nostalgia trip?

TB: *[Laughs]* Well then if you're saying that – everything I ever heard before, that formed me, came from the past. By your standards anything I could ever make would automatically be nostalgic.

TW: Well that's what you said, not what I said.

TB: Well that's the implication of what you're saying.

TW: I'm saying that the reason it has significance... well those tracks are omnipresent, when they're doing well they're everywhere and they mark out times in people's lives.

TB: Every piece of music that people hear.

TW: Yeah but those ones are everywhere.

TB: Yeah true, but I'm talking about my response to it, not necessarily everyone else's.

TW: No but your response to that now, does that mark out a particular time in your life.

TB: No. Any piece of music, or anything which I recognise and have heard before, it's going to evoke some kind of specific feeling, so like acting as a symbol. It may be a different symbol for me than for other people.

RS: Yeah and I guess taking away any kind of symbolic relationships, semantic, whatever, whatever, whatever. Like, it becomes about music again.

TW: Or sound or material.

RS: It becomes about the material and it kind of makes me question what is the point in the process, what is the point in doing that process where you kind of like destroying it beyond it's musical arrangement?

TW: Deconstruction?

TB: That's not why I did it – at first I just wanted to see what it sounded like.

RS: The meaning of the track is the effect I would say. Because it isn't a symbolic thing. The effect of the track is within the composition of the track. The way that it puts chords together, creates a certain aesthetic contemplation of it.

TW: I think one of the really interesting things in what Theo's doing is the reorientation of the ideas of tension and

release, because you've completely restructured the way things build up and fall away. One of the key things about the original tracks is they all make use of that very –

TB: Yeah, yeah, I know what you mean, there's a kind of flattening. But again, initially I just thought about the processes, and wasn't totally sure what would come out. I suspected they might produce something interesting. I'd already done Summer Mix, and I just wanted to see what it sounded like. And I put loads of tracks through and I tried a lot of techniques until I found something I really liked. I was looking for a sound I liked. And then the titles just made sense. Maybe I was thinking about my dad's work. He always named things very literally. But it's probably the same for all of us now, making stuff, I don't know what it's going to be before hand, I just put things together.

RS: But that's what's kind of interesting.

TB: And things just pop up. And different things you hadn't considered come out as well. So everything is after the fact, it's whole existence is after the fact.

RS: But I think there's a difference between what I do and what that work is in that I probably did a similar thing at a certain point where I used process as a way of – you know like in the way that emerged in art history. It emerged as a way of dealing with expression, and dealing with and framing phenomena and things like that. Which is kind of what you're doing, but I almost feel like the process in that kind of anal processing of things, is quite redundant as a way of working for myself. I'm not saying it's always redundant, but I feel like the revelation for me is that expression is really important and you can explore things through the way you express, through collage, or perhaps appropriation.

TB: When producing it, I wasn't interested in anything which didn't, when I listened to it, make me feel weird, or change my mood or whatever, in some way. So it can be viewed as a form of expression, it's just a different way of achieving it. As I say I would put a hundred tracks through it and listen to the results. And yeah, for a little while I had a maybe romantic idea. I like the process of making sound with little direct input into it, algorithmically or however, then somehow, something comes out of it, something that affects me. Unpredictable.

RS: I see your new Scottish Diss stuff as an extension of the remixes we are talking about here, but what's kinda more interesting is that you are engaging also in a very specific social context / time and you seem to have quite a structured idea of how you playback the results - a loud PA etc etc. There's no answer I guess, but there's something quite interesting about music and context, or cultural activity for that matter. You can see how techno, or dancehall all seem to be born out of a particular place, but with some stuff, like 'art music' or computer music, they're born out of an institutional, almost academic situation - often sterile I believe. But what happens when the academic situation loses its relevance, yet it's aesthetics are still practiced - take process / algorithmic methods of production and composition - as a form of hauntology? It could be comforting, but also irrelevant, and that makes me feel a bit disenchanted. But again, what's to say different ideologies won't move around in their pertinence - fading and regaining weight...

TB: Yeah surely it's impossible to return to discarded processes or approaches and retain anything close to their original meanings (especially if they were originally attached to some particular ideology or whatever). But on the other hand, I don't think returning to these approaches has to be automatically nostalgic or irrelevant. A similar approach in a new time / context might appear the same but take on a new, different relevance. Alternatively, what if the old approaches / processes are used just as symbols to combine and manipulate? That, on its own, leaves me feeling a bit empty.

RS: But I guess like, for example, I just started thinking the first thing that comes into my head like DJ Shadow's Endtroducing, is completely made out of other people's music, but at no point in the record did it say a list of all the samples and how it's been processed, but yet it creates some great pieces of music out of other people's music. So what makes it [the remixes] interesting then?

TB: Hang on, let me answer that then. Well you know the video work I've done before, the thing I began to get interested in was how – in Colour Projections for example, when you have two circles coming together very slowly, it's how your knowledge of what's happening affects your actual experience of it. And that's what it is with this, your knowledge that it's this one thing made into this other, with a certain process, it just makes it into a different thing for me.

RS: Exactly, all right, okay.

TW: And you make it clear when you perform it. Don't you display the titles?

TB: Yeah by getting the titles and projecting them. In my past I came across a lot of people who would try to tell me that only the sound matters, almost like there's some value in ignoring the context. And I'm just setting up some context by giving it this title etc.

RS: Yeah, yeah.

TB: When I first made it, made this algorithm, put the stuff through it and listened to it, my experience of it was based on the knowledge of what I'd done to it. And I guess I could also say I can give people a, well a hint of the situation that I made it in.

RS: Yeah yeah, so I guess that's the thing, I guess the difference is with expression you create an illusion that you hope has some kind of human-based response, but within this you're kind of taking the response to a different – you're exploring it in a different way.

TW: You're also somehow expecting your ideas to be transmitted by your work, aren't you?

TB: No, only from a practical point of view.

TW: If you're trying to do something expressive aren't you trying to project an idea or an emotion into your music?

TB: No no, I hate the idea of expression in that sense.

TW: It's kind of a dodge.

TB: I hate the idea of that, that wasn't what I was trying to do at all.

RS: I do think there's something, I guess in terms of music and noise again, and this is what you were saying about – I think you do accept these notions of how things like Eric Prydz are received in wider contexts, within the context of – the scene, or whatever word you want to use.

TB: I have my own –

RS: Because you said yesterday that Eric Prydz –

TB: Uh oh

RS: – is noise, a cultural noise.

TB: No, I said to some people.

RS: Yeah to some people it's just a noise.

TB: Some people like *[name removed]*.

RS: Like *[name removed]*.

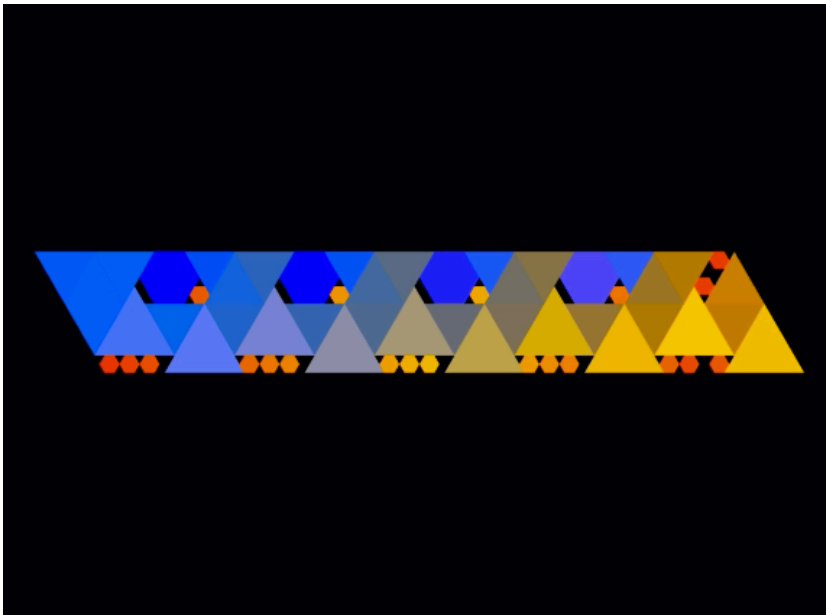
TB: Yeah don't get me wrong, there's loads of different music going on in different places that I really enjoy. But it seems like a lot of computer music that exists within certain scenes (that I guess we have contact with) only has a function of sustaining those scenes... which seems really hedonistic somehow (bad hedonistic - **[RS:** like Leo diCaprio in *The Beach*]). So the music, maybe ironically, does support and perpetuate a culture, I don't think we can question that. The question is more: is this culture actually interesting to people inside or out of it? It seems quite strange for a culture that tries to imagine itself as 'experimental' to keep repeating the same things year after year.



RS: Apart from the occasional genuine 'wild cards' that somehow often feel fickle when presented in that weird context.

TB: Yeah things get lost. There's also the classic arty festival disguise of producing very familiar music with an attempt to contextualise it as something new by adding an almost completely arbitrary written statement (usually pulling in references from theorists/scientists that might appear to support it somehow). Seems like a strange way round to work to me... We both sound totally cynical, and maybe we are. And maybe a lot of what we're saying is flawed also. But I see very little self-reflection in these scenes. I'd like to see more. It sometimes feels like there's a mass group reluctance to criticise each other, or enter any kind of dialogue, perhaps because there is some unconscious fear/understanding that everything in it is somehow empty or redundant, and criticism will lead to the whole thing being unravelled.

RS: But, perhaps that isn't a suitable place for your work, or more obviously there isn't always an ideal home for some practices. Take for example, when I've done things with you in the past, I'm specifically thinking about the BUS club event, I found more than one artist friend of mine say "why's this guy not massive and in lots of exhibitions..." in relation to your Tiling project. He was only exposed to the work through some wanky hybrid art/music event and perhaps that's a positive thing about moving things around. It says something about the conditions of projects being linked to context, which is maybe something that shouldn't always be prescribed.



So, perhaps the problem here - for a lot of practitioners - is that some people don't want to be explicit about what and where their work exists and that's fine, but as things around and about 'practices' become more complex... like the social 'conditioning' of the internet, it almost becomes harder for unprompted discoveries to happen in a physical realm. How often do you hear new pop tunes on the radio/in the supermarket that make you want to explore them more? The classic club DJ is an important mode of communication for new forms - to push new sounds, or the radio - things like NTS could become exciting, and hopefully they're trying to 'do away' with the imposed musical hierarchies.

It makes me question the social media, soundcloud-uploading, tweeting artist. Even though there might be more chances to be discovered/new places evolving for work, as so many are non-physical it seems like there might be a decreased possibility for future 'chance' discoveries (in record stores, or whatever). Whole new scenes emerge prompted by harvesting musical histories - like that crap pop you hear with samples of 40's jazz. I do find a certain affinity to older music - maybe cause it's embedded in history (a story), rather than being new and not yet fully digested. It seems important for things to be archived properly. Though it's a different sensation, I still crave the new wave equally...

RS: Can I just say, it makes me think that – and this is how I personally perceive that stuff, I can divorce myself from the original source material even though I'm familiar with it, and it becomes a kind of concrete thing. It kind of becomes concrete again, it goes back to sound as kind of pure material.

TB: When? When you're listening to the remix stuff?

RS: Yeah because also the way it's arranged is very non-musical, for want of a better word.

TB: Originally when I played them in public situations, I had the titles projected for the whole track, but a few gigs later I was just projecting the titles for about 20 seconds then back to black, because it's much nicer to be able to drift back into the –

TW: In the Woolpack, people hadn't noticed them and didn't know what the hell was going on.



RS: But not knowing what the hell goes on is okay.

TW: Well I'm not sure it actually is, it definitely helps the experience.

RS: It changes the experience in that it makes you go, 'ooh'.

TW: But to the average punter in the Woolpack it sounds like noise. Like unstructured annoying noise.

RS: But that's kind of what it is.

TW: It's not unstructured, it might be annoying.

TB: I know the tracks quite well, so I see a lot of structure.

TW: That's what I'm saying, it's not unstructured and if you do know that there is a rationale behind it –

TB: But even without a rationale, I just picked the tracks that I saw structure in, or for whatever reason I enjoyed.

RS: But I don't like this idea that conceptualism makes materials okay that aren't regarded as okay.

TW: That's very interesting, because I do think it makes a very big difference in this case.

RS: Yeah but in a lot of art that's what conceptualism is.

TB: I agree with you and I'm really bored of this too, but that's because there's often just a concept and some boring material and no relation between the two.

RS: But it makes me think, I remember one of the first times I bought the Wire mag, it had this article on some guy called Matt Rogalsky, and it was this guy who went through 24 hours or so of radio and took out all the silences and made a track from all the silences and it sounded like 'phhht shhh unphh hyoo', in-between the words.

TB: Yeah and you don't really need to hear it to appreciate it.

RS: Yeah you don't need to hear it to appreciate it, but in the case of what your thing is –

TB: Yeah I agree with what you're saying. In mine, the process isn't very interesting in itself.

RS: In a sense you're kind of stood on a fence and maybe that's a good position to take.

TB: It's just an ambiguity.

RS: I once read about an Arthur C. Clarke story called Childhood's End in which aliens come down to earth and create peace due to some physiological force. Anyhow, what's interesting is how the aliens do not 'get' what or why humans listen to music because they cannot contemplate it - it is just a noise to them. Like the idea of mental rejection, xenolinguistics etc. perceiving an alien language, but in this case from the perspective of non-humans... recoiling towards human subjectivity. A little bit like when I see people going mad for Carsten Nicolai, to me it is kinda pompous and very austere, but bad austere. So what is it to believe that so-called high-culture is bad culture? Is that a class divide or cultural divide? On paper I should enjoy Nicolai's music, but actually it has all the wrong nuances for me. Perhaps I am a fascist or a lazy listener, I dunno.

TB: On paper I don't see why you should enjoy Nicolai's music.



RS: Because it is supposedly breaching all the following areas: Art, Techno, Phenomenology etc. Not that I would define myself as those things, but I know they've been of interest through other forms.

TB: Well perhaps it just fails to do that. As I've heard pointed out before (including by you), Nicolai (we seem to be using him as a standard-bearer), and a lot of other stuff feels like weirdly decontextualised techno. It's the classic academic music mistake of thinking you can transplant the sound of some music out of its context, manipulate it and imagine some of the original meaning will carry with it. You just end up with strange, hollow shells. I see that as a flaw, but maybe my attitude is flawed too... am I just similar to someone worrying about a lack of 'authenticity'?

It's interesting to compare that to someone like Lorenzo (Senni)... It's not obvious what the difference is, there just is one. It feels genuinely impossible to pin down where he fits, but he does. Which seems really powerful.

RS: I agree. I think it has something to do with intensity and emotion perhaps - that's why trance is often so successful, because it draws from this culturally embedded emotional language, and he addresses that energy but also plays with expectations.

TB: Yeah he kinds of develops it, criticises it and loves it all at the same time.

RS: I really believe in that position and think that's how you approach work.

TB: And in your work too. There are contradictions that run through it, but that irresolvability seems like it's the energy that could produce new ideas when you experience it.