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**CALVIN
JOHNSON**

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CYRUS W. SMITH OF ART TALK AM IN CONVERSATION WITH

CALVIN JOHNSON

DECEMBER 30, 2008

Based in Olympia, Washington, Calvin Johnson's work in underground culture started as a teenage fan volunteering at the local community radio station, KAOS-FM. He moved on to writing for fanzines, organizing music and film events, playing music in various ill-fated bands. Calvin established K, a locally oriented media outlet, in 1982.

In 1993 Calvin founded Dub Narcotic, a recording studio, in which he has documented the work of such acts as Mirah, the Blow, Versus, Built to Spill, Fitz of Depression, Make-Up and Little Wings. It has also been the incubator of many Calvin experiments in collaboration and self-expression, such as Beat Happening, Halo Benders and Dub Narcotic Sound System.



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CYRUS SMITH So, We're sitting here in the Dub Narcotic Sound Studio. Sitting here talking with Calvin Johnson. I'd like to thank you for taking the time to talk with me.

CALVIN JOHNSON You're welcome.

CS So, I asked to be here because I'm part of a group of students, we call ourselves the "Art and Social Practice Program." We're students who are working outside of studios and for the most part also outside of galleries. And so, we're choosing instead to work in the world, or maybe using the world as our stage. Staying independent, or off the grid a little bit. Abandoning the exhibition of art in favor of something more like an experience. And so, I'm looking at finding venues for capturing the pursuits of an artist engaged in life and culture, and seeking platforms that could be models to capture more of an ephemeral existence as an artist, which is where you come in. I've been looking at

independent music, and how that exists, and how that's survived, and been a pretty strong force culturally for a long time. And also looking at what artists might have to learn from music. So, I'm just hoping to catch your thoughts on a few things and see what music can give to art, or how that exchange takes place.

CJ Alright.

CS So, my first question to get you going is going to be about collaboration. I have a quote I'd like to start with, by Michelangelo Pistoletto, from the late 60's actually. And he says "by collaboration I mean non-competitive human relationship based on shared values of sense and perception. To give a part of myself to those who wish to give a part of themselves is the work that interests me."¹ I was just going to start there and get your thoughts on working together. How you chose to be many instead of one. How you started organizing. Being part of bands or groups of people.

NOTE // 1. Michaelangelo Pistoletto, Manifesto. 2 April 1968.

CJ Collaboration is also about trust.

CS Trust, okay.

CJ People have to trust each other. Trust that the person they are collaborating with knows what they are talking about, or has good ideas. So if you're working with someone, and they, like, say "oh, we should do this," and it seems completely out of left field, or non sequitur or something, you just have to work with it. It doesn't mean you just have to accept it on faith, there's still going to be a dialogue about it, but you have to take it seriously, and that's a part of collaboration that seems hard for some people to accept. And collaboration is really about the sum greater than it's parts. X and Y put together create something beyond that. And that's the magic element that is undefinable.

CS Something to build on that, I think, is that the notion of being a collective, or a cooperative, or acting communally is often associated with a radical left political stance. Do you see working with people,

and engaging in that process, trusting that those efforts will compound, do you see that as a political stance for yourself?

CJ Um, it definitely can be. Cooperative models, and collective models, those are different things, and they can be useful tools. I've worked with both of those before, and I think they can be really amazing. They're a little more work than a hierarchical model, which is what people are used to, and a lot of people feel comfortable with. They know where they are in the hierarchy, they know who's above them, who's below them, and everything is defined and they don't have to think. With a collectively organized organization it's more...

CS Level maybe?

CJ I think one of the crutches of a hierarchical organization is that you can disavow responsibility. "That's not my department." If it goes wrong, "It's not my problem." Whereas if you're a member of a collective, then you have, perhaps, more stake. The problem I think a lot of people have

with collectively run organization is they get confused and think that that means that everyone does everything. You still have to delegate responsibility. That is where the flaw happens. A lot of times, you have these three hour meetings where you're trying to decide whether the toilet paper should go over or under. And everyone's getting really heated about it. More appropriately you would delegate.

CS *(laughs)* You would put someone in charge of which way the toilet paper...

CJ Joe and Sue are going to study the matter, because the organization has policies, and using those policies as guidelines, and Joe and Sue are going to determine which is most appropriate for the group. And come back and say "Well, we recommend this because..." And everyone else goes, "Oh, great!" And then there you are. So not every single decision, clearly, needs to be made by everyone. I think that's a common misconception.

CS Yeah, and I think the notion of having roles

makes the most sense with music too. Where you each have your own instruments, and you're contributing from what that instrument has to offer to the whole.

CJ That's true, yes. But K (Records) is not a collective or a cooperative. As far as the state of Washington is concerned, we're a sole proprietorship. But I have been and am involved with both collectives and cooperatives. And I think a really wonderful model here in Olympia is the Olympia Food Cooperative. Which is a business owned by its members. It's a consumer co-op. The people who shop there own the business. It's also collectively run by the staff. So the staff doesn't have a hierarchy, there's no managers and under-lings. It's both, and it's very successful in both those ways. In fact it's the only consumer food cooperative in the country that's still collectively run, with more than one location.

CS Wow.

CJ Most food cooperatives, once they start getting bigger, they feel like "We have to

have managers, we have to have this hierarchy." And they found that, no, you have your set of guidelines, and as you expand you just refer to the guidelines. "Our policies state, such and such, therefore it makes sense for us to do things this way." So they have continued to expand, following these original guidelines, and I think it's a great model for both those things.

CS I like that you brought up the size, kind of dictating that it would negate any ability to act collectively.

CJ It's an excuse, but it's not necessarily true. It's only true if you decide that.

CS That's interesting to hear of a model that's getting larger and maintaining a collectivity somehow. Is that how your bands have operated though? I guess that's the question.

CJ It depends. I feel that bands ... it's another one of those situations where people get really confused about what's going on, and what's right and what's fair, and I tend

to blame the Beatles for that. They're seen as the ultimate four people in the band, everyone somehow is equal. Which may or may not be true, I don't know, I wasn't there. But it seems to me as if there's a different interpretation that may be more accurate. And it goes back to this idea of a collective where responsibility is delegated. And instead of saying "Well, we're a band, everyone should have an equal share, everyone should make decisions together," what if we delegate decisions? In terms of the drum parts, maybe Ringo should be in charge of that.

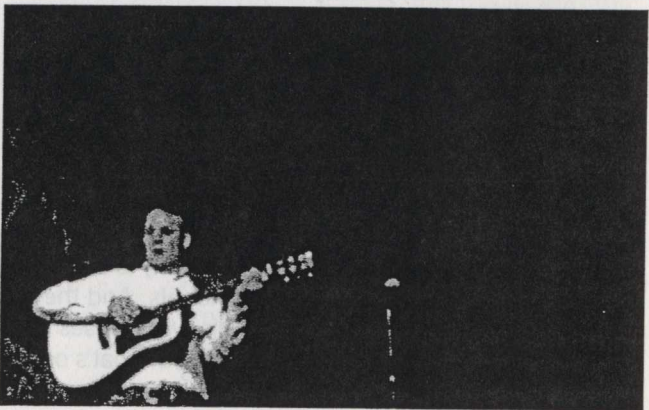
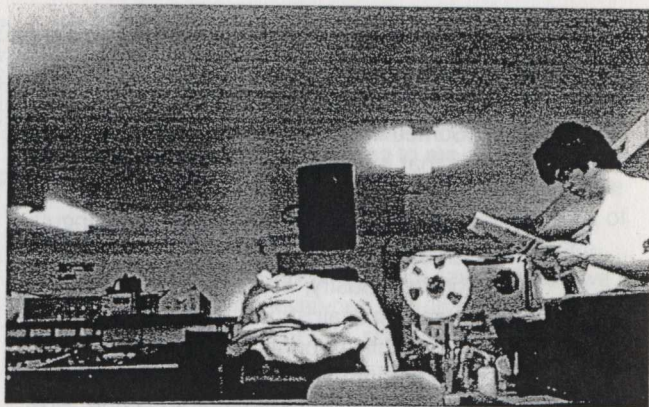
CS *(laughs)*

CJ With our input, but he seems to be the one who's most knowledgeable in that department. And so, you know, when it comes to a band or any creative pursuit, I feel it's a big mistake to look at it where everyone's equal. We're all people, we all have a say. But, some people are more creative than others in different ways. And again it's about collaboration and trust. It's not necessarily, put your ego aside, but it

is to remember that the ultimate goal is to make a good album.

CS Something that I think could fold into this, is that it seems like the idea of being independent can be a little bit of a misnomer. That you are this independent or singular character lashing out against the world or the industry, whatever it is that you're standing against. But then there's an incredible amount of interdependence in the community of an independent music scene or an independent art scene. How much you rely on each other to make those decisions, like you're talking about. Having a group of people who you not only trust on an individual level as far as creating a song with, but that you trust to be part of the community you are a part of.

CJ Sure. Community is... it's not an either/or situation, being an individual or being part of a community. A community is a collection of unique individuals. And they each are providing their own plusses and minuses to the greater good. That's one of the purposes of the Dub Narcotic



Studio, is to be a gathering point for people to collaborate, to create sums greater than their parts, and to create a space where people feel comfortable doing things that might be a little daring for them or be unusual for them. Or doing something that they always wanted to do, but they never thought they had a chance. We've been very successful in being able to create that environment for people, and we've benefited from that as a label certainly.

CS So, I was going to talk next about industry. The phrase we use in the art world is "platform." Creating a "platform" for your work. So say, I'm not signing a work Cyrus Smith, but it's like Cyrus Smith Industries, or some other name that I'm going by that could be many things, and be able to encompass things like collaboration, but under a name instead of a person's name. Which is essentially what a label is. So, maybe just to catch your take on the

IMAGES /// Top: Dub Narcotic Sound Studio. 2007. Bottom: Calvin Johnson, live at the Smell in Los Angeles. 2009.

importance of framing something that way, and what that provides a piece of music, a piece of art.

CJ Well, in terms of a body of work, the only framework that I try to draw on is the general visionary aspect of the work, and that's what draws me to particular artists, is that they seem to have a really clear world view that's unique. And so, that's why we don't work within any one genre of music. We work with singer song writers, we work with composers who work in a more traditional chamber orchestra realm, we work with hip-hop artists, punk bands, rock bands. All sorts of different underground musicians. But the similarity is that they all have a very clear vision of what their work is, where it's going to go. And that is the greater body of work that I see K creating as a label.

CS I don't know if this is simplifying it too much, but what I see from the general structure of K and how you operate, is that it looks a lot like DIY punk culture, and I'm wondering how much you see yourself

a part of that, or how much that has to do with how you're framing the work that comes through here.

CJ Well that's more about the process, rather than the content.

CS What do you think that lends to the process then? To work in that way?

CJ Well the process is, we are trying to work more broadly on a human level. And that involves working with local businesses, local producers on all levels, down to our manufacturing. When we can't get our records pressed in Thurston county or Washington State, but we try to have all of our CDs and records and cassettes, and all our covers manufactured within the United States of America, and that's very important to me. And we have employees here, we try to treat them well.

CS We've ended up talking a lot about the individual, whether it's the individual artist, or the individual that's supported by, or involved with this industry, which is some-

thing else that I was planning on asking about, actually. Just the idea of smallness. And, thinking small with big ideas. Thinking of art as a microcosm, or even that individual as a microcosm. Is that something that you think of? Is that why you live in a small town still?

CJ This is just my home, that's why I live here. And this is where I like to be.

CS I guess I ask because we had somebody tell our group of students, basically, that you couldn't make it in the world unless you went to one of the big art centers, and that there was no way to even stay in Portland, because Portland was too small. You'd never be anybody, you'd never amount to anything.

CJ Well that depends on what the definition of anybody or anything is. It depends on what your goals are. You can't "make it" in Portland, you have to move to a big center? How does that take into account these people who are making it in Portland? How does this person, how does he explain that?

CS I guess he's not here to defend his words, but maybe I'll leave that open and bring up another idea, about the centralization of culture. You've talked a lot about a decentralized underground culture.

CJ Decentralized underground culture is really just one aspect of a decentralized capitalist culture. Our economy has become so centralized, and we are suffering greatly from it now. The decentralized nature of capitalism at one time was quite a source of livelihood for most people. And the centralization of it is mirrored in the centralization of pop culture. And you know, it's selling to the lowest common denominator. And in the end it gave birth to a burgeoning underground culture, cause there was a lot of people who wanted something that wasn't the lowest common denominator. And so we see that in our culture now, in that every aspect of creative endeavor; music or film or painting or whatever, there's a very rich variety available now. People just doing their thing in their own way. And it goes in ebbs and flows in different ways, cycles.

But it seems like we have a very healthy underground artistic community in the United States in all aspects of creative work.

CS Listening to your music, another thing that I see is what I'm going to call a "Big Love." A lot of your work is about the heart, and the outpouring of emotion, and a fullness in that way. Which with punk rock music, this love seems like it doesn't quite fit. But then I also see that as a really radical thing to bring to that stage. There's a phrase here that I'm going to throw out, that I've been tossing around with a few other people. I'm not sure where I heard it first, but it's this notion of "Positive Activism." And it's basically just a way to define creating the world that you want to live in. And your songs about love in this really stripped down, straight forward, punk rock sort of way, seem to speak really loudly in that way. Is that something you think about? Creating the world you want to live in?

CJ It is one strategy, definitely. An example would just be, female involvement. In both music and in other aspects of the musical

world, besides performance or the creation of music. That's always been a big part of what we do at K, and when we organized the International Pop Underground convention in 1991, it was 5 days of events, and two weeks before it started somebody said, "We should add a night at the beginning that's going to be all female musicians. Just women." And, I was actually against this idea because I felt like there were already so many women performers and organizers and sound people that to me, it was like creating a world where you don't need to separate women out and make a ghetto. Just lead by example. Here's the world that we would like to see. We have created it. It exists. And so I was kind of like, "Well, we're missing the point if we ghettoize women to one night." But then I came around to it, cause I was like, well, is it possible to have too many women? No! So, let's just add a whole other night of it. But I think the idea of, like, rather than complaining about something, we just made it be. Here it is. This is a possible world. And I think that generally speaking we try to approach things in that way.

CS Another thing that happens when you create the world you want to live in, when you create an industry around it, like we've been talking about, it can introduce those ideas to the larger consciousness in an interesting way, but one of the dangers that I've seen, that I was hoping to get your opinion on, is if something becomes institutionalized then it can void itself basically, by becoming an institution in an oppressive sense, rather than in the freeing sense.

CJ Well that's true, because a lot of times, what might attract you to something is its spontaneity, and its freshness. The way I interpret your question, institutionalizing means making it rote. I've seen that happen in an artistic sense with performance and people start to have expectations. When they see it the first time, it's like "Woah! Crazy! That's totally what?!?" But by the third time they're just expecting this one thing.

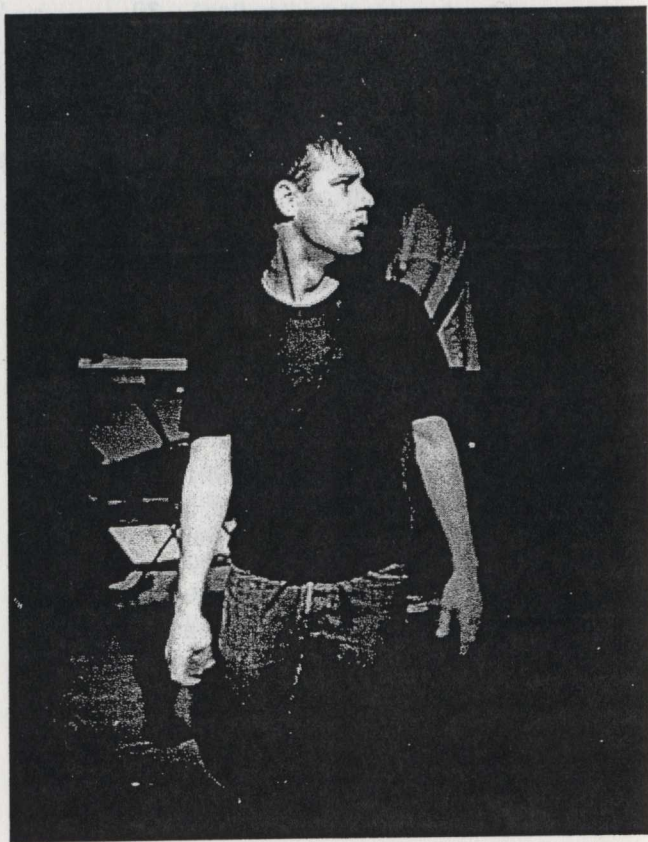
(Calvin waves his hands over his head in a dramatic expression)

CS Can you do that "totally what" to me, all over again, like you did the first time?

CJ I don't know, I might have institutionalized that in my expression, in my body language.

CS Oh yeah, that won't record, that I mimicked Calvin's body language, but I wasn't referring to the body language. I mean the "Wow" sensation that you're talking about. People want to get wowed like that first time, over and over again. Is that what you're saying?

CJ Well yeah, and that's why I think that it's really good for instance, here in Olympia we had a series of festivals. Yo-yo a go-go happened in 1994. Then it didn't happen till 1997, 1999. And I thought it was really good that it wasn't an annual event. Because when you do that then everyone expects, this is what happens, and then this happens, and then this happens. If you put a year or two in between them people don't have those same expectations, and they leave themselves open to



things being a different way. They don't become tradition, or rote, or habit. And I've seen that with all sorts. Certainly in Olympia, when I started being involved in music here there was very few live performances of underground music and so when one happened it was a big deal, it was like, "Oh wow! Special event!" Now in Olympia we are blessed with a wealth of venues and spaces to have underground performance, but it almost leads to a sort of blasé attitude. "Oh well, another show." And you kind of know what a show's going to be, what to expect. And so it's almost a good thing that venues come and go as regularly as they do, because it breaks up people's expectations. And people have new experiences with new venues, and they learn what can and can't work, and what to expect, what might be a different approach that they hadn't experienced at a different venue, that's a good thing.

CS Can we talk for a minute about the idea of reinventing the wheel, too though. I

really do appreciate this idea of staying open to new ideas and new ways of working, and maybe not letting tradition dictate your actions. But there could be some values in tradition. Maybe even in the basic framework of getting all of this stuff on vinyl and sharing it, as a traditional way to approach music, but that is effective for a lot of different ways of making music. Do you see a danger in re-inventing the wheel? If that's the right phrase for it. Versus tradition.

- CJ** Reinventing the wheel. The phrase implies that one is wasting time by covering ground that's already been covered and you would benefit by using that as a starting point. It's like a platform, maybe, using one of your terms. You can take what's already been invented, and then go from there with your creative energy. But I feel that reinventing the wheel often, in a creative situation is very useful, because just because someone invented it, doesn't mean they invented it the best way for your purposes. But you certainly can learn. People say to me "How do I get K to

put out my record?" Put out your own record! Why should we put out your record? We're not going to do any better than you would probably, on your own. And you'll learn a lot more. Maybe that would be re-inventing the wheel for them to put out the record themselves, going through the motions, but they will become stronger artists for it. They will know more about what the end result is, and where it's going to go. So I feel like it can be a useful tool.

- CS** So, the next set of questions is about the idea of experience, and of convergence. People coming together the way that they do for music shows. Not so much talking about recording now, but about playing shows, touring, that sort of thing. Just the idea of direct contact. I heard you talking recently about the state of technology allowing for a more direct form of communication between artists and musicians; and I was thinking of the live concert as being the most direct form of that, when people can come in contact with each other. It's something that I see music having as a big advantage over art. One of its

values as a creative pursuit. Do you have any examples of how, or what drew you to the experience of music, and how that manifests now for you.

- CJ** As a performance medium?
- CS** Yeah, as a way of working. As a place to end up on a weeknight or a weekend, stay out till two in the morning.
- CJ** To perform or to experience live performance?
- CS** Both. To be part of a concert, or a festival.
- CJ** Well that would be more like rock and roll, just has always been something that interests me. Very interested in rock and roll music and its history. In particular the concept of local performances in rock and roll. A big influence for me when I was fairly young, thirteen or so, I read a biography of the Beatles, and the world which spawned them. It was this world of just rampant local performances, which is the way they were written about in the

50's and early 60's. They were performing at lunchtime, performing at union halls, performing at the church basement, performing at private parties, performing in the street at the market, you know. It just sounded so exciting that there were all these opportunities for young people to perform skiffle, and rhythm and blues, and pop music that they were making, and that it was all being done by local people. And it grew from there into local clubs, and it just seems very exciting that a self contained local scene could exist, and that it wasn't isolated to Liverpool, it was happening all over the world these local scenes. And this, like Liverpool, these local scenes spawned local musical styles, or genres even, and this seemed fascinating. That the creative energy would have this sort of Galapagos islands type of effect. It may have started by the same seed, but it went in it's own direction, influenced by itself really, to do that. This idea has always fascinated me. When punk rock came along, I saw it as just perfect. Perfect laboratory for this experiment. And that's really what happened immedi-

ately with punk rock. And that's the way it was presented. You know, when I was first reading about punk rock when I was fourteen, fifteen, *Cream* magazine, they would do an issue devoted to the San Francisco punk scene, the New York punk scene, the Ohio punk scene. And this is like a main stream rock magazine, but examining punk rock from a regional perspective. And that was exciting to me, cause that was exactly what I was interested in. It was a local and regional phenomenon, within the context of this larger global movement. And so, that's exciting. But I see that not just for rock and roll, or punk rock, or soul, or R&B, or blues; any indigenous form of folk music shares these aesthetics wherever. And you can find that studied. It's been documented voluminously.

CS I'm going to stop you there and say that I just enjoy that idea of punk rock being an indigenous folk art-form. Is that how you always think of it?

CJ Sure, reggae, or soul; they're the same thing. Within our industrialized culture,

they are an indigenous folk movement, or type of artistic expression, yeah.

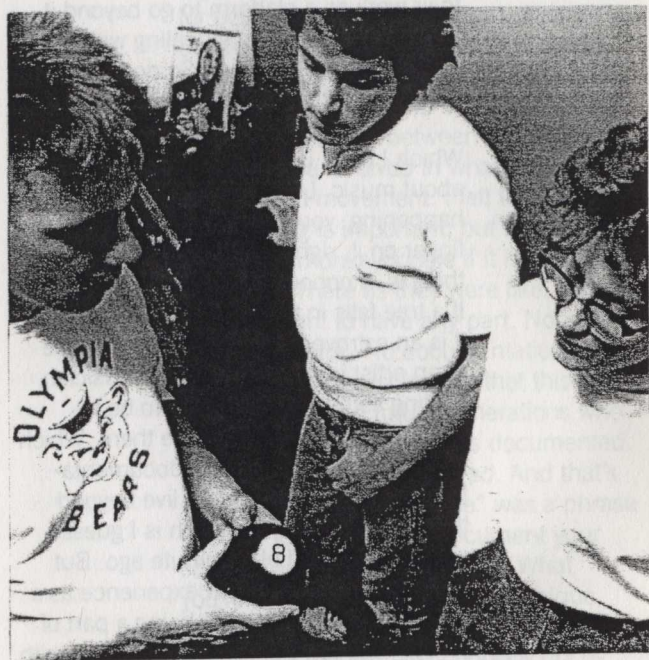
CS Another thing that I heard you talking about, was that you would be acting as a documentarian for these folk art-forms. Like, what was it called? The American Folkways?

CJ Well the Folkways label was a great example of documenting sounds. You look at the catalog of the Folkways, and there's people who were going around doing field recordings of all sorts of indigenous music all over the world, as well as people working within more conscious constructs of sound. Like people saying, "Well, I'm going to attach this thing to this bicycle, and I'm going to get a thousand bicycles going through the streets, and I'm going to record it." Whatever. Folkways is like, "Oh! We'll do that album!" I think that's really exciting. They were really more about documenting than they were about creating a scene, necessarily. But, as modern physics says, you can't look at something without changing it, and that's true. You

can't document something without changing it. And that's true about a punk scene, for better or for worse. Or both. And we've certainly seen that over the years. It has positive and negative aspects to a scene, to be documented. And that was really a point of contention between me and many of the people involved in what's called the Riot Grrl movement. I felt that, "What you're doing is important, but it doesn't mean jack monkeydoodle if it isn't documented." Where as they were like, "No, we don't want to have any part. Nobody take any photos. No documentation." But I felt like the biggest impact that this music will have is on future generations who will only know about it if it is documented. If it's thoroughly documented. And that's why "document your scene" was a phrase I used a lot in the 90's. Document your scene. Cause, you know what? What you're doing probably isn't that unique, it's probably been done a million times before, but unfortunately nobody documented their scene. And maybe that's better. Now you're reinventing the wheel without knowledge that there is such a

thing as a wheel. But on the other hand, maybe that's a case where you could use their work as a platform to go beyond it. Especially when you're dealing with something like gender issues. So documentation, I think it's important.

CS Which I think is interesting. Thinking about music. Like the pulse is always happening, you just have to put your finger on it, right? And then the other thing is, if nobody knows, does it matter? If a tree falls in the woods... Right? And it is an extroverted way of being, the life of an artist in general, being a musician. Putting something out there to be received. There's an exchange there. Which would be an argument for documentation, I guess, so that it can live beyond the initial experience, which is I guess where we started off a minute ago. But let's talk about that. Your experience as a performer, rather than as being a part of something. You put yourself out there with your work. It seems like you let it all out on stage. You let it all out on vinyl, wherever else. When you have the opportunity to, it



your whole to it. And with that exchange in mind, with the audience, I'm wondering if you could talk about that relationship, and what that means to you.

CJ What's the question exactly?

CS What it means to be putting it all out there, as an artist, as a performer? Putting it all on the line.

CJ Well, now, that's your interpretation. I think, for me, it's a form of creative expression. To perform creative expression. And there's a dichotomy there. There's these two parts to that, that are not mutually exclusive, but there's always a tug of war going on, and that is to be as honest as possible, and the other thing is to present a something. Even within the context of improvisation is still creating a facade of some sort. Whether it be a painting, or a play, or a song.

CS A whole something that can be experienced.

CJ There is something that is presented. That in itself is in some sense dishonest, because it's a creation, it's not you. So, there's the two things. There's being honest, and there's creating. And so, you can go to a play and say, "Oh, that's phony! He didn't really die! He's just pretending!"

CS *(laughs)*

CJ But on the other hand perhaps he's pretending in such a way that he's telling you something about death that you never knew. And he couldn't have done that if he was just being himself. So, there's a dichotomy, and there's a struggle. And when you're working within music, a lot of times blues or rock and roll or whatever, usually is trying to strip away all facades. Yet, at the same time, there's always going to be some uniform involved, or some costume, which in a sense the performer is hiding behind. A lot of what my early performances were about was trying to strip away. You know, one of the earliest shows that I was involved in organizing, which was actually started by Bret Lunsford of Beat Happening, was

this idea of alley shows. There's nowhere to have shows, and there was this really nice alley right off of his alley, and he was like, "Hey, come on down and we'll have a show!" And it was really cool to see people who were used to playing in these loud punk bands, suddenly they didn't have all the electricity, or the guitar to hide behind. They were completely naked, and performing acoustic, and it was scary to them, much scarier than playing with electricity. And that was very interesting. I really, I learned a lot about that. And I learned a lot about that another idea, the institutionalization that you're talking about, cause the first alley show, no one had been to one before, no one knew what was going to happen! It was just like, whoah! And people would get up and do songs, almost like a hootenanny situation. But by the third alley show, people knew what an alley show was. You went to this place, and certain people did certain things, and it was like, "okay, entertain me." Where as before it was like, "I know a song. Don't you know a song?" Such a division between audience and performer. It was more like a group activity.

- CS** Is that something you're interested in breaking down?
- CJ** I think it's always fun to try to find ways to make that happen. I was a member of the Olympia Arts Commission, and one of the main responsibilities is to help with public art. Right now they're building a new City Hall, and the arts commission is involved with choosing the public art that's going to be in the new City Hall. But for me, public art wasn't about a sculpture or a tapestry that was available to be viewed by the public, I thought that public art should be art made by the public. That was much more interesting to me as a definition of public art. And I feel that I wasn't as successful as I wanted to be in terms of turning that around. Turning those tables in that realm, but that idea of public art being made by the public has always been an important concept to me.
- CS** Could use that same word again, folk art.
- CJ** Similar. In the same realm definitely.

CS So, we were talking about support systems and communities, and I was hoping to get an example of a way that you've been supported in the past, and then maybe also a way that you were able to support somebody, maybe pass it along.

CJ Well let's see, a way that I've been supported... When K first started I was involved with a local magazine here called *Op* magazine, which is published by the Lost Music Network, which is a non-profit organization. And the people involved with that were people who I had met through KAOS originally. They were very supportive of me. They were like, "We have these resources. We have computers, a phone system, we have mailing lists, we have a bulk mail permit." These are all resources that they had, that they were like, "Well, you're welcome to use them when we're not using them to do your projects." And they provided me access to these tools. Which were infrastructures that I hadn't developed on my own. So, we've always tried to do that at K. Make our fax machine, or our copy machine, or

CJ access to our mailing list, something that we provide to local artists or art groups. "Yes" was a band here in town that made a lot of copies on our copy machine. It's not really relevant anymore, but in the 90's we had a cassette dubbing system, and bands would come and make their cassette tapes, cause we were like, "Well, we're not using it." We were doing something exciting. Just generally, when you have a scene, the more activity the better for everybody. Rather than everybody sitting around saying "There's nothing to do, there's nothing going on." Instead people put out their own cassettes or put on their own shows. Everyone benefits, because there's more creative energy flowing, and people feed off each other's creative energy. And it set's an example I think. The next group of people, they don't need to reinvent the wheel, because they see, you set a standard. And I think that's one of the reasons Olympia has such a wealth of creative energy, because the people who grew up here, to them that's standard. They're not like, "Gosh, I wish I could put out a record." They've already put out a

record by the time they're seventeen! Just seeing by example how it's done and they just do it. People have bands and they put on shows and they have fan zines, and it's just a given to them. Whereas I've seen by going on tour, there's towns where people are like, "Nothing ever happens here." And then you go there a year later and there's all this great stuff. Two people just going, "Well, I can do that." Makes all the difference. And it really does snowball. Their creative energy affects other people, and other people get active and they do things. And by creative energy I mean, within the punk rock idea that being in a band, or having a fan zine, or running a record label, are all the same thing. They are doing stuff. They're taking control of the media. Taking it with your own hands. And I think that was one of the exciting things about punk rock when it started was that people were making their own fan-zines, and they weren't waiting for the New York Times to knock on the door and ask them what they were doing. They were just letting the world know.

ART TALK AM /// ON THE RADIO

CYRUS W. SMITH IN CONVERSATION
WITH CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS
KPSU RADIO 2008-2009

Book 8 of 10

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