the conversation

Vahri: Take these as starting points: what's your experience of interdisciplinary collaboration? How do you think it will go in this case? How do you think it affects the final work in your experience? In this case?

I'm wondering if building interdisciplinary collaboration into the design of the project is a good idea. Like, I conceived *Telephone* as a way of working at a distance, geographically, chronologically, and in practice. So there are instructions to follow that accommodate who you are, where you are, what you do.

On the other hand, isn't all, or almost all, artistic practice interdisciplinary? Especially in the performing arts. Should we turn it around as ask, what artistic practices aren't interdisciplinary?

Jacob: I don't know about all artistic practice but artistic performance practice definitely ties in interdisciplinary collaboration, whether it is acknowledged or not. I'd imagine the solo composer, painter, writer may not engage with interdisciplinary work.

I'd also imagine that collaboration and collaborative process have myriad interpretations.

I think this is where process can get stuck, when the understanding/experience of 'sharing' (bad word) art to make something more is unclear or 'ego-ransomed'.

Gemma: I agree with Jacob that collaborative process has myriad interpretations, and that this is where process can get stuck, when the understanding or experience of sharing art to make something more is unclear or ego-ransomed.

I guess I see artistic collaboration as something that can simply be a methodology, a form of research, an enquiry. I believe that the outcome should not be the collaboration itself; rather, the outcome can be something entirely new and perhaps stem from each person's reflection on the experience *of* the collaboration.

Vahri: 'Ego-ransomed': great term! This is the interesting bit for me.

What about the other case, where one contributor is sluggish? How can others address it or compensate? Can artists from different disciplines make up for something lacking that's out of their area of expertise?

Gemma: I believe that artists should enter into a collaborative phase out of a desire to stretch their own boundaries and comfort zones. However I don't think that the collaborating artists need necessarily learn a new skill or even share a particular 'Aha' moment (although that is nice when it happens). I think it's

more about bringing your own agenda and skills to the table and flexing your muscle a little, impressing the others a little, but ultimately it's about putting yourself into an uncomfortable situation where you are exploring the frontiers of ideas that you have held in the back of your mind. So, maybe it is more about ideas than skills.

On skills though, at some point, each person can deliver a kind of 'solo performance' within the group, whether it is a drawing, song, poem, whatever it may be. These snippets can be happily exhibited alongside each other, because in this case, each work has influenced the other, but each is still distinct and has the unique thumbprint of the artist and can be identified as coming from that person, who is reacting in accordance with their own expert line of business. The notion of all contributing towards one ultimate product, I think, is ambitious, and probably a good way to create muddy or confused pieces of art.

Alex: I think a lot of the audio work I do is interdisciplinary in that there is an ongoing interrelation between myself in audio and dancers in physicality. This is especially evident in the contact improvisation work, perhaps, but also exists in my DJ sets.

Perhaps studio work or radio sets without a live feedback element are more insular but as a musician I am regularly engaged in communicating with myself about how the environment feels and relating that back to the sound palette. I guess if I can stretch the definition of interdisciplinarity existing when internal headspace meets external skinspace, then I would say almost all my music is interdisciplinary.

Vahri: That's a groovy and weird idea, that interdisciplinarity exists *within* musical composition or arrangement. How do you mean? Is it something to do with transition from internal impulse to external communication? What kind of compromises/concessions get made along the way?

Alex: I guess what I was thinking was that there is a very strong immediate

feedback loop present when I play music. Not all the time, in that there are definitely times I just focus purely on the sound and affecting the way sound is transmitted to the audience/dancers/participants. But the drive to change the sound or the drive to play with effects that smooth out or roughen up the sound – this drive comes not only from within my own headspace but also from the environment and the feeling I get from people in it.

Certainly it has something to do with the internal impulse to external communication. For me, especially working with mathematical complexity but defined structured as a digital DJ, the interplay is also between creative intention and technical execution. And the input for that creative intention is the internal headspace with cues/feelings/sensory input from the external environment.

Concessions can be made in the way of physical ability to respond to ideas with either enough time to execute the physical input or with enough creativity to truly reflect the essence of the desired intention. But these concessions all go towards the creation of the artistic quality of the musical experience so I rarely see them as concessions: more as additional condiments and spices to accompany the ongoing feast.

Vahri: Yeah, spices can be too hot! The danger Gemma speaks of… But it's all flavour.

Gemma: Ultimately it can be very positive to interact collaboratively and work in an interdisciplinary way; it can take your work to new heights. However, there is a lot of danger. In the art world you do come across agendas, egos and unclear outcomes. It is possible to have your discipline 'contaminated', but again, that should also be seen as a good thing! It is also sometimes necessary to learn a new technology just in order to get a job done, although I am not sure if this is true collaboration (this comes back to skills). I think a true collaboration is when each creative has gained ground on their own particular inquiry, and they could not have done it without engaging with the others.