Joan Jonas

"It's the shamanistic idea–the performer goes through the actions so that the audience can experience them also.... It takes you into a space that you wouldn't otherwise be in."

View

Interview by Robin White at Crown Point Press, Oakland, California, 1979.

The most obvious thing to ask you is about the etching, to start with. Have you ever made visual work like that before?

I went to art school; my background was--

But, I mean recently?

Yes. I do a lot of drawing. I use drawing in my work a lot, in my performance. And I draw a lot, just by myself.

Have you ever made any separately, for sale?

No, not yet. No, I haven't sold them. I thought about it. But in order to sell drawings, you have to show them, and I never had a group of--I never really developed that aspect of my work enough so that I felt I could show it, you know, have a show.

Yes.

Whereas, now, doing these etchings is kind of like presenting that work in a certain form that can be shown--that's the way I see it. I mean, it can be seen as something in itself, instead of as part of--my performance.

Yes, right. So--were you hesitant when Kathan asked you to come, or did you know--feel that you were ready to do it?

I was ready.

Yes. Did you know what you would do when you came here?

Yes, I did. Because I had five drawings--they're from the chalk drawings from a performance that I did in 1976, called *Mirage*.

Yes.

It was a series of drawings, and--it interested me to do the white image on the--I thought of it first as a chalk drawing, but then it became a negative image, you know, on the ground. So, it interested me to do that.

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In the group of etchings, there's that image of the sun, and there's--

That's an old image I've been using for a long time, actually. The sun image.

With the double--circle.

Yes, usually I erase that so it looks more like a new moon. But I left that circle this time.

Yes. And then there's a--it looks like a rainbow, sort of.

A rainbow. I thought of it as a rainbow, but now--people seem to see other things in it, which is interesting.

I see--a music sheet, you know, also.

A crude music sheet.

Yes.

Somebody just told me that it looked like tire tracks. Which I like, also.

One very striking image is the one that looks like a bull's head, in a way--with the horns coming out. And then there's another one which looks like--branches coming together, or sticks, which you would build a fire with, almost.

Well, actually, the bull's head is a heart.

It's a heart?

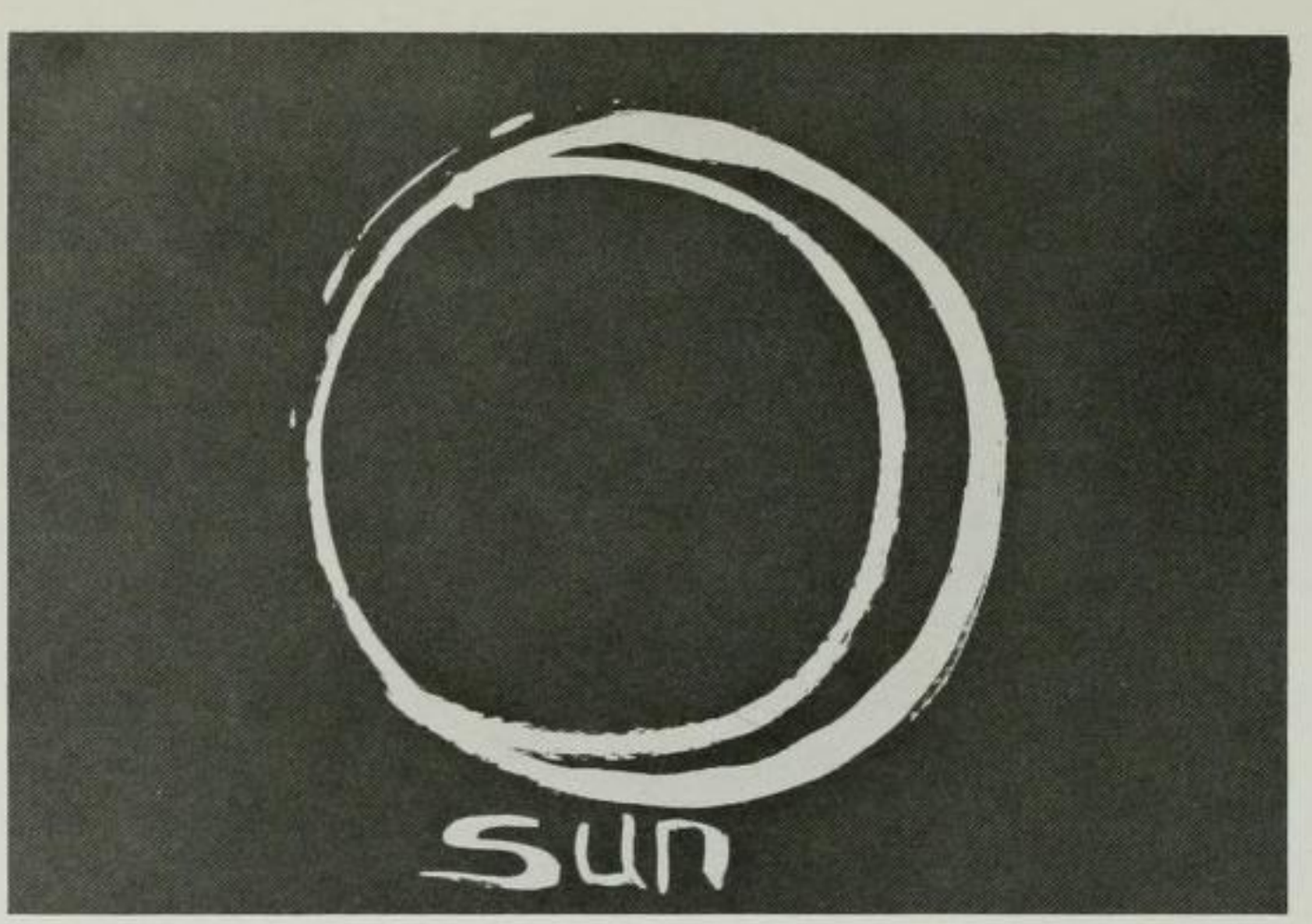
Yes. But also I like the double reading of that, too, because--it does look like a bull's head and it looks like--somebody said a bug, once, with--

Yes, with antennae. I thought they were horns.

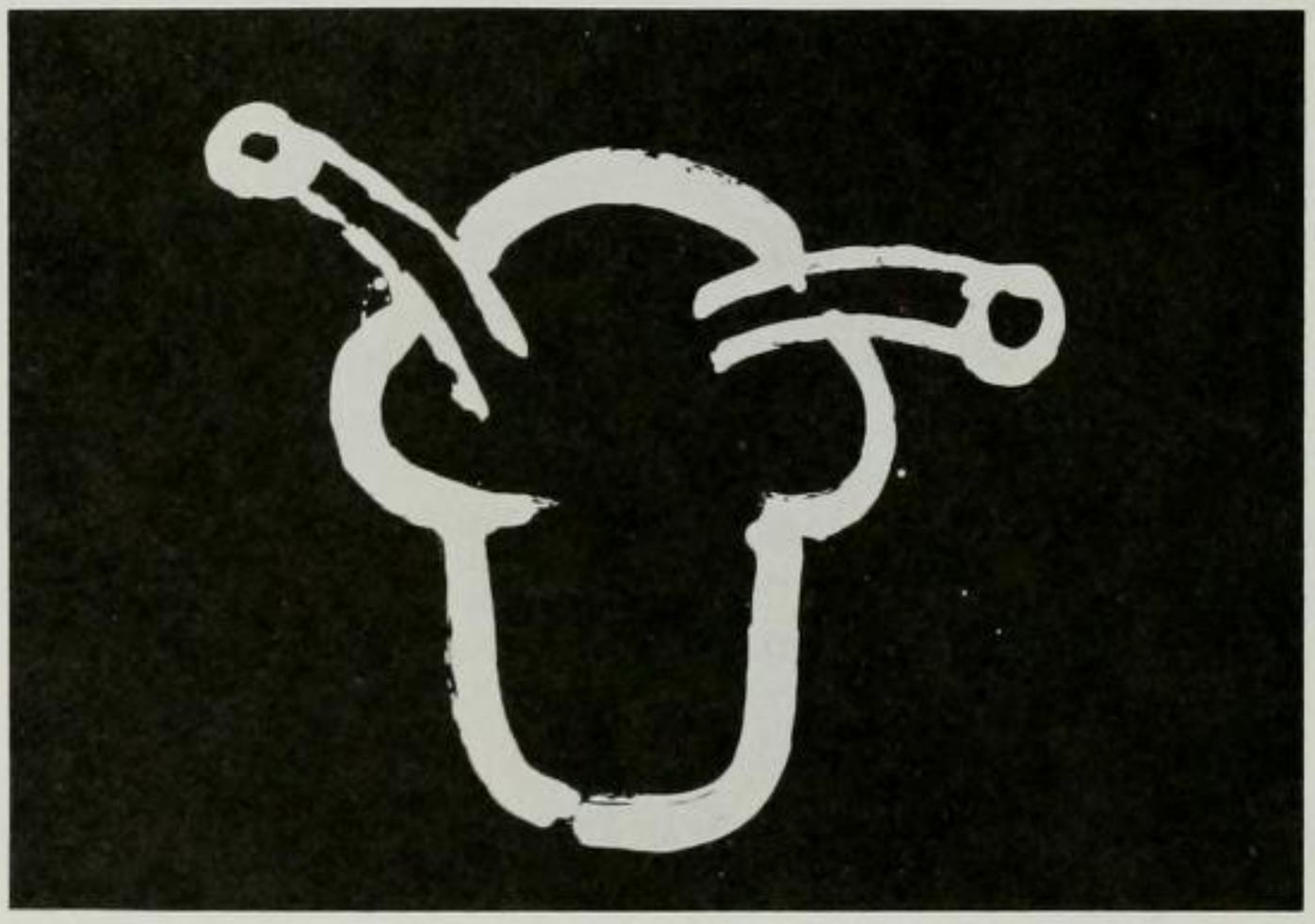
Yes--well, it does look like--in my performance, when I draw it, it can be read as the devil. But it's originally a heart. And the other thing is an image from Leonardo, one of his drawings--of rays, reflecting in a concave mirror, I think.

Oh. And--the very large etching, with the orange and blue double lines, is completely separate?

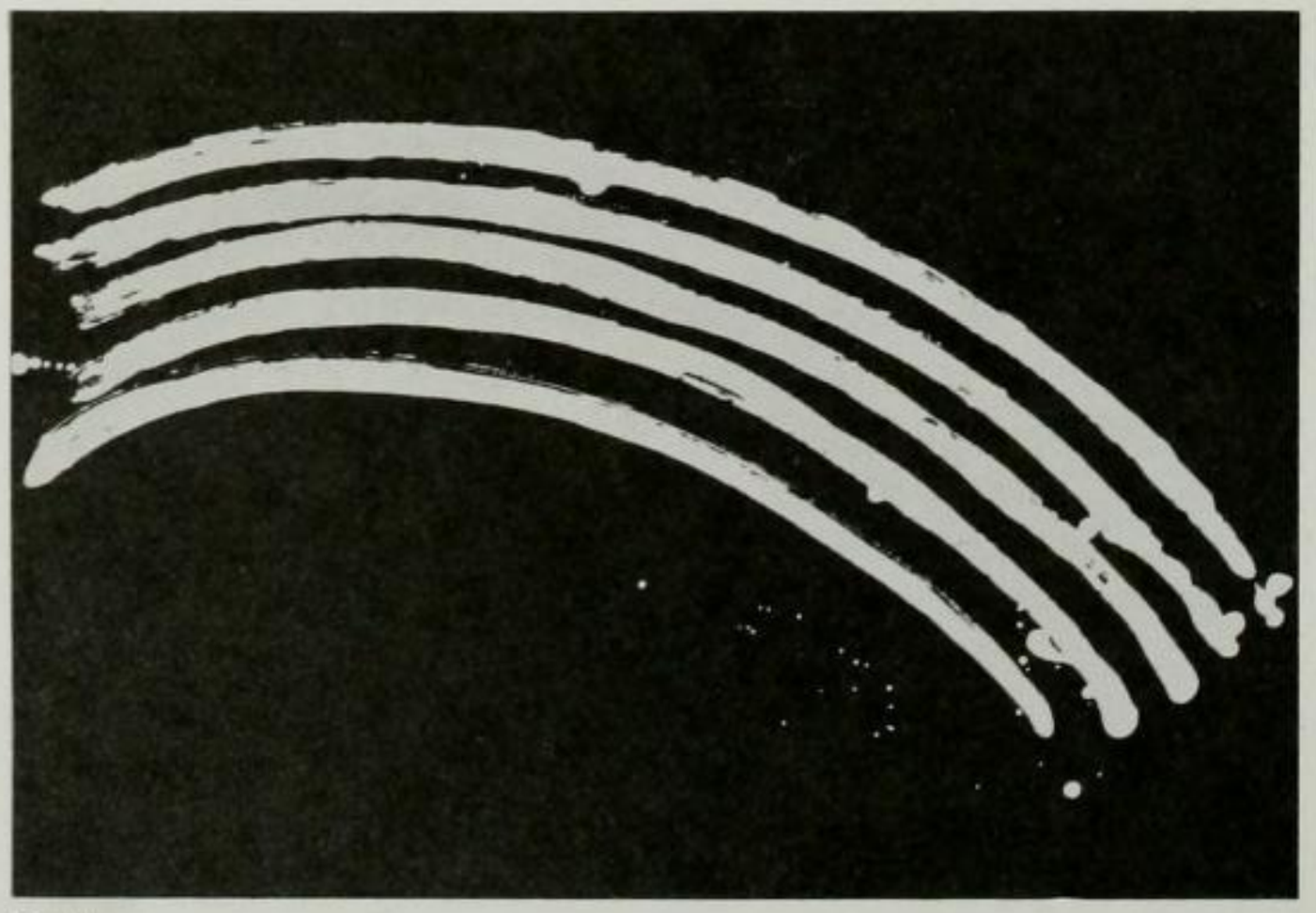
Yes. That's just a drawing I've been working on for a few



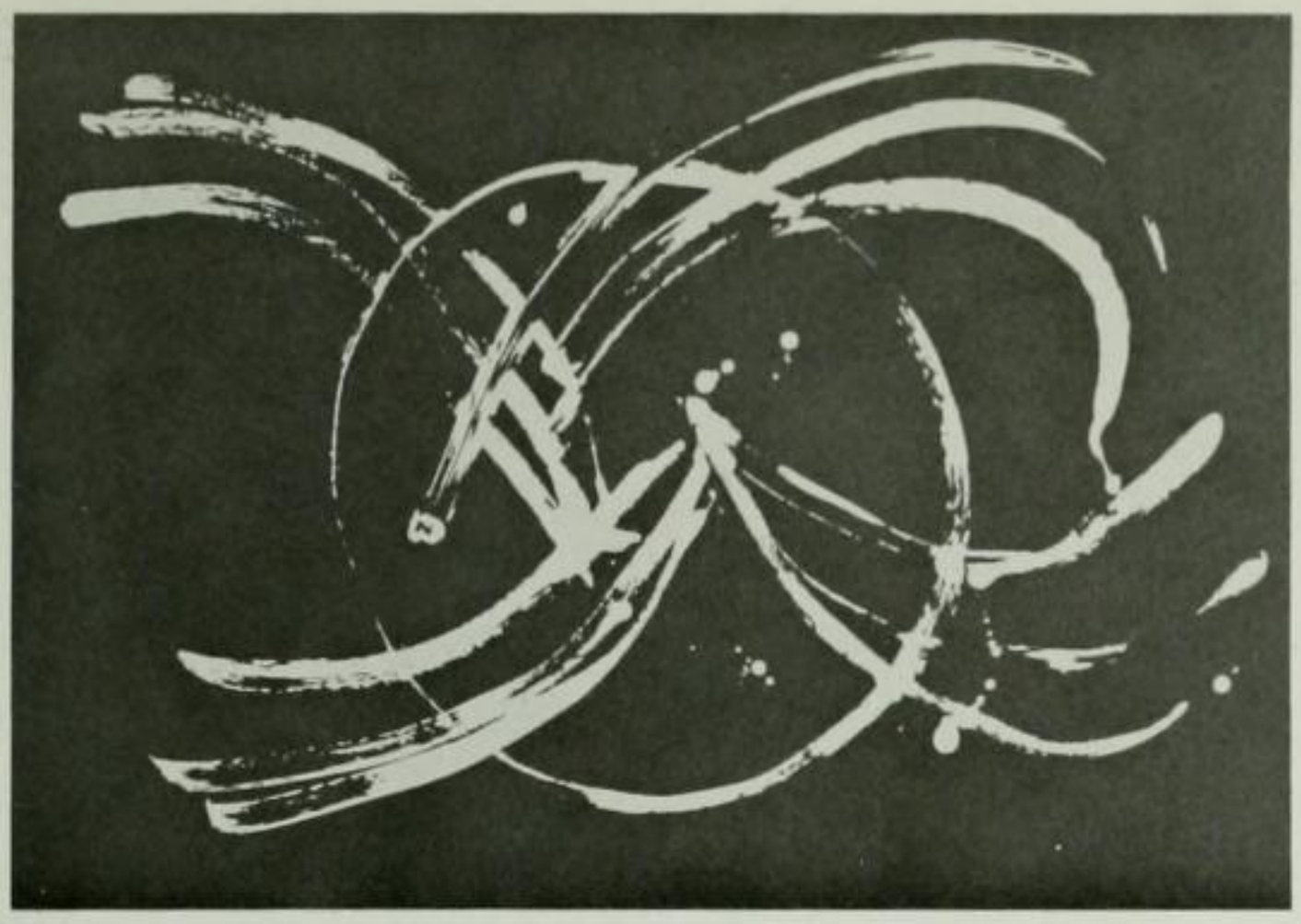
Sun



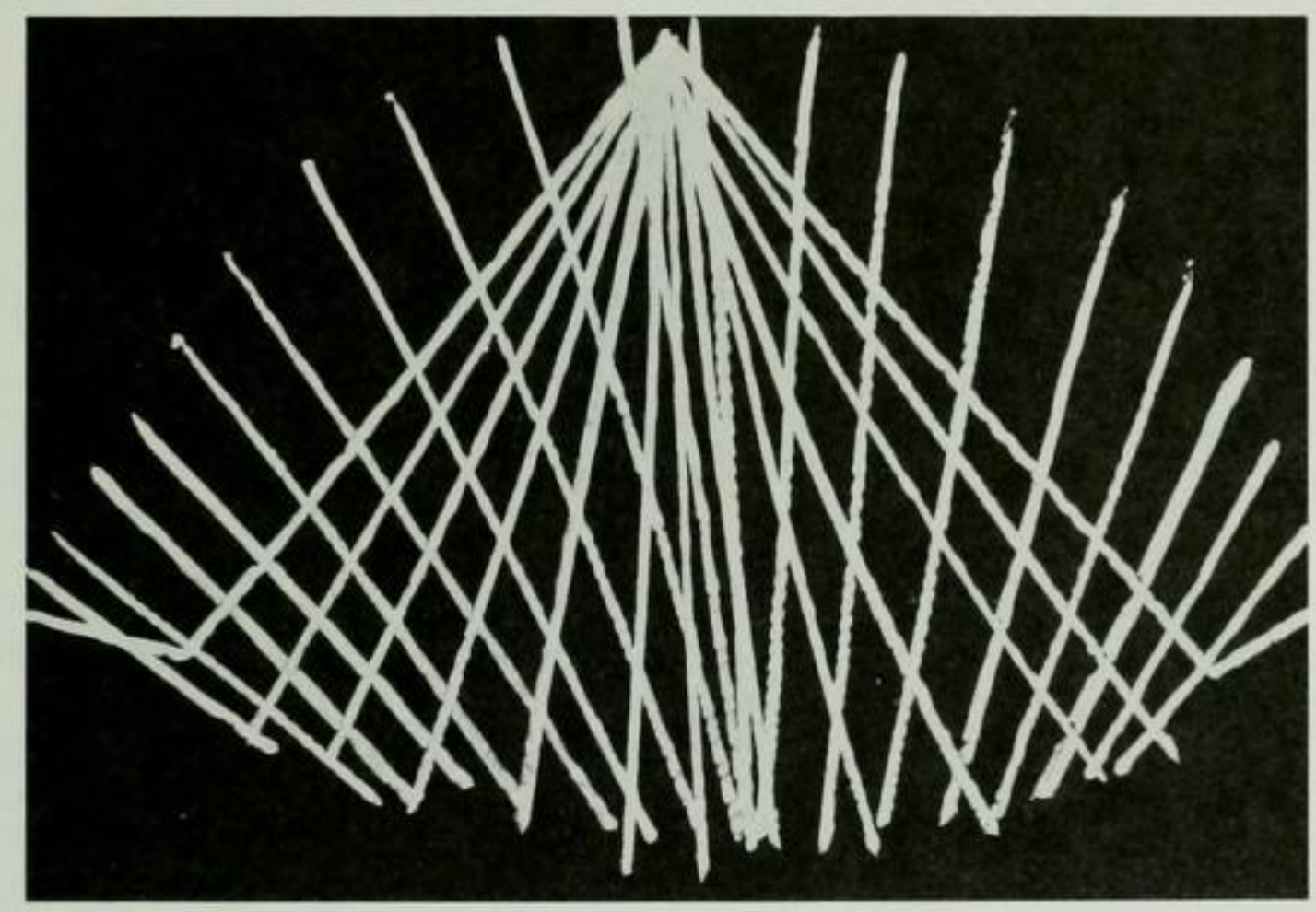
Heart



Rainbow



Hurricane



Reflection

Hurricane Series, 1979. A set of 5 aquatints, each 36 x 24", 2 red images, 3 black images. Published by Crown Point Press.

years, and I used the landscape part of it in *The Juniper Tree*, as a backdrop.

You must have drawn these thousands of times. One of the printers told me that you drew each drawing over and over and over again until something clicked, until you thought it was right.

Yes.

So, it's a combination of spontaneity and something that's very studied and precise.

Yes. At least insofar as it comes out of practice, I guess. It's funny, I don't necessarily always draw like that, but it just--I think I got into the habit of doing that kind of drawing in this recent performance, *The Juniper Tree*.

The actual activity of drawing is a very important part of all your performances?

Yes. Ever since the early ones, I used drawing. Not always, but, for sure, since the first video piece.

Yes.

In *Organic Honey* I used drawings. I called them "Drawings for the Monitor". I drew while looking at the monitor instead of at what I was drawing.

In the workshop that you taught recently you asked everyone to paint something while they were laughing, or while they were having an argument. Was that because laughing or talking preoccupies your conscious mind so that the other part of you is free to do something else?

Yes, right.

How did you come to this?

Drawing something in performance in front of an audience is about the same process. If you're concentrating on the performance, you can't worry about what the drawing's going to look like. You just make the drawing. But, somehow, a lot of strange things have come out, a release of partly unconscious archetypal images. These have surprised me, and I could never duplicate them, and I think that they were only there because I was in the performance.

These drawings--the sun, you say, you've worked with for a long time, and the heart, and the rainbow. Do they have specific meanings, for you, in the context of each performance? And do these meanings accumulate?

Yes. The sun represented--when I first did it, it was like an alchemical sign. That's why I have the sun and the moon together, the opposites, ambiguity. And then--let's see now--the heart. I wanted to put a heart in my last piece. The fact that a sign is its opposite and that an image can represent different things enriches my vocabulary.

Yes.

And--the rainbow, I'm not sure how I got that. But it has something to do with weather changes, and day and night, and--that circle with the lines coming out of it is a symbol of the hurricane.

Oh, really?

Yes. And then, the other drawing--I was using cones at the time, I think that's why I included the drawing of the mirror reflection. I was looking for things that related to cones, that form. And they all end up having something to do with energy, each one of those things has--

Natural energy.

Yes. So now I think of them as something together, to be read--to me they're kind of like a visual language.

In the large etching, which is very different, there's a childlike quality. It's like a fairy tale; there is a landscape and then there are these little--things that could be huts, or, plants--and this face of a dog. Is it actually a dog, or a wolf? I thought it was a wolf.

Well, it could be a wolf. It's a dog's head, but it doesn't really matter. Probably it's better if it's a wolf. A wolf is a wild animal. It's out in the desert someplace. I didn't want it to be specifically a dog. It's something more primitive, maybe it's the Animal Helper.

You don't object to the word primitive?

No. I like the word primitive. But I don't do primitive things on purpose, it's just that they come out that way. I

think it's because they--they're naive, in a certain way.

Well, I think it's because you're trying to go deeper into something. And the deeper you go into the layers of things, I think, the more you get rid of the sophistication and the complication, the refined quality. What you do reflects the amount of energy that you put into it. When I saw Mirage, *at* Documenta, *you were generating such energy, in spite of the heat, and the lights, and the people walking in and out. You were like a hurricane on stage! And there was a kind of hauntingness, too. You were running back and forth, from one place to another, picking up one prop--leaving it--picking up another one. Is* The Juniper Tree *like that? Or, are most of the things you do more calm?*

You saw one of my most agitated performances. Usually they're more calm than that one--that was really an unusual situation. In *The Juniper Tree* I do a lot of things, but hopefully they're done in a controlled way. Not overly controlled, but a way that conveys an ease with the material. I don't like to be rushing from one thing to another, although things do whiz by sometimes. But I always put a lot of details in my work, so that it seems very--full of--well, crowded in a certain sense.

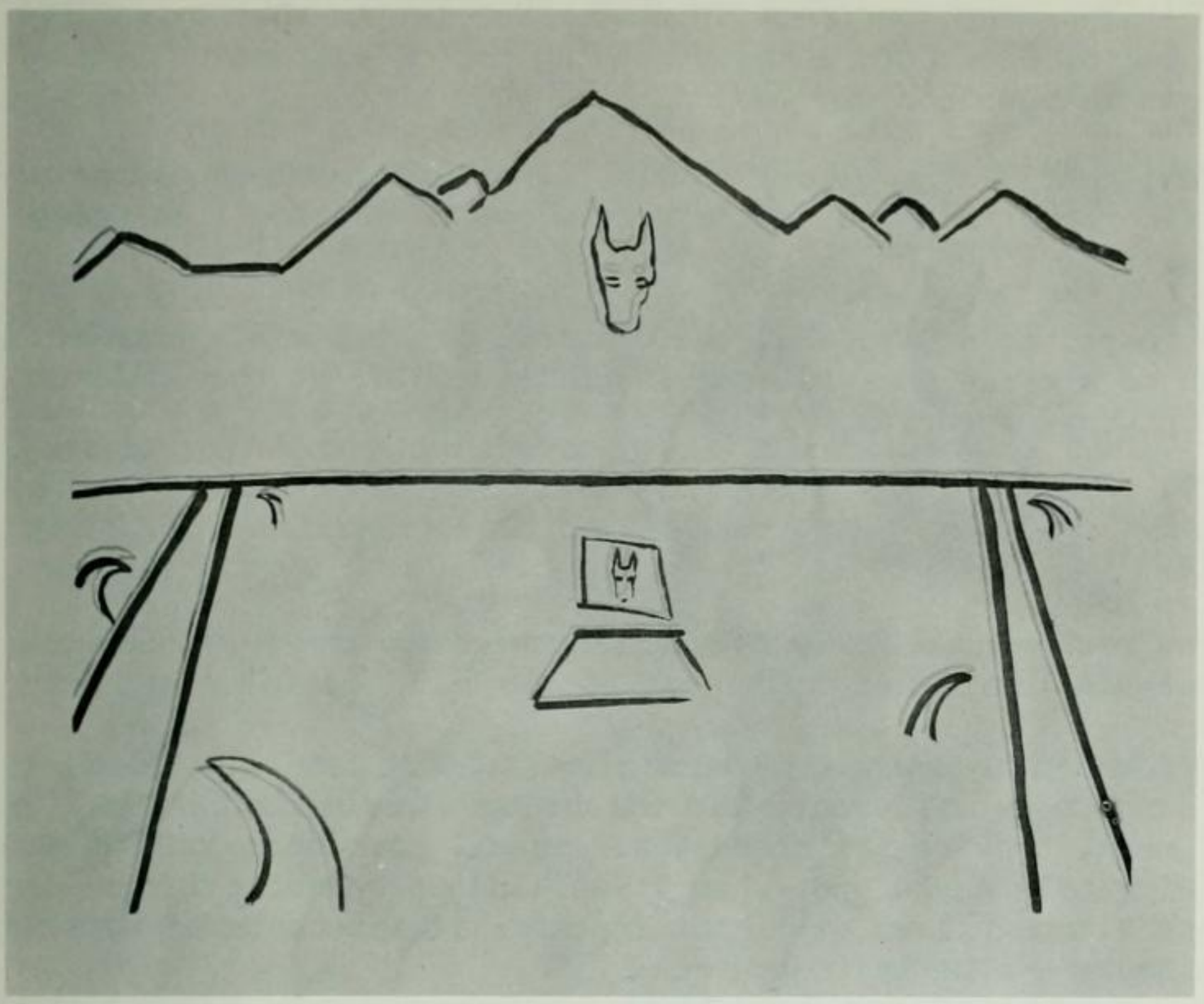
Yes! And as soon as you get into things like "primitive", then you start to deal with things like ritual, too. It seemed to me that in Mirage, *you were presenting certain private rituals.*

I guess that it's sort of like play, you know, you feel that you're watching somebody playing? Maybe that's why it seems private. To start with an object, and to play with it is very childlike in a certain sense. It's just my natural style, it's very hard for me to be intellectual about it. I'm just trying to think why people have always said my work looks like ritual. I think that in the beginning my sources were literary. I read books like *The Golden Bough*, and also anthropological books about primitive rites.... At the time I was reading *The Golden Bough* I remember I was reading also about the Australian aborigines.

When was that?

It was about seven years ago. Also I read a book called *Spiritual Disciplines*, a collection of essays. I got some ideas from that, some drawings, "The Endless Drawings".

That's very interesting.



Spring Mountain, 1979. Sugar aquatint, image size 45 x 36", paper size 52 x 42". Published by Crown Point Press.

Films have influenced me also. I remember especially Maya Deren's footage shot in Haiti. She made a film of a man making a sand drawing. It interested me a great deal. He repeated the gesture over and over. It was like watching somebody do something that's very private, you know, to watch somebody draw. And--I think drawing *is* a ritual, in a certain sense. I like to draw, I find it very--soothing. In making my film of drawing on the blackboard and erasing, I was inspired by Maya Deren.

Drawing is totally personal, like writing your signature.

Even though my drawings are full of--they're kind of aggressive looking, they are really close to the way the Japanese draw--what do you call that drawing?

Calligraphy.

Yes, calligraphy. It's some kind of meditation, to make a certain kind of drawing. Because you have to do it in a

certain--mood, or frame of mind. You get to that by making a lot of ones before that, getting rid of extraneous tightness in your body so you can move your arm.

Yes, yes. So, you were reading about anthropology and primitive societies, and that's very close to getting into fairy tales.

Perhaps, in a way. But the original impetus was a commission to do a piece for children in Philadelphia, at the Institute for Contemporary Art.

Oh, in 1976? That's when you first did The Juniper Tree*?*

Yes.

How was using a fairy tale different from using your own material completely?

I found that overall my work came out the same way; some things were different, but the images have a similar quality. I mean, they're all archetypal images, as much so out of this fairy tale as before, when I was kind of grasping in the dark. And although I am still out in chaos it interests me to have a source, a definite source.

Would you tell me what the fairy tale's about?

The Juniper Tree? You haven't read it? Well, it's a--a family drama. It starts out with a man and a woman, who love each other very much but they don't have any children. The woman is standing under the juniper tree, and she cuts her finger, and all of a sudden she thinks that she's going to have a child. And when she has a son, it's "red as blood, and white as snow"--and--

It's what?

As red as blood and as white as snow. Everything relates to that in the piece. The woman is so happy that she dies. And the man takes a second wife, and they have a daughter. The stepmother resents the little boy, and eventually she kills him and makes him into black pudding. She cooks the little boy, and--serves him to the father, who comes home for dinner--

Oh!

Saying, "Where's my son?"--the father has no idea what happened. So, then, the father eats; the daughter's weeping, the

father's eating, and he finishes the entire pudding, and then throws all the bones under the table. The daughter gathers the bones together, and takes them out under the juniper tree. And the juniper tree stirs itself, and a fire shoots up and a beautiful bird flies out from the tree, and the bones disappear. And then the bird goes to three different craftsmen, a goldsmith, a shoemaker and a miller, and he gets three objects. The father hears the bird singing, and he goes out under the tree, and the bird gives him a golden chain, puts it around his neck--and then the daughter goes out, and the bird gives her a pair of red shoes, and then the stepmother goes out thinking that the bird will have something for her, and he drops a millstone on her head, and she's--killed. And then the bird turns into a boy and then they go in the house and they eat.

You said a moment ago that you have been dealing with archetypal images. Can you be specific?

Well, I've talked about this with my friends but I've never tried to articulate it before in public, so it's pretty difficult.

That's okay.

For example, the ladder I use in *The Juniper Tree* is the tree, and it represents a passage from earth to the sky.

And the tree can also be the tree of life.

Yes, and my climbing up and down the ladder/tree represents going through changes. In *Organic Honey* I wanted to create the idea of a magic show where the woman would be the transformer, or the one who is transformed. It's the shamanistic idea--the performer goes through the actions so that the audience can experience them also. The *Organic Honey* characters were a series of becomings, you could say. The dog represents instinct, or the Animal Helper, the force that drives one through obstacles. Also, it's involved with opposites.

Yes.

In *Mirage* I was attempting to integrate opposites. For instance, stepping through the hoop is a metaphor--

Represents a rite of passage?

The "Endless Drawing" is a rite of passage.

So the performances represent, in a way, symbolic rites of passage in your own life?

Yes. For instance in *Mirage*, there was a dance done on a gridpattern--I called it Demon Dance--driving out the demons by striking the squares with a stick as I jumped from one square to the other. In *The Juniper Tree* all the images are made much more specific. The heart represents the way of the heart as opposed to the way of the warrior, to begin with.

The right way.

But the heart image represents the devil in this story, as well, because I wanted the image to stand for the thing and its opposite, evil. Now the women in the story--there's the good woman and the bad woman, and the bad woman really takes over. I thought of her as the devouring female. I was interested in playing that archetype; it was a kind of bloodletting. It takes you into a space that you wouldn't otherwise be in.

Wouldn't let yourself be in. Playing the role allows you to feel what the character is feeling.

The thing about that story is that it's really a resurrection myth. Wouldn't you agree?

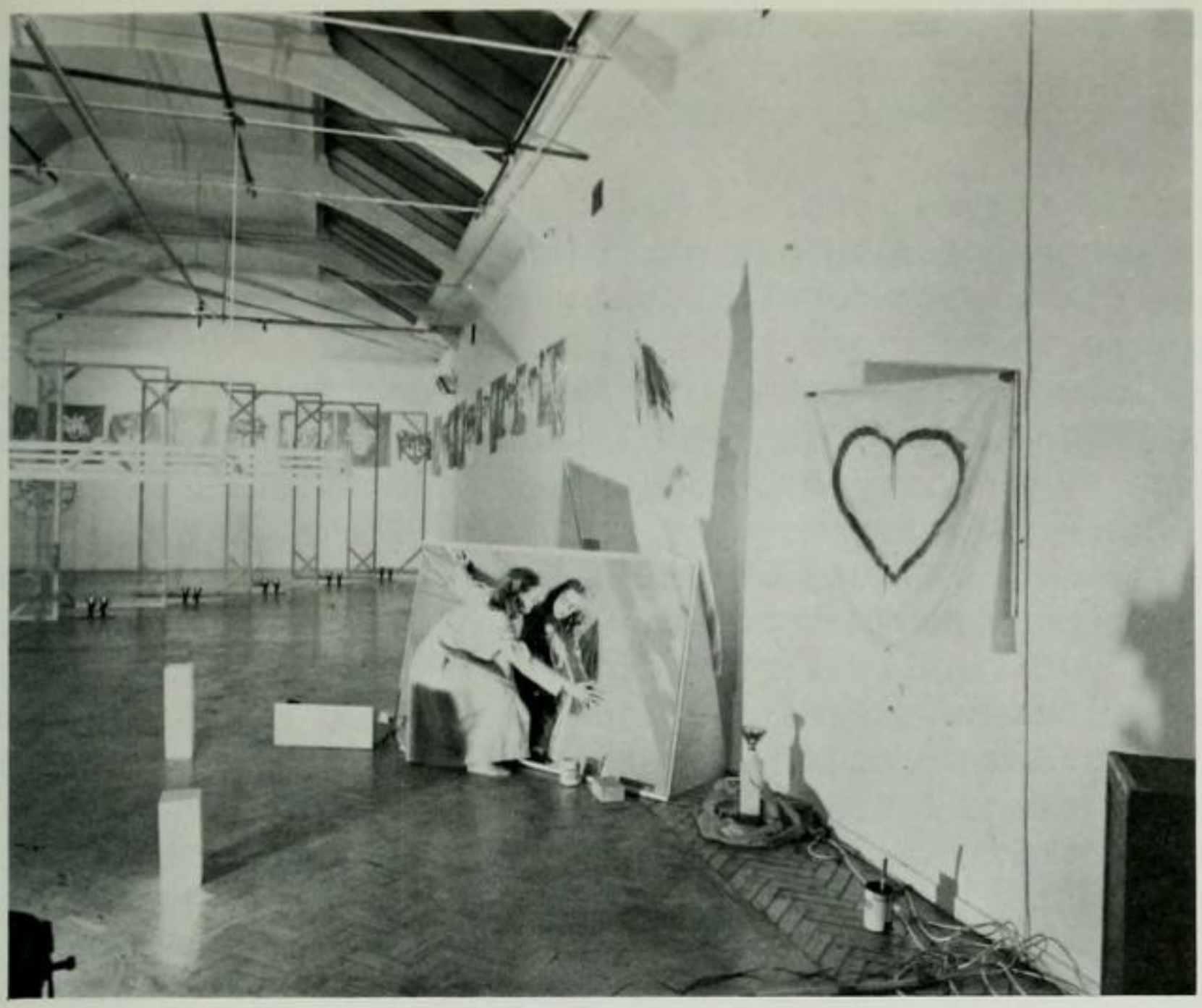
Yes, definitely.

And I die twice in the story--

Because you play both women. And also, it is the resurrection of the little boy--

Who must die and who is reborn. It also symbolizes for him the rites of passage into the next stage of growing up. In mythology, the women are the healers, the transformers, and the men are always the heros. So I really thought of the women as the ones who bring new life forth. For example in this story it is the sister who gathers the brother's bones and puts them under the tree. In *The Frog Prince*, the girl lifts the spell from the boy by throwing the frog against the wall. In *The Boy Who Went Out to Learn About Fear*, it's the wife who finally teaches the boy by throwing water on him.

Right, I remember, she wakes him up with a bucket of cold water. Well, why did you choose to do The Juniper Tree? *Why is it special?*



The Juniper Tree, 1979. Performance at The Whitechapel Gallery, London. Photo: Boyd Webb.

For several reasons. I didn't want to choose one of the well-known ones. And, I liked this because it wasn't about a prince and a princess--it was about a family--a mother and a father and a son and a daughter. And also, I liked the epic quality of it.

And it's a tragedy.

Yes, it is. It really is a tragedy, it seems ancient. A lot of fairy tales are bloody, but that's one of the more brutal ones. This story's a little bit over-balanced on the brutal side. But, when you take all the bad stuff out of the fairy tales, they lose their meaning. Then they have no more substance.

Is it the same performance that you did for children, that you do for grownups?

No. No, it's very different. In my first version, that I did for children, I didn't illustrate any of the--gory parts, but I didn't leave them out, because in all the versions I used reading from the original text. Somebody was sitting and reading the story simultaneously with the action--later, the story was on tape. I did enact the grisly parts in the later versions. And also at first I used a lot of my old

props, and it was visually very similar to my other work.

Like the cones that resemble a dunce cap or a megaphone?

All those images, yes. I had a ladder, and all those cones, and a table. And then I started working with other people, and we did a collaboration, more or less. And they almost forced me to get into the difficult parts. I was actually very disturbed by that story for at least a year. And then I got beyond being disturbed. When I represented the story through my own imagery, when I was somehow able to pull out some image that represented the story for me, then I sort of went beyond. Because of being a performer, and not an actress, I didn't know how not to identify. So, I identified with the story. But finally I stopped identifying with the story; I was able to--have more distance on it, you know. It didn't disturb me anymore. The piece that I do now is not at all like the piece I did at first, at The Kitchen; maybe it is more theatrical. It is dealing with language a bit more, I think.

Perhaps this one had to become more theatrical because there's a plot. I mean, in Mirage *there wasn't really a plot, you know?*

No, *Mirage* never had a plot form.

That's an interesting distinction that you made between being an actress, and being a performer. You said, I think, that The Juniper Tree *has evolved from being more of a performance to being more theatrical. Does that have to do with obvious things like plot?*

It has more to do with the approach to playing character, I think. People in the theatre, more conservative, wouldn't think I have anything to do with acting at all. I perform tasks, and play with objects that have symbolic reference to the story, and I do it as a symbolic character instead of as a neutral performer. Sometimes I change character with masks, or there is only just a hint of an alter ego or a changing character.

Well, if there is change, it is symbolic change.

Yes.

Do you think that you might start writing your own fairy tales? Did you write Mirage? *There is a script for* Organic Honey, *isn't there, and also a script for* Mirage?

I made those after I did the performances. Sometimes I write one down because someone will ask me to publish it. Actually the only ones I've written full scripts of are the ones that I've published.

So, now that they are published, do you think other people will be interested to make performances of them?

I don't know. I've never heard of anyone doing that. I can't imagine anyone else doing one of the pieces. But I suppose they could at some point--it would be odd.

Would you say there's a difference in the way that objects are used in theatre and in performance?

Well, the objects I use are not literal adaptations of the elements in the story but they are symbolic of some archetype; they are metaphors, they are really the archetypal element.

You seem to use some objects over and over again.

Yes, I use balls, for instance, so I can push them around the floor in a geometry. I got that idea from reading Zimmer, I think. The magic ball that you follow to the source. And in *The Juniper Tree* I put extra things in there that were references to fairy tales and myth in general, so that the activity would characterize a fairy tale, and suggest a wider context than just *The Juniper Tree*.

But I was thinking of the cones, for example. They're not in this latest version.

No. I used those for ages and just stopped using them.

It looks like, on the surface, a very big switch. Is it?

Well, it's a new area because I'm using a narrative, and speaking, and trying to depict a character, and I have to think about time in a different way because of having a more definite structure set up. Actually, what I am doing now is structuring my pieces much more. I had to figure out how to use a narrative. In *The Juniper Tree* I didn't change the narrative at all, I just told the whole thing verbatim, but interrupted it with inserts that were words, songs, actions that augmented the narrative or emphasized an aspect of it.

We've been hearing a lot about the new image painting and that whole trend toward representation. I just wondered if

you felt that you are in any way related to that?

I have always considered my work to be about images. Initially, I was very influenced by Imagist poetry: Ezra Pound's way of describing imagist work, how images create a metaphor. That's the way I started out, and that's always been the way I've worked.

But, unlike painting, your work creates a three dimensional image.

I guess so. It's like three dimensional poetry.

And the fourth dimension, time, too, I suppose?

Yes--at first my time was linear; one thing after another like film, now there are more layers so that while going forward, it also gets thick.

Does The Juniper Tree *include video?*

No. Just a sound tape. I wanted to do a piece without video. This is the first piece I've done indoors without video since 1971.

Are you getting tired of using it?

No, not exactly. I used it in several different ways, and sometimes you just can't go on using things. It seemed like I was depending on it, on a certain kind of technology.

When I saw Mirage, *I was struck by the juxtaposition between all the primitive material in it and the TV screen. But the video wasn't an element that took precedence over other elements. The work was not a collage, but a composition, composed of elements that are moving: video, drawing, sound, actions, color, whatever.*

Theatre comes into that also--using theatrical devices. I used the idea of video as I use everything else. All those fragments in there, from different sources, back and forth. Magic shows, also, they were a big influence on me as a child.

So a viewer gets information in lots of different ways when watching a performance. But you didn't mind concentrating on one specific thing when you were asked to make the etchings.

No, I found it relaxing. I loved it. It was a relief. It made me think that I really should do more drawing. Concen-

Photo: Roberta Neiman.

***Mirage*, 1976. Performance at the I.C.A., Philadelphia.**

trate on my drawing a little bit more. I want to find a way to get drawing into my performances more.

But why can't you just make it separate?

Well, I can, but I find it's hard to know what to draw, or why to draw, something like that. If it comes out in performances there's a reason. I can't just draw images out of thin air. That landscape piece, the one the large etching is based on, was something I used as a curtain in *The Juniper Tree*, in an earlier version. I took a slide that I had taken in the Southwest, and I copied it. It was just a road going through the desert and the mountains. I changed it from the slide. But that work did come out of the performance. That gives the drawing another dimension.

I see a parallel between that etching and the work that you've been doing, especially when you were working quite a lot with video. When you were beginning, I think you were very concerned with the idea of space, the way that people perceive things, depending on their point of view. And also the way that, on a television screen, things that exist three dimensionally become totally flattened out. Now this image, a landscape from the Southwest, has a vast sense of space in it. It suggests huge, three dimensionality, but at the same time

it's completely flat. And I recognize your interest in combining two dimensional space and three dimensional space. And the etching also incorporates the symbol of the little wolf or dog, and there are some of the other symbols on the side: new moon, or whatever the crescent shape is. So I think it is a very expressive image for all those reasons.

Yes, you are right, it is a combination of all those things, but it really wasn't intended. I had a table and a window with the image on the window. So the floating image is from that. I thought of it as a reflection. But the way you are talking about it makes a lot of sense. All of these things are not conscious when you are doing them and I know they are all parts of earlier work.

Like the dog image.

Yes. And I am interested in that kind of optical switching. I really got away from dealing with space. I've recently been less interested in space than I was in what was going on in the space. I am going to use the idea of the double line in my next piece. I want to get back into the other thing.

You do?

Yes. In *The Juniper Tree*, I had to concentrate on a narrative. But now I'd like to get back to some ideas of visual perception. Because I think that one of the most interesting things about dealing with--you know, the theatre situation, or the performance situation, is what the audience sees, when they see it.

Yes.

In *The Juniper Tree* there was a lot to see. It was--based on a kind of luring, and--

Luring.

Yes. The sets. A lot of imagery. But not so much concern with space. The way I like to deal with space is for it to be an ambiguous situation, where the audience is seeing something in a way that's strange to them. *The Juniper Tree* was about this kind of picture-making, you know? But not altering the space--I mean, it's very hard to say this, but I was making stage sets, and doing something with the lighting--that's what I'm most interested in now, is really the lighting--how the lighting changes the space and mood. I used those screens to reflect the light and also to see through.

Yes.

But, anyway, this large etching, the idea of that drawing, is interesting because it's another way of getting back into a kind of ambiguous optical concern. And also, in a way, those two lines in the drawing represent the story, and what I'm doing next to it. Because in parts of the piece, I do things that seem to represent different states of mind, depending on who's interpreting the story.

Yes.

Sometimes they're close together, and sometimes they're--

Yes--

Not close together. But people who have seen the piece have told me that sometimes they have to concentrate on two things at once. I do this complicated, this mathematical thing in the middle of one of the scenes. It's actually very simple, but you have to sort of follow it in order to know what I'm thinking about doing--while you're listening to the story, so if you haven't heard the story, it's hard to do the two things at the same time. People have told me that sometimes they got away from the story because they were getting into what I was doing.

Yes.

Or, they couldn't follow what I was doing because they were trying to follow the story. I like the--several things going on at once.

Yes, that's been an element in everything you've done--I mean, from what I've read, even in the pieces that you did on the beach, there were always people doing different things simultaneously. In the indoor pieces there was always the video and you could watch the video, as a kind of detailing, or particularizing of something that was going on, and you could watch both things at the same time. That amplifies your perception.

The video was like an ongoing mirror that added another layer of images.

You pile on lots of layers, for people to pay attention to, and at the same time, while you're building up these layers, you're also getting rid of some other layers. I mean, we talked earlier about the drawings and how primitive they are,

and I think this implies pulling off layers and going back to a very simple, most basic, structure.

So each part of the layer, each layer, whatever it is, represents, maybe, a kind of simple concept. But there's so many of them together that it becomes complicated.

Yes. Would you say that you're not really interested in yourself as a subject matter anymore?

No, actually I'm not. I did a tape once where I used myself, and I don't think I want to do it again.

Is it too--exposed, or is it just not necessary, or--?

No, the reason I don't want to do that is because I don't want to get into this whole thing where everybody's expressing themselves. The word "personal" is used too much, and people get confused about what they're seeing, you know; they think it's you, or they think it's something that is about you specifically. People have interpreted *The Juniper Tree*, why I did it, and everybody has a different viewpoint. But, really, no one knows why--my real connection to it--because I haven't told anybody. I don't like all that autobiographical connection. It's too myopic.

I know that that's something that you've been accused of.

What? That I--

That your work is very autobiographical.

Which one?

I suppose it was Organic Honey.

Oh. Actually, that one was, in a certain sense. I used objects my grandmother gave me--painted fans, knitted dolls, and then my dog whose image was in the piece, chewed them up and they were gone and I was the dog. It's interesting, like a Rorschach test, but who is going to read it, and interpret it, and why bother? I hope that the work had psychological content available through its formal elements: video, sound, image conjuring. I was a piece of material like the mirror or the monitor.

How did you--you said that you began to be interested in dance, because the process of drawing and making sculpture was very like, or very connected to, the process of dance.

And theatre and dance--and drawing and sculpture--are all ways to approach the work that you're doing now. I wondered if you ever had studied any other kind of theatre, any primitive theatre, or Balinese or Japanese theatre?

Well, I went to Japan in 1970. And I saw a lot of Noh theatre and a lot of Kabuki theatre and it made a huge impression on me. And then I saw a lot of Jack Smith's early pieces.

Yes.

That was very impressive.

And, earlier, you were impressed by the dance activity at the Judson Church.

Yes, the end of the Judson Church period, and some Oldenburg pieces from "Store Days".

Which was about--'68, '67?

Yes. 1967.

And before that time you had been working making sculpture? And then you became very interested to work with movement?

Well, yes, movement and objects. I was interested that people could use objects and sculptural elements as part of performance. I think that's what attracted me to it. I'd never been a dancer, or studied dance--but I was very athletic. Also just after I became interested in performance I was studying the Minoan mother goddess and Minoan imagery, and I went to Crete because of my interest in mythology. From looking at those sculptures I began thinking, maybe instead of making static figures I could have figures moving around in space.

Did you study art history?

I majored in art history, and I studied a lot of sculpture. I never studied painting. But I'd been looking at paintings all my life, you know?

Yes.

Looking at the space of paintings, really. How painters create illusions and how they deal with a framed space, that stays in the frame, and with depth and distance. And also, films, how people deal with space. So that's how it started.

And it seemed that that was what I should be thinking about, putting something into a space. When I first started doing pieces I used to just go to the space and look at it. The way I got an idea for the piece would be to just look at the space, until my vision blurred.

Trying to perceive it.

Yes. How it looks to an audience. What they're looking at. But then I, you know, then I got interested in the ambiguities of space, illusions about space.

And video.

Well, video came later, but yes, video.

You have made video tapes, then, that are not part of the performances, but that are actually independent?

Yes. A few. But performance and tape--the two fed into each other.

And you've made films, too?

A couple of films.

How did you come to use masks? Is that from the Kabuki and the Noh theatre, too?

Not entirely. Maybe. Earlier I was influenced by a film-maker, Franju, who used little black masks. In doing a solo piece, taking on different disguises and personae, wearing different costumes, the mask is just a natural.

I see.

So I do put myself into a certain kind of a--the masks, I create certain moods, you know?

In the piece that you'll be working on when you go home, you will be using two different fairy tales--one is The Frog Prince *and the other is* The Boy Who Went Out to Learn About Fear. *Is that one of the archetypal situations that interests you? Fear?*

The minute you start doing fairy tales--fairy tales are, in part, about fears, I think. People keep telling me which fairy tales scared them the most; that comes up a lot in conversation. And the idea that one is afraid of a fairy tale,

or afraid of what happens--fear--comes up in a lot of different ways. It interests me. So, these two fairy tales--*The Frog Prince* and *The Boy Who Went Out To Learn About Fear*--are about certain kinds of fear. And I think fear is part of your life, you know, it's sort of a necessary thing.

Do you think that people learn from watching The Juniper Tree, *for example? Do people come away with something to think about?*

I think every artist would always like the audience to either learn or experience something that will change their lives in some way. So, that's what I could say that I would like, to do something that would somehow alter people's experience of what they in future would be seeing. If I could do something in a certain way, and it alters someone's experience of the world, then that's all I could ask for. And I don't know how--I'm not sure--

How that works.

I mean, I'm not trying to teach anybody anything, although I think these stories are fragments of archaic teaching stories, but that's not my purpose, really. I do think that it's interesting to expose the material in fairy tales. It opens up a new area for people.

Did the Grimm brothers write all their fairy tales?

No. They just collected them.

And, are they mostly from Germany?

I think these fairy tales are. They're from Kassel. They got a lot of fairy tales from one woman who lived right near Kassel. All fairy tales were passed on like that, mostly by women.

Until they wrote them down. And that was in the 19th century?

Yes. They all came from various ancient sources, you know, handed down over the years.

So, actually it's a tradition that you're picking up on--

Yes.

* * *

Joan Jonas

Born, New York 1936.

Lives and works in New York City.

SOLO CONCERTS & EXHIBITIONS (Indoor)

1968 *Oad Lau*, St. Peter's Church, New York
1970 *Underneath*, Alan Saret's loft, New York
Mirror Piece, 14th Street YMCA, New York
Mirror Piece, University of California at San Diego
1971 *Choreomania*, Loeb Centre, New York University, New York
1972 Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy, Lo Giudice Gallery, New York
Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy, Galleria L'Attico, Rome
Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy, Ace Gallery, Los Angeles
Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy, Documenta V, Kassel, Germany
Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco
1973 *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York
Organic Honey's Vertical Roll, Festival d' Automne, Musee Galliera, Paris
Organic Honey's Vertical Roll, Galleria Toselli, Milan
1974 *Funnel*, The Kitchen, New York
Organic Honey's Vertical Roll, The Boston Museum, Boston
Funnel, Project '74, Kunsthalle, Koln, Germany
Funnel, Contemporanea, Rome
Funnel, Texas Gallery, Houston
Funnel, Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis
1975 *Twilight*, Anthology Film Archives, New York
Twilight, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
Native Dance, And/Or, Seattle, Washington
1976 *Native Dance*, San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco
Mirage, Anthology Film Archives, New York
The Juniper Tree, A Performance for Children, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia
1977 *Mirage*, Vanguard Theatre, Los Angeles
Mirage, Documental VI, Kassel, Germany
Mirage, Rome
Mirage, Salle Patino, Geneva
Mirage, Kunsthalle Basel, Basel
The Juniper Tree, The Kitchen, New York
The Juniper Tree, St. Mark's Church, New York
1978 *The Juniper Tree*, Vienna Performance Festival, Vienna
The Juniper Tree, 112 Mercer Street, New York
1979 *The Juniper Tree*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven
The Juniper Tree, Whitechapel Gallery, London
The Juniper Tree, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco

SOLO CONCERTS (Outdoor)

1970 *Jones Beach Piece*, Jones Beach, Long Island, New York
1971 *Night Piece*, University of California at Irvine
Beach Piece II, Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, Canada
1972 *Delay, Delay*, a work performed on the side of the Tiber River and viewed by the audience on the opposite shore, sponsored by Galleria l'Attico, Rome
Delay, Delay, a work on a 360 yard long field, Documenta V, Kassel, Germany
1974 *Crepusculo*, a night piece in a garden, Galerie Schema, Florence

INSTALLATIONS

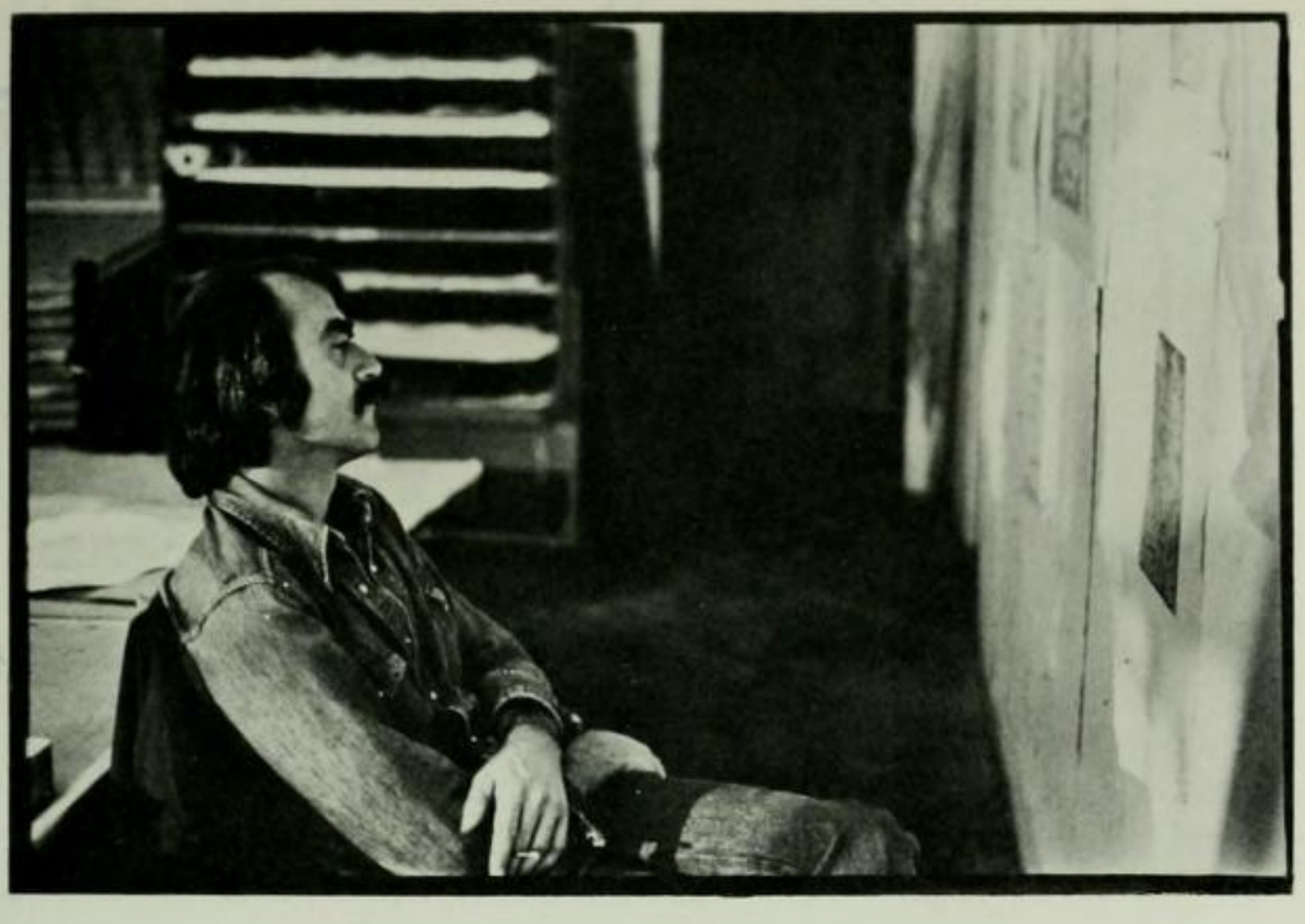
1976 *Stagesets*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia
1977 *Drawing Room*, School of Visual Arts, New York
Three Tales, Documenta VI, Kassel, Germany
1979 *The Juniper Tree*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven
The Juniper Tree, The Whitechapel Gallery, London
Upside Down and Backwards, Sonnabend Gallery, New York

FILMS

Wind, 1968
Paul Revere, 1971 (with Richard Serra)
Veil, 1971
Songdelay, 1973

VIDEO TAPES

Left Side Right Side, 1972
Vertical Roll, 1972
Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy, 1972
Two Women, 1973
Barking, 1973
Three Returns, 1973
Glass Puzzle, 1974
Merlo, 1974
Pool, 1974
Good Night Good Morning, 1976
I Want to Live in the Country (And Other Romances), 1977-78



William T. Wiley

Honest Lies Somewhere Between

"What makes anything a viable alternative is the integrity of your approach to it . . . it doesn't have anything to do with the materials, or the style . . . it is a kind of energy that comes into the particular sequence of events."

View

Interview by Robin White at Crown Point Press, Oakland, California, 1979.

You're preparing for another retrospective, at the Walker Art Center, and you've been working on a mural in Hayward, and there was something in your conversation earlier that prompts me to ask if you sense a change coming in your work? You have said that the most crucial change came when you went to Europe and New York in '67 or '68. Since then do you see a change at all, or do you think that you will just continue moving along the way that you have?

Well, I see changes, but I see it as a--a continuous evolvement.

Well, yes.

And I think probably something that occurred in '67, when I was thirty, has remained very much at the center of that. It was an opening up to a whole lot of things I hadn't allowed for before: to influences, to eclecticism, you know, accepting any--any point of view as a valid point to work from. It was a major change at that point and that seems to basically contain the possibility of continuous evolvement. Just accepting any which way of working, or--

But I don't understand how you can be so open to every possibility?

Well, you can't. I mean, finally that's just an illusion that you have. "Oh, I'm so open to all these possibilities!" But I think there was with me, maybe, just a relaxing of moral standards about where creative energy can come from.

That it can come from any impetus?

Yes, right. And the thing that makes anything interesting to do, or something one can learn from, is just, you know, the attitude that occurs in you when you do it.

Do you mean that there is something that you want to explore and then you're open to whatever comes along to help you do it?

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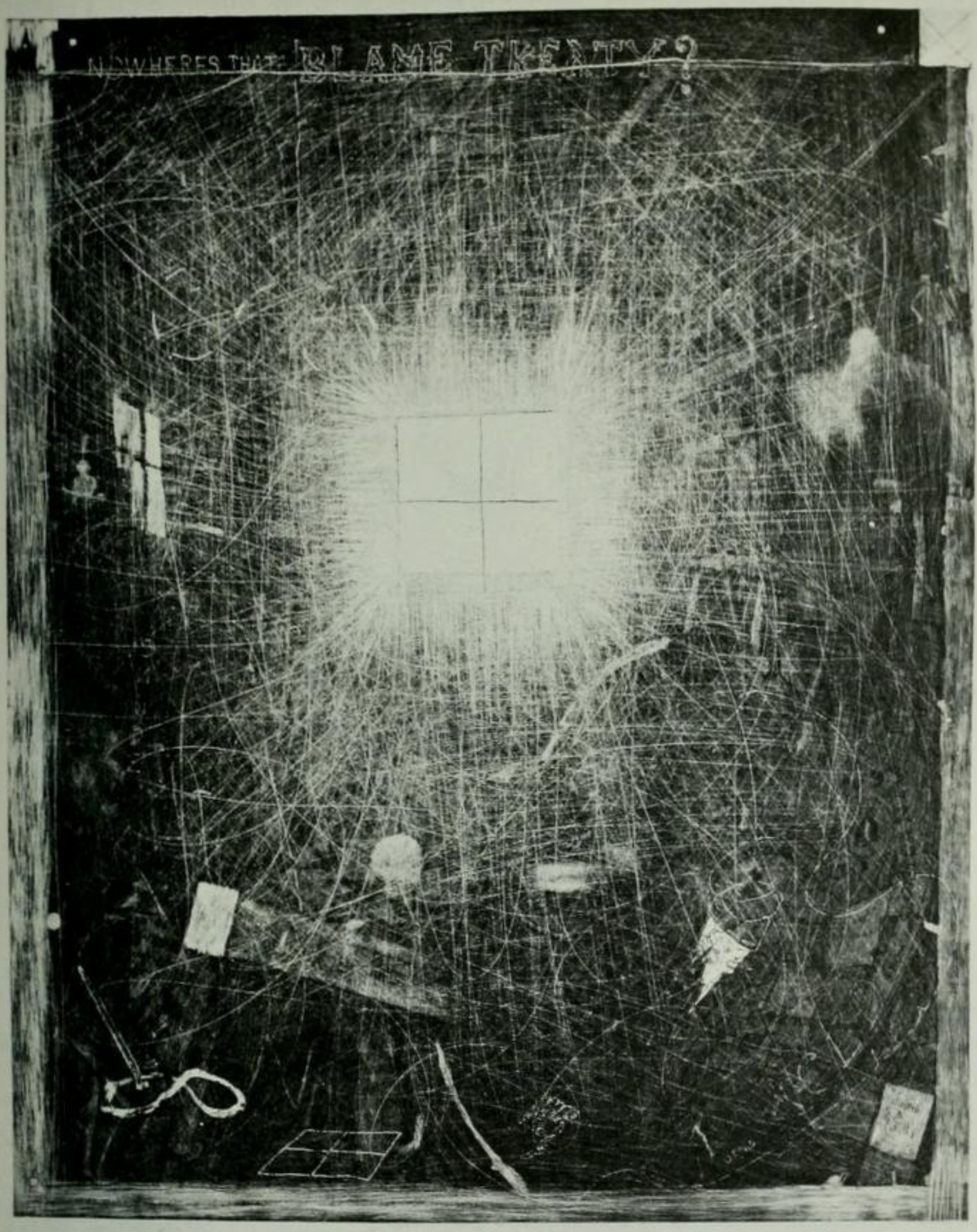


Nowheres that BLAME TREATY?, 1979. Soft-ground etching and aquatint with burnishing, 48 x 39". Published by Crown Point Press.

Yes, in a way. But preceding that period (in '67 or '68) I thought the work had to occur in a certain chronology, it had to occur within a certain style, or something. Your development would be sort of laid out and you had to follow that in order to make sense to anyone, to make sense to yourself. And at that point, in '67, I learned that you could throw the rule book out, and that what makes anything a viable alternative is the integrity of your approach to it--

Yes.

It doesn't have anything to do with the materials, or the style, or whether it is abstract or figurative or whatever it is. It is a kind of energy that comes into that particular sequence of events.

Yes.

Which causes it to be something that is interesting to encounter.

Interesting to encounter on the part of other people who would look at it?

Yes. Or yourself.

Because it--the work--your work, I'll venture to say, has a lot to do with self-expression. And it's a kind of mirror and window at the same time. You once said that when you were little you could paint and you could draw, and if you could draw a truck you could get a certain power from it, like: "I'll draw you a truck, and you give me three baseball cards"--or whatever. Right?

Yes.

There is definitely a certain power--the ability to take what you see and transform it, re-create it, and then you--you have it. But, not just for yourself, it's not just self gratification. Is there something there that other people can learn from it?

Yes, possibly. But you want to be real careful at that point, because--

It's not about being moralistic, I'm not saying that.

No, no. It's just about being--cognizant? of--yes, of the fabric we all share in terms of life, the interconnectedness

of that. In some way the work might cause one to pause, or see it, feel it, or reflect upon it for a moment.

To recognize it.

O.T.P.A.G. Fishing, 1978. Soft-ground etching, 26 x 32". Published by Crown Point Press.

Yes. Recognize it. Realize the interconnectedness of stuff. I've been giving a lot of thought to that, recently, because of the mural I did in Hayward. I've been trying to write something about what I was doing there, what my approach was, and why I did it, and that's very much along the lines of what we're talking about. It's just a personal view of Hayward, the Bay Area, San Francisco, California, you know, the world, where I live--Earth, twenty years, forty-one years--it's just a one-person view, vision of, that accumulated experience.

It's interesting that you use the word accumulation. When Jannis Kounellis was here, he talked a lot about accumulation and about how Italian artists--or European artists in general--have a different relationship to history than American artists do. He sees art as based on an accumulation of tradition along with all the things that one's background and environment present.

You can think of yourself as American, or as European, or as just ancient in terms of human history--

Yes.

And you're supposedly reincarnated, you know. Everybody's a programmed savage.

So everybody has a certain amount of accumulation that they're working with?

Yes. And a certain amount of ignorance. The mind can only do something in relationship to what's already been programmed, regardless of the illusion your history feeds you.

But where is this programming coming from?

Accumulated history!

So, it's not necessarily conscious accumulated history.

Right, right. And not necessarily defined by Europe, or America, or fifty years, or two hundred, or whatever. This idea is recently becoming real, or at least accepted more as a possibility in terms of where impulse and inclination actually come from. And how relevant they are from day to day.

But, even if we are all programmed savages, there are different ways of expressing whatever our programmed history is. The way that you choose to make a work of art isn't the way that Kounellis would choose, or that Sol LeWitt would choose. So, how do you account for those differences? By where you are, by the specific influences of the time?

Yes, right, right. We have a context and you as an organism grow up within that context, and accumulate those--those inputs.

A lot of what you do seems to me to be about how human beings are quite fragile. You've created this character called Mr. Unnatural, for example. And he wears a dunce cap, and he looks ungainly and gawky. He's a pretty good metaphor for that uncomfortable way that people feel a lot of the time in whatever situation they're in, you know? And I've been thinking that part of what you are saying is that it's okay to be like Mr. Unnatural. Human beings cannot always plan things, they are not infallible, they are not so strong, they're just people, and the dumbness and the frailty and the foibles of human beings are there, and they're okay and we should accept

them.

Yes, recognize them, see them, so you can stir them into the calculations that are always being made. Maybe you're going to set off some heavy event like an atomic power plant; that might be the time to really stir that awkward, ignorant aspect in there. Just to give pause there for a minute about the effects that aspect might possibly have in the world.

Yes.

Maybe you could think for just another moment, "Is this trip necessary?", or reconsider what might be miscalculated evidence: "Well, this will do us no harm", or "Let's dump this here", or, "We won't have to deal with it." And that's an ignorance of the interconnectedness of everything.

In the fifties we all thought that everything was perfect, and that we could control everything. Forever. And now we see that's not the case. Things get completely out of our control. But I have an idea that really you are saying something reassuring, it's okay--

"Well, it's okay just to be." We were talking earlier about my change in attitude when I became thirty--that was okay, thirty years on the planet I have to accept.

That's not a limitation!

Oh, no. It's sort of the foil, it's like a *koan* almost, you know, it's like a Zen limitationist freedom. If you can serve, then you can rule.

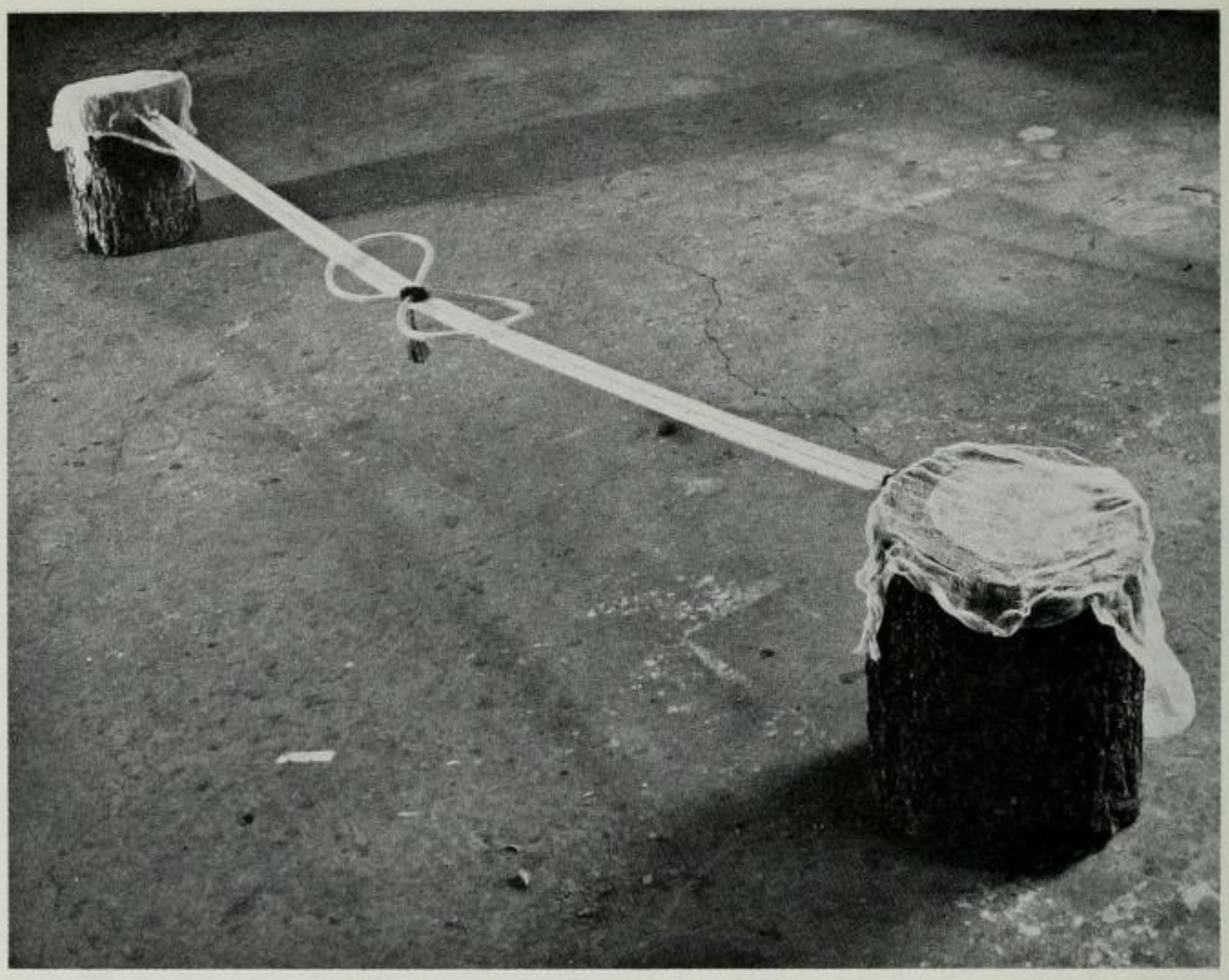
That's in the I Ching.

Yes, right. But then, as each idea happens--"Ah!"--within the mind it's still this puny, this really puny little light. It's fascinating, the illusions that one can manufacture about how penetrating the vision is at that point--

That has to do with power, too, you know--

And--desire. What one's hankering after. But you don't have to make that move--you don't have to see that as the only alternative--pushing the button, or smoking the cigarette, or shooting the gun, you know.

Uh-huh.



Wizdumb Bridge, 1969. Assemblage, 12¼ x 9½ x 49¼". Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands.

It's a whole de-programming situation.

Do these kinds of attitudes have something to do with being out here in California? When I moved out here what impressed me very much was the space, and the freedom, the feeling of having left the old life behind, shedding it like a skin. And the feeling of possibility: that you could do whatever you wanted. And I'm sure that 100 years ago, these feelings must have been a hundred times as strong, when people came out here and experienced the big space, the big sky. The West is expansive and people are not so physically close to each other, nor, I suppose, so mentally close to each other, either. Perhaps you're allowed more possibilities.

Yes, I would basically go along with that. In a really general, off-the-top-of-the-head, clichéd sort of way--but as the room for expansion, in terms of throwing things off, is increased, then the room for misinterpretation and error is equally increased. So, I think it's more the mind--the particular mind in the particular context.

It's more the mind than the context?

It's the mind *in* the context. I talked to people a lot when I was in Paris; I met a guy who grew up in France, outside

of Paris--and he loves New York. He feels that in New York he can leave a lot of stuff behind. In New York he's just like everybody. Of course, he still has Paris there, that which he doesn't leave behind. But his mind is getting the illusion of a new space--"I'm free!"--and it's true in a physical, a territorial sense, but it's more about, I think, the chemistry of the brain saying, "Now I get to have a new experience because I'm in a new space and a new place and it's all possible."

Well, yes, okay.

I only dwell on that because, well, you don't want territory used for any excuse.

No.

Any excuse for non-thinking. I don't want to think that I have to go somewhere in order for thinking to occur. You know? But on an obvious level, the first time I went to Europe and then New York and then back out here again, I thought I could see those kinds of patterns. And before I saw them I didn't have any idea about where they came from, or why someone on the East coast might think that way and so on.

But that's what I'm really interested in knowing, actually. Where do you think these differences come from?

Well, it is--from what you said. It's just that here there's a lack of--tradition, a lack of history in an obvious sense, family ties, you know.

But in doing these interviews, I was struck by the coincidence between you and Mangold for example, Bob Mangold, because you both went to school at the same time, you were both interested in paint on canvas, in working on something that was big and essentially two dimensional. He was at Yale on the East coast and you were here at the San Francisco Art Institute and you both were participating in an increase of energy inherent in the place and time. In the late fifties, early sixties--there must have been a big influx, upsurge, of energy and interest here. I've talked to several people who came here in '59, '60, '61, '62. So there must have been a kind of magnetism, there was something happening here the same way that there was in New York. Other people gravitated to Yale or went to New York City. And how is it that such completely different work was produced? I mean, you said that you didn't think there was such a dif-

ference in attitude.

Ah....

But I maintain that that can't be true, completely, because the result is so different. Not necessarily Robert Mangold specifically, but between Minimal art and the art that has grown up in California in the same time period. It's the product of a difference in sensibility, surely.

Yes... yes. Well, I guess what people usually give as the reason for that is a lack of support for art here.

I know that there wasn't as much art criticism here and that caused people to develop more eccentrically. But I just wondered if there was some other way to explain it.

When I first came to the Art Institute out of high school, wanting to be an artist, it was just art, you know. Art didn't mean East coast, West coast, European, Midwest--art was art. And if you were an artist you were part of that league that covered the world (like Sherwin Williams paint!) At the Art Institute, later on, I became aware of regionalism--attitudes that involved jealousies and fears and stuff.

The real world.

I guess I feel there's a validity to it all, and it grew out of a definite viewpoint. Part of it, I think, grew out of the fact that--well, for example, the people I studied with at the Art Institute, there wasn't a great deal of interest (or support) in their work other than from themselves. So, an attitude about "Well--

It's okay to go your own way.

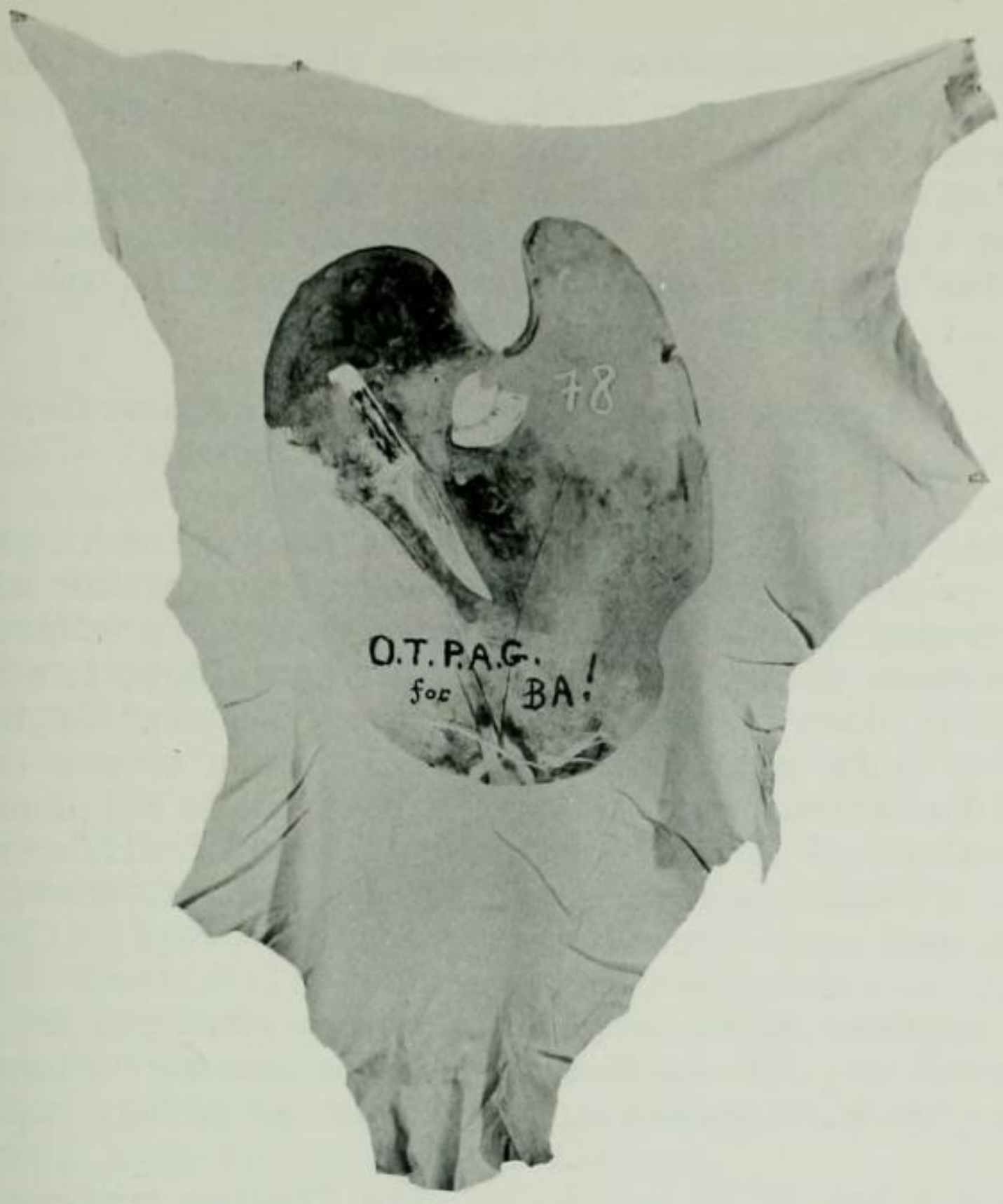
"It's okay to go in your own way", and also I think there was even a tougher put-down of somebody who was receiving critical attention, acclaim, showing in a gallery, selling work--a kind of moral attitude about, "Hmmm. They're selling out."

Yes, I've heard that before.

That was, a lot, because of loneliness and lack of support.

Did you feel there was a kind of resentment?

Toward the East coast?



O.T.P.A.G., 1978. Aquatint monoprint on chamois, irregular chamois size, image size 30 x 23". Published by Crown Point Press.

Yes.

Well, in a way, I don't think I did. But, in another way, I thought: "Well, yes, you know, the work out here is good, and it's too bad people think art is all centered in one spot" and stuff like that. But--at that point I'd never been back East, so I tried to maintain some sort of skepticism. Actually I had started, before I was out of school, showing work back East and doing some of the things I'd been cautioned about by teachers. You know, "Watch out, you get in a commercial territory and they'll just sell you down the line."

But you went ahead and did it anyway. So, you actually didn't suffer too much from that.

No. In fact, the main result for me of receiving that attention, of having people pick up on the work even before I was out of school and showing it back East, was that it

didn't solve the problems I thought it would. You know, at twenty, twenty-one, you think, "Gee--well, if you get in that territory, then you must have it figured out", and it's a shock to find out that the people in that territory, maybe they don't know either. "Those are the leading authorities ... I didn't think the work was quite that good and yet they like it.... What does that mean?"

How do you overcome that? Finally you find your own vision about what you're doing, is that what happens?

Yes, I think your own appetite finally surfaces in there--why you're really doing it. Whatever is authentic within you is trying to surface through the territory of art; it might have to do with selling something or not, but it doesn't--it doesn't matter. You carry the seed of integrity in your actions and in your work. It doesn't have to be all done in isolation, and it doesn't have to be all done on West Broadway, I mean, there are millions of different alternatives. There's a real simple truth in that, then, and it makes sense.

So just because other people can accept what you do, and not only accept it, but applaud it--that's not sufficient. And going to New York helped clarify a lot of things for you.

Yes. And a lot of it had to do with finding contradictions to things that I had taken as rules: "In that city, no one will speak to you." And you go to that city, and everybody says, "Hey!" just right off the bat, and so, where did that rule come from?

Yes. And then when you see that that rule doesn't work, you can transfer that understanding to a whole lot of other rules. And then you see that, really, you make your own rules in a way, and they're applied to you.

Right, right.

And that's the kind of thing that you were trying to teach students--I am told--this open attitude, not limiting--keeping things open.

Yes.

In a way, in New York, art deals with limits--I mean, people use limits to define their territory, and they explore that territory as fully as possible. And, in your work, I don't see the limits, I don't see where a structure is, you know?

I've been looking for it, because it's something to hold on to.

Yes, well, I look for it too, occasionally. At different times, earlier, I wished for it.

For limits?

Yes, sure. I wished for some consistency, some style that would finally formulate, like Albers, maybe, or Reinhardt, you know, somebody who just narrowed, or distilled, and it made me want to approach that, down to being satisfied. That was a really attractive possibility, that realm, rather than the endless alternatives and not having any one thing. Finally the idea occured to me, "Well, that's a very singular way: using all of it."

Yes, yes.

And that seems to be my appetite, my inclination. And there's no alternative but to follow what your appetites are wanting to do. But occasionally when I'm in some dilemma about what I'm going to do next out of all these multiple choices, I really long for a more limited viewpoint--"Gee, it's too bad it's not all 5 x 5, and basically black paint"--being bored at some point with all those alternatives.

Right, right. Do you always go back to the beginning, though?

Well, I seem to suffer through at that point. We talked about this idea before, it came out of Eastern thought--forming a beginner's mind. Because what finally happens to me, anyway, is that in that situation you become an expert.

It becomes facile, it becomes very easy to do something that you can do well, and then you do it without thinking about it?

Yes, or, even simpler, in just being--the mind moves in similar patterns, thinking--putting out a pre-conceived idea about what should occur--you go to your studio and work, and generally I'm pretty disappointed with what initially occurs: "Oh! This again? I have to start here?!"

But you do.

Yes. Because finally that's the only alternative. It's like surrendering, taking off all the ideas about "I don't want it to be about that, I want it to be about this." It's just finally surrendering to the impulse of working, essen-

tially serving that impulse, assisting whatever's trying to come through, and accepting whatever is coming out. I'm usually thinking, "Okay, I've seen that enough, I'm ready to do something else." And then I try something else, and that doesn't go, so--it's like, well, Mr. Unnatural is a good case in point. Being in a certain place and printing, for example, at Landfall or at Crown Point. "What shall I do now that I'm here?"--falling back on some theme--Mr. Unnatural--"Oh, I can't stand that anymore! I've done that enough!" --and after maybe a week or two week's time wasted, "Oh, it's not wasted, it's fine," then, I'll just accept. I was looking for a way out; I didn't want to work with that image anymore.

No?

But then in finally accepting it, through the acceptance--the thing usually springs open.

Yes. Being able to take it further, then?

Well, not take it further, just re-accept it. That's actually what's supposed to come out, what's going to come out. And that's a whole self-acceptance thing. It's battering your ego back into the proper shape to--to work. Nothing being accumulated, in terms of skills or laurels or wisdom; it's being innocent, you know, it's being a beginner again. "Okay, I don't know anything--I'll just start." You know, it's not going for that illusion of, "Oh, I've been at this for twenty years, I definitely know what I'm doing."

So you want to be a real amateur.

Well, that takes you out of the driver's seat to a certain extent.

That's a lot like Cage.

Yes.

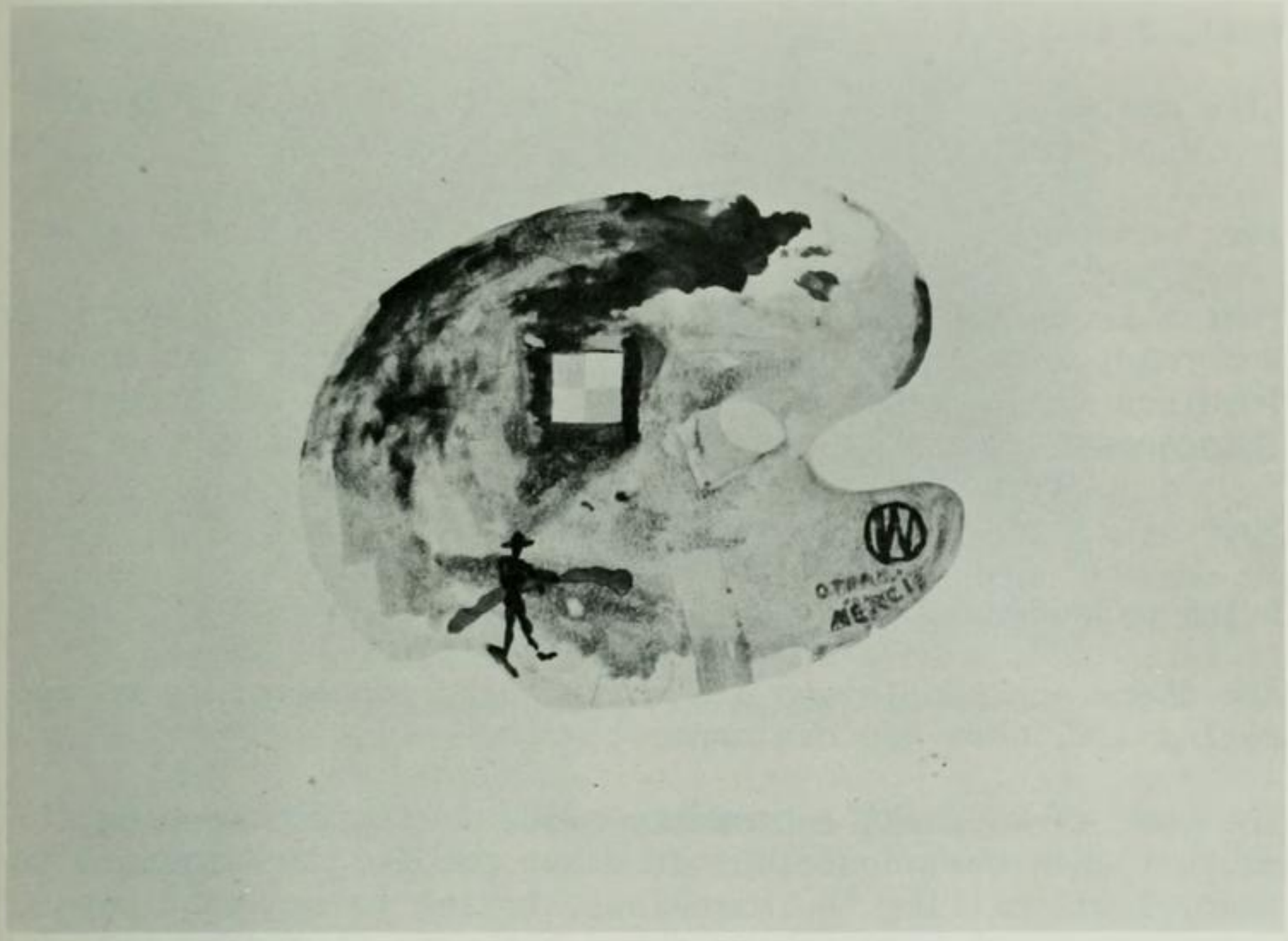
He sets up situations where he asks the questions, but whatever the answers are, that's the way he goes. Of course, he's ultimately controlling what happens because he asks the questions in the first place--he programs the computer, as it were. But he is also, like you, trying to get away from ego, trying to be more open and more responsive to what else is happening.

Yes. I want to see what actually wants to come through, or

what needs to come through, rather than talking just in terms of what the work's about; you know, not to say, "It's about this, and so it goes this way." It may turn out that way, but it's not knowing beforehand. In order to handle whatever focus is coming out of this constant re-remembering, I have to be aware that it's not really *me*. I don't own it.

Do you believe in reincarnation?

Oh, sure.



***O.T.P.A.G.*, 1978. Aquatint monoprint, 29 x 41". Published by Crown Point Press.**

What were you? Do you know?

I don't have many views about who I was before--but, yes, I feel that whatever functions as intelligence is probably recycled in one form or other. And within the last ten years I've been opening up to influences, energy, or sources of inspiration, and I feel that I am continually receiving ideas and energy from other artists who lived at other times.

Practically speaking, do you study or read, or look at... who's your favorite?

That's always--that's always changing. It's like following a scent.

Who's your favorite this month?

Flavor of the month! Well, it seems I like Redon. He's in my mind a lot as I work--Redon, Seurat, you know, it's like things that come up have territories. "Where's this coming from? Gee, it must have been from having looked at--Redon, or Seurat"--sometimes it's people you haven't even paid that much attention to on a conscious level.

Well, I know--

Like maybe dark drawings, "Gee, where is this coming from?" You know, you're looking for your own parallels.

Yes.

"Where is this? Gee, it reminds me a little bit of Redon, or Rembrandt, or something." And I finally decided that those impulses may be coming from that territory. So--I accept reincarnation as some recycling of information...

Sure.

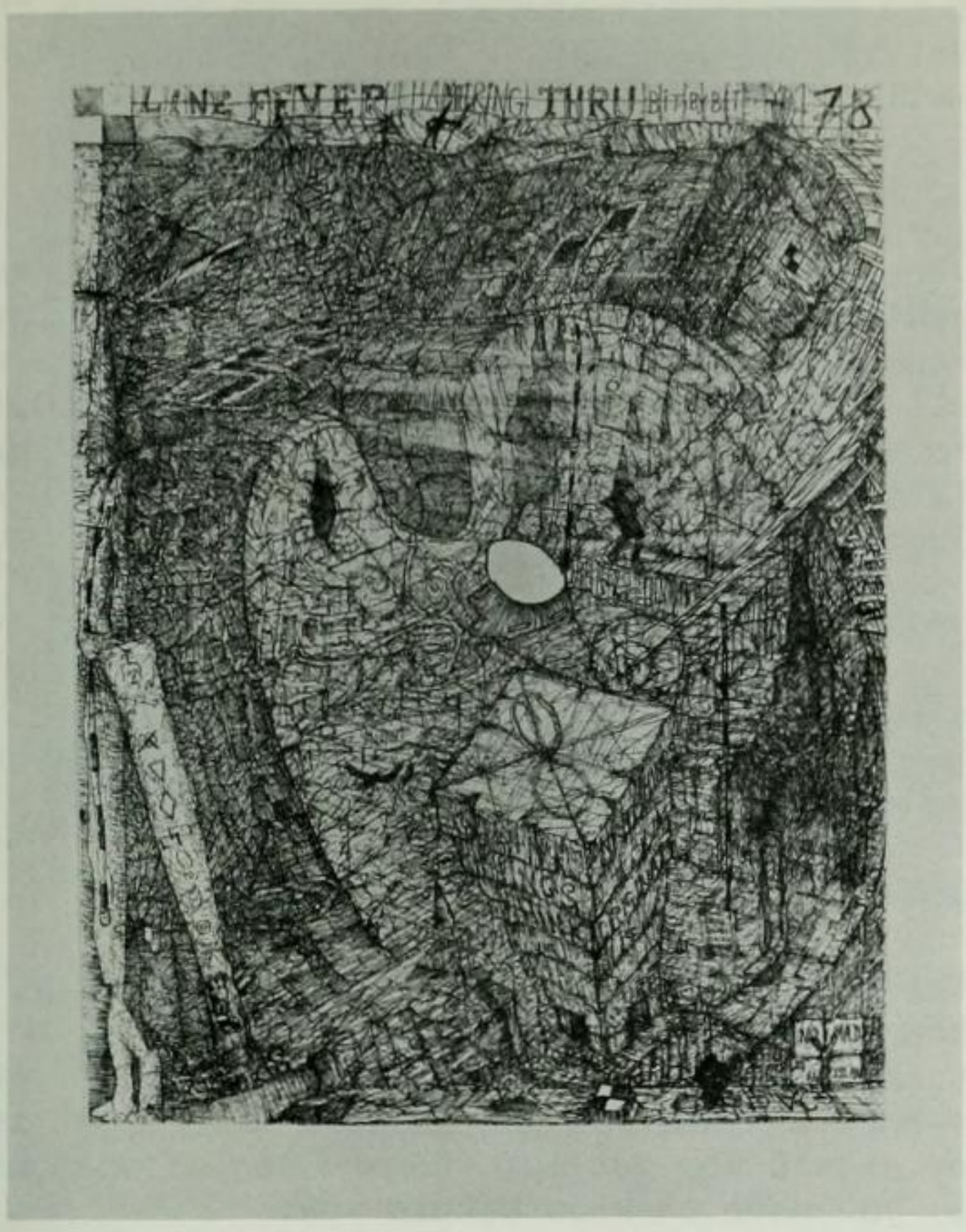
Being passed down the line.

Are there any people who are making art, contemporary people making art, whom you can connect with?

The last five years, especially since I stopped teaching, I haven't been very conscious of other people. Previous to that, I was hitting the magazines, trying to see what was going on, but I was looking for a lot more at that point, I mean, that was before I got connected with what I wanted to do. I was looking for ideas and input and impulse and stuff, considering anything, because I wasn't pleased with what I was doing. But I was also feeling guilty about it. I had some idea that art has to spring from some totally pure source within you, and you can't go to a grandfather in the art sense. "Hmmm... you've been looking at so-and-so"--and this big guilt trip was laid on, you know.

Oh, I see.

I thought you couldn't draw from those sources, taking what you need, and dump the rest out. But getting connected, or re-connected, with my impulses and appetites finally took a



Line Fever, 1979. Soft-ground etching, 32½ x 26". Published by Crown Point Press.

lot of pressure out of that territory. Now I think I'm not as cognizant of influence. I take it in just as a matter of--

Osmosis, maybe.

"That's an idea that's really interesting", or you can use something coming out of a territory that you're not involved in. "That's really good." Or "That's better than I could have thought of." My other feeling, when I think about it, is that there's nothing wrong with creative attempts. And of all the things in the world that need criticism, it just doesn't seem to me that people trying to make art need a lot of criticism, except in the most specific sense. Because you're working with someone, getting to know them, because-- I think, you know, it's tough to do. At least in the culture of 1979, we should just let those energies exist; there's not a strong support system for art, really, in everyone's life. So, criticism of it on any level almost seems totally beside

the point to me. Basically what it needs is love and support and if what you're doing as an artist isn't self-nurturing, then you will be the one that will kill it.

Yes.

Somebody doesn't have to step in from the outside and do that. Whether you're in your penthouse on Fifth Avenue, or you're in your basement on Grant Street--the pain and the misery should tell you when it's no longer sustaining you, and then if there's anything left in the brain that's looking for another relationship with life, it should occur. It seems it gets real personal at that point.

Right. Well, for you--

I've been thinking a lot about this because I just juried a show recently in New Mexico, and I realized how distasteful that is to me, to be in that territory.

How did you make that kind of judgement?

I don't think that it makes any difference, really. Because I think they're both illusions: being accepted, being rejected, both of them ask you, "Why are you doing it?" "I got in, hooray!"--but, why did you get in? "I didn't get in, you know"--why didn't you get in? Regardless of what happened out there, you have to know within you.

We were talking earlier about your preparation for the Walker Arts Center retrospective. Who does the editing? Do they say that they want this one, this one and this one? Or if you do it, how do you choose, and what are your favorites?

Well, I have certain favorites, as we go through the process. But since it wasn't something I thought up, and it's not something I wanted to do, I'm more or less going along with the viewpoint that thinks it's important to do it.

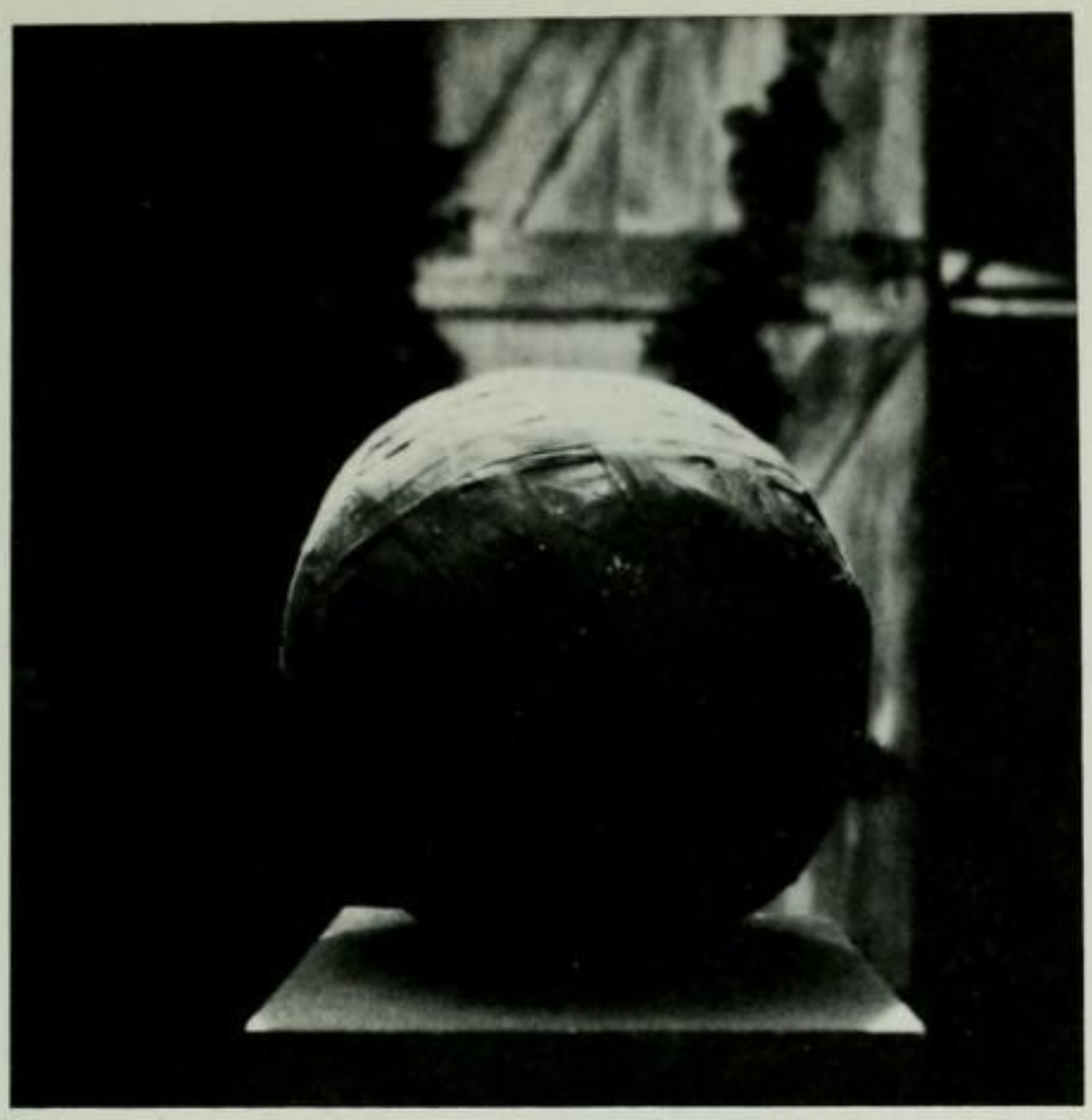
Yes.

And occasionally saying, "Yes, definitely that goes in; that one I don't care about."

Have you ever made any political art?

Yes, I think so.

What?



Monument to Blackball Violence, 1968. 12" diameter, black friction tape.

I think it's all political.

I mean, did you--

Specifically?

For example, did you make art for McGovern's campaign, or Kennedy's, or for campaigns to stop the war or to stop the bomb? Is that an interest?

Yes, sure. A lot of works have involved a specific comment on political territory. Bombs, in particular, and a piece about Martin Luther King when he was assassinated.

"Blackball Violence"?

Yes. I just finished a painting (or drawing--I say large drawing on canvas) and the stimulus for that came, partially, out of just having finished the Hayward project, the murals. The imagery that rolled out of that was employed, but also I had read an article in "Environmental Action" which was telling about people--they call them "night riders"--who, for money, will dump toxic substances. For instance, the article told about a chemical company back East that had a toxic substance that they wanted to get rid of, and there was an approved dumping ground, but instead they found a trucker who for $75,000 would just take it, and dump it. Somewhere.

***Working at C.P.P.*, 1978. Soft ground and hard ground etching, 12½ x 14½". Published by Crown Point Press.**

Yes.

So this guy found some roadwork going on, and dumped it around there, hoping to camoflage it. There happened to be a scientist vacationing in the area who happened to see it, smell it, whatever--and found out that this whole area was contaminated by the stuff, and traced it back to--so the piece I just finished has a lot to do with that specifically.

Incredible.

But I think that theme of what we're doing to the planet and each other has been, in one form or another, pretty much in the work since about '67, specifically in the watercolors with the narrative line. Before that it was impossible to do, because before that I just had a different idea about what art could be.

It had to be about aesthetics, or about--truth, or beauty, or all of that.

Yes, right. But all those things are involved--

Yes.

It's all right to address all those situations, and also to speak or paint or visualize your feelings and your emotions about specific events that are occuring in your life and lifetime.

Yes.

So, most of the work--not all of it--but a portion of it has that as a stimulation, you know, it is a commentary on current events. And a lot of it's about just what it is to be an artist, trying to deal with that idea--I mean, a lot of the things we've talked about, I talk about in the works.

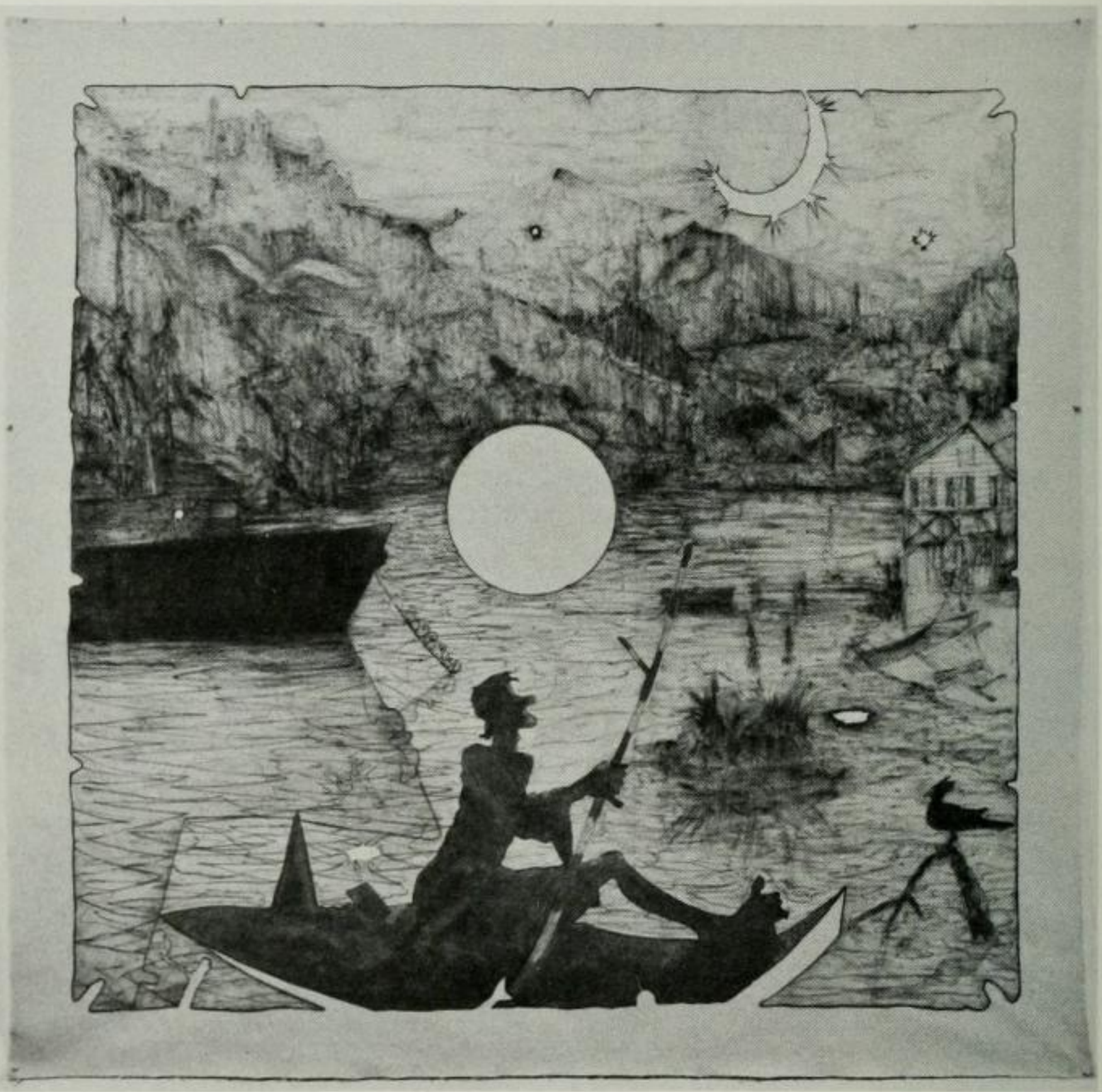
But it's not--you don't see it as being art in the service of something. It's not dogmatically political.

I think art's really a nice form for the presentation of feelings, opinions and stuff. And I think you can do it, you know, in an absolutely non-obvious, political way.

Yes, yes.

You make a statement. And everything in life is, in a way, making a statement. But there are just various levels of perceiving the truth.

* * *



Nothing Seems Clear, 1978. 2 parts: water color on paper, and acrylic on canvas. Hansen Fuller Gallery.

William T. Wiley

Born: Bedford, Indiana; October 21, 1937

Education: San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, California, 1959-1961, B.F.A.
San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, California, 1962, M.F.A.

One-Man Exhibitions

1960 San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, California
Staempfli Gallery, New York
1962 Staempfli Gallery, New York
1964 Staempfli Gallery, New York
1965 Lanyon Gallery, Palo Alto, California
1967 Mills College, Oakland, California
1968 Allan Frumkin Gallery, New York
Hansen Fuller Gallery, San Francisco
Galerie Paul Facchetti, Paris
1969 Allan Frumkin Gallery, Chicago
Hansen Fuller Gallery, San Francisco
1970 Allan Frumkin Gallery, New York
1971 Hansen Fuller Gallery, San Francisco
Studio Marconi, Milan
"William T. Wiley", University Art Museum, University of California at Berkeley
1972 "William T. Wiley", Chicago Art Institute; Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C.
Galleria Odyssia, Rome
Galerie Richard Froncke, Ghent, Belgium
Allan Frumkin Gallery, Chicago
Hansen Fuller Gallery, San Francisco
James Manolides Gallery, Seattle, Washington
Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles
1973 "William T. Wiley", Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands
1974 Utah Fine Arts Museum, University of Utah, Salt Lake City Utah
1975 "Three One-Man Shows: William T. Wiley, Dorothy Hood, Armando Morales", The University of Texas San Francisco
Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles
JPL Fine Arts, London
1976 Allan Frumkin Gallery, New York
Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles
Museum of Modern Art, Project Room, New York
1977 Galerie Paul Facchetti, Paris
Musee des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Belgium
1978 Hansen Fuller Gallery, San Francisco
1979 Allan Frumkin Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
Allan Frumkin Gallery, New York
"10 Year Retrospective", Walker Arts Center, Minneapolis Minnesota
University of Akron, "Graphics Exhibition", Akron, Ohio; Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio; Southwest Texas University, San Marcos, Texas; San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, California; Smith-Andersen Gallery, Palo Alto, California

Selected Group Exhibitions

1960 "Young America Show", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
1961 "American Exhibition", The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois
Grand Rapids Art Gallery, Painting Invitational, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Oakland Museum, Painting and Sculpture Show, Oakland, California
California Palace of the Legion of Honor, Winter Invitational, San Francisco
1962 "90 Years of Bay Area Art", San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco
"Fifty California Artists", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
California Palace of the Legion of Honor, Winter Invitational, San Francisco
1963 "Arts of San Francisco", San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco
1964 2nd Biennale of American Art, Cordoba, South America
1966 "Whitney Annual", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia
1967 "Whitney Annual", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia
"American Sculpture of the Sixties", Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
"Funk Show", University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, California
"Pittsburgh International", Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
"Toward a New Metaphysics", Allan Frumkin Gallery, New York
1968 Dwan Gallery, New York
"Social Comment in America", Museum of Modern Art, New York
Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Wellington-Ivest Collection, Boston, Massachusetts
"Whitney Annual", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
1969 "Whitney Annual", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
"Spirit of the Comics", Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia
"New Methods and Materials", Museum of Modern Art, New York
"Violence in Recent American Art", Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
"National Drawing Exhibition", San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco
Drawing Exhibition, Fort Worth Art Museum, Forth Worth, Texas
"Human Concern/Personal Torment", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Reed College, Portland Oregon
"University Annual Art Festival", Reno, Nevada
"When Attitudes Become Form", Kunsthalle, Berne, Switzerland
"U.S.A. Groupe 69" Musee des Beaux-Art, American Library, Brussels

1970 "Symbol and Vision", Gallery Reese Palley, San Francisco
"Looking West", Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska Museum
Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts
Allan Frumkin Gallery, New York
"Art on Paper Invitational" Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, North Carolina
"Centennial Exhibition", San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, 1970-1971
"Aspects du Racisme", Paris, France
"Kompas IV Exhibition", Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Dortmund; Kunsthalle, Berne, Switzerland
"American Painting", Foundation Maeght, France

1971 American Painting and Sculpture, 1948-1969, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois
"Kent State Memorial Exhibition", Kent State, Ohio
Art Gallery, University of California at Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California
"Corcoran Biennial" Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

1972 "Sacramento Sampler", Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California; Oakland Museum, Oakland, California, Sao Paulo, Brazil
"Looking West", A.C.A. Gallery, New York
"After Surrealism: Metaphors and Similes", Ringling Museum, Sarasota, Florida
"Working in California", Albright-Knox Art Gallery, New York
"Painting and Sculpture Today", Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, Indiana
Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, Alabama
Cologne Art Fair (Studio Marconi), Cologne, Germany, 1972
Documenta V, Kassel, Germany
"Venice Biennale", Venice, Italy

1973 "Twenty-five Years of American Painting: 1948-1973", Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa
"Extraordinary Realities", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
"Whitney Annual", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
Baltimore Museum of Contemporary Art, Baltimore, Maryland

1974 "Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture, 1974", Krannert Art Museum, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois
"Painting and Sculpture Today 1974", Indianapolis Museum of Art and Taft Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio
"Whitney Annual", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
"Surrealitat-Bildrealitat 1924-1974", Stadtische Kunsthalle Dusseldorf, Dusseldorf, Germany, 1974-1975

1975 "Biennial Exhibition", Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
"Words and Images", University of California Art Museum, Santa Barbara, California
Barbara Fendrick Gallery, Washington, D.C.
Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, California
"Color on Paper", Ruth Schaffner Gallery, Los Angeles
Faculty Show, Memorial Union 4th Floor Art Gallery, University of California at Davis, Davis, California
Art Gallery, College of Marin, Kentfield, California
"Group Drawing Show", Walnut Creek Arts Exhibition Center, Civic Art Gallery, Walnut Creek, California

1976 "200 Years of American Sculpture", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
"Watercolor U.S.A.", Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri
"3 From California", Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
Museum of Modern Art, New York
"California Gold", U.S.I.A. Traveling Exhibition, 1975-1976
"Bill, Bob, Bill, Bill", U.S.I.A. Traveling Exhibition (Europe, Middle East, India), 1976-1978

1977 "Painting and Sculpture in California: The Modern Era", San Francisco Museum of Art, 1976; National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.
"Drawings of the 70's", The Art Institute of Chicago, Society for Contemporary Art, Chicago
"Artists' Maps", Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
"Annual Invitational Drawing Exhibition", Central Washington State College, Ellensburg, Washington
"California Bay Area Art - Update", Huntsville Museum of Art, Huntsville, Alabama
Kiku Gallery, Seattle, Washington
"New in the Seventies", University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas
"Invitational Drawing Exhibition", Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego, San Diego, California
"Watercolor and Related Media by Contemporary Californians", Baxter Art Gallery, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California
"Recent Media", Brooks Memorial Art Gallery, Memphis, Tennessee
Drawing Exhibition, Linda Farris Gallery, Seattle, Washington
"Recent Art from San Francisco", Den Haag, Amsterdam, Netherlands
"Works on Paper", San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, California
Landfall Press Traveling Exhibition of William T. Wiley's Prints and Book, "Suite of Daze", Hansen Fuller Gallery, San Francisco; Chicago Art Institute, Chicago, Illinois

Terry Fox

"The impetus might have been similar in Dada, but it has nothing to do with this art form. Performance art has to do with the day in which it originated, the 70's. . . . It really is an attempt at synthesizing communication. It's an attempt at a new communication."

View

Interview by Robin White at Crown Point Press, Oakland, California, 1979.

You'll have to bring me up to date a little bit about what you've been doing. I've actually only seen one piece that you've done recently.

What was that?

That was the piece that you did at the Berkeley Museum last September, with Georg De Cristel. When you were working with the--shaver.

The shaver--that was my intermission.

Oh!

It was like a "beard harp", because Georg plays the jew's harp. He's a jew's harper from Innsbruck. He wanders around in Austria playing the jew's harp--I met him when I was in Innsbruck.

He wanders around--you mean, he's like a minstrel?

Yes. With a bag of jew's harps that are made for him. He wanders around with them through mountain villages and gives them out to people, teaches them to play, forms groups, and moves on. It's wonderful.

Yes.

So, in that performance, I used these big bamboo poles--fifteen foot bamboo poles--that I had down in the bottom space of the museum. It had to do with the architecture of the museum, how it's splayed out in a fan shape, like a deck of cards. I would whoosh these poles through the air, making a deep, breathing sound--left to right, right to left--as long as I could. And when I couldn't do it anymore, then I would take a break and put the shaver against my cheek, move my mouth, and use my mouth as a resonator and make different tones. So I could harmonize with Georg.

Oh!

And Georg was wandering this fan shape the whole time, giving

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Cover photo by Paul Hoffman

out harps and teaching people how to play, and he would come down sometimes and we would play together and harmonize. The performance was quite long; I think it was four or five hours.

God, you must have become really tired. Are you still using your body as a measurement?

Photo by Marion Gray

Strolling Performance, with Georg De Cristel. University Art Museum, Berkeley, California, 1978.

Yes.

It seems from this piece that you are, because you used the one thing until you got tired, and then--

That's always been an aspect of what I do. A lot of what I do deals with exhaustion--proceeds to exhaustion. I mean, I do something until I can't do it anymore. For instance, a couple of years ago I played an instrument continuously for twenty-four hours in a boat on a river inside a tunnel.

So the work that you're doing now still relates very much to your physical being?

Well, I would say that everything I've done relates to the same thing, and my physical being has had a lot to do with it.

In the past?

In the past, and now.

You use your body as a--as a reference, a standard of

measurement.

Sure. You and I both have the same body. So it's universal. It's personal and universal at the same time. Everybody has a liver--you could base work on the liver. Everybody would understand it. Or, the eye--what I'm starting to do now are works with the eye and the ear.

Are you working with the ear and the eye now? In New York?

I don't have any space yet. I'm trying to get space and do it. I want to make objects.

You do? What kind of objects?

Well, you know my performances are usually really pared down in a real simple...

Yes.

Sometimes there would be only one object, or two, or three, or four, but--like a performance involves everything I've been thinking about. It is a way of putting it all out at once, but, it ends up being a very concentrated kind of thing because I try to reduce all of the elements, you know, I am constantly reducing them. You get to the point where you only need to do one thing to convey the whole scheme of things. And it will work.

Yes.

Because it will be understandable.

Yes.

It's like the Sioux Indians, before they sing, they give a yell. And it's a one-breath yell that they give, and it's as loud as they can yell it. And in that yell is contained the whole structure of the song that they're about to sing. And, in fact, they base the song on the yell--the same sliding notes, the same harmonies, the same pitches, the same changes that happen, in a split second in this yell, are carried out into, maybe, an hour long song. The song is an elaboration of the yell.

An amplification of this very--

Yes, the song presents the material in a much slower way to somebody who's not as intensely involved in it as the singer.

The singer hears all those things--

In a yell.

Because he's doing them. But a listener, all he hears is a crazy yell. But, if you sing that yell out, the listeners understand exactly what you did.

So, the performance for you is like the song?

Yes, it's like singing it.

I get the impression that a lot of the work that you do has to do with exorcizing your own feelings of isolation and deprivation?

Yes.

The art, making the art, is a way of getting these feelings out of yourself. Without so much regard to how people would respond, or what they would be able to take away from it. Perhaps not so much regard to the universal content of it. I have the impression that, for you, art is a private ritual that requires doing.

I do art because I get pleasure from doing it, or I have to do it, or I need to do it, or I want to do it. I do it--I do it basically for myself.

Yes.

It's true that in terms of audience I don't make it accessible to them. I mean, they have to do certain things before it becomes accessible to them.

What do they have to do?

Well, it's like--performance has changed so much. It's almost impossible to talk about performance anymore. That word means something different from what it used to. There must be a better word, we could say "situation". I make a situation. The actual situation is what's going on in the space we're in. And the situation involves everybody there, and there is a blend when everybody starts participating. For instance, in Montana, where I played the instrument in a boat in a tunnel for twenty-four hours, people came all twenty-four hours and sang into the tunnel, played instruments, dropped their dogs in the water, listened with their ears against the ground. Once, in Germany, I did a performance at Documenta

where the people threw stuff at me. They were throwing candy and whatever they could get, and they yelled all kinds of obscene information.

So, you appreciate an audience reaction, on any level.

Well, for instance, take the opera. The reason you clap so loud and so long is because you've wanted to participate for two and a half hours! Finally you can stand up, you can even stand on your chair and scream out, "Bravo!" So, you get your chance to participate, but not 'till the very end. But to get back to talking about performance art, I think it's an endangered species. There're a few people doing it, like I'm doing it, but not many.

You still are?

Yes, and I still think it's a viable thing. I think that the original impetus for performance was vital, and it's still--it's really important. In fact, I think it might be more important now than it ever was. But it's so bastardized by people in and just out of art schools, that now performance has become a cliche--every performance exactly the same; you know what to expect, you know it's going to be slides, and pre-recorded tape, and so on. And, who can't do that?! You know?

I know.

And that's the reason it's become so popular--who can't do it? But who does it relate to, what does it mean? In New York, if we go to The Kitchen, it costs five dollars each, ten dollars to see somebody play a pre-recorded tape, I mean, it's really ridiculous. And it's gotten to the point where the audience sits on chairs, you know, and if there are no seats available, then they close the doors. You get reservations--

You can't sit on the floor?

Originally performance was--for instance, my performance at Reese Palley was in between the drywall of the gallery and the real wall of the building, it was between the two walls. A real wall and a fake wall. The space was only three feet wide, and the performance was there, and people managed to fit in there. The audience took care of themselves. I always figure that if they want to stay, they'll stay. If they don't want to stay, they'll go. If they want to sit down, then they'll figure out how to do it, and if they can't

A listener at the entrance to the corrugated culvert. *Culvert,* Clark Fork River, Missoula, Montana, 1977.

figure it out, then that's too bad for them. Or, if they watched the performance and they didn't understand it--then there's a mental block somewhere. You can't give them all that pablum, you know, I mean, they've got some intelligence. I still feel that way. The spectators may give up all their preconceptions and just open themselves up to what I'm doing, and get out of it what they can, or, they're going to retain all their preconceptions and get out of it what they can. It may be something different. Or, maybe they're not going to get anything. Or, maybe they're going to laugh and go away. I mean, that's up to them--that has nothing to do with me. I do my best, that's my only job.

How do you feel about political art?

I think the only way you can do political art is to boycott or strike--you can't do it anymore by--by making something political. For example, nobody goes in the next Biennale.

Right.

Nobody. Everybody refuses to be in it. And then, that has

some effect--but it doesn't have an effect to put a political work in the Biennale, because it's already--

Because it's already been subsumed by--

Yeah, it's already absorbed by it. I think good political art would be to figure out a note that people could hum to offset the subway noise, say, or sirens. If there were a way, when you heard a siren, to also create a note that would harmonize it, turn it into a pleasing combination, one that might make you feel great--that's the kind of politics I'm interested in. I mean, I really do believe that art is healing--you know, I really believe it.

I agree.

It's constructive, and it's vital, and it's really necessary, but it's hard to verbalize the reasons for it.

I agree. I think that art is regenerating. In a psychological way, it can expand you, heal you, nourish you.

I've done performances that went on for hours, and--we all, the people who were there, got so close, you know, that at the end it was just--wonderful. It was like you're sorry to leave or something.

Well, I think it makes quite good sense, then, to be involved in performance art. Because here is a human being, and he's up there offering, or doing something; as opposed to making an object, and putting it up on the wall and hoping somebody can relate to it one way or another.

Yes, I try to get closer than that. And it's not just a person up there, it becomes pretty organic. But--the only people that this art exists for are the people that are there. And--it's the only time the art exists.

And that makes it rather special.

It's like any confrontation, it's like a street accident, or a meeting, or--anything. I mean, it just happens between people who met. If you meet a friend out on the street--well, you could document that, videotape it, photograph it, and send it to an art magazine, or put it in a gallery--but it wouldn't mean anything to anybody.

No.

The meeting just had something to do with the two people that were there, and it's like that with performance, too, it's only for the people who were there. Of course, you can document it if there are reasons for you to do that. But the idea that documentation is the art is totally wrong.

Yes.

It's like life's theatre.

It's the energy that goes back and forth.

And it's only for the people who are there; it's not for anybody else.

So it's not a kind of art that can exist for all time. It does only exist in the time that it occurs. I think that's an interesting thing--I don't think I've ever heard anybody say that performance didn't have some claim on art history.

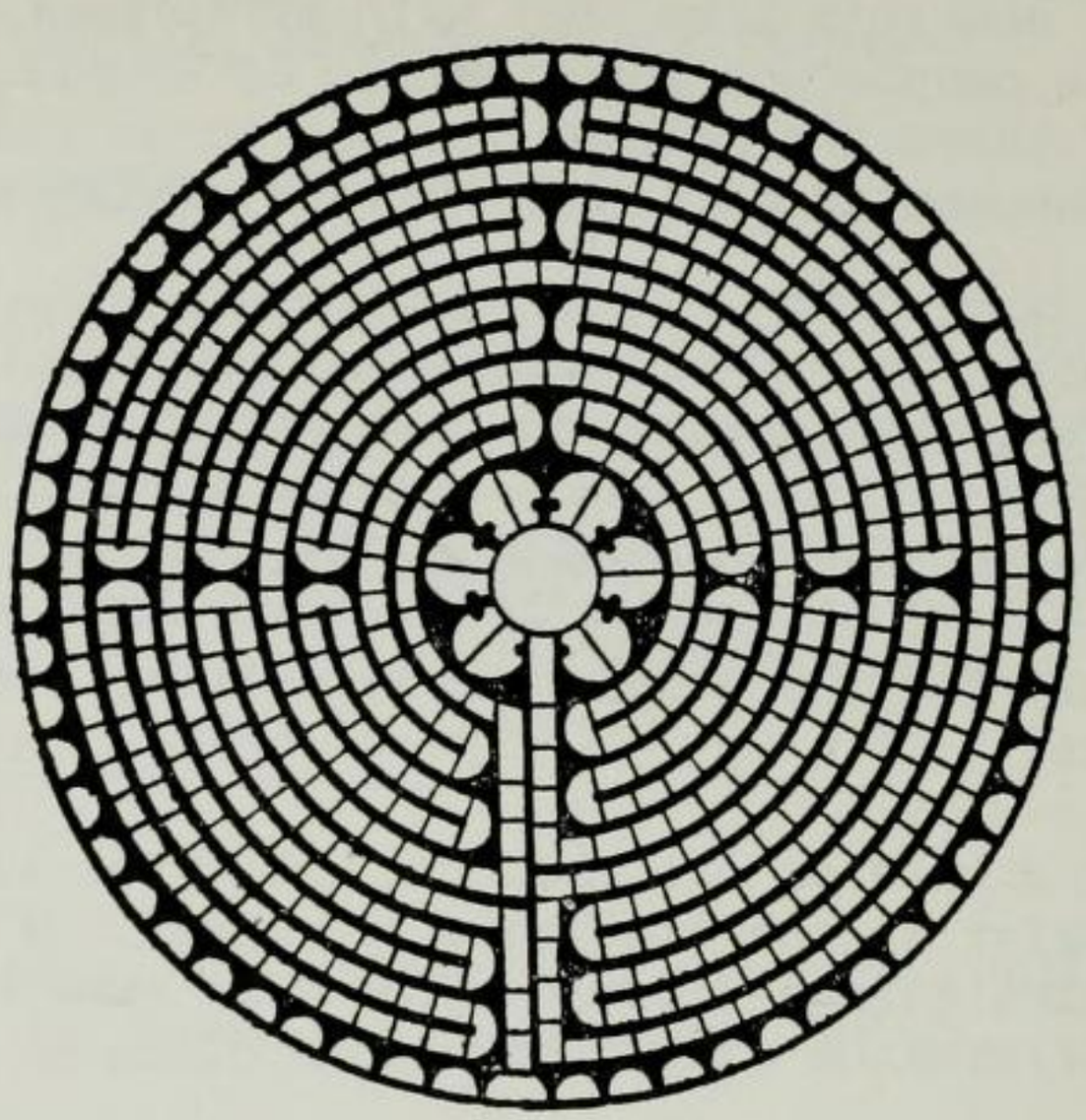
It doesn't. The whole idea of justifying art through the centuries, saying that performance today relates to Dada and Surrealism--I mean, it doesn't at all. The impetus might have been similar in Dada, but that was a war situation, an anarchistic situation, and it has nothing to do with this art form, which is an original way of trying to communicate. This art form has to do with the day in which it originated, the 70s, not the 60s; it doesn't have to do with hippie or drug culture, either, I don't think. It really is an attempt at synthesizing communication. It's an attempt at a new communication.

When did you do your first performance?

I did public theatre, but those weren't really performances, they were--street situations. That was in 1969--I did one a month, and I just made announcements, printed them myself. The performances were on street corners, like one was on the corner of Fillmore and McAllister. One was indoors at Anne Halprin's studio, and it took place simultaneously with Wolf Vostell in Cologne.

So, who came to them? Who did you send the announcements to?

I just put them up all over, you know, stuck them up on walls --especially down South of Market, where I was. All along Third Street. Mostly just friends came. I sent some to people that I admired--artists here and in Europe. For instance, I sent Beuys every one of them. So, when I met him,



Rubber stamp diagram of the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral, Chartres, France.

he sort of knew me, already, although I hadn't really done anything in a gallery. In the one in Anne Halprin's studio, one of the chief dancers, Patrick Hickey, took over and they did whatever they wanted. I didn't have any control. But there was one that I set up--the one where I transposed a blind lady from Market Street to Union Street where she sang and played her accordion in front of a huge construction pit, from sunset until dark. The first performance I did as an art performance was at Berkeley in 1969, for the 80's show at the old Berkeley Museum. It was the defoliation of the jasmine plants.

Oh, yes. Now, that was a very political piece. It was about Viet Nam. I mean, that's what I thought.

Yes. It was also designed specifically for the people that I knew would be there.

Were they veterans, or were they people that would be sympathetic, or were they people that you were out to shock?

They were extremely rich people, who obviously supported the war in some way or another. The garden was one of their favorite places to eat lunch. If you went there on a normal day there'd be two or three very rich looking people sitting

around having lunch--having their bottle of wine there, because it was beautiful; it smelled really good, it was real quiet, a wonderful place.

And the museum let you do it? They didn't mind?

Yeah, they let me do it. I don't think they knew how extensive it was going to be. It takes seven years for those plants to bloom, and they were in their sixth year. It was a garden--it wasn't very big, it was like, eight feet by eight feet, and I burned a square--I burned the whole thing with a flame thrower, and it just left a slight border of these plants, and they ended up having to dig them all out--it destroyed them. So, then, the next day when these people came to have their lunch there, it was just a burned-out plot, you know. I mean, it was the same thing that they were doing in Viet Nam. Nobody would get excited about napalming Viet Nam, but you burn some flowers that *they* like to sit near, and it's like--

But do you think they ever made the connection?

Oh, yeah. Definitely. Definitely.

There was another piece you did about Viet Nam. The one with the fish, in 1970.

Yes, "Turgescent Sex". It was meant to be a political piece. It was a real, direct involvement for me, considering myself as a victim, and identifying with the Vietnamese people, and also considering myself as guilty. The fish represented the Vietnamese and also represented me. There were hundreds and hundreds of knots constricting this fish. So, what can you do? You can't do anything about the war, you could go out in the street and get shot, or you could protest and sign petitions. But nothing was working. I don't know how you felt in those times, but I really felt bad--it was because of being on the West coast; I think emotions were stronger--I felt terrible. I wanted to release my guilt. So I tied the fish up in all these knots, and my release was to blindfold myself and untie them, releasing the fish from all these bonds. Blindfolded, I untied one knot and put this side of the rope to the left, this side to the right, and then untied the other half of the knot; if I got the strands mixed up the whole thing formed another knot, and--it was like the whole system, the whole war was like that--it was so complex and hard to--to, what do you call it, extradite yourself--

Extricate.

Extricate. And so that's what I did with this piece, always trying to keep the one half separate from the other, so that finally the fish could get removed from its bonds. And then taking the bonds and making a nest out of them and putting the fish in it, and wrapping the fish up with the blindfold, putting it in the nest, and then blowing smoke over it--it was like--it was just like a release, a release from guilt. And it also was personal for me, because it was a labyrinth of circumstances, you know that there must be a way to get out of it, no matter how hard it is, you really can do it--it doesn't matter if there's four hundred knots and they're tied real right--you just have to go very slowly, one at a time....

Before you began work in performance, you were a painter. When you were making paintings, were you trying to deal with the same subjects, or communicate the same kinds of things as you have done since you started to make performances? What I'm trying to get to is, do you think that performance art is a good medium for expressing certain kinds of ideas that can't be expressed so well in painting?

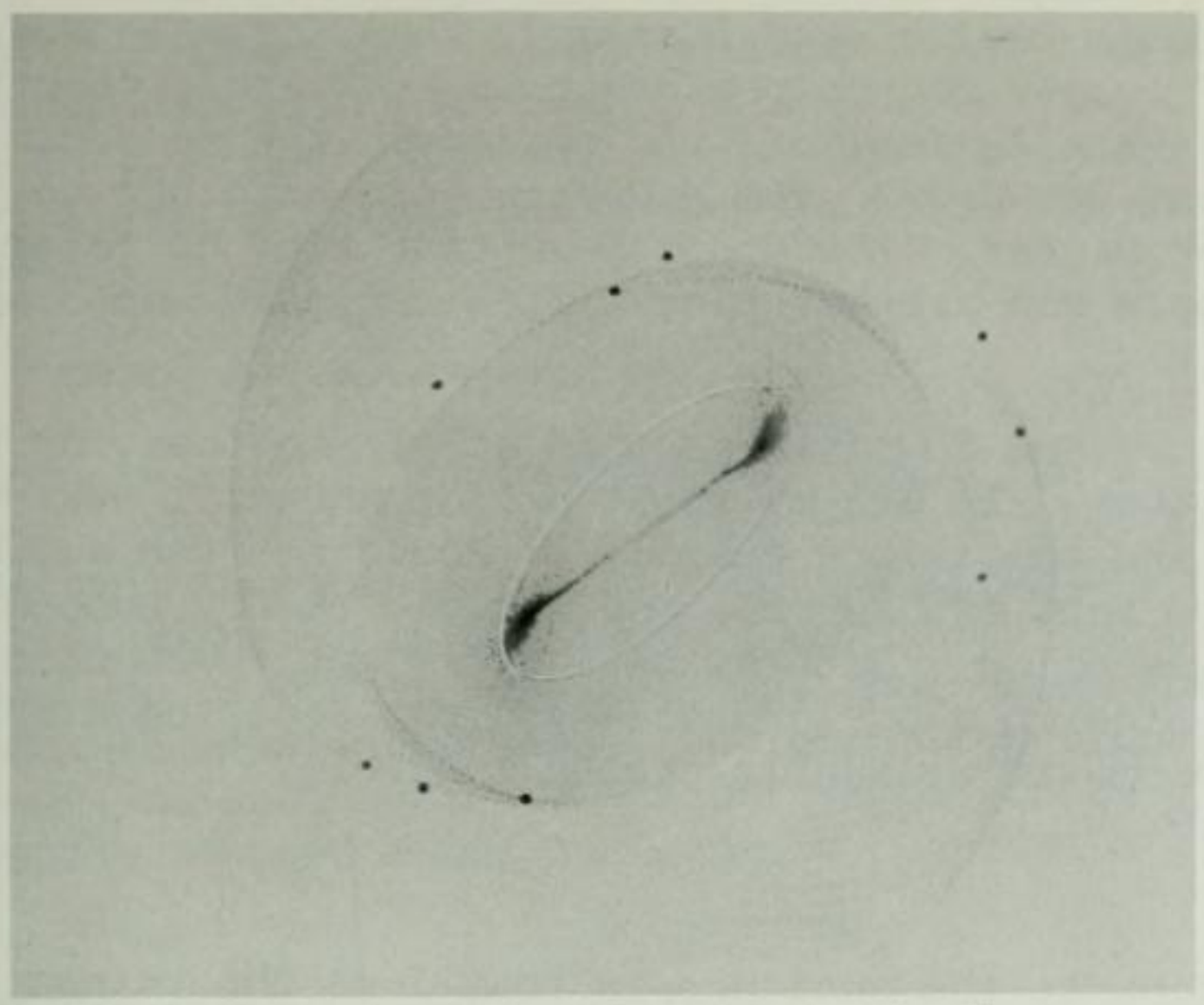
Yeah, that was my case, anyway. I became a painter because I started doing it--when I was in highschool I had a shed that I used as a studio, and a big easel, and a palette--

Right.

And books on Michelangelo. I wanted to be an artist, and an artist, to me, was a painter. I sort of got in a trap of being a painter. And continued on, even though--actually, working on a painting was extremely satisfying, the act of doing it, was wonderful. But I never liked the product. And I don't think I ever did one good painting the whole time, and that was a long time, too. Ten years. When I started doing performances, I was confronting people, instead of manufacturing this object--you put it out, you put it in a gallery, nobody pays it any attention. I don't know about you, but I can't look at a painting in a gallery for longer than a few minutes even if I really like it. I might come back two or three times and look for two or three minutes each, but--I mean, to stand there for an hour, an hour and a half--in front of a painting--

I think unless you're a painter, or an art historian, it's pretty hard to do.

Yeah, and if you're in a gallery or a museum, you just get glutted after a while.



Pendulum Spit Bite, 1977. Aquatint, 40 x 49". Published by Crown Point Press.

Oh, that's for sure. Whereas in performance you're hit by the immediacy of the activity. Painting is static, and it's also timeless, it's an object and exists--forever. It's more absolute and more ideal. Performance is the opposite, it's very human.

Well, sure. For me it partly came out of my living in Paris in 1968 and experiencing direct confrontation. The difference between being involved in a direct confrontation, and reading about it, say, it's just so different! It's the difference between performance and painting, to me. I decided instead of making something that's permanent, or that moves away from me into another context, I could be responsible for the context of my art.

I've been wanting to ask you why you would do performances that only two people can come and see? Or that no one comes to see. It would be as if it hardly existed at all, wouldn't it, if no one experienced it?

The answer has to do with a kind of integrity or something that any artist has. I mean, you feel a compulsion, or a need to do this thing, and you do it. And if it happens to be a situation where only two or three people are going to come, it certainly doesn't make a difference. You have to do it anyway, so you do it. And you learn from it. Sometimes I want to do things that are private, sometimes I want to do things that are more--public.

So you don't really need feedback, then, from an audience? A lot of people who do performances--certainly theatre, or concerts--really feed off the audience, the response is back and forth, you know? The audience gets high and the musicians get higher. You don't have that kind of relationship with people who are watching? It's not that important to you?

Well, I try not to pay attention at all to them, or even to look at them. In all my first performances, I never wore my glasses and that's the reason. I could see the audience, but they were sort of blurred, and I could really concentrate on what I was doing. But you definitely get feedback of sorts while you're in a performance--you can feel the atmosphere in the room--it's usually pretty tangible.

Yes.

My relation to the audience is that I do the things the best that I can; I'm involved in the work the most that I can be involved in it; I try and give everything to it. And if I do that, then that's all I'm responsible for, you know? They're responsible for what they get out of it.

I see.

And everybody gets something different out of it. Some people don't get anything out of it. They're there because it's something to go to, and--

I think you really have to go with the proper attitude. It seems to me that most of your pieces are pretty long, and if anything extends over time it requires a commitment on the part of the people watching it, if they're going to be involved in it. It's not something where you can go spend half an hour and say, "Oh, I'm losing interest now, I'm leaving"--

But it is. You should have that choice. You should be able to leave if you want to. That's one reason for the length of my pieces. I did one performance on Mount Tamalpais near San Francisco in which I played an instrument in conjunction with a small plane which flew overhead...

Right.

I think it started at three, two or three, something like that. And I continued on, until nobody was there. Nobody stuck around to the end of that. It got cold and it got dark. The only person who stayed was my friend Al Wong who helped me

bring the instrument up. He had the car. But there wasn't a single other person there. Well, things have just changed so much--my earlier performances, people just thought I was nuts, you know, like the first time in New York, at the Reese Palley Gallery--

Right. I heard about that.

I heard people saying, as they were leaving, "He's crazy, you know, he's just nuts". It wasn't the situation of the passive crowd, sitting there in silence, nobody getting up, or leaving, or even moving, until it's all over, no matter how painful it is, or how uncomfortable they are, and then tremendous applause at the end. I mean, that wasn't the point, you know, and there was no such--no such audience. And I've talked to a lot of people who've stopped doing performance, because of that reason.

Why? Because the audience doesn't--

Because they couldn't stand the audience anymore. Performance has been media-ized, or something, so that now it's not any different than listening to a record or watching a film, to go to a performance. Performance now is something completely different than it was before. And I'm not saying it shouldn't change, but there was a reason for it to exist in the first place, and that reason has been subverted or diluted. At the beginning it was very direct, and it didn't deal with entertainment. Entertainment wasn't a part of it at all.

No.

In fact, that's why at first it got a lot of bad press, because journalists thought it was boring.

That's why I said that people have to go with the right attitude. They can't expect to just be entertained.

But that's the attitude they have now. You go to Soho, you pay fifteen dollars to go to The Kitchen, you sit in chairs, and you watch a performance that's done on pre-recorded tape, films, slides--I think it's part of a larger problem in the whole art world. It's the pervasive influence of art schools. These things are just extensions of art school teaching aids--slide projections and pre-recorded tapes--

Well, people like technology, learning how to use technology. And often the technique becomes too important, it becomes an object in itself to be able to use the technology, to make

videotapes, for instance.

But anybody could do that, you know.

Well, it's true, anybody can.

I am still interested in making tapes--I've got a real long project that I want to do on tape, but video is similar to painting, it's the same kind of restrictions. So you're going to do a performance and use a tape and the longest tape you could get is an hour. So your performance turns out to be an hour long. And that's really stupid, you know. You have all these equipment restrictions. You have a given technology and you're seeing what you can do with it. But you can't do anything that the tape recorder can't do.

No?

You can only do things within the limits of the technology, and that's a--to me, that's a terrible restriction.

I think for some people that restriction is an impetus, you know, it's a defining limit, and to take limits and work within them is easier than it is to work with absolute freedom, to work in this nebulous, nether area of defining everything for yourself. That's extremely difficult.

Yes.

And I think that's one thing that's been really hard to deal with about performance. People haven't had a clear definition of what it should be.

Well, they should never have one. That is another thing that happened to performance; once an artist becomes known by people, they expect certain things from you, and communication becomes difficult. One reason for doing a long performance is that--sure, everybody comes with expectations. But even if you have expectations, if the performance is successful enough, you just drop all those; I mean--you'll be able to--to go to a new place that you have never been before.

So, you have to clean out your mind.

And one way to make it happen is by extended time. Those expectations get fuzzier and fuzzier and then maybe you go through a boredom or anxiety period, and then that goes away, and then you can really get into what's going on.

It seems that there's been a gradual change in the performances that you've done over the years. Now it seems to me that the means are even more spare and that your activity is directed more toward producing sound. Whereas in the past, I think--from what I understand--you worked with more objects, more elements, and elemental physical processes like water dripping, and bread-dough rising.... Do you know a lot about primitive sound instruments? Have you ever done any investigations into that?

No. I mean, the only real instrument that I play is the saw, musical saw, singing saw.

That's an instrument?

Sure. And, when I was a kid, I played the accordion. I'm not so interested in instruments, though, because of the same thing we were talking about with painting or video; you're limited to the range of the instrument. Like the piano, the poor piano is just so abused, you know, in art performance. They pound it apart, burn it, drown it--it's pathetic.

It was a gesture that meant something once.

Of course. But I'm not concerned with music too much, and most instruments are entirely to do with musical systems, they are set up in certain scales, and they get certain tones. And no matter how broad the range is, that's what you're left with.

Music is a lot more like language than sound is, more structured and logical.

Yeah. It also has a lot to do with mathematics. But I'd rather be able to stretch a piano wire six blocks, and see what that sounds like.

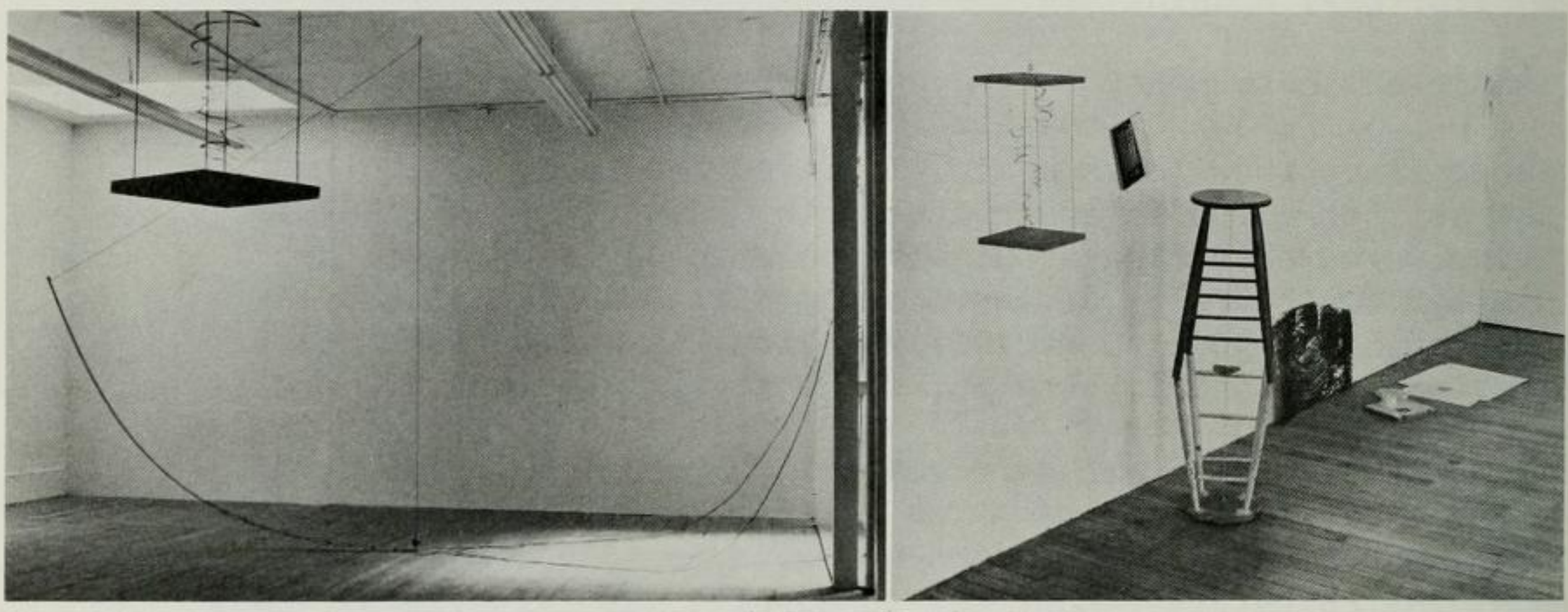
Do you think sound reaches some more primitive and more basic level of consciousness than music?

Yes--I mean, sound just occurs--you get it, and you can't close it out unless you're deaf; you don't have to think about it, you don't even have to be conscious that it's actually happening to you. But it's working on you. I do performances with sound, and it's more sculptural than musical; it has to do with space, filling the space or changing the space, changing the architecture of the space with sound. And moods can change; all kinds of things can happen with sound. Sound can be really deep, you know, it can be really

meaningful, really--a good way to communicate.

So, sound can influence the mood of a person in a space--which can influence that person's experience of a space?

Or, totally change the space--completely, you know? In a limiting space, it can make the space even more constricting than it was before, or make it round where it was square before, or--I think there are all kinds of alternatives. But when I do sound work, it's always designed for the specific place where it happens.



***Metaphors for Falling*, 1977 at Site, San Francisco**

You conceive of a certain sound which will be appropriate for a certain space, and you have an idea in mind that you want to change the space and make it be a certain way, and you know what way you want it to be?

Not always, no. I don't know, in the beginning really what's going to happen. Like that piece I did in Montana. I played a very small instrument, it was a food cover that was only four inches in diameter.

A food cover?

Yes. I'll show it to you. I played this for twenty-four hours in that space, which was a hundred-foot long tunnel. You could barely hear it outside, you know, it was a really dreamy sound, but this--this little thing managed to set up standing wave patterns in there that would just create booms, that would be like a--BOOM--you know, and it was unbelievable! Another thing most of my performances aren't done in a gallery space, they're done in other spaces.

You like basements a lot, I've figured out.

Yes. I like the floor, I really like to be close to the ground. Or, yes, cellars.

Well, let me ask you something else--about the pieces where you were concerned with getting out of your body, transcending your physical limitations. Pieces prior to 1973. Brenda Richardson wrote about them in her catalog for your show at Berkeley. In these, you would put yourself into a trance situation, or get to a situation of total calm, reaching a plateau of--serenity. Is there a longing to produce in yourself or in the people who are with you an escape from their physical situation?

I don't think escape is the right word. I set up a situation, I think we talked about this before, and I feel it is a real situation. It's actually happening and is that thing.

In the catalog essay, Brenda speaks over and over again about the influence of your stay in the hospital, and your--I suppose I feel that this is something that I wouldn't necessarily like to touch on, but I think it's impossible not to touch on it--

No.

When you were sick, you know, your pieces seemed to be about the experience of being in the hospital, but not so much about--life and death, death and re-birth and things like that. Was that something that you--thought about, I mean, did you feel like you'd been reborn, in a way, after you'd come out of the hospital?

No, I just felt lucky!

You didn't have any transcendent experiences about coming very close to death, and all these things?

Oh, sure. Yes, I did. But it doesn't seem appropriate to talk about it now.

But does that experience inform the way that you are now, so there's a trace of it in every performance, in everything?

Oh, sure it does. Human contact is really important.

We spoke earlier about the universal versus the personal, and the self-referential quality in your work and how much of the universal is able to be pulled out of that. It seems that your physical being does, as you said, have a lot to do with

the universal quality in your work.

Yeah--well, you didn't see any of the objects I--

No, I haven't.

From the labyrinth. I found a metaphor for my physical being, not my body, a labyrinth. I worked with the labyrinth for years. Everything I did related to the labyrinth. In fact, my work was based exactly, almost scientifically, on it.

Really? Everything was based on that?

Everything. Yes. All the performances, every object I have made for six years. Like you were saying, it's really honed down, universal symbolism. The labyrinth is--I'll show it to you. All the objects are made out of the simplest kind of--nothing, you know--pieces of wire hanger, and pieces of wood, and--string, and paper.

And is the pendulum related to the labyrinth?

Yes. That's a--I mean, talk about metaphor! The labyrinth itself is a metaphor--the actual labyrinth isn't really a *labyrinth*, I mean it's--it's a metaphor for something. And, so, my explorations with it were trying to discover some of the things that it's a metaphor *for*, and--

Is it a--

The years of working with it ended up in a very bad way for me--I became--I mean, it really was an obsession. It became really obsessive. That's why I titled the show at Site, in 1977, "Metaphors for Falling"--all the objects.

I see.

All the objects were metaphors. I had already done the pendulum with the bowed piece of wood, the pendulum around the glass on the floor--for the show, when Kathan asked me to do the print.

Oh!

At the time I was working with pendulums, and I made a big sound in my studio with a pendulum; I'd had pendulums for about a year, hand-held pendulums and all kinds of pendulums. And it just seemed natural for me to do the etching with that. I didn't know anything at all about etching; I'd never

done a print, not even a potato print or anything. I'd never--

And you don't make drawings, either, very often do you?

Oh, I like to draw--a lot. But, I don't make big--drawings, no. Anyway, what happened is I got a book out of the library on etching, and I was reading through it and there were some really great things--and one was how you could just directly put acid on the plate. And so I thought of dripping acid from the pendulum. And then it was--I mean, I really enjoyed doing that print a lot.

It's beautiful, the print.

The actual working on it was--was really something, I mean, it was really great.

So the labyrinth is a metaphor for existence, for the way that life is--finding this path, from the beginning to the end.

Well, I'm sure it relates a lot to existence. I mean, it interested me at first because of that hospital stuff--cycles of, you know, everybody's life goes in certain cycles. But mine were pretty short--cycle of health, cycle of sick, health, sick, health, sick--and the labyrinth is like a left, right, left, right. The most perfect labyrinth is at Chartres Cathedral, on the floor. To get in that particular labyrinth, you move up halfway towards the center, and then you turn to the left. You do a--a little quarter walk, then come back all the way to the center except you can't step into it, but you walk right around the edge of the center and after 65 more turns, then you go back out again. The actual labyrinth, I think, is also kind of an instrument. Because it's on the floor, and when you walk it, you make this very precise pattern in the air, and it works like a magneto, I think. Like, you could charge yourself by walking this thing.

Oh!

It's very long, you know.

So, it gives you energy?

I mean it--you're walking in space in this certain configuration that's really a lot like a magnet, you know, creating electricity. You're doing this revolving pattern and it's not maze-like. Most people associate labyrinth with mazes.

Yes.

You're lost and you can't find your way out. But this is a unicursal path, you don't get lost at all.

Unicursal?

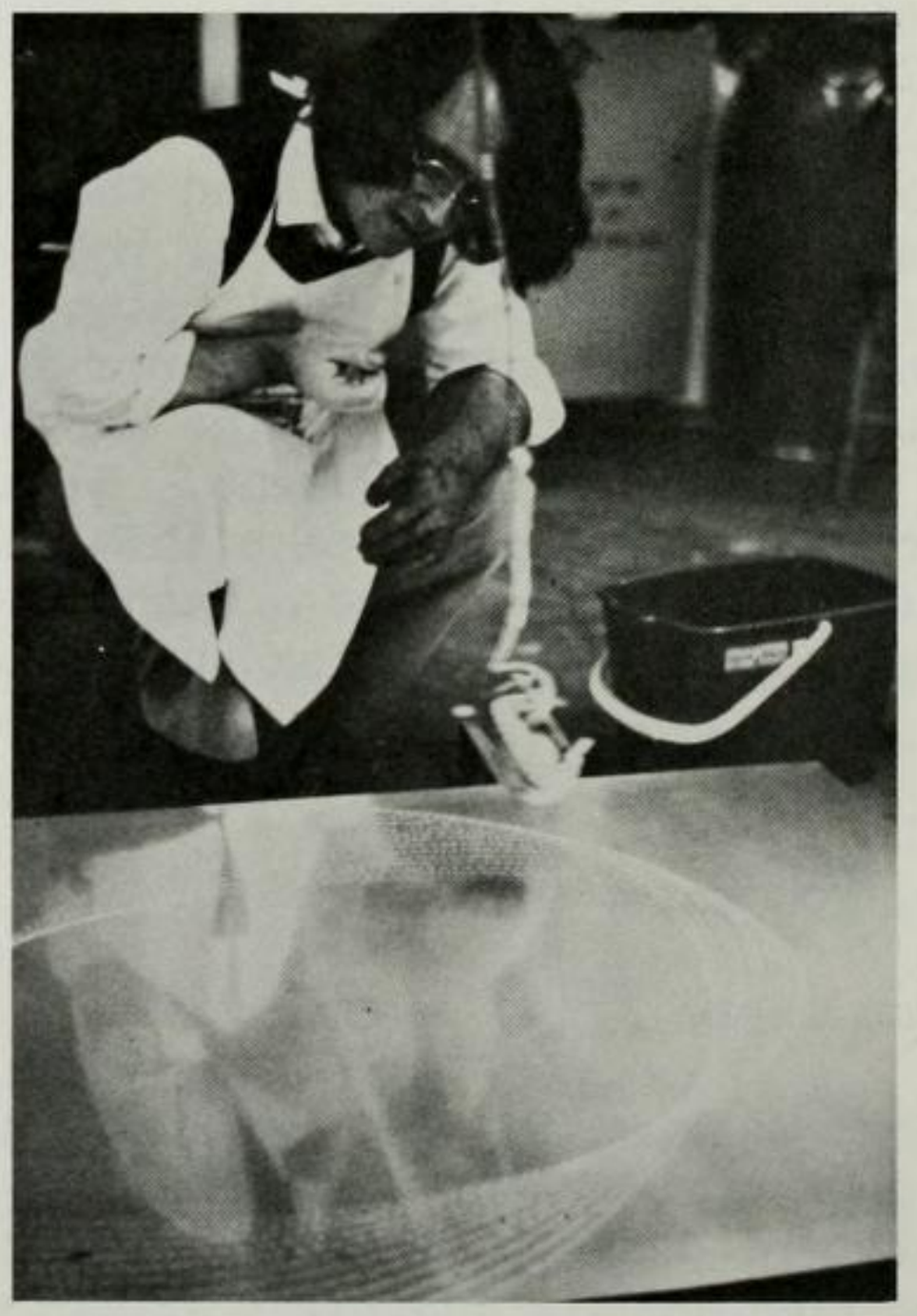
That means an undeviating path. The actual distance from the entrance to the center is twenty feet. But it's one hundred yards to get there. And during that time, you go through every inch of space within that forty-foot diameter circle. You've hit every inch of space, but in a revolving pattern, continually left, right, left, right. I mean, I think that was the purpose of the labyrinth, when they built it.

Yes. And now, at this time, have you, more or less--left the idea of the labyrinth in the work that you're doing?

Yeah. Well, I hope I've left the labyrinth by moving here.

Well, New York, you know--

From here, it's new every day.



Pendulum constructed to drip acid onto the copper plate for *Pendulum Spit Bite*.

Video Art U.S.A., Sao Paulo, Brazil
Bodyworks, Salon of the Museum of Modern Art, Belgrade
Today Together, International Art Fair, Koln
1976 *Exchange: DFW/SFO*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Group Show, M.L. D'Arc Gallery, New York
Video Series, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Video Tapes Produced in Europe, The Kitchen, New York
Video Art: A Survey, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Changing Channels, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Painting and Sculpture in California: the Modern Era, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
A Tight 13 Minutes, Saloon of M.O.C.A., San Francisco
1977 *Whitney Biennial*, Whitney Museum, New York
Painting and Sculpture in California: the Modern Era, National Gallery, Washington, D.C.
Documenta 6, Kassel, Germany
03 23 03, Institute of Contemporary Art, Montreal, Canada
1978 *A Selection*, Hartnell College, Salinas, California
Video Selection, Archives of the Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
Airwaves, 2 disc long playing record, 110 records, New York
International Performance Festival, Vienna
The Sense of the Self, Ind. Curators Traveling Show opened purchase, New York
1979 *Doctors and Dentists*, Robin Winters, 591 Broadway, New York
Estuary, Dance by Simone Forti, Merce Cunningham Studio New York
Lisbon International Show, Lisbon
Numbers, Galleria Nuova 13, Alessandria, Italy
Audio Scene 79, Modern Art Gallery, Vienna

ONE MAN PERFORMANCES

1968 *Fish Vault*, Sarphatikade, Amsterdam, December
1969 *Excision*, Public Market, Amsterdam, January
Public Theatre (What do Blind Men Dream?), Union St., San Francisco
Public Theatre (Theatre of the Void), Fillmore St. San Francisco
Public Theatre (simultaneous theatre), San Francisco/Cologne
Public Theatre Woolworth's, San Francisco
1970 *Four Demonstrations*, Pine St. Studio, San Francisco, March
Wall Push, Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco, February
Defoliation, University Art Museum, Berkeley, March
Sound, Bowl & Water, M.O.C.A. San Francisco, April
Celler, (with Ronny), Reese Palley Gallery, New York, July
Levitation, Richmond Art Center, Richmond, California, September
Soluble Fish, under Pont Neuf, Paris, France, November
Isolation Unit, (with Joseph Beuys), Kunstakademie, Dusseldorf, November
1971 *Environmental Surfaces*, Reese Palley Gallery, New York, January
Pisces, M.O.C.A./De Saisset Art Museum, Santa Clara, California, February
Zyklus, (by Thomas Schmit), M.O.C.A. San Francisco, March
Lever, (for Dana Beal), 93 Grand Street, New York, October
Hefe, (for Ute Klophaus), 43 Martingerstr, Monchengladbach, October
Clutch, 16 Rose Street, San Francisco, November
1972 *Counter*, (for Dorothy), 16 Rose Street, San Francisco, July
Action for a Tower Room, Kassel, August
Pont, Galerie Sonnabend, Paris, France, September
L'Unita, Modern Art Agency, Naples, Italy, October
1973 *Yield*, University Art Museum, Berkeley, September-October
1974 *Bowing*, M.O.C.A., San Francisco, August
Halation, 63 Bluxome Street, San Francisco, November
1975 *Capillary Action*, Galleria Schema, Florence, Italy, April
Duologue, (with Tom Marioni), C.A.R.P., Los Angles, California, May
Cats Brain Bread, Fort Worth Museum of Art, Fort Worth, Texas, August
Attic Salt, And/Or Gallery, Seattle, Washington, November
Timbre, Mountain Theatre, Mt. Tamalpais, California, March
Lunar Rambles, Streets of New York, 5 days, May
552 Steps through 11 pairs of strings, 16 Rose Street, San Francisco, August
1977 *Culvert*, Clark Fork River, Missoula, Montana, May
Copasetic, Forum Stadtpark, Graz, Austria, November
Slide, on the river Inn, Innsbruck, Austria, November
Copacetic, Vlissingen Vestzaktheater, Vlissingen, Netherlands
Immersion, De Appel, Amsterdam, December
Copacetic, University of Montana, Boesman, Montana, December
T.B.Y.D., (+ Nina Wise), Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, August
1978 *Strolling Performance* (+ De Cristel), Galleria Pellegrino, Bolgona, May
Strolling, Flagellating Doppler, (+ De Cristel), Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, November
1979 *Beard Harp*, 75 Warren Street, New York City, May
Sound, LAICA, Los Angeles, July
with Romaine Perin, New York City, August
Modern Art Gallery, Vienna
Forum fur Aktuelle Kunst, Innsbruck
De Appel, Amsterdam

Terry Fox

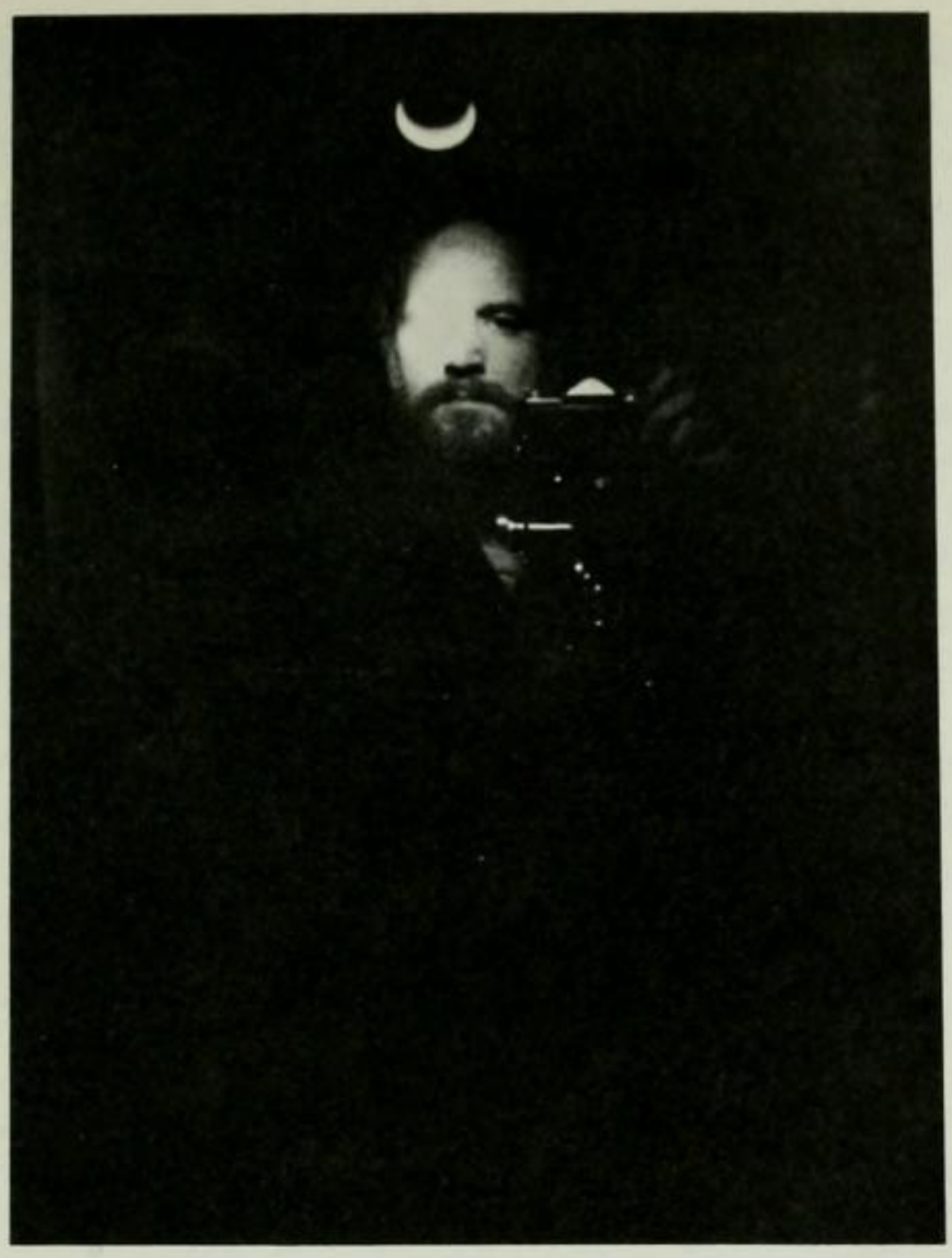
Born: 1943

ONE MAN EXHIBITIONS

1970 Reese Palley Gallery, San Francisco
Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco
Richmond Art Center, Richmond, California
1971 Reese Palley Gallery, New York
Reese Palley Gallery, San Francisco
1972 Reese Palley Gallery, New York
Galerie Sonnabend, Paris, France
Modern Art Agency, Naples, Italy
1973 University Art Museum, Berkeley, California
1974 Everson Art Museum, Syracuse, New York
1975 Schema Gallery, Florence
Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California
And/Or Gallery, Seattle, Washington
1976 The Kitchen, New York
1977 Site, San Francisco
The Kitchen, New York
De Appel, Amsterdam
Forum fur Aktuelle Kunst & Galerie Krinzinger, Innsbruck
1978 Podio Del Mondo Per L'Arte, Middleberg, Netherlands (Permanent Installation)
San Francisco Art Institute Gallery, San Francisco
1979 Galerie Nach St. Stephen, Vienna
Galerie Krinzinger, Innsbruck
Galeria Pellegrino, Bologna

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1969 *Summer Symposium,* Van der Voort Gallery, San Francisco
The Return of Abstract Expressionism, Richmond Art Center
1970 *Sculpture Annual,* Richmond Art Center
The Eighties, University Art Museum, Berkeley
Sound Sculpture As, Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco
Body Works (Traveling video show organized by W. Sharp)
1971 *Fish, Fox and Kos,* De Saisset Art Museum, Santa Clara, California
Group Show, Cheltenham Art Center, Philadelphia, Pa. (Org. Italo Scanga)
Project: Pier 18, Museum of Modern Art, New York
Arte de Sistemas, Museum of Modern Art, Buenos Aires
Six Comedy Sonatas, Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco
Prospect 71, KunstHalle, Dusseldorf
1972 *Projection,* Louisana Museum, Denmark
Notes and Scores for Sound, Mills College, Oakland, California
San Francisco Performance, Newport Harbor Art Museum, California
Performance Spaces, School of Visual Arts, New York
Third Biennale, Coltejer, Medellin, Columbia
Sources, San Francisco Art Institute Gallery, San Francisco
Encuentros, Pamplona, Spain
Video West, Everson Museum, Syracuse, New York
Arte de Sistemas: 2, Museum of Modern Art, Buenos Aires
St. Jude Invitational, De Saisset Museum, Santa Clara, California
Documenta 5, Kassel, Germany
Video International, Everson Museum, Syracuse, New York
All Night Sculptures, Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco
Circuit, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York
1973 *Circuit,* Cranbrook Academy of Art, Cranbrook, Michigan; Hanry Gallery, Seattle, Washington; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.
Record as Artwork, Galerie Francois Lambert, Milan, Italy
1974 *Middle Market,* I.C. Nelson Gallery, Davis, California
Collector's Video, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles
Art Now, J.F.K. Center for the Performing Arts, Washington D.C.
Circuit, Kolnischer Kunstverein, Koln
Record as Artwork, Kolnischer Kunstverein, Koln
Moca Ensemble, Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco
South of the Slot, 63 Bluxome Street, San Francisco
Video Art, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia
1975 *1975 Biennial* Whitney Museum, New York
Video Art, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio
L'Art Corporal, Galerie Stadler, Paris, France
Recontre Internationale Ouverte de Video, Espace Cardin, Paris, France
International Open Encounter on Video, Galleria D'Arte Moderna, Ferrara
90 Biennale de Paris, Musee d'art Moderne, Paris
Basel Art Fair, Basel, Switzerland
Americans in Florence: Europeans in Florence, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis
Video Art, Wadsworth Athenum, Hartford, Connecticut
Video Art, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois
Exchange: DFW/SFO, Fort Worth Museum of Art, Texas



Iain Baxter/N.E. THING CO.

"In '69 I had a show in the National Gallery of Canada, on the whole lower floor; it was a total corporate environment. We rearranged the museum entirely, built office walls, hired secretaries, had a president's office. People would come in and they would go back out, and look to see if they were really in the National Gallery. It was a total change of art for them. A real estate man came in and asked, 'How did you rent this building?' "

View

Interview by Robin White at Crown Point Press, Oakland, California, 1979.

It's the end of the 70's, the end of the decade, and--the N. E. THING Co. has been in business for about 14 years now. Does it have new aims, or are you still basically concerned to try to expand the notion of art for the public, or to put the sensitivity of the artist at the service of the public?

It's interesting that it is the end of the decade. I wonder what's going to happen in the next session, next time around. Right now I'm going through a lot of personal things dealing with the N. E. THING Co. My wife and I worked very closely together and now we've split up. What I see happening is that I'll probably continue on with it, and be myself at the same time: Iain Baxter / N. E. THING Co. I also see that I am going to be continuing on working with the fusion between, or the osmosis between, ordinary life and the artist's take on it. I've had an idea for a while--I am wanting to do a guidebook, which would deal directly with the public, and try to--in a sense, heighten the public's awareness.

A guidebook to where?

A guidebook to a city. A hand, ear, eye, nose, mouth and footpath to the city.

So it will be very specific.

Yes, seeing where people touch things in the city, where they walk in special ways, where all the smells are, and it would also be a normal guidebook. I started thinking about it again partly because of this project at Crown Point. I wanted to be a tourist in San Francisco. We all just got into the city, going around taking photographs.

Yes.

I work very much in terms of the environment; it's a way that I've functioned for a long time.

That's clear. One thing that's obvious in all the pieces that you've done--even when you were studying zoology, and doing illustrations--is a concern for the way that individual organisms, animals or humans, live in their environment.

Vol. II No. 4. September 1979.

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Yeah, that's interesting. I know that consciousness came out of my interest in Zen, going way back to the early 60s.

I read that you had gotten a scholarship to go to Japan in 1961, after college.

Yes. It came about because of those animal drawings I was doing when I was at the University of Idaho. I liked the work of Morris Graves, who worked with things that related to animals. He did incredible paintings. One was called "Little Bird of the Inner Eye." His work was a very strong influence on me.

Was he teaching at Idaho?

No, no, no--I just saw his book. And it influenced me in terms of wanting to go to Japan. So I wrote away and got a scholarship to go there.

Oh.

I tied the philosophy of Zen into the drawings I had done. I wrote something about harmony between nature and art, and that's how I got the scholarship. So then in Japan I just wandered around, and read a lot, and talked to people. When I went there, it really changed my mind around. The Japanese philosophy of life is very much more about harmony than in the West. If there's a spider in the spot where they're building a fence, they'll move the spider web.... Zen is a way of rolling with things, too. Accepting things, and you deal with them as they come.

I read a wonderful quote this morning by Marshall McLuhan. Someone quoted it in one of the articles written about you.

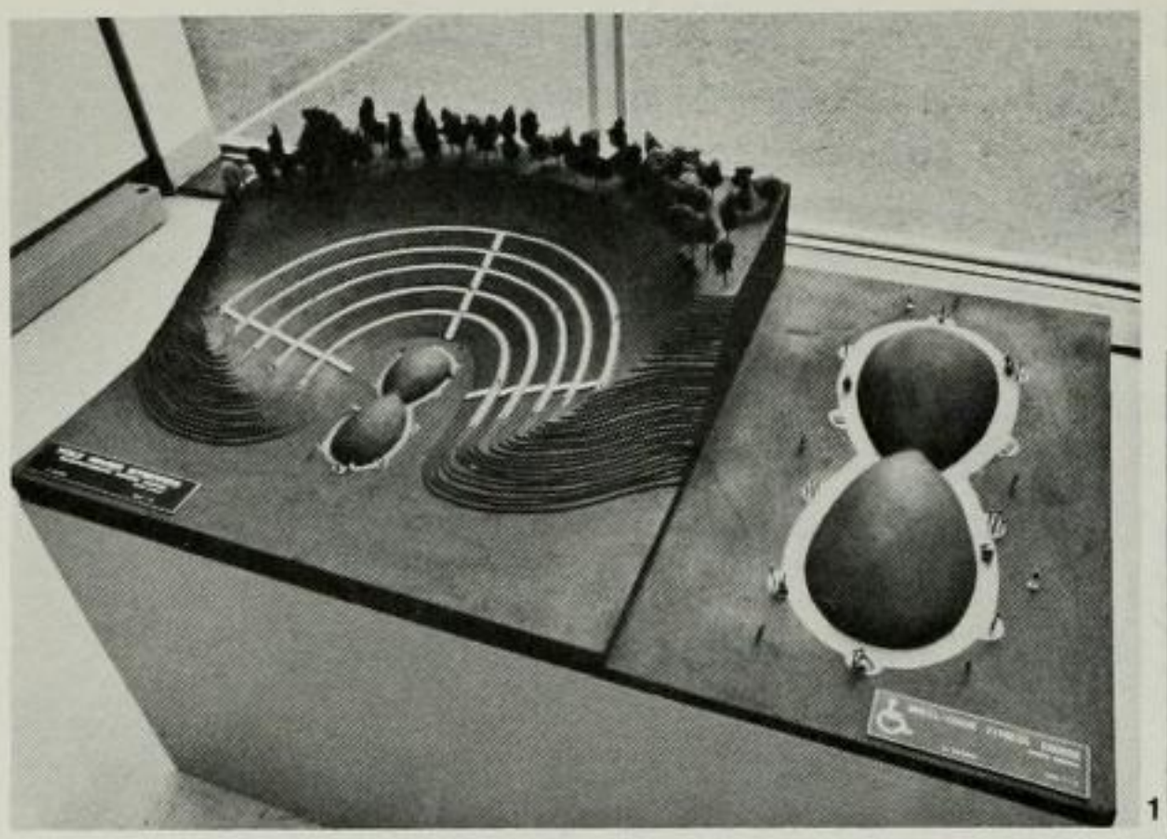
A quote about art?

No, it was about change. Something like, "If you want to control change, you have to move ahead of it, not with it."

Well, I'd say that's a neat thing. True.

That's taking Oriental philosophy and going one step beyond it.

Well, I think it's fun, if you can do it, to make change happen. But, at the same time, when you get stuck, you can move with it, too.



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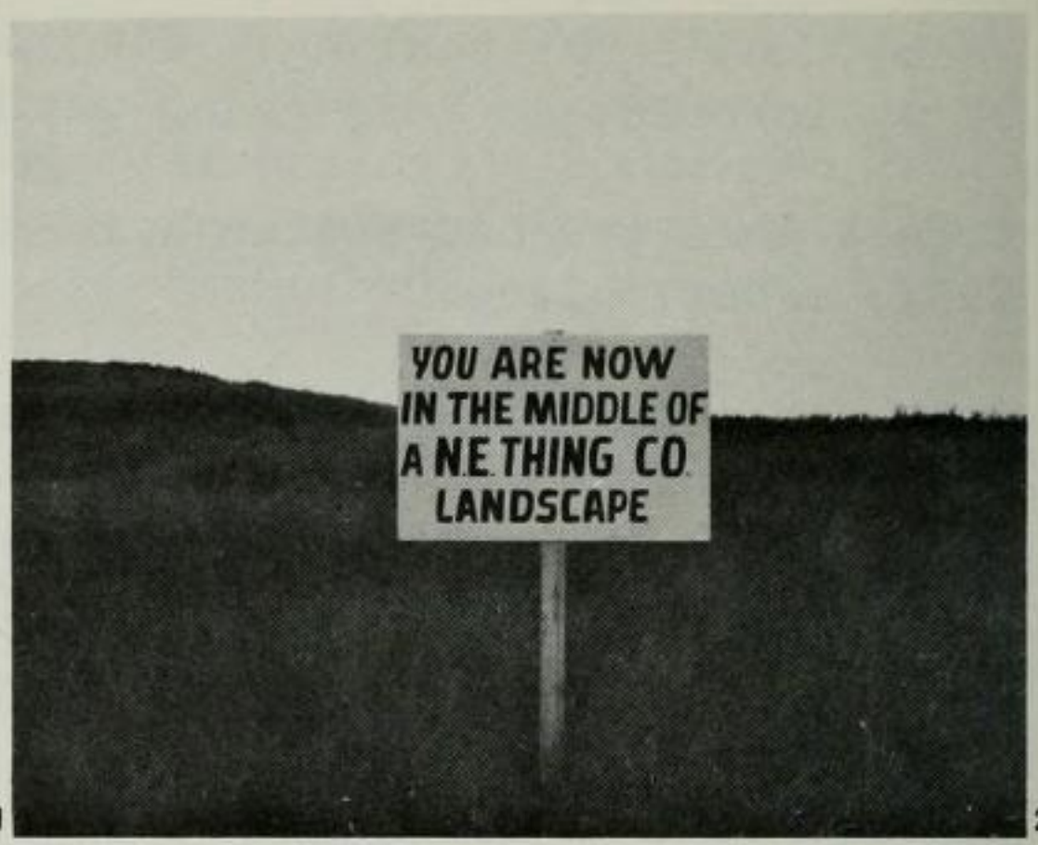

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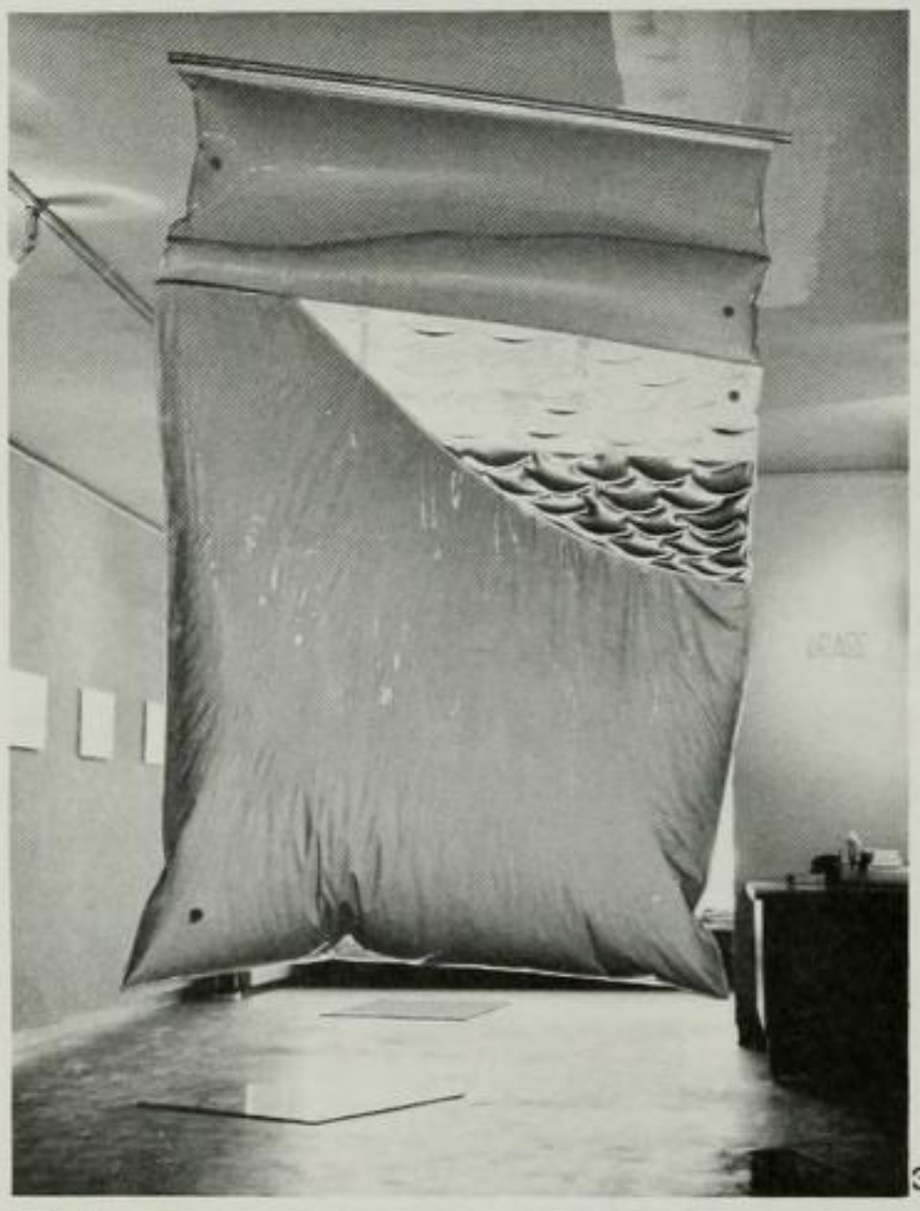

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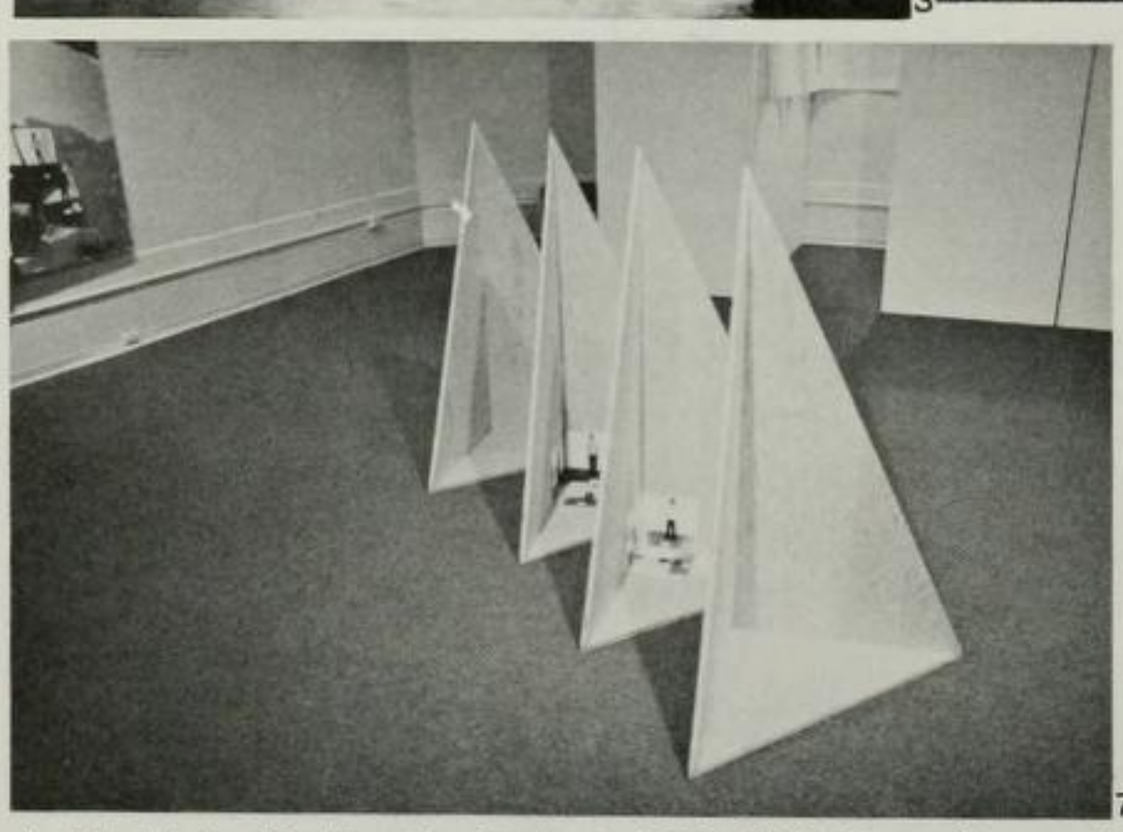

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1 Model for Earthworks Project, 1979. (Tolt River Steppes) Seattle, Washington. 2 *YOU ARE NOW IN THE MIDDLE OF AN N.E. THING CO. LANDSCAPE*, 1969. Prince Edward Island, Canada. 3 *Bagged Inflated Landscape*, 1966. 4 *Still Life—Carrot*, 1964-65. Vacuum-formed plastic. 5 "Artoficial" Button, 1967. 6 A.R.T. Certificate, 1968. 7 *4 Corners*, 1977. From the *People/Language* series. Photographs of people whose last name is Corner, are placed in corners. 8 *N.E. THING CO. Corporate Environment*, 1969. National Gallery of Canada.

So you go along with the change when you can't go ahead of it.

One of the great things in the world is rationalization.

Another good one is memory. Memory tends to erase the hard edges of bad events.

Memory's like sandpaper, isn't it? It sandpapers down all the rough edges.

So up until you went to Japan, it seemed that you had a traditional and normal background. You were interested in skiing and zoology and both of these things have to do with--

The outdoors?

Well, I was going to say with nature. And--

Also forestry.

This isn't a quiz game!

I started out in forestry. That's what I thought I was going to do. That's why I took biology and zoology.

And then you got into doing illustrations, which piqued your interest in art. I saw photographs of an exhibition that you had in Japan in which you used screens. The paintings on the screens were kind of Abstract Expressionist--

I was just steering my way through all that. But I used the Japanese, traditional screen as a format. The screen was an interesting possibility, because you could take the screen and make a square out of it, or fold it; I liked that potential.

And then you came back to Vancouver, and you made paintings that looked like a kind of cross between Jack Youngerman and Matisse cut-outs, you know?

Well, I was influenced by Kelly and Youngerman. But really I was interested in shape itself. I got very interested in just the idea of pure shape, which I think came through Zen, through their *sumi* painting and things like that. Then I also ran into a guy named Morandi, who was fascinating.

Giorgio Morandi? Please tell me about Giorgio Morandi!

Well, I think he was one of the most profound artists. He worked in a brief, little, contained world. But if you really study him and look at him, why he--he spent many, many hours just shifting and organizing a few objects. I'm very interested in all the possibilities in something like that. Someone says, "Well, you do this" and then they say, "Well, there's this way to do it and that way, that way" -- and you look at all of the possibilities, and then out of all that, there's one or two ways that are really quite profound. So, the more you do that in your life, then, maybe, the more profound decisions you can stumble on. I liked Morandi because he was a guy that used over and over the same objects, but looking at them from a lot of different views, as different information. Gaylen Hansen, a friend and teacher of mine at Washington State University, and I used to play an amazing kind of fun game. We would say, "Oh, here's a possibility to do this" , and we would do that, and then say, "Well, there's always this possibility, so we--

Gaylen Hansen's having a show this summer at the New Museum.

Right. So, we would have--like, oranges and pillows, and--we'd have maybe fifty oranges, and we'd put all these oranges around the edge of the room, or, we'd play with a box of french fries, "What happens if we stack them up?" It was very, very informative and very important for me and for him. That really launched me into a lot of--lots of stuff. You have to realize that I went into a master of fine arts program with no background in art.

I know, that's one of the things that makes you rather unique in terms of the things that you've done since. It was after you went to Japan that you were teaching and studying at Washington State?

Yes.

And making paintings. Then all of a sudden there was this two-ton ice sculpture, in 1964, right? And--I really wondered--

How that fit?

How that came about?

Well, that came about because of what I just told you about, the whole fooling around. It's part of a way of thinking. I went to Vancouver; I was still really interested in Morandi;

I was starting to try and find a way to say something with still life, that would be more contemporary. Morandi used the objects of his day, and it occurred to me that the common pottery of our day is plastic bottles.

Plastic bottles... right.

They should be in a plastic museum. Because that's the common stuff that we use every day, plastic squeeze bottles for everything--from toothpaste to hair shampoo, bleach--

Cups and everything.

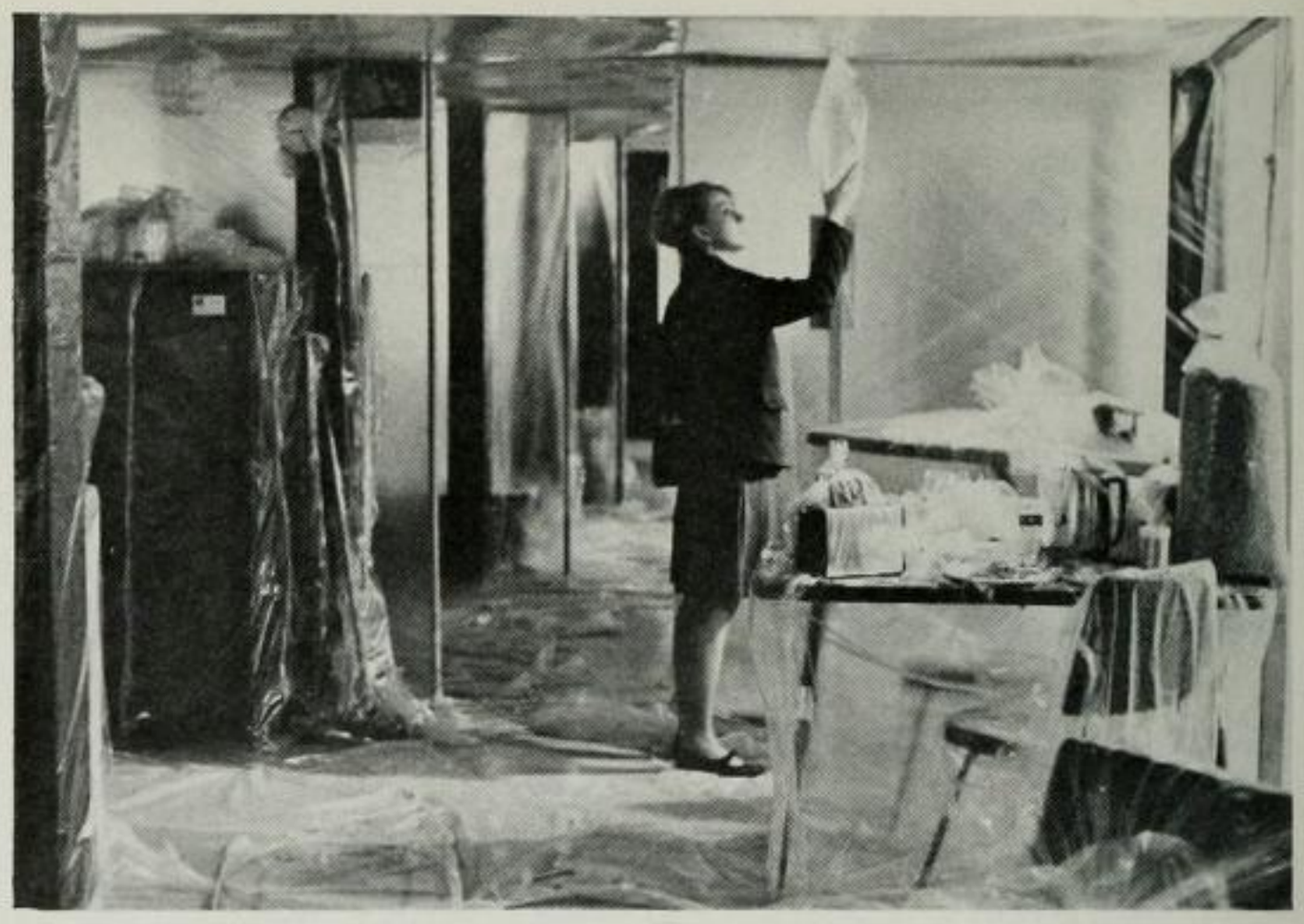
Then I got excited about the idea--I could have painted those things, but I decided that what would be really more interesting to do would be to make them in their own material, which is plastic. So I did a lot of works in late '64,'65, which were vacuum-formed, plastic, still life objects. I had to go to a factory and figure out how to do it. And then I used real fruit and vegetables with the plastic bottles to make still lifes. Now, the ice just happened because I was asked to do an environmental project, and I liked the idea of having two tons of ice and then melting it with a big flame thrower. At that point a lot came together. I was teaching at that time at the University of British Columbia.

All right. Well, what gave you the idea to start a business?

I was leap-frogging over all these ideas and trying everything and not knowing what art is, and what to do with it, and I wanted to have an umbrella. In the art world you have to have a direction--so people can know what you're doing. Either you were doing Hard-Edge painting or you were doing Minimal, if you were anti-Expressionist. Otherwise someone would say, "Well, he obviously has no direction, he doesn't know what he's doing." So I just said: "Well, I'll set up an umbrella and I'll have all these departments. I can have a department for photography and printing, and I can have a whole area called 'things', which was--

Wait a second. Let me ask you something. This is kind of a strange question, but you weren't coming from an academic background in painting, yet you wanted to play by the rules of the art world. So you did consider yourself an artist? If you hadn't painted, if you weren't an artist, and you'd still gotten into all these crazy ideas, what--what would you have called yourself?

1.



2.

INFORMATION

N.E. THING CO. LTD.
1419 Riverside Drive North Vancouver B.C. Canada

Date 1966

Project **N.E. THING CO. LTD.**
Glossary

Number 1.

SSI - Sound Sensitivity Information (music, poetry [read], singing, oratory, etc.)

MSI - Moving Sensitivity Information (movies, dance, mountain climbing, track, etc.)

ESI - Experiential Sensitivity Information (theatre, etc.)

- It should be recognized that there are categories where certain types of sensitivity information are combined with others to provide their form, but for the most part the categories above have been established because the "arts" tend to have a particular emphasis on one kind of information characteristic.
- We find that by setting up a new set of definitions like this that people are better able to see the cross-relationship between the "arts" and in so doing can become much more involved and supportive of the new types of "arts activity" — Sensitivity Information — SI — that are going on.
- The idea of comprehending "all arts as information handled sensitively" breaks the historical chains that keep them apart from each other and grossly misunderstood.

VSI - Visual Sensitivity Information
A term developed and used by the N. E. Thing Co. to denote more appropriately the meaning of the traditional words "art" and "fine art" or "visual art". Refers to the handling of visual information in a sensitive manner. Also refers to the "artist" as a VISUAL INFORMER, as someone who knows how to handle visual information sensitively.

SI - Sensitivity Information
A term developed by NETCO to denote all forms of cultural activities, i.e. dance, music, theatre, film, fine art, poetry, novels, etc. It is based on the theory that there are all types of INFORMATION around in the world. INFORMATION is usually, or tends to be, confronted with and dealt with in either a practical or sensitive manner. Thus INFORMATION which is handled in this pure or sensitive way culminates in SI (Sensitivity Information) in general context, and eventually leaves its mark on our life as culture. The divisions within SI are based on the dominant characteristic of that particular area of information, for example: Vision - VSI - Visual Sensitivity Information (painting, sculpture, architecture, books, etc.)

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN

N.E. THING COMPANY LIMITED

Description **Vancouver, B.C. 1966**

NETCO. TERMINOLOGY USED TO DESCRIBE CULTURE AND THE VARIOUS ARTS FUNCTIONING INSIDE THE IDEA OF CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE.

S...

1. "Art is all over" button, 1970. 2. *Bagged Placed*, 1966. Environment, U.B.C. Art Gallery.

3. Information sheet of N.E.T. CO. terminology, Vancouver, B.C. 1966.

Well, I don't know if I would have gotten into crazy ideas at all if I hadn't gone through the painting, if I weren't an artist. It's curious to me why I never got stuck with those bird drawings. I don't know how I didn't get stuck there. I went from illustration to art, and getting into the field of art opened a door to a whole area of personal research into the phenomena of seeing and being. I think pure science is on that same level.

I know that you're very touchy about the label "artist".

I think it's the wrong--it's a label--I mean, I've used it and I'm called that, but I'd rather call myself a visual informer.

So, you're still involved with all these concepts, then?

Yes.

Okay. How did you come up with the name?

N. E. THING Company?

Yes.

Well, because of being involved with a lot of things and information, anything--N. E. THING. It was set up legally. I went to lawyers and set it up with them as a legal corporation, because I liked the integrity of that.

And you didn't know any other artists who were--even thinking along those lines?

No. I could only come to that because I was way off on my own in Vancouver. I had an irreverence for the art scene. I don't like all the pompousness.

Well, you were free from restraints--

Free from New York. But I am very much a believer in looking at information in magazines, and I was aware that constriction and constipation were happening in a lot of stuff which was going on at the time.

But you didn't know about what other people were doing in New York that was parallel to your ideas? Lucy Lippard, in her book on Conceptual art, wrote that certain notions were just in the air, you know, that you were three thousand, or four thousand miles away from people in New York, and six thousand

miles away from people in Europe, who were becoming involved with things that were similar to what you were doing. And there were also some Californians working with these kinds of ideas. But Lucy didn't go to California until later.

Lucy Lippard came out to Vancouver, and I met her, and she went back, and she talked about me and then they kept including me in all the shows. Seth Siegelaub, who was the main promoter of Conceptual art, was aware of the constrictions of a very localized way of thinking, so he was always making it a global thing.

When did all this other Canadian activity start to take place? There's General Idea, and Mr. Peanut, Western Front, there's--

Well, they all started coming along in the 70s. The N. E. THING Company was founded in 1965. A lot of those people weren't even out of art school yet.

You had a lot of exhibitions all across Canada at that time. You had one in the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa?

Right. In '69 I had a show in the National Gallery, organized by Pierre Theberge, on the whole lower floor; it was a total corporate environment. We rearranged the museum entirely, built office walls, hired secretaries, had a president's office. There was a display area; a corporation could have a gallery, so we had a small visual area where you could see things. People would come in and they would go back out, and look to see if they were in the National Gallery. It was a total change of art for them. A real estate man came in and asked, "How did you rent this building?"

So you were serious about the artist as corporation?

My things were always signed just with a gold seal, the corporate seal. This really hurt one in the gallery world, because people want to buy an original and an artist's name. And many collectors are from corporations and sell their own business products; they don't want to buy art from a business.

You once wrote that: "The role of the artist in society today is constricted by a series of negative structures--financial, political--and especially the connotations of the word 'artist' itself, which propels his position to the fringes of the sources of power, and subservience to media." One thing you didn't mention was the fact that you were isolated. You never saw that as a drawback?

I have never seen it as a drawback, because it gives you a focus; you are in a different space on the earth. I really have been very much aware of McLuhan. By using media, you can penetrate anywhere, and be in touch--because that's what the world is all about, right now.

I suppose one of the advantages of acting as a business, as opposed to acting just simply as an artist, is that artists are not nearly as global as business.

Yes. I.B.M. or any of those companies are just totally all over the place. And they're into a level of sophistication that behooves us all to really understand, otherwise they're going to--

I know! It makes the concerns of the artist, and the things that an artist deals with on a day-to-day basis seem so small and insignificant.

You know as well as I do the art world is about four or five thousand people in the whole world. And that's why I've been interested in a broader way of trying to criss-cross around in life, to try to see what it all means. I think I'm into an educational stance as an esthetic--

Somebody described the way that you approached the public as "missionary zeal".

It's a global awareness--like Buckminster Fuller. I never expected to be an artist, a visual informer. I never expected that would happen in my life. So, I am kind of thrilled or excited about it, and I want to share that with someone, with other people so that I might, in a way, give an insight or a change in their lives, or allow them to see their world in a different way.

Do you ever get letters from people who have seen what you've done and thought it made a difference to them?

Well, I did some things on radio and people did write. Yes, I've received letters over the years.

You did some commercials on television, in 1971, I think.

Yes. I bought national time right across Canada, and I did little visual clips of--well, they were kind of cliches; it would say "The N. E. THING Company presents Visual Sensitivity Information Number 33" and it would just be myself sitting

on a limb of a tree and it would say, "Out on a Limb". They were about 15-second visual ads. The radio ads would say something like, "Sound Sensitivity Information Statement Number 33--this statement is leaving the front of your radio at a forty-five degree angle. Did you see that?" That went out nationally, over the whole of Canada, on a major program at about 9:15 in the morning. I couldn't have gotten on those stations unless I had a company. You can't penetrate certain structures unless you have--a structure that looks like their structure. So by having the N. E. THING Co. over the years I've been able to move like that.

What do you think is the most successful project that the N. E. THING Company has ever done? What's your favorite? What's the first that comes to mind?

Probably the one we talked about that I did for the National Gallery, because it was a whole concept with many parts. I had a telex and telephone--I had money from the gallery in order to use the phone. And the gallery flew a whole bunch of people in to do a conference--Lucy Lippard and Seth Siegelaub were there. We all talked about problems in the art field. Because, see, a corporation would have a--would have a conference--and using the telex was real exciting, because it put you in touch with another kind of way of moving through the world. We should talk about Ingrid's involvement because I worked very closely with my wife at that time. We bounced around a lot of ideas and she has a really great conceptual mind. So a lot of her thinking is woven in there.

Well, as the two of you have split up, who's keeping N. E. THING Company?

We will both use it as we wish. Because it's definitely a part of her life, and it's part of my life. So the only way that seems feasible is to just both use it.

Do you think she really will use it?

I don't know. She has the option to do that. She has a background in swimming, physical education and music, and she's right now involved with developing programs for city parks.

But does she consider herself an artist?

I think so, I think part of her does, very much so. But I don't know how much she's really working with--say, visual perception, per se. But we wanted to leave the option to use the N. E. THING Company open for both of us.

Let's talk about art environments. The first big environment that you did was The Bagged Place, in 1966, the bagged apartment, right?

Yes. We just picked up on--I guess, the whole idea of bagging things. Christo has done--has done wrapping, right?

Yes.

And if you've ever gone to Europe, you've found out there is a complete difference in how people in shops deal with, for instance, a bunch of vegetables. They get them and they have sheets of newspaper, or brown paper, and they wrap them for the customers.

Right.

But in North America, it's a bag community. We put the vegetables in a plastic bag. And there's a whole difference in that. So, Christo's things came out as wrappings.

Oh!

And he comes from a European background, and that's very interesting, the differences in that. So, anyhow, we got into bagging, which is a North American phenomenon. Of course, that's why the phrase, "What's your bag?" would come out of North America. I don't know if you knew what was in there, in The Bagged Place. Everything in the apartment was bagged. All the way down to, like, if you had a cup of coffee on a table--the saucer was bagged, the cup was bagged--

Was the coffee bagged?

The coffee was bagged, the sugar from the sugar bowl was bagged; there were all these bags.

God!

The toaster was bagged, and there was a chunk of toast coming out and it was bagged--and there was a bag of air hanging in the room.

A bag of air? Was the apartment bagged too?

Well, the outer walls were, yes. And the rugs, and the floor, and the refrig--it had, a refrigerator and counters and beds, and bathroom fixtures, and TV sets that were going with plastic bags over them--

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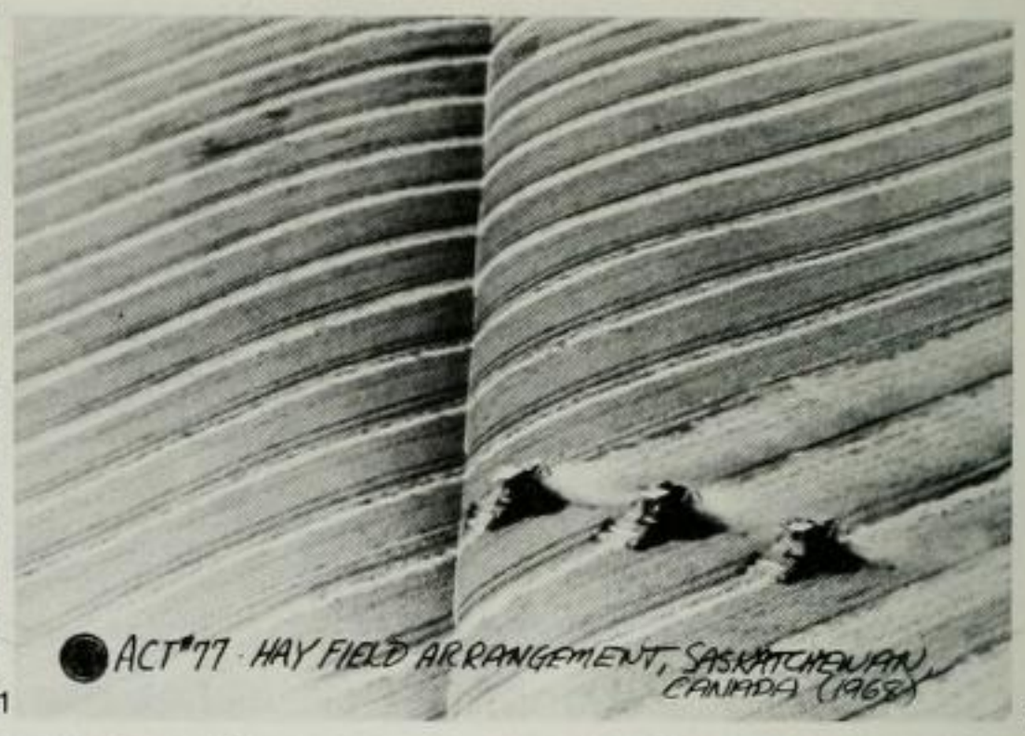

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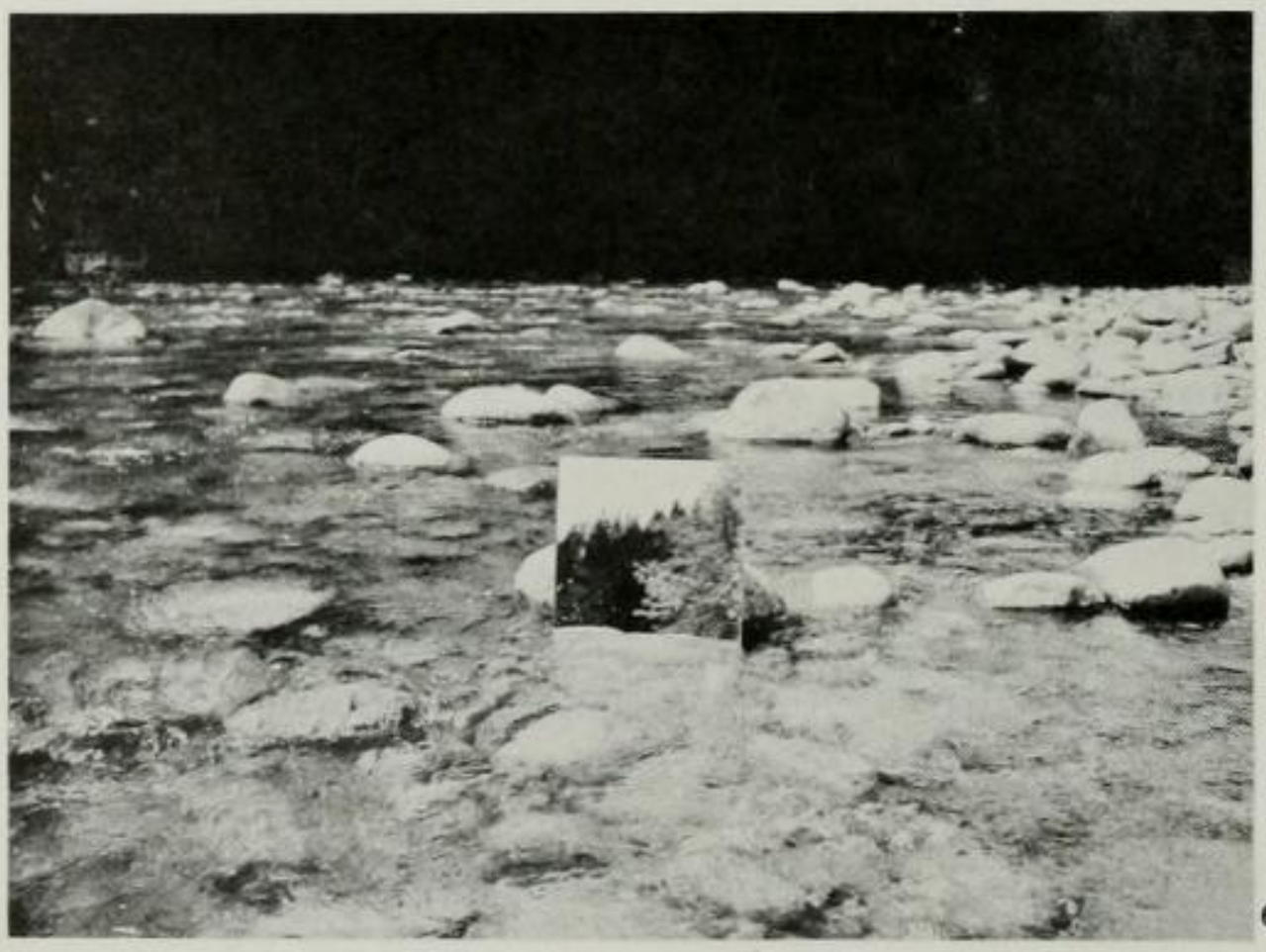

6

COMPANIES ACT

No. 84030.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that "N.E. Thing Co. Ltd." was incorporated under the *Companies Act* on the 16th day of January, 1969.

The Company is authorized to issue ten thousand shares without nominal or par value.

The address of its registered office is 1419 Riverside Drive, North Vancouver, British Columbia.

The objects for which the Company is established are:—

(i) To produce sensitivity information:

(ii) To provide a consultation and evaluation service with respect to things:

(iii) To produce, manufacture, import, export, buy, sell, and otherwise deal in things of all kinds.

A. H. HALL,
Registrar of Companies.

ja30—9057

From *The British Columbia Gazette*, January 30, 1969

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1. *Paint Into Earth*, 1966/68. One quart of white outdoor paint poured into a circular hole of one quart capacity. Simon Fraser University. 2. *Act #77*. Hayfield arrangement, Saskatchewan, Canada, 1968. Hand tinted photograph, 30 x 40". 3. *Eye Scream Restaurant*, Vancouver, B.C., 1978. 4. *Rock Line Bank to Water*, 1967. Bragg Creek, Alberta. 5. *2 Tons of Ice Sculpture (Destruction and Disappearance)*, 1964. Vancouver, B.C. 6. *Reflected Landscape*, 1968. Mirror placed in the Seymour River, N. Vancouver, B.C. 7. Published notice of incorporation of the N.E. THING CO., Ltd. 1969.

It's hilarious to read the articles that were written about the exhibition. You were the recipient of every cliche against modern art, that ever had come out!

I know. Sometimes I wonder where I would have gone in my career, what it would have meant, if those things were done in New York? But if they were done in New York, they would have been different.

You did have a show at Sonnabend in New York, in 1971?

Right after Gilbert & George.

What did you show?

Well, I had a whole lot of corporate stuff--it was all about joining the Vancouver Board of Trade. It was all on information sheets, very, very cold, and very mechanistic, and very corporate-looking. And I picked out twenty-five artists in New York and sent telexes to them, and that was my announcement. You can penetrate structures using communications. But that only can happen when you're somewhere else. Because if you're there, you don't penetrate, you're just--

You're already in it.

Yeah, you're in it.

Right. And I think that there's a certain resentment on the part of people in this structure to people outside the structure, right?

Yes. In a way, I see myself as kind of a world art court jester, who's dealing from a distance. A lot of people see my work very humorously, but then there's also a serious side.

A very optimistic side, also, you know--

Yeah. And an educational side. It's something for everybody, and some people can see all the levels. Peel all the layers of the onion and get into the center.

And understanding these things can help people live better in the world?

Maybe affect someone's way of dealing with things, and appreciating things, and embracing other things, and not being so uptight, and just--leading a more insightful life.

Well, specifically, what kind of response did you get when you went to the Data Processing Managers Association meetings?

In Renton, Washington. That was in 1971. I got very good response, because basically a lot of those people are very open--but no one's presented things to them in the proper way. What happens is that they see artists as pompous; it's another field, see. So they don't see that it has anything for them.

In other words, people wait until the information is presented to them in their *way of seeing things, right?*

Yeah, right.

They don't basically want to go out of their way to try and understand information if it's not presented in their kind of language. What you did was that you rented a booth at the Data Processing Managers Association Conference, and you were there--

And another friend of mine, Paul Woodrow, who was working with us.

Right.

And we set up a booth, and we were consultants--

And the other booths were full of data processing--equipment?

There was Univac, and A.T.&T., and Memorex, and all the corporations that deal with information processing systems.

And what did you have in your booth?

What we had was a brochure, which was a manila folder so that if you took our brochure, you would put everybody else's information inside it. I also hired some women to walk around wearing inflated clothing which we had designed; it caused a big sensation. I had a giant computer card that was inflated. I also gave a button away.

What did the button say?

Well, the button said "GNG".

Which stands for?

"Gross National Good."

As opposed to?

"Gross National Product". If this society, or country, or capitalism ever can get out of its spiral to wherever it's going, it would have to function on a level that would substitute "Gross National Good" for "Gross National Product". Now it's just dog-eat-dog, and "we'll charge the highest prices." Corporations have to rise above this, and look at, you know, keeping the country going. I think that in the future the companies that will be most successful are the ones that break even--the ones that just turn things over. They would be the ones that would be rewarded. If you made a profit you'd be penalized.

Unless you took the profit and put it back into--

Two or three hundred years from now capitalism will be a game, like Monopoly. There will be various people who will opt to play this game of Capitalism, and other people will play Socialist games, and there will be other things. The whole world will be operating on a game theory, and the winners will be the guys that break even. The challenge will be to figure out how to break even, and keep the system turning over, without ripping anybody off.

Sounds a little idealistic.

Oh, yeah. But, why not? Some people are really proficient at manipulating businesses and they could be challenged that way. And then the artists will always be going through everything, articulating it all, and just putting it down. Well, not putting it down, but putting it out!

Sure! I understand.

And, see, when I say the word 'artist', if I use it in that context, I also mean--I mean *all* artists.

Immediately--I wanted to ask you--name five artists, artists in that sense? Is the president of I.B.M. an artist?

I think certain corporate guys are, very much so. Or--people that handle solving Arab/Israeli affairs. There's a whole level of theatrics; it's very ingenious. It's conceptual, and--and--we're all involved with those machinations of how to work things out. But I would rather look at the Balinese, whom McLuhan talks about. Their whole life is a form of art. I think the more we backpedal into realizing that, that we should, or can, or--will look at life like that, the better.

Because it gives us a better insight, and a better way to solve all our problems.

Sure.

So, I guess I tend to be the ultimate optimist.

Let's get back to what happened at the trade convention. What did you say to people? And what was their response?

Well, when they'd walk up, they'd say "What do you do?", and we would say "Well, what do you think we do? They would say whatever they thought and we would say, "You're right!"--and that's how we'd handle it!

What did they think you did?

They would say that we might be consultants on ideas and information, or that we would help with employee motivation and all this kind of stuff; they liked all that. And there was a really nice response because it was very refreshing for them. The other really incredible thing was that--that conference, which ran on for four days, had an attendance of 20,000 people. If you had a month-long exhibition at any art museum, the Museum of Modern Art, or--L.A. County Museum or Dallas, or wherever--you *might* get five or six thousand people through the exhibition--and that's a lot of people, actually. But 20,000, the concentration is incredible.

Also it was a situation where a dialogue could take place, whereas in a museum, there is no--

That's right.

Exchange.

It was a really great high for me, in terms of experience, because it was just so powerful. And one guy wrote me and asked me to do a lecture on employee motivation, because he really liked us. He liked the whole thing that was going on. So, we went back there and gave a whole lecture on how to motivate the computer management people.

Artist as consultant.

Yes. And I think that's an area that's going to probably emerge as something artists will do more and more because

1

2

3

4

1 *Reflected San Francisco Beauty Spot, Buddha, Golden Gate Park*, 1979. Photoetching with aquatint, 29 x 35".
2 *Reflected San Francisco Beauty Spot, Golden Gate Bridge*, 1979. Photoetching with aquatint, 29 x 35".
3 *Reflected San Francisco Beauty Spot, Pyramid Building*, 1979. Photoetching with aquatint, 29 x 35".
4 *Reflected San Francisco Beauty Spot, Coit Tower*, 1979. Photoetching with aquatint, 29 x 35".
Published by Crown Point Press.

they look at the world in a fresh and unusual way.

And this exhibition, or this symposium that you're going to be in, in Seattle, next month--the idea of using earthwork sculpture as a land reclamation tool. That's not dissimilar.

It's taken many years, but it's starting to happen.

When you were teaching in art departments, you would basically encourage your students too--well, it wouldn't be so much about form, and it wouldn't be so much about--

It's about a way of life and how to look at the environment. You can't get away from talking about your own experiences, and your own perceptions, but with me teaching becomes a way to try to help students see a broader spectrum. A lot of times they find it difficult; they're always looking for me to tell them the recipes to do art.

Right.

I'm telling them recipes to look at life! As a work of art, right? And so they get confused. But it's a healthy confusion.

I don't hear anywhere in your conversation any criticism of painters because they're only making paintings, or sculptors because they're only making sculpture, or performance artists because they're only doing performance art, you know? And I run into that a lot.

I don't want to push against artists. I just like to push against the whole lethargy of the civilization dealing with narrow perceptions. I see all of our, all the various ways that we, all the activities you just mentioned, as valid ways to look at handling information. All I look for is a high level of quality inside that. As you taste a lot of things and look at a lot of things you finally gain an insight into--where the quality is. But any of the ways that people work are--are valid.

I understand.

It's just that--I like a big spectrum.

Yes. Which is why you have Aesthetically Claimed Things.

That's right.

Which are all different kinds of things, they're not paintings, or--

That's right. Aesthetically Claimed Things started in 1968 as a way of stating something about--and they also grew out of the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. It puts its approval on various appliances. I noticed that, and I had a company called, you know, N. E. THING Co., and I thought, well, we'll put our corporate seal on some things we like--that would be a way to make a statement. The objects are just a fence, or a grate on something, or a knob on a stove; it just spills right across everything. And then there is the other side, Aesthetically Rejected Things--which are called A.R.T. We've touched on a lot of things. Now you can see why I would want to have an N. E. THING Co. as an umbrella. For all my ideas.

You've used telex machines, and you've used telecopiers, and--

Yeah. Well, I did a bunch of works using telex and telecopier and stuff like that. I liked the whole idea of sending the truth and receiving a lie.

Sending the truth and receiving a lie?

For instance, there is a work from 1969, which was one dot in a piece of paper. You draw a dot, and it's one dot. When you put it on the telecopier, and you send it, it's a lie because there's two dots. Because one exists here, and one exists on the receiving end. So there's not one dot in existence, there's two.

Oh, God!

And there was a show in Halifax in '69 which was real interesting, because I had a telex in the gallery, and I had one at home, so I would send instructions every day to the gallery, and then the curator would give them to the various student classes, and the students would carry out my works. The show evolved every day. There was a visual and verbal dialogue going on, back and forth, and all of it was put up on the gallery walls.

And you were also in the "Information" show at the Modern, right? And you used a telecopier--for that, too, right?

Yes, I had a telecopier in that show. And a lot of the ACTs and ARTs were there as well.

A lot of the--

Aesthetically Claimed Things and Aesthetically Rejected Things.

Have you claimed anything recently?

No, I haven't recently, but I'm just getting geared up to some more of that. I want to go to specific cities now, and, do "The ACTs of San Francisco" or "The ACTs of Los Angeles."

These etchings that you've made here, are they ACTs?

No--they are reflections, which I guess is another whole thing! They're done with mirrors, and I've been using mirrors for a number of years; they focus on the normal beauty spots of the city. So, they're like a different kind of way of looking at a postcard. You know that sense, when you go on a trip and you visit places, and then you leave all of a sudden; the whole trip is just a memory, a reflection of what you saw.

A memory is a reflection. The prints also are putting one environment in the middle of another.

The mirror's in front of the person's face that's holding it, so it's kind of like a giant eye.

Okay, is there anything else you want to talk about?

I want to tell you about this Newport Harbor Art Museum project, in 1968, because it might relate to the etchings I'm doing now. The entire physical landscape in reality was the work of art. There was a sign as you drove along the highway that said, "You will soon pass by a one-quarter-mile N. E. THING CO. landscape", and so you drove by this sign and all of a sudden, a hundred yards down the road there was a sign that said, "Start Viewing", and a quarter-mile later there was another sign that said, "Stop Viewing".

But that's a kind of common thing to do, anyway, as people are always "oohing" and "aahing" over landscapes, you know.

Well, I know. But it's nice to define it as a specific thing, and do it. We did it again in Canada. The road went through a farm, and a curious thing that happened was that the farmer had all kinds of people turning into his driveway, asking if they could buy his house.

Oh, no!

Which I couldn't understand, because there was nothing saying

that, but apparently it worked as an incredible real estate device. And he got so pissed off with all the people that were going to his house, that we had to take the signs down. That was just an idea dealing with looking at a big, long, quarter-mile landscape.

A very long painting.

Yes, that's it, that's right.

So many of those things you do involve perception, changing people's perceptions; the way that you see something depends on the point of view that you're looking at it from. So, what's your role, how do you see yourself? How do you think that people see you?

Ah, probably--a curious figure in the whole art scene. But I think the kind of thing I'm doing will ultimately be seen as a way of thinking and looking at information. It will take many years, yet. But I don't care, because the works are there. I'd like to leave you with one thought: if you have a glass of water--

Yes.

Which is only half a glass of water--

Yes.

I would say it's half full and not half empty.

1974 *Investigations*, N.E. THING CO., John Greer, & Ian Carr-Harris, Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, N.B.
1975 One of *17 Canadians* show, organized by Alvin balkind, Vancouver Art Gallery
1977 *Transparencies*, special exhibition from the Art Bank collection
Another 2 Projects, People/Language, & Eye Scream Restaurant, Vancouver Art Gallery
1978 *10 Canadian Artists*, Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland, Summer 1978
1979 *EARTHWORKS*, Seattle, Washington

Selected Special Projects

1962-63 Conceived of and carried out research in the *Teaching of art using Non-Verbal techniques*. This work was done at the University of Idaho and Washington State University. Initial report of this research was described in ART JOURNAL, summer, 1966, pages 370-371, published by the College of Art Association of America
1965 Designer of Visual Area of *Medium is the Message*, first major multisensory public happening, at the Festival for Fine Arts, University of British Columbia, February, 1965. Event is described in *Kandy Kolored Tangarine Flaked Streamlined Baby*, by Tom Wolfe.
1968 *Piles*, special exhibition done at University of British Columbia for the Festival of Fine Arts. A special publication resulted with accompanying map allowing the public to visit various pile sites in the city of Vancouver
1970 Consultant to Data Processing Managers Association regarding *Your employee and motivation*. Renton, Washington
Consultant to CBS in Ottawa regarding special T.V. show using television for direct viewer participation, also consulted with CTV, Vancouver on program concepts.
1972 *Made by Man/Woman*, one act play written 1968, performed 1972, Factor Theater lab, Toronto
1974-75 Established a Cibachrome Photo Lab called N.E. PROFESSIONAL PHOTO DISPLAY LABS LTD.
1977 Designed and built EYE SCREAM RESTAURANT, 2043 W. 4th, Vancouver, B.C.

Iain Baxter

Born: November 16, 1936, Middlesborough, England. Came to Canada in 1937.

Education: *B.SC. Degree*, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, 1959. *M.Ed. Degree*, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, 1962. *M.F.A. Degree*, (Painting) Washington State University, Pullman, Washington 1964. *Japanese Government Foreign Scholarship*, 1961. *Senior Canada Council Grant*, 1971.

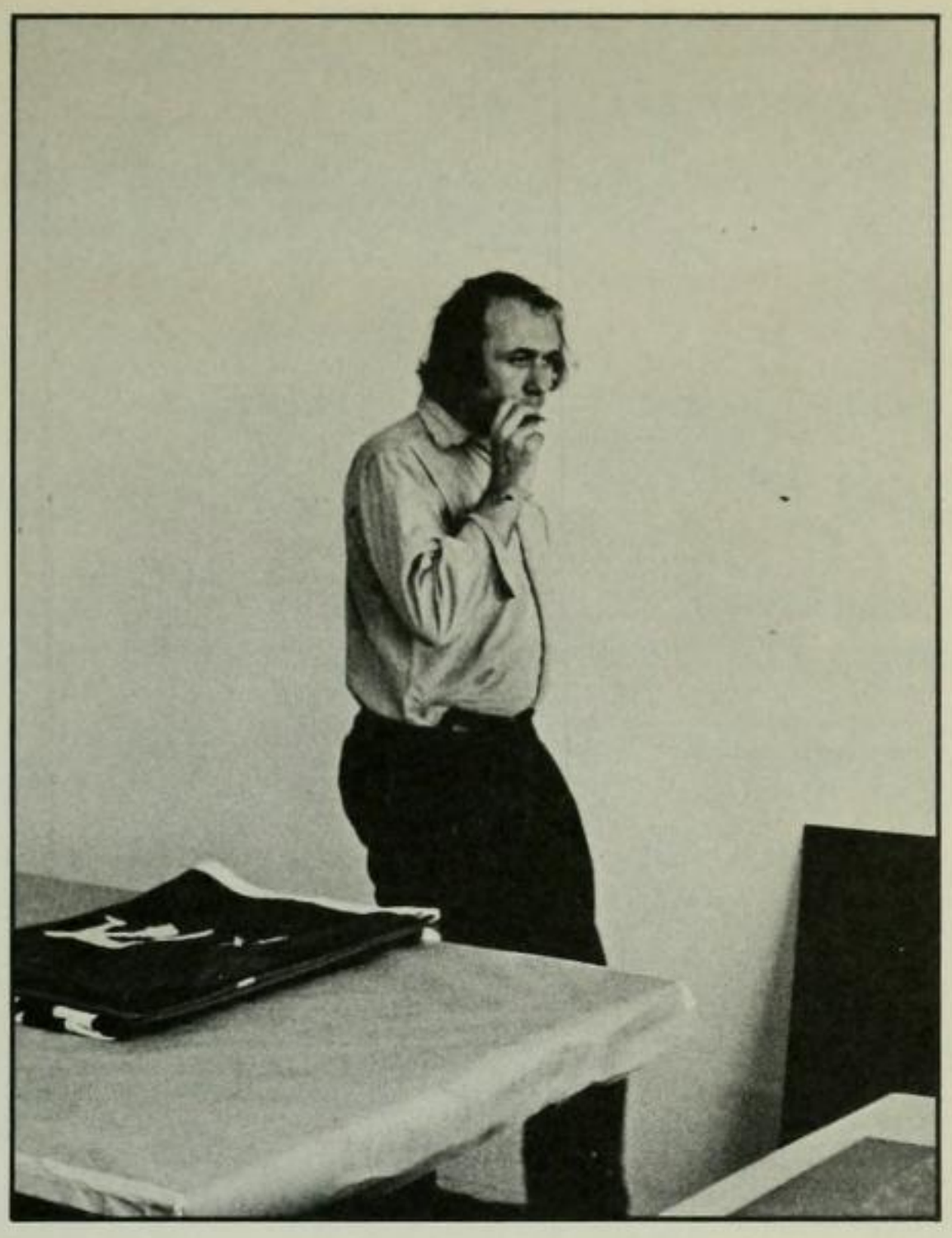
N.E. THING CO. LTD. P.O. Box 34204, Station D, Vancouver, B.C., Canada. Company founded in 1966.

N.E. THING CO. LTD. Selected Projects and Exhibitions

1956 *Looking*, photo project, Peyto Lake, Banff National Park
1961 Yamada Gallery, Kyoto, Japan, November
1966 *Bagged Place*, plastic environment, University of British Columbia, Vancouver,
N.E. THING CO. Victoria Art Gallery, Victoria B.C.
N.E. THING CO. Rolf Nelson Gallery, Los Angeles, California
A Fence, as Dance, Theatre, Music & Sculpture, N.E. THING CO. production, Mills College, Oakland, CA.
1969 *Ecological Projects*, Project Department, N.E. THING CO., Washington State University, Pullman, WA.
Building Structure, N.E. THING CO. at Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto, Ontario
TRANS-V.S.I., Halifax-Vancouver Connection with Nova Scotia College of Art and N.E. THING CO. by Telex, Telecopier, Telephone and Telegram
N.E. THING CO. LTD. ENVIRONMENT, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario
1970 *North American Time-Zone Photo-V.S.I. Simultaneity*, N.E. THING CO. Photography and Publications Departments, Protetch-Rivkin Gallery, Washington, D.C. , October
N.E. THING CO. LTD. booth, at the Data Processing Managers Association International Conference and Business Exposition, June 23-26, Seattle, Washington.
1971 *N.E. THING CO. LTD.* Sonnabend Gallery, New York, New York, October
Radio and T.V. ads, N.E. THING CO. at University of Alberta Fine Art Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta
Lithograph Photographed, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design
1972 Edgeley Community Athletics, *N.E. THING CO. hockey team sponsorship*, Downsview, Ontario
1974 *N.E. THING CO. LTD.*, Sensitivity Information, Language-Sex, Bau Xi, Van., B.C.
N.E. THING CO. LTD., Sensitivity Information research, Peter Whyte Gallery, Banff, Alberta
1976 *Celebration of the Body*, Exhibition to celebrate the Olympics, 1976, Queens Univ., Kingston, Ontario
1977 *Another Two Projects*, Vancouver Art Gallery.

Group Exhibitions:

1960 *Young Contemporaries of Canada*, London Public Library and Art Museum, London, Ontario
1961 *Spring Show*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Quebec.
1963 *Drawings U.S.A.*, St. Paul Art Centre, St. Paul, Minn.
1964 *Canadian Watercolours*, Drawings and Prints, National Gallery of Canada
1965 *Focus on Drawings*, International Drawing Exhibition, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
6th Biennial of Canadian Art, National Gallery of Canada, toured Canada, and shown in London, England
1966 *Newport Sculpture Show*, Newport Harbour Art Museum, Balboa, California
Toys by Contemporary Artists, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
Reflections, La Jolla Art Gallery, La Jolla, California
1967 *Sculpture 67*, org. by Dorothy Cameron, National Centennial Exhibition, Toronto, Ontario
Plastics, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario
1968 *26 Artists*, at Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
Soft Sculpture, org. by Lucy Lippard for American Federation of Arts
New Media New Directions, org. by Kynaston McShine, for Museum of Modern Art, New York
Canadian Artists 68, org. by Dennis Young, for Art Gallery of Ontario
Third Triannual International Exhibition of Prints and Drawings, Chile, selected by National Art Gallery of Canada
1969 *Sao Paulo Biennial*, Sao Paulo, Brazil
577,087, org. by Lucy Lippard for Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington
Place and Process, Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta
Concept Art, organized by Konrad Fischer, Leverkusen City Museum, Germany
Art Inside the Arctic Circle, org. by Lucy Lippard with Wm. Kirby Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton. Projects carried out at Inuvik, N.W.T.
New Art of Vancouver, org. by T. Garver, Director, Newport Harbour Art Museum, Balboa, California
The Moon Show, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
Return of Abstract Expressionism, Richmond Art Centre, Richmond, California
Summer Show, org. by Seth Siegelaub. Exhibited world wide because exhibition exists only as catalogue distributed
March, special one month exhibition where each of the 31 participants was given a day of the month of March to do something; exists only in catalogue
New Multiple Art, Arts Council of Great Britain, London, England
GROUPS, org. by Lucy Lippard, Visual Arts Gallery, School of Visual Arts, New York, N.Y.
1970 *Book Supplement Show*, org. Seth Siegelaub, for Studio International Magazine in Vol. 180 No. 924, 1970
INFORMATION, Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y., org. Kynaston McShine.
Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects, New York Cultural Centre, New York, N.Y., org. by Donald Karshan
Art in the Mind, Oberlin College, Ohio, org. by Athena Spear
Art by Telephone, org. by Jan Van der Marck, Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
950,000, org. by Lucy Lippard, for Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, B.C.
Concept Art—Art Povera—Land Art, org. by Germano Celant, Turin, Italy
A Plastic Presence, shown at Jewish Museum, Milwaukee and San Francisco
The Highway, org. by Steven Prokopoff, at I.C.A., Philadelphia, shown at Rice University, and Akron Art Institute
1971 *49th Parallels*, New Canadian Art, shown in Florida, and Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art
The Boardwalk Show, by Protetch-Rivkin, Washington, D.C.
Situation Concepts, Galerie im Taxispalais, Innsbruck, Austria
1972 *Vesuvio Projects*, Mt. Vesuvio, Naples, at Henry Gallery, Seattle, Washington. Org. Jan Van der Marck
Collecting Art of the 70's, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington
Mail Art, by Jean Poinsot, exhibited at Paris Biennial, Paris
Soft Ware Show, Guggenheim Museum, New York, N.Y., org. by Jack Burnham
1973 *North American Video Exhibition*, Syracuse, Cranbrook, and Seattle
C. 7,500, org. by Lucy Lippard, Women's Art Show, toured Calif., Conn., Penn., Mass., Minn.



Vito Acconci

"I think of art as having a kind of instrumental use. The word exists, the category exists, so it does have a place. So when I say 'make art,' I don't mean a kind of–a kind of self-enclosed art, but I mean art as this kind of instrument in the world."

View

Interview by Robin White at Crown Point Press, Oakland, California, 1979.

I can start by asking you if you have titles for the prints, the ones you're making now?

Ah, no.

You don't?

Ah--I mean--I want them not titled.

Really?!

The prints are so much--each one is so much of an image that the image, the image talks, it doesn't really need a title.

Is there anything you've ever done that hasn't had a title?

Ah... probably not. Well, there was a--one of the things that these prints came from was a--was a large drawing, actually, a piece done for a show called "A Great, Big Drawing Show at P.S. 1", in January, February. Each person was given a wall, and the drawing I did was made up of ladders on the wall. That was just called "Wall Drawing", so that comes close to a piece that doesn't have a title. But it's true, most of my pieces have had titles and--and very, very loaded titles--

Yes.

The titles usually provide an occasion, situate the piece in some kind of--possible system of activity. This one doesn't.

No.

And in these new prints I want each of these images to act as potential instruments for use, but I don't want to--I guess I don't want to classify the use, I don't want to point the use any more than "Ladder to Climb", "Wing to Fly", "Flag to Wave", you know?

Is this just special for these prints, or do you think that you're going to stop using so many words, you're going to rely less on titles, and paragraphs, and descriptions?

Probably. Well, I don't know that. All I can say definitely is that in the pieces of the last year or so, for the most part,

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the words have gotten--have gotten fewer, fewer, and fewer. Compared to, say, to think of an extreme example, in 1976 I did a piece at the Biennale in Venice that had an audiotape text that was specifically designed to be movie length, so the thing was like an hour, an hour and a half.

Really?

Now, three years later, the piece I did in Sonnabend in March had--basically two words with numbers: "One, two, three, four--you're wonderful."

(laughs)

Yeah. And the piece I did at the Stedelijk, in the fall, just had the word "Please"--now, a lot is done *with* the word--

Yes.

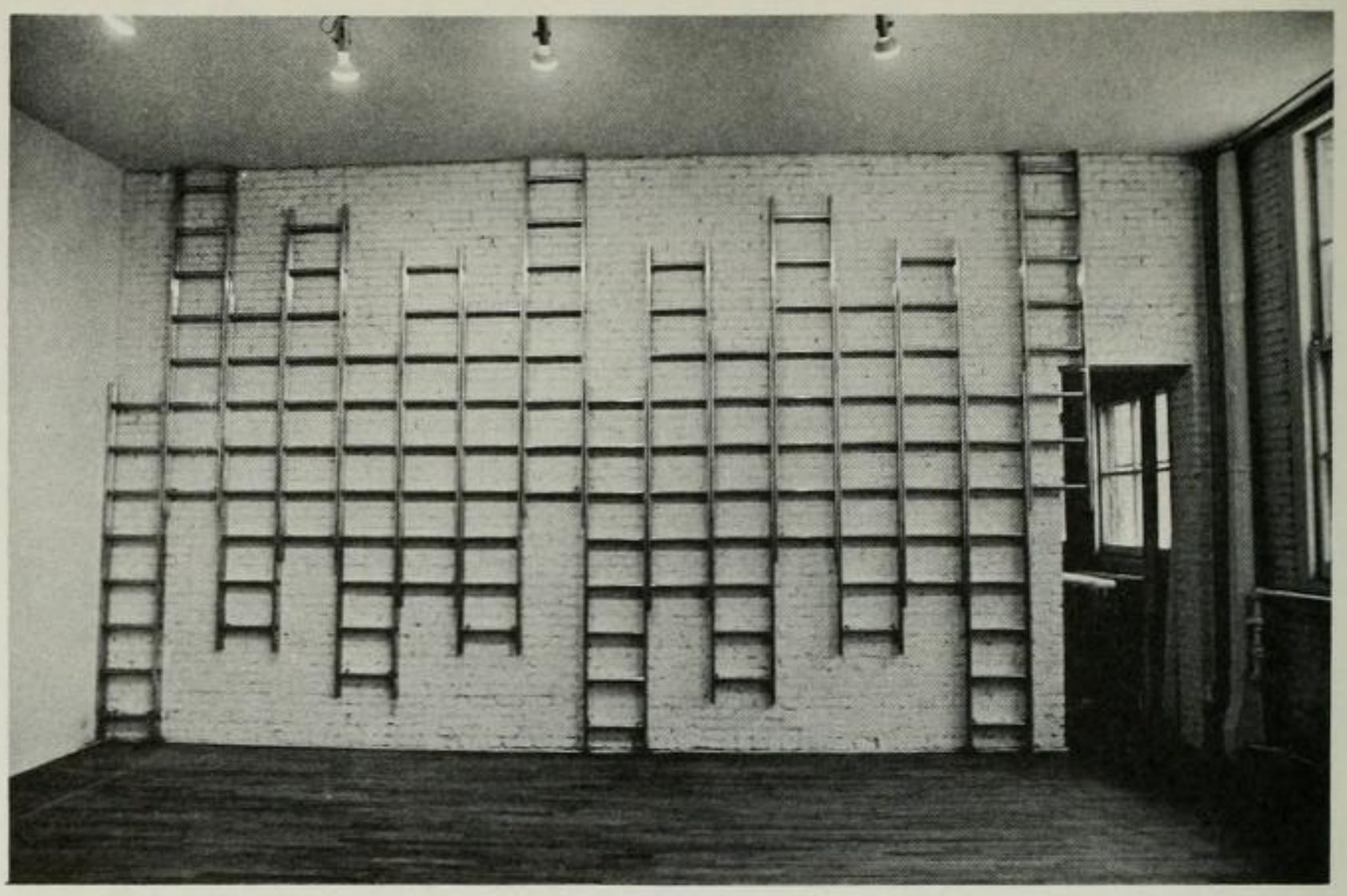
The word is played around with, the voice is played around with. But the basic material that the voice is playing with, has gotten much, much--much, much sparser. Still, the titles have been somewhat elaborate. The last piece I did, actually, was an installation in Hamburg, and that is probably the first installation without sound--if we don't count that ladder wall-drawing, which was very specifically designed for a drawing show. It made sense to me as a drawing; now this is a way to approach line and wall. But that's very specific. The piece in Hamburg was probably the first installation I did without--without sound. But it did have an elaborate title.

What was it? What was the piece like?

The room given was, oh, I'd say approximately twenty-five feet long by about eight or nine feet wide. The room is placed in the museum very much as a kind of passageway, you necessarily have to walk through this room to get to others. The piece consisted--and this is something that might continue in future pieces--the piece uses products--ready-made, bought products more than a lot of other pieces of mine.

Objects. Yes.

It uses a baby carriage--basically a baby carriage, a bicycle, and a fishing rod. The baby carriage is pushed up against the wall, against one of the narrow walls--seeing the room as a corridor, the baby carriage is pushed up against the end of the corridor. The handlebars of the bicycle are hooked onto the handle of the baby carriage. So--bicycle clasps the carriage.



Wall Drawing with ladders #1, 1979. P.S. 1, New York.

The back wheels of the bicycle are raised--we'll talk about the means of raising in a minute. And on the back of the bicycle is a long fishing rod, about fifteen feet long, with the reel, fishing line and all that stuff.

Yes.

So the fishing rod extends, it extends across the length of the room to about maybe three feet from the wall.

Oh!

And the fishing line continues; at the end of the fishing line is a hook and a lure, a very elaborate, big, fish lure--a red and white, shimmering, tailed object.

Is it hanging in the air?

Ah, no, the lure and the hook are hooked onto the opposite wall. The wall opposite the baby carriage.

So it goes across--

It goes across kind of diagonally. And on the sides of the bicycle are two airplane wing-like structures.

Oh!

Basic wooden frames covered with fabric. And the wings of the bicycle clasp onto the tops of the two side walls and lift the back of the bicycle.

So, they're quite big, these wings?

Well, not that big, nine feet long, ten feet long. Hanging on the fishing rod are three large flags. An American flag, a Russian flag--but the American flag and the Russian flag are each painted white. So, that at first you see them as two white flags, but as you go closer you see the--the image coming through. So, there are these two whitened flags plus a white truce flag. So there are three white flags. And the wing structure is covered with fabric, covered with a German flag. So, there's this red and gold--red and gold and black. And the piece is called *"Let's Pretend that this is an Apparatus for a Political Kidnapping."*

Oh!

So, although there is no sound tape, obviously it's still--it's still using language.

I would--if you hadn't told me the title--I would have thought of something innocent, *not something political.*

Even with the flags whitened?

Especially *with the flags whitened.*

Oh--like taking away--taking away from--

Wiping out the--the antagonism and--

Taking nationalities, and taking territories away; let's all be pure.

And let's just, you know, get on our bicycle and go fishing! It's a good thing you titled it!

The title and the--the materials for the piece came together as a whole.

It sounds like such a surrealistic contraption.

Yeah, that bothers me. I know the intentions are different, so hopefully the feel of it is different. But a lot of my stuff, lately, you could say--sounds like surrealistic contraptions,

sounds like Russian constructivist contraptions, that piece at Sonnabend--

The piece at Sonnabend, for me, was completely about tensions.

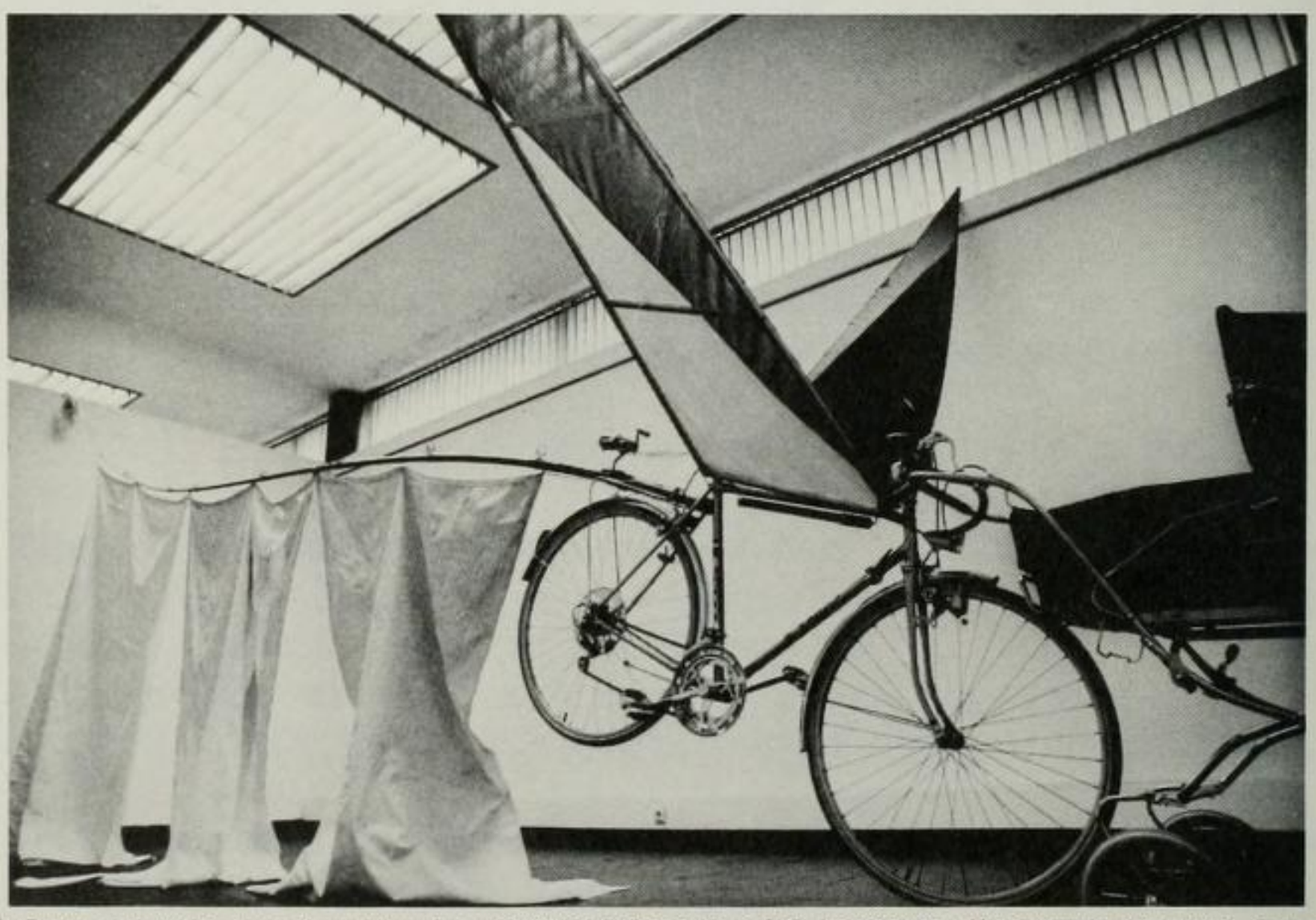
There've been so many machine-like things, machine-like apparatus that could spring, or, maybe more precisely, that could be very easily *sprung*, by a viewer.

Right.

There's usually one point where a viewer can very easily let something go.

We talked earlier about the Rube Goldberg kind of thing.

It's been on my mind a lot. I don't know if I can say why that started. Something like following a line, exaggerating a line: "Hip bone connected to the thigh bone". Also, the kind of Americanism that interests me is the kind of Rube Goldberg attitude, doggedly, almost stupidly carrying something to an extreme.



***Let's Pretend that this is an Apparatus for a Political Kidnapping,* 1979. Installation, Kunstverein, Hamburg, Germany.**

I know.

You take something that's ready-made and you twist it, so you don't so much invent--you sort of--find what's at hand. You find what's at hand, and find what else can it be used for?

Right.

That kind of--

Resourcefulness, in a way.

Yeah, yeah.

That's what interested me about the film we saw the other night, "Escape from Alcatraz". Clint Eastwood was extremely resourceful! I liked that thing with the spoon.

I wish I had been seeing it in a movie maybe five times its length. Then it would have showed the dogged resourcefulness of it more.

It was too neat.

I would have been more interested in seeing everything for a longer time. Now we see a spoon, so you take a long time to look at the spoon. Now, you touch the spoon--you take another long time to touch the spoon. And finally, after a long time, you start to realize what it can do.

We've been talking about movies while you've been here, what is it about the movies that you like? What ties them together?

That's hard for me to figure out. I mean, I can point out things I like about--I know why I like certain directors. If I was going to say what director interested me more than anyone else, I would say--without any kind of hesitation, Godard.

Yeah.

But--I almost consider that--apart from movies. It's too inclusive, it's almost like meta-movies. So, I can't even consider him when I talk--when I talk about movies, because I'm too aware of all his uses of other movies, so I have to consider him--consider him apart.

(laughs)

So, then when I think of directors I really like, they are mostly American directors--Howard Hawks, John Ford, Sam Fuller, Brian DiPalma. I tend to see the two minutes of a movie that I think really typify it, and then I cancel out the rest. Howard Hawks interests me because people always seem to be seen from the hip up, or from the waist up. So that you always have this kind of--walking-companion distance from people

on the screen. Not close-ups--you're never close enough to be intimate with the people. And never longshots, so you're never far away to get a kind of whole view, you're never above these people.

You're just sort of with them, all the time?

You're always this walking, friendly, not too close--but not too far away--inbetween distance. It's sort of interesting, I think. When you use a close-up in movies, does that really give a kind of intimate space? Probably not, whereas I think on television a close-up might, because on television a face is just about the size of *your* head, whereas in a movie, it's something else.

Yes.

There was an interesting Charlie Chaplin statement about why he never used a close-up face in his films. He said there's nothing funny about a face eight feet tall.

(laughs)

And--and, by extension, there's nothing face-like--about a face eight feet tall.

No, no.

Which then brings me to why I like John Ford movies.

Yes?

Because John Ford movies--first of all the use of John Wayne becomes sort of--face as landscape.

Yes!

Face as Mount Rushmore. It's a face to climb over, rather than--rather than a face to be face-to-face with, you know? It's no longer a face, it's land, it's a field--
I will say this even though I shouldn't like to make this kind of categorical statement--to me, all movies are about landscape, all television is about close-ups. So John Ford movies are a kind of essence of movies--all about landscape.

So it's the scale of things that's appropriate to a movie?

Yes. And the kinds of things I always thought I hated about John Ford movies, now interest me more and more, but I don't

know how, exactly, to talk about them. The kind of almost--Catholic sentimentality--Catholic, very right-wing sentimentality.

Which is something that you must have come out of?

Sure. I came out of it, and that's probably why at first I couldn't stand John Ford movies--I just despised that stuff. But, at the same time, it seems like there's some inherent connection between Catholicism, right-wingness, and landscape. But I can't figure out what it is!

It's like something that you can't--actually put your finger on, it's so much a part of the fabric of American life.

And it's so incredibly believed in, which is why John Ford stuff--and John Wayne--John Wayne interests me. It interests me, and repels me at the same time but that's true of most movies--I mean, I really despise movies. But at the same time I love--

Would you ever make a movie--about *something, with a narrative line? You've made videotapes but--*

I did one feature-length, super-8 movie. I wanted to make a kind of super-8 "Gone With the Wind."

Oh! What a wonderful sense of irony!

How do you--how do you make super-8 do something that it's not supposed to do? When I did it, super-8 was still--it was '74, I guess--but I was still thinking of super-8 as basically a silent medium, and my immediate impulse was--"Okay, now, let's make a movie *about* silence, let's make a movie about reasons not to talk." I hate this about myself and my way of working. But I need a beginning point, I need a medium to work with, I need an occasion. I can't do things without a medium. I can't do things without a space.

Most people go back to the last work that they made, and use that as their jumping-off point.

Yeah. Which I'm sure I do, too, sometimes.

But you mostly seem to take it from the situation--you need a--a given.

I don't know where to go until I know where I am. If you give me a space, then, sure, I can have an idea for that

space.

So, you don't kind of travel along with ideas that you're trying to put out?

They're so vague. That bothers me. I wish, I'd like to change those methods, and--some of the work recently, maybe hints--hints at something else.

Do you see a theme that runs through all *the work that you've done, I mean, what's the--what's the thing that's the most important to you?*

Hmmm...

Maybe we could ask--make a different question?

Yeah.

Is each work, each installation, completely different? Or is there one point that you're always striving for in each installation?

The specifics are different, but I'm sure there's basically more of a one point than--

So you don't think there's one subject that's been a kind of theme, or something like that that is important?

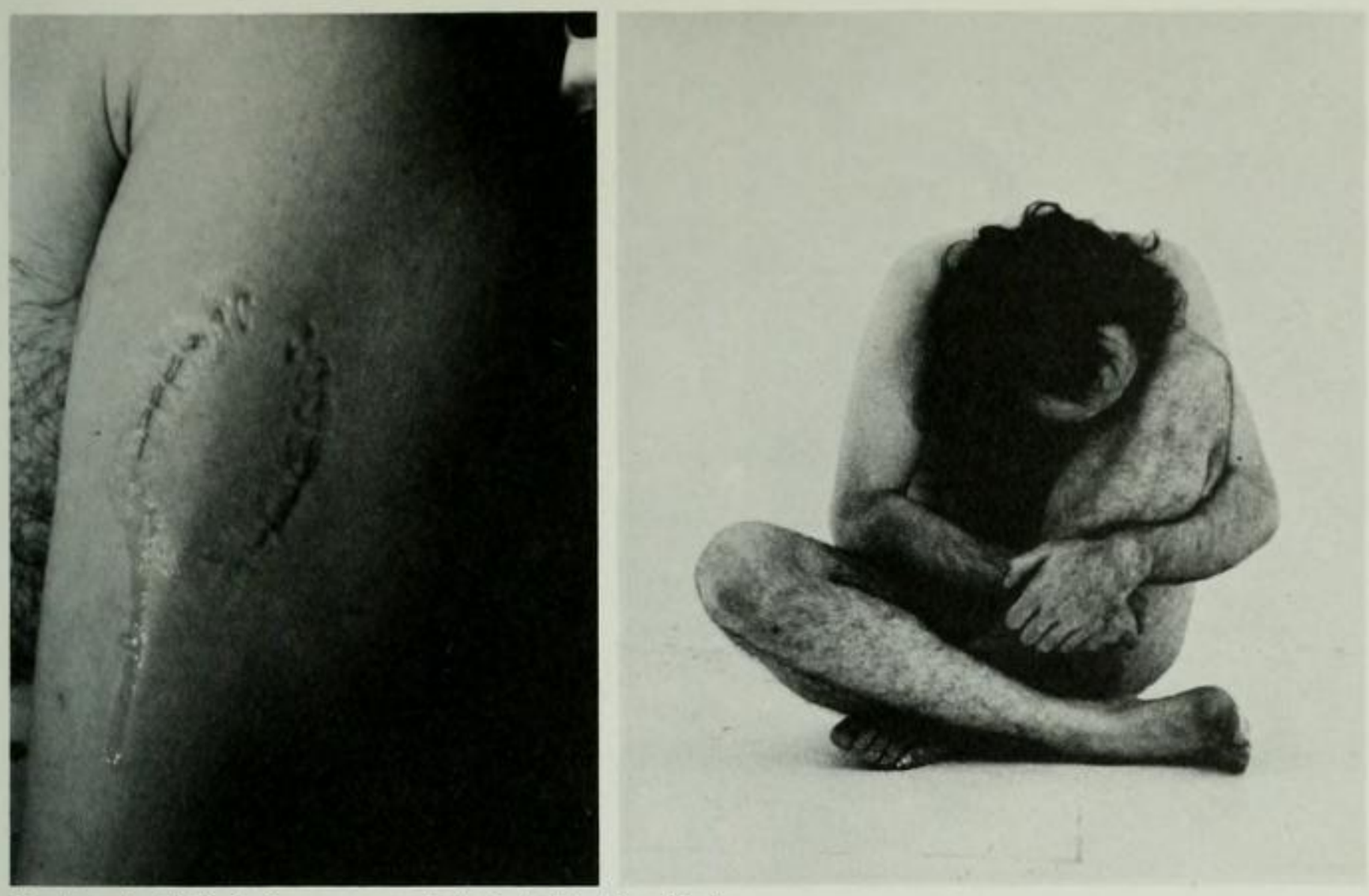
Except in the sense of some kind of point of action, point of activity, instrument--instrument for action. I think that's something that's continued from the beginning. At first I was using *myself* as an instrument of activity. The instrument for action continues to, say, to use a piece you've seen, the most recent piece at Sonnabend--where the swings are instruments for action. This is a place where a viewer can act. So there's still a kind of instrument, an instrument that can be activated. In the early pieces, I was an instrument that activated myself.

You know, looking at you now, it's just impossible to imagine you--biting yourself, or--

(laughs) Why? I'm curious.

Well, I don't know. I suppose you look like too much of a grown-up, now.

(laughs) That growing-up thing is kind of interesting. When



Trademarks, 1970. Performance and photos/prints, New York.

I look at my work in retrospect I think one way I can look at it is like a child--a kind of child growing up.

Um-hmm.

The first piece is--child realizes he or she is there, so I examined myself. I turned to my own body, I turned to my own self physically.

And the pieces that followed--

I find myself there, and play with myself a little bit, then I realize there is another person there, so do these pieces with interaction--the two agents acting with each other. Then, gradually, I realize--well, these things can exist, you don't have to be there.

Yeah. Right! But, actually, you're kind of removing yourself more and more from them.

Yeah, yeah, I am.

For example, with this piece in Hamburg, there's not even the presence of your voice.

Yeah. Yeah. I guess every--anybody who does art can say this--the presence seems to have been shifted to a kind of "behind the scenes" presence. This person going from place to place, setting up--setting up something.

When you set up something, what do you want to set up? I mean, for example, how could you set up a piece that wouldn't work, that would be a failure? I hate to use that word; it's not a very--

I think of a lot of pieces of mine like that. Maybe what I'm saying is that out of every year where I might do about twelve, thirteen pieces, two or three might seem absolutely necessary.

For what? I guess that's what I'm interested in. I was reading the book that you did for the piece at Wright State, the piece called "In the Middle of the World"--

Yeah. Right. That wasn't a tremendously successful piece.

Well, it was very interesting to read the book, to read your self-criticism, and understand your thought processes. It's fascinating to see--well, "I'm thinking it should be like this, and it shouldn't be, and this won't work, and then we'll try it this way, and this won't work"--and finally, to evolve a situation which you feel can be successful on some level.

Yeah.

So, do you--would you always go through that process every time you make an installation?

Yeah, yeah. Except that it's probably not as defined as that. If I didn't know I was doing a book I'm not sure if it would quite be as defined and systematic as it appears. But sure, but the process--the process is close. My tendency is always to sort of build it up, and tear it down. I mean, not so much literally, in a space--

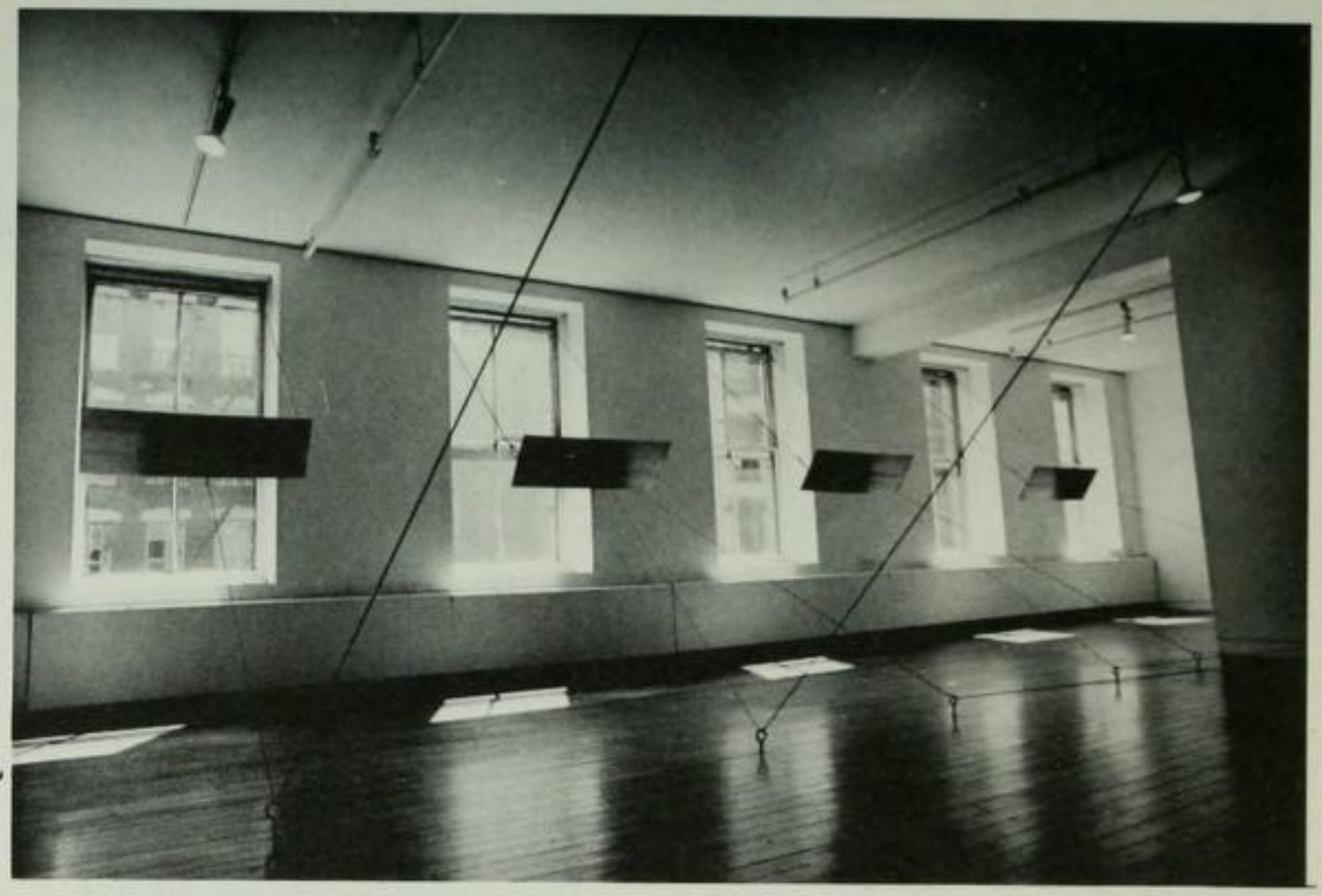
No.

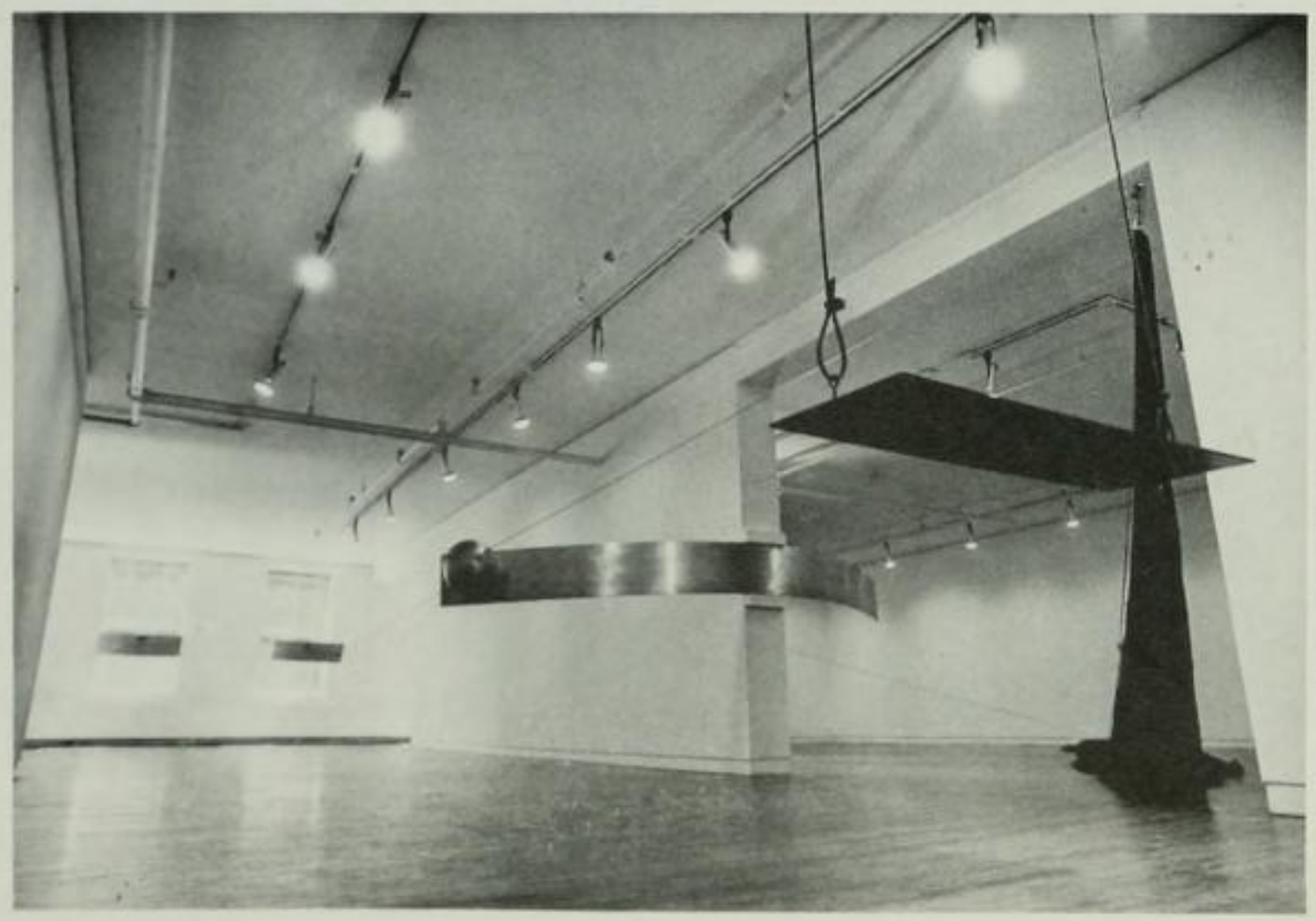
But at least mentally, with diagrams. Again, I'm probably talking about the way a lot of people work. I have to try to tear it apart, and if it doesn't completely tear, then maybe I can integrate it! (laughs)

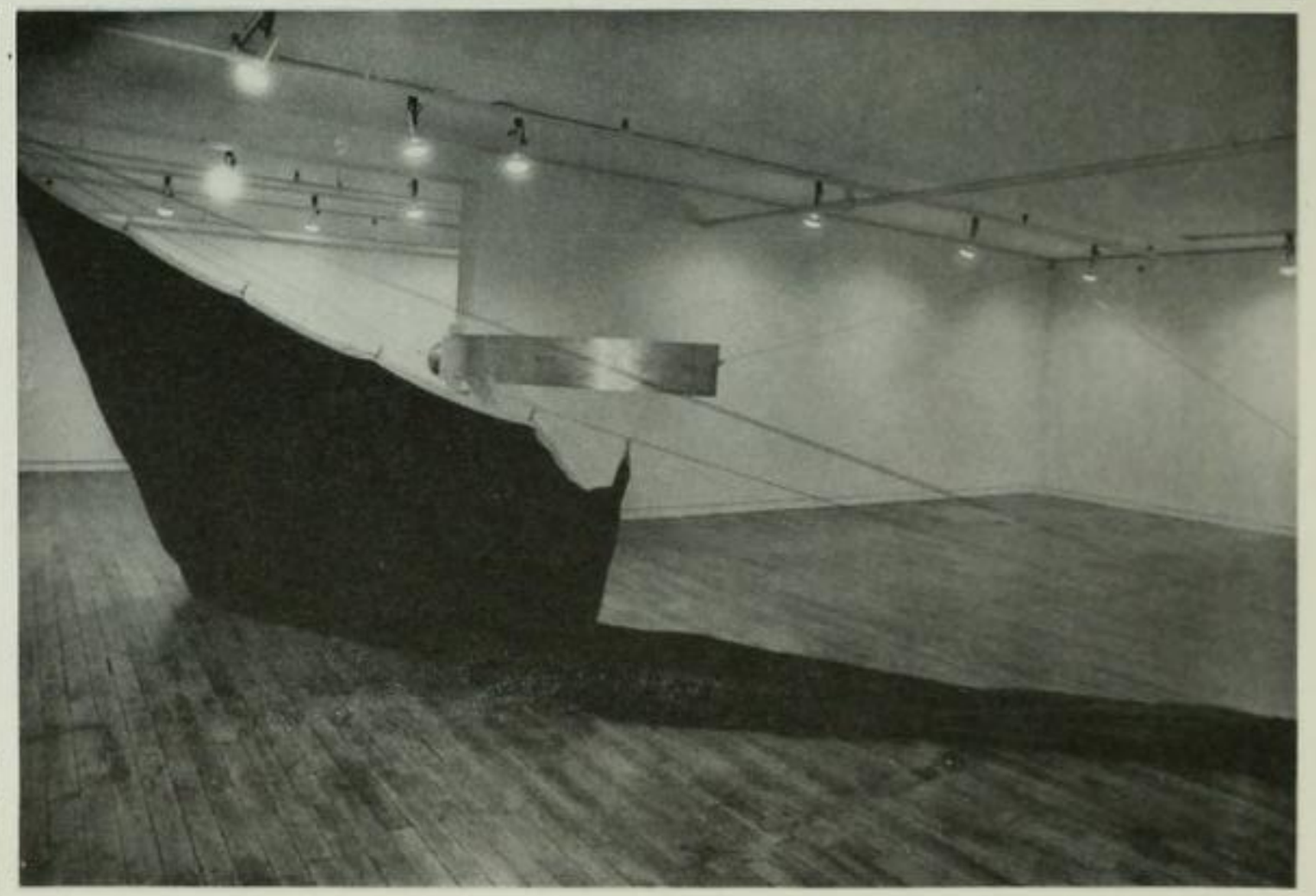
Right.

That happens a lot when I do pieces, and that's why--sometimes I do feel probably, certainly, "Oh, Hell, my pieces are--quote--failures."

What kind of feedback do you get from people about them? I mean, this piece in Hamburg, for example--or, maybe the piece







The People Machine, 1979. Audio installation, Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

at Sonnabend would be a better one to talk about, because probably more people--

Yeah, but not--I don't know, not that much feedback. Not that much feedback. Not the kind of feedback that I felt I could *use*, so much.

Not constructive?

"I like it, I don't like it"--but there were some things. I remember Robert Morris telling me that--the thing he didn't like about the piece was the blue swing.

Oh.

And what he didn't like about the blue swing, was that it was too specific. Everything else in the piece was--and I'm using probably my language instead of his--everything in the piece was abstracted and *like* something. In other words, the things at the window were *like* swings, the catapult was *like* a catapult, and you couldn't immediately say "This is specific catapult, this is specific swing, this is specific flag"--the flag was--

Right, right.

Too big, too--too general, too generalized--so everything was *like* something. Except the blue swing. It was hung right from the ceiling, it was separate from the rest of the piece, it was painted blue, you immediately saw that as *a swing*. It wasn't so much *like* a swing, it couldn't be--it couldn't be anything else.

Anything else.

I liked what he said. I still think I was right! But I liked that comment. I wanted the swing--I wanted that swing to be very separate from the rest of the piece.

Right.

I wanted everything to be interconnected, and then this--would be a kind of a clinker. This would be completely--from another direction, and therefore, because it was from another direction, the rest of the thing--which was very interconnected, could almost *aim* at that.

Yes.

Actually that thing was about aim. Maybe that is something that's--that's been present in the work from the beginning. In the very early pieces, like "Following Piece"--the first period of pieces, I picked something in the world outside me, I pick something--I think you could almost call it target--that I tie myself to. I connect myself to something outside by aiming at

Following Piece, 1969. Activity, New York.

this target. The next step--I aim it in on myself. Next step--the kinds of two-agent pieces, I aim at him or her while he or she aims at me. And more recently--viewer--in some cases maybe viewer can aim at the piece, which I guess is the kind of traditional art situation, but at the same time, the piece aims at viewer--the catapult, the catapult aimed against viewer. So that, the notion of aim, the notion of target I think has sort of--

Always been there?

Has been kind of persistent. I think it started when--those pieces using my own body in '70 started from thinking "What--how can I think of a generalized art condition?" It seems like in any kind of art situation, viewer enters exhibition space, viewer heads toward artwork, so viewer is aiming towards artwork. Viewer is treating artwork as a kind of target, so it seems to me this is a kind of general condition of all art viewing, art experience. Therefore, if that--if that target-making notion is a condition of all art experiencing, could I use that target-making notion as a condition of art doing? So, in other words, could I treat myself as target, then, in turn, this target-making activity is made available for viewers? Something to target in on, on their own. Probably the way I

see pieces and the way a lot of other people see pieces--

Doesn't necessarily coincide?

Probably the terms don't coincide, but possibly I and "those others" are getting close to the same thing. The terms I use tend to--tend to be--structural, overall, words like "target", "aim", "direction"--are structural, but they relate very closely to behavior in the world, operation in the world, the way I operate in the world, the way viewers operate in the world. I think what I'm saying is that--I don't talk about the things in--emotional terms. I'm not sure I know what those emotional terms are.

And I always relate to your pieces in a very emotional, in an experiential way--and I don't think I'm alone in that. So, while you may be presenting a very analytical and formal situation about target and aim, viewer and art, one comes in and one--I, in fact, feel, in some of the installations more as if I was the target, you know?

I think that's something that's true, yeah.

Being a target means in a sense to be hunted, you know, to be--sought after, to be hit.

Yeah, but sought after is kind of interesting because you're being hunted, you're a little bit of--at the same time you're the prey--you can also become a star, you can be sought after.

Well, that's true.

Ideally, that's what I'd like from a lot of the installations. The viewer is sort of--you're in this position where you're pushed. You have been aimed at. Now that you're aimed at, though, you can potentially do something. Exactly what effect this doing something might have--would probably change in various pieces.

But what can you do? I think, for example, in the installation at Sonnabend, one wouldn't--I mean, people have too much respect for the integrity of your artwork to actually go up and pull *the thing that would result in the catapult going and the swings falling out the window, and everything crashing down. Nobody would actually do that.*

Yeah, it's a kind of frustrated action. Like it or not, I have put myself in the position of being a kind of--"gallery artist". I mean, I do things for gallery spaces. So, there-

fore, if I want my pieces to be about potential action for the viewer, at the same time I should be aware that this is always going to be a frustrated action--it has to be about that. It should be about an action that can't--that cannot really be carried out because of the circumstance it's in. And perhaps what that would do would get people so enraged that they--

That they would--

That they would *really* want to tear everything apart.

(laughs)

They would want to tear the entire system apart. You would be--so oppressed by this, that the only thing to do is overturn it.

Are you really interested--in that? In a lot of the things that were written about your early pieces, critics talked about your interest in trying to break down, or explore, or expand, but mostly destroy the notions of art, or bourgeois art. And performance was a perfect way to do it, because the definition of performance is so open-ended.

Well, at that time it was a sign, a sign of the times. My generation--I mean, it was one thing that connected, I think, a lot of us, no matter how dissimilar our work might have *seemed*, there was this *common goal* for all of us. We really thought we were going to change the system, we really thought we were going to--we were going to change the art system as it existed. All we did was make the art system much stronger than it had ever been before. We made the art system *bulge*, but we certainly didn't make it break. We made the galleries stronger than ever, because the gallery could say, "Look, we can even show *this*."

Right. "And we can even find people to buy it."

Yeah, exactly! Yeah, yeah, sure. Yeah, exactly. And we allowed it. I mean, I can't say, "Well, you know, we were just victims." That's certainly not true. We thought of gallery as a kind of distribution system, so we have to use it, because this was a way that things could be distributed.

You can't be independent of the gallery/museum system--finally. Because you can't--survive--

Yeah.

Financially.

Yeah. Yeah, and not just financially--being independent of the gallery system doesn't necessarily mean just doing something outside of galleries--I mean, what you would do, for example, couldn't be talked about in magazines, because magazines are really gallery-supported--everything, everything has that kind of base.

Yeah, I think that it's pretty difficult to exist outside of the structure, and still be accepted as an artist.

And my aim has always been to do art. The aim was always art. In other words, a lot of those earlier pieces--it wasn't so much that I was using art to--examine my body, examine psychological processes. If I was doing that, it was incredibly miscalculated, other people could do that much more thoroughly than I could. It was always the other way around. I was always using those psychological processes, or physiological processes to--make art. I mean, my aim was always art. You know?

Uh-huh, uh-huh.

I think of art as having a kind of instrumental use. The word exists, the category exists, so it does have a place. So when I say "make art", I don't mean a kind of--a kind of self-enclosed art, but I mean art as this kind of instrument in the world.

Yes. Right.

And that's probably why I can't work without a particular medium in mind. In other words, when I made my first videotape, it wasn't a matter of deciding "I'm doing a piece, and it's going to be on videotape." Someone was doing a videotape show and asked, do I want to do something on video. And then my place was to decide what could I do on video. At that time I had done live stuff, I had done stuff with photographs, I had done stuff on film. Now, what can I do on video that couldn't be done better, couldn't be done as well--with those media?

Right.

So it's always for me--I always need that, again, to repeat what we said before, I always need that starting point for a work--whether it's a medium, or whether it's a space. But lately, as I said, I've been objecting to that about myself. One reason I'm objecting to it, one way I could see the work is--I set myself up as this kind of--as this kind of interior designer, I'm setting myself up as a decorator, "Give me the space and I'll fix it up."

(laughs)

"Give me a space and I'll design it."

That's very different from the way that you were thinking about yourself, as an operator, in the past. No?

Yes--except, I mean, if I want to use those same derogatory terms, I could say--"Give me the idea of a film frame, and I'll set myself up as--something for you, the viewer, to look at." So I'll make myself this--this target within this film frame. I'll manipulate the film frame.

Okay. So even with the idea of being an interior decorator, or designer, it's still about target and aim, and stuff like that?

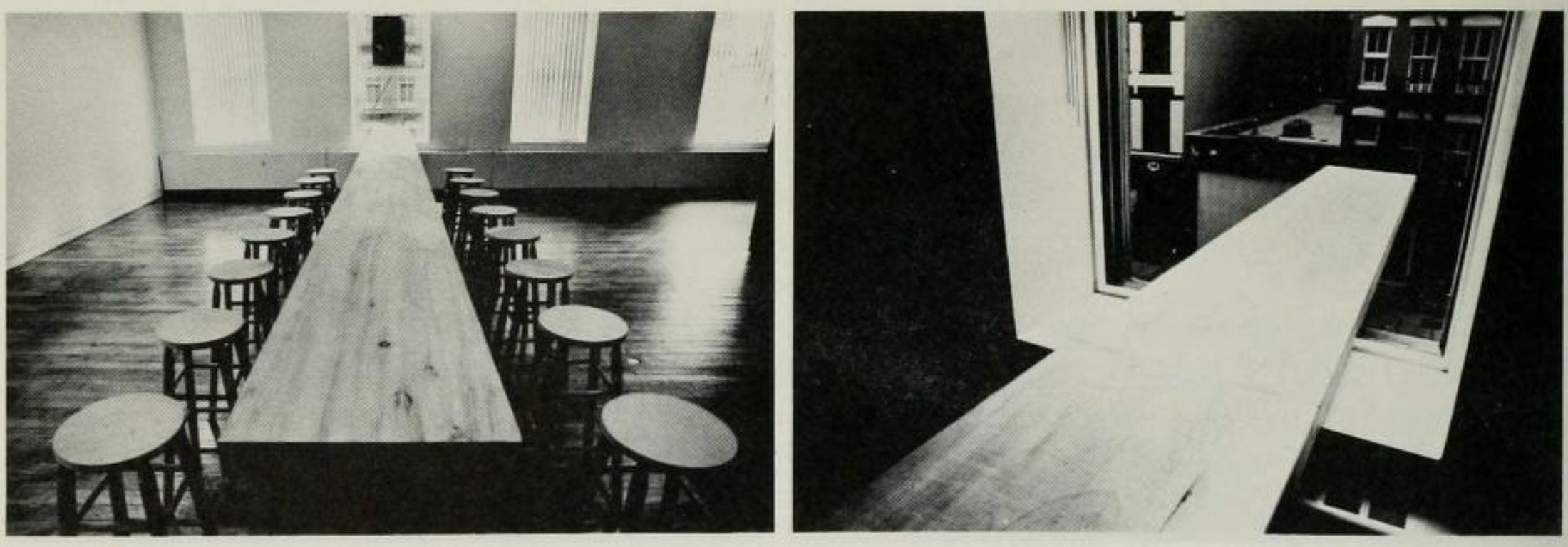
Sure, oh, sure. I mean, I don't totally think that about the decorating, designing thing--but what that does signify to me is that--I am constantly adapting to spaces, just as I am constantly adapting to various media. And, obviously, there are alternatives. And the alternatives sound strangely like what any kind of art is and has always been. Why can't there be something from outside a space that's brought into a space? But if I think about it, that seems to be exactly what I thought I, myself, was reacting against from the beginning, the idea of "let's take something from my studio and bring it to a viewing space." Now, I still might not like that, I still might not want to take something from my studio and bring it to a viewing space, but there's something that does interest me about the idea of something coming from *outside* the viewing space and being inserted in the space. But, again, we get that kind of target idea--I can't get that target stuff out of my head!

In the early pieces there was a lot of talk about the relationship between you and the viewer. I had the feeling that you were very interested to work with this notion of intimacy.

Very much.

How to relate to people, how to become intimate with people in a public space. In "Seed Bed", for example, you were able to do something--private, and to draw people into this private act, to make them more intimate with you, but at the same time it ended up being rather impersonal, because you were isolated, cut off, hidden by the ramp.

Yeah, it's true. We only have this ten minutes in the gallery, so we can do whatever we want--



***Where We Are Now (Who Are We Anyway?)*, 1979. Audio installation, Sonnabend Gallery, New York.**

"I don't know who you are, you don't know who I am, it doesn't matter."

We'll never see each other again--but, now, the intimate space has been changed very much to a public space, which is why a lot of the installations have the shape of a meeting-table, table with chairs on either side. This is a public meeting hall, rather than an intimate chamber space where I can be with you. And I think one of the changes has been that a kind of "I-you" language could have been applied to those earlier pieces that you were talking about, and in the later pieces there might be a kind of "we"; it's no longer that--that "I face you" intimacy.

Does the change reflect the changes in your life, in the things that you think are important in your own life? Because the things you did earlier must have been a response to problems that you were having yourself?

I'm never sure.

Really?

If this is a public space and there's a person doing a work--inherently in any kind of art situation, you have this distinction between publicness and a private person, a private person doing something. Much of that early work seemed to be about this distinction between privacy and publicness. What I was doing was making blatant what it seemed like any artwork does--private person doing work, putting it into a public space. By extension, then, I put my privacy, put myself and my private life, in this public space. But with--with the exception of one piece, *Airtime*, in which the subject matter was about finding a way to end a relationship, and maybe one or two other pieces, I'm not sure how directly that was done. I mean, I'm

really not sure how much about my specific person a lot of those pieces were.

Um-hmm.

I don't know if I'm hiding from myself the fact that they were, and I don't want to admit it--

After all this time, probably not.

I'm not sure, I'm not sure. It's just that when I look back at them--with the exception of pieces like the one I mentioned that very much had to do with a specific person--the pieces seem to be so much about, sure, using myself, using my own person--but that person became so generalized.

Everyman.

A lot of those pieces were based on the idea of--ah--exhibition space as a kind of meeting place. Artist does work, puts it in a public space, now let's get rid of that middle term, let's put "me" in this public space, and now we're in a situation where I meet you. What I think started to bother me was that--I was thinking in terms of a situation of "I-meet-you", but it was never really that.

No, it never could be that.

Because first of all, those two people meeting--the I and you, the viewer--were never really on equal ground.

No.

It was always--it was always a piece, it was always announced, I was always the artist, it was very much--"I"--"I-as-art-star" meet you, the viewer.

It was a very formal--structure. And you as art star, meant you as a personality.

So it wasn't these two people meeting, but very much a viewer almost taking this journey towards me, you know?

Yes.

Viewer taking journey to--I was setting myself up, really, in a very traditional stage kind of position.

And so you've decided--

I was very literal about it. For instance, meeting people late at night on a deserted pier, and telling each one something that hadn't previously been revealed about me. Viewer comes into the--comes into this warehouse pier at--at the door, near the street, they don't see what--they can't really see what's around, so they're groping their way through this long pier in order to get to me. It's like this kind of, you know, perilous journey.

Right!

Or, right after that, the piece called "Claim". I'm seated at the foot of the steps--it's this kind of basement space--viewer enters on street level, viewer opens the door, decides whether or not to--to come downstairs, I'm blindfolded--viewer is forced to come towards me, so the--it had that notion of "I'm-this-focal-point" that viewer is sort of forced to be confronted with.

Yes.

Claim, 1971. Performance, New York.

And once I'm in that focal point, I'm setting myself up as a star. So, at the time I was preparing the piece that turned out to be "Seed Bed", I was thinking, "How do I get rid of myself as a focal point?" And it seemed to me that--well, in order to get rid of myself as focal point--very simply, I shouldn't be seen. Now, there are three ways to do that. Three basic ways--I could be above the ceiling, I could be on the other side of a wall, I could be--I could be under the floor. The other side of the wall seemed wrong to me, since it seemed like then I'd be setting myself up in another room. Above the ceiling seemed wrong, since it seemed to me that there was too much space, ten feet or so, between me and viewer. So, the only logical place, it seemed to me, was under the floor--

I see.

And that's the way "Seed Bed" began; it didn't begin with the idea of--of, you know, masturbation. In fact, the masturbation part came no more than a week before the piece began.

So, all you knew was that you were going to be under the floor? You didn't know what you were going to do there?

I wanted to be under the floor, but I couldn't figure out what I could do.

Ah-ha!

I kept thinking, I'm under the floor, the piece is very much about--privacy, publicness, inside, outside--so I thought, well, something has to come from inside of my body going outside.

Uh-huh.

I knew it had to be that.

Right.

But, it's kind of significant, I think, that even that piece started so much in general space terms.

That's interesting to know. So, after that you figured out that your presence could be there, but you *didn't have to be there, so then you started doing the audiotapes.*

Yes. You know in those audiotapes, in the installations with audio, I've always used my own voice.

Oh, I know.

I've happened to use other people's voices--maybe on one or two occasions--but my voice has been there, also. There's one practical reason. I really dislike the idea of other people saying words that I've determined.

Perhaps because you come out of poetry, you feel very connected to the language you write.

No, I was trying to avoid the whole theatre tradition which has other people saying--

Well, maybe that's what saves you from being theatrical?

Saying the words. Maybe.

But actually I think that your pieces are very theatrical, in fact, and even more interesting they're rather dream-like. We go into your installations, and there's this voice--

At the same time, though, it's that dream-like space that I probably don't like about--those things.

I don't mean dream-like in the sense that it's pleasant, I mean dream-like in the sense that it's not direct--

I agree with you in that--

Persistent, it's persistent.

But you pointed out, I think, the thing that bothers me about a lot of installations of mine. The fact that there's this disembodied voice, there's this voice that the viewer really can't--can't control. A lot of my installations are about this kind of community meeting place. And, well, this is a funny kind of meeting place--this voice is talking; the viewers can't talk back.

Right.

If viewers talk back, it doesn't really do any good. The audiotape is going to keep going on. So, then it seemed to me, well, maybe I should use, maybe I should *use* that. What a piece with voice is, what a piece with sound does is create a kind of--a kind of oppressive space.

Yes!

Because once that sound is in that space, that sound keeps going. Therefore, the sound is about oppression, so I started to think of language as oppression, language in installation as oppression. And then I did that piece where I had a long, rope ladder in the stairway of the Whitney, and this voice going from bottom to top saying, "You made it, you're a nigger. Higher, higher." And a voice at the same time going from top to bottom saying, "We made you. You're a cunt. Down, down." If sound in a space acts as oppression, then I should use oppressive language--language should be about numbing a person, since it's going to be that, whether I want it or not.

Oh, no...

Originally, I had wanted language, I thought, to be the opposite, to bring people together. I thought, once I'm not there in person, and this public space is a given, if people are here, what people can do is join together. What people can do is--gather together at a kind of community meeting place, at a kind of community table. I wanted this kind of freedom for viewers. But I discovered that, using voice, that's not what's happening at all.

Right.

What's happening is exactly the opposite. I'm numbing viewers, I'm oppressing viewers, I'm forcing viewers into a position, I'm forcing viewers--I'm sort of putting viewers into their place. And I kept thinking, well--

Well, not in their place, in your place.

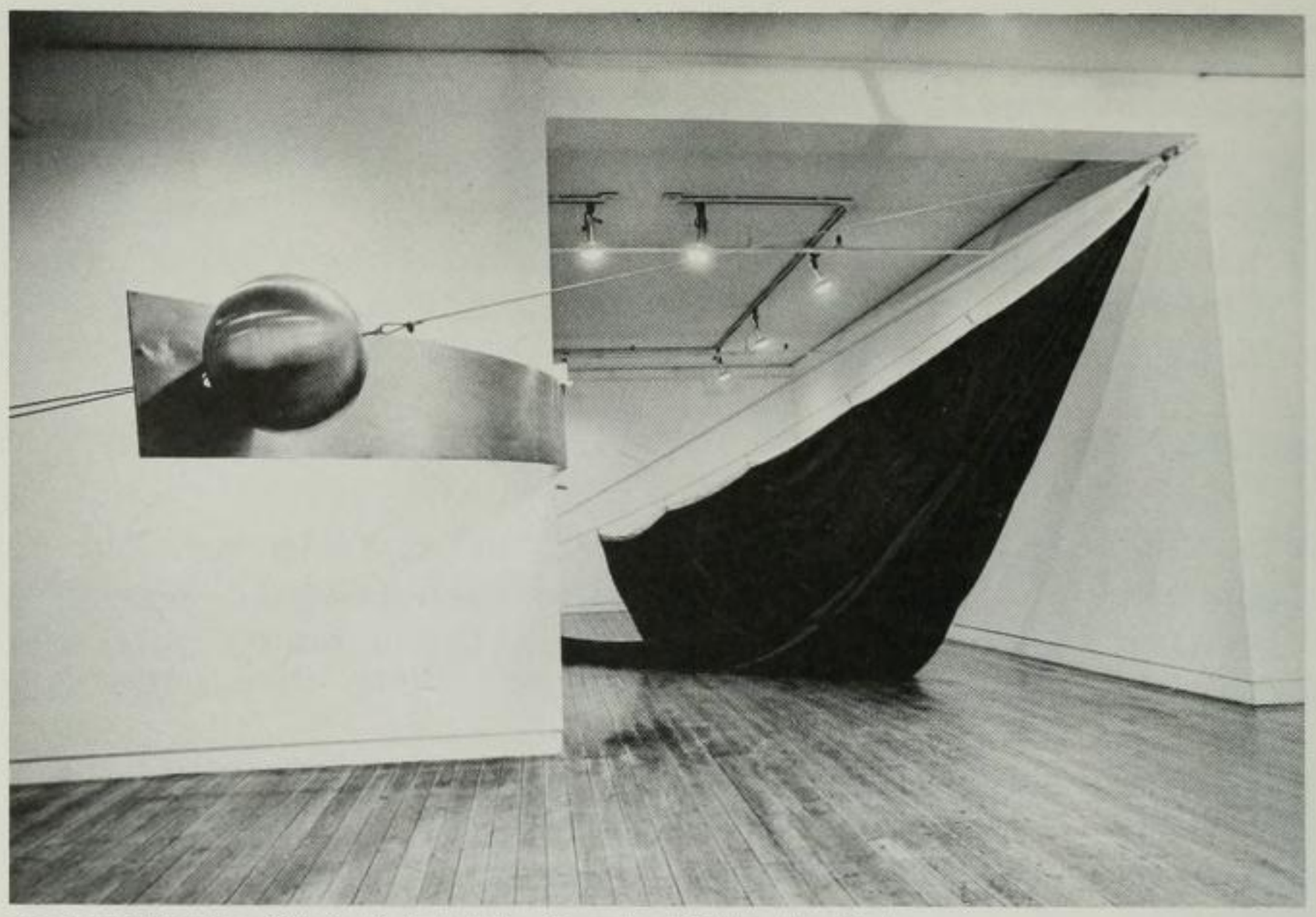
In my place, exactly. Yeah. I'm forcing viewers to be a part--I'm forcing viewers to be in a place that *I've set up.*

Yeah, yeah.

And that bothered me, and I didn't think of any way around it, so I thought, well, if I can't think of any way around it, then I should try to use it. So I started to use language like that, that kind of oppressive language, and then I could start to shape the pieces into--this kind of machine-like structure we were talking about. If viewers are pushed that far, are they just pushed and then dropped there? Or, can you be pushed to a point where--you can activate something? In that Sonnabend piece, I agree with everything you said about the reasons why a viewer wouldn't do it, but there is that kind of possibility. A viewer could release just one swing--

There's the possibility--right.

If you released one swing, all those other swings would go out the window like this machine-gun of swings, then, in turn the catapult would be released--and then, in turn, the little flag--the little flag waves a little bit, and the whole thing--and the whole thing is smashed. At the same time, of course, you're in--you're in a gallery situation, you're in a particular art context situation, you're in a particular kind of political situation, therefore you aren't going to do this. But--it's so easy to do, and also you're being told by this tape that "You're wonderful, you're wonderful, you're wonderful." You know? "I'm built up, now, I can really rule the



The People Machine, 1979. Audio installation, Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

world, I can release this." Then, at the same time, "I'm in this conventional gallery situation and also, if I release this, what would I do? I mean, what happens?" So, the swings swing out the window, the catapult is released, but it all--it all becomes a little useless. That might be what I think about--my work! (laughs)

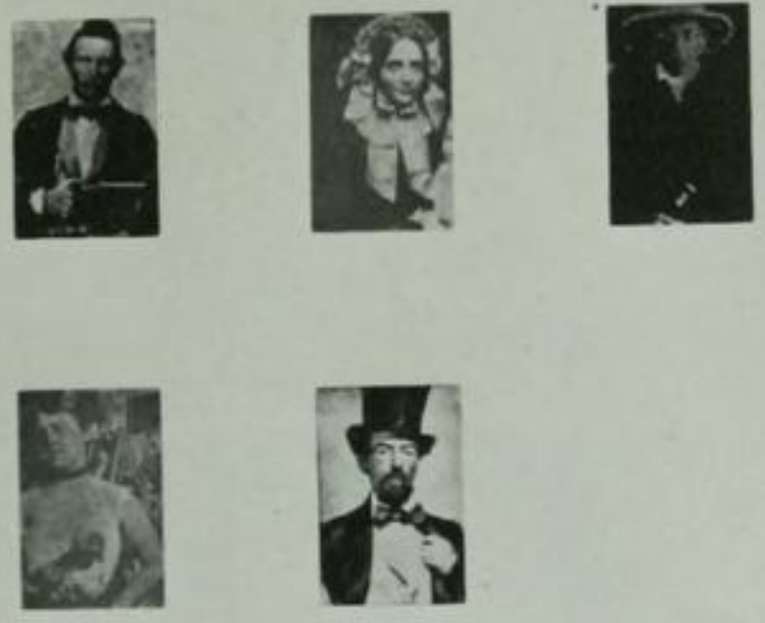
(laughs) Vito!

No, I'm sure that's true. I mean, ideally, I want my position to be--I'm the guerilla fighter. I go from city to city, I go from place to place, and examine the terrain, I set something up so there are these little bombs in all these places.

But your work has a lot of political and social comment in it. Specifically I could mention the piece that we talked about before at the Whitney Biennial, and also, this piece in Bordeaux, called "The American Gift." Those seemed to be about the subject of oppression. In the case of the Whitney piece it's the oppression that certain minorities feel in the art world, blacks and women.

Yeah, sure.

And in the case of the piece you did for Bordeaux, you were dealing with what seemed to me to be a subject which is extremely touchy, and really on everybody's mind. And that is



The Selling of Five Americans and a Place for One World Citizen, 1977.
Photoetching with aquatint, 30 x 42". Published by Crown Point Press.

the feeling that American art, the American art establishment, has basically oppressed, and suppressed the burgeoning European art scene.

"The American Gift" piece was an important piece for me in the sense that--up until that time I had been doing, I had been doing installations for, I guess, three years or so, two or three years. Ah--the way I saw the installations, they were--they were incredibly vague, they were incredibly ungrounded. It was as if once I wasn't using myself anymore, once I couldn't focus on me, I almost didn't know--didn't know what to shift that focus to.

Ah-ha!

So, that the pieces from between, say, the beginning of 1974 to 1976, all were involved with a lot of--ah, even the look of them hinted at various kinds of vaguenesses, various kinds of ambiguities; they were all about projections, I was using slides a lot--at first the installations were almost about a kind of substitute presence for me, as if once I wasn't there anymore, I didn't quite know how to let myself go, and I was

trying to put myself, trying to put images of myself in the pieces anyhow. Gradually, I think, by 1976, it became clear to me that if the piece wasn't going to focus on me as the instrument of doing the piece, then what it should focus on should be the ground on which the piece is done, and by that I meant not just physical ground--I had always been working with that notion of trying to fit an installation into physical space--but I suddenly realized that ground is more than that. Ground should mean the audience for which a piece is intended, ground should mean the particular place in which a piece is done. In other words, if a piece is done in New York, this should be a different piece than a piece in Los Angeles, or--

Yes.

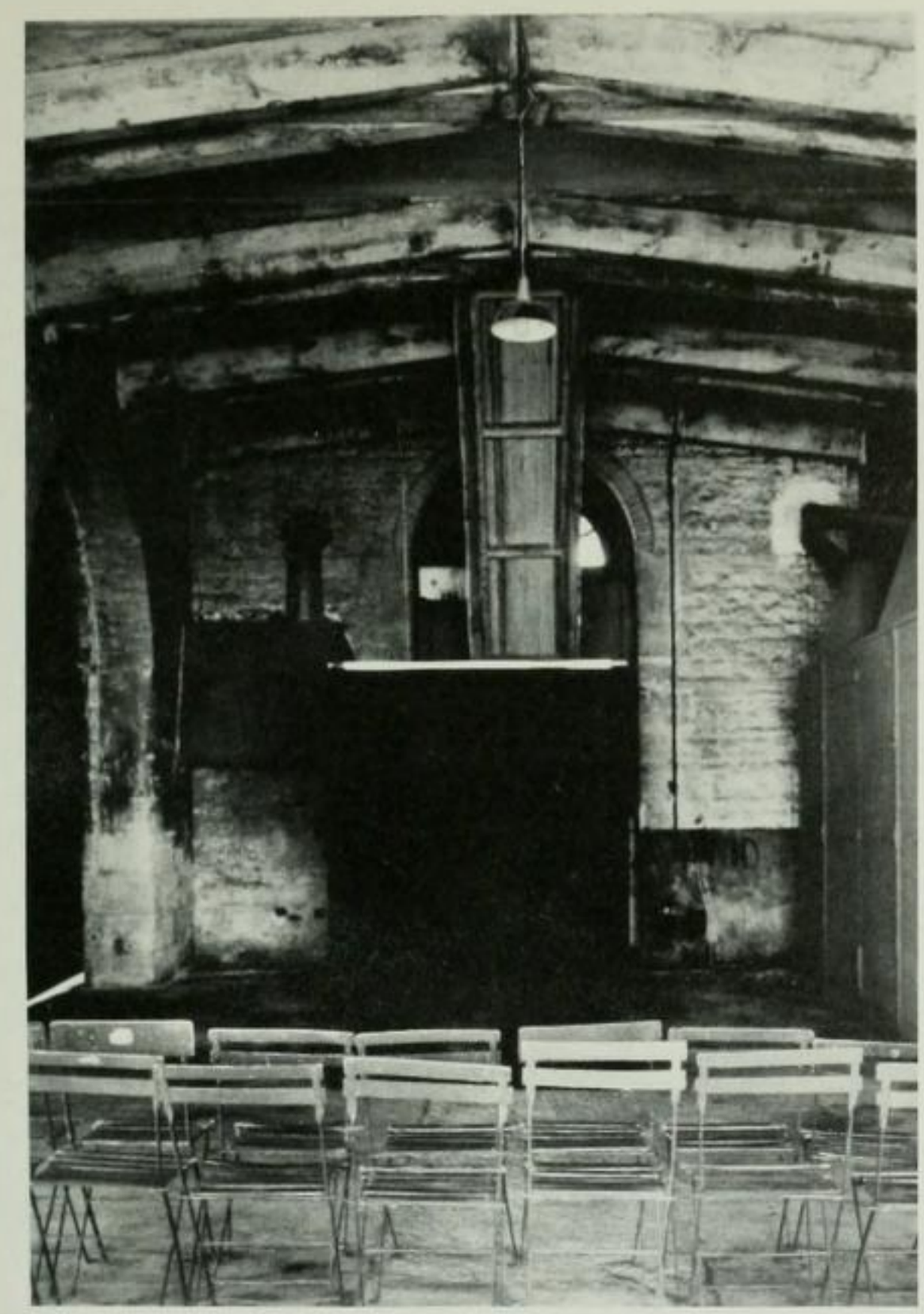
Or a piece in Milan. And the way that frame of mind, I think, was shaped was by the very practical situation of me, and artists in my generation, ah--the fact that we showed more in Europe than in America. We were showing in Europe for the simple reason that, at least up until that time, there was in Europe an incredible idolization of American art. There was an incredible kind of mythologizing of American art.

I know.

And for very specific reasons, I think, very specific economic reasons--Pop Art was so incredibly successful; therefore the next American movement might be just as successful. So--European galleries were showing American art--pretty much to the exclusion of European art.

I know. Right.

A lot of American artists who had never shown in America were traveling around Europe, and showing in Europe first. So, with that situation it was clear that--if I'm being shown in Europe, it's absurd to pretend that I'm in this neutral position of--"I am an artist doing a show." I thought it was, rather, "I am doing this show specifically because I'm an American artist. I'm doing this show because I'm a representative of American art. I'm doing this show as a representative of American art business." So, it seemed to me, I have two solutions. Either, if I don't like that situation, I shouldn't do anything, or--if I still want to go on doing something, that situation should, in some way, start to have something to do with the pieces. So, "The American Gift" is a piece that started to bring in that notion of American-separate-from-Europe, American as almost a kind of--undercurrent of



The American Gift, 1976. Audio installation, Centre D'Art Plastique Contemporain, Bordeaux, France.

Europe. My voice speaks in a whisper, then the French man or woman's voice repeats what I say. Also, I think one other general thing I was working with then--and this, I guess, is two things; the two things coincide--was a way to make translated tapes make sense to me. If something's going to be--going to be translated, the Europeans who are speaking my words are just doing that--speaking my words. Therefore, they're following my directions, so there is that notion of--here is French language following the directions of an American speaker. So, with that as a kind of tactical base, then I could bring in the notion of--Americans coming to Europe, by extension American art coming to Europe--whatever. So, for me, that piece started to shape the idea of doing a piece for a particular cultural space.

The words for that piece--the tape for it, what was it like?

My voice in a whisper would say, "You are the Europeans." French man or woman's voice would say, "Nous sommes les Europeans." My voice, "You have America in the back of your

mind"--

That's right.

In French, man and woman's voice would say, "We have America ..." In other words, they would translate what I would say--but the person would be shifted. Whereas I said *you*, they would say *we*. So, I would say--ah--"You are not responsible for what you say"--the French man or woman's voice, "We are not responsible for what we say." There was this black box--five feet by five feet, seven feet high, at one end of the space, and folding chairs at the other end of the space, two or three rows of folding chairs. There was a speaker on either side of the folding chairs, one speaker with my voice, English; the other speaker, their voices, French. So, then after the lines I just told you, my voice came from the box, speaking French, but speaking very obviously an American's French--saying something like "Listen, listen, America speaks, America speaks," and then something like "La, la, la, la, ah, ba, ka, da."

(laughs)

Then, by the chairs, my voice in a whisper, "You've learned the language." French man or woman's voice, "We have learned the language, la, la, la, la, ah, ba, ka, da"--little bit of a French accent this time.

Um-hmm.

Then, from the box my voice, again speaking an awkward, an obviously American's French, would say something like "Attention please. One minute of America, one minute of America." Then there would be one minute of Charles Ives music, or one minute New Orleans jazz, or--one minute of gunshots. It was trying to import this kind of American sound that, then, can become the undercurrent for, and be pushed at--the European viewer.

There's nothing friendly, or generous, it doesn't have those kind of connotations. I don't want to say that it's insulting, but it's provocative.

It turns back on itself and becomes just as insulting to Americans, too.

Yes, it does.

But it's certainly insulting--whether it's insulting to Euro-

peans, or to Americans, it's jabbing.

It is kind of shocking, in a way, that you would make a piece which was meant to--

Well, I feel as though there's probably a tradition of it--but, also, I think for me to--it sort of connected with what we were talking about before, how--if you're going to have audio-taped language, audio-taped sound, audio-taped voice in a piece, this is a voice that cannot be talked to. It's a voice that keeps going on its own. I think that I could almost say in general that any audio-taped voice is an insulting, aggressive voice, no matter what it is saying, since it can't be answered. It's there as an aggressor, no matter how friendly or sweet it is.

That's part of the relationship between human beings and machinery, you know?

Of course, it can always be unplugged. In the situation of doing a show in Europe, if you're not going to be there, they may just never turn it on!

(laughs)

(laughs) But it happens all the time.

Well, another thing you said--we started to talk about this but I want to go back to it. When I said your installations were dream-like, I didn't mean daydreaming, I meant something deeper, like actual dreaming, maybe a nightmare. It's very powerful. And you said, didn't you, that you don't like that?

Oh--I don't. I don't really like--I don't like the viewer to be in a position of--something is happening to him, that he can't control. And that's probably another reason why I started to dislike a lot of live stuff of mine, a lot of live stuff in general. The ritual notion of a lot of live pieces, that kind of--religious notion that I think a lot of performance stuff gets into, is something which I feel very, very alien to.

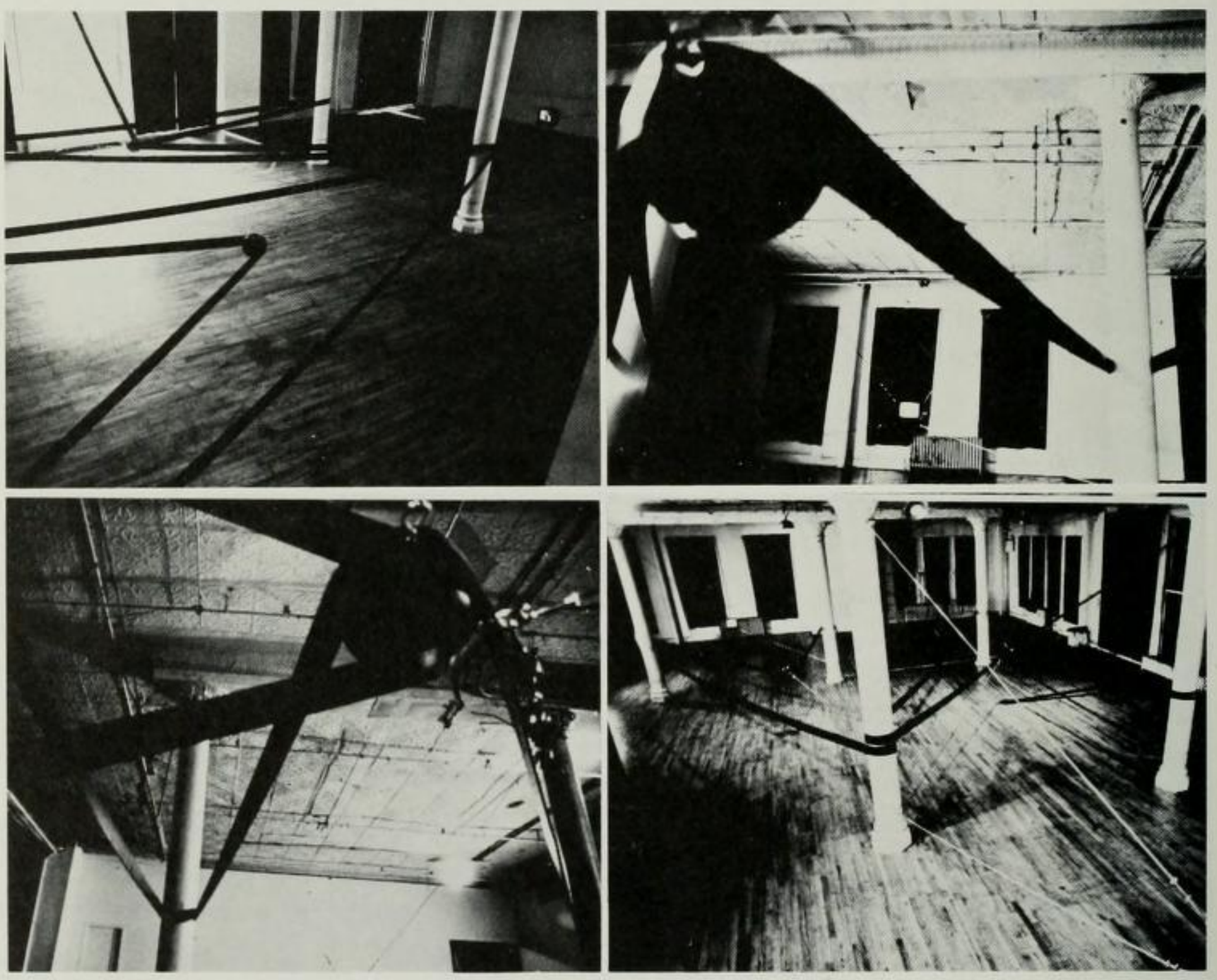
And also, you said you stopped doing live stuff because you were becoming a star, it was a kind of cult--it was a kind of cult built around an art star, and you found that to be uncomfortable?

Ah--well, no, if anything, incredibly comforting, but I didn't like it.

You didn't like the fact that you liked it?

Whatever theoretically I thought art should be, was totally the opposite of that. Yet my stuff--and I'm sure a lot of other people's stuff--I think were leading to that. For example *Avalanche* magazine, which I liked a lot, always had an artist's face on the cover. It began to occur to me at one point: isn't that strange that anybody who knows a piece of mine knows what I look like? And I kept thinking, I don't know if I know what Franz Kline looked like, or--something there seemed very weird to me.

Yes.



VD Lives/TV Must Die, **1978. Video installation, The Kitchen, New York City, New York.**

And yet, at the same time, I would think: it shouldn't be weird, since I want the work to be about a person-to-person meeting place, and you obviously know a person you've met. It's perfectly logical that you would know me from--from my pieces. But something seemed funny about it. I think that's specifically because of performance. Most of the things, or a lot of the things, that I feel influenced by are things that involve performance, whether it's rock music, whatever. Yet at the same time I don't like them. I listen to Punk music, but I never go to Punk concerts. I can't stand to be in that kind of crowd in front of performers. I don't like to be in

that kind of audience, gathered around the performer, I just--

You feel like too much is expected of you?

No, just the opposite. Nothing is expected of me. I'm there to be dragged along by a performer, and--

Manipulated. Yes, I think that's true.

And obviously I'm generalizing, but I think I feel that about all performance, and--and I think that's one of the main reasons why I--when I say I stopped doing live pieces, obviously it wasn't exactly like that, it wasn't saying that "I'm not going to do live pieces ever again." It was that, with this way of thinking in the back of my mind, I noticed that stuff was starting not to be live anymore.

You do something first, and then figure out the reasons.

Yes. And when I realized what was in the back of my mind, that's when I realized what was happening to the pieces I was doing.

Do you ever think about the historical potential of your installations?

I'm forced to wonder how--how can those pieces be retained except in magazine form?

Well, for instance the installation that you did in Bordeaux is being bought by the Beaubourg. It will be in their permanent collection. So, in a hundred years, if there are still people on the earth, and if they're still going to museums, that work could be on display. How would you think those people might react?

Ideally I would like my work to be seen as "This was the perfect sign of the '70s." In other words, I would like the stuff to be very intimately connected--

To the time that it's made.

Ideally, I would like people to be able to look at a piece and say, "This had to be 1973, not '75"--and not because of stylistic reasons, but because of--something that had to do with what was going on at the time. Now, I don't really believe that's actually true about my work--but ideally, I'd like it. That piece, "The American Gift", that was bought by the Beaubourg was a piece done in France and it already has, you know,

French language. It was a perfect piece for them to buy. But, even more, it was relatively small, relatively portable. And I think that's the main reason they bought it.

They just wanted to have a piece by you!

The few installations of mine that have been bought have been among the very few pieces that aren't really that connected to a specific space. For example, the Whitney just bought a piece, and they didn't buy the piece that was made for the Whitney.

No. It's probably too on the edge for them.

Well, also, it couldn't be transported, it couldn't be lent out for group shows, it was so determined for that space. And museums do think of whether a piece is easy to take down, take out or whatever--obviously everything can't be on display all the time.

No.

"The American Gift" is an exception to this because I do think that's a good piece, but--but for the most part I think installations that museums would *buy* would probably be among the minor pieces. I might be wrong. The way I see it now, I most favor the pieces that tie in more to an existing space.

Well--these etchings, for instance--these can be transported, these will be--

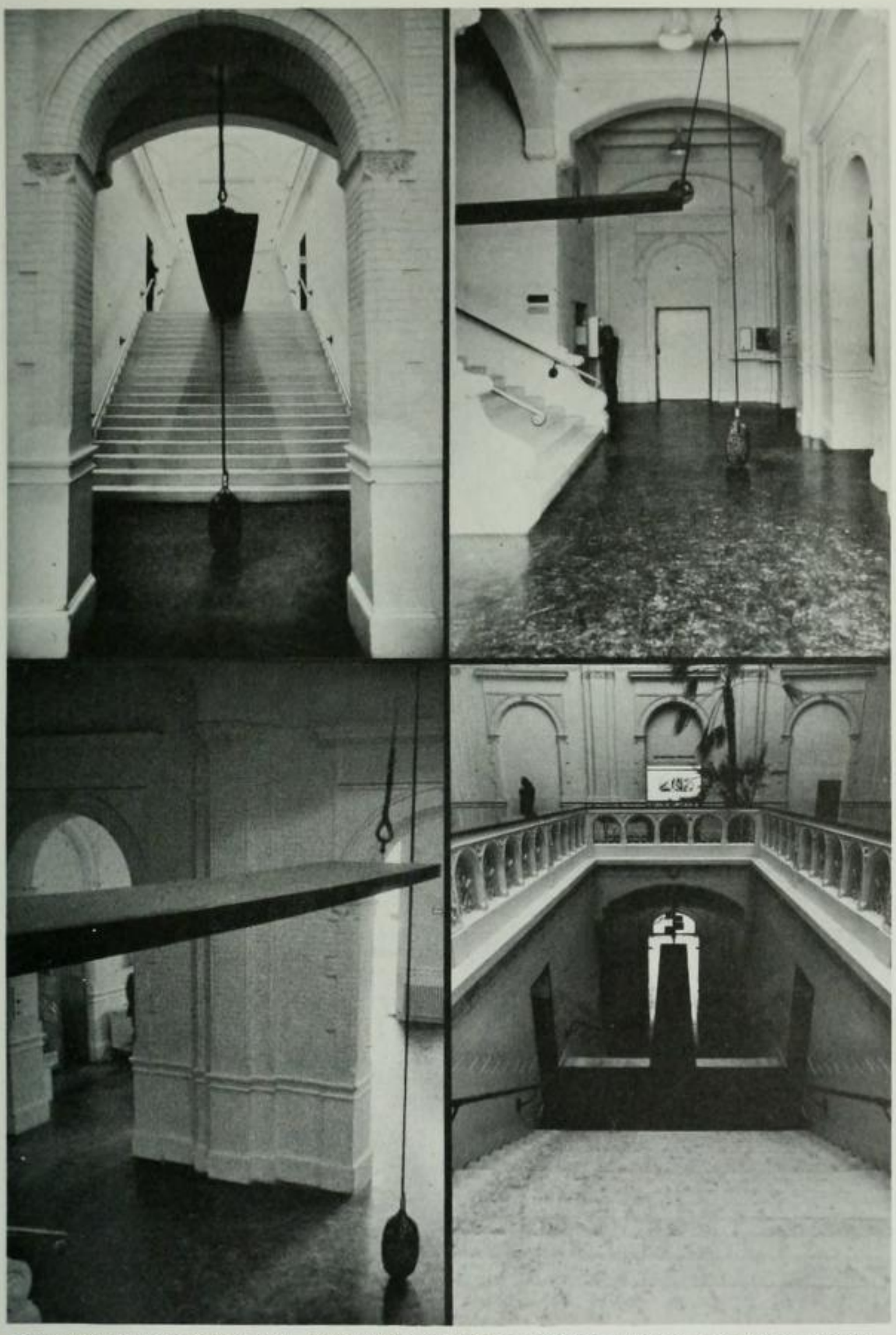
Sure.

Museums could buy these, you know?

One of the things that interested me in doing prints, even when I did them two years ago at Crown Point and at Landfall, is that I don't normally think in terms of "wall", I feel like I've left "wall" out of work. And prints force me to really think of wall. More and more I want--I've done some pieces, some installations that--that have hinted at uses of wall. I have a feeling wall is probably more inherent to a kind of--general condition of art, as we think of it.

I think that's true.

I think the '60s was kind of "floor" time and the '70s are "wall" time.

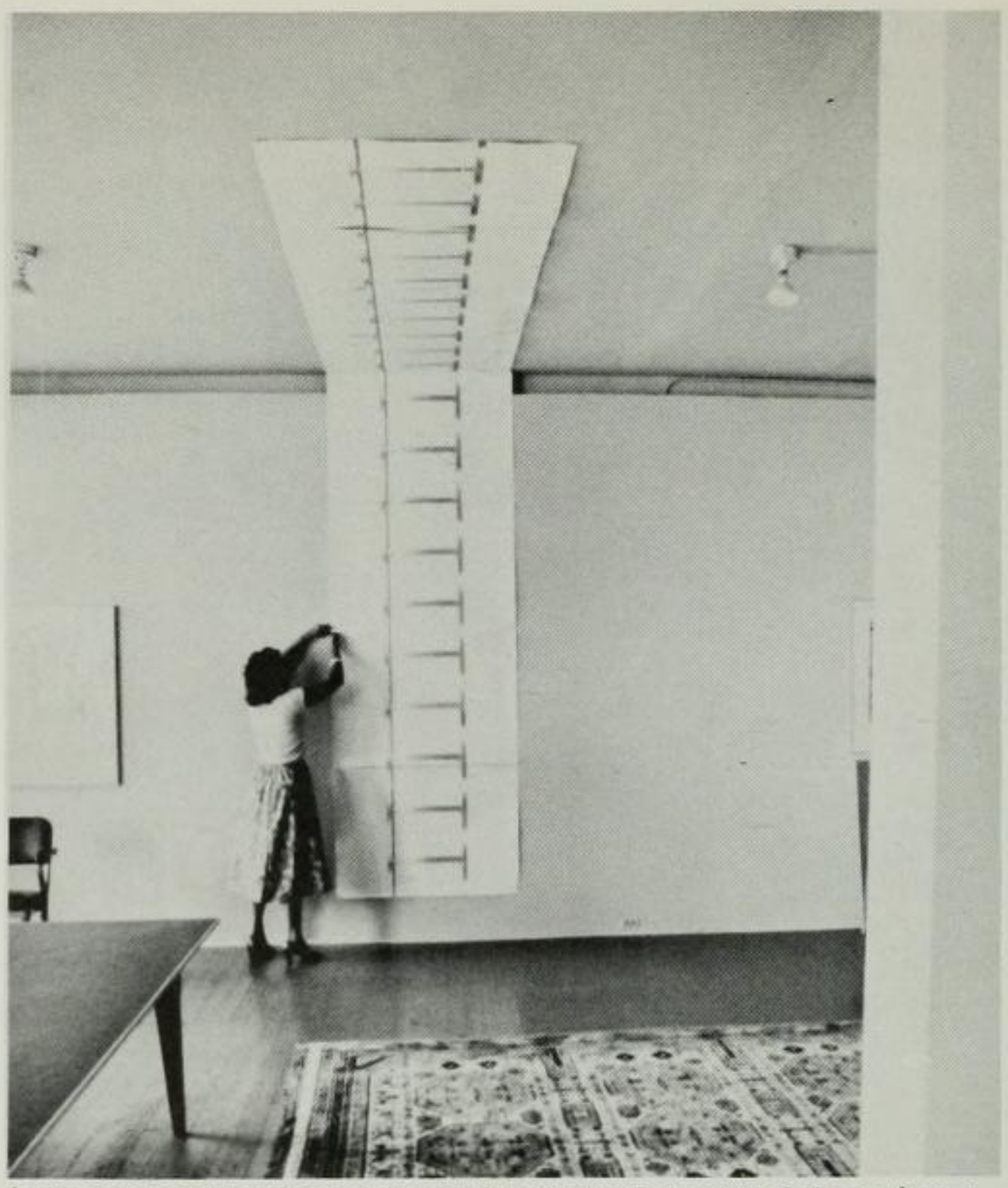


***Monument to the Dead Children*, 1978. Audio installation, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Holland.**

Maybe the '80s will be "air" time.

(laughs)

Have you thought about the titles of the prints any more?



***Ladder*, photoetching with aquatint, 19' 4" h. x 3' 5" w. Each print is 8 pieces of paper individually framed. To be published in 1980 by Crown Point Press (project not yet completed).**

I don't think they need titles as they're seen by viewer. I don't think they need titles once the pieces are up. I think they need titles almost as directions to the installers.

Ah-ha.

For example, I could call that ladder piece "Twenty-foot ladder for any size wall"--which, I think, I would prefer to "Twenty-foot ladder for wall and ceiling." The implication is that it can fit; it is twenty-feet long and it can be on any size wall, so obviously it will have to move onto the ceiling. Now--when it's been installed a viewer coming in will be able to see that.

You said before that you wanted to tie it into the architecture, somehow.

Well the way that I thought of these pieces, I think all three of them, was that I was starting with the basic notion of plate--plate can be, plate can have image, plate as image can be added to another plate as image. As these plates are added, they start to overlap--paper then, paper is added to

paper, and then paper, once it's added to paper, starts to correspond to the form of the room. So you could have a twenty-foot ladder, or a twenty-foot airplane wing. Plate becomes image, becomes paper, becomes wall, becomes room.

Would you say that you're interested actually in architecture? In a way that has been different from what you've done before?

Certainly I was architecturally influenced for a long time. Of course, I'm interested in tying into something that's already been built, rather than building. In that Hamburg piece that we talked about, the baby carriage, bicycle, fishing rod--I mean, one thing I think that's starting to interest me lately is--the notion of--the notion that one ready-made product tied to another can then start to form what we think of as generalized architectural shapes, shelter, whatever. So, in other words--maybe this is--I'm skipping around again.

It's all right.

It's symptomatic of the way I think. Maybe we can go back to the etchings for a minute. Because I think this is pretty typical of the way I think about a lot of pieces. I know I had in mind the idea of making--of making three, three pieces. I don't know why except I didn't like the notion of two, because two is just too much of a dialogue--the third element always sort of thickens the plot. The third element is always the clinker.

Yes.

That notion of three has always interested me. I think one thing--one thing I retained from my Catholic background--

The trinity!

Well, the notion of father, son, very logical, very understandable. But then, the Holy Ghost!

The Holy Ghost--it comes in--

Just out of nowhere.

Right.

So this kind of clinker destroys the mirroring capacity of twos. Three is just--four then ties it up again. With three, there's a loose end. So, I wanted three, and thinking somewhat architecturally to start with, mainly because the first

etchings I did--the last etchings I did here--two years ago, were very discrete, very much picture-etchings--almost a corollary to my "real work".

Yes.

So, I thought, well--if I'm going to do etching again, the only way that would make sense is if, in some way it approached more the realm of a "real piece". So, I was naturally thinking in installation-like terms. So I was thinking in terms of larger scale. So, I thought, you know, one was going to be very high, one was going to be very long, and one was going to be almost square.

I see: the ladder, the airplane wing, and the three flags.

Yes. I started thinking, what can I--what can get me to that long vertical--what can get me to that, to that long horizontal, what can get me to the square? In other words, starting with a generalized vertical, I used the ladder as the concretized vertical, and now this gets us to a vertical in--well, in this case in sort of three-dimensional space. I think that's pretty much how I've thought of, how I've thought of most of the installations. They always start with general ideas--like that Sonnabend piece.

What was it called, by the way?

"The People Machine". It began with the notion of something coming into the room, something coming from outside into the room, something connecting with something else in the room, so--so I was thinking of this kind of abstracted line. My first drawings and diagrams--the Sonnabend diagram for the piece was just this line coming in from the window, going down the side of the room, connecting with something at the doorway--almost drawing this kind of rectangle that fit into the rectangle of the space. And then I tried to find some ways to get to that.

It strikes me that it was also something, perhaps, like a diagram for the kind of activity that takes place there, because, the viewer comes into the room and walks around the gallery....

Yeah, it's true. You come in--the gallery is built as this kind of L-shaped corridor that leads you to a main, central, somewhat enclosed room.

And the point where the catapult is, is the point where

Proofs of *Flags*, photoetching with aquatint, 4' 2.5" h. x 10' 3" w. To be published in 1980 by Crown Point Press (project not yet completed).

people always meet--like a central, focal point. You know, when I was reading art criticism about your early work, people brought up, obviously, Marcel Duchamp, but--they also brought up Jasper Johns. And now you've done these etchings of flags, and I wonder--

How does that bring up Johns? Yeah, I've wondered about that--

Well--

These flags are not--of course, I always thought of Johns as important to me, especially in my poetry days; I think the way I was using language was really influenced by--by his flags, his numbers. The fact that you could draw a number, and not a tree. A number is something that exists only--*only--*

On paper.

As it's drawn. So I was using words that way. I would use idiomatic expressions, or words like "there" or "then", or words that refer to the time of reading the page or to the place of the page, or puns because they cancel themselves out as words. In my writing days I was really interested in paper as a literal page space.

Oh, I see. The flags in your etchings are the opposite of Johns' flags. This is a two-dimensional rendition of a three-dimensional object. They give the illusion, clearly, of three-dimensional objects.

They are specific flags, illusions of specific flags, draped in a specific way.

Right. They bring up questions about photography, too.

Yeah, I guess. I guess all three of the etchings have something to do with that. I'm not sure if I know how to refer to it, though!

Well, it's just something to bring up.

When I was thinking, initially, of the images for the etchings--the ladder and the wing came. The ladder was very, very easily a vertical. And the wing, this could be the horizontal. With regard to what I wanted to be the almost square shape, I wasn't quite sure--the flags were harder to come to. In the same way that the ladder could appear on paper very similar to the way that a ladder could be leaned on the wall, then I--with regard to the square etching, I wanted something that could be hung on the wall--something that could be draped on the wall, and I was thinking, was thinking of flags.

Somebody wanted me to ask you what you're reading these days? What books are you reading? Question from the audience.

Probably in the last few years I skim more than I read. Actually, I think, the way I've always read is to have tables of contents around, to have titles around--and my reading is skimming, more than reading. I have to have a lot of books around, I can't borrow books, I have to--I have to own them. I have to have them there, to constantly refer to. I have my books really carefully categorized.

Oh!

So that--when I'm about to do a piece, I know the categories I want to use, so I go--I go and look at contents, and--

What are the categories?

They start with Body and end with Revolution. What bothers me about it, is that up to now art and fiction have been separate. All my novels, all my art books, are separate from the categories. And that seems absurd to me and I want to

find a way to fit those in, but I don't know exactly how, where I want to put them. I wish I could give examples of the--of the categorization, because sometimes I think that might be the best piece I've done.

Your library! (laughs) What are you going to be doing next? Do you know?

One thing we didn't talk about was some of the stuff I'd done last--which might be worth mentioning, because it might have something to do with--with what I'm doing next.

I thought that the piece that you had done last was the Hamburg piece?

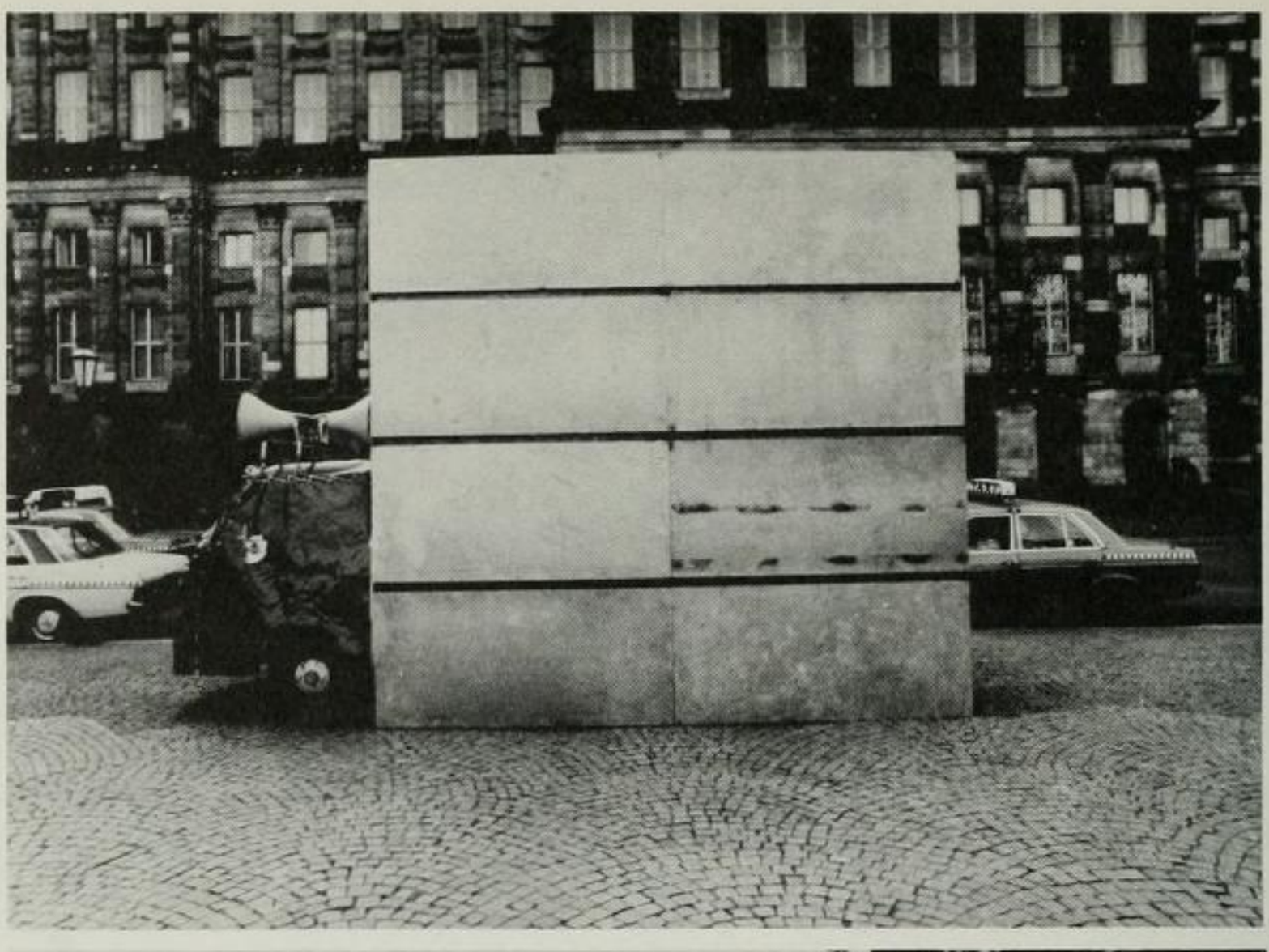
Yeah, it was, but right before that was--maybe a reason to mention this was that I guess it was the first outside piece, you know?

Oh!

It was a travelling truck, a flat-bed truck; it was an installation designed for five town squares in five cities in Holland. In each city it would appear for three days. On the bed of the truck were something like twenty-eight steel panels, twelve-feet long. So each day the truck folds out into a different shape. The truck is always used as the base for the shape. The first day it folds out into basic steps leading up to a wall. Second day, it folds out into a series of three or four shelters, or corridor-like shapes. The third day into a kind of table-and-chair-like shape, using the flat bed of the truck as part of the table. The cab of the truck gains a face, so it becomes this kind of "Truck as mechanical monster", you know?

Yes!

On top of the cab there's two speakers, one facing front, one facing back. On an audiotape, my voice in English, a woman's voice in Dutch. Background of a lot of car horns, a lot of overlapping, very aggressive. As car horns fade, voice comes in, voice starts out like a kind of electioneering truck voice. Voice addresses, "Ladies and Gentlemen," voice asks, "Is there a terrorist in the crowd?" And the car horns go again. Then, from there on, part of the tape is addressed to the terrorist, part of the tape is addressed to the--normal people. Things like, "Pardon me, now, while I talk to the terrorist", or, "Pardon me, now, while I talk to the normal people"--or, one's "Pardon me, now, while I talk to myself"--



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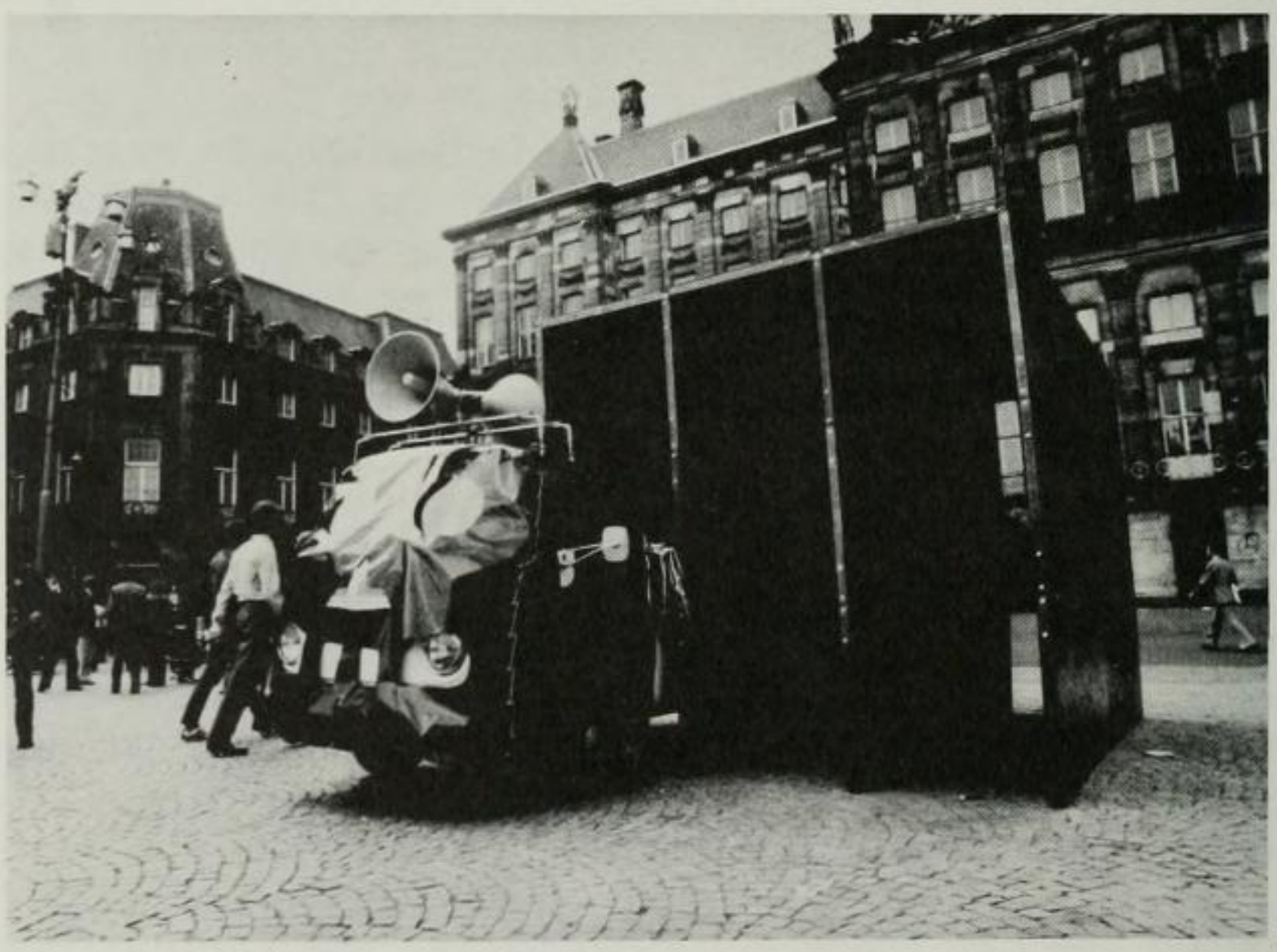


Day 2.

The Peoplemobile, 1979. Mobile audio installation presented in Amsterdam, Middleburg, Rotterdam, Grongingen, Eindhoven. Sponsored by De Appel, Amsterdam.

but usually it's either the terrorist or the normal people. Tape is basically the same for all three days, except for some parts which change day by day according to the particular shape. In other words, when it's the table-and-chair shape, "Feed the hungry terrorists. Sit down with the terrorists", that kind of stuff. I'm making this sound more confusing than it is.

The Peoplemobile, **1979. Day 3. Mobile audio installation.**

No, no.

Then the Dutch woman's voice changes tone a bit and becomes like a telephone voice, and says something like "At the tone, the time will be--one o'clock exactly"--bong, and a church-bell sounds. Then the time and the tones start to overlap, so by the time it's twelve o'clock, there are eight bongs, eight bongs going on and lots of parts overlapping. And the voice says, "When the time you hear is the time you have, something's going to happen here."

(laughs)

You know, in the past, I've been using gallery space as if it's a kind of town square.

So, you might as well go one step further?

Why not do something in a town square? But sometimes I wonder about that, about most of my stuff. I mean, I think of my stuff as political, but I can understand people who are really committed to a political art thinking that my stuff is cheating--

A parody.

It is a kind of parody of politics.

Do you consider that you're really making political art?

In order to maintain a kind of civil order, politics has to maintain a point, whereas maybe art, if at all valid as politics, can sort of thicken the plot. In other words, it would seem to me that an artist should be obligated to be against any kind of political system that would be in operation in his or her time and place. That would be the only way art could be useful, as politics. It would have to negate the existance of political order.

To negate, that's one thing. But would you say that it has a further responsibility to undermine?

What I'm wondering about my own stuff is that--it undermines, but it doesn't really present an alternative.

I think what your art undermines is the sense of security. Personal security.

Yes. And then when I think badly of the work, I think it can be a very comforting thing to fall back on, because you don't have to take a definite stand, all you have to do is undermine. In other words, I'm sort of, like, raising a ruckus!

Right. You're inciting people.

But--yeah, but to what? And I wonder if that's a real flaw.

Well, do you know what you are inciting them to?

No, that's what I mean--I don't know.

You just want to incite.

I hate it when it's said that way, but I think I have to say yes, just say yes. Maybe I think that that's the way art really should be. That maybe the function of art, as a category in relation to other categories in the world, is to undermine. Then, maybe politics as a separate category, can build something up. But art has to knock it apart, first.

Maybe you could say that it just has to present an alternative to the existing situation? That doesn't have such negative connotations. And then you could include all kinds of art.

Yeah, but what I'm--but my stuff isn't exactly presenting an alternative.

No.

An alternative must exist--but I'm not really giving an alternative. And I'm not sure if I like that. But I do think that maybe that's--maybe it is what art should be devoted to--

You asked me when you first got here if I really like doing interviews. So, I thought I would ask you if you really like doing art?

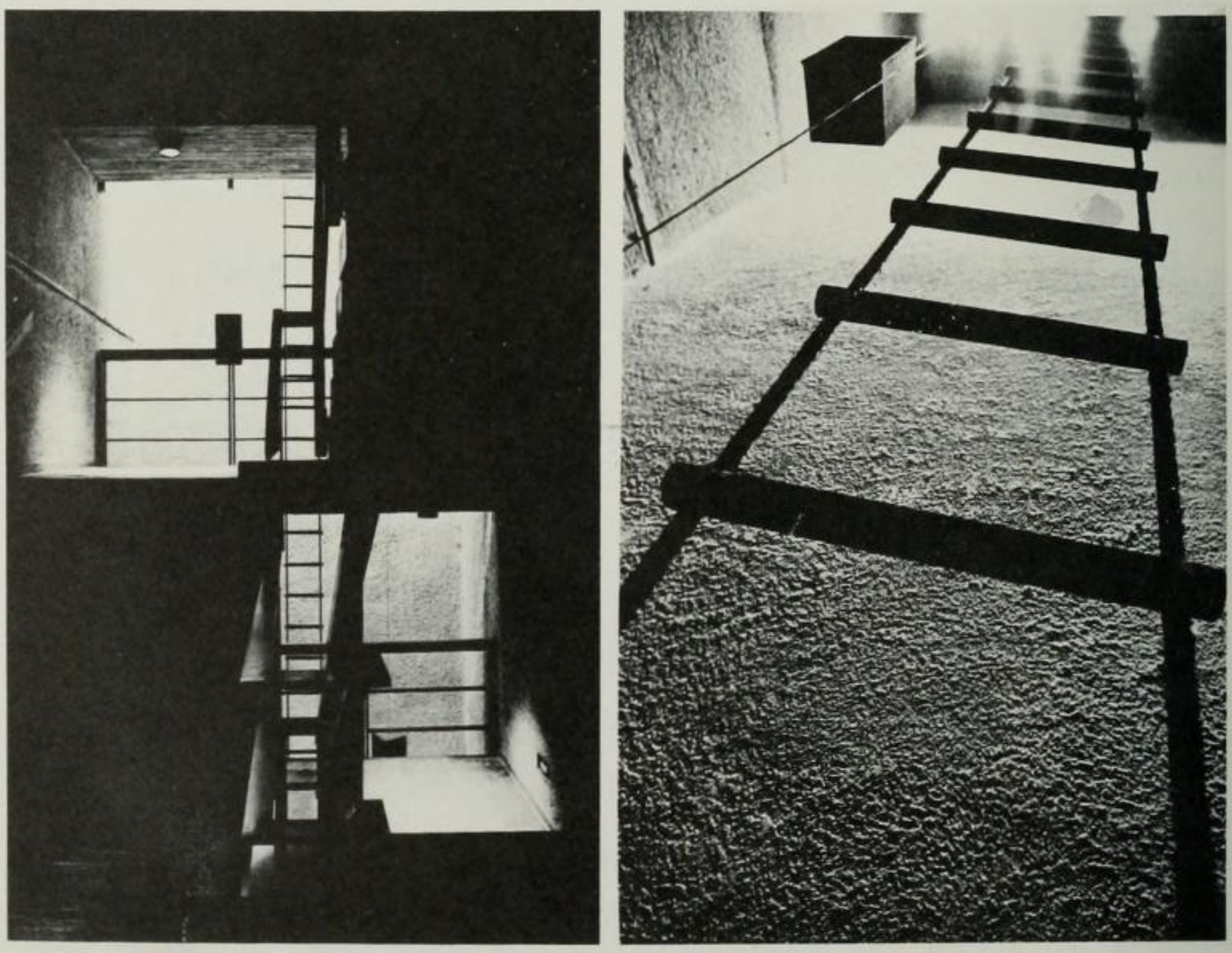
I can't think of anything else I'd want to do. I feel constantly agonized, doing art, but I have a feeling what I'm agonized by is the kind of--is the art system that I've committed myself to, and put my stuff in. I'm agonized by deadlines and all these things, and that I'm not caught up. It's not the actual doing pieces. Yes, I have to say, yes, I do like doing art.

###

"I mean, ideally, I want my position to be–I'm the guerilla fighter. I go from city to city, I go from place to place, and examine the terrain, I set something up so there are these little bombs in all these places."

Films (all silent)

1969 *Three Frame Studies,* black-and-white/color, 9 minutes, Super-8
1970 *Applications,* color, 8 minutes, Super-8
Open-Close, color, 6 minutes, Super-8
Openings, color, 14 minutes, Super-8
Rubbings, color, 8 minutes, Super-8
See-Through, color, 5 minutes, Super-8
Three Relationship Studies, color, 15 minutes, Super-8
Two Adaptation Studies, black-and-white/color, 16 minutes, 16 mm
Two Cover Studies, color, 9 minutes, Super-8
Two Takes, color, 8 minutes, Super-8
1971 *Conversions,* black-and-white, 72 minutes, Super-8
Pick-Ups, color, 15 minutes, Super-8
Watch, black-and-white, 9 minutes, Super-8
Waterways (Burst: Storage), color, 6 minutes, Super-8
Zone, color, 15 minutes, Super-8
1972 *Face to Face,* color, 15 minutes, Super-8
Hand to Hand, color, 12 minutes, Super-8
1973-4 *My Word,* color and b/w, 120 minutes, Super-8



Tonight We Escape from New York, 1979. Audio installation, Whitney Museum, New York.

1974 *Art Now*, Washington, D.C.
71st American Exhibition, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Project 74, Koln, Germany
Eight Contemporary Artists, Museum of Modern Art, New york
1975 *Video Art*, Museum of Modern Art, New York
Lives, Fine Arts Building, New York
Autogeography, Whitney Museum Downtown, New York
Body Art, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois
Video Art, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
1976 *72nd American Exhibition*, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Identite/Identifications, Bourdeaux, France
Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
In Transit, L.A. Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Calif.
Video Art: An overview, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, Calif.
Language and Structure in North America, Kensington Art Center, Toronto, Canada
1977 *Improbable Furniture*, I.C.A., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum, New York
Filmex, Los Angeles, California
Time, Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Art of the 70's, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois
American Art in Belgium Collections, Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, Belgium
Vienna Performance Festival, Vienna, Austria
1978 *Venice Biennale*, Venice, Italy
The Sense of the Self, Independent Curators Incorporated, Washington, D.C.
3 Installations, Tampa Bay Art Center, Tampa Bay, Florida
A Great Big Drawing Show, P.S. 1, New York City, New York
Journees Interdisciplinaires sur l'art corporeal et les performances,
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
Concept, Narrative, Document, Musuem of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois
Sound, P.S. 1, New York
The Artist: Hermit? Investigator? Social Worker?, Kunstverein, Hamburg, Germany

Selected Writing by the Artist

1968 *Four Book* (book), 0 To 9 Press, New York
1969 *Transference: Roget's Thesaurus* (book), 0 To 9 Press, New York
Selection of work, *Street Works* (book), 0 To 9 Press, New York
1970 'Notebook Excerpts', *Assembling*, New York
1971 'Notes on TRADEMARKS', *This Book is a Movie*, Jerry Bowles, ed., Delta Books
'Notebook Excerpts', *Interfunktionen #5*, Koln, Germany
1972 'Notes on Work', *Avalanche #5* (Acconci issue), New York
Notes Toward the Development of a Show (book), from January 1972 at Sonnabend Gallery, Editions Haussman, Hamburg, Germany
1973 'Notes on RUBBING PIECE', *Breakthrough Fictioneers*, Richard Kostelanetz, editor, Something Else Press, New York
Pulse (for my mother), Multiplicata, Paris, France
1974 'Notes on Video', *Art Rite Magazine*, New York
1975 'Notes on Drawing', Kunstforum, Germany
'West, He Said', *Vision Magazine #1*, Crown Point Press, Oakland, California
1976 'Ten-Point Plan for Video', *Video Art*, Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, New York
'Three Adaptation Studies', *Essaying Essays*, Richard Kostelanetz, editor, Out-of-the-Window Press, New York
'Play for New York', *Vision Magazine #3*, Crown Point Press, Oakland, Calif.
1977 *Leap/Think/Re-Think/Fall* (book), Wright State University Press, Dayton, Ohio
'Venice Belongs to Us', *La Citta di Riga*, Rome, Italy

Videotapes

1971 *Association Area*, black-and-white, 60 minutes, sound
Centers, black-and-white, 20 minutes, sound
Claim Excerpts, black-and-white, 60 minutes, sound
Contacts, black-and-white, 30 minutes, sound
Focal Point, black-and-white, 30 minutes, sound
Pryings, black-and-white, 20 minutes
Pull, black-and-white, 30 minutes, sound
Remote Control, black-and-white, 60 minutes, sound
Two Track, black-and-white, 30 minutes, sound
Waterways, black-and-white, 20 minutes, sound
1972 *Face Off*, black-and-white, 30 minutes, sound
Face Off, black-and-white, 10 minutes, sound
Undertone, black-and-white, 30 minutes, sound
1973 *Command Performance*, black-and-white, 50 minutes, sound
Full Circle, black-and-white, 30 minutes, sound
Home Movies, black-and-white, 30 minutes, sound
Recording Studio from "Air Time", black-and-white, 30 minutes, sound
Stages, black-and-white, 30 minutes, sound
Theme Song, black-and-white, 30 minutes, sound
Walk-Over
1974 *Face of the Earth*, black-and-white, 20 minutes, sound
Open Book
Shoot, black-and-white, 10 minutes, sound
Turn On, black-and-white, 20 minutes, sound
1976 *The Red Tapes*, black-and-white, 140 minutes, sound

Vito Acconci

Born: January 24, 1940, Bronx, New York
Lives and works in New York City

One Person Exhibitions

1970 Gain Ground Gallery, New York
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
1971 John Gibson Gallery, New York
Protetch-Rivkin Gallery, Washington, D.C.
1972 Sonnabend Gallery, New York
Sonnabend Gallery, Paris, France
L'Attico, Rome, Italy
1973 Modern Art Agency, Naples, Italy
Galerie D, Brussels, Belgium
Sonnabend Gallery, New York
Galeria Schema, Florence, Italy
1974 Galeria Forma, Genoa, Italy
Galeria A. Castelli, Milan, Italy
1975 Sonnabend Gallery, New York
Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland, Oregon
And/Or Gallery, Seattle, Washington
Carp, Los Angeles, California
Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco, California
Hallwalls, Buffalo, New York
James Mayor, London, England
1976 The Kitchen, New York
Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio
Sonnabend Gallery, New York
Anthology Film Archives, New York
1977 Galerie D, Brussels, Belgium
Modern Art Agency, Naples, Italy
Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
Anthology Film Archives: Film and Video Retrospective, New York
School of Visual Arts, New York
University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass.
The Clocktower: Institute of Art and Urban Resources, New York
Salle Patino: Centre D'Art Contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland
1978 Salvatore Ala, Milan, Italy
The Kitchen, New York
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California
Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Minneapolis, Minn.
Kunstmuseum Luzern, Luzern, Switzerland
I.C.C., Antwerp, Belgium
Galerie Nachst Ste. Stephan, Vienna, Austria
Mario Diacono, Bologna, Italy
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Holland
Whitney Museum, New York (video)
1979 Young-Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
Sonnabend Gallery, New York
Rhode Island University, Kingston, R.I.
Town-Square Projects (sponsored by De Appel, Amsterdam, Holland)
Sonnabend Gallery, Paris, France

Selected Group Exhibitions

1968 *Events,* Central Park, New York
Tiny Events, Longview Country Club, New York
1969 *Performance,* Hunter College, New York
Language III, Dwan Gallery, New York
Street Works, Architectural League of New York
55,087, Seattle Art Gallery, Seattle, Washington
1970 *995,000,* Vancouver, B.C., Canada
Information, Museum of Modern Art, New York
Software, Jewish Museum, New York
Recorded Activities, Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
1971 *Sonsbeek 71,* Arnheim, Holland
Art Systems, Museum of Modern Art, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Project: Pier 17, Museum of Modern Art, New York
Artist's Videotapes, Finch College, New York
1972 *Notes and Scores for Sounds,* San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, S.F., Calif.
Spoleto Festival, Italy
Documenta V, Kassel, Germany
Making Megalopolis Matter, New York Cultural Center, New York
1973 *Recent Drawing,* Whitney Museum, New York
Some Recent American Art, Museum of Modern Art traveling exhibition, Australia and New Zealand
Recent American Art, Seattle Museum of Art, Seattle, Washington
Contemporanea, Rome, Italy

Howard Fried

"Success in my terms–in terms of making a participatory piece successful, making the activity work right–is achieved when people start developing a style for dealing with the machine, for dealing with the situation."

View

Interview by Robin White at Crown Point Press, Oakland, California, 1979.

I've tried to think what it was that I wanted to know from you. I'm really very interested in the three most recent things that I know that you've done: Vito's Reef, *the* Museum Reaction Piece *and* Condom. *I've been thinking about the relationship between you, or your work, and Terry Fox's work, Chris Burden's work. And Vito--he's the other person that I really would connect you with, Vito Acconci. Vito, Chris, and Terry--all of them spent, until, say, '74 or '75--exploring, doing performances that related to their own bodies, using their own bodies as the subject, or the object of the artwork. And rather than using your own body, you seem to have been involved in exploring your own psychology. These last three pieces--*Vito's Reef *and the* Museum Reaction Piece *and* Condom--*seem to be heading more toward exploring the psychology of society, of a particular kind of group--*

I was thinking that when you emphasize the body--you know, the works of those people were pretty psychological works.

Yes, certainly Vito's is, or Chris' work.

I mean psychological in the sense of--exploring their--or, revealing their position in the world psycho-narratively.

Yes, yes.

It's true, they used the body. But to describe those works as body works puts everything on a much more superficial, almost formal, level. A lot of those works dealt with the psychological situation of the specific artist, you know. I think a lot of those works dealt with a kind of a passage process, facing the monster, facing the truth.

Yes.

The dynamics, how you get by these obstacles, is the most important aspect of anybody's work--I mean, to me. With each of the people you mentioned, if you look into the works you see they each have a kind of characteristic posture or stance, or psychological style, for facing their problems. I find it interesting, I don't know.

Of course it's interesting.

What I'm saying is that body art has more of a limited time frame than a limited subject matter. It's like--you know, age periods have a limited time span, but there's no limit to their subject matter.

In articles and reviews about your work, even as recently as two years ago, people still referred to your early preoccupation with an

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"approach-avoidance syndrome". Since then I think they claim that you've moved on to "conflict resolution"--

I moved on to that--I mean, in the work, in--1972. I started doing--trying to do works about conflict resolution--trying to build works around structures capable of resolving conflicts. The change was acknowledging, you know, acknowledging my desire to resolve conflicts. Whereas earlier, I think, I was pretty enchanted with conflict. I don't know how successful I actually was in resolving my conflicts at that time.

Well, I think that you're certainly successful in fomenting conflicts, anyway!

Fermenting?

No, fomenting: encouraging, stirring up. Is the structure still conflict resolution?

No, I only--when you talk about conflict resolution it's not like I'm trying to take some philosophical position. I "resolve conflicts"--I'm using a kind of mechanical matrix to set a piece up, and that matrix establishes a conflict and the possibility--or, the inevitability--of the resolution of the conflict within that particular piece.

How are the pieces different now that you moved from approach/avoidance toward conflict/resolution?

Those are pretty academic ways of looking at things. And it's also hard for me to talk about them without being specific. I could say that *The Burghers of Fort Worth* and *Vito's Reef* have something in common. In *The Burghers of Fort Worth*, the matrix, or the armature, was what I saw as the structure of art education, today in higher education institutions.

That was in 1976. You went to Fort Worth and you arranged for four golf pros to give you golf lessons?

What I was trying to do was set up a situation where one person was getting too many imputs to comprehend at once.

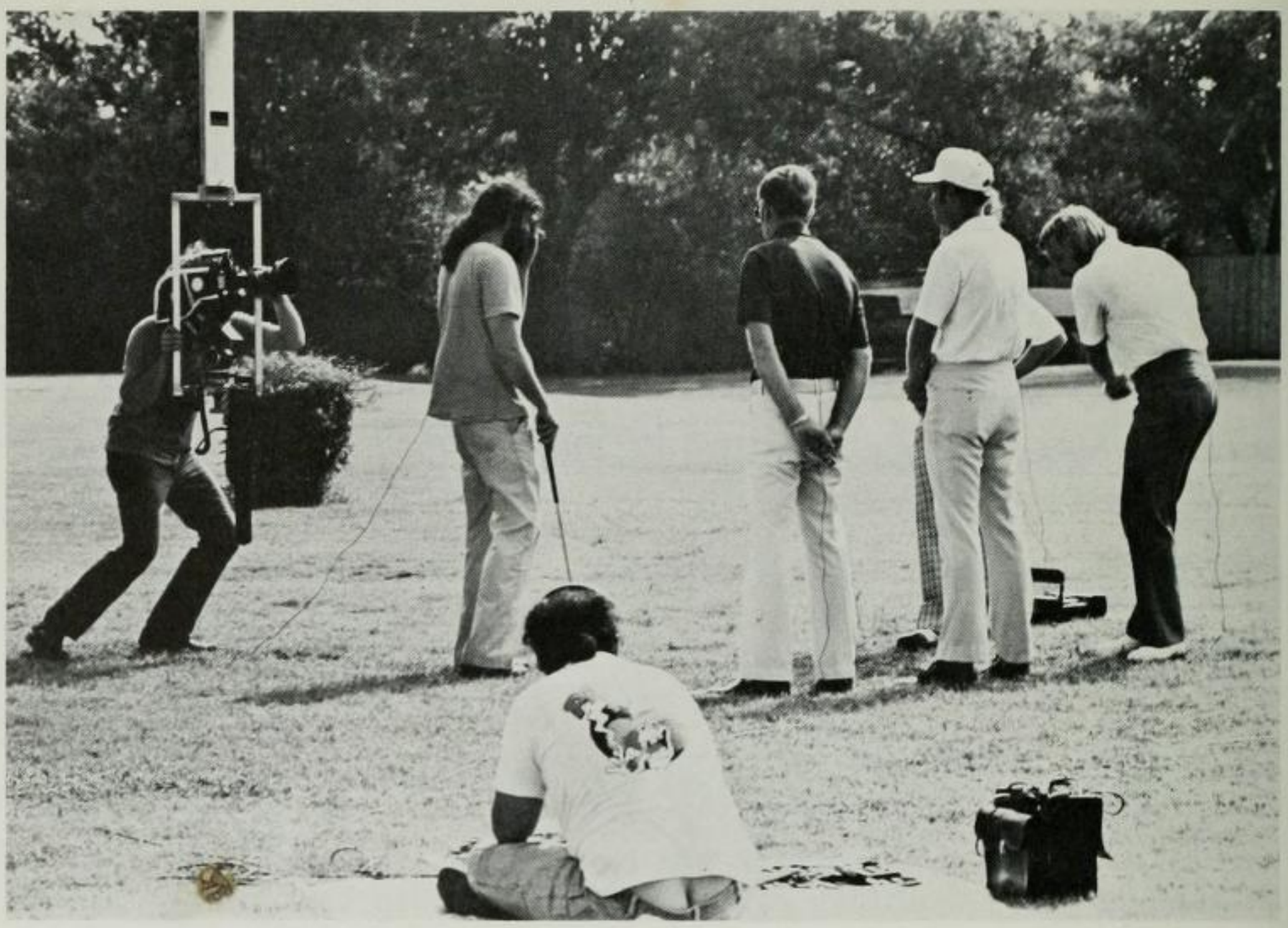
You?

Yes, I was the student, so I was getting information--I was getting instruction. Getting instruction from four people at once. Which is too much to assimilate.

Um-hmm.

The reason I was concerned with this art education business was because I'm involved in it, you know. I teach.

Yes.



The Burghers of Fort Worth, 1975. Performance and film, Fort Worth, Texas.

That was a more self-conscious look at my situation as a teacher than say, *Vito's Reef*. The tone, the attitude, is something like this: I know this about this situation, but I'm not really a part of it, I just happen to be right in the middle of it. So I'm self-conscious--I mean I'm sort of uncomfortable about where I am. Anyway, a couple of years later--

Well, before you get to a couple of years later, tell me--what happened?

Oh, you never saw the film.

I didn't see the film.

The film became something different than the idea. What happened was the film became very involved with the language of the golf pros, the language of Texas, and of the game. The language is a matrix all its own. The content of the instruction, the specific use of cliches and idioms, all of that became the subject. What I expected to happen was a lot of disagreement among the instructors. And, it might have, you know, with a different group of people, but that ended up not being so important. Actually they supported each other very beautifully. But there's too much information, and I can't assimilate it at once, and--there's a certain amount of frustration, there's also a certain amount of growth, you know, I mean, I do learn something--not a lot. Of course, what happened was that since I had to edit the film and it took a year, I learned plenty, you know!

About editing? From golf?

No, about golf from editing. They did say a lot, but I might have gotten about five percent while I was hearing it.

I see.

They happened to range in age from early 20's to, probably, late 50's. And they have attitudes that seem somehow characteristic of their ages and of Texas. The language is just packed with those attitudes.

Okay. You said that there were similarities between that and Vito's Reef?

Well, in *Vito's Reef*, the dynamics of the situation--all of it is a teaching situation.

Yes.

I'm lecturing, or--directing, or sort of coaching--just teaching, in the last part. But the self-consciousness of "let's look at the role together" is gone. It's more "let's get the job done. I'm gonna get this job done now."

Well, I only saw the first half of that tape.

That's part one, the other part's not finished yet.

Yes.

The reason that I called it *Vito's Reef* was--the idea of the reef never got developed too much in the first half. But most of part two takes place on this reef. It's a kind of situation--a place people go, or used to go by tradition, to be apart, to perform the infinitive.

To perform the infinitive?

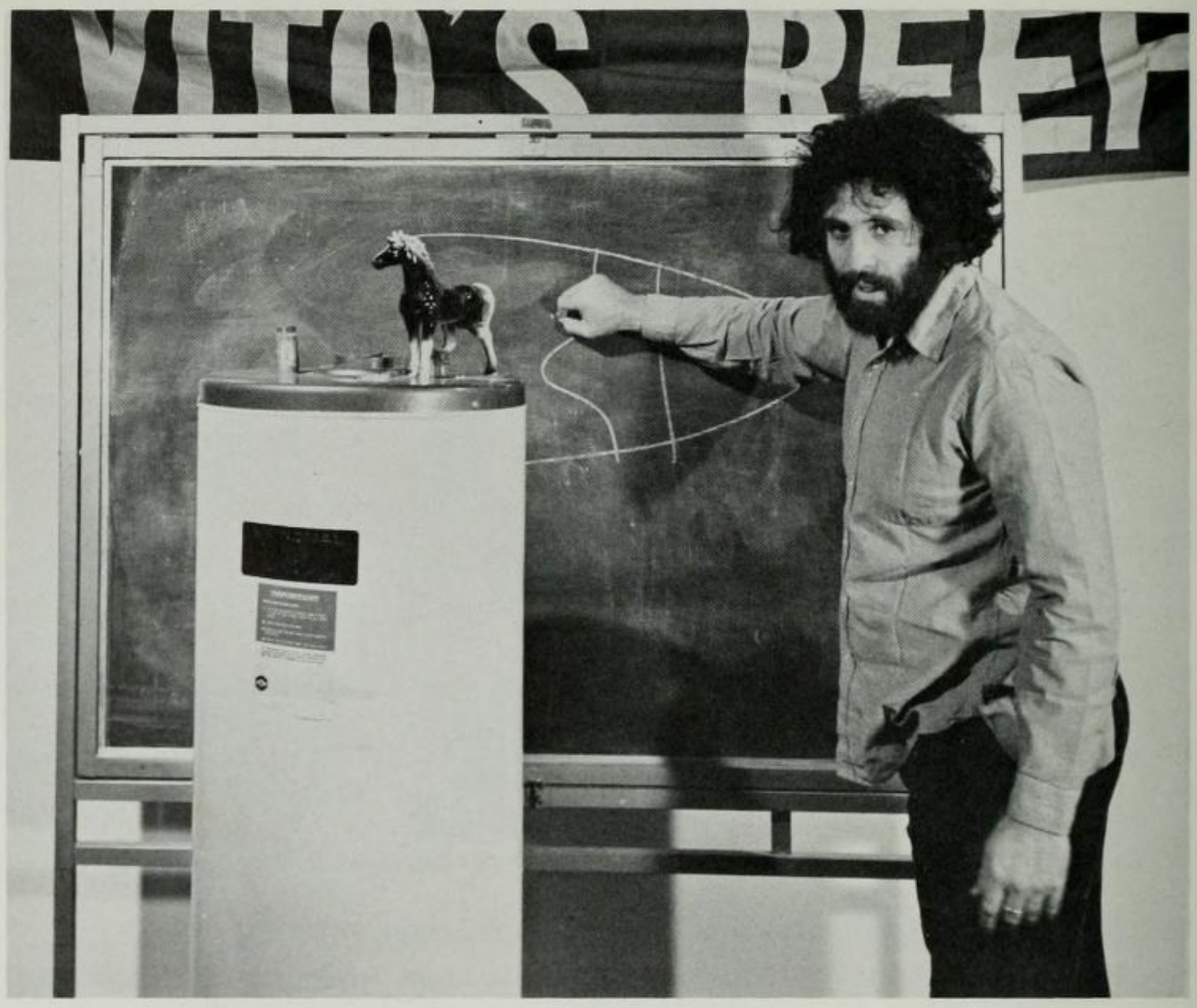
That's just how I will refer to it in the second part. The infinitive is, to veto.

To veto? Oh, but in your title it's spelled V-i-t-o, not v-e-t-o.

I know.

And I thought it was referring to Acconci. I thought it was a kind of acknowledgement.

Yes. The acknowledgement's important, but the verb is very important too. It has to do with--well, I don't know if I want to talk about that because it isn't done. It has to do with certain aspects of a psychological stance, you know? I'm dealing kind of abstractly with what the role of performance has been in avant garde art, and what it is today.



Vito's Reef, 1978. Video tape, San Francisco.

Well, how do you see it?

Well, I think it was the most appropriate form to do certain kinds of work for certain people; it was more than just an area they wanted to work in.

In other words, it chose them more than they--

Yes. It had to do with the kind of works they wanted to do, or the works I wanted to do, anyway. Something had to be confronted on a certain level.

It's very direct.

An audience provided an element in a work that--that you couldn't have in any other form, you know?

Yes. And, now?

Now I don't perform very often. When you perform *for* an audience there's a separation between the audience and the performance. I always wanted the audience to think of itself as being an element

of the piece. The audience is less neutral than it used to be, it has more expectations.

Well, maybe it's too soon to get into this, but--in my notes, I kept writing the same question over and over again, which is: how do you relate to your audience? I didn't see any of your early performances, I've only seen the tapes. Any my experience was--that I'd watch the tape, and then I'd come out and I'd say, well, can you tell me what this was all about?

Do you feel that way?

Yes. Would you take any piece--not these recent ones, an early piece--and tell me where does the audience come in?

Well, see, you can't find a similarity between a live performance and a tape, you know?

No.

In a tape there's no interplay.

No.

It's there for the audience to see, you know?

Yes.

But I could talk about an early performance piece like *Forty Winks*. I laid out--I did a few things, I addressed the audience and planted questions with them, built up a certain credibility, ate a cake with my hands (laughs). Then I asked them to follow me, and told them that the answers to the questions--

Follow you out of the museum on to the streets of Berkeley?

Just to follow--yes. And the answers to the questions that arose would be answered.

So, that involved direct audience participation?

Yes. So, they followed me, and I never did tell them; I never answered the questions. But if they realized that the situation was equivalent to--being walked, being led out of bondage, being walked around until everybody who was a slave died, or freed themselves, went home--then, they understood it.

I wonder if I would have understood.

A lot of people just--stopped, because--because of whatever their reasons were. Maybe they had to go somewhere, or something. That's

Intraction, 1973 and 1974. Performance and videotape, MOCA, San Francisco

an interesting point: do they understand it? It's understood to different degrees. I don't know, I don't know who got what from that piece, except for one person. Jim Melchert called me the next day and he--he knew.

He understood.

Yeah, you know, he was laughing and calling me Moses.

Right!

That moment's very valuable to me; my relationship to whoever that happens for. If I were to lay the information out in a piece so it's more available to everybody, I would destroy the possibility of that moment.

In this instance, the audience was also involved in the performance. There are other performances like Which Hunt, *or* Sea Sell, *where the people who were involved in the piece, were manipulated--*

Yes.

By you. The participants in Forty Winks *were manipulated by you until they finally achieved, I think, what it was that you wanted, but they may have achieved it without ever comprehending what it was they were supposed to do. They did what you expected of them, but without ever understanding that that's what was expected of them in the first place.*

Yeah, well that's--that's a big part of my method!

Right. It's a structure without--structuring, in a way.

And teaching, too, like, I never tell. I mean, students don't even ask anymore. The most common question I used to hear was, "What do

you want". Can you imagine being asked that? "I want you to be an artist." But, fortunately, that doesn't mean anything!

Yes, right! Can we go back a little bit to the audience? Most of the pieces you've done have come out in one form and another form as well. There's a performance, and there's a text, which is sometimes the script, I take it, and there's often a videotape or a film.

Why don't you give me an example?

Okay. Intraction. *There it was very clear--it was a performance, or an activity that took place at MOCA, right? You built a room in the space, and set it up so that everybody came to a sort of all-night restaurant thing inside, and sat around and drank coffee, and--there was an audience outside the room, and holes were cut in the walls so that people could walk around and they could look through the holes, and they could see people drinking coffee and talking and listening to music. And, at the same time, you also had video cameras trained on the scene inside the room, but the cameras weren't on the people--which was what everybody outside the room expected--the cameras were trained on the creamer.*

The people outside the room could have just looked at the creamer, if they'd wanted to.

Well, right, they could have.

(laughs) It's not really likely.

No. So, the people who were the audience in that case saw the performers drinking coffee and talking. But, if you didn't see that and all you see is the videotape, you see the creamer, and you see just what happens to the creamer--you see that someone picks it up, pours milk in their coffee, puts it back on the table. And it gets moved around the table. And, in that case, it's about media filter-

ing, you know? What the camera chooses to focus on, that's what you see. So--I would assume that, in a way, the performance was done so this videotape could be made, to make a statement about media selectivity.

Wait a minute. Say that again?

Okay. I assume that the purpose of this activity was to make a videotape.

No!

No?

Because there was an audience there for the--it was important that there was an audience. You know? The audience was an element of the piece. They could look through the holes, or they could watch the monitor.

Ah-ha! And if they had watched the monitor, they would have only seen the creamer.

Right.

And then they would have gotten the point.

Some people did. But it's important that they were there in that position. If an audience didn't exist, you know, then it wouldn't have made any sense.

I understand.

But, the resultant videotape is a different story. It is actually another work. And that's why I don't even present that information--if it was a record album I'd probably explain it on the back of the cover! My interest in the tape is on a lot of other levels. On the tape all you see is a counter-level view of people drinking coffee and there's a creamer somewhere there. Then when the creamer's moved, it cuts to another--the counter's square, you know? So, there's a cut and then the--the creamer is set down. So the implication is there's a switch being made to follow the creamer. You have no way of knowing there's an audience that could see it another way. But--that's like when you're watching television, they don't tell you--they don't keep flashing on "Warning: The Surgeon General Says That This is a One-sided View".

Right, right.

But everybody knows that. But beyond that, I got concerned with putting the edits closer to where the change was. Originally there was the element of a reaction time--I'd have to find the creamer on the four monitors, and then switch to it, so I'd be a couple of seconds late sometimes, a lot of times. Later, I wanted to make it look more perfect. In a way, that has aspects of TV, but it's also

something I was just compelled to do. Gratuitous formal aspects always enter my considerations toward the end of a piece--I hate it.

Have you always edited your tapes a lot, or did you work, earlier, with real time?

No. I've always edited. I remember being a guest at Cal.* and talking about what I was trying to do with *Intraction*, the piece we were just talking about. People really took exception, like, "That's wrong, you know, to fuck around with it." A lot of people placed a certain kind of value on realtime recording, you know.

But I think that's one reason why videotapes are often so boring.

There are some boring works that I really like. It's not that I'm reacting against them being boring, it was just--there's this idea, you know, there's this Berkeley idea that it's possible not to manipulate (laughs)! I became--I was interested in editing pretty much as soon as I realized people philosophically valued real time.

Now, to take the newest tape, one you're still working on, Condom. *How would you categorize the structure of that piece? The matrix?*

It's built on a series of questions, answers and interruptions, transacted by a group of people in various arrangements: lines, sitting all in a row, walking around a table, cleaning up in one case, and drinking--getting drunk--in another. The conversation is started with a question from me--

Which is?

"How does your sexual identity affect your economic situation?"

You first did this in L.A.?

Yes. I did it live.

As a performance?

I was asked by David Antin to do a performance for the American Theater Association Convention. It was in a hotel.

In a hotel?

Yeah. The convention was at the Biltmore Hotel, in 1975 or '76. So, it was in a hotel. I wanted to discuss the relationship between sexual identity and economic situations and I was getting screwed: "Come down here and figure everything out yourself and we aren't interested in what you need or anything--you know, just come down--you're a performance artist, come to this stage and perform"--for $90.00--no travel expenses. I was getting screwed--I wanted to pro-

* University of California, Berkeley, 1974

tect myself. This was what I had to work with. So I walked around the lobbies, trying to--pick up ideas and vibes and stuff. One problem was I didn't have any participants to be in the piece. A seduction had to take place to get the piece done. And so I wrote this introduction. I came up with a line to seduce the people I saw walking around the hotel. It was a straight theater convention of some kind.

Did you have trouble getting your groups?

I ended up with a much more formal rap than I could use, a much more impersonal rap than I could use, because none of the people I saw in the hotel lobby came. It was a very small audience. There were hundreds of people at this convention and probably only thirty people came to my performance and they were all art regulars. So I said "I've got this piece, but I need some participants--so, my piece will end if you don't help me. But why should you? I understand, it's O.K."

(laughs) So, did they help you?

Not for a while, everybody sat there, not knowing what to do.

Did you explain, did you--?

No. That wasn't important. What was important was to give them a line so I could--I was still working with the idea of seducing my cast, you know. Just getting them into the structure, the apparatus of the piece, somehow. The structure came from my idea of how a condom works, which is that it cuts off the flow. You get somebody to have some kind of intercourse with you and--use this condom, this series of questions, answers, interruptions. (laughs)

So, what happened?

Well, there was dead silence after my rap and I was sitting there. Finally David Sherk, who had come down with me, said he'd do it.

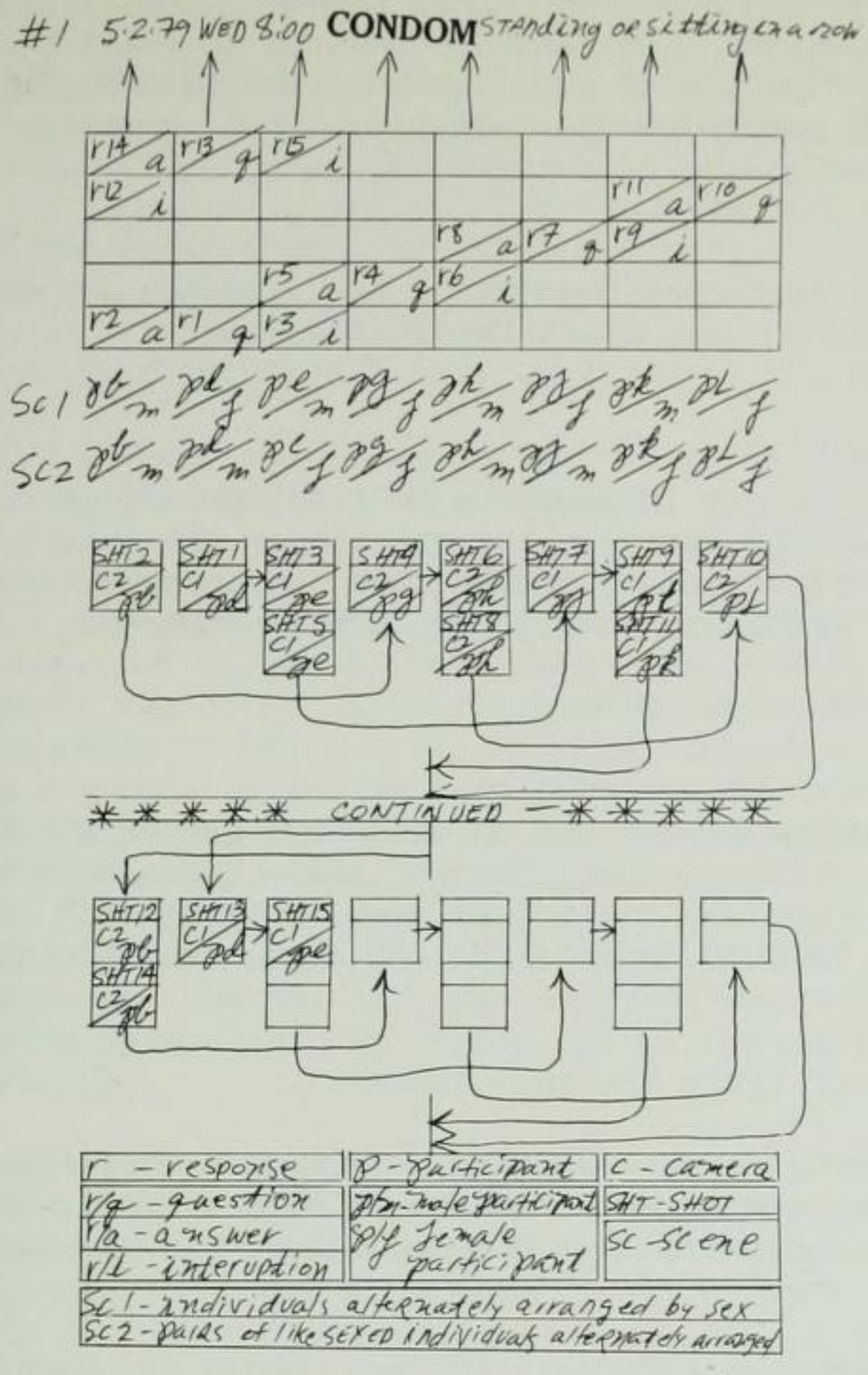
That's a friend!

So, then all of a sudden six, seven people said they'd do it. So then I sat down in the audience and told them what to do. And they did it.

How long did that last?

Maybe fifteen minutes. I'd tell them when they had screwed up the system, and then throw out another question. And they'd try again. As a performance it was like a demonstration of the mechanics of the piece. You know, to make that piece really--be good,--it takes some practice!

When you went to the middle west, where was it--Minneapolis--and you did the piece again, how did your activity change in order to produce



Condom, 1979. Schematic drawing for action and camera direction for Session 1: 1) individuals alternately arranged by sex, sitting in a row 2) pairs of like-sexed individuals alternately arranged, sitting in a row. Minneapolis, Minnesota.

more fruitful results? Which would, I assume, mean--a more clearly obstructed flow of information!

How did my activity change?

What did you do that was different, so that you could more easily seduce people to come and--

In Minneapolis, all I was interested in was making the tape.

So, you asked them how their sexual identity affected their economic situation?

No, I didn't ask them, I gave them that question to start with. That was the first question; the second person in the sequence asks it.

And what happens after that?

Then the first answerer, the first person in the sequence, tries to answer the question in a response that is at least two phrases long. Then the third person in the sequence, the interrupter, cuts off the answerer with a response no longer than two phrases.

Of their own choice?

Yes, but this is happening sort of fast, so the subject doesn't get changed as much as you might think it would.

Right.

Then the next person in sequence or line, depending on the activity or the arrangement, becomes the questioner who interrupts the interrupter with a question no longer than two phrases, and the third person formerly the interrupter becomes the answerer.

One person asks a question--

Then the person who preceded that person in sequence answers the first question, and the person who succeeds the person who asked the question interrupts the answer with an interruption that is longer than two phrases. So, you can't just say, "I disagree." You have to say, "You're full of shit, because, blah, blah, blah." And then that person, before they get farther than two phrases is cut off by a question from the next person in the sequence. The camera work anticipates this sequence. There are two cameras.

I remember when we were watching your tapes, when the men and women were together, the women seemed to be more serious, they seemed to take it more seriously than the men. And when you did the version that was all women--

When there were men and women the men tended to--want to--make light of the issue or divert the issue, or--not deal with the issue seriously, although they might deal with it humorously. I mean, as a general trend, although there were some exceptions. Sometimes it seems like it's just to avoid dealing with the issue, but sometimes it's to avoid dealing with the frustration that's coming out of dealing with the issue, you know?

Yes.

And this structure doesn't allow anything to be resolved, so it's--

Pretty frustrating!

When anybody's dealing with, say, a problem that has dynamics of this type--abstract, economic, or political-type-problems--while you're talking about it, there's never enough real access to the problem for it ever to be resolved in the discussion. But the discussion moves things in a direction.

So, you were curious to make a piece--in which the flow of information

was obstructed.

Well, not so much obstructed. Part of the dynamic of the piece, a part of the--the energy for moving--the strength, the thrust, comes from the fact that the flow of information is always interrupted.

Did the people who participated in this, did they come up afterwards, any of them, and acknowledge the structure? I mean, acknowledge that you had set it up purposely this way? Or, do you think they all just left--frustrated--and thinking "Jesus, that guy's really--"

No, no. We talked about it. I mean, they'd say "You know, this is hard, this is a drag". And I'd say, "I know!"

(laughs) Right. That's something that's very characteristic of all the tapes that I saw--the element of creating a situation which was sure to frustrate, and aggravate, the people performing in the piece. In Condom, *clearly there the participants understood they were in a frustrating situation to begin with, and the outcome--*

I'm not so sure they did. That wasn't so apparent right away. I didn't say "This is going to be frustrating", I just told them what they had to do. I could see doing it without getting frustrated, because I wouldn't--if I was doing it, I wouldn't have any expectations of--

Resolving anything.

Of resolving anything. Success in my terms--in terms of making a participatory piece successful, making the activity work right--is achieved when people start developing a style for dealing with the machine, for dealing with the situation.

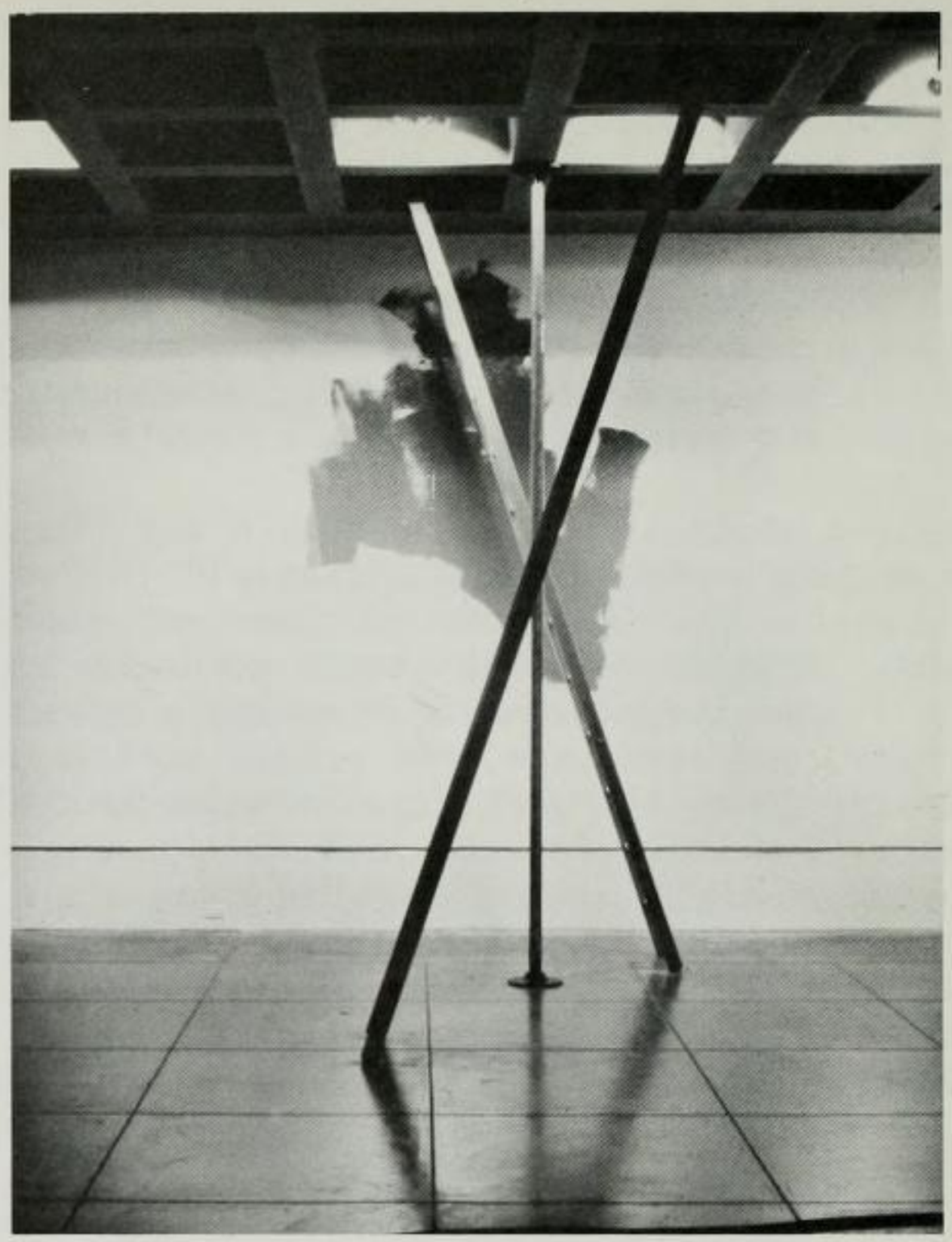
For overcoming?

Not so much overcoming, just running the machine.

In other words, they adjust their responses so that they can say, with one or two phrases--

Right. And then it doesn't have to be heated, like some of the initial responses are. For instance, if somebody says--let's just start it with the original question, "How do you think your economic situation's been influenced by your sexual identity?" And then, somebody says, "Well, I think I've made X amount of money less over this period of time than I could have otherwise." Then she would be interrupted--it's a guy that's interrupting--saying, "You're full of shit, sister and I think you deserve what you got." Then the next questioner would say, "Well, don't you think that kind of response indicates that you're a bigot?" Which the guy then has to answer! Of course nothing ever was said that clearly or directly--or smartly.

I see.



Fireman's Conflict Resolution, 1972, 1978, 1979. Photograph of 1978 installation Everson Museum, Syracuse, New York.

What I'm getting at is, in a mechanical analogy this machine would run smoothly if the responses just flowed out.

Yes.

But when they start trying to dig down inside and care about the answers too much, or posture with the answers, then they get frustrated. If the women, in this particular situation, start getting heated, then the men start getting evasive. You know?

Yes.

And that becomes more frustrating to the women. When somebody's trying to talk about making less money than one should, it's frustrating if someone says, "It would be nicer to be in Tahiti."

Right, sure. When we talked on the phone I asked you what you had done at U.C. Santa Barbara last week, and you said the Fireman's Conflict Resolution. *Is that a new piece?*

It's an installation. The first time I dealt with that piece was in '72. This is the third time. I did it again because there were still things about it to work out. This time I threw a bucket of paint, which was the same color as the wall, on to the paint I had rolled

on the sculpture the day before. The first coat was red and it reads like fire. And I also made some changes in the text that goes with it.

You often do the same pieces more than once.

Only when there are unresolved problems. In the case of *Derelict*, say, which I've also done three times, as soon as I saw what was happening in that space this last time, I knew that it wasn't the end, because it wasn't right and I knew what was wrong.

So, you keep on making them in installation until the one time when it's right.

And then I sell it. Happens every time. (laughs)

(laughs) Your writing is interesting, I mean the texts that I've read that accompany the pieces. They're like poetry. Have you ever written any poetry?

I wrote some poems--I threw them all away for the same reason I stopped painting. I realized it was sounding like a lot of other stuff I'd heard. That's how I got into this business of equivalent structures.

Equivalent structures?

Trying to build art around a structure that I could relate to something else, trying to find a way to make the structure I am dealing with somehow work--the way something equivalent actually does work--sort of a physical metaphor. That involves something besides writing a poem to sound right, or painting a picture to feel right. It involves making something that seems like it works, not in terms of how it feels, but rather, working because it might actually work in the physical world, for some not entirely subjective reason.

How did you come up with the structure for the Museum Reaction Piece? *That was completely fascinating to me.*

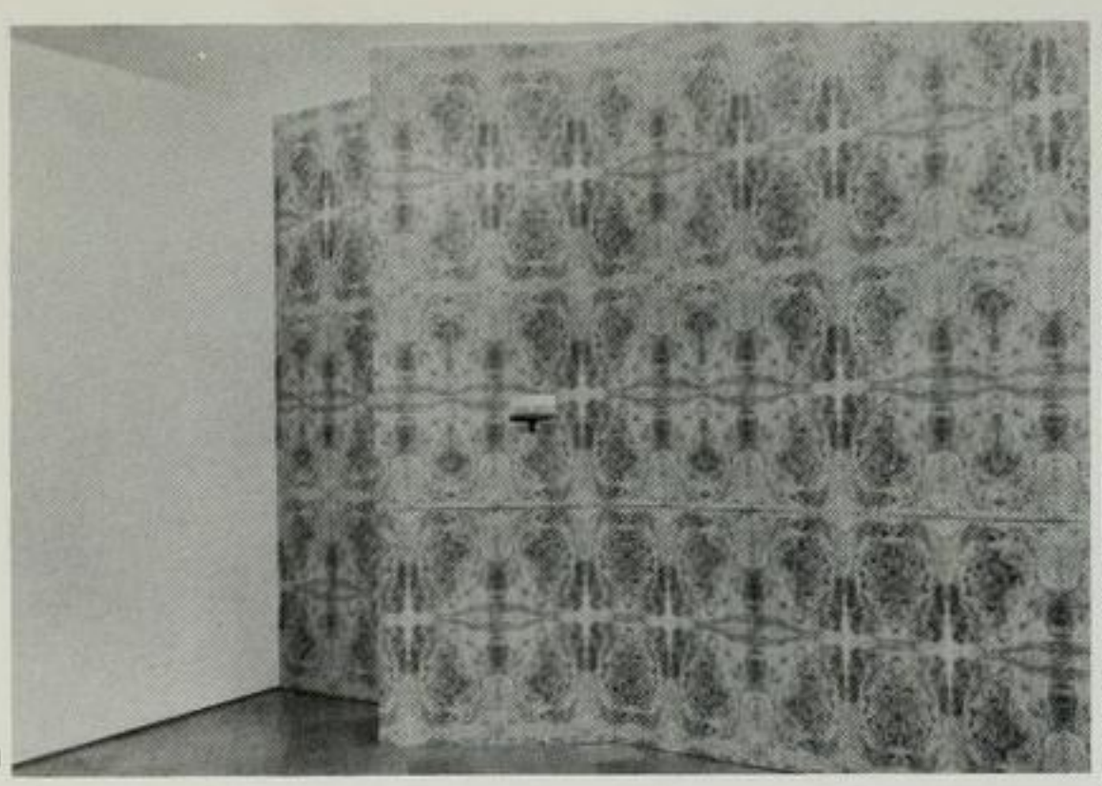
That's a system that relates my experience with museums, and my experience with household plumbing and electrical wiring.

(laughs) Where's the connection?

It's perfect--where's the connection? (laughs) Well, let's talk about the flow of information. Museum activity is a bunch of choices about what to do, and--

Museums, it seems to me, operate on exactly the opposite premises from the ones that you do, because museums, in my experience, are programmed to pick up on the various things that are familiar, that do feel right.

Yes. But, what I'm dealing with here is a slightly more complicated



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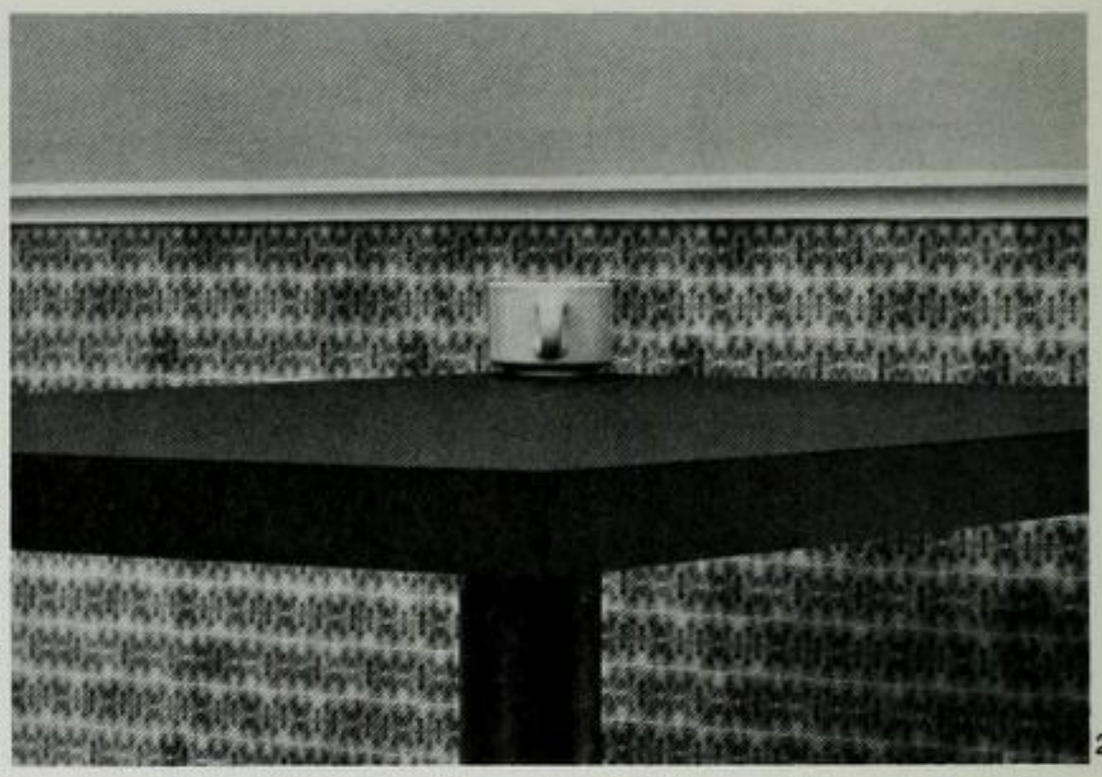

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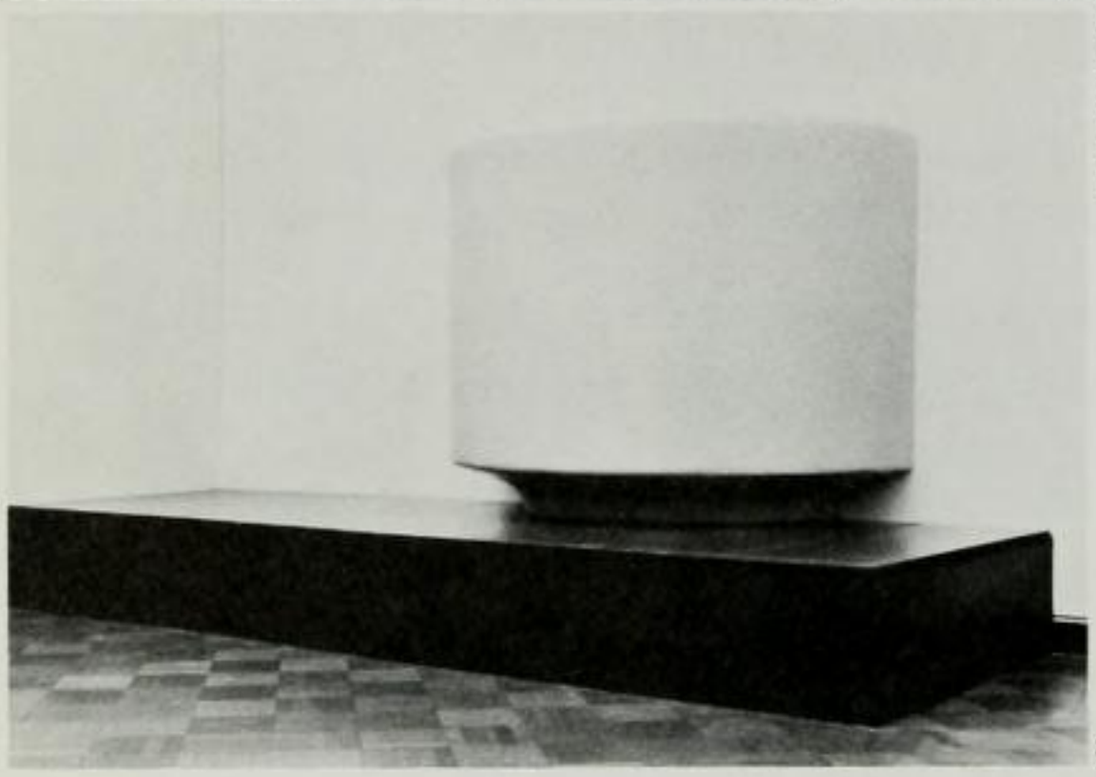

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Derelict, 1974, 1975, 1977. *(Terra Cotta Table Installation)*, 1977. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. 1. Looking from the entrance of the installation to the back wall (photo on wall is indistinguishable at this distance) 2. Photo on back wall 3. View back into installation, turning from photo on back wall.

thing.

You are thinking in terms of them organizing exhibitions?

Yes. They can be familiar with a name, they can be familiar with specific works, they can be familiar with an image--I'm dealing with a metaphor for that, this flow of air, and--

Flow of air?

If you cook some food in a room that's adjacent to another room, there's a flow of communication between the two. In the *Museum Reaction Piece* the flow is aided by two fans which are in the wall common to bathrooms. Turning the light on in either room also turns on the fan that exhausts the air from one room into the other room. If you're cooking something up, what you're cooking up goes over.

Goes into the next room.

There are two hosts. Each is assigned a room. Each must choose what to cook for dinner. The person in the first room turns on the T.V. and watches a program called "The Number One Host's Host" and then decides what to cook for lunch the next day--after seeing the program. However the second person comes into the other kitchen half an hour later, after the first person has cooked and eaten, so the smell

of what they've done is now in the other room. Assuming the lights were on. Assuming they didn't cook in the dark. Now it's in the air. It's at that point that the second person makes her decisions about tomorrow's meal.

Is there a text for this piece?

Yes.

And will the video tape be the final form of the art work?

When that tape is done, the way I'm going to show that piece, is--that the two rooms will be built every place it's shown.

Oh!

And, then outside the rooms will be the text, and then beyond the text will be the tape.

So, all three things happen at once.

The tape alone can't give you the experience of the rooms, which is a sculptural thing that's informed by this literary thing, the text. The rooms have a particular kind of experience because there are relatively few elements in each one. There are slight differences in how they're arranged, and the experience of going in one, and then the other, is important. The differences become almost subliminal. It's just weird little stuff, but it's important. For instance the lights--the light bulbs are both forty watts. In one room the light-bulb is above the middle of the table, and in the other it is fifteen inches off to the side above the table. You feel rather than know you're in a different place. It is an architectural experience that makes you aware of your position in the architecture. The tape, on the other hand, is a soap opera experience.

So your pieces usually appear in more than one form, and each form amplifies the information. None of the forms is sufficient by itself?

That may be.

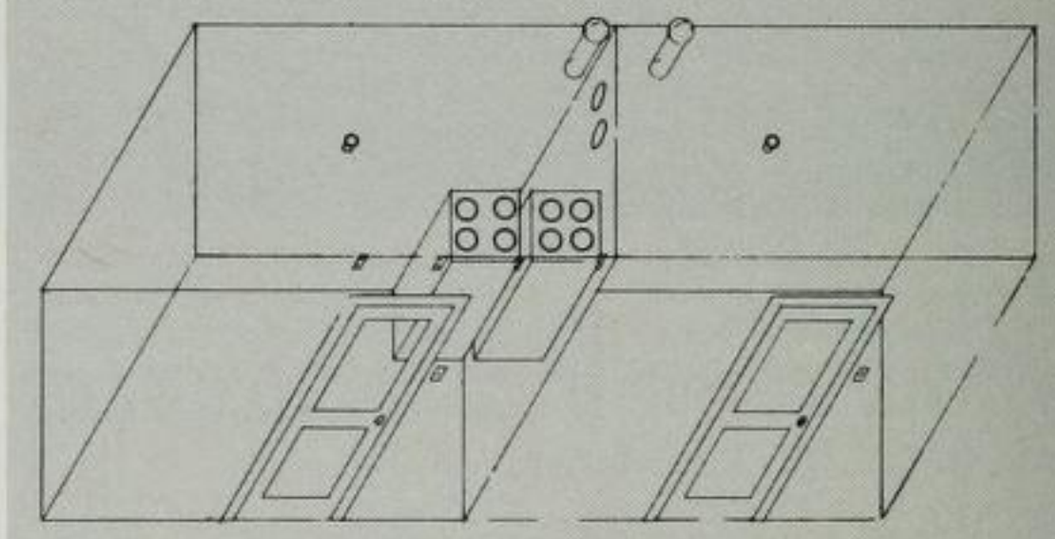
What is the relationship between the script that you devise for a piece and the subsequent activity that develops? I still don't really understand how much the participants know about the way that they're supposed to act, and how much of their activity is really spontaneous? I think that's important, because watching a tape you have a different experience of it if you think that everything they're doing is spontaneous, or if you think that they're only acting because you told them that they were to act in a certain way.

It's not entirely spontaneous, but to a degree it is.

Certain things keep occuring in the pieces that you've done where other people have roles--mainly that the people eventually end up totally frustrated.

Museum Reaction Piece, 1978. Installation at Everson Museum, Syracuse, New York.

You may find it captivating to test and retest yourself unmercifully - Perhaps to prove that the temperature of the air can't be influenced by fourty watts of incandescent light. You may have forgotten that it is the temperature of your body that really makes the day pleasant and that even a fan [especially a fan] - not blowing in your direction at all - [not incidentally] - might induce a fever and damage your lunch. But nevertheless, as a professional courtesy, don't cook in the dark. Use the lights. That's why they're there.



"The Museum Reaction Piece"

This is not a conservation piece. It's a reaction piece; and more deplorably, it employs two separate standards to achieve its intentions.

Museum Reaction Piece, 1978. Diagram from text.

I think that usually I'm also totally frustrated. In the *Museum Reaction Piece* there was a--I ran into problems with that, problems like I never ran into with anything! I went back to Everson three times, you know, it was months.

Why?

This was re-done and that was re-done. Mostly, the piece was just more than anybody had possibly bargained for, you know? This business about how I direct really became something to dwell on. The technique that I used was to take what was on tape and cut it up a little bit, and then transcribe the tape to use as a script, and then play back the tape to the cooks and their guests, so they could see how it was supposed to be delivered. I had to rehearse them in doing what they had already done.

So that it seems--

So it seems spontaneous. This was all done so that I could shoot it differently than I had the first time. I've never really done these pieces with actors, you know?

So the people you are using in this piece really are museum people.

Yes, and I'm not going to contrive, you know, write a script and contrive a museum person.

No.

At least I don't have to worry about whether that part of the structure's right or not, because it is right, because it happened with a museum person. I liked the idea of doing a soap opera with a museum staff.

What you're doing is very cinematic; it's very much about being the--the screenwriter, and the director.

But, the problems that have developed have been different kinds of problems than would have come, say, if I had been thinking in terms of using actors.

You wrote the Watershed Text, *in 1978, right? It was part of an installation at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Somewhere in the text you said that "what art really does, and I believe this is what it should do because this is only what it can do, or the only thing it can do, or the easiest thing it can do, is to transmit the attitude of the artist; art, whether an object or an action, is the result of an action. When an action is understood, it transmits the attitude and context of its purveyors." So, my question is, what attitude are you transmitting?*

When?

When. Does it change with every piece?

Oh, yeah.

Okay. Well, let's--

The reason I use the word "purveyors" is because if somebody else is connected with the circumstances of a piece, then that's going to count, you know? That's why *Watershed* deals with--I mean, you can't disconnect the museum.

In that situation, you're not the only purveyor; the Museum is also the purveyor.

Right. In installation works in museums, the museums take some kind of role. And the more conscious they are of the fact that they're doing that, the better the situation is for everybody. The real content of certain pieces is, you know, the place that they happen to be in--

The place affects the content.

The consciousness of the place affects the content.

Some of your pieces, for example Which Hunt, *seem to be more about the experience that the performers will have, than about the experience that somebody watching the videotape would have.*

I don't feel that way because I feel like their experience has been manipulated to the point where it's almost anybody's experience.

Okay, that makes it clear. So, it becomes a generalized experience.

In that piece, the circumstances it's happening in are more clear than the in-depth development of any of the characters. But there is starting to be some interest in character. In *Museum Reaction*--that's starting to happen.

It sounds like it's also beginning to happen in The Burghers of Fort Worth, *with the golf pros.*

Well, yes.

Before we finish this, I'd like to ask you how Children's Charmers *has been coming? That's the title of the etching project you began about two years ago, right? (laughs)*

(laughs) I've been thinking I'm going to do that, now. I mean, soon.

I hope you do. You told me a little bit about it, but I still don't think I really understand. What you've done is you've started to build a--a set, basically, I think.

Well, what I wanted was a picture of a street. I wanted to be able to paint the traffic lines on the street and then change them. I wanted them to be--

So, it would be a sequence of pictures?

Yes. My shots had to be aerial, and so rather than try to negotiate something with the city, I decided to build this model. (laughs)

(laughs) Okay.

At first, it didn't seem real important how detailed it was, you know. But then I got carried away with the model.

One of the printers told me you were building the road just the way the city builds it, with gravel, tar, the works. Kathan said she sent a pick-up truck to your studio, to bring the model to Crown Point for photographing, but it was too big to fit in the truck. So what happened after that?

I didn't get it finished.

Why did you want to build this model?

I don't know how else I could have controlled this situation. The basic scenario of this thing is that in the first sequence you have a street corner--the intersection I'm dealing with is Tenth and Mission. All the manhole covers are off the manholes, which creates an element of danger in the street. The words "CHILDREN'S CHARMERS" are painted on the street like the words "BUS STOP" sometimes are. But the orientation of the words to the access of traffic is such that it's hardest to read. That's the first picture. And in the second picture, the man-

hole covers are on, reducing the element of danger, and the words have been moved to the appropriate place for maximum readability, where the words "BUS STOP" would normally be. Then in the third picture, the manhole covers are on, and rain has fallen on the street--and "CHIL-DREN'S CHARMERS" has been abbreviated to "CHI CHA".

(laughs) It's so catchy! "CHI CHA"!

So, it's safe and catchy.

Well, we can just leave it as a mystery.

We might as well! I don't think there's much of the mystery left, though.

I think there is. Okay, there's just one more thing to ask you. The other night Laurie Anderson was discussing performance as opposed to theater. She said that people have so many voices of their own, that the idea of acting and taking on another persona wasn't appropriate for her. There is always a strong element of drama in your work--do you think it's theatrical?

I might think of it more in terms of framing, you know? It's dramatic, and sometimes it's theatrical, but it's--well, my method usually involves it being real rather than acted in the usual use of that word. I mean, what I try to write in is the frame, not what happens.

It's a subtle difference, but it seems very important to me.

It's a problem of--of framing, or trapping. I have to spend a lot of time waiting.

* * * * *

Films and Video Tapes

1970, 1970 (28 min.) super 8 b + w film. *Approach-Avoidance 1*, 1970 (15 min. - loop) super 8 b + w film. *Chronometric Depth Perception*, 1970 (2 min. 52 sec.) super 8 b + w film. *Inside The Harlequin; (Approach - Avoidance 2 + 3)*, 1971 (two 14 min. loops -simultaneously projected adjacently, super 8 color film. *Cheshire Cat 2*, 1971 (16 min.) super 8 b + w film. *Fuck You Purdue*, 1971 (30 min.) video b + w. *Sea Sell Sea Sick at Saw Sea Soar*, 1971 (50 min.) video b + w. *Which Hunt?*, 1972 (50 min.) video b + w. *Seaquick*, 1972-74 (40 min.) video b + w. *See Indian War Dance*, 1972-74 (40 min.) video b + w. *Intraction* and *Ghost of the Creamer*, 1973-74 (50 min.) video b + w. *Sustentense*, 1974 (4 min.) 16 mm. film, color and sound. *The Burghers of Fort Worth*, 1975 (30 min.) 16 mm. film, color and sound. *Vito's Reef*, 1978 (34 min.) video color. *Museum Reaction Piece*, in progress Dec. 1979, video color. *Condom*, in progress Dec. 1979, video color.

Howard Fried

Education: Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, 1964-67; Cleveland Art Institute 1966; Western Reserve University 1966; San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, California, 1967-68 B.F.A.; University of California at Davis, Davis, California, 1968-70 M.F.A.

Solo Shows and Performances

1969 *All My Dirty Blue Clothes,* University of California, Davis
1969 The Art Company, Sacramento, California
1970 University of Nevada, Reno, Nevada
1970 Reese Palley Gallery, San Francisco, California
1971 Reese Palley Gallery, New York, N.Y.
1971 *Temptation Of The Sandman,* 16 Rose St., San Francisco, California
1971 *Synchromatic Baseball,* 16 Rose St., San Francisco, California
1972 De Saisset Art Gallery, University of Santa Clara, Santa Clara, California
1972 Reese Palley Gallery, San Francisco, California
1972 San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, California
1972 Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
1973 Solano State College, Solano, California
1974 San Jose State College, San Jose, California
1977 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California
1978 Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York
1979 Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York, Jan. Projects/Video
1979 Fort Worth Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas. Video tapes, Dec. 4.

Selected Group Exhibitions

1979 *6 Rushmores and 8 Acropolii Do a Dollar Make,* "Repair Show", Berkeley Gallery, San Francisco, Ca.
My Truss and My Palette, "Bay Area Conceptual Art", Reese Palley Gallery, San Francisco, Ca.
1970 *All My Dirty Blue Clothes,* "Pollution Show", Oakland Museum, Oakland, Ca.
The Third State of Openness, "Slant Step 2", The Art Company, Sacramento, Ca.
Studio Relocation, "Three Sculptors", San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, Ca.
The Fifth State of Openness, "Concealment", University of California, Davis, Davis, Ca.
The Return of The Agrarian Society, "The 80's (Free)", University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, Ca.
Studio Relocation, "Looking West", Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska
The Chesire Cat II, "Young Bay Area Sculptors", San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, Ca.
1971 *The Chesire Cat II,* "Group Show", Cheltenham Art Center, Cheltenham, Pennsylvania
Manson/Calley Mantra, "MOCA FM", Museum of Conceptual Art; KPFA, San Francisco-Berkeley, Ca.
Pie In the O Zone, Youth in Asia, "6 Comedy Sonatas", Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco, Ca.
Synchromatic Baseball, 16 Rose Street, San Francisco, Ca.
Inside The Harlequin, "Prospect 71; Projection", Kunsthalle, Dusseldorf, Germany, 1971, Louisiana Museum, Denmark, 1972
1972 *40 Winks,* University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, Ca.
September, Holding's a Dirty Business, "Notes and Scores", Mills College Art Museum, Oakland, Ca.
Untitled Green Paper Wall, "San Francisco Performance", Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, Ca.
Indian War Dance, Indian Rope Trick, "Documenta 5", Friedrecianum, Kassel, Germany
Which Hunt?, "San Francisco", San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, Ca.
Fuck You Purdue, "Video West", Everson Museum, Syracuse, New York
Sea Sell Sea Sick at Saw Sea Soar, "St. Jude Invitational Video Show", De Saisset Art Museum, Santa Clara, Ca.
See Everson Art Museum, Syracuse, New York
Long John Silver vs. Long John Servil, "Critics Choice", Focus Gallery, San Francisco, Ca.
Fireman's Conflict Resolution, "Performance Spaces", School of Visual Arts, New York, New York
1973 *Sea Sell Sea Sick at Saw Soar,* "Circuit", various museums; Seattle, Cranbrook, Syracuse, Los Angeles
See
Intraction, "Chris Burden, Trans Parent Teacher's Ink, Howard Fried", MOCA, San Francisco, Ca.
1974 *"Sustentense,* "Actions by Sculptors for the Home Audience", KQED TV, San Francisco, Ca.
Sea Sell Sea Sick at Saw Sea Soar, Projekt 74", Stadt Koln, Wallraf-Richartz Musuem, Cologne, Germany
See
"A Concert", Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco, Ca.
Derelict, "Steven A. Davis, Howard Fried, Steven Kaltenbach", University Art Museum, Berkeley, Ca.
1975 *Seaquick,* "Video Art", Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnatti, Ohio, Musuem of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois
Seaquick, "Video Art Exhibition", Societe Des Expositions Du Palais Des Beaux-Arts, Bruxelles, Belgium
The Burghers of Fort Worth, action "Exchange DFW SFO," The Fort Worth Art Museum, The San Francisco Museum of Art, Fort Worth, Texas-San Francisco, Ca., 1975-76
"Lives", The Fine Arts Building, New York, New York, (catalogue)
1976 *"The Burghers Of Fort Worth",* film Premiere, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, April 14, 1976
Condom, "American Theatre Convention", performance, Biltmore Hotel, Los Angeles, 8/9/76
"The Conceptual Minute", Viacom Cable Television, Chanel 6, San Francisco, Ca. Nov. 25 + 27, 1976
The Conceptual Minute, "A Tight 13 Minutes", Breens of MOCA, San Francisco, Ca. Dec. 21, 1976
Untitled Drawing #9, "California Painting and Sculpture, The Modern Era," San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, Ca. (catalogue)
1977 *Intraction and Ghost of The Creamer,* "Whitney Biannual", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, N.Y.
Relays And False Starts, "Exchange 80 Langton, LAICA; Los Angeles and San Francisco, Feb + March
1978 *Vito's Reef - Chiaroscuro - Gable,* Video Free America, July 29, 1978 SF, Ca.
Studio Relocation, "From Self Portrait to Autobiographical Art" organized by Independent Curators Incorporated, traveling, 1978-79.
1979 *The Burghers of Fort Worth,* "Whitney Biennial", Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC, NY.
Vito's Reef, Part I, "Everson Video Review", orgn. by Everson Museum of Art Syracuse NY traveling
Vito's Reef, Part I, "Video Roma", summer 1979 Rome, Italy
Fireman's Conflict Resolution, "Bay Area Contemporary Strengths", Univ. Cal., Santa Barbara Art Museum
Vito's Reef, Part I, "New American Film and Tapemaker Series", Whitney Museum of Amer. Art
A Clock of Commercial Significance, "Space, Time, Sound, A Decade in The Bay Area", San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Dec 1979-Feb 1980
Vito's Reef, Part I, "Wave", University of Houston, Nov-Dec 1979

Laurie Anderson

"I've been looking at, thinking about, the human voice. . . . My work is based on the voice and what it means to speak to people, what conversation is."

View

Interview by Robin White at Crown Point Press, Oakland, California, 1979.

This afternoon you were reading a story over the telephone to Liege, in Belgium. It was a live radio broadcast, via satellite, right?

Yes, right.

And that made me wonder about where--where was the first place that you found support for the work that you're doing. Because in the art world it's pretty unusual to do such ah--entertaining, intelligent work.

I think the first thing that I did in terms of, I'd say, the downtown New York art world, was a show at Artists' Space, the old Artists' Space that used to be on Wooster Street. The way it worked was that they would ask a few more established artists to invite younger artists to do a show. Vito Acconci asked me to do this show and--I'd been working with sculpture and painting and trying a lot of different things--

When was this?

This was '74, I think. The show was photographs and writing on the wall. It was large writing, you know--I guess I was thinking of the kinds of narrative things that were around at the time--Roger Welch, Peter Hutchinson and Bill Beckley. Eventually it occurred to me that big writing is kind of spooky--like on subways.

Like graffitti.

Yeah! Like an eight foot high CHICOOOO, you know? Besides, it goes by so fast on the train, and you can't read it. Billboards began to make less and less sense to me--why write so big? Reading is such a private experience, it seemed more appropriate to put the writing in books. In my case I was interested in the difference between how you would read it and how it would sound if somebody spoke it--

Or presented it.

Yes. Because my writing style, like most people's, is more stilted than my speaking style. When you write something down you write grammatically, and all of the hesitations, well not all of the hesitations, but all of the natural hesitations are edited out.

Yes.

And you don't feel the movement of the, of the thought. So I began to think that it was important to say things rather than to write them and put them on the wall.

Yes.

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The first performance I did was called *As: If* and it was about language probably more than anything else. On one side of the structure of the piece was water and on the other was words. I tried to be very diagrammatic and structural in one way and loose in another. The diagrammatic part was a kind of subtext, on slides. I was interested in metaphor. There was always a comparative structure going on, on one side water, and on the other, words. All of the stories that I have told and all of the things I've talked about had something to do with--

With water?

It was sort of part of a cycle of the humors. The next piece I did turned out to be about fire. I never got around to earth and air--

No!

I abandoned this literal metaphor structure after awhile--it's kind of boring. But, this thing about words and water was, to me, an exciting way to try to structure things.

Vito was coming to visual art from the literary tradition--and you came out of a literary tradition too, in a way?

I'd always done a lot of writing. I wrote a novel when I was twelve years old--quite a good novel now that I think about it (laugh).

And your family were story tellers from way back?

Oh yeah, well they're liars from way back! There are a lot of people in this family and it's always been a very verbal situation--a lot of talking--and just, just to hold your place in this mob scene you had to talk. You had to defend yourself and that's the way you did it. I've been looking at, thinking about, the human voice. One of the most interesting things I did last year, was a seminar in the Midwest with Benedictine Nuns.

Great! How did they find you?

They had gotten my name from a national list of artists--

Did they know anything about your work?

They read something about it in this list. It said something about "artist who deals with spiritual issues of our times", some blurb--

Oh!

I think I'd written it myself. And since they could only have women at the convent, I was a natural choice. I was amazed--this is the biggest Benedictine Convent in the world, 3,000 nuns. Benedictines are scholars but they also want to balance it with physical activity. They're very strong. They work in the garden and have pigs and cattle and then they work in the library...and pray. On the way into the convent we passed an enormous graveyard of nuns; it was a very moving experience to me because all of the stones, all of the crosses--little

crosses, were marked with the same four or five names, you know--Theresa, Maria Theresa, Maria, Theresa Theresa--

Oh!

Everything was given up.

Everything, including their identity.

Yes. To be a part of this corporate thing, and it was quite beautiful, the way they lived. I wasn't really sure for the first day or so what I should do--

I can tell already from what you said, you must have done something with the names, Maria--

Well, no I didn't do that, I didn't do that. I, ah, you know I was an outsider and, ah, I wasn't really sure what I was there for. And so I wanted to just, you know, talk to people and watch.

Did it make you feel anxious?

Well, ummm--

The thing that is so interesting, just to interrupt you for a minute--it's actually sort of connected to the first question--is that although the work you do exists in the context of the art world, it can also dwell outside of that context and this is the perfect example.

Well--

What could be more foreign to the contemporary art world or avant garde art, if you want to call it that, than a Benedictine Convent?

I think it's very close to the art world in a lot of ways. The nuns are isolated, but these are people who think and feel and have a relationship to--to a kind of ideal, a spiritual or intellectual ideal.

I know, that's true.

I could also relate to the Spartan aspects of it. I would get up in the morning: there's this five o'clock tiny, tiny tapping at the door; I'd go to the door and nobody would be there but there'd be this tiny plastic cup of orange juice, in this methadone type cup; as the door would open it would just miss the cup--it was very carefully placed, you know. In the room itself was just a bed and a cross over the bed, that's it. And I like that, I like the spareness of it. The thing that struck me most about being there was the nuns' voices. They have quite low voices, except, about ten times a day they stop to pray, and at that point their voices rise in pitch to become very, very high, very clear, you know, "Dear God". Like children.

Ahah.

It is parallel to something every woman in this culture experiences:

"Life in Los Angeles", from *Americans on the Move*, Part I of *UNITED STATES*. 1979.

dear daddy or dear daddy and mommy.

Yes, still.

We spent the week talking. I wasn't sure that I should bring up my impressions of the prayers, but my work is based on the voice and what it means to speak to people, what conversation is. This, of course, is very special conversation--

Between yourself and God. But it's a one way conversation. So, you talked about that special kind of verbal/non verbal communication. Do you emphasize the verbal over the visual in most of your work?

I find myself doing more audio things than visual, although the visual is still a real important part of it--

I was so impressed with your multi-leveled approach in the piece that I saw in San Francisco. The lighting, the darkened stage, and images projected behind you--the film and the slides added to the dimension of mystery and magic that I felt really hovered in the air.

I really like to work in the dark. My ideal evening here in New York in my own place is to turn off the lights and turn on all the equipment. I have a sort of irresponsible attitude in terms of energy: the more "tech", the better as far as I'm concerned. So I plug in all the equipment and really just play with it, until something occurs--

I see.

The right layering and leveling becomes a kind of intersection between things that are, not illustrating each other, but supporting each other,

in terms of the kind of movement I want to make. Yeah, I like to work in the dark. When I began working I--one of my sisters is an actress and theater basically gives me the creeps. I just can't respond to it; I've never been able to believe in it really.

I understand that, I have a hard time believing in it too; I'd rather go to a movie.

It's just very spooky to me. It seems to me that people already have several voices, without pretending that they are someone else and trying to convince other people of it. They have their interview voice, their ah--

Their "Dear God" voice.

Their "Dear God" voice; it's complex. I like theater for the--play itself, I mean Shakespeare...I thought about it a lot last spring when I was trying to write something about the difference between theater and performance--

Some performances are not at all related to theater, but some, for example Joan Jonas, straddle the border.

I was thinking of it in a couple of ways: one is that in theater there is, first of all, character and then motivation, and finally situation. For instance, if you want to have earthquakes in your play, you might have a character who's really interested in earthquakes, a geologist. Or you might tell the story of something that happened during an earthquake that the characters remember and they bring it up in the play.

There has to be a logical sequence.

Yes. There has to be motivation for the character to say or do something. In a performance, though, you don't have to have character. If you want to talk about earthquakes all you have to do is say "earthquakes", and whatever follows from that.

Yes.

So that's a big jump.

Also, I think that in performance word association is pretty important. If you brought up earthquakes it would trigger associations and memories of experience about earthquakes and those associations of yours would feed into whatever else is going on.

Right, you're free, you don't have to understand that character.

No. So you don't feel at all tied to theater? What you do seems much closer to entertaining, I mean night club or cabaret almost. I was surprised by the performance that I saw in San Francisco because it seemed like an evening out--watching you perform a series of songs--

Yes....

From a sort of repetoire. You might almost request favorites, you know? The material can be used over and over again, I suppose?

Well some of it can--that piece is pretty much--

This is called Americans On The Move*?*

Yes. This is the first part of a four part series about American culture. This first part is transportation, the second part is money, the third is kind of the psycho-social situation and the fourth is, ah, love. All of the pieces, in some way or another, in the first part relate to transporation; they have a diagrammatic connection to each other.

Are the other parts already written? Have you performed them?

I've never done all four together.

But you have done all four?

Ah, the last one I haven't done--

Love.

Actually the last three are still flexible to some extent. I was working on the first part last spring, changing it a lot, even after I first performed it. I've tried to reserve the options to pull things out as I see how it feels--

Oh yes, of course.

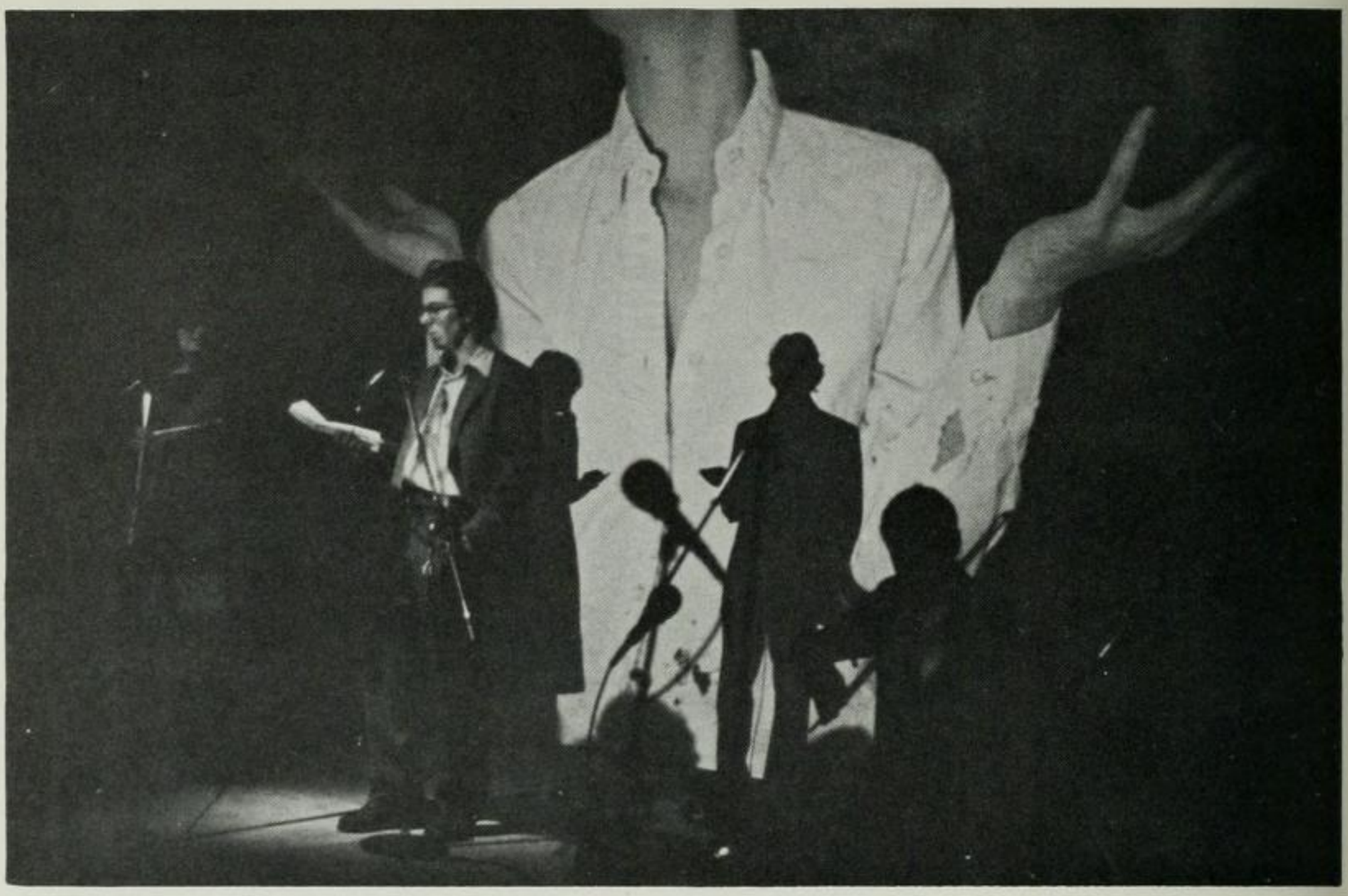
Rather than finish the whole thing and call it the final form. I like doing things in different situations because each time you have a completely different physical set-up. You can learn a lot. I'm not used to performing on raised proscenium stages, so when that happens, it changes things quite a bit. I put whole different parts in that I wouldn't include if I were working in a flat space like the one in San Francisco. That was a fairly flat space, although the audience was sort of on a slant.

Also, I suppose you relate to the audience differently, depending on the physical set up of the space?

Originally my idea was not to be this person on a stage, mostly because that idea reminded me a lot of theater. I wanted the work to be about space, in a certain way, so I used architectural images that wouldn't jar with the space so much--

Like that piece at the Whitney in 1976 where you sang and talked in front of a film of the window in your loft, with the curtains blowing--things like that?

Yes. So the performing space would be a logical extension of the room itself, without being reminiscent of some other situation. It was another way to hide, to be in the dark, to not be there, to be a bulge in the



"This is the Time - And This is the Record of the Time", from *Americans on the Move*, Part I of *UNITED STATES*. Performed by Joe Kos, Geraldine Pontius, Peter Gordon and Laurie Anderson, at The Kitchen, New York, New York, 1979.

film surface. And then I thought--since I have spent a lot of time working as a sculptor, ideas about space were real important to me and, ah, I wanted to emphasize physical presence in a real room rather than--well, for example--the best performance is like a bad movie. Because you go to a movie, you sit down and you feel the popcorn under your feet, you think, ugh, coke sticking to the arm of your seat, and if it's a bad movie you sit through the whole thing, you know, looking at where the exit signs are and whether there are tassles on the curtains--

Right, right.

And if it's a good movie you fall away and then you come back, and you notice those things again.

Yes.

In my first performances you felt that spatial situation, your own presence in the room the whole time. I began, at that point, sending standing waves through the audience. Just really emphasizing the room tone--

Sending standing waves? When was this? What are standing waves?

It was in the mid '70's. The standing waves were just barely audible; they produced a physical sensation. You became aware, because of these waves, of your placement in the room. It's like being blind, in a sense, because you feel the space behind you; it's a way to prevent fall-

ing into an illusion, into film space. I really wanted to, umm--

Locate people in reality?

Yes, exactly. Yes, I began to understand that my idea of space in terms of performances was really almost as if people were there for scale you know? I mean I set it up so that they would feel their physical presence. That's very sculptural, spatial etc. But it's not about energy.

It's also not so much about communicating.

I think I really wanted to ignore the fact that there were people there because I, ah, I was nervous. I thought I'd be a librarian, you know. It's what I always wanted to be--or a scholar, someone who's near books.

Retiring?

Yes, and near ideas. I got into the work I do through a series of things that I thought seemed logical and then when I found that I was--there were people, that's when I turned out the lights and wanted to be a voice in the dark.

That's interesting, because I know that you studied art history and you taught. Those are activities involving scholarship. But obviously at the time you went to Barnard, you connected to a whole lot of "out there" activities--

Oh, yes--

You seem to make real effort to engage the audience in a way that doesn't exist with certain other people. Like Terry Fox, his attitude about the audience has been either they get it or they don't--the responsibility lies with them.

There was one incident that really shocked me, and that was in Berlin. I was doing something and I heard this sound from the audience. I was doing a song about flies--

Flies?

Yeah, a piece called "Zzz Zzz Zzz Zzz"--it was one of the first times that I worked in another culture, in another language. I was trying to find a way to do it, to find sounds in between languages--sounds that are not quite words but function as words, like "SH!" or "HUH?". In Berlin, I concentrated on "S-S-S", and "SH!". You know the wall was built in--a metaphor for barrier, language barrier. Actually *kluft* in German is the word for language barrier, although it means gap or hole--ditch, language ditch--a kind of negative wall. In this particular piece there were many images that underlined the particular sound, "Zzz"--one of the talks had "Zzz" in almost every word and so--it really became very fly like--

(laugh)

The images were, you know, bad violin playing, the sound of snoring, general buzzing noises. The idea was where does language begin--where does sound stop and language begin?

Sure.

Where do your lips start turning it into something coherent? A lot of times when I work in Europe, I can't understand any language at first; it seems like people flapping their mouths and clacking their teeth.

When you first start to speak a foreign language, its just syllables. It's nonsense for awhile.

Well, I was doing this fly sound and suddenly I heard this sound from somewhere else; I thought it was feedback first of all, and then I thought it was on the tape--but then I knew it wasn't on the tape. And then I looked out and saw about three rows of Germans with their arms linked going "Zzz,Zzz,Zzz,Zzz,Zzz,Zzz," singing along to the tape. Oh my god! I really didn't know what to do, I was absolutely shocked!

They liked it! Now you are very direct. For example, when you gave your lecture at the San Francisco Art Institute, that was also a performance in a way.

In a way. There's been a sort of gradual transition really, from doing art history--it's dark and all these slides--

Right! Exactly.

And then you're talking, you're the only voice droning on and on--

Yes.

And you drift, I drifted. I drifted way away from the facts.

When you were giving art history lectures?

Yeah. They were writing it down! I never got over that. I do feel like one of the things that's real important to me is to keep the performances as short as possible. That's following my own attitude toward my work, since it's composed of very short segments.

Yes.

I don't have ideas for longer than three minutes, generally. I also realize that this is an evening and you've asked someone to come to a certain place, at a certain time. The people who come didn't go to a movie that night; they didn't go somewhere else, they came to this. So I really feel an obligation to do it--to compress and make my thoughts as clear as possible. Generally a concert won't take longer than an hour and fifteen minutes, maybe an hour and a half.

So you wouldn't be interested to perform the whole cycle of Ameri-

cans on The Move?

Oh yes, I would. It's not the length so much, it's just the fact that there are many, many parts and it's difficult to get all of the equipment in one place!

It's a question of endurance also and how long you can perform on stage, no?

Occasionally I do something like use a three minute tape just on by itself, while I catch a moment to breathe. Sometimes you do drift off even in that situation and that's really scarey, because you realize that you are in this room with a lot of people--you have a certain kind of control--over this room--

Which people hand over to you.

Yeah, they do, but actually reserving a lot themselves. The power the audience has--I've been noticing in the last few years that I respond to that really directly. Now I really like to watch people.

Something that impressed me when you came to San Francisco was that although your work is not at the stage where students in art schools could have read a lot about Laurie Anderson, your lecture was jammed and your concert--the performance was sold out. Obviously word of mouth really operated very effectively for you. You have a reputation that precedes you without, without benefit of the usual art magazine kind of syndrome. The students in San Francisco are into the punk aesthetic a lot, into music a lot. Did they make the connection to you through that? Have you been involved very much with music outside the art world?

That's important to me. When I go to universities and art schools, something that I try to emphasize to people when I talk to them, is this: there is a structure set up, all set up for the universities and the galleries and the museums and the magazines, just like any other installment plan in the country, you know? They'll tell you what to do and they'll tell you what the requirements are and what gallery you're supposed to join and you know, they have it all laid out. But, I think there are other ways to be an American artist rather than going through that circuit.

Yes.

You can find your own way. Artists are supposed to be innovators and yet we have our own little system set up which is very closed and which doesn't really infiltrate the culture.

Consequently the general public can't understand contemporary art and is quite hostile to it. Take that performance of Dance, *at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. They seemed able to endure the film backdrops Sol LeWitt created but they didn't tolerate the dance or the music, they just got up and left.*

I really admire an artist like Sol LeWitt, who has the nerve and the

Tape Bow Violin, 1977. Tape playback head mounted on the body of the instrument; strip of recorded audiotape on the bow, instead of horsehair.

interest to try something new.

Oh yes!

I was interested in Sol's film ideas because a few years ago I was looking through one of his books, *Permutations On One Through Four*, and his diagrams for the pieces looked to me exactly like a musical score--it's all laid out like that. I had always, you know, always loved his work but I had never, until that point, spent time really looking at the systems--at the way that they were actually made. So I spent about a week looking at this book, really looking at how he tilted systems. I wrote a quartet which I played for him, it sounded like it looked--it was actually on a forty-five that I made.

Was it in the exhibition at Holly Solomon's a few years ago?

Yes. It was a quartet for him, with each instrument going through those permutations.

One of the courses that you taught was called "Principles in Art History", and you subtitled the course "Scruples", as in moral principles. And also you wrote a song that was a quote from Lenin called: Ethics is the Aesthetics of the Future. *I can perceive a relationship between those things and something that John Cage said, which was that art should be useful--should influence the way we experience things out-*

side an art context. Were you thinking along similar lines?

"Use" is a dangerous word.

Cage illustrated his meaning of "useful" with a story about being stuck in traffic--if you can transfer the experience of listening to music to the experience of listening to truck horns, or other sounds around you, you can possibly get something besides indigestion from any situation. That's useful.

I see. That reminds me of probably the first performance that I ever did, in 1972, in Vermont. I was spending the summer in the tiny little town of Rochester, and every Sunday evening there was a concert in the gazebo with the local band. People would come in their cars and park around the gazebo. They wouldn't get out of their cars--

Like going to a drive-in.

Exactly! It was a drive-in concert. The band is just kind of playing away--"toot, toot, toot", and at the end of each song, instead of applauding, people honked their horns.

Oh really? That's wonderful!

Majestic sounds. A hundred cars, trucks, motorcycles all honking! The applause sounded better than the concert. So a friend and I decided that we would have a concert of cars. We scored three pieces for various pitches, but at first we couldn't find anyone in Rochester who really wanted to be in a car concert.

(laugh)

Then we decided that the way to do it would be to audition cars. So we set up a little booth at the local super market, "Is your Dodge a $C^{\#}$?" And people would then go, "Oh well, I hope so."

(laugh)

It was a wonderful concert. We had the audience sitting in the gazebo and the orchestra of cars parked around them. The rim of the mountains, green mountains, around, created a wonderful sort of supersonic stereo affect.

Right!

So, yes, a sort of "Cagean" attitude to sound is always useful--even in a traffic jam.

What I wanted to ask you was, if in your class called "Scruples" you talked with the students about the morality of making art, about what you think of it yourself? It's kind of a big--

Oh yeah, back to the first thing. The answer is not a logical answer or a verbal answer. The answer is the work. The work, itself, is the answer to the question of is it useful; if it reaches you, it is.

Yes, I agree.

We're used to entertainment being the the carrier, the container of the banal; a trick to make you laugh, or buy a product.

Entertainment is usually connected to the time to relax, the time to turn off your mind, the time to not have to think clearly.

Right. Or you could say humor, perhaps, instead of entertainment. Of course the flip side of this stereo situation is that, ah, seriousness can also be a container for the banal you know?

So true! I was thinking about the use of humor, the use of fantasy and story telling in your work. Magic is related to fantasy--you don't use conventional magic but you use a kind of high-tech magic.

Yes....

Like the voice harmonizer, and the slide projections--where the slide-image is projected into the dark void behind you and captured fleetingly by the violin bow you wave in front of it. Also the warmth and energy that come out of the performances that you do--there's a new emphasis on these elements that wasn't there I think, most of the way through the 70's, you know? I think the decade was basically serious, logical, abstract and cerebral.

Yes.

Now we're beginning to see the use of fantasy in the work of a lot more people. That was partly the idea behind the "Word of Mouth" artist's meeting that Crown Point sponsored. Going to the South Pacific, to the island of Ponape. It's a romantic gesture that has something to do with the art of the 80's. I think most of the artists who are going are people who use humor or fantasy--they are all warm, you know, in the way that they present their work.

Now that I think of it, that's true. It's really going to be an interesting trip....I think it took--it really took a decade to fall out of the 60's.

Oh yeah.

It was incredible to be sitting around talking about the *edge*; it was exhilarating. And now that we all dropped off the edge--

Everybody dropped off the edge and back into their own little space, in a way, during the 70's.

It was a strange decade, oh yeah. I've forgotten it already--of course I forget easily; I have no memory of anything--a lot of horrible things have happened to me but I erase them quickly and I think I've had a great life.

You remember what you want to remember.

That used to be a theme in things that I did. I was using myself di-

rectly in my performances; I was the material at a certain point. Like anyone who recounts their past, I found that it became another past. You have what happened to you, and also you have what you said about what happened to you.

Yes.

One of the first performance pieces--the first one in the series called *For Instants*--was really about the experience of editing material. I think there was a story about Joe Gould in it.

Who is Joe Gould?

He wrote an autobiography, extremely excessive and beautiful. He left out nothing. Then at one point he decided he was going to edit it. There would be this long paragraph: "...today for lunch I had chicken with tomato sauce and a little basil and oregano, and the spaghetti was cooked *al dente*, just correctly"...about three paragraphs long. And when he edited it, he crossed out the whole page and just wrote, "Had Chicken Cacciatore today."

(laugh)

I think there was also something about Faulkner in that piece as well. The anecdote was that Faulkner used to invite townspeople up to his place in the evening and encourage them to talk so that he could use them as material. He would sit on the porch and they stood below on the lawn. There was only light on the porch, and whenever someone said something that Faulkner considered out of character, he would shade his eyes and say, "Do you mind moving away, you're blocking the light." In *For Instants* there was a very bright light on the screen from a film projector, and projected onto that same surface was white writing on a black slide; you could only see that white writing if the light of the film projector was blocked out. I played a violin duet for tape and violin in which my hand moved back and forth in front of the film projector making it possible to see the written words only when the shadow made it dark enough to see through the double layer of light. The hand with the bow looked like it was holding a pencil.

As if you were writing.

Yes. And as my hand moved, you could see the lyrics for the song: "White on white, left to right. Could you move away, you're blocking the light." Editing and blindness were the themes, in a sense, in that piece. And in a lot of those performances I was dealing with the difference between writing and talking.

I was thinking about how you started out using your past as material. Some other artists whom I've spoken with who also used their past, their own lives--Chris Burden, Terry Fox, Vito Acconci--have now all moved beyond the exploration of their own pasts and are working much more with what happens when you put the work out into society, into the culture.

Exactly, exactly; that's the transition I've tried to make as well.

I decided that there are a lot of things going on in the world and that my work didn't have to be so self-reflecting. Suddenly the world was full of things to think about.

What made you change your perspective?

I think, ah, probably depression; it's usually depression--

(laugh)

And boredom. Depression and boredom. I had to force myself to change.

So your first big piece is Americans on the Move*?*

Yes. But others led up to it. Over a period of three years or so I began using a lot of political things in my work. One of the first ones, I think, was a story about Stephen Weed. It was a song for two microphones and two speakers. I moved from microphone to microphone, from left to right, and there were also two lights:

> "Stephen Weed/was asked by the FBI/to come in and answer a few questions/and they had it set up/so that there was an agent on his right/and an agent on his left;/they alternated questions/so that in order to answer them/he had to keep turning his head. /And he said that after a few hours of doing this/he realized that no matter what questions they asked/or what answer he gave,/the answer always looked like 'no...no...no.'"

Most of the work that I do is two-part or stereo, not monolithic at all--so there's always the yes/no, he/she, or whatever pairs I'm working with.

Yes.

But even with this American cultural cycle, it's one person's viewpoint and I still use "I". Another good transition for me was that I learned that I could say "you", and that was real exciting.

(laugh)

At first I felt that it was such a hugh assumption for me to talk to a "you"--

You had generalized.

Yes. I don't understand the use of"you" in public terms, especially in love songs. "You're so beautiful, you're bla,bla,bla,bla", and everyone thinks they're singing directly--

To the person! I know, that's one thing about English; it's the same word and verb for all the different meanings of "you". I think that's not like any other language. Do you speak other languages or do you just learn enough to get by for the performances?

I studied French for a long time, but I don't speak it very well. In

CLOSED CIRCUITS

A Song for Microphone Boom, Woodblock, Light, Voice, and Electronics

Well, I know who you are, baby—I've seen you get into that meditative state.
You're the snake charmer, baby...And you're also the snake.
You're a closed circuit baby...You've got the answers in the palms of your hands.

Well, I met a blind judge and he said, "I know who you are!" And I said, "Who?"
And he said, "You're a closed circuit, baby." He said, "You know, the world is divided into two kinds of things — there's luck...and there's the law. There's a knock on wood that says 'it might' and there's the long arm of the law that says 'it's right'. And it's a tricky balancing act between the two because *both* are equally true. 'Cause might makes right and anything could happen Que sera sera...Am I right?"

Well, I saw a couple of hula dancers just hula-ing down the street.
And they were saying, "I wonder which way the tide is gonna roll in tonight?"
And I said, "Hold up hula dancers! You know the tide's gonna roll out...then it's gonna roll right back in again. 'Cause it's a closed circuit, baby. We got rules for that kind of thing. And the moon is bright tonight."

And don't think I haven't seen all those blind Arabs around! I've seen'em around.
And I've watched them charm that oil right out of the ground.
Long black streams of that dark, electric light.
And they said, "One day, the sun went down and it went *way* down—into the ground.
Three thousand years go by...And we pump it right back up again. 'Cause it's a closed circuit, baby. We can change the dark into the light. And vice versa".

Well I know who you are, baby. I've watched you count yourself to sleep
You're the shepherd, baby. And you're also 1-2-3—hundred sleep.
I've watched you fall asleep.

Well, I was up real late last night...I must have just dropped off to sleep.
'Cause I saw you were crying, baby. You were crying in your sleep.
You're the snake charmer, baby. And you're also a very long snake.
You're a closed circuit, baby. You've got the answers in the palms of your hands.

Text for *Closed Circuits*. A song for microphone boom, woodblock, light, voice and electronics.

the last series of performances, I translated the thing and then I had an American who lives in Paris and a Parisian also translate it. Then I used a kind of balance of those three translations. That way I could feel comfortable with my version of French, but there would be some concessions to real French.

Right.

I think my accent was described as John Wayne selling used cars.

(laugh) But I don't know any other performance artist who even attempts to perform in French, Italian, Danish, German--to speak to people in their own language. Today you were speaking the story in French over the radio?

Yes, it was in French. We set up the phone last night to make the connection and also to use some electronics. Basically, since it's Sunday today, it was pretty much about the phone. I've done a lot of work for the telephone; it just seems like the only way to get out--

(laugh)

On Sunday. Sunday is the worst time--Sunday at 1 o'clock is the

worst time in the week for me--because it's very desolate, you know. I think this must be the time to visit friends.

For me it's Sunday at 4 o'clock--get the phone and talk to friends.

Sooner or later, it rolls around for everybody. So I was talking a little bit about time, and what it feels like to be--I remember the first television I ever saw. It was in Chicago in the '50's. It was before tapes so everything was live and it was all from New York. "Good evening it's 9 o'clock", and you'd look at the clock and it was 8 o'clock. And you'd think "Wow! New York is *always* later and darker...more exciting". That's when I decided to go to New York. Europe is even more so. It's in the future.

They're always in the future for us.

Yeah, they're our ancestors, too.

Since it's Sunday, were you thinking about religion?

Yes. When I was in Virginia I heard a lot of religious shows. I was staying in the Holiday Inn and watching television a lot. Local T.V. in the United States is so wonderful--so *local*. There was a series of dramatized biblical stories--Moses talking to Aaron in these *wonderful* Virginia accents, you know, and they had towels as turbans--they were sort of like terry cloth and you could see the tags, but it was really moving.

Moving? Oh, because it was so eccentric.

Yes. And then I saw the most bizarre thing I've ever seen, right after that show. This guy comes riding along on the T.V., on a horse, and then he gets off and he goes, "Howdee I jest wonna show this o-n-e little toy", and he brings out this kind of like little divining rod, designed by Mrs. Susie Adams, back in the back woods, Back Hollow, Virginia. It has two little horses' heads, revolving horses' heads on the end of each fork of the divining rod. And he says "This here is a GeeGaw Winnersnacker!"

GeeGaw Winnersnacker?

GeeGaw Winnersnacker. The show turned out to be a thing called "The Circuit Rider". He was like an old time southern preacher, who didn't have a church, but would ride around and preach wherever he could, "Now, when I turn this one head here", he said, "That's Gee, and when I turn this other head, that's Gaw. So! When Christ says Gee, you say Gee, when Christ says Gaw, you say Gaw. That's the GeeGaw Winnersnacker." I love T.V.

So do I.

I just like to look at situations. One nice thing about the work that I do is that I get to go around the different parts of the country. I also take a lot of trips even without doing work. Just going some place with no money and no plans.

Going to see whatever you can find.

Not taking a tape recorder or cameras--

Relying on your memory.

Really the chance to be not myself, you know, to be an observer and not to have to act in a particular way.

I understand that.

These are the times that I really learn the most.

Have you designed any new instruments recently?

I'm going to get a new instrument tomorrow. I'm really excited about it! It's a keyboard on which you can set pitch variations,then as you feed signals into it, let's say it's a series of words, the pitch changes so that there's a song generated by the words.

Did you work on the design of it?

No, no--you can get this instrument. Generally it's a studio instrument like the harmonizer. The harmonizer's really lovely. I use it for--well that was the low and high of the voice situation in the "Transportation" part of *Americans on the Move*.

You know what that reminded me of, a little bit: being in a seance and having the medium be possessed by another spirit and take on the spirit's voice.

I do have that sensation. But it's more especially when I play the violin, because the violin is, for me, another voice. The violin is in my vocal range pretty much, and I feel that in the duets I do talking and playing become really the same thing. And of course the way the whole instrument works is just so beautiful. I like to combine electronics with the violin; it's like combining the 20th and the 19th century. Electronics is so fast and the violin is a hand instrument.

The combination of 19th and 20th century is like incorporating history into the present.

Incorporating, and *updating*, history. For me, the action of the bow seems like an endless source of images, or ways to be. A lot of the pieces that I've made come out of this action.

The action of the bow across the strings?

A lot of the stories I use are about this kind of balance or glide activity. One of the first ones I did was *Unfinished Sentences*, which has a very linear design. There was a sentence, a bow length sentence, and then the bow just goes you know, this way, like that--

A bow length sentence, in other words, a sentence you would speak while you were moving the bow over strings? Or was it one of the tape bows?

It was strictly acoustic--using a bow with tape is another variation on that. Actually, the thing about using tools is that you need constant access to them. It seems strange that so many art students, for instance, work with video tape although they have limited access to the equipment. It's like a painter who thinks about a work for months and then, one day, goes out to rent a brush--paints the painting in 24 hours and returns the brush--clean--the next day.

No chance to really work with the material.

As for me, I like to work with whatever equipment I have, you know, and not plan things for equipment that I don't have--because it teaches things, the material does, in doing it; it teaches me things.

That sounds like John Cage, again actually. I'm wondering if Cage had been a specific influence on you?

I'm sure of it. Also, through other people who are influenced by him. Last year I was invited to be in the Nova Convention for William Burroughs, sort of a celebration of his work. I had not really read that much of Burroughs, I didn't feel connected to him, but since I was an M.C., I decided that I'd better read his books. Then I realized how widespread his influence was. He really was someone who had given a lot of freedom to people in a lot of different ways. And thinking about the artists who influenced me, one of them was Vito Acconci who in turn had, of course, read Burroughs.

Yes.

It's so easy sometimes to forget that you are part of a whole thought structure that is going on, and you participate in that, without--

Without acknowledging it or realizing it--

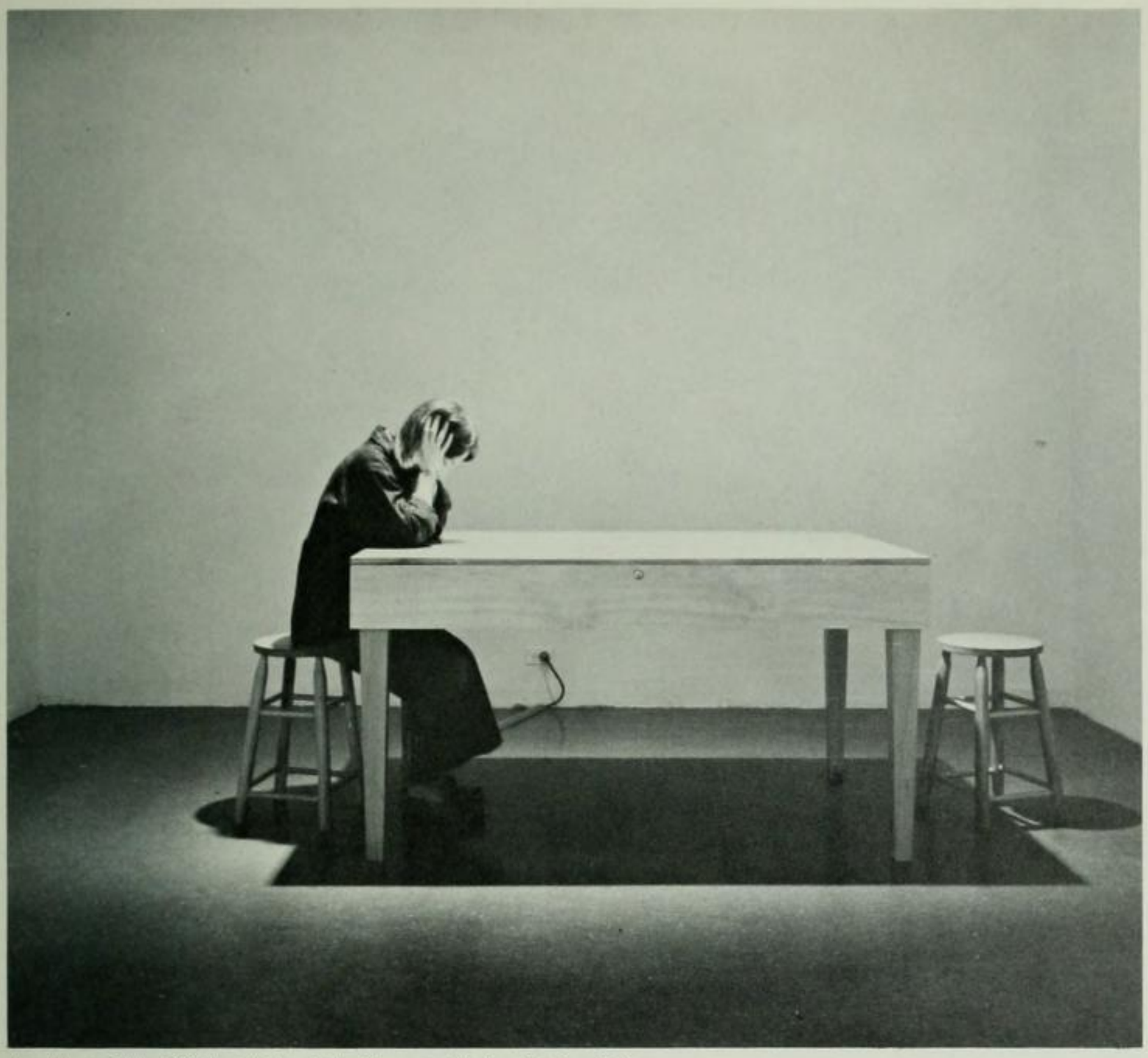
Yeah. You think you're alone and thought this up yourself, you know, and you're not; you're a part of this intricate web of 20th century thought. That, to me, is incredibly lovely because I--it's just less lonely.

How would people collect what you do? You don't make installations and you don't make objects.

Sometimes I do make objects. Violins, and tables--things like that, phone booths. I like to make objects or alter objects that already exist. I can see altering a table. You can also eat on it. I don't want that piece in my house actually, and I don't want the telephone booth here either; it's too crowded already.

Are they in somebody else's houses?

The table is on its way to Berlin now, actually; it's going to be in an exhibition. It's O.K. though no one will eat off it. Occasionally I do books, things like that. The project I've been working on for a couple of years is a record, which to me is an object. It's something in the physical world. Doing performances, the work that you do is



Handphone Table. 1978. Installation at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

seen by a certain number of people and that's all.

Is that why you resort to the radio or T.V. or records?

Well, I really like working on vinyl. When I did the show at Holly Solomon's with the juke box, we were going to put out an album as a kind of documentation. I've never been interested in documentation of my work, you know, it just was never an obsession. But to make a record was interesting. Then I started listening to the songs as I might listen to a record and it wasn't good enough, frankly. It was interesting as documentation but not as a record. And I wanted to make a good record, a thick record that you could listen to many times.

Like reading a book and you have to go back to certain passages.

Yes, exactly. I've done that record four times--

(laugh) Oh god!

And now I'm on the fourth version, re-recording it, burning the out-

takes, and it's been a whole long situation of learning to make a distinction between something that's heard in your house and something that exists in an art space with visual material. I have a plan to make a disc this spring, a video disc, which is real exciting to me. They're just coming out now, video disc players. They're all so odd looking--

I haven't seen them.

They're just like the first phonographs. Clumsy. And about to change the world.

* * * *

"The violin is, for me, another voice. . . . I feel that in the duets I do talking and playing become really the same thing. For me, the action of the bow seems to be like an endless source of images, or ways to be. A lot of the pieces that I've made come out of this action."

Performances continued:

OGGImusica Festival, Lugano, Italy
Real Art Ways, Hartford, Conn.
San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA
Mills College, Oakland, CA
Thorne Hall, Northwestern University, Chicago, Ill.
University of Virginia, Richmond, VA
Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta
Modern Art Gallery, Vienna, Austria
Stadtparkforum, Graz, Austria
Aspen Center for the Visual Arts, Aspen, Colorado
"Blue Horn File" (with David Van Tieghem and Peter Gordon), Mudd Club, NYC
"Commerce" (with Peter Gordon), US Customs House, NYC
Cabrillo Festival, Cabrillo, California

Group Exhibitions

1972 "Story Show", John Gibson Gallery, NYC
1973 "Thought Structures", Pace University, NYC
1974 "About 405 E. 13th St.", NYC
"Women Conceptual Artists", Lucy Lippard, Curator (travelling-US & Europe)
1975 "Narrative In Contemporary Art", Guelph, Ontario, Canada
"Group Show", Holly Solomon Gallery, NYC
"Not Photography", Artists Space, Edit deAk, curator
"Self Portraits", Fine Arts Building, NYC; Susan Penzner, curator
"Lives", Fine Arts Building, NYC, Jeffry Deitch, curator
1976 "Autogeography", Whitney Museum, Downtown Branch, NYC
"Performance/Object", Holly Solomon Gallery, NYC
"Non-Collectible Art from the Collection of Horace and Holly Solomon", Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, NY
"Choice" Yale School of Art, New Haven Conn.
"New Work/New York", Fine Arts Gallery, California State University, LA
"Line UP", Museum of Modern Art, NYC
1977 "Works On Paper", Holly Solomon Gallery, NYC
"Artist By Artist", Art Lending Service, Museum of Modern Art, NYC
"homecoming", PSI, Long Island City, NY
"Surrogates/Self Portraits", Holly Solomon Gallery, NYC
"Words At Liberty", Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
"Words", Whitney Museum, NYC
1978 "American Narrative Story Art", Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas and Berkeley University Art Museum
"Narration" Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Mass.
"Architexts-#1" And/Or, Seattle, Washington
"The Sense of Self; From Self Portrait to Autobiography" travelling exhibition organized by Independent Curators, Inc.
1979 "Small Is Beautiful", Freedman Gallery, Albright College, Reading, PA
Center Gallery, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA
"Words" Museum Bochum, Bochum, Germany
Palazzo Ducale, Genoa, Italy
"Stage Show" Museum of Modern Art Lending Service, NYC
Neuberger Museum, Purchase, NY
New Museum, NYC

Publications

1971 *The Package*, Bobbs-Merrill, NYC
1972 *October*, privately printed, NYC
1973 *Transportation Transportation'*, Pace University Print Shop, NYC
1974 *The Rose And The Stone*, privately printed, NYC
1978 *Notebook*, The Collation Center, NYC
1977 from "FOR INSTANTS", in *Individuals*, Dutton; Alan Sondheim, editor
1979 from "Americans On The Move", *October*, Spring issue, NYC

Discography

1977 "Its Not The Bullet That Kills You—It's The Hole", 45 rpm, Holly Solomon Gallery, NYC
1977 AIRWAVES, 110 Records, NYC (anthology, B. George)
1978 New Music For Electronic and Recorded Media, 1750 Arch St. Records, (anthology, Charles Amirkhanian)
1979 Big Ego, Dial A Poem Poets (anthology, John Giorno)

Laurie Anderson

Education: 1969 BA; Barnard College, NYC; Magna cum laude with honors in Art History; Phi Beta Kappa.
1972 MFA; Columbia University, NYC; Sculpture

One Person Installations and Exhibitions

1970 Barnard College, NYC
1973 Harold Rivkin Gallery, Washington, DC
1974 Artists Space, NYC
1977 Holly Solomon Gallery, NYC
Hopkins Center, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH
1978 And/Or, Seattle, Washington
Museum of Modern Art, NYC (Projects Gallery)
Matrix Gallery, Hartford Athenaeum, Hartford, Conn.
1979 University Art Museum, Berkeley, California

Performances

1972 "Automotive"; Town Green, Rochester, Vermont
1973 "O-Range"; Lewisohn Stadium, City College, NYC
1974 Artists Space, NYC
The Clocktower, NYC
Projects Gallery, Boston
"Duets On Ice", Five New York City locations
"How To Yodel", The Kitchen, NYC
1975 Music; Downtown Branch, Whitney Museum, NYC
"Songs And Stories For The Insomniac", Artists Space, NYC
"Songs And Stories For The Insomniac...Continuued", Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio
"Out Of The Blue", University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts
"Dearreader", Holly Solomon Gallery, NYC
"Dearreader - 2", Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, NY
"Dearreader - 3", Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, R.I.
1976 from "FOR INSTANTS", Museum of Modern Art, NYC
from "FOR INSTANTS", Whitney Museum, NYC
from "FOR INSTANTS", Brockport College, Brockport, NY
"FAST FOOD", Artists Space, NYC
from "FOR INSTANTS", Skidmore College, Saratoga, NY
from "FOR INSTANTS-3", Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, PA
from "FOR INSTANTS", California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, California
from "FOR INSTANTS-4", University of California, San Diego, California
from "FOR INSTANTS-4", Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, California
Stereo Stories, M.L.D'Arc Gallery, NYC
"Engli-SH", Akademie der Kunst, Berlin, West Germany
"Engli-SH", Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek, Denmark
"Road Songs", St. Marks Poetry Project, NYC
"Songs", Meet the Composer series, The New School, NYC
1977 "FOR INSTANTS-5/Songs For Lines/Songs For Waves", The Kitchen, NYC
"Audio Talk", The New School, NYC
De Appel, Amsterdam, Holland
from "FOR INSTANTS", Arte Fiera, Bologna, Italy
"Some Songs", International Cultural Center, Brussels, Belgium
"That's Not The Way I Heard It", Documenta, Kassel, Germany
"On Dit", Biennale, Paris, France
"That's Not The Way I Heard It-2", Galleria Salvatore Ala, Milan, Italy
1978 "FOR INSTANTS- Continuued", Otis Art Gallery, Los Angeles, California
"Some Songs", And/Or Gallery, Seattle, Washington
"Like A Stream", Benefit performance, The Kitchen, NYC
Reading, The Ear Inn, NYC
"Like A Stream-3", with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota
"Down Here", Texas Opry House, Houston, Texas (sponsored by Contemporary Art Museum, Houston)
"Some Songs", Mills College, Oakland, California
Wright State University Residency Performances: Wright State, Dayton, Ohio; Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, N.M.; University of California at Long Beach, California
"Some Songs-2", Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland, Oregon
"FOR INSTANTS-Continuued", DC Space, Washington, DC
"A FEW ARE...", Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario
"Song for Self-Playing Violin", Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnatti, Ohio
"Song for Self-Playing", Real Art Ways, Hartford, Connecticut
"Some Are..." Benefit for Hallwalls, Buffalo, NY
1979 "Americans On The Move - Preview", Carnegie Recital Hall, NYC
"Americans On The Move", The Kitchen, NYC
Theatre of Nations Festival, Hamburg, Germany
Groningen Museum, Groningen, Holland
International Cultural Center, Brussels, Belgium
Dany Keller Gallery, Munich, Germany
Cultural Center, Bonn, Germany
Customs House, New York City
Autumn Festival, Paris
International Theater Festival, Brussels
CAPC, Bordeaux