

RRFA 01: Robert Rauschenberg papers

Interviews: Kostelanetz, Richard / Interview with Robert Rauschenberg, 1966-1967

Dated: 1/29/67

Richard Kostelanetz
242 East Fifth Street
New York, New York 10003

Dear Mr. Kostelanetz:

With my signature, I hereby irrevocably consent and authorize the use of your interview with me, whether in whole or in part, in a book on the theatre of mixed means that you are compiling. I understand that this consent that I grant you herewith extends to all further publications of this interview, whether here or abroad, in English or in a foreign tongue. I also empower you to place this interview in a periodical, in advance of publication, for which I shall receive a percentage of the awarded fee, which I understand will be fairly determined solely by you, Mr. Kostelanetz, in relation to how much labor and expense the manuscript needs. This will be my sole form of compensation and you in turn shall make no claim whatsoever for any benefit my appearance in your book will bring to me. I am over twenty-one years of age.

Robert Rauschenberg
The Interviewee

Witnessed by:

[Signature]

Richard Kostelanetz
Richard Kostelanetz

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Richard Kostelanetz
c 242 East Fifth Street
New York, N.Y. 10003
27 November, 1966

Mr. Robert Rauschenberg
381 Lafayette Street
New York, N.Y. 10012

Dear Bob,

Here, by foot mail, is the transcript of our interview. I find it continually interesting--most of your ideas emerge quite clearly. I hope you are as pleased with it as I am. Also enclosed is an Xmas card for both you and Steve. Also a release, which could you please return to me. Among the magazines asking to see this for prepublication were PARTISAN REVIEW; so the quicker you can get this back to me, the faster I can get it out to them. Sorry about the delay, but my illness thoroughly screwed up the works for ages.

For one thing, the interview is slightly longer than most; that's why I've cut several things in pencil marks. If you feel them essential, conspicuously cross out my marks. (Do not erase, because I have the master copy, which will eventually go to the printer's. I'm libable not to see erasures.) If you want to cut more (it isn't necessary) or make any changes in either your own words or mine, please feel free to do so; also make insertions. On the latter, rather than scribble between the lines of typewriter print, could you please use insert slips, preferably typed, and staple them to the page upon which the insert belongs.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me.

I've tried several times to respond to Sue Hartnett's call to my answering service; but I've had no luck. May I ask to come to the big meeting on Wednesday at Central Plaza?

With thanks for your patience and cooperation with the interview,

Yours sincerely,


Richard Kostelanetz

P.S. One envelope to return to me,

Interview with Robert
Rauschenberg.

Richard Kostelanetz
242 East Fifth Street
New York, N.Y. 10003

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Q.) In the stuff I've read I've noticed that we hardly know what your childhood was like. ~~How did you channel your energies?~~

A.) It wasn't very much--just an ordinary house, sometimes in the city and sometimes in the country; but when we lived in the city, it was just on the outskirts. When we lived in the country, it was just on the outskirts. It wasn't country life, but there wasn't much city effect either. Post Arthur, Texas, was much smaller than it is today, of course; but it hasn't changed its character very much. It's a refining town and a port. My father worked for the power company. He quit school in the third grade; so they always thought that going to school would be a very important thing. But I absolutely hated school and graduated very neatly in the fourth quadrant. I didn't think it was so bad until I figured out what quadrant meant.

Q.) Well, what did you do ^{with yourself during} those years.

A.) Well, I just tried to get ^{through} through. I had no sense that school had anything to offer. In classes I did a lot of drawing, instead of reading. Mostly, hour by hour, I would just sit there hoping that a time ^{would} pass a little quicker and that I would get through it. There ~~were~~ only a couple of times I got interested. One was a class in English, where I got involved with writing; but it was because we had a good teacher.

Q.) Were you involved with activities outside of school.

A.) I did lots of extra-curricular stuff. I didn't take drama,

but by the time we got to junior high school and high school, school, I worked with a repertory after hours things

Q.) As an actor.

A.) No, I was too shy to act, but I did all the schlepping. I painted posters and scenery and stuff like that. In school, I was on every publicity committee there was. I knew that I could make resemblances of things. I could handle color, which was all tempera, like poster paint. I couldn't letter. I really enjoyed doing that, and it wasn't until after I had left Texas, I had already been in the University of Texas for six months and went into the Navy; and I still had not found out (that one could be an artist) I do not know I avoided it, except that in Port Arthur there was no sense of any kind of cultural life. Life magazine wasn't there; we did not have the kind of communication we have nowadays. I'm sure that the dog even knows about art.

Q.) Then, in school you had a reputation as a person who could draw or at least do certain kinds of drawings.

A.) And I loved it, and that was the thing. I would work all night on something like that, but I wouldn't crack a book or do fifteen minutes worth of homework.

Q.) So, then, something did happen in high school. You found a vocation--something you like to do so much that you did it, and you were known to do it well.

How did you regard drawing them--as a kind of technical ability, like weightlifting or penny-pitching.

A.) I never thought of it as much of an ability. I thought everybody could do it a little bit. Some people could draw a little better than other people, but I never took drawing or painting any more seriously than that.

Q.) Later, [Josef] Albers told me I couldn't draw--that my whole

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a lot of

penny-pitching.

that I discovered

childhood was wasted.

Q.) Did he do so in fact.

A.) I had an awful time pleasing him. I was too messy for collage, and I was too heavy-handed in my drawings.

Q.) ~~They like~~ He would like open spaces and thin lines.

A.) Right. The Matisse kind of thing.

~~Q.) Was he committed not only to his methods but to his own style.~~

⇒ He would teach a course in form, that he teaches year after year refining it more and more, and a course in the performances of color. A really clinical method.

Q.) As you describe it, it sounds as though he is trying to impart more knowledge than style.

A.) Right. We worked in drawing from the same model. Once a week or once every two weeks, someone in the class at Black Mountain would pose for us. Then, he would do this--the valleys and the mountains and things like that about the figure. Other than that, it was an aluminum pitcher--those regular things without a straight line in them; and you can't do any shading; and yet it is really outside and inside that you do it with one line, and you can't do any erasing. You feel that there is air on this side of the line and on the other side of the line is the form. In watercolor, we had it again--one model we used month after month; and it was a terra-cotta flowerpot.

Q.) What happened then, you were unable to reproduce these things in the required way.

A.) Right. I figured out, at least in the water-coloring classes, that what he really had in mind was something like Cezanne. I found him so intimidated that after six months of this, during the first year, my whole focus was simply to try to do something that would please him. I didn't care what I got out of class. All I wanted to do was one day walk in there and show him something and hear him say, "That's

pretty good."

Q.) It sounds like the old myth of the ~~European immigrant~~ ^{idealist} who had preconceptions that you, as an American, found impossible to recreate. The American discovers that he cannot do it the way the European did it. Instead, he does it on his own, in his own way.

I noticed that you wish to avoid historical interpretations of yourself. In general, you would prefer not to say that someone influenced you, for you see everything ^{as happening} at the moment.

A.) No, I've been influenced by painting, very much; but if I have avoided ^{saying} that, it was because of the inclination, until very recently, to believe that art exists in art. At every opportunity, I've tried to correct that idea, suggesting that art is only a part-- one of the elements that we live with. Being a painter, I probably take painting more seriously than someone who drives a truck or something. ~~Being a painter~~, I probably also take his truck more seriously.

Q.) In what sense.

A.) In the senses of looking at it and listening to it and comparing it to other trucks and having a sense of its relationship to the road and the sidewalk and the things around it and the driver himself.

Q.) You suggest, then, that we must revise our notions on two counts: of what art is and what the artists does.

A.) I think historians have tended to draw too heavily upon the idea that in art there is an historical development. I think you can see similarities.

Q.) They are concerned with identifying influence and, thereby, continuities.

A.) Right. There's another thing. Now we have so much information that ~~area~~ A painter a hundred or two hundred years ago knew very little about what was going on in painting ⁱⁿ any other place but his immediate friends or some outstanding events. It wasn't natural for

into consideration also
him also to take in cave painting and fold ~~it~~ into his own sense
of the present.

Q.) Didn't Malraux say that the artbook, as a museum without walls,
makes all the past immediately present, in the same way that recordings
~~make~~ ^{of music's} all the past immediately present.

A.) I think that people like Leonardo Da Vinci had not a technique
or a style in common with other artists but a kind of curiosity about
life that enabled him to change his medium so easily and so successfully.
I really think he was concerned with the human body when he did his
anatomical work. ~~But~~ I think he was making his investigations
equally from his ^{personal} ~~own~~ curiosity away from any art idea as he was
trying to figure out how a horse's leg works so that he could do a
sculpture of it.

Q.) He had less commitment to art than to his own curiosity, which
took him into art into one case and into science in another case.
(Generalizations)

A.) I think, if you want to make generalities, there are probably
two kinds of artists @ ^{one} ~~the~~ kind that works independently, following
his own drives and instincts; the work becomes a product, or the
witness, or the evidence of his own personal involvement and curiosity,
his desire to the creation or create
rather than making an interesting artwork.

Q.) Or ~~the~~ ^{to} ~~make~~ ^{of} a career out of being an artist. So you would
say that Rimbaud, in that famous example, gave up poetry for a
good reason--he wanted to do something else. You would believe
then that art is not a temple to which you apprentice yourself
for future success.

A.) It's almost as if art, in painting and music and stuff, is
the leftovers of some activity. The activity is the thing that I'm
most interested in. Nearly everything that I've done was to see what
would happen if I did this or if I did that.

Q.) Rather than say what the artist does, you want to say that there
are two kinds of artists and they do their own ^{work} in different ways.

A.) It's like outside focus and inside focus. A lot of painters use a studio to isolate themselves; another function is to free themselves. Do they sound too much like the same thing? If I painted in this room--
 X the stove is here and ^{is black} all those ^{POTS} dishes ^{are} there--my sensibility, being what I am, would always take into consideration that the woodwork is brown, that the dishes are this size, that the stove is here and the stove looks like this. I've tended always to have a studio that either too big to be influenced by details or neutral enough so that there wasn't a constant specific influence, because I work
 X very hard to be ^{ACTED ON} influenced by as many things as I can. That's what I call being awake.

Q.) I lost the point about studios. This kitchen here, if you used it as a studio, ^{full of detail} would be different from a studio that was bare, and ~~therefore~~ it would have a different effect upon you. Therefore, if I were to ^{ask} you ^{to draw on} a piece of paper two feet by four feet in this room, the result would be quite different from what would happen if I were to give you the same piece of paper in the next room. Thus, the environment of a place ^{greatly influences} determines the style of everything that happens within it.

A.) One might not see it in the first work, but certainly by the third work you would know it. When you first begin working, you find your batteries charged from all kinds of activities. Sometimes (it doesn't help) and what you find is not anything you can use or you can not use it. A first work would tend to be more foreign from what you had done the day or week before than, say, if you had been working on three or four things, one right after the other.

Q.) Do you ever isolate yourself to work--refuse to answer the phone, ^{to} listen to the noises on the street, ^{to} respond to the doorbell--and do this for a long period of time, like a couple of days.

A.) If I am very busy and have more to do than I can do at that moment,

well I'm certainly willing to let the telephone ring. Still, I find it very hard not to wonder whether that telephone call wasn't very important or something so that I've always tended to get most of my work done at night, when the regular dirty activities have sort of slacked off.

Q.) From what hours to what hours.

A.) No particular time. I have many times worked for several days in a row, maybe taking a half hour nap and then starting over again. It's not a cultivated thing but more a matter of how interested I am in what I am doing.

Q.) Do you sleep an half hour and then work another day.

A.) No, I can work for four or five more hours and then take another nap. Buckminster Fuller used to have a system like that, where he could sleep just a little bit; but I don't know if he still does it.

Q.) People are enormously impressed by the variety of your work.

← How do you look upon your past work as a painter--as an evolution, or merely a succession of islands upon which you're put your foot.

A.) Looking back, I can see certain things growing, as well as a slacking of interest in ^{ANOTHER} one area because I am familiar enough with it. So far, I've been lucky enough always to discover a new curiosity so that there's always been a new curiosity that also feeding and building while I'm doing something else. I can figure out some logical reasons when I look back far enough, BUT I NEVER DO WHEN I'M MAKING THE WORK.

Q.) Let me take a particular example that interests me--say, the white paintings of 1952. Here you have created what, if you believe in linear notions of art history, is a dead end. Did you look upon it as a gesture toward a dead end.

A.) No, It just seemed like something interesting to do. I wasn't aware of the fact that it was an extreme position; but I really wanted to see for myself whether there would be anything to look at, but I did not do it as an extreme logical gesture--a Barney Newman stripe without a

RR

Q.) But there was an idea there, then--not an idea derived from art history but ~~the idea of~~ a simple experiment. ^{which was to see if a painting could incorporate transient images from outside itself} Therefore, once you discovered the result of that idea, then ^{you} could go onto another.

A.) You could speculate whether it would be interesting or not; but you could waste years arguing. All I had to do was make one and ask, 'Do I like that?' 'Is there anything to say there?' 'Does ~~that~~ thing have any presence?' 'Does it really matter that it looks ~~pinker~~ ^{BLUER} now, because it is late afternoon?' Earlier this morning it looked quite ~~blue~~ ^{WHITE}. 'Is that an interesting experience to have?' To me, the answer was yes. No one has ever bought one; but those paintings are still very full to me. I think of them as anything but a way-out gesture. A gesture implies the denial of the existence of the actual object. If it had been that, I wouldn't have had to have done them. Otherwise it would only be an idea.

Q.) I ~~one~~ suggested that there is a strain of modern art that is more interesting for what it implies than what it is. Take Warhol's movie ~~THE~~ EMPIRE STATE BUILDING which, though rather boring, implies the question of whether ~~static~~ movies can be constructed with a fixed space and an open time. I thought of the White Paintings as an example of this; but you would say, quite the contrary. You find it endlessly interesting to look at, and you look at it all the time. Is this because you did it?

A.) I don't think I could answer that. Obviously, I have a very strong affinity ^{ever} with it, or else I wouldn't have done it.

Q.) Have you ^{ever} put them up for sale.

A.) Yes. They were for sale. There are five white ones. I also ^{AT THAT TIME} did two black ones, but the black didn't work very well for me. Two was really enough of that. After I painted ~~ed~~ one, two, three and four of the white ones, I jumped to an arbitrary large number, which would imply that they could just go on and on. I had no

interest in exploiting the fact or establishing a reputation as the artist who paints those white canvases. It wasn't an obsession. I try to avoid obsessions.

Q.) You wouldn't do it today.

X A.) I don't have to. ~~I'm lucky.~~

Q.) If, say, every one of them had been sold, would you do one again/just to have it around.

A.) I probably would have kept one. I like to keep at least one work from a particular series. I probably have a very bourgeois sense of security. When I get up and ask myself, 'When are you going to do something,' it is kind of nice to be able to go to

X the paint rack and look and say, "That's not bad, DID I DO THAT"

Q.) As a writer, should I hang up my favorite manuscripts on the wall; and when I get depressed or run down, I should go look at them. for ~~inspiration~~ comfort and inspiration.

A.) If they work for you.

Q.) ^{Claus} Oldenberg said that ~~someday~~ he has a dream ^{that} someday he would call all his things back, that they had not really gone away.

X A.) ^{SOMETIMES} I have ^A another funny feeling that in working with a black canvas, say, and with something you picked ~~up~~ up off the street and you work on it for three or four days or maybe a couple of weeks and then, all of a sudden, it is in another situation. Much later, you go to see somebody in California, and there it is. You know that you know everything about that painting so much more than anybody else in that room. You know where you ran out of nails.

Q.) You can look at it then as a kind of personal history.

A.) Yes. It's not like publishing, for each one is an extremely unique piece, even if it is in a series. I like to look at an old work and discover that is where I first did ~~such and such~~ ^{CERTAIN THING}, which may be something I may ~~now~~ just happen to be doing now.

At the time I did that earlier piece, I didn't know it was the lower right hand corner that had the new element--that that part would grow and that other parts would relate more to the past.

Q.) So than rather than an evolutionary metaphor, you are suggesting the image of, what is it, waves, that each new waves has some of the past wave in it.

A.) I don't know what I would ^{CORRECTIVELY DO} if it should ever stop. I don't know how I do what I do, so I certainly wouldn't know how to start it.

I do feel like ^{it} could stop, simply because I don't feel responsible for having started it. I never really had a big drive that I could consider cultivated.

Q.) As it just happened suddenly, then it could just stop happening with equal suddenness. Do you worry about its halt.

X A.) You worry about all kinds of things. It is not so much worrying ^{AS} about it that I think about it ~~so often~~. You wonder why some paintings ^{ers} didn't start until they were forty and why other finished painting by the time they were forty.

Q.) Have you ever started something that you couldn't finish.

X A.) Yes, ^{BUT} I really try very hard not to do that. I work very hard to finish everything. One of the most ^{PROBLEMATIC} difficult pictures I ever made was something I was doing for ^{A MAGAZINE} ART NEWS; you know that painter's picture series. I had started the radio sculpture thing, ORACLE. My mind ^{WAS} felt very uncomfortable by all ^{THE NEW DIFFICULTIES AFFORDED IN AFFORDED IN} that work in metal, because I really didn't know what to do with it. So I figured I ^{WOULD IF I WAS TO BE SCRUTINIZED} do a painting instead. I said I'd do it, and I try to do what I say I will do. That painting went through so many awkward changes, unnecessarily. It was large, it was free standing. Then I put it against the wall, then I finally sawed it in half, and made two paintings out of it. I wrecked one of them.

Q.) This The reason was that your mind wasn't geared to painting

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A.) Right. And I didn't know what to do when Rudy Burckhardt came up and said how far did you get today. 'Can I take the picture tomorrow. Why did you do that? What do you have on your mind?'

It just didn't work out. I knew I was compromising at the time; and when the article went in, I insisted that they photographed what I was not doing too. If those things are going to mean anything, they somehow ~~ought~~ to be the truth. In those day, it seemed like that would be your only chance for the next twenty years to get your ~~picture~~ ^{PAINTING} reproduced in color. ~~Now I have this lousy painting.~~

Q.) In looking at your career, the customary remark is to tote up all the forms you have used: ~~white painting~~ blueprint paper, white painting, black painting, collage, assemblage, ~~combines, theatre pieces~~

A.) I call those things 'combines,' because it was before the museum show ~~was~~ of assemblages. RR

Q.) Doesn't 'combine' refer to paintings with ~~amplified~~ ^{more} dimensions than two--with the Angora Goat we have three, with the radio four.

A.) Earlier I had this problem with the paintings that would be free standing--not against the wall. I didn't think of them as

~~sculpture~~. I actually made them ~~as~~ ^a as a realistic objection; it was unnatural for these to be hung on a wall. So when the sculptural or collage elements ^e got so three/dimensional, then the most natural thing in the world was to ^{put} wheels on it and ~~put~~ ^{put} it out into the middle of the room. That gave me two more sets of surfaces to work on. It was an economical thing. I think I've been very practical. Sometimes the underneath surface is also a painting surface, because that would be viewed. ~~I think I've been very practical.~~ In that one there is a mirror on the side so that you can see what is underneath there without bending down, or you're invited to.

Q.) So you looked upon these as paintings. ^{for}

A.) I thought of them as paintings, but (over)

← What to call them--painting or sculpture--got to be a very interesting point, which I did not find interesting at all. Almost as a joke I thought I'd call them something, as Calder was supposed to have done with 'mobiles,' and it worked beautifully. Once I called them 'combines,' people were confronted with the work itself, not what it wasn't. Sometimes you can choke on these things; people have called my drawings 'combine drawings." The word does really have a use--it's a free-standing picture.

Q.) Just in passing, let me say there is one work ^{of yours} I can't deduce.

~~That is~~ ^{the set,} ~~FACTUM I and II.~~

A.) I was interested in the role that accident played in my work. So I did two paintings as much alike as they could be alike, using identical materials--as much as they could be alike without getting scientific about it. Although I was imitating on one painting what I had done on the other, neither one of these paintings was an imitation of the other, because I would work as long as I could on one painting and then, not knowing what to do next, move over to the other. I wanted to see how different, and in what way, would be two paintings that looked that much alike.

Q.) How, then, did some critics consider this a comment on action painting.

A.) I think Tom Hess said that. Again, you see, if you do anything where an idea shows up, particularly in those years when an act of painting was considered pure self-expression, then it was assumed that the painting was a ~~gesture~~ ^{N. EXTENSION OF THE MAN.}. The climate isn't like that now.

We've had a history of painting here now, and it's unfortunately getting to be not like Europe, I think. We have enough reserve work so that it is very easy for a tradition to exist here which also includes any new ideas, which ^{are} immediately tacked on to where we were yesterday.

Q.) Where we were once part of European history, now everything is part of American history.

A.) ~~That's~~ That's what I mean. In the old days, the differences were a lot clearer.

Q.) Does this bother you.

A.) Yes, a little. I can see that having all the material to think historically, more people will deal with art historically.

Q.) And, therefore, making historical gestures, rather than doing things on their own.

A.) ~~And~~ And also the way of looking at work. Instead of just being confronted with an object--a sculpture or a piece of theatre--we have so much past now that it is very easy to get off on tangents that are absolutely irrelevant--what's is like and what it's not like-- and that miss the energy that actually created it.

Q.) Painting is being put into historical perspective before it has become history.

A.) I would like to see a lot more stuff that I didn't know what to do with.

Q.) In several earlier statements, you said that your paintings were not the result of idea. What you've said now, however, suggests that they stem from a certain kind of idea.

A.) I think the ideas are based upon very obvious physical facts, ^{notions} that are also simple-minded, such as, in the white paintings, wanting to know if that was a thing to do or not, ^{on an factor} wondering what the role of accident is. Those aren't really very involved ideas.

Q.) That is different from the idea, say, of doing a painting about war.

A.) Yes, they are more physical than aesthetic.

Q.) Rather than posing a thesis, you are asking a question and then doing some artistic experiment to answer it, or ^{to} contribute to an answer.

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A.) But I do it selfishly. I want to know.

Q.) What kind of idea was present in, say, MONGRAM (1959), if you can remember.

which contains a stuffed Angora goat

(if you can remember)

A.) I have always worked with stuffed animals and before that stuffed baseballs--objects of common..... But a goat was special in the way that a stuffed goat is special, and I wanted to see if I could integrate an animal or an object as exotic as that. I've always been more attracted to familiar or ordinary things, because I find them a lot more mysterious. The exotic has a tendency to be immediately strange. With common or familiar objects, you are a lot freer; they take my thoughts a lot farther.

cut

Q.) Does the success of the painting depend upon the fulfillment of the original idea.

A.) Not only for content was it a difficult object to work with, but it is absolutely beautiful. Angora Goats are beautiful animals

the goat

because also

~~anyway~~. I did three versions of that painting. For the first one, I was still on the wall; I got him up there safely attached to the flat surface. To make him appear light--and this is the way my mind tends to work--I put light-bulbs under him, which erased the shadow of the enormous shelf that was supported him. When I finished it, I was happy with it for about four days; but it kept bothering me that the goat's other side was not exposed; that it was wasted. I was abusing the material. So, off it came. I did a piece where he was free-standing. There was a narrow seven foot canvas that was attached to the base that he was on. I kept having the association

I couldn't have him facing the canvas, because it looked like some kind of stiff life, like oranges in the bowl. So I had him turned around, which gave me another image which didn't occur to me until, this time, only two days after I had finished it--a kind of beast in ~~car~~. It looked as though he had some responsibility for

AND VEHICLE

X

upright
 supporting the canvas or that pulling a ~~canvas~~ canvas or cart was his job. So, the last solution stuck, which was simply to put him right in the middle--to make an environment with him simply being present in it.

Q.) How dominant is he?

A.) He is dominant but I wouldn't worry as much about that as how dependent is everything else to him. I think that the painted surface and the other objects were equally interesting, once you see what the goat is doing there.

Q.) But doesn't this presume that you forget about the goat to a certain extent.

A.) No, you forget about how exotic it is to have a goat in the picture, which was never the point. It was one of many challenges, but it wasn't a function of the work to exhibit an exotic animal interestingly. Also, the tire around the goat brings him back into the canvas and keeps him from being an object in himself.. You don't say, 'What is that goat doing in that painting, but why the tire around the goat'; and you're already involved.

Q.) Why have you do such a diversity of work ~~moving on from island to island~~ ^{and impatient} Do you get bored easily.

A.) I'm not.... I'm sure every artist says this, but I'm not interested in what I know a lot about.

Q.) How do you know.

A.) You get a feeling when you ^{are} working that maybe that's just about enough of this sort of thing and that you'd like to do something else.

Q.) ^{Now that you have become so involved with theatre,} Have you given up painting.

A.) No, That was a mistaken rumor. Giving up painting is all part of that historical thing. ^{PLUS THE COMFORT IN SPECIALIZATION.}

Q.) The whole notion of your giving anything up ^{probably} strikes you as rather ludicrous. (over)

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 from
 P-52-3

Q.) Have you in fact done any painting this past year.

A.) I've done a few ~~watercolor~~ drawings and watercolors. I haven't done a painting. I've been busy moving into this place, which has taken about nine months; and before that, I was looking for places. I think that does something to ~~do~~^{you} psychologically. Also, I got rid of all my silkscreen. I had a friend come up and do that while I was touring with Merce Cunningham, because I did want to come back and have all the material I had already known, after I had stopped painting for some time. I didn't want to fall into any old habits after I had ~~actually~~ been all the way around the world. I was sure that the energy I had stored up would throw me right back into the studio. When I returned, I found that ~~still~~ although I didn't have any silkscreens, I had four large canvases, and I immediately had to do something with them. So, I did something else--collages from silkscreen printing, that were done on paper so that I would have a record of the images I could use. I was going to store them, to see what use they might be to ~~me~~ at a later date. I also bolted objects onto the collage surface at any place; I found that ~~interesting~~^{MIXTURE INVOLVING}.

Q.) I don't fully get that.

A.) Say this is the canvas here; it was full of paper and paint. Then you put a piece of plexiglass over that and bolt that on, and that gives you a surface. ~~You can tack things on here and there.~~

Q.) ~~It gives the canvas more body.~~

A.) It gave me a ground so that I could attach something.

Q.) What kind of paintings do you have in mind for the future.

A.) I have a very complicated idea that I'm not ready to do now, and I'm very anxious to work. I have another thing I want to try, and it is simply a matter of when the cleaners get out.

Q.) Will you be able to work on a painting while you are doing theatre work.

A.) Absolutely, I always did that.)

Q.) You see it sounds interesting for the painter to give up painting.

Q.) It's the myth of Duchamp. Actually, I was thinking more of Claus Oldenburg's statement ^{me} that when he did a theatre piece he temporarily gave up painting.

A.) The last year before I went away with Merce, when I was doing a lot of theatre, I did more painting than I ever had before. If you're working on something, it seems to me that the ~~more~~ more you work the more you see the more you think; it just builds up.

Q.) You would prefer then a more varied regime than a single-minded regime.

A.) Absolutely. I find that when I'm working on paintings, I can do drawings I like very much. You are forced to adjust to flat surface and a different scale. I can't see yet what the painting does for the theatre work, for I really don't know what I'm doing in theatre.

Q.) How did you become involved with theatre.

A.) I've always been interested, even back in high school. ^P _{Q.)} Is there a mystique of theatre that captures you.

A.) I like the liveness of it--that awful feeling of being on the spot. I must assume the responsibility for that moment, for those actions that happen at that particular time.

Q.) Are you on the spotlight now.

A.) No. If I said anything that I didn't want you to repeat or to take out of here on that tape, I wouldn't even bother to see that you erased it. What theatre ^{is} look like is what it was.

Q.) Was your first professional involvement with Cunningham ^{and what did you do for him.}

A.) With him, and with Paul Taylor. ^{At} first I did just costumes and props. Then, at a certain point, it became clear that the lighting and the whole staging was just as essential to the way it looked as what they were wearing. Merce lost his lighting man, and although

I didn't know anything about lighting, John Cage and Merce convinced me that ~~that~~ I could learn it for the next concert, which would be, like, in two weeks. There were three new pieces, and I didn't know one thing from another. I thought that personally I know I can't, but I certainly do like it that they think I can. I'll try to do it their way. One must encourage that kind of faith.

At the same time I was getting interested in what the dancers at Judson Church were doing--both dancers that were in Merce's company and dancers that weren't. Before I did any real theatre of my own, Tinguely and Jasper Johns and myself collaborated with David Tudor to do a concert in Paris, and we also worked on Kenneth Koch's "The Construction of Boston," which was later. I don't find theatre that different from painting, and it's not that I think of painting as theatre or vice versa. I ~~tend to~~ think of working as a kind of involvement with materials, as well as ^a rather focused interest which changes from time to time, which then gets to be simply what people would call style later.

Q.) *Even though* your involvement with theatre may not be too different from your involvement with painting, ~~but~~ surely painting is different from theatre on the outside.

A.) Well, in my paintings, almost from the very beginning, I observed that painting changed from one kind of light to another. Then I started incorporating lights into my painting, and theatre is a continuation of that. I wasn't proving that a lightbulb was paint or that paintings ought to have light bulb^s. It was an organic evolving of ~~those~~ ^{those} materials.

Q.) You say it as ~~a natural extension~~ ^{neither an eccentric gesture nor a logical step but}

A.) ~~It is true that painting changes with light.~~ ^{physical} All right. So what happens if in this area you have a fixed light situation or if you fix the light this close to the pigment. Lighting for Merce

seemed to me to be the same kind of involvement. If you use this kind of light, it will look this way. If you use a little light, it's like painting ^{in the} dark.

Q.) Did you add to their work significantly? Was Merce's work different?

X A.) I was ~~quite~~ free. WORKING-RELATIONSHIP.

Q.) I mean different because of your contribution.

A.) I think somebody else has to answer that.

Q.) How did you become a choreographer--the author of a theatre piece.

A.) That skating piece ^{Pelican} was my first piece. Naturally my respect for the technical ability and beauty of Merce's group didn't make it any easier. At the same time the more I was around that kind of activity, I realized that painting didn't put me on the spot as much or not in the same way, so at a certain point I had to do it.

Q.) Was there a larger challenge here?

A.) When I did ~~set~~ ^{the} lights, my lighting cues were not programmed. I played the light ^{board}. From performance to performance, things were different. In a work called STORY, I never repeated the set. ~~It~~ A new one ^{was} made for each performance from materials gathered from different places. The costumes, actually, stayed more ^{or less} the same; but from time to time, stuff was thrown out and other stuff was brought in.

Q.) Was it just miscellaneous clothing?

A.) ~~Or anything you could cover yourself with.~~ The dancers could ~~not~~ ^{or any} decide which of these or none ^{were going to} they ~~would~~ wear when. I never knew where anyone was going to be; the space was not defined. ~~This was the only way to do it.~~ In fact, I had already been lighting his ~~traditional work the same way.~~

The set had to be made, ^{out of what you could find,} given the amount of time ^{that} you ~~could find in~~ a particular locale, out of stuff ^{that} was there.

Q.) In the auditorium itself?

A.) No, out in the alley or anyplace you could get it.

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We didn't travel with a set.

Q.) What you then had was a piece not with a closely composed score but ^{rather with} a set of ground rules. for how this game ^{should} ~~shall~~ be played, and the ~~the~~ game started as soon as you came into town.

A.) Right, That was an exciting thing to do.

Q.) In some places, like London where we were held over for six to eight weeks, well, and we did the piece three or four times a week, then it was very difficult to do a completely different thing every night. A couple of times we were in ~~sets~~ such sterile situations that Alex Hay, my assistant, ^{and I} would actually have to be part of the set. The first time it happened was in Dartington. ~~that~~ school in Daven. That place was inhabited by a very familiar look--that Black Mountain beatnik kind of look; about everybody; but they occupied the most fantastic and beautiful old English building, all of whose shrubs were trimmed. There was nothing rural or rustic or unfinished about it. For the first time, there was absolutely nothing to use; you can't make it every time. There was a track at the very back of the stage that had lights in it; so the dancers couldn't use that space. About an hour before the performance, I asked Alex whether he had any shirts that need ^{ed} ironing, which is a nice question to ask Alex because ~~he~~ always did and he always ironed his own shirts. So, we got two ironing boards, and we put them up over these blue lights that were back there ^{Q-when} and the curtains open, ^{ed} and there were these dancers and these two people ironing shirts. It must have looked quite beautiful, but we can't be sure absolutely. But from what I could feel about the way it looked and the lights coming up through the shirts, it was like a live passive set, like live decor.

Q.) Would you do it again.

A.) I won't do that. Then we found out, since we were touring for a year, that we went more in that direction. It didn't occur to me then but it does now that it might ^{have been} ~~be~~ difficult to tell whether we were

ADD "A"
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choreography or set. I knew and I assumed it would be perfectly clear. ^{knowing that my job was to do decor, it might have been in bad taste, but I did it in all innocence.} You see there is really very little difference between the action of paint and the action of people, except that paint is a nuisance because it keeps drying and setting.

Q.) However, there is, I think, a great difference between doing decor and being the author of an entire piece.

A.) Well, you do a bit more. When you make sure that all the cables are ~~are~~ taped down and that the curtains are working and that the stage is locked, you've already done everything except get up the nerve to go out there.

Q.) And put your name on it.

A.) It wasn't so hard to put your name on it as it was actually to be there yourself.

Q.) On the stage.

A.) The first piece I did, PELICAN, I had no intention of being in; but since I didn't ^{actually,} know much about making a dance, so I used roller skates as a means to freedom from any kind of inhibitions that I would have. That already gives you limitations, puts you in a certain area that you must deal with.

Q.) This is another one of your physical ideas that then determined possibilities.

A.) It was a ^{use} ~~using~~ of the limitations of the material as a freedom that would ~~somehow~~ establish the form, eventually. I auditioned dancers for the piece; and to my surprise, I found that dancers who had skated when they were children and some of them quite well, because of their training, couldn't roller skate. They froze, and it was every awkward. It needed ^a the kind of abandon to actually do it of someone who wasn't trained.

Q.) Was the reason physical in origin^g or psychological, similar to why actors ^{an} have trouble being in happenings.

A.) I bet it's the same kind of thing. In their thinking, ~~they~~ dancers have a going dialogue between them^{selves} and the floor, and you see I put wheels between them and the floor. They couldn't hear the floor any more, and their muscles didn't know where they were.

Q.) Did roller-skating movement become the syntax of the piece.

A.) No, it was just a form of locomotion. There were other wheels in the dance too.

Q.) Was that a unifying image.

A.) No, it was just that once you establish the fact that you are going to call it a dance, as I did, and you didn't want it to be a skating act, then somehow the other ingredients had to adjust to that; so that ~~the~~ Carolyn Brown, who was not on skates, was dancing on point^s, which is just as arbitrary as way of moving. (Some kind of relationship was established with the ground we were on that somehow had to continue, because that was the nature of the piece.) It would not have occurred to me--well, once I say it, it occurs to me and I think it could be done--that someone could have possibly walked in that piece. Like when you ~~you~~ do a black and white painting, you just give up the idea of different colors, even though you could put colors in black and white paintings, just as someone could have walked in that piece. But if your focus is on the black-and-white, then that's ^{where} ~~where~~ you are.

Q.) It was a physical decisions^g that determined^d certain possibilities, but ^{it did} not totally determine^d the piece.

A.) Anything you make up your mind about you can change it about.

Q.) May I please ask you to describe in detail, from start to finish, the piece I saw several times and am, therefore, most familiar with, MAP ROOM II. I'm particularly interested in processes of creation in the new theatre.

A.) I began that piece by getting some materials to work with-- again we have that business of limitations and possibilities. I just got a bunch of tires, not ~~so~~ because I'm crazy about tires but because they are so available in New York, even on the street. I could be back here in fifteen minutes with five tires. If I were working in Europe, that wouldn't be the material. Very often people ask me about these repeated images, in both my painting and theatre like the wheels of a tire. Now I may be fooling myself, but I think it can be traced to their availability. Take the umbrella,

Q.) which appears in CHARLENE ~~and~~ and elsewhere.

A.) After any rainy day, it is hard to walk by a garbage can that doesn't have an umbrella in it.

Q.) broken umbrella

A.) And they are quite interesting. I found some springs around the corner. I was just putting stuff together--that's the way I work-- to see what I could get out of it. I don't start off with any preconceived notion about content of the piece. If there is any thinking, it is more along the line of something happening which suggests something else. If I'm lucky, then the piece builds its own integrity.

Q.) Once you collected the stuff, what happened. Did you play with it a little bit. Did you say, what can I do with tires?

A.) You just mess around. The springs made an interesting noise, so I decided to amplify that.

Q.) And the tires.

A.) They can be walked in; they can be rolled in; you can roll over it. You can crawl through it. All these things are perfectly obvious. Perhaps there are uses of it that you haven't seen before. What I'm trying to avoid is the total exploitation of all the possibilities, which is an academic idea. (over)

Q.) You prefer the idea of exploration.

Q.) There is an academic way of making a dance of time and variation and the exploring of all the possibilities inherent in any particular object. If you don't have any preconceptions about moving, you're got to start somewhere. This is my way.

The reason that it is called MAP ROOM II TWO is because there was a MAP ROOM ONE which was done at Goddard College. There was an old sofa on the stage there. I think I make theatre pieces very much the way I make a painting, which is that you simply have to put something into the space. Working three dimensionally ~~you are in a proscenium theatre~~ is closer to a painting. The sofa already occupying parts of the space gets to be a member of the cast.

Q.) What about the shaping of the other major theatrical element, which is time. How do you fill that.

A.) Most often, my pieces are as long as they just naturally get to be from having worked on them that long. It's a funny thing, but I almost know my size right now and I really ought to do something about it. My pieces are about a half an hour, no matter what my attitude is. I should do a very long piece and a very short piece.

Q.) If you used a forty-five minute film, say, then you would have to have ~~an hour's~~ at least an hour's worth of content.

A.) Well, that did stretch my new piece LINOLEUM out, because I have three movies in it and the movies don't go all the time, so that certain activities simply have to continue until the movie is over. I tend to think of time, as we traditionally know it, as my weakest point, because I've had the least experience in considering the timing.

Q.) It is certainly the most frequently heard criticism of MAP ROOM II is particularly that it ~~was~~ ^{was} too slow.

A.) I don't mind that. I don't mind something being boring, because there are certain activities that can be interesting if they are done ^{only} ~~only~~ so much. ^{Take} ~~That's~~ that business with the tires, ^{in Map Room} which I found interesting if it is done about five minutes.

But something else happens if it goes on for ten more minutes. It's a little like La Monte Young's thing [THE TORTOISE'S DREAMS AND JOURNEYS] You admit that it isn't interesting any more, but you're still confronted by it. So what are you going to make out of it.

A.) However, there is a difference ^{so} between intentional boredom and inadvertent boredom. The first, as the artist does it, reveals that he knows precisely what kind of effect it has upon you. La Monte is intentionally boring, because by forcing the same chord upon you he wants you to hear certain gradations in sound.

A.) I'd like it ^{if, even} ~~that even~~ at the risk of boring someone ^{that} there ^{is} an area of an uninteresting activity where the spectator may behave uniquely. You see I'm against the prepared consistent entertainment. Theatre does not have to be entertaining, just like pictures don't have to be beautiful.

Q.) Must it be interesting.

A.) Involving. Now boredom is restlessness; your audience is not a familiar thing. It is made up of ^{individual} ~~individual~~ people who have all led different lives.

Q.) If I were to sit here and talk at, say, one quarter of normal speed, it would be inadvertently boring.

A.) Not necessarily.

Q.) Would you find it interesting.

A.) I might. I'd have to hear it. I've been with people who have speech problem. At first it makes ^{de me} you quite nervous, later I find myself listening to it and being quite interested in just the physical contact; it can be a very dramatic thing. I've never ^{deliberately} thought about boring anyone; but I'm also interested in that kind of theatre activity that provides a minimum of guarantees. I have ^{been} more interesting ^{ed} in works I have found very boring than in other works that seem to be brilliantly done.

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Q.) Isn't ~~that~~ that a contradiction--that you ~~were~~ were interested in things you found boring.

A.) More interested in something that was boring than something that was entertaining.

Q.) How? Can you give me an example.

A.) Some of Bob Morris's theatre pieces have very little activity that goes on for a very long time. They were usually presented on mixed concerts; and I found myself at the end of the evening being more moved by the inactivity by Bob than I was by some of the things that I was at the time in awe of--skillful executions of extremely difficult movements.

Q.) Why. Was there more challenge. Was the idea of the piece more interesting. What was it that made it more memorable to you.

A.) It may be that that kind of pacing is more unique to theatre going. The role of the audience, traditionally, I don't find very interesting. I don't like the idea that they shouldn't assume as much responsibility as the entertainer does for making the evening interesting. I'm really quite unfriendly and unrealistic about the artist having to assume the total responsibility for the function of the evening. I would like people to come home from work, wash up and go to the theatre as an evening of taking their chances. I think it is more interesting for them. What I was doing at Morris's things was just that. I myself was a traditional member of the audience.

Q.) I'm concerned about this juxtaposition of interesting and boring. It bothers me conceptually.

A.) Does it help you to think about a painting that isn't beautiful.

Q.) No, because that isn't necessarily contradictory. What you're doing, I think, is setting up an opposition to entertainment.

A.) Right.

Q.) I'm not ~~convinced that~~ if you're not being entertained you have to be bored, or vice versa.

A.) I think that's it. I used the word ~~word~~ bored to refer to someone who might look at a Barney Newman and say there ought to be more image there than a ^{ng} single vertical or two single verticals. If one said that that was a boring picture, ~~they were~~ ^{he was} using the word in relation to a preconceived idea of what interesting might ~~might~~ be. What I am saying is that ~~there~~ I suspect there is a lot of work ~~work~~ right now in theatre, described as boring, which is simply the awkward reorientation of the function of theatre and even the purpose of the ^u audience^c. Just in the last few years we have ^fmade some extremely drastic changes. Continuity in the works that I am talking ^rabout has been completely eliminated, it is usually different from performance to performance. There is no dramatic continuity; the interaction tends to be ~~coincidental~~ a ^d coincidence or an innovation for that particular moment. All those ideas tend to point up the thought that it would be better for theatre if you couldn't go a ^fsecond night--that you would have a different ^fwork there, even though ^vit might be in the same place and have the same ^epeople and deal with the same material. I think all this is very new now; so both the audience and the artist are still quite self-conscious about the state of things in theatre right now. The fact that in a single piece of Yvonne Rainer you can hear both ^hRacmaninoff and sticks being pitched from the balcony as your sound experience without those two things ^{ng}making a comment on each other. Now that is an extraordinary situation, and it is very new in theatre.

Q.) Is that the collage principle?

A.) Collage is a method, but this is actually part of the subject here. When you make a collage, you don't have ~~to be~~ such different characters next to each other; the word doesn't imply that. You can make an absolutely pure cubistic painting, a realistic painting. It's an attitude.

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~~tude.~~

QUESTIONS THAT REFER BACK.

4 A.) When you were in high school, what did you think you would become.

A.) I actually didn't know. That really wasn't a ~~big~~ problem in that size town, at our income level. If you went to college, you usually decided there or just before. In fact, when I went to college, I didn't know what I wanted to study. I told my ~~parents~~ parents I would study anything they picked for a year, and if I didn't like that, I would study something else. They observed that I always had so many animals. They thought that if I liked animals so much I would probably be a veterinarian. I had ~~one~~ stipulation. I wouldn't go to a military school; so it was either the University of Texas or Texas A. & M. At the University, they didn't have a veterinarian school; so they thought pharmacy was a ~~lot~~ like that.

"A"
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to p. 2

Q.) Do you think of the idea of sophistication as important in your career.

A.) You'll have to define it.

Q.) When you first came to New York, for instance, you discovered ideas that other people have been accustomed to all their lives. You said ~~earlier in the interview that~~ before that some of the things you said in earlier interviews you wouldn't say now, because you were more sophisticated.

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to p. 14

A.) Not because I was more sophisticated, but simply because I had different ideas about it. One tends to be right and ~~is~~ wrong about what they think, in ~~that~~ relationship to a very temporary involvement. It may be from day to day, or even minute to minute, or even a year and a half. If it goes on much longer than ~~that~~ and you're not changing your mind, then you better worry about it.

Q.) Do you feel in any sense alienated from America today.

A.) I feel a conscious attempt to be more and more related to society. In the theatre and engineering thing we're doing now, one of our main concerns is to utilize industry not just for the money but for the differ-

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(art?)

ence in the kind of world we would live in if technology wasn't treated as a special commodity and if ^{industry} people had conviction and ^{nerve} nerve, as I think an artist has to have nerve, to take the same chances at the same time ^{with him} instead of making a great public relations collection and taking tax deductions and making millions of dollars worth of advertisement all for art as a special, social-prestige kind of thing, way after all the changes had been taken. How wrong can they be if they make a collection of fifty paintings. Certainly ten of those fifty are going to pay for the duds that they bought, and that's not really very interesting. If they had that same attitude about the work they were doing, they wouldn't be successful at all. Something's wrong there.

Q.) As an artist, ^{do} you feel that you are part of a whole world in which you are ~~living~~ ^{living}.

A.) That's what's important to me as a person. I'm not going to let other people make all the changes; and if you do that, you can't cut yourself off. ~~It~~

This very quickly gets to sound patriotic and pompous and pious; but I really mean it very personally. I'm only against the most obvious things, like wars and stuff like that. ~~It~~ I don't have any particular concept about a utopian way things should be. If I have a prejudice or a bias, it is that there shouldn't be any particular way. Being a complex human organ, we are capable of a variety; we can do so much. The big fear is that ^{we} ~~one~~ doesn't do enough with our senses, with our activities, with our areas of consideration; and that's got to get bigger year after year.

Q.) Could that be what the new theatre is about. Is there a kind of educational purpose new--to make us more responsive to our environment

A.) I can only speak for myself. Today there may be eleven artists; yesterday there were ten; two days ago there were nine. Everybody has their own reason for being involved in it, but I must say that this is one of the things that interest me the most.

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APB 1/4/44
L.P. 64

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Q.) How will we be different after continued exposure to the new theatre.
How will our lives be different. How will our responses be different.

A.) What's exciting is that we don't know. There is no anticipated result; but we will be changed.

Q.) May I pick up that question of how you composed MAP ROOM II, from start to finish. Here I'm particularly interested in processes of composition.

A.) I don't begin with any preconceptions at all.

Q.) Not even the kind of physical ideas that preoccupied you in the paintings.

A.) No, but ^{there is} the physical encounter with material and with ideas on a very literal, almost simple-minded plane, where one is dealing scientifically with the obvious.

Q.) My "the obvious," do you mean the stage.

A.) In the theatre things, yes; but in the case of the painting, like the two that look as exactly alike as I can do it by hand, it's a different kind of obviousness.

^I In beginning a theatre piece, ^{if} at all ^{is} possible, the first information I need is where it is to be done and when. Where it is to be done has a lot to do with the shape it takes, with the kinds of activity. The roller-skate piece [PELICAN] was done in a skating rink; if ^{it} had not been performing in a skating rink, I'm sure that my first piece ^{would} ~~was~~ not ^{have} been on roller-skates.

Q.) Once you had heard it would be in a rink, you said why not use roller-skates. That's the kind of association you would make.

A.) Right, exactly. Then I will use either ~~isolated~~ things that I just ^{happened} to think of, like putting flashlights on the back of a turtle [in SPRING TRAINING], liking that for the idea of light being controlled by something literally live and the incongruities of an animal actually assuming that responsibility. That's a separate idea, and that is one way of working.

Q.) The idea was to outfit a live animal over which you have no control with a light. Wasn't there a piece that involved a dog ^{coming} ~~that came~~ out on the stage.

OBVIOUSLY NATURAL ACTIVITIES OR ARBITRARILY

A.) Yes, I used a dog in a piece of Paul Taylor's

Q.) For a similarly uncontrolled possibility.

A.) And the presence of any ~~other~~^{one's} kind of animal other than people, drawing attention to the fact that people are simply a different kind of creature.

Q.) Or ~~just~~ the fact that a theatrical situation could contain other creatures aside from people. However, Lassie has always been a hero.

A.) But that's because of Lassie's people-quality. I wouldn't be interested in using an animal that communicated with human beings on the level that human beings have taught them to communicate. Lassie is actually a human hero. She puts out fires, saves children, does her work on the farm.

Q.) Does this bother you.

A.) That's not my interest in using other kinds of animals. A turtle is very hard to ~~empathize with~~... What is it people do when they read human emotions into the activities of....

Q.) Empathy.

A.) ~~Empathy~~. It's very difficult to empathize with a turtle.

Q.) If you can't empathize with a turtle, then you accept it as an animal.

A.) You accept it as a turtle; ~~it~~ doesn't become a surrogate human being. ~~So that these~~ ^{these} are separate kinds of images that more or less occur to me divorced from any particular program or piece, like the shoes in MAP ROOM II that are cast in twelve inches of plastic. That was a completely separate image.

Q.) That came to you.

A.) Apparently out of the blue. I had Arman build those shoes, because he works in plastic. I simply told him what the idea was, and he made them for me.

Q.) Did this idea occur after you had gotten started on the piece.

A.) That sort of involvement can happen at any time, and then simply be used in the next piece.

Q.) If it happened before you had to do the piece, it would be an image in your storehouse.

A.) Right, The neon that I used in that piece came from a desire to use neon. I tend to work on such a short deadline that I can't do anything special, as I can when I'm ~~sure~~ working just for myself. Availability and expediency get to be determining elements in my theatre work.

Q.) Let me go back for the moment. The piece starts in your mind, once you are asked to do it.

RR A.) ~~Right~~. What I want to know first is where. Then, if at all possible, I would like to see the space. If not, then one gets photographs. I carefully check all the architecture of the space. What permissions are granted physically because of the architecture of the room--where the audience sits, how many doors there are, where the doors are, if there are any windows. In MAP ROOM I, there was a window on one side of the audience; I used it as a small stage. The piece, instead of beginning on the stage, began outside that window. It actually turned out quite beautifully, because it was pouring rain. A God-sent activity was actually working for the piece. It was a simple activity that was happening outside--a girl braiding her hair; ~~by the time she~~ finished, she was soaking wet. ~~Then~~ the rain picked up the light very beautifully that she was illuminated with and also put a particular strain on an otherwise perfectly natural and obvious activity. RR RR

Q.) Although you weren't in full control of the situation you didn't mind the accident.

RR A.) ~~Right~~. I don't want to be in full control. In fact, a lot of the obstacles I bring in function to make sure that I'm not in full control. I very rarely tell my people ~~exactly~~ what to do. What my pieces tend to be is a vehicle for events of a particular nature that can embody

control.
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~~the~~ and utilize the personalities and abilities of the performers ~~but~~
 in a context that one would not see ~~them~~ in within their own work. ?????

I have never been particularly interested in improvisation, because
 trusted to improvise one ^{very} rarely moves out of ~~their~~ ^{his} own particular cliches
 and habits. Or, if they do, they are using their own pre-manufactured
 disguises of those habits.

Q.) Such as actors, who favor certain inflections.

Then, what/you are doing/is writing a programme, almost, for the
~~space~~ your materials, which include your props, your people and your space.
 How specific is your programme. In MAP ROOM II, what ⁱⁿ was your first
 sequence, ~~that~~ four people came forward.

A.) Right, ~~the beginning~~ That wasn't the first thing I thought of.
 It was the use of that confined small stage, on a traditional stage.
 I broke it down and used in front of the curtain as something different
 from behind the curtain, so that I ^{TRIED TO} ~~created~~ two different architectural
 space situations within one piece, although the stage was small. Also,
~~it~~ ^{the space} went out into the audience, for while we were on stage with the words
 making sentences at random, Trisha (Brown) was passing out cards to the
 audience for them to put on their backs for ^a ~~their~~ ^{a later} projection that would
 use the audience themselves as a movie screen ^{later} Now, ~~that's~~ another
 use of the audience different from letting them remain spectators.

Q.) How carefully did you programme Trisha Brown's activity--that she
 would come before the audience and pass out cards?

A.) My instructions to her didn't go any further than telling her
 exactly what her job was. I gave her a task and an attitude.

Q.) Did you give her a time.

A.) No, however long ^{she needed,} ~~it took her to do it.~~ She actually cued us,
 for when she was through we were through. I said that she should wait
 until the lights ~~went up~~ came up on us and we were
 settled. Anytime after that that she felt ready to go, she should just

start, trusting her own sense of timing ~~to~~ accomplish the most natural organic relationship ^{NS} to "time."

Q.) So she improvised the dimension of time.

A.) Right, ~~with~~ only using practical ^{NS} considerations, rather than aesthetic ones. It would have been out of the question for her to prolong ^{her} ~~her~~ scene. Somehow her activity had to relate to accomplishing a particular job. I gave her an attitude, saying be gracious but not patronizing, ^{possibly} using the ~~attitude~~ ^{attitude} of, say, a nurse's aide or an airline hostess.

Q.) That's almost like method acting--pretend that you are someone else or remember what something was like in your past.

A.) But using images that way the attempt is not to assume a character than a quick way to assume a tone. It's like saying, 'Not too ~~loud~~ loud.'

Q.) How specific was your programming ^{of} in the sequence ^{so} with the tires.

A.) ~~Then, things were put together more or less sequentially.~~ The sequences ^{were} determined by a practical consideration in every case. I had only five people I was working with; if I had picked three, then it would have been three. ~~But it~~ ^{But it} ~~turned out~~ ^{turned out} I had five. ~~Whereas~~ ^{The} people in the front passing cards had ^{to} get offstage, and there was a costume ~~stage~~ ^{change} involved for Deborah Hay. There had to be an activity there to allow Deborah to get into the costume that had the live birds. I didn't have to change clothes as quickly; so I would have to be the one to bridge that time lapse there. So I figured out the activity I would do; that would be the wiping of the ~~screen~~ ^{-screen} mirror that had the images on it. It started with no image, but as I wiped it one began to appear. [Mount Rushmore tilted vertically]. I liked the paradox that the more you wiped, the clearer the image got; whereas in painting the reverse tends to be true. That was for my own personal entertainment.

~~Q.) A private joke that was not communicated to the audience.~~

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A.) I continued my activity until Deborah was ready.

Q.) Which then became the cue for your to stop.

Why did you fit
That image was Mount Rushmore, ~~wasn't it.~~
tilted sideways

A.) That's the way it fit on the mirror.

If that had been a totem, it would have been right side up.

(Also, it postponed the legibility a few moments longer.)

Q.X) So then your ~~programme~~ ^{script} consists of tasks and cues.

~~A.) It's an organic construction. It's a collaboration with the architectural possibilities of that particular space.~~ *cut*

~~Q.) No, I meant that your script, then, is tasks and cues, and that's the way your outline, so to speak, your sequences.~~

A.) ~~Right~~ Right. My main problem in constructing ~~my~~ a programme or a piece is how to get something started and how to get it stopped without drawing particular attention to one event over another.

Q.) However, isn't this as aesthetic bias, as is your preference that the piece should have no climax.

A.) The shape that it takes should simply be one of duration.

Q.) And Space.

A.) Right. But ~~space~~ ² is a necessary consideration and one of the contributing factors to determining actually the content. If I took any of my pieces and did them again someplace else, then what should I adjust to the new environment and what should I build.

Q.) In the new environment, ²² is your piece radically different.

A.) It can be. New elements come in. In MAP ROOM I, there was a trap door ~~and~~ on the stage, and it was a very small stage. The ³ space was filled ~~vertically~~ ^{horizontally} very quickly; and so I started working vertically. From the ~~trapdoor~~ to the roof was another space that I used, because of the smallness of the stage. Now, when I redid the piece, that whole area of activity had to be eliminated. There was no trap door on the new stage. As I found no way of assimilating it, that section automatically drops out.

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Q.) Did ~~the~~ piece lose or gain.

A.) It changes only. Gaining or losing is a critical evaluation, and I stay out of that area.

Q.) Was it recognizable in the new setting.

A.) It might look more like a different piece than the same piece. Probably the tone of the piece would still be there; but from MAP ROOM I to MAP ROOM II, which is the same piece changed so drastically that I ~~thought~~ thought the latter warranted being called number two, only two elements out of, say, ten were in both.

Q.) Which ones.

A.) I can mostly think of what was cut out. ADD LATER

Q.) To return to the ~~piece~~, ^{sequences of Map Room II,} your activity of wiping the mirror ended once Deborah Hay had her costume on; then she came on stage, ~~as I~~ remember it, with a cage around her waist, almost like a tire.

In that ~~cage~~ ~~box~~ were three doves. Why.

A.) It was going to be pigeons, but pigeons are bigger than doves, not for any symbolic reason but because that's about the biggest bird that the amount of space would permit. I was toying with a whole ~~other~~ kind of image that turned up in a piece I made after that, which is linoleum, which ~~was~~ ² where I used ~~chickens~~ chickens, which is a big available bird.

Q.) Why not, say, sparrows.

A.) It seemed to be the wrong scale for people in the back row. I wanted the actual ~~major~~ object of the bird, rather than, just, bird-like activity. Actually, the first part of the image was that her costume should be something edible for the birds, ^{such as bread or corn;} but that turned out to be an impractical way to think; for birds put temporarily into a new environment aren't going to eat. ~~Her original costume was bread or corn.~~

Q.) What was ~~the next sequence in the picture~~ your purpose ~~there~~.
How did it work for you.

A.) I liked the combination of two independent elements being forced to operate as a single imager.

Q.) Supposedly neither should dominate the other.

A.) Right, It was a kind of coexistence combined to make a single image.

Q.) Was that the entire idea--combining two images in one figure.

A.) Yes. The new ~~part~~ element was Trisha moving across the stage inside the tire with her bottom side showing. In fact, her body was as abstract a form as the tire. She was actually sitting in the tire and protruding, so that her outside shape remained the tire (or a black circle) obscured by some enormous tongue. The tire actually shielded her method of moving. I have photographs of it, and I find it hard to recognize it as a human body.

Q.) Even when you recognize it as a human body, it is hard to recognize what sex it is. Is that intentional.

A.) No, not intentionally. Actually, I had no trouble recognizing what sex it was, because of the construction of the bottom. A certain lack of interest ² ~~my~~ confuse one there, in this case in detail, or detail.

Q.) So she was moving across the stage ² as this ^{singularly} ~~singular and stage~~ filled-tire ~~or~~ filled donut image.

A.) Her method ^{of} moving was actually determined by the position--how can you move and what sorts of things can you do. Her ~~choreography~~ ~~was determined by that particular limitation. I wasn't concerned~~ I didn't want the audience to be involved with who it was in the tire and what they looked like. What I wanted was the most abstract image at that particular moment.

That was followed by the two men ^{with their feet} in the tires, Steve Paxton and Alex Hay, who are somehow moving with the attitude of feet that

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had the ability to roll..

Q.) ~~However~~ However, at the first walked in a more of less normal fashion, they just have ~~flat~~ shoes with curved bottoms

A.) But later they did actual forward rolls, letting the tire be their major contact with the ground as they rolled forward. Then they ~~arranged~~ put both feet in the hole of the same tire, *and*

Q.) ~~And hopped around.~~

A.) ~~No~~ actually walked, turning the tire as they went. Instead of ~~putting~~ putting their feet on the floor, they actually walked inside the tire and moved themselves that way.

Q.) Then they put four tires in a row, slide into the casket perpendicular to the tires, and rolled like the truck-axle ~~across~~ across the floor. *Were* these intended as a series of variations along the theme of man and his tires.

A.) Not necessarily. There were other things that came out of the work sessions with the tires. I simply went out into the neighborhood and collected some tires, and ~~in~~ in a work session where we messed around with the tires to see what there is that one can do. They are variations in the sense that different uses are put to the same material, but not variations in the sense of establishing a theme. Tires were not the theme. Actually, movement was the theme, with the restriction of tires.

Q.) ~~Wasn't everything in the entire piece a variation of this theme of movement, where tire was the element of this sequence.~~

A.) ~~But tire is like sofa.~~ At the same time that this is going on, ~~there~~ a sofa has been moved on stage. It has its own light which makes it an independent entity. *Deborah Hay* ~~she~~ has the simple direction of the following: Move from position to position on the couch, always considering the couch as part of your image. Never once did she just stand up and be a person standing on a couch; the image wasn't couch and it wasn't person.

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Never once did she just stand up and be a person standing on a couch.

Q.) She always blended into the lines of the couch.

A.) Right, She wasn't couch, and she wasn't person. The live element was responsible to animate that area of the space.

It is very difficult for me to describe these things this way and to describe the working process, because I just try things. I actually work by eye.

Q.) You do have a method, though, and you are ^{conscious} conscious of it, although you may not be conscious of it at the time you are working at it.

A.) Only through observation later can I come to some kind of....
Actually, anything I tell you about it, you ^{could} could probably get out of the work, if you had seen a number of pieces.

Q.) I think you will find, as I have, that the authors are better able to talk about their work than the people who see it, regardless of how trained they are, because the authors are more precisely aware of the new language of the new theatre. Take the sequence you have ~~and that probably is, in fact,~~ just described to me--Deborah Hay on the couch. I have seen it several times, and I could not have described it as satisfactorily as you did. Now that I heard your interpretation I do not think I would want to describe it in any other way. This may stem from my own ⁱⁿ ability to perceive your ^{kind} ~~pre-~~ class of preoccupations, and I doubt if I'm alone ^{in this respect,} We all lack an education in the new theatre.

A.) Including the people who are making it.

Q.) If you asked a drama critic what happened here, he might say it was a boring scene in which a girl did a series of headstands on a couch, because that is all his intellectual and perceptual equipment prepared him to see.

A.) His secondary interest might be whether she was a pretty girl or not and how much or how little she was wearing. My interest was that she was costumed in a color that most closely matched the couch.

So that integration would happen as easily as possible--so that there would be a little separation between her activity and the natural construction of the couch as possible.

Q.) While she was working on the couch, the film came. Wasn't it a travelogue; and it was projected upon large white cards which Trisha Brown asked the audience to hang from the back of their necks..

A.) Using the audience as a screen; so that ~~part of the audience~~ at that point ^{it} was divided. It had two functions: part of the audience was responsible for being the vehicle for the movie while the rest of the audience were the observers for the movie. At that point, part of the audience had an active role in the production, as opposed to being separated from the activity we had on the stage, ~~It was then~~ a third involvement of actor to audience.

Q.) It also further split our focus, because we weren't quite sure where we were supposed to look.

A.) Right. In most cases, my interest is in acknowledging the fact that man is able to function on many more levels simultaneously. I think our minds are designed for that, and our senses certainly are. We can be sitting here, and our nose could tell us that ~~there~~ something is burning in the kitchen; yet, intellectually for hundred ^{of} years the idea of uninterrupted concentration has been considered the most serious attitude to have in order to utilize our intelligence.

Q.) On the other hand, in this very distracting situation right now, I am endlessly impressed with your own capacities for concentration in the interview. How do you do it?

A.) I think we can do it.

Q.) Do you hear the various size noises of trucks outside.

A.) Right.

Q.) Still, you are probably concentrating harder on this interview, much harder than I can.

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You would agree with John Cage, then, that one of the purposes of the new movement is to make us more omniattentive.

A.) Yes. I think we do it when we ~~have~~ are relaxed; all these things happen naturally. But there's a prejudice that has been built up around the idea of seriousness...

Q.) as connected with concentration and the ability to cut oneself off from his environment.

A.) Like doing one job, like specializing. That's why I'm no more interesting in giving up painting than continuing painting or vice versa. I don't find these things in competition with each other. If we are to get the most out of any given time, it is because we have applied ourselves as broadly as possible, I think, not because we have applied ourselves as singlemindedly as possible.

Q.) Do you have then a moral objection to those dimensions of life that force us to be more specialized than we should be.

A.) Probably. If one can observe the way things happen in nature ~~or in man-scheduling of events....~~ Well, nearly nothing in my life turned out the way that, if it were up to me to plan it, it should. There always is the business, for instance, if you're going on a picnic, it is just as apt to rain as not. Or the weather might turn cold, when you want to go swimming.

Q.) So then you find a direct formal equation between your theatre and your life.

A.) I hope so, between working and living, because that's our medium.

Q.) You would believe, then, that if we became accustomed to this chancier kind of theatre, we would become accustomed, then, to the chancier nature of our own life.

A.) I think we are most accustomed to it in life. ~~I don't think...~~

If people plan a picnic two weeks in advance, I don't think the tendency is to think what a miracle that was. How unlikely that would be base,

syntax

? syntax

These things are accepted facts. Why shouldn't we use that same form in everything. Why should Art be the exception to this.

You asked, if I had a moral objection, ^{I do,} because I think we do ^{have} this capacity that I'm talking about. You find that an extremely squeamish person can perform fantastic deeds because it is an emergency.

If the laws have a positive function, if they could have, it might be just that--to force someone to behave in a way they have not behaved before, using the facilities he was actually born with.

Growing up in a world where multiple distractions is the only constant, he was able to cope with this new situation. But, what I found happening to people in the Navy was that once they were out of service and out of these extraordinary situations, they revert to the same kind of thinking as before. I think it is an exceptional person who utilizes that experience. That's because in most cases being in the service is not a chosen environment; it is somebody else's life that their functioning in, instead recognizing the fact it is still just them and the things they are surrounded by.

Q.) So you would object to anyone who finds the Navy an unnatural life.

A.) It is a continuation of extraordinary situations. We begin by not having any say over who are parents are; our parents have no control over the particular peculiar mixture of the genes this time.

Q.) Let us return to the scene's of the piece. The film is going, and Deborah is on ~~at~~ the couch.

A.) Then there is the neon. I discovered when I went to get several pieces of neon that they had a Tessler Coil that they use to check that there is no leakage in a neon tube and that it is the right color. They just touch the coil to the tube anyplace, and it activates the gases. I asked him what would happen if instead of touching the tube, couldn't I use my body as a conductor? and couldn't I hold that thing. He said that I could if I grabbed it very quickly, but it would

knock the hell out of me if I hesitated. It took a little doing always to grab it firmly, because one has fear in control of their muscles too. Have you ever been on a high diving board, you know, and though you want to dive off so much, you don't do it. It's that kind of thing.

Q.) It was easier when we ^{were} younger.

A.) Because we didn't have so much fear; we hadn't heard so many stories about what could happen. It's like the caution that happened on the roller skates. Skating is the most natural thing the child can do; but to do it seriously as an adult ~~is~~ is very hard, hard

~~Q.) Even worse, in front of an audience,~~

~~A.) is very hard.~~

Q.) At this point, you took the glass shoes idea out of your storehouse.

A.) Right. I had them anyway, knowing that I would use them someplace in a piece. The combination of the ~~glass~~ clear plastic and the neon showing through them (what???) seemed to be > ? , for that way one could show that you could see between the foot and the floor, even though one was just walking.

Q.) It was a very beautiful image; and because of its beauty, it tended to dominate ~~and~~ to be the most memorable image. Also, it was very original, stunningly original; the other images seem ~~ed~~ more prosaic. What this discrepancy in tone a defect.

A. Yes. It was even a defect to have that activity happen at the end of the piece; but before that ^{point in the piece} I had been very busy. If I did that piece again, the order would be rearranged ~~I would take that into consideration.~~ At the time the audience first saw it, that piece has never been performed ^{in its entirety,} not even in a rehearsal.

We had some idea of what to do. I'm not against a rehearsal, but I have a tendency to keep making changes up to the last minute and I tend to work with people I can trust enough.

We all knew that evening that we were making this thing for the first time; I like that ~~paper~~ psychologically.

Q.) Were all subsequent performances exactly the same.

A.) The first evening it felt just a little too rough and slow.

Everyone had trouble getting in and getting out--functional problems.

~~The second evening we trusted too much the fact that we knew how to get on and in what order things came.~~ ~~Even then I had a slip of paper~~ *stet*

with me; and I would go offstage to see what happened next. As I'm the author, you could imagine how the cast felt. That second evening I sensed that the whole thing just sort of died right in front of everybody. It was simply the execution and carrying out of a certain type of activity. So, the third evening I said let's speed the whole thing up; I don't care if we finish in fifteen minutes. Let's get on, do what we have to do, and get out. That would, I thought, tighten things up. My idea of the sequential arrangement is not just to string some activities along, like you're making beads or taking a trip, but when you have three things happen, you should convey the individuality of each of these events separately plus their interaction which happens because of their coexistence. What had happened was that everything had been stretched so that it became a ~~linear~~ linear piece as opposed to....

Q.) An over-lapping line, like a slinky or a chain with interlocking loops.

A.) Right.

Q.) A chain can go straight; it can also be curved, dropped, or dangled....

A.) And you get maximum strength there too.

Q.) ~~What~~ Looking back over your involvement with theatre, do you see any ~~consistent~~ kind of development, aside from the obvious development that you have now become the author of your own theatre pieces, rather than ⁿ

a contributor to somebody else's. ^{Also,} do you see any development in your company of more or less regular performers.

A.) Well, that is mostly a social thing of people with common interest, and we have tended to make ourselves available as material to each other. It is in no way an organized company, and it changes from time to time--people move in and out.

Q.) It includes, roughly, Alex and Deborah Hay, respectively a painter and a dancer; Lucinda Childs, a dancer; Steve Paxton, a dancer;

A.) Yvonne Rainer and Bob Morris we have worked a lot with. Trisha Brown. In my new piece, I used Bob Breer's sculptures. When I

x7 did the piece I used the son and daughter of the people I was staying with (Christopher and JILL Denny) at the time that I premiered the piece in Washington. When I did the piece for Educational

Television, Bob Breer delivered the sculptures to the studio; and since I needed another person, Bob Breer immediately became part of the performing group. It's not a company or a group in the sense of Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham or Jose Limon; it's informal.

~~Q.) Let me return to that question of development.~~

A.) In MAP ROOM, a couple of the people ^{involved} said that they had now gotten some kind of feeling about what I was after. ~~You see, they also are after something when they work for me.~~ Because this is my fourth or fifth piece and these people, if they weren't in it, had seen them all, ~~then~~ then I think there is a body of work. If someone is working with a different kind of image than you are used to in painting and if you see five of those paintings, you're more apt to see what they are doing than if you see one. If one, it looks like a lot of things that it isn't and a lot of things that is it is; but you don't really understand the direction. It's like signposts; you need a few to know that you are really on the right road.

Q.) Do you feel stronger ^{and more confident} now than before approaching a theatre piece.

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A.) Yes. Confidence is something that I don't feel very often, because I tend to eliminate the things that I was sure about. I cannot help but wonder what would happen if you didn't do that and if you did this. You recognize the weaknesses - ~~IN~~ MAP ROOM II, that weakness of the neon thing coming last. LINOLEUM is probably one of the most tedious works I've ever done, the most unclimatic. It is a series of activities that are not programmed to happen one after another; it is more or less a constant change. You simply move into it with your attention and live through this thing. At a certain point, it's over.

Q.) Why do you use the term "bastard theatre."

A.) We had difficulty defining what we were doing. We were approaching an audience in Europe that has seen very little of our work. Working with that kind of distance and with people who had not seen the work first hand, we wanted them to get some idea or even a few words to describe the area of our involvement. The more we looked into it, the harder we found this to do. Let me get that definition for you.??

After several days of discussion, we decided that if it had any direction at all, it was that of conscious variety or disvertisement or possibly even contradiction.

Q.) More various, more possible, more free.

A. ~~Q.~~ The theatre we stood for was a kind of freedom, as opposed to the restriction of a single concept.

Q.) Is the bastard more free than the son.

A.) ~~Wasn't it~~ Another word that came to mind was hybrid - a reference to the fact that our backgrounds are so varied. We have people with exquisite training in dance working right along with painters and sculptors. There's another difference. A play could be

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be cast with different actors, and you would still get the same play. If I was not in contact with these people, I could not do those pieces. The whole concept would have to be changed, if I had new performers. ~~people~~ Their whole possibility is quite different from letting Doris Day take Mary Martin's part in a musical or using the Cincinnati Philharmonic rather than the New York Philharmonic.

Q.) You write for them, and they have learned to respond to the particular language of your instructions.

A.) It goes beyond interpretation or following directions. From the outset, their responsibility, in a sense of a collaboration, is part of the actual form and content and appearance of the piece. It makes them stockholders in the event itself, rather than simply performers.

Q.) Because they came from different backgrounds, they make it hybrid *merely* by their own initiative.

A.) The hybrid and bastard theatre ^{also} refers to the fact that the pieces on the program may be extremely different from each other, inconceivably representing a single point of view. The exploration of traditional dance techniques, the use of traditional music, the investigation of electronic sounds, the doing of music without having an author or a composer..... I have a feedback system which I used in LINOLEUM, and I'll be using more units of the same sort in the piece I'm doing for the Theatre and Engineering Show, where the placement of people--where they are and in ~~what~~ direction they are turned--will determine ~~what~~ sounds one hears ~~within the range~~ as again determined by the particular kind of speaker they are carrying plus the possibilities of movement.

Q.) You are writing in script, then, in which you not only programme general directions but also the machinery to respond to these directions.

A.) In this case, in LINOLEUM, the directions were not predetermined at all. ~~It was completely undetermined what I would be doing.~~ I had a job to do; ~~which~~ I was the shepherd of the Breer sculptures, moving them out, and around. Everyone else was working within particular functions. Deborah was making a line ^{while wearing} in a mask that magnified her features and which limited ~~her~~ and distorted her vision. She had the single act of taking spighetti out of, in this case, Simone Whitman's lap, ^{which} ~~was~~ was a live prop, a static element, and then making a spighetti line on the floor. Alex Hay ~~was~~ was also masked and blinded to the point that he couldn't use his senses of seeing except to follow that line. He couldn't move any more freely than walking in the middle of a double bed would allow you. The Breer sculptures were fragile, and they have their own motors. As they hit something, they change their direction. The sound was created by my relationship to the fixed ??

If I was in this area, the sound was like this; if I was in that area, the sound was like that. All of these elements ^{There} existed simultaneously in an extremely critical relationship to each other. Alex Hay could not see when he was about to walk into a Breer; I was also working with the handicap of a mask, which distorted my vision. ~~I found that I couldn't operate under this.~~

Q.) ~~The piece had a very hazardous syntax.~~

A.) Yes.

Q.) Are there any other major characteristics of a mixed-means ~~in~~ work

A.) An absence of hierarchy.

Q.) ^{So that} No elements dominates.

A.) ^{for instance,} Is there a hierarchy in La Monte's theatre.

A.) ~~There's a La Montarchy.~~ He's using his materials very differently, extremely differently than I am. In my situation, there is nothing that everything is subservient to. He permits freedom by creating a vehicle that can absorb to the point of obliteration the individual interest and activity of any single element there, ^{where} I am trusting each single element to sustain a work in time. His idea is so powerful that, no matter how much individuality you get, at worst ^{it} he can have only a less successful performance. If anyone wanted to move out and behave extremely independently in my pieces, the whole thing would stop. He has a sound phenomenon which is actually the nature of the piece, and that nature is so strong that it will absorb the individuality of the people working there. My pieces can be stopped, ruined, ^{changed} beyond recognition. My ^{pieces} could become someone else's pieces, if not for a common trust.

Paxton: I think that La Monte would say the same thing. I think he works very hard for a uniformity in his people. Anybody stepping out would be very noticed by him, and he would consider the piece ruined or stopped.

Q.) Yes. If you create a tone that is dissonant to the chord, the resulting sound would be very painful, because of the volume of the ^{level} sound.

A.) His pieces are built on a restrictions rather than a common independence.

Q.) It is a follow the leader game: When I move, you don't have to move after me, but you must move in a precise way that relates to my movement. You can do only one of several choices; and unless you do

cut
out
page
space

cut

it precisely, you louse up the sound.

A.) Precisely because sound is so dominant, it cannot but avoid a hierarchy.

A.) Also, his pieces do not take into consideration the possibilities of turtles today and chickens tomorrow or the use of turtles rather than a Bob Breer battery-operated sculpture. These are differences. One can always point out the similarities; but these differences are big enough to illustrate a different attitude, whether I can put it in words or not.

Q.) I'll ask you straight out. Is La Monte's piece theatre or music. When you watch it yourself, does it strike you as a theatrical conception or a musical one.

A.) The emphasis is on the sound; it's like environmental music. How different is that actually from doing opera in the opera house, for the opera house is part of traditional opera. The difference is that La Monte's piece insists upon involving you for a greater percentage of your attention than traditional opera does.

Q.) I wonder

Paxton: I wonder whether it is more involving than opera or to whom it's more involving. It is bound to be more involving to somebody who likes it than to somebody who doesn't like opera.

Q.) But it is so loud that you can't get away from it. I could imagine reading a book in an opera, but I don't think I could read a book in La Monte's piece.

A.) Contrast it with Morton Feldman's music; it's much quieter.

Q.) But Morton's Feldman's music is not involving.

A. (I find it very involving.

Q.) When something is very loud, can you, yourself, not be involved. things that are

A. I want to separate subjectively involving from objectively.

Because La Monte's piece is so loud, you can't get away from it.

ADD
to
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your painting
Q.) What was ~~PANTOMIME ASPECT~~ about.

A.) ~~It's a painting that...~~ I thought of it as making a surface which would invite one to move in closer; and when you move in closer, you discover that it has two electric fans which then join you. I thought of it as kind of an air relief. Any physical situation is an influence on not only how you see and if you look but also what you think when you see it. I just knew that if you were standing in a strong breeze, which was part of the painting, that something different would happen.

Q.) It's a way of saying to the spectator that if you look at it from ~~is~~ here it is quite different from looking at it from there.

A.) If I did make a point, it is that even the air around you is an influence.

Q.) The Metropolitan Museum right now, with all the pollen in the air, is a lot different from mid-winter.

A.) Right.

A.) (Also, looking at pictures from one place to another, and also from one season to another..... That's ^{why} the business about masterpieces and standards are all archaic.

Q.) The notion of masterpieces presumes that if someone puts the Mona Lisa in a ^{stuff} New York Museum and you have to push your way through a ^{obnoxious} large crowd to see it, you should still be greatly impressed

A.) Put it in the Greenwich Village outdoor show and see what happens. Put in the Louvre and send it in with an armed guard, and people will see it. I like that idea of that kind of dramatic carrying on, for that's part of our time too. Not that I'm against it, but it's not the sort of thing that I'm interested in making. That's for another aspect of society to carry out those things.

Q.) Isn't it a kind of exhibitionism to put a guard next to your painting.

A.) If it's theatre, it's good theatre. It's very hard to draw the line there. Exhibiting is theatre--pictures are hung in a certain way,

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in a certain space; ~~MM~~ tThey aren't just brought in there and thrown up on the wall. I think it is very hard to get away from idea of dramatic activity.

Q.) ~~to return to an earlier point that worries me,~~ How can you say that theatre and painting ~~are~~ not too different.

A.) It's the same considerations we use all the time. If one gives up the idea of being completely self-sufficient and separating himself from society and what's going on, then I think that it could be different. It seems to me that the only difference.... Take how we dress; we dress historically. When we get up in the morning, we are putting on the clothes that are going to be in the Metropolitan Museum in glass cases a few years from now, if they are not already there. Instead of giving up art for life, if you want to separate the two, I think that my tendency is more to see them as coexistence. I find it interesting to realize that if I were from another time, and if you were sitting in front of me dressed normally as you are, you would appear quite strange. There would be lots of information around you. Now, there's information in everything that we do, and our concerns....

fuzzy

Q.) This question seems to follow inevitably from your attitudes! Could you ~~become something~~ ^{adopt a vocation} entirely different five years from now.

A.) I'm sure.

Q.) Could you even ~~become something~~ ^{turn to a vocation} quite distant from art.

A.) I think so. I ~~wouldn't~~ ^{don't} feel that ~~it~~ being an artist is that special.

Q.) Would you like to become president of an art school.

A.) I don't think I tend to go in that direction.

Q.) A producer of cultural activities.

A.) Yes, but that is more of the same thing. I like the idea of producing, because that keeps you in contact with very real problems. However,

Q.) As a teacher.

A.) I think the whole idea of institutions, museums and universities, are more or less obsolete with their approach to teaching art.

I think the question is not whether art can be learned or not but what kind of climate do you make to produce and encourage a lively perception,

If I taught a painting course, one of the first things I would do ~~was~~ force everybody to build his own canvas stretcher; so that from the very beginning they are involved with the fact that they are making an object--that every inch of it is to be part of their consideration. I would ask them do you want to work on canvas? Why canvas? It seems to me that painting as it is taught assumes that certain things are valid, and there's no reason to assume those things. ~~Schools are either no good, or you have to say that they could be good.~~ Even if you buy your stretcher, when you decided how big ~~they are,~~ ^{it should be,} you are already in that process. If it could be implied that every step could be otherwise, then I think that students wouldn't be floundering--working in someone else's style, turning out competent work. One of the worst aspects of seeing students' works is that they tend to look good...

Q.) But derivative.

A.) Right. ~~That's the problem~~ I think that the ^{students'} ego is prematurely being satisfied. I don't blame the teachers, because they are usually people who want to do their own work or raise a family or something like that.

Q.) In contrast to nearly all ^{contemporary} modern artists, ~~and~~ you did ^{not need to} find yourself by first painting through several established styles--by taking them as your models. From the start, you were, as we say, an original.

A.) I always had enormous respect for other people's work, but I deliberately avoided using other people's styles, even though I know that no one owns any particular technique or attitude. It seemed to me that it was more valuable to think that the world was big enough so that everyone ^{does} ~~don't~~ have to be on each other's feet. When you go to make something, nothing should be clearer than the fact that not only

do you not have to make it but that it could look like anything, and then it starts getting interesting and then you get involved with your own limitations.

Haven't you meditated on why is it that so much work looks alike.

Q.) I've meditated more on the facts that my ^{own} writings tend to take certain shapes. CUT

Q.) May I ask you about Oracle?

A.) I finished it after I got back from Europe, after touring with Merce Cunningham. Technically, it had to be completely rebuilt, because thing which hadn't been possible when I started became possible.

Q.) In the technological sense.

A.) Yes. It was started in 1962. It is five pieces of sculpture that are a single work. Each piece has its own voice.. There is a console and it is embedded in one of the pieces. unit, which is the controls; ~~the console~~ Each piece can be played, because the console has five volume controls, one for each piece, and a scanning mechanism ^{that goes across the} for radio dials is a constant movement; so that what you control is the speed of scanning which give you the maximum possibilities of varied sound, from stop to pure, abstract noise and any degree in between. Each piece can be adjusted accordingly. One of ^{the} ideas was to make it so simple that you would ^{not} have to be educated to do it--so that the thing would just respond essentially to touch to give you the maximum variation.

Q.) When this sculpture is displayed, is someone ~~manipulating~~ working the dials or are they merely preset.

A.) Anyone around it can change it.; and it can be set up so that the sound is constantly changing, independently of anyone's control.

One of the pieces, a cement mixing tub, is also a fountain, because I wanted another source of sound too in running water. I didn't want to imply that these all had to be electronic.

Q.) Do you consider this an 'environment' or a 'combine.'

A.) Sound is part of the piece; it is not a decoration. It is a part of the climate that the piece insists on. You really do get a sense of moving from one place to another, as you shift from the proximity of one piece to another piece.

Q.) Because the field of sound is constantly changing.

A.) Andrew Forge [an English critic] said it was like taking a trip where the perspective was free too.

Q.) Several questions come to mind: Why the field of sound? Why does it change as I move around? How does the sound relate to the visual elements? Is the organization of the sound as haphazard as the visual dimensions and, therefore, is that haphazardness a kind of consistent syntax.

77?
syntax

A.) The sound relates to the pieces physically by the material interaction--the particular kind of distortion and the sound of its voice as it is shaped by that context. ^{because hearing} 'Why sound' is a sense that we use while looking anyway, ^{It is like} ~~is~~ just as ^{as} the arbitrary uses of light bulbs in paintings before; because paintings are seen in different light, it gets to be an ^{integral} part. ^{syntax?} It is not in competition with the fact that a fire truck is going past, but it has a little bit of that built into it. The sound is radio, but the radio's sounds from minute to minute are as different as you are. ^P I think that one of my chief struggles now is to make something that can be as changeable and varied and alive as the audience. I don't want to do works ^{where} that one has to impose liveliness or plastic flexibility or change but ^{where} that change ~~exists~~ within a work would be dealt with literally. It's very possible that my interest in theatre, ^{which} now is so consuming, may be the most primitive way of accomplishing this, and I may just be working already with what I would like to make.

Q.) You introduced a comparative value here--as lively as the audience

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It would seem to ~~me~~^{me} that Oracle in its mere presence would be as 'lively' as the audience because ~~it~~ of the various kinds of happenstance activities that occur within its field, particularly because you as the artist do not control its sound. In that respect, its off-hand, strikes me as more like the audience than Map Room II, which ~~was~~ did not have that much activity--that much variety and change--within its field, at least not to my perceptual equipment. The theatrical situation per se, with its limited range of vectors of communication, makes this kind of total field impossible, unless of course the artist resorts to electricity literally to flood the audience area with his sounds.

A.) One of the big differences that you're pointing out is that Map Room II was a proscenium situation, ~~and~~^{where} the audience was bound to their seats. If Oracle were on a stage, you would not be as thoroughly involved; indeed, it would not have the possibility of being involving.

A.) Also, in Map Room II, how many events were happening at once within the creator's domain. Were there ever more than two.

A.) Actually, at one point there were three, because it is very hard to use five people, in a small area, without limiting things. I like a sense of space, and a stage that's small has its capacity. If one occupies a larger space, then one is more apt to have ten things going at once. If the space isn't acknowledged..., I don't want to sound so abstract. In that particular situation, if four events were going on (and remember my scale is life-like, because I tend to use objects around as props rather than ^{for} building special effects), the space should feel like air that you could breathe. If five things were ~~going~~ going on, it would be much more visual. You would look at the individual activities, and the sense of space, as landscape or as air, would be fulfilled.

Q.) What are you presently working on.

A.) For some time now, it has been apparent to me that our interests and involvements that go beyond painter's usual run of material.

Though this is technical information that is so new that an artist does not have the opportunity to deal with, if he knows about it at all.

So, the attitude of the artist necessarily will change through the utilization of contemporary materials as part of ^{his} natural working stuff. One has to move outside the ~~studio~~ studios and the art stores,

Part of the responsibility that an artist has is to acknowledge the resources in his own time. We are surrounded by materials and technologies that are too refined to be obvious information. There

is no handbook out that would let you deal with a wide range of any of these things--lasers, computers, plastics, resins, epoxies, and

such. Obviously, something else has to change. The series of nine evenings that we are doing for the Theatre and Engineering

Festival [New York, October, 1966], if they are not successful any other way, will be important for the ^{energetic} attempt to deal with this particular phase of our switch-over. It necessarily is awkward.

Scientists think, feel and behave differently from artists; each ~~one has years of~~

Q.) How.

A.) As generally as possible, it seems to me that an artist tends to deal quite directly and respond directly to a very complicated situation with simple means, and with an overall attitude, where a scientist responds to a small area, a simple area, to explore the complexities within it. Artists may be thinking too widely; scientists are thinking too narrowly.

Q.) Remembering the example of Buckminster Fuller, I wonder if this difference, which is real, has less to do with science and art and more graduate school, which if nothing else insists that you shall concentrate on a small thing and explore it as thoroughly as possible.

A.) That may be so. I think the concern with refinement voids a sense of the whole, as well as makes too specialized and fragmentary a relationship to society.

Q.) ~~I wonder if this has more to do with the educational background of professional scientists in contrast to your own.~~ There is a certain generalizing capacity that people who don't go to college manage to retain.

A.) This isn't in any way critical. I'm just trying to explain the difference.

Q.) ~~Do you find that they can grasp the whole of your own ideas.~~

A.) I think that the exchange has been extraordinarily useful. We have had a series of bull sessions where an artist says, "I would like to do this." The scientists says, "I don't think you can do that, but what about this." "Well, if you can do that, then why not this." I think that this particular group of artists have a reputation for being interested in contemporary means as part of the natural content of their work.

Q.) What held together Bob Whitman's ^{all the sequences} ~~untitled piece~~ ^{first version of Two Holes of the Water (1966)} in my mind was that each used technology invented ^{since} ~~since~~ 1900. ^{else} What happened in the bull sessions.

A.) Maybe one of us had heard of the Sonar-Doppler (Spt) system for blind people. Why couldn't that be used with my moving so that the sound would relate directly to my own presence and activity. My area lies in ~~seeing~~ using the invisible light rays, which ^{are} ~~is the~~ infra-red, so that a performance goes on fully lit in apparent darkness--in a light that you can't see. One area of the piece can only be seen through technology; I'll be using infra-red television to broadcast the information the piece itself; even if one is in the presence of the actual physical activity, it can only be viewed through translation. You will see nothing or nearly nothing in the original but everything in the reproduction.

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You will hear it, though; and if I am lucky, there will be a dramatic paradox set up. And I'm using a tennis game to produce the darkness.

Q.) If Bob Whitman's PRUNE.FLAT. sometimes suggested that the filmed image was more alive than the live image, so your piece ~~will~~^{will} suggest that the television image will be more alive.

A.) I don't think you'll be able to decide, because I am trying to make a piece that the activity in the darkness will be so imposing that you'll be conscious of the fact that you are not seeing something. If there were a herd of elephants, you would have a stronger sense of their presence than that of a flock of birds. I want to make this a very clear physical fact that you are confronted with something fully lit than you cannot see. It's right there, and the infrared tube will see it perfectly fine. Certain people, I'm told, with a particular eye trouble can see infra-red, and I don't find it impossible that such senses could be developed. It would certainly change our lives a lot..

Q.) How did you get to work with scientists. They are not easy come by.

A.) We got to know each other through Billy Kluver, a researcher in Lazars at Bell Labs, who has been involved with the technical aspects for artists' work for a long time. He's worked with Jean Tinguely, Jasper Johns and myself and a few others. We began with just a few of us, and then more and more scientists got interested. Right now more than thirty scientists are taking this work seriously.

Q.) Do they see any future industrial uses.

A.) So far we have designed a couple of things that could have good commercial value. Another advantage of the Festival is this business of getting industry involved on a level where chances are being taken, instead of putting together collections usually selected by museum directors of finished works ~~that have already been guaranteed~~ one out of ten of which have already been guaranteed. Get them involved with their

facilities and backing where the artist really needs them. I think that artists can profit by industry and that industry can profit by artists in this exchange. To industry it is an untapped source of supply--one that is most interesting right now.

Supply
Q.) Of what

A.) Talent. Technique. Equipment. Even in something as ordinary as movie-making, it is very difficult for an artist, even if he has his own camera, ~~even~~ to be able to afford film. There are possibilities for equipment ~~these~~ that are only ~~available~~ available to commercial organizations.

Q.) Are they lending you equipment

A.) No, we are building our own equipment. We have gotten our own backers. We are paying for it ourselves, and any profit realized by this show will go to form a foundation which will own and house the equipment. It will be a laboratory for other artists and scientists to be able to work together as though there were a perfectly natural situation. ~~Not only will~~ Not only will this series of theatrical evenings is not only a try out of whether scientists can work with artists--the answer there seems to be yes, definitely--but it is also a benefit show to guarantee the future of this kind of activity. Another interesting aspect of this is that with such a broad interest we ~~discovered~~ discovered that we would have to send complimentary tickets to the science editor, the theatre critic, the music editor, the drama editor and the art editor and, with my tennis match, possibly the sports editor. ~~The purpose of the show has been the use~~ The motivation for all the works has been the use of technology without technology being the theme itself; it doesn't control the work.

Q.) One of the myths of modern culture--we associate it particularly with Lewis Mumford--is that art and technology are eternally opposed to each other and that one succeeds only at the decline of the other.

How does this relate to your own experience.

A.) I think those are dated concepts. We now are living in a culture that ^{won't} ~~won't~~ operate and grow that way. Right and wrong, science and art--~~you can't substitute one thing for the other and simply keep changing the power balance~~ These things do clearly exist at the same time, and both are very valuable. We are just realizing that we have lost a lot of energy in always insisting on the conflict--in posing one ~~set~~ of these things against the other.

Q.) It seems to be that technology has had a huge impact upon modern art--the creation of new paints, the impact of media--all of which has never been fully explored.

A.) You can't move without encountering technology. Just think of what it would be like to go out into the fields and picking your supper; now we have it deep-frozen in the own kitchen after it was gathered from all over the world. It is only habits ^{actual} in thinking that have tended to make us callous to our surroundings.

Q.) How do you look upon working with technicians--as a division of labor, as a division of mentality.

A.) I've never questioned paints. I never ground my own pigments or minded for the chemicals that made it. I assumed a certain amount of information in a tube of red paint. I think that one works with information as though it is material. I think that somehow it is richer if you are in a live collaboration with the material; that's our relationship to the engineers.

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