

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

SONYA RAPOPORT
ART DEPARTMENT ALUMNI
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviews conducted by
RICHARD CÁNDIDA SMITH

in 2006

Copyright © 2010 by The Regents of the University of California

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between The Regents of the University of California and Sonya Rapoport, dated October 26, 2007. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Director of The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, Mail Code 6000, University of California, Berkeley, 94720-6000, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

“Art Department Alumni At The University Of California, Berkeley Oral History Project: Sonya Rapoport,” conducted by Richard Cándida Smith in 2006, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2010.



Sonya Rapoport in 2006 Oral History Interview

Discursive Table of Contents—Sonya Rapoport

Interview #1: June 26, 2006.....

 Audio File 1 36

 Audio file 217

 Audio File 336

Interview #2: September 21, 2005.....

 Audio File 4..... 50

 Audio File 5..... 66

Sonya Rapoport**Interview #1: June 26, 2006**

[Begin Audio File rapoport_sonia1 06-26-06.mp3]

01-00:00:00

Cándida Smith: So tell us where and when you were born, and then the years that you studied in the art department at Berkeley.

01-00:00:10

Rapoport: At Berkeley, not the years I studied otherwise.

Cándida Smith: I will get into that a little in another minute.

01-00:00:18

Rapoport: Well, I was born in 1923 in Boston. I grew up in Boston. I came to Berkeley, I think I must've been about twenty-two years old, with my husband. I had to wait a year for residency before I attended Berkeley. I started school, actually, in 1947, and I got my degree in '49.

Cándida Smith: So you were in the two-year masters program?

01-00:01:12

Rapoport: I graduated in a half year, a year-and-a-half. I could've gotten my masters in one year, but James McCray said, "What do you want to leave so fast for?" I was a little hurt that he thought I should stay. It was up to me, but I thought that was very wise. However, the year before, while I was here waiting for my residency, I spent that year with Erle Loran. It was very coincidental that I was studying art in Washington, D.C., at the Corcoran School. My husband was a research fellow at the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, and as we were packing our books to come here, I saw that I had gotten Erle Loran's *Cezanne's Composition*. I never realized that Loran was at Berkeley. But just as I put that book in the box, I realized that. So we came. There was no place to live, and we stayed with the Calvins.

Cándida Smith: Photosynthesis.

01-00:02:44

Rapoport: Photosynthesis, Nobel laureate. He was in the chemistry department, and they offered their home to us. Melvin and my husband were always talking about what he's going to do, how—all that kind of thing. Finally they landed on me, and they said, "Sonya, what can we do for you?" I said, "Do you know Erle Loran?" It seems as though Mrs. Calvin and Mrs. Loran worked at the juvenile court together. So they knew each other very well. It was very easy for them to set up an appointment for me with Erle. So although I wasn't an official student, I used to go to him for criticism. Then he let me attend his classes. So I guess for a year-and-a-half, I was an official student. The year before that, I was Erle's private student.

Cándida Smith: Well, before we get into the class and your period as a student, an unofficial student at Berkeley, I'd like to get a little background. You know, if you could tell us a little bit about your parents. What your father did, what your mother did, and so forth.

01-00:04:16

Rapoport: Well, let's say I'm a typical child of the Depression. I come from an upper-middleclass family. The family were merchants. My father was in leather—manufactured trunks. Just a typical, but quite well-to-do. My mother—well, eventually, she tried all sorts of businesses and things. She was a very strong woman. She was a mahjong champion, very up-to-date. I didn't realize it, but I guess I get a certain strength from my mother. My father was a very loving, affectionate person. My mother was very—well, she was a skating champion. She had lots of talents. She had a mechanical aptitude, which was quite interesting. She came from a family of seven children. Immigrant parents from Russia. Well, her parents were from Russia, but my great-grandparents also had come to the United States from Russia. But they went back. They didn't like the United States. But my grandparents stayed here. The reason why I say my mother was mechanically—had this aptitude is that they had this *enormous* Pierce-Arrow. And she was the—well, there was the chauffeur—my grandparents' chauffeur. But of all these people, my mother

was the only one that could drive that car. It was just remarkable how this little woman in this huge [car]

Cándida Smith: Did you go to public schools, private schools?

01-00:06:45

Rapoport: Well, the Depression hit us fairly soon after that. I went to Brookline High. And that in itself is a special community. A community of gangsters, which people don't realize. But it seems as though—At that time, Brookline had the highest per capita income of any city in the United States. I guess the gangsters wanted to feel very proper. So I had a bit of that around me.

Cándida Smith: Was your family religious? Practicing?

01-00:07:32

Rapoport: I could say my parents were not very intellectual. My grandmother was an Orthodox Jew—my grandparents were Orthodox. I was exposed to all the rituals.

:

I belonged to a synagogue, I used to have to go to school, Hebrew school every day, from Brookline to Roxbury. That ended with the Depression, because you had to be very wealthy to belong to that synagogue. There wasn't much of an intellectual influence, except my one uncle was very dedicated to Jewish education. But socially, well, my mother's older brother was a founder of Brandeis University. My father's family was very scholarly. His father was a Talmudic scholar. And that family is—well, you've probably heard of Bernard Berenson? I was named after my grandfather's first wife—he had three wives. My father's father's first wife, Berenson, Sarah Berenson. I don't know exactly what the connection is, because Bernard Berenson converted to Catholicism. His name would never be mentioned, because of that. I didn't find this out until after I was married and I was going to Florence. But I can't tell you exactly what—Because it's a name that just was a no-no.

Cándida Smith: What about your exposure to fine art, classical music, literature, as you were growing up? You said your parents weren't very intellectual—

01-00:10:02

Rapoport: No, no.

Cándida Smith: Did they go to the symphony? Did they take you to the Museum of Fine Arts?

01-00:10:05

Rapoport: The oldest of my mother's siblings was kind of an artist. That's the one whose husband insisted upon Jewish scholarliness and gave a lot of money to this kind of things, publishing books and so forth. She, my aunt Sarah, played the violin. They had symphony tickets. She did study art. But what's interesting about that is that her children are the parents of—their oldest son's daughter married Arne Glimcher from the Pace-Wildenstein Gallery now. But at that time, he was—which is kind of interesting—he had just graduated, or went to Mass Art [Massachusetts College of Art]. He wasn't a very important person. But she was a Wellesley girl. Everybody in that family went to Harvard or Wellesley. The wife of Arne Glimcher went to Wellesley. And of course, I went to Mass Art.

But that was kind of a coup for Arne to get into that family. It was a prestigious—the whole family, my family, was considered very prestigious. I mean, I was a miserable person. I mean, very self-conscious. Because they would point to the fact that I was a member of my grandfather's family, that was very successful financially.

Cándida Smith: This was your mother's father?

01-00:12:29

Rapoport: My mother's father.

Cándida Smith: What was his name?

01-00:12:34

Rapoport: The name is Axelrod. His oldest son was a founder of Brandeis. Although my parents weren't very intellectual, and none of them were, except the oldest daughter. They were very philanthropic. Very highly respected. So I grew up a very self-conscious, very inadequate. I felt very inadequate in that family. I felt inadequate, because beauty was very important. Two things were important, beauty and money. I was neither rich nor beautiful—I look back, I wasn't that bad looking, but "beauty" was non-Semitic looking. You see, we were in Boston, I guess we all tried to give ourselves the Yankee attributes, and one of them was not looking Semitic. But I was very self-conscious in that very prominent family.

Cándida Smith: When did you become interested in visual art? How did that emerge?

01-00:14:13

Rapoport: Well, when I was in grammar school, I was given a scholarship to go to the Boston School of Fine Arts. I went there every Saturday for many, many years. I remember studying with Karl Zerbe. Most people don't know who he is, but he was very important at that time. I guess ever since I was born, I can remember going up to Ogunquit, Maine. My grandmother and grandfather had homes, and some of the relatives, in Nantasket. But we always went to Maine. And we would leave, like, in May, come back in October. It was only, I think, ninety miles, but it was like you said goodbye to the other side of the world. My most pleasant years, my happiness was in Ogunquit, Maine. It was comprised of an artists colony and a theater colony. I remember Buddy Ebsen, oh, all the famous theater people would perform at the Ogunquit Playhouse. And Buddy Ebsen, who became Li'l Abner and somebody else on TV, he used to play ball with us on the beach. Diana Barrymore would walk on the beach with a fur jacket, had a little dog with her, and very high heels. We would see her parade along. Little things like that. I learned to milk a cow, grow corn and potatoes. I rode a horse. Not too often. It was very expensive to ride horses, and we were suffering from the Depression.

I always thought that I wasn't very rich, or I didn't have any money. That was really imposed on me. But eventually, when we get to that, I realized we were well off. So the artist—In Ogunquit, there was a little museum there. And there was sort of like a port, where they caught lobsters and clams. Where we dug for the clams, the crabs, I guess. And right there, all these artists had their studios. Famous artists. But nobody knows—I mean, I mention them, and they're not well known here. But they were very—Well, Marsden Hartley was one of them that used to come. But I'm not acquainted with him. I think he was dead at that time. And Marin, John Marin. But the people that were alive at that time were Robert Henri and a whole slew. It was very, very arty. And there was an art school there. I did attend the art school, and went to the lectures.

Cándida Smith: So early on, you were exposed to I guess what could be called the American Scene?

01-00:18:24

Rapoport: It was the American Scene. And whether my Aunt Sarah influenced me—But I knew, ever since I was a youngster, that I was going to be an artist. But this was a no-no in the Jewish religion, because you're not supposed to make an image. But technically, that's wrong. You're not supposed to make a graven image of God. But it was just a regular concept. So I don't know whether it was because it was against the religion. It was looked down upon. I mean, everybody would say, "Art? What's that?" So they didn't think much of art. But my mother encouraged me to be an artist.

Cándida Smith: So when you finished high school, did you then go on to college?

01-00:19:33

Rapoport: Well, that was sort of a sad part of my life. I was sick for a year. I was a good student. It was the Depression, and my parents said, "Well, if you can get into Harvard or Radcliffe, we'll send you. If not, we can't afford to send you." They were saving their money for my brother to go. The boys—my uncle

inherited the business, my brother would take whatever they had to go to college. And I was a sickly child. I was out a year of high school. I should've repeated that year, but the teachers thought I was so smart, I didn't have to. But I wasn't so smart. I mean, I couldn't catch up. My grades were not that good. I never applied for any college. So I went to Mass Art. Now it's a respectable Massachusetts College of Art. But then, it was a normal art school, where everybody went to be a teacher. If there was anything I just never thought of was to go to college to be a teacher. I was a rebellious—As a matter of fact, I was on probation. I was very rebellious. Because I didn't like the environment. It was very non-intellectual, non-cultured. I wasn't stimulated. I didn't care for the people. It just was not a place for me.

Cándida Smith: Did they have an approach to the teaching of art that you could characterize?

01-00:21:49

Rapoport: Everything seemed to be so commercial. I didn't even get to the teaching part. I only went there for two years. I can't remember learning anything, except I drew from plaster casts, charcoal drawings. I made a little piece of sculpture that I have upstairs. I just can't remember, except how I was such a misfit. Actually, I had a very poor art background, because I was a Latin student. I took the Latin curriculum. Nobody took the Latin curriculum and went to Mass Art. [laughs]

Cándida Smith: How much did you know about art history, the history of Western art, at this point in your life?

01-00:23:10

Rapoport: Not much. I knew the American Scene. That's the way you've described it—is that what it's called? I was exposed to that in Ogunquit, and the museum. And the people that lectured. The only thing I can remember about MassArt is on my way, I used to stop at the library, the Brookline Public Library. I'd start at one end, and my ambition was to read every book. [laughs] But while I was at Mass Art, I met my husband. And that changed my whole life. He realized

that I had good enough brains, I could've gone to most any college—I couldn't have gotten into Harvard, but—He was a little upset about that, that my family was so ill informed and not thinking. And from the moment I met him, let's see, I went to summer school at Columbia. He was getting his PhD. He got his PhD that year. And he arranged that I go to Columbia. I remember John Dewey was teaching that summer. And that was my first experience of a real university and living away from home.

Cándida Smith: Your parents didn't mind?

01-00:25:02

Rapoport: Well, that was very interesting. One of the things I admire is that my husband would not make a commitment as far as marrying me. I was dying in the hospital. Literally dying of pneumonia, with all kinds of tents and things around me. And my father said, "I'll do anything. Get well. What can I do for you?" And my husband was leaving; he got his PhD. He was my boyfriend. I said, "Send me to Columbia to be near Rap." Rap is what we called my husband. And at that time, well, there was no sexual permissiveness. I came from Brookline, which was an elite place. And all the girls at Brookline were virgins. I mean, the boys would go to Chelsea or Revere. But they had faith in me. They trusted me. Which was very admirable. But of course, my father didn't like the fact that I went to the art school. They had picked out a place for me. Mount Ida's Seminary, in New Hampshire. That was the school that they wanted me to go to. Because if you go to art school, boys like to hold your hand. That was my father's analysis. That's the way they expressed themselves. So anyway, that was the end of Mass Art. What I did was, at Columbia, after that I applied to Yale, because they had a very good art school. I was accepted. But my family decided, since I had only one year left, I was going to get married—by that time, I was going to get married—I should stay at home. It was my last year.

So Boston University collected all my credits from MassArt, and there were only a few from Columbia. I went to Boston University, but I switched. I

switched to majoring in a science, because my future mother-in-law, when you mention art, “What’s that?” You see, there was such a denigrating attitude toward art. Art was a craft, something you do with your hands. Jewish people were intellectual, they did things with their brains. So I majored in biology for one year at Boston University. Maybe I studied French or something. Then I got married.

Cándida Smith: How did you meet your husband? And first, you should probably tell us what his name was. And then how did meet him? What kind of social circles were you running around in?

01-00:29:20

Rapoport: Well, his name was Henry Rapoport, but everybody called him Rap. It’s very interesting. I was a very rebellious child, first. I would go to the symphony by myself. I’d go everywhere myself, ’cause there was nobody that was interested in things that I was interested in. I heard Rachmaninoff give his next-to-last concert at Boston Symphony Hall. I was at the concert alone. I had a good friend. She went to a temple dance. I remember the name of the place, it was Kehilath Israel, which was an Orthodox synagogue. They had social dances and social activities. She met a soldier. At that time, let’s see, I guess the war was on. She met a soldier at that dance. They planned a date, but they needed a girl for my husband. There were the three men there. She called me up. Was I available—that was Sunday night—to go out with the soldier and my husband-to-be? And there was another fellow that was my husband’s roommate. They had a suite of rooms at MIT. All lived in the graduate house at MIT. My husband was a very outstanding student. So they came, they picked me up. My parents weren’t home. I remember when I came home from that date, they were so angry with me for going out too much.

Cándida Smith: Too much?

01-00:31:51

Rapoport:

I had gone out the night before and so forth. I stopped my mother's ranting, I said, "Mother, I've met the man I want to marry." And her whole attitude changed. "Tell me about him." I knew right then. This was a man that was going to take me out of that upper-middle-class, horrible values of beauty and money, and he was going to nurture my intellectual propensities. He was not like the people in my neighborhood, or the boys I went with. They were all middle—I don't know, I just didn't care for upper-middle-class. So superficial. Even if they went to Harvard. It's amazing how little effect going to a university could have upon people.

Anyway, he was from a poorer family, from New Jersey. He was tough, whereas all of the people around me seemed soft. You could see, I was not a very happy child. I remember, I met him on October 20, and he got his PhD in June. So he was around for that year. Then he went to work on penicillin. That was a big thing for the war. We got married, and I followed him. Let's see, so I went to Boston University. I got married. New York University. You're talking to somebody who went to, like, thousands of different universities. There're only a few, but see—But NYU collected everything, all my credits.

So my art was behind me, except you know, they had a very good institution at New York University. It hadn't quite gotten together yet. But I had to choose a different major to balance. So that's when I studied labor economics, and realized what "poor" really meant. I became very politically liberal. Of course, my parents were so afraid my husband was a communist. But he wasn't. That was their fear. And that he was too smart for me, he would break my heart. Which he never did. But I did study prints at New York University. I got a very good background on great printers of the world.

Cándida Smith: So a technical background, or was there art history?

01-00:35:23

Rapoport: Not technical, all art history. No, I had enough credits in technical from Mass Art. I started collecting prints. I collected for a while. But I've given all those away to my children. Goya, Picasso, Daumier. I could buy Daumiers for seventy-five cents. I hounded the streets. I remember the Wehye Gallery in New York. I remember buying all these Daumiers for seventy-five cents.

So I got my degree. We lived in the Village. Let's see, the Whitney Museum was on Eighth Street. I was going to Washington Square. We lived right near Eighth Street. So I really got to know that museum. Peggy Guggenheim, I think, had—Was it? No, that was the Whitney. The Guggenheim—Well, after I got my degree, I went to the Art Students League, and that was across the street from Peggy Guggenheim's.

Cándida Smith: Her gallery..

01-00:37:07

Rapoport: Twentieth century art. I studied with Reginald Marsh. I mean, I would never in my right mind have picked him, but he was a famous name. See, I was always so isolated from the right thing to do with art.

Cándida Smith: Was he interested in the work of the students?

01-00:37:34

Rapoport: That's where I realized after a while that my work has a lot of humor in it. I don't know whether you ever—Parody. And he was the right person for me. He was crazy about my work. I mean, it was so funny. He was a person that did parody all these—you know, the street scenes and so forth. I wish I had the work I had done for him. But people stole things. I don't know where they were.

But he was not a Berkeley School person. He was a realist. And he was very attentive. He was very dedicated. But I was exposed to, across the street, the

twentieth-century art. And that was Peggy Guggenheim's, I think. On Fifty-seventh Street. That's where the Art Students League was.

Well, my husband wanted to leave industry, wanted to leave penicillin. I mean, that industry. He got a grant—it was a very prestigious grant—to study at the National Institute of Health. I remember he got \$2000 for the year to live on, and they gave \$700 for me. That's pretty tight income for a year, \$2700. I was equivocating at that point, because I was very socially conscious, and had majored in labor economics. Should I go for my PhD in economics in Washington? Or should I continue art school? Well, the art school won out, and I went to Corcoran School of Art. And that was a desert, an absolute desert of art thinking. The criticism was—There was no substance.. But I did manage to get—there was the first prize and then first honorable mention, I got the first honorable mention, I think—it was like a second prize—when I finished. Did realistic. But I was so hungry for art input. There was none. The teaching was so bad. I came across Erle Loran's book. It was my bible. I devoured it. It gave me a sense of what a composition should be. I mean, movement and shape and color. It was such a revelation, after all these years of starvation. When my husband got the position at Berkeley and we were packing the books, I realized that he was teaching at Berkeley. I just couldn't believe it. That's when we came. When finally, the Calvins looked at me, they said, What could they do for me? “Oh, do you know Erle Loran?”

Cándida Smith: And so then you decided to get an MA in art.

01-00:42:09

Rapoport: Well, after Corcoran. Oh, yeah. There was no question that—I should say that when I was in grammar school—I don't have the letter, but I—a composition, I tried to find it. I wrote I wanted to be an artist, but I did not want to paint pretty flowers. I wanted to do something that had meaning. And so already, I had the idea of being a conceptual artist, at a very, very early age.

Cándida Smith: Meaning, let's say in 1940s, *meaning* in art could mean Ben Shahn, for example, or it could mean Paul Klee, or it could mean Picasso, it could mean "meaning in form."

01-00:43:11

Rapoport: I didn't know, I was—I could've been ten years old when I wrote that. I didn't know what it really meant. I just knew that I didn't want to paint a picture of flower, or realist flowers.

Cándida Smith: But I want to get us back to the mid-forties, when you were here in Berkeley. What did *meaning* in art mean for you at that time?

01-00:43:51

Rapoport: I was so busy fighting the Berkeley School. I didn't know.

Cándida Smith: Well, if you were to look at the art that was around you, excluding the Berkeley School, the artists that you admired most—

01-00:44:13

Rapoport: Oh, well, I was used to admire Ben Shahn, Robert Henri, this sculptor—I can't remember their names. It was that school that I confronted Loran with my first knowledge—well, of trying to figure out what did art mean to him? And those were the people that I would mention. William Glackens. They all belonged to the Associated Gallery. There was a print group that printed. Associated Artists, I think it was called. I didn't know, really. I just was just one big bundle of wondering. I was moving away from that American Scene.

Cándida Smith: You didn't want to do what Picasso or Matisse were doing.

01-00:45:55

Rapoport: No. No. No. I never thought of what—What I was doing when I came, which was very interesting, is that I did—I left the Corcoran School with all the sophisticated figurative paintings, I did primitive paintings. Those, they're upstairs. But they were really primitive. And those are the things that I used to take to Loran. And he thought they were wonderful.

Cándida Smith: Primitive as in prehistoric cave art from Lascaux?

01-00:46:40

Rapoport: Primitive as naïve. That's what I loved. I loved primitive art. I would take out these books and copy the frescoes. I didn't have any high and mighty ideas of Dada. All I knew was Surrealism was a no-no at that time. I was trying to get Loran's approval. And what did he like? And yet I was fighting against what he liked and what he tore apart in my work. But he didn't tear apart the primitive ones. The primitive was what I was doing when I came.

That year, I could say—I called it one of the big mistakes of my—maybe one of the mistakes. First of all, life worked out beautifully. And my husband was my badge of honor. By marrying this very special, brilliant person, I no longer was inadequate. He was my respectability, my everything. The mistake I made in my life was, I should've gone to Yale. Reason why I said things worked out well was because of my marriage, my relationship with my husband. I should've gone to Yale. But I didn't. I should've gone to the San Francisco Art Institute. But I was in Berkeley. How would I get across the bridge? It cost money. Whereas here, the tuition was practically nothing, I audited all these course. But you see, at that time, I thought that that was a big mistake.

Now, you're asking who did I admire and all that kind of thing. Being associated with the art department, *never* did a professor ever tell us what was going on in San Francisco. Nobody ever recommended an exhibition or a gallery. That was a big no-no for the department. There was no discussion of art within any context, except it was an art intellectual wasteland. It was no relationship to the outside world, except the Berkeley School. I think what was so contrasting to me—Here I was this professor's wife in a very important department, one of the best in the world, and when you're a professor and you've got students, and you're a chemistry professor, what your student does is your work. So there's a collaboration between the professor and the student. Now, we lived for the students. These were my husband's future. And an artist is different. An art professor is for himself.

He's not for the student. He is suffering, trying to make—They were suffering, they were trying to make names for themselves, they were trying to be practicing artists. The relationship between an art professor and his student was so different between the chemistry department and their students. I guess I agree, artists are self-centered. You know, they're—I didn't—I don't know, ask me more about the prof—So you're trying to get from me what art was an influence, what—

Cándida Smith: What you admired at that time, before you—actually, even sort of at that moment that you're arriving at Berkeley.

01-00:52:20

Rapoport: I was admiring Ben Shahn, that American School.

Cándida Smith: I want to get into more discussion of Erle Loran. Perhaps let's look at the classes you took, and some of the teachers you had contact with, to get an overview of who in the department you intersected with, and what each of them meant for you as a student.

01-00:52:51

Rapoport: Remember, I had been in New York, I'm a kind of a tense, driven person. I didn't find these people driven or excitable or anything. The one person that really seemed like a real human being was Glenn Wessels. He was real. He was vibrant. But when the course—I did take a course with him, but the course—They had a history course, art history course, where every professor taught a period of history, and we had to emulate that period. Like the Renaissance, we had to do a Renaissance painting. I think Ryder taught that course. I know, I found a Seurat, an Impressionist course. So we went through history by doing a painting of that particular period. So I had the whole group of professors teaching those courses. So I became acquainted with each professor.

Cándida Smith: A painting or an oil sketch?

01-00:54:38

Rapoport: No, we had to do a painting of a very thorough—Egg tempera. We had to study how to do an egg tempera painting. One teacher taught that. It was a very good, very thorough course. Each professor taught a particular period. And we did fresco, we did mosaic, or—So that was very good.

Cándida Smith: Do you remember which course number that was?

01-00:55:13

Rapoport: I didn't remember numbers.

Candida Smith: It was just the art history for the majors class.

Rapoport: Whatever it was, I had to take it as a graduate student. So I got to know each professor, I avoided Worth Ryder. He was like a cowboy to me. You see, I'm not used to these laid-back people, you know. He kind of had a southern—I don't know where he came from, but he was very laid-back. Very easy going. He had an obsession of his daughter. He had a daughter that was born with a bad heart. Cornelia, I think her name was. We all knew that this was the sorrow of his life, that she couldn't be excited or she'd have a heart attack—they were afraid she's die. I think they called them blue babies or something like that. This is what I remember about his laid-back-ness. He was like a cowboy. I'm used to a New-York style, you know. Everybody had respect for him. And affection.

Cándida Smith: Well, he had an idea of art as research. Did he talk about that?

01-00:57:03

Rapoport: I never heard an intellectual thing come out of him. I know this is strange. But what was so interesting was that one of my friends, who was a graduate student there, and her name was Marian Cole, and there subsequently was a very famous artist from Texas called Max Cole, a well known artist. I'm still wondering if they're the same person. She was from Texas. She was a dear friend of mine and was very easy going. We were together a lot. But Worth

Ryder had her for a babysitter, because she was so calm, slow, easy going. That was the kind of person they needed to take care of Cornelia. I was kind of offended, you see, that here he would choose my friend all the time to take care of his daughter. I could see why, because I'm a very nervous kind of a person. I would give that girl a heart attack in a few minutes. So maybe I sort of felt offended. You see, this shouldn't have come into the scheme of student relations with the professors.

Cándida Smith: Did he ever give you any feedback on your paintings?

01-00:58:46

Rapoport: Never. Well, I never studied with him, just that one course that I took with him. But I studied a lot with Haley, who was another laid-back, quiet, sweet person. See, that wasn't my style. But I learned what space was from Haley.

Cándida Smith: Okay, what is space?

01-00:59:22

Rapoport: Well—

[Begin Audio File rapoport_sonia2 06-26-06.wav]

Cándida Smith: Okay. So what is space? You were saying John Haley really taught you what space is.

02-00:00:29

Rapoport: Well, what was so funny about this is that I had been—we *all* had been playing around with space. And space is very hard to define. According to all those diagrams, it's non-static, it's not one plane right on top of another plane. It's an angle. It's a tension between two objects. But you can know that, and play around with all those objects, and think you know what space is, but I had the same experience that everybody else did, is that it took a couple of years to really realize what space was. We all knew that it wasn't perspective space; that it was confined within a picture plane. But it's very hard to get. And the concept was very—Now it doesn't seem like such a difficult concept

to get, but I remember, in Haley's class—although I really learned it from Loran—I yelled out, “Oh! So that's what space is.” Right out loud. And Haley was absolutely thrilled.

So you're asking me now to define it? It's tension around something, I think. It's movement. It's the negative, it's non-static.

Cándida Smith: And what's the relationship between the formal aspects of spatial deployment on a canvas and, say, the gestalt or the psychological aspects of—

02-00:02:59

Rapoport: Oh, you know, that's a big contention, this. I think that that is what we're always fighting with. That narrative, that meaning, that—you call it psychology, story—that was an interference. There was no such thing as a hand's gesture meant this. Or why this was superimposed on that. Everything was down to lines and cubes and planes. Anything that had any real reference of reality was a no-no, was a negative. I mean, if you could see a man's head in an abstract drawing, painting, that was not the way to art. *Real* art was an abstraction of space, line, volume, planes, contained within the picture plane. Nothing could bounce out at you. But space is just one element of all those things. It's the crucial element. And that's the hardest thing to get. I haven't thought about space for years. But it was an obsession. An absolute obsession in that department.

Cándida Smith: What did the phrase, “Bring it back to the picture plane” mean, and why was it so important in the department?

02-00:05:18

Rapoport: Oh, well, everything had to be flat, contained. This is a painting, It just can't come out at you.

Cándida Smith: It can't sink in, you think?

02-00:05:30

Rapoport: Oh, and it can't disappear. And now, that reminds me of Wessels. I keep thinking of Wessels. I looked at the drawing that I did for him, and sinking in, and being separated. I did a building for his project. Each window was discrete. And he said—I did, and then I put charcoal. And he—Well, I was humiliated that he would think that those windows should've been put back into the building, that they stuck out too much. They didn't come beyond the picture plane, but they were isolated. Isolated entities on the building. And they should've really blended in. There was a word they called, it was a uniformity. Now, it just occurs to me about the space. The space in the background was supposed to be just as important as the object that you were drawing. That was another aspect of the space. But that's not the space that was the mystery, the tension. I guess I'm sort of pulling all these formal attributes together. But I looked at that thing I did for Wessels last night. I didn't think that the windows—last night, after I don't know how many years, forty, fifty years—those windows didn't pop out at me.

Cándida Smith: But he said they did.

02-00:07:25

Rapoport: But he said they did. I think that they were after a uniformity. That's not in one of the drawings of Loran's books. And that's not what Hans Hofmann was always talking about. But that was a very important part of the Berkeley School, that everything was kind of at a—I can't remember the exact word. Unity? Unity is something.

Cándida Smith: So you had Haley for a class, and there you struggled with space.

02-00:08:10

Rapoport: And what's interesting is every piece that I have upstairs that I found, every drawing has a little drawing on the side that the professor drew of a plane and an arrow, and another plane.

Cándida Smith: Could we go get those? Can we see them?

02-00:08:28

Rapoport: Would you like to?

[interruption of tape]

02-00:08:32

Rapoport: What I was saying is, as an example, if you see this figure, you see these little—can you see these little diagrams that the teacher would do on the side? With the arrows to show the planes.

Cándida Smith: And how would that diagram then relate to what you had done, in order to improve it?

02-00:09:01

Rapoport: Well, that was the point, that they were trying to improve it, according to their principles. But I would have to really study. I look at this, I think it's a pretty good drawing for a student, don't you think?

Cándida Smith: So the criticism, caustic or not, was that the drawing didn't do what?

02-00:09:28

Rapoport: I can't remember whether this was a compliment or a criticism. It's just like a hammer on you, over and over again, that this is what this is supposed to convey. Now, it is erased a bit. So maybe I was trying to get that volume, the movement. You see, there isn't that—Although I like this drawing. There isn't that—You see that arrow with the two planes. That's kind of interesting, isn't it?

Cándida Smith: So they wanted you to put more planar tension?

02-00:10:17

Rapoport: Probably.

Cándida Smith: Planar tension? Spatial tension?

02-00:10:19

Rapoport: That's—you see, you've got all the vocabulary. I don't know. I don't even know whose class this was. But it certainly wasn't O'Hagen's. I think there are other ones that have the—Here. Well, I don't—

Cándida Smith: Well, there are some circular drawings—

02-00:10:51

Rapoport: Here.

Cándida Smith: Is that yours, or is that the teacher adding?

02-00:10:58

Rapoport: This looks like a teacher. I wouldn't have put a thing like that there. But I don't know—I can't see push-pull.

Cándida Smith: Push-pull. So from their point of view, there wasn't a push-pull in this drawing.

02-00:11:12

Rapoport: Well, I can't see how this would be an example of push-pull. Let's see if we do have—

Cándida Smith: So “push-pull” meant?

02-00:11:22

Rapoport: Again, the movement back and forth.

Cándida Smith: So the planes had to have a certain degree of instability?

02-00:11:35

Rapoport: Oh, always at an angle. One of them had to be tilted in some way. That was my interpretation of the overlap and—sticking out or—It's very hard for me to remember exactly. But the planar tension and—

You've got the vocabulary. I forget all that vocabulary. But it's just such a big overload, a big impact. And they would pick on—Let's see, are there any

other little drawings? There were more than one, I don't know whether—
 These are for that history class. And oh, this is where the windows stuck out,
 that Wessels was so upset about. You see how this has the overall relationship
 of a unity, and how these are just isolated.

Cándida Smith: So unity would mean that the planes circle around each other? Or were linear?

02-00:13:01

Rapoport: Well, the unity really was a tonality. And that is really one of the principles,
 although they emphasis—See how this loses its tonality by having each
 individual one stick out? And they were very—I didn't mind that. I thought
 this was great. But Wessels did not like this at all. It really hurt my feelings.
 Oh, I must've done this for O'Hagen's class. And this [is] an original
 Margaret O'Hagen.

Cándida Smith: So it looks like, in the class, she was trying to get the students to imitate her?

02-00:13:46

Rapoport: Exactly—absolutely. There really isn't that much difference, but this is the
 expert and this is the student.

Cándida Smith: Well, it looks sort of vaguely analytic cubism. Or no, synthetic cubism, not
 analytic. Picasso in the thirties?

02-00:14:14

Rapoport: But of course, her things were flat, and Picasso's were more deep. But she
 was different from everybody. She was derivative of the primitive artwork,
 you know, from the primitive countries, cultures. Northwest Indians and—

Cándida Smith: Was she already talking about the Northwest Indians?

02-00:14:39

Rapoport: Oh, that was her obsession. That was her derivations. Everybody said that the
 reason why she wasn't so good, it was so clear that she was too derivative,
 and not integrated.

Cándida Smith: Now, who said this? The students or the other faculty?

02-00:14:58

Rapoport: Oh, no, no, no, the students didn't know things like that. The faculty. I mean, she was onto something that really materialized in the future. I didn't mind that she wasn't so separate from these basic cultures, primitive cultures. What I minded was, she was such an egotist. You see, I'm so critical of them. Like, I didn't care for—I mean, didn't *not* like Ryder. I thought Haley was very sweet. She was a star, a princess. Everybody had to kowtow to her. And she liked the boys in the class, anyway, she didn't care for the girls.

Cándida Smith: So she didn't help the women?

02-00:16:02

Rapoport: Those who idolized her, and I wasn't about to idolize her. I kind of resented her egocentricity. But she had a passion, and her life was dedicated to art.

Cándida Smith: And her family.

02-00:16:21

Rapoport: And to her miserable husband. Her denigrating—I mean, he was so derogatory toward her. He was an alcoholic. He was just—And she *adored* him. You see, we carried all the miseries, the home miseries. The students were more aware of the characteristics of the teachers than their relationship to them.

Cándida Smith: In some of her writings, she talks about artists being gods and goddesses. Did she talk that way in class?

02-00:16:59

Rapoport: I only took one class from her. See, I took a lot from Haley, from Loran, and Wessels. Remember, I was—And McCray.

Cándida Smith: Yeah.

02-00:17:18

Rapoport: McCray had a big impact on me. This is a typical Cézanne. Now, where are the little—I shouldn't have put those away. But this is a pretty solid drawing, don't you think that was very solid?

Cándida Smith: Yeah, it's solid. It's very Cézanne-y. [Rapoport laughs] So how would this drawing particularly—

02-00:17:55

Rapoport: Well, I was an A student. I was a very good student. So these were all good. I only got a B once, and that broke my heart. A B-plus from Ryder.

Now, this was one of those—See, this drawing was that history class that I was talking about. This looks like a Haley.

Cándida Smith: I mean, it looks very Picasso. Or de Kooning, for that matter. But he taught a class on *Guernica*. Did you sit in on that?

02-00:18:34

Rapoport: No, I never—I didn't take many classes, I don't think. Let's see, I mustn't get mixed up. I'm thinking these were for the seminar. This is another art-history thing. Why did I keep this down there? I don't know why I left this down. [pause] I guess what you're getting from me are the more personal—my personal impressions. Sort of a, "Why was I stuck in this place, where all the exciting things were going on in the Art Institute?"

Cándida Smith: You knew about what was going on at the Art Institute?

02-00:19:30

Rapoport: I did know, not too well. But this was a very staid—They were disinterested. But I don't know what the professors were like at the Art Institute. They were passionate about their beliefs, of the Hans Hofmann theory, and the push-pull, and the Cézanne's composition, and there wasn't a wavering. There were no questions. And this didn't have anything to do with what was going on in the

museums or—There was a real distaste, as I said, for Surrealism, for anything realistic. I—Oh, this is a Seurat. I remember that.

Cándida Smith: I can see the Seurat.

02-00:20:59

Rapoport: I don't know whether this was for Haley or—

Cándida Smith: What kind of theory of color were they teaching? How did color relate to push-pull?

02-00:21:08

Rapoport: I don't remember anything about color. It was O'Hagen that was the colorist. She was the one that was so—There's another one that looks like—See?

Cándida Smith: And this is yours or hers?

02-00:21:33

Rapoport: Mine. Hers was just this one. Hers was more simple. And see, mine was more complicated. I really—Let's see, we'll put this back. Now, this was in Haley's class, I think. Blending the figure.

Cándida Smith: And what did blending the figure mean?

02-00:22:06

Rapoport: I mean, there was no difference between the background, the chair, or the head. It was all one pattern. But it still had to have that planar contention. You know, the tension and the distribution. You say color, well, maybe we could say distribution of dark and light. That's a good example. But this is what we did for O'Hagen.

Cándida Smith: Now, these classes, would these all be graduate students, or was it mixed, undergrads and grads?

02-00:22:54

Rapoport: Mixed. These were mixed. I think that that historic class was a graduate class. You know, it's interesting when I look at the graduate students, they were

mostly women. There were very few men. One man, now it just occurred to me, was Richard Nelson, who became professor at Davis. There's a Richard Nelson Gallery named after him. The men were not such great students. But they were the ones that would get the very, very few jobs. It was *very* gender-oriented. I remember Loran saying, "What are you doing all this work for? You're just going to go leave us and have babies." There was no chance of any woman ever getting a job that filtered through, you know, for teaching. That was—

Cándida Smith: Well, was that your ambition, to get a teaching position?

02-00:24:02

Rapoport: No, no, no. No, no, no, I didn't want—I was offered teaching positions, but I never took them. Because I couldn't take them, with three kids in three years, and being a professor's wife. But it was so—

Anyway, here was *Study for Problem Two*. So these are what we did as far as color. Don't ask me what *Problem Two* was. But apparently, there was something wrong with this painting. Because of those lines.

Cándida Smith: And those lines?

02-00:24:47

Rapoport: I don't know, but they weren't good. I mean—

Cándida Smith: They weren't? Why not?

02-00:24:52

Rapoport: Well, they didn't fit the—

Cándida Smith: I'm just trying to figure out what's the criteria. What were the criteria for—

02-00:25:01

Rapoport: For one, it was O'Hagen's criteria. You see, if you get a mass of, let's say, eight students' work that had these rectangles and these spots and lines, the good ones—you could see the good ones come out. You're asking me what

are good ones? I don't know, distribution of color, balance, originality. She would pick. But if you look at an isolated one like this, right now, sixty years later, you can't tell whether—There's no context of whether this was good or bad. All I know is she was very upset with me. How come I did such wonderful work for Erle Loran and not for her? That was her attitude toward me.

Cándida Smith: And how come?

02-00:26:13

Rapoport: You know, that's a very interesting question. I've never thought of how come I—[pause] I guess—I can see I'm such an opinionated person. I mean, about people. I tried very hard for her. But she was elusive. Her taste was so unique. She was a unique person. Very original, very idiosyncratic. There were people there that just *adored* her, felt she was the only influence on them. I couldn't measure what she wanted. She was too elusive, too temperamental, not particularly rational. Well, now I've been told that I've got pretty much of the scientist in me. I never thought I did. But maybe I just couldn't pin down what she wanted. I just worked intuitively. Whereas I knew what Loran wanted, I knew what Haley wanted. I sort of knew what Wessels wanted, I didn't care what Ryder wanted. But she was—she never spoke of push-pull very much. Composition or anything. She was all for—she was really a colorist. And she tried to give us color exercises. Now, don't ask me what color was good and what color wasn't, but they were always offbeat colors that had to—Now, here one recedes and one comes forward. But is there a balance? That it doesn't sink way, way back, It doesn't shout right at you. You know, there were a lot of things to think about for a student, hard to get. For any artist, there are a lot of things to think about. Whether I ever got anything that lasted from her, I don't know. I was continually thrust in her company socially. I'm not one to idolize, you know, or—She demanded a tremendous amount from people. Full dedication, full admiration.

Cándida Smith: Admiration?

02-00:29:22

Rapoport: For her. For her. But yet, I think that Fred and Pat, they just adored her. They thought that—She was a little elusive for me. And demanding, demanding. Demanding of the person.

Cándida Smith: So Loran was your most important teacher, the one—

02-00:29:47

Rapoport: Oh, he was probably the most important person in my *life*, up until a certain stage.

Cándida Smith: So how did he organize the classes that you took with him? Or how did he organize the training?

02-00:30:02

Rapoport: Now, remember, a graduate student didn't take that many classes. So you ask about classes. But I remember one class that—But I used to sit in, before I was a student. And oh, I was so happy that I could. I got my easel, I went right up front. And he came to me and he said, "You know, you're just auditing, you shouldn't be up front. Go back. You shouldn't block the other students." I still remember that. That was a real love/hate relationship. And it lasted for many, many years.

Cándida Smith: Was he an abusive person?

02-00:31:03

Rapoport: He was abusive, in that he was so—No, he wasn't—[He was] so self-centered. Distant, cold.

Cándida Smith: You had said that he was caustic, his criticism tended to be caustic.

02-00:31:24

Rapoport: Oh, yeah.

Cándida Smith: Which means cruel, I would say.

02-00:31:27

Rapoport: Oh, if that's what you mean by abusive. But he didn't abuse you personally. He didn't know he abused you. It was just his nature. It's terrible to talk about people that way. I think I have a tendency to always want to prove that even if the person is cold and distant and cruel, that I can conquer that; that that person will finally become a real loving person. But that's not true. People are people.

Cándida Smith: So what did he try to do, vis-à-vis you and your work? How was he trying to guide you? Whether it was in classes, or in life, or in critiques.

02-00:32:19

Rapoport: Well, it wasn't me he was particularly guiding. He was guiding everybody to conform; to keep things in the picture plane; to have things in planar absoluteness, you know? That one couldn't interfere with the other. So that you could get going—the space in between. If I had a book, I could find out, show you the diagram. Or the movement around; or the object in the back has to come to the front, it can't recede. He was teaching me—

Cándida Smith: Did he do that in his own work?

02-00:33:13

Rapoport: Well, you see, I used to go there and criticize his work. For years, that was part of our relationship.

Cándida Smith: I mean, we could go back downstairs and locate his portrait of you, in terms of—

02-00:33:29

Rapoport: Yeah. Well, let me just go through. Here's Margaret O'Hagen's. I thought it was wonderful that she—Here. [pause] I've got these things.

Cándida Smith: That she sent you after she went back to Canada?

02-00:33:52

Rapoport: No. No, we never were in contact after she moved back. But whatever it is, open house, nobody ever had the—She was sick, maybe? But anyway, this is an interesting—this was the very complete early Loran.

Cándida Smith: That's work you did for Loran?

02-00:34:17

Rapoport: No, that's Loran.

Cándida Smith: Oh. Okay, so tell me, where is the—I mean, we could use this as an example.

02-00:34:31

Rapoport: You want me to analyze? Oh, this—

Cándida Smith: Yeah, briefly.

02-00:34:35

Rapoport: Actually, this is very early Loran. I think this is—

Cándida Smith: Pre-Cézanne?

02-00:34:45

Rapoport: No, this is post—All that I knew of him was post-Cézanne. But he was doing these—It's hard to see this with that background. That is typical of the work that he did, I think, when I first met him. He got the Pepsi-Cola prize—he was very proud, that was a very prestigious prize—when he was teaching. And these are his realistic sort of realist work.

Cándida Smith: So where's the push-pull? Where's the negative space?

02-00:35:24

Rapoport: Oh, you're asking. It was when he went into abstraction that I used to go over to his house. We lived within two minutes of each other. But it's probably all there. But I never was much interested in his—But these are the things that seem to be of market value.

Cándida Smith: Of his work now?

02-00:36:00

Rapoport: Yeah. Oh, these are the diagrams. Oh, yeah, so you're right. On the side of that figure it looks like Haley did these. All the same kind of diagrammatic, volumetric, planar—Now, you know, I don't know whether that was a Loran or a Haley. And these were some of the people that were colleagues. What is this?

Cándida Smith: It looks like a program for some sort of seminar?

02-00:36:55

Rapoport: These are the Berkeley art scene with Erle Loran. See, there's the same realism. This is what I did. One of your questions was what did I do when I left school. It was these black and—With three little kids within three years, it was just not too much color, and quick watercolor.

Cándida Smith: These are things you would do late at night, or while your kids were napping?

02-00:37:38

Rapoport: Oh, yeah. Oh. Life was *such* a struggle.

Cándida Smith: 'Cause then you had to clean house, and cook dinner, and all those things?

02-00:37:51

Rapoport: And I never had a baby sitter. So anyway, now we're going to go down.

Cándida Smith: Yeah, let's. Are we going to? Yeah.

02-00:38:02

Rapoport: I don't know, these are just works that I did after I left—'50—after I left school.

Cándida Smith: In what way does this one reflect your Berkeley training, if it reflects it at all?

02-00:38:16

Rapoport: Oh, I think *everything* I do reflects my Berkeley training. I still, when objects in other people's work come out of the picture plane; or they're not settled, falling back, rooted into the ground; or if they're static—I still cringe.

Cándida Smith: Cringe?

02-00:38:50

Rapoport: That they should—You know, an interesting thing happened. But still, I cringe, I question it. Remember now, I'm an entirely different kind of an artist now, so this is—

Cándida Smith: Yes, I know.

02-00:39:07

Rapoport: Entirely. But I'm kind of getting back into what I call traditional, meaning into appreciation, because I have ideas about technology, now that it's gone so extreme, that I'm trying to integrate. But I went to a Kiki Smith print exhibition at Crown Point Press a couple weeks ago. And she did a whole— Did you see that show? There's a print of legs, feet on the ground, the bottoms of shoes—I looked at it, and the print was atrocious. It came out beyond the barrier of the picture plane. The space around it was all colored—I've got the catalogue here—flat, receding, had no relationship to—And you know, I *loved* her exhibition at SFMOMA. This print was—[phone rings]

[interruption]

Cándida Smith: So you were saying about the Kiki Smith prints.

02-00:41:39

Rapoport: Oh, yeah. So here's the print. It was this particular print. There were only three on exhibition. I think that this is a pretty good example of what I'm not talking about, in regard to what I learned, and why I was so offended by this. I mean, these shoes coming out, and that background being completely isolated.

There is movement there, but it is so offensive, according to the Berkeley School.

Well, after reading about this, it's true that she had such a terrible time with the background, which is this, that she decided to turn the plate over and use the background, the back of the plate, for the background of this print. But they went ahead and printed it. Now, so I was very offended by this print, according to what I had learned from the Berkeley School. A few days later, there was a photograph of a homeless person in the newspaper. But it was exquisite. It didn't look—it looked more like a drawing. It was feet and a homeless person, on the ground. It attracted me because everything was perfect, as compared to this.

So then I started questioning the value of the Berkeley School. I mean, I go through these discussions with myself. Is that photograph that I saw a better work of art? It wasn't an art photograph, it was a documentation in the newspaper. But it abided by the rules. Is that better than this, that defies all the Berkeley School rules? Yet, there was an alive quality about this, a dynamic quality, that the other one didn't have. I don't have the answer. I'm just telling you the questions that I had, because this had such an impact on me, as for being so bad, so wrong, that it brought me to the point of, Maybe that's why it's so good, because it's so bad. I don't know.

Cándida Smith: Had you been a Clyfford Still or David Park student, would you have had a different response to this work?

02-00:45:02

Rapoport: Well, I think that David Park abided by the rules. I don't think David Park would've approved of a thing like that. I don't know what Clyfford Still would have, because his painting was so abstract. Maybe Clyff thought he, since he was so abstract, he would've really been appalled by this painting here, this print. So this woman has—Well, she's one of the reputable artists,

living artists. I don't know. I'm just saying that this was a usual dialogue I have with the Berkeley School. Even sixty years later.

Cándida Smith: So switching, or coming back to Erle Loran and your relationship with him, what kind of work were you doing for him? Was it more of that nature— [indicating among works on paper]—or this nature?

02-00:46:10

Rapoport: You say “for” him.

Cándida Smith: For him or—

02-00:46:13

Rapoport: I don't think I—The only thing I ever did for him were—You know, he did take a sabbatical while I was there. The things I really did for him were those little primitive things, when he was tutoring me. I would go there about once a month, shivering.

Cándida Smith: What was Sonya Rapoport doing for herself, while you were at school? Isn't part of the whole purpose of getting a masters in art to become—

02-00:47:01

Rapoport: Well, I think I—

Cándida Smith: You know, to develop your own self-expression?

02-00:47:05

Rapoport: All right. You know, that's a very interesting point. I was being a good student. You know, I was born in Boston. I did adjust to all the conformities of life; that's what the structure of my upbringing was. I was conforming. I was doing the act of painting. Struggling.

There were a lot of opportunities when I got out of school, a lot of opportunities for artists. Competing for Richmond Center, the Oakland Center, the San Francisco rental gallery, and so forth. I succeeded. But I don't know how late it was, I said to Erle, “How come I'm not making it?” And he

said, “You don’t have a personal style.” I realized that that was one of the best things he ever said. I didn’t realize I didn’t have a personal style. I just thought I was doing—you know, just wanted to do good artwork. I mean, these are all kind of personal, but that’s what his answer was to me.

Cándida Smith: But isn’t that one of the things that a school might want to help encourage?

02-00:48:50

Rapoport: No. That’s why the school was so devastating. Whether these men were artists themselves, that they couldn’t relate to a student. I saw no real personal relationship as a give-and-take. You see, what this conversation, or this interview is bringing out, is all the criticism against it. But you know, I owe my art life to it.

Cándida Smith: So can you explain that? How is it that, despite all these problems that you’ve raised, there’s still—out of this grew your own personal vision? [pause] Or did it grow out of rebellion?

02-00:50:03

Rapoport: Well, Erle Loran said I was recalcitrant. I was always recalcitrant. And he gave up on me when we were friends. Although he was still caustic. Why did I develop what I developed? Is that what you’re saying?

Cándida Smith: Well, how does what you developed, how does it relate to what you learned at Berkeley? And what happened in your thinking, you know, that may have countered what you learned at Berkeley, that allowed you to go in other directions?

02-00:50:46

Rapoport: I consider myself a real product of the university. A Berkeley baby. I just devoured my surroundings. I met people in all departments. The fact that my husband was a professor was my pride and joy, I had access to everybody. Anyone that I wanted to talk with or collaborate with was very cooperative. I mean, this university has an impact on my whole life. Because of its

disciplines, the people I had dinner—I could invite anybody. I was on the inside. I carried my parking sticker. You know, you could tell if you were a professor by—What did we have? A parking sticker or something. It was on our car. And that was my entitlement. I mean, that was my badge of honor. I did participate in different clubs that the university offered. I met people from psychology, anthropology, physics, literature. I could have them over for dinner, and they invited us over for dinner. Maybe I'm exaggerating it, I don't know. But meeting all these exciting people, these people that were so passionate about their work—That was one aspect to how my mind was being cultivated. The other aspect was my husband's work. He worked in synthetic medicines. Every country in the world, all these third-world countries were trying to develop the natural products. So we would go around to these exotic places. So I became acquainted with, and people came to work with—I went to many lands. Was privileged to experience all these people, all these different cultures. So between cross-disciplines and cross-cultures, my mind was fertilized with this structure that I learned at Berkeley.

Cándida Smith: A structure, right.

02-00:54:22

Rapoport: The structure. The structure. And now that, you know, someone's writing a book about my life, my art life, she calls me systems, or structured or whatever that she associates science with. Of course, the scientists—All my kids are scientists. I mean, they would shriek in horror that I would be considered a systems artist. I can just say one thing, if you read my article, that I resented—Did you? My isolation from art. I resented—My life was chemical. I had all the chemistry people over all the time. When I didn't, I was with my kids. But I realize now that this was good, that this had an impact on my contribution to my art.

[Begin Audio File rapoport_sonia3 06-26-06.wav]

Cándida Smith: These two paintings here are from what date?

03-00:00:19

Rapoport: Well, let's see, I had the show. Early sixties, I would say. Very early. Or even '59. They're the two that are left of a whole group, because my granddaughter did not want me to sell them. A man came and bought a whole group of them.

Cándida Smith: In these paintings, you had—I would presume your children had gotten old enough that you were able to actually do some painting?

03-00:00:56

Rapoport: Well, let's say that if you figure '59 is when I started, and my daughter was born—I was pregnant while I was getting my masters. Was '49, is when I left school. So my daughter was ten years old, and my son was eight years old, and another son was seven years old. So they weren't that grown up. So that's why, in one of my lectures, I was talking about all my guts were pouring out, and my entrails. A woman from San José—Landau or something.

Cándida Smith: Susan Landauer.

03-00:01:45

Rapoport: She discovered something very unique about these paintings, that they're really collage—Oh, I don't know, that all those lumps and things are blobs of paint on canvas, collaged onto here. Well, there are lots of little stories about these paintings. While I was living in Brazil, Karl Kasten and Erle Loran, I think, brought these over to show at the Museum of Modern Art. And Humphrey took a look at the frames. They weren't elegant enough, and he didn't show them. If I had only known, at a distance, I would've paid anything to have them reframed. I'm trying to think—'63—that was before I exhibited them. That's why the frame is a little better now.

Cándida Smith: But to what degree—how do these paintings reflect the Berkeley structure that you learned?

03-00:03:20

Rapoport: Well, it doesn't look like much push-pull to me. I don't know, it was, let's say, ten years after. But I went into abstract expressionism, which I did not

learn at the Berkeley School, from those figure, background, planar things. I don't know how they reflect. I like to feel that they're substantial. But they're certainly not Hans Hofmann-y, are they?

Cándida Smith: They do, to me, they more resonate with tãchisme, with Dubuffet or Foutrier, Soulages.

03-00:04:14

Rapoport: Yeah, Soulages was one of my favorites. I love Soulages. You asked me who I liked. Soulages was always a favorite of mine. But then his later years, I soured on him. But who did I like? You know, people always ask who did I like? I don't know who I liked. I don't know what I was exposed to. But I know when I brought to Humphrey later a new set of paintings, he included me in a very important exhibition. And as he included me—which were entirely different work; we can go into that, too—he said, “I'm so sorry that you left this thick abstract period.” Well, that is kind of typical of the mean art world. If he was so sorry, why didn't he show them? Why didn't he fix them? Why did he have to say that? I mean, when I came back, I went to the Legion and they gave me the show there, I was preparing my announcement. My husband was all for it, whatever I wanted. I had a color reproduction. I didn't know how to design anything, I didn't know anything. I went to Erle, because he was the only one I communicated with. He looked at the announcement, and he said, “For somebody so early,” I think he said, “in your profession, why would you be so extravagant with a color reproduction?” He was against my having that. All these things. Well, actually, I was very early, but I was late enough to have a one-person show at the Legion of Honor. And then John Bolles Gallery, which was a very prestigious gallery—he had all the important European people—he took me on, which was very nice. He gave me a one-person show every year for many years.

Cándida Smith: And you started moving into computer art when, in relationship to these paintings? How did your painting develop between these paintings and when you move into digital art?

03-00:07:29

Rapoport:

Well, see these little lumps that Susan Landauer thinks distinguishes me for something special. I had a cigar box that I put my little icons in. And some of my icons were just globs of paint on canvas. They went into this box. And, oh, I think the next step was when Humphrey did show my work, was I did my combine paintings. Now I realize I should never have labeled them “combine,” because everyone thinks that they’re derivative of Rauschenberg, because he’s known for his combines. But I called them combines because they were several paintings connected physically with each other. One part was the abstract expressionist; and one part were drawings that I saw in my husband’s scientific journals, and one part was something else. But they were two or three different styles. I was going into another style. In the meantime, I was collecting icons of myself.

Cándida Smith: Meaning?

03-00:09:10

Rapoport:

In that Pandora box. Like a uterus from a child’s play game, the fleur-de-lis. But I took the last curve and separated that. I mean, here’s a fleur-de-lis. But there’s an end on either side that’s like a hook. I cut that. That was my—well, it looked like an embryo. A mandarin orange. I realized later, many years later, that this collection was a gender collection. All the gender implications. And to hop, skip, and jump, that’s what started me on the scientific—we bought an antique architect’s desk at the university warehouse. I opened it, and there were survey charts that had been done. They were 1905. Dated 1905. They were on rag paper content. So that started my using the background, a scientific, so-called, geological survey chart. That started many things. It started a gender expression of taking all these little icons and designing them on the survey chart background. Survey chart were waterways and earth things. They were of places that had been—places where the Japanese internment camps had been placed. It was just very coincidental. So I was kind of aware of the cross-culture, I was aware of the gender, I was aware—

It was my Pandora box, I called it, where things finally opened up, where I was associating things beyond the abstract. You know, I've thought recently—You asked about the effect that the Berkeley School had on me. One thing, I think, was the verbalizing of the push-pull, the planar, the space, the movement, the dynamic relationship of one object to another. We were verbalizing. I guess I learned that verbalizing became contextual. Content. And the anti-Berkeley School way. But nevertheless, it was thinking about art and about pieces in it. You know, artists don't think about it—They don't verbalize about their art. Very few people, very few artists verbalize.

Cándida Smith: Well, I think younger artists now have to verbalize—

03-00:13:04

Rapoport: Oh, now they're studying theory.

Cándida Smith: But of your generation—

03-00:13:08

Rapoport: They never did. Now they're studying art theory and—was it modernist? Post-modernist theory? That kind of thing.

Cándida Smith: You mentioned most of the graduate students were women.

03-00:13:21

Rapoport: Yeah, that was interesting, when I was thinking about my graduate years, we had a graduate room. It was lovely. Okay. This was pleasant. We had a beautiful room. We all worked in it, we criticized each other. I don't think we thought of ourselves as women artists, really. It was just a glorious time of sharing. That's why it's so hard for an artist to leave school and to go into a studio alone. But that doesn't happen anymore, not in what I consider the art of the day. The art of the day, people are interactive. They work in groups. One person does the design, another person does the computing, another person does the music. An artist working in isolation is a time of the past. Unless you get people that are still stuck in the past.

Cándida Smith: Of which there are plenty, but—

03-00:14:41

Rapoport: Of what?

Cándida Smith: I said, of which there are plenty.

03-00:14:43

Rapoport: Oh, many. And typical of the Berkeley art practice school today.

Cándida Smith: It was made clear to you that as women, you weren't going to have any opportunities as teachers.

03-00:15:00

Rapoport: We didn't—

Cándida Smith: But what about galleries, or the ability to develop? I mean, presumably, what you all wanted was to be able to exhibit.

03-00:15:11

Rapoport: Of course. You know, that's what was such a big change. We were students. We would never think of approaching a gallery, that we were qualified to have an exhibition. Nowadays, I mean, all these students are professional artists. That was a big change, that being a student meant you were going to exhibit. I didn't. I was privileged, in that I didn't have to get a job, that I could do it. My husband always said, "Do what you feel is right. Do what you want to do."

Cándida Smith: Did you have much interaction with the undergraduates at the time?

03-00:16:01

Rapoport: Well, there's where Jay DeFeo came in, and Fred was there. But the one I was very close to was Sam Francis.

Cándida Smith: What kind of work was he doing as an undergraduate?

03-00:16:20

Rapoport: I don't know.

Cándida Smith: Or I think he was actually somehow both, I think, but—

03-00:16:25

Rapoport: Was he both a grad—

Cándida Smith: Yeah.

03-00:16:26

Rapoport: I didn't know what he was. But he was floating there. He needed an old, experienced, married woman to talk with. And I was that woman. Actually, he and Fred and a couple people were more rebellious materially. So we didn't communicate art-wise. I don't even know what they were doing. But he had probably an unhappy marriage. He didn't tell me it was unhappy, but he was struggling with his situation of being married, and probably, I mean, from what I've heard afterwards, with all his girlfriends, and his marriage was struggling with being this monogamous marriage. Fred was really a rebellious character, but we were always very good friends. The one person that I really had an effect upon—and nobody ever paid much attention to him until he won the prize, and they were all over him, calling him up when they visited New York—was someone called Leon Kuzmanoff. They gave prizes for *Life* photographers, they were called. And he won the prize. But he had to get his masters degree. He was so unqualified. I would teach him all the Berkeley methods. "You're popping out here, you're going too far back, you're not getting the background up close, you're distinguishing against a form." You know. I just really worked hard with him. He gave me a beautiful photograph. We were very close friends. I don't know what's happened to him. But he was one of the prominent graduates that you never hear about.

Cándida Smith: Why don't we go downstairs now?

[interruption, change of venue]

Cándida Smith: The painting that Loran did with you, it's a portrait of you from what year, do you think?

03-00:19:19

Rapoport: I think it's '61. Well, it was before I cut my hair. Everybody wanted to do a portrait of me, because of my long hair.

Cándida Smith: How long was your hair?

03-00:19:34

Rapoport: Down to my knee.

Cándida Smith: So you didn't have it cut for twenty years?

03-00:19:39

Rapoport: Well, since I met my husband, whose mother had long braids, I hadn't cut my hair until—I can't remember, but it was after this. I remember going to Margaret O'Hagen; finally she wanted to do a portrait of me. I had my hair cut, and she looked at me in such dismay. I also realized nobody recognized me without long hair. So anyway, I used to go to Loran's house and criticize his artwork. He would teach me about his African collection. He had a wonderful pre-Columbian, primitive. He asked me which one he had recently purchased—He really knew a lot, but I'd give my opinion about his latest painting—He decided he'd like to do a portrait of me, and he did two, identical. Of course, I criticized it. It didn't have my mouth. It didn't have a lot. But it's a very good painting. I think it's a very good painting. I'm in the same outfit that I am in the one upstairs. This was in my trousseau. Sort of an ethnic kind of a dress.

Cándida Smith: How might this painting—How is it typical of Loran? How's it reflect what he wanted to convey to the students?

03-00:21:31

Rapoport: He was a very good portrait painter. I don't think he wanted to convey this to the students.

Cándida Smith: No?

03-00:21:39

Rapoport: He was a very good portrait painter. He had commissions. Important commissions. My portrait is a wonderful spatial painting. He's practicing what he was preaching. But he did not want to be a portrait painter. Why he decided to paint me in the middle of all this, I don't know. But he had a free model. And he did two. He wanted one for himself, and one for me. After he died, I went to his house to pick up the other painting. I couldn't find it. It was sort of morbid, with his second wife there mourning, and for me—Everything was rolled. I just couldn't unroll—I had a feeling that he painted over it. He used expensive canvas, you know, linen. He painted over a lot of paintings. I wonder where that second portrait—It's a shame that he would've painted over it. But I couldn't find it. It was identical to this.

Cándida Smith: Well, maybe you could just to some degree, illustrate the spatial dynamics.

03-00:23:13

Rapoport: Well, you know, I'm not that kind of an artist anymore.

Cándida Smith: I know, I know.

03-00:23:19

Rapoport: But I'd have to look at it. Let's see. What are my ideas of what he taught? Well, I certainly think that he's aware of the background. We were always taught to be aware of the background, which wasn't supposed to be a background. In other words, the background was as important as the object itself. And this has a tonality that they were talking about. And the background doesn't recede, the colors are sort of blended. And there is a dynamic of the arm of the chair with my arm, and the leg going this way, and the vertical—I don't know whether that was a window or a door or something—kind of matching the verticality, but slightly tipped to the back of the chair. And then the relationship of the horizontal window line there, with the line of the chair. But it's not exactly duplicating it, it's just, you know,

turned a bit to give that dynamic space that way. And then the verticality of the leg up, again, relating to a plane of the verticality of the window there. Then the upper—the thigh as the dynamic crossing the arm. It's interesting, the way—I think it's wonderful—the way he put the two hands as a vertical, but yet there's—They're together as a vertical, yet they're moving back and forth. And then the leg in relation—I mean, everything is related. I like the body and the way it's related more than the face. You could see that he was trying to get a resemblance of the face. But the dynamic of my looking that way, whereas the painting is really over that way. I think it's a very good painting.

Cándida Smith: You never had it framed.

03-00:25:58

Rapoport: Oh, how he resented that! Every time he saw it, he said, “And you couldn't have it stretched?” Well, actually, when my daughter got married, and they wanted to give her a gift, I said, “How about giving the painting you did of me?” And he liked that idea. Now, she lives in Spain. So we were always going to roll it, to send it to Spain. What was interesting in the conflict there is, his wife Clyta, the first wife, was—as I said, she worked at juvenile court and was a psychiatric social worker. She was kind of horrified to give as a wedding gift the painting of the mother-in-law. She didn't think that that the social dynamics was quite kosher. But I thought it was a wonderful gift, and the kids were thrilled with it. So it was always ready to be shipped to Spain.

Cándida Smith: Now, you would see him, Loran, once a month, without fail, for twenty-five years?

03-00:27:20

Rapoport: Oh, well, once a month, well, when I was being tutored before going to Cal. But after I graduated, well, even when I went with the kids, I had the little kids, Loran and I would go to the galleries together. That was my art critique tutorial. We would go to every gallery in San Francisco. And he would pull

everything down, the way I do. You know, we're both so critical. But he would criticize the work because of the push-pull. I remember, for instance, William Wiley, that's a good example. Now, Wiley did—there were some that were abstract that were grids. Do you remember those? Loran liked the grids. Then there were the ones that Wiley became famous for, that were sort of like cartoonish, sort of. Loran thought those were atrocious. Because those were more of a Surrealist bend.

But anyway, we just—it was wonderful to have to go—I mean, to see everything. I was so proud to go with him, you know, because *everybody* knew him—oh, although everybody thought he was such a snob. You know. But he was very famous, and I would tag along. I never felt he ever respected me on my own level as a person. Part of my privilege of being my husband's wife is that I was a faculty wife, you see. I would be invited, and he was a chemist going to these art parties. I don't think if I wasn't married to a professor, I would've been invited to all these parties, meeting all these world-renowned people that would come to his house. But it was fun. At times, like, we would have to deliver paintings to the rental gallery in San Francisco. I remember one time. I was always not a very good driver—I was a terrified freeway driver. But we alternated who drove. And when it came to giving paintings for a competition, he would be painting on his painting while I came up to the door to pick him up. It was always this last touch, this insecurity.

I remember wanting to leave early once, because I never liked passing over that big freeway, all those lines that we'd have to go in the traffic. So I didn't like to return at five o'clock at night, when there was traffic. I would like to return when there was nobody on the road. But he wanted to leave very, very late, because he would paint dabs on his painting at the last minute. And he, I remember—Clyta and Erle didn't, neither of them, believe me that reason why I wanted to go early—that I was being recalcitrant of not leaving late in the day, so I could miss that traffic. They didn't realize how fragile I was. I mean, I remember being very upset that—going always to the last minute, so

he could get his last dabs on his painting. Was never late enough for him. It was always too late for me, because of the traffic. But anyway.

After his wife died, I wasn't very friendly with them. You know, he married this Ruth Schorer, you know? I remember my husband was a friend of Mark Schorer. He was on a committee with—I don't know, some committee Schorer was on, or something. But anyway, it was an art phase of my life. I'd never had much of art groups or—I was always so isolated—Each one thinks we're outsiders. You know, like you say, Fred thought he was an outsider. But I have to relate one incident I think is important. But it doesn't have anything to do with Loran. Do you want to ask—are you interested?

Cándida Smith: No, relate that. Follow your train of thought.

03-00:32:43

Rapoport: Well, it's my position amongst artists, and not having any art friends, being away from the art crowd—That's probably why I developed into the kind of artist I developed, because I wasn't sharing any of these things. But I was on the board when Fred Martin was the president . It was an elected position. I was very complimented that they elected me, for the San Franci—it wasn't—it was the California School of Fine Arts.

Cándida Smith: I think, actually, they changed it before he became president, so it would've been the Art Association—

03-00:33:17

Rapoport: No, this was when it was the California School of Fine Arts. When it was a group, advisory group for the Art Institute. It was something. And there was a board, yes, of the Art Association. And people like Sam Tchakalian and—I don't know. Who's the Japanese painter? George Miyasaki. A whole group of people like that were on the board, mostly men like that. Nancy Genn was on it, too. I, you know, with my hesitancy always to drive across the bridge—I think I went across with George, and we met. Afterwards we had this big meeting—the boys went for beer, and here I've got to get back, you know,

because I've got my three little kids and my husband waiting for me and that kind of thing. It was always the tension of—Okay. So, but I had to join the boys for beer. I was the only woman. I think there were only two women on that big board of men. We sat around having beer. I don't drink beer. They were all artists, all you know, well-known artists, and they were having a discussion, one discussion after another. Now, remember, I came from discussions of people in the chemistry department, the most brilliant minds in the world. I mean, I didn't know any chemistry, but they were very intelligent people. I'm sitting with these guys that could barely speak English, talking about inane—or listening to them. I contradicted every one of them. I mean, it just was—I don't know why I did it. But I was very annoyed. Probably not being able to go back home and to have to have beer with these guys. I came home, and I threw up all night long. I was so upset. I realized, or I thought I had realized, that I had lost my identity as a woman; that here I was, with all these men, and being as aggressive or assertive about my ideas, and contradicting them, when you know, a woman had her place, at that time. I resigned. I could no longer—I felt so fragile that I could turn my femininity into what was considered a masculinity that I think maybe I didn't run for office anymore. But that was the end of my Art Association—

Cándida Smith: But it sounds like the art community in the Bay Area didn't give you the kind of intellectual sustenance that you were seeking.

03-00:36:51

Rapoport: No way. No way. But I'm a demanding person, I guess. So I think that all these were reasons why I went into a different kind of art. You see, I went into the computer world, the digital world. But that's not, in itself, an intellectual pursuit. You know, those people don't even know art. They know who Rembrandt is, but they wouldn't know who de Kooning is. They're not at all educated, art-wise. But anyway, I didn't get the intellectual sustenance either way.

[End of Interview]

Interview #2: October 4, 2006

[Begin Audio File rapoport_sonya4 10-04-06.wav]

04-00:00:00

Cándida Smith: That this piece in front of us, that you're sitting by is the transition from abstract expressionism to the directions you were going to be developing over the next thirty years. So could you explain a little bit about this piece? What it is and how it came to be?

04-00:00:22

Rapoport: Well, I was looking for a medium that was different, but involved what I considered the climate of the time, which was technology. I had used survey charts as a background, with a code, a language code. My box over there has all the symbols—the cigar box—that I had collected since the late fifties. These were little icons that attracted me and had some kind of secret meaning, which I never went into. But I had these icons that I had used on the survey charts. But I went to computer printouts. Wandering around the math department, I found their throw-away bins. It was a question of how could I use these in the way that I wanted to express my feelings, and use my language code? So this one here was one of the very early ones that indicated a story I wanted to tell. This is a story about the women of Bangladesh that I had found in the *Chronicle*. So I was using stories from the newspaper that attracted me. It was a foray into my gender topics, a way of assimilating what I called an aesthetic icon—iconography. And still abstract, but going into the reality around me. So this was the first one. Just a small sequence, not knowing how to use the different computer forms, but indicating the thought process of a language vehicle and the technological tool. But it developed into this bigger piece, I tied them together. This is a piece expressing my response to Charlie Simonds, actually, a very fine sculptor from New York. He modeled things in clay. And this brought me back to the earth, and to my values in life. And some of these lines are from the survey charts, which deal with earth—earth profiles, and water, and all my secret messages, that are

combined with getting back into the earth. Actually, to the clay of the golem. So this was the big transition.

Cándida Smith: What years are we talking about?

04-00:04:22

Rapoport: These were done in '76. I think I started the series in about 1974 or so.

Cándida Smith: And the computer printouts are found objects, then.

04-00:04:47

Rapoport: Both of these are found objects. But then I went into computer printouts that were meaningful for me. I interpreted them and put relevant material, intellectual material, on top of them. That's when I started working with people at the university. Dorothy Washburn, who was a Miller scholar in the anthropology department; worked with designs on pottery. And we worked with her printouts, I interpreted them and put my own material—the material that we found in a burial triggered my *Shoe Field*, rather than just the pottery shards.

The shoe image, the shoe effigy. So she was one person that I collaborated with. The other group was up at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, the table of isotopes, where the physicists—What is her—Virginia Shirley's husband was the director of the laboratory. They gave me the printouts on how to make gold. They had just discovered that. So I had their research printed out on my paper forms. I had ordered special computer forms, rag archival forms that had rag content. So the fact that they had accomplished making gold was very exciting to me. So it was an opportunity for me to put my Jungian symbols and go through the stages of alchemy. And so there was the anthropology department; there was the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory; and then there's the botanist Donald Kaplan, had all these printouts. Well, actually, they were off-prints from papers of a friend of his who had worked with the Pandanus tree, that he had given me, so that was a trigger for work with the rituals from New Guinea involved with this tree. And then, of course, there were my husband's

connections, where he was involved with indigenous medicine. I got the printouts from the Calvin Laboratory, because they were doing experiments with rat brains, grinding up what they called intelligent rat brains. Intelligent rats were rats that had been trained around the—going in and out of labyrinths. And they took these intelligent rat brains, and they inserted them into brains of the untrained rats. That's a little bit related to our gene theory now. But if you ask any person, chemist that's dealing in biogenetics, they're horrified, because this is not a logical way to go about transferring. I was involved with Winnie DeVos, whose husband was a psychologist in the anthropology department. All these connections were through the university. I just found out who was who and what I was interested in, and would they collaborate with me? It was just a very exciting life for me. And I just picked everyone's brain.

Cándida Smith: Was there a relationship between the content of the printouts and the visual form of the printout?

04-00:09:55

Rapoport: Oh. Actually, this was the first reason why I probably went to the printouts. Because I just *loved* the shape of the characters. And you can see from here how these forms on the printouts triggered where and what I put upon them. This harkens back to my training. My whole life's work, I feel, is based on my training from Berkeley. The fact that they were able to verbalize what went here and what went there, and why, and why it was right. Of course, this was very antagonistic for me, to have to have to listen to all this explanation about art. I fought it and fought it and fought it. But after so many years, it became so integrated into my being that I did this unconsciously. So whatever you're looking at, you're looking at a relation, a two-dimensional relationship, a layered three-dimensional relationship, all evoking the push-pull, the layering of imagery, the tensions between the volumes or the two-dimensional surfaces. They're contained within the parameter of a format. They don't come out and hit you; they're restrained within the picture plane. So you're

looking at a product of the Berkeley school, a recalcitrant. A product of the Berkeley school. I think the verbalizing of this kind of teaching was so significant, after I had been to the Corcoran School, I had been to the Art Students League, I had been to the School of Fine Arts connected with the Boston museum, I had attended Massachusetts College of Art for two years. Nobody could ever say anything about form. And at Berkeley, you did. I mean, it was very irritating, I was always challenged and—But I think I was born a systems artist, I guess. And the system of the Berkeley School—the Hans Hofmann and the Cézanne and Erle Loran is what appeal—well, it didn't appeal, it was easily integrated. So yes. First, it was the visual imagery.

Cándida Smith: Do you have a question?

Terri Cohn: Do you want to say any more about the conceptual relationship between the formal and the idea? I think that that was part of what Richard was asking. And the way in which—what you drew on top of these, related to the actual content.

04-00:14:51

Rapoport: Oh. Well, that started with the anthropol—this became very frustrating, because what did all these numbers and letters mean? I was very curious. Visual was no longer the most important thing. I just *had* to understand the programming and what went on. So the print—conceptually, each background, printout background, had to relate to what I put upon it. With the Dorothy Washburn, it was not only deprogramming her symbols of designs, which were—she used the comma as a way to designate a pattern of early American Indian pottery. So I had to take that comma, and then I had to find out how that comma related to the pattern. So what went on top, which is all over there on that table [laughs], was completely a decoding of early American Indian pottery design. But accidentally, I discovered an image of a sandal, a ceramic foot effigy, amidst all these shards. The sandal style was not of the sandal style that the American Indians used. We're talking about the year 1000. Now, how did that foot effigy get into New Mexico, when—They

found it was a Mexican sandal, and trade relations had been established because of that discovery. But I was really interested in the sandal. All of the different styles of the sandals, and where they came from, and how they related to the tribes and so forth. So that's when I had my first shoe performance, asking people about their shoes. Why did they wear them? Why did they wear them that evening? How did they like them? Where did they buy them? So forth and so on. So that was really my first performance having to do with shoes. Oh, I must say that I—after investigating the American Indian sandals, I investigated my own shoes [chuckles], and asked these questions. I asked the other people questions. And we put those responses—Well, that's when I started—well, let's say quantifying qualitative information. I put a number on how they liked their shoes and where they got their shoes and so forth. So I had a lot of numbers. And they had a shoe charge compiled from these numbers. Each one was given a shoe charge number, a shoe color; a pattern came from this, on the computer. And at that performance, there were seventy-six people. I put the data into a—I didn't put it in, I had a programmer—put it into a magnetic field program, where you could see all the participants, each one represented by a tilde. Well, the people were actually given two numbers; their entry into the space, and their final charge number. And these two were calculated into a magnetic field program. And we have the field program over there. Let's see.

So conceptually, I used the alchemy for the Table of Isotopes, Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory; conceptually, for the Indian thing, American Indian anthropology. I went into the concept of shoes and how the people wore them, related to each other in a shoe field theory program. As far as the rat brain, I had their printout, I put all kinds of herbal indigenous medicine—[pause] let's see, equations on top of that. Let's see. On top of that program, so whatever related program I had—Or like the Pandanas tree, well, I just used the information. But that got to rituals and the male ritual of getting rid of the female from the mother, that kind of thing. So everything—each piece has its

story, and a related concept. Which brought me into cross-cultural material, interdisciplinary material, gender, ritual, religious—[pause] Did I answer that?

Cándida Smith: Well, I have two questions. Do you have a follow-up on anything?

Cohn: Just the one on—scientific.

04-00:22:24

Rapoport: What?

Cohn: Scientific.

04-00:22:24

Rapoport: Oh. You know, it's very hard for me to talk abstractly, when the stuff is right there.

Cándida Smith: You're doing fine.

04-00:22:31

Rapoport: I can't remember—

Cándida Smith: For most of your viewers, they're not going to have the specific—they're not going to have had the experiences in the various labs that you've had. Is it important for them to understand the content of the scientific research that you are working with? [pause] Does that question make sense?

04-00:23:07

Rapoport: Well, of course, each person comes with a different background. If they're visually oriented, they appreciate the aesthetics. Because I always try on that level—If they're scientifically oriented, it makes a different kind of sense. I still get irritated if they're only involved with the science. What I want them to do is to get the metaphor between the science and the concept behind it. While there's a lot of humor—an example would be aroma therapy, if you could call that science. It is considered a science, I guess. So I did a piece, *Smell Your Destiny*. In India, before the students take their exams, they go to the fish market to clear their heads, via the fish smell. Well, that piece had to

do with the changing attitude in society. And at one time, we used to—Well, I guess the purpose of it was that each community changes, according to the fish in the fish pool that absorb the smells of society. And at one time, the smells used to be from quiet people. We used to admire quiet people. But the pools were filled with fish absorbing aggressiveness. So the change in community, in their aberration of different traits. So I went down a whole group of—I'm trying to think of the traits. One was aggressiveness, that we now admire; one was truthfulness, which no longer has any value. So it was the whole change of society, according to the smells of the community {and smelling?} that the fish absorbed from pills, and then exhumed to the people in that society. It's a very funny piece. And the way the fish—an alternative way of the fish getting these traits that could impart to the community—were swallowing pills. And for instance, I'm trying to—I made a play on all kinds of traits. For instance—I'm trying to think of some of the pills, but they were common medicines—but I'd have to look up—that I changed the name of the pill. And they were fed to the fish.

Cohn: This was experimental?

04-00:27:08

Rapoport: What was that?

Cohn: This was experimental, that they were being fed these pills?

04-00:27:12

Rapoport: Yeah. I mean, conceptually. For instance, aspirin was changed to aspire in. That's coming back to me. I had one Milk of Magnesia that I changed to something else. (The fish took Milk of Amnesia while swimming to Nazareth from the Dead Sea.) There were dozens of them. I was afraid I was going to be sued by the pharmaceutical companies. So anyway, that's one concept that grew out of aromatherapy. Then, of course, the gene splicing. That, I took issue with an artist who—a very famous artist, Eduardo Kac—who created the artist's gene. But he created this gene out of—He took a biblical sentence, and

he went to the King James translation of the biblical sentence, which gave priority to the English—Oh, well. First, he wrote the English language, and changed that for the biblical sentence. And then he went to the Morse code and changed the English into the four nucleotides, ATCG.

I said that that was a corrupt gene, because he should've gone, if he was using a biblical sentence, he should've gone to the Hebrew Bible. So by going to the English language, he was giving English the dominion, the priority of a gene. If he'd gone to the French language, it would've been a French gene. But this would've been objective, by going to its original source. So the gene was contaminated on that level. Secondly, he used the Morse code, because Morse, Samuel F.B. Morse—who was a racist—he believed in slavery, he believed in Manifest Destiny, he was very prejudiced, religious-wise, especially anti-Catholic—So the gene source was not only a translation of the English, it was—the tool of changing of transmutation into the DNA was by a bigot. So I had both Lilith and Eve, who are part of my gender, part of my gender topics, they *redeemed* the gene. They went to the Kabbalah gene to create a pure gene, according to words and numbers that are part of the Gematria, [which] is a way of transposing numbers into words and—

So we had moral gene, as compared to the corrupt. So that was another way of conceptualizing the science of gene splicing. And on that same level, an earlier piece was called *The Transgenic Bagel*, of taking good traits—I'm always trying to reform the world, I guess—and taking the animals from Noah's ark, which was in itself—could be conceived as a gene pool, and taking these animals and excising their trait. Like the lion would be strong, I guess; and the lamb would be gentle. I mean, all these things were done in the seventies and eighties. I haven't really looked at them recently. And then these were inserted into—these traits were inserted into a bagel. And the way you got that trait was that you ate the bagel. So anyway, I'm looking for a handkerchief. My nose is dripping. I'd like a distinction made.

Since I was an early user of science in art, and also an early user of technology and art—To me, science was one thing, and technology was another. It was just a different discipline. Two different disciplines, coming from two different sources, two different energies. Whereas everybody seems to put together science, technology. But for me, they were different things. Different triggers, different interests, different disciplines. Which they really are, but people really don't understand that.

Cándida Smith: I wanted to get back to the relationship to your Berkeley training. And one, is the degree to which the kinds of ideas that Loran is outlining, and Cézanne's composition, how do they translate, if at all, when you move from a bounded, a framed two-dimensional image to other kinds of media? I mean, with these here, at least they give the appearance of having a frame around. You know, they're bounded; they have four edges; Internally, four edges, so you can see them as still functioning within—

04-00:34:26

Rapoport: As a picture.

Cándida Smith: As a picture within that framework, even though you're already pushing in a non-painterly, and maybe even more seriously a non-graphic direction. What happens when you start creating a work, a work that no viewer can possibly ever take in all at once? Which is, I think, central, isn't it? to what Loran's conception or Hofmann's conception of a painting or a graphic object is. You see it all at once.

04-00:35:10

Rapoport: Are you talking of time-based work?

Cándida Smith: Well, there's time-based work, there's also the shoe piece, as—

04-00:35:19

Rapoport: But I wonder, could you—What do you mean, “No viewer could take it all in”? In other words, no viewer can interact with it, as they do a picture?

Cándida Smith: I'm talking the very simple material basis, that goes back to Alberti; that a painting is, or you know, a drawing is, a two-dimensional object with four corners. And this is what, you know, was the basis of the pictorial aesthetic that you were trained in, which you then rupture. But how do the formal principles get translated?

04-00:36:01

Rapoport: Right here, I have my Loran picture.

Cándida Smith: Okay.

04-00:36:09

Rapoport: That explains how I took the structure, the structures that Erle created, and applied them to a narrative sense, a serial sense, a time-based sense. And do you think we could open that—

Cándida Smith: We can do whatever you'd like to do.

04-00:36:43

Rapoport: Okay.

[untranscribed interruption]

04-00:37:23

Rapoport: Okay. Now, this is the combination of using a relevant background— Professor Raymond, in the chemistry department, gave me his printouts having to do with his discovery of a chelation process that—[pause] Well, here, it says, “A major breakthrough in the study of plutonium, it's a chemical process known as chelating. A non-toxic chemical engulfs the plutonium, and this allows it to be—[pause] to be held in abeyance, to prevent the death of victims from plutonium poisoning.” I know that's a little complicated. But anyway, the point is, holding in abeyance. That was the chemical experiment and the process. So what I used was these diagrams that are classic expressions from the Berkeley School, originating with Hans Hofmann, all— This is a system of holding an image in abeyance. So in a way, it's going from

interpretation, conceptually, of the science, into a real object. My interpretation of the objects that had been on my dresser for over twenty years. But that was, like, twenty years ago. So I took each diagram that Erle Loran had illustrated with a Cézanne image. So expressing all these formalities. So first, these are all the objects on my dresser. Oh, the first one here is the chemical process, and all these molecules floating around. Chemical process for art analysis. So you can see the junk there. And the beginning is—I'm beginning with a picture of the objects on my dresser, and showing what Cézanne would have done with those objects. So I have a diagram of one of his paintings. But it's a diagram. It's a diagram made from one of these, to show how the movement in a painting circulates, and doesn't get lost in perspective. And so this diagram is superimposed upon the picture of objects on my dresser. And now we're going to the simple, the objects that abide by these concepts. First was the two-dimensional object. It was a purse. And so you see the arrows of this two-dimensional—I think I'm answering your question how it's going—how this Berkeley system is evolving into applying something conceptually, and using a narrative.

So here's another—Well, this was not an object on my dresser, this was a correlative object. I had twenty-nine objects on my dresser. In order—and then analyze them. In order to make them more exciting, I attributed a correlative object. The point was, I assigned a word to the object, a word to the correlative object. How did these objects, the words from these objects, relate to each other? So that was my interest in language. So this was a correlative object, because it was two-dimensional. Well, here—parallel to the picture plane—is static. Parallel to the pic—So this correlative object was an image that was static. It was flat against the picture plane. Nevertheless, its relationship, if you put it on the floor, would make it dynamic. Whereas here is a dynamic image against the picture plane. And so it unfolds in more of a dynamic way, rather than a two-dimensional way. And then we go into overlapping planes. And all my work is overlapping. Not all my art will happen conceptually. But it's overlapping pictorially. You see here, this is

overlapping. The diagram is overlapping on the object. The printouts are overlapped with language designs and pictures. So whether this was inculcated in me to further develop, I don't know. But I was—I just went on. And that's the way it went. I wasn't thinking of it intellectually, I just did what felt good to me. And so here we have these overlapping planes that create space, that create movement. This is so significant to me, when I look at an artwork these days. Artists have no idea when they overlap, they have to ground the overlapping. They sort of—you don't know where the bottom starts, where the top ends, and the overlap isn't clear. So there's—I'm so critical about the space that should've been created, but they never learned to. And the same thing is the overlapping planes with volume. And here we go around.

These were all—This was an object on my dresser. One thing I meant to mention was not—I'm describing these to you physically. But these also have a content to them that were very significant to me. For instance, this is Dracula, and phase of love, this correlative object. And right here, a plane is a dynamic plane. So not only is it a physical plane, but it's—the content is dynamic. So the content and the physical always seem to be correlated. I tried to do that. Well, here we have the snakes moving around as a volume moving in space. And then the two-dimensional of the Chartres labyrinth, where—and this is Loran's diagram on top.

Cohn: Sonya, do you think that any of this was encouraged through your training in the art department? This kind of—

04-00:46:27

Rapoport: No. The one thing that I remember—I think I repeated this before—was after years of knowing Erle—I mean, for twenty-five years, every month we went to all the galleries. We saw *all* the shows. I heard *all* the criticism of how this wasn't spatial, and how this was—I mean, he was very critical. Finally, I got the courage to ask him—I don't know how many years—“What's wrong with my work? What do I need?” And he said, “It has to be different.” But nothing

like this had ever been encouraged. As I said, I knew him so well that I was afraid to ask him. They only encouraged the principles. They were very, very harsh about that. But very verbal. Very explicit. So it got your mind going. I remember once, John Haley admiring a primitive thing. A drawing their colleague did. So maybe they were open and admiring something. But nothing was ever encouraged that went beyond this system.

Cándida Smith: One of the things—this relates to my second question, which looks back here, just in the specific content of the materials that you're working with. Because one of the things that's very clear from Ryder's papers and from the papers I've seen from Margaret Peterson, and from other things I've read, is that one of the purposes of these forms was to abstract the visual form out of the social context, out of—that any kind of content that the form had was strictly irrelevant. If you paid attention to it, you weren't being an artist, you were being something else, so—

04-00:48:49

Rapoport: Extraction. That's a wonderful word. I don't remember hearing it, but it was true. I guess I was extracting all the time. But I was extracting a concept. I was transcending that structure that they aimed to extract.

Cándida Smith: You have alluded to your interest in Jung. Were you reading a lot of Jung at the time?

04-00:49:35

Rapoport: Well, you know, when you're an artist, an obsessive artist, working all the time, you just don't read a lot of books. I have an extensive library. And my favorite book is one of Jung's books. I've been through that book a thousand times. So I was well acquainted with the imagery. When I worked on something, I came across a book or an article in the newspaper, then I would investigate. But I've always been interested in psychology and the healing process. I guess everything that I do has the healing process behind it. But I'm more familiar with Freudian ideas than I am Jungian. But I just *love* the

imagery in the Jungian, which is alchemical. And of course, alchemical and chemistry, I mean we're always interested in them.

Cándida Smith: How did your husband take the connection to the alchemical—

04-00:51:04

Rapoport: Well, of course, he was—all chemists are familiar with—it was that green book. I don't know, who's the—the Emerald Tablet by Hermes Trismegistus—the green book. He gave me—he had it saved from his MIT days, from years and years ago. But they knew that chemistry is an outgrowth of that. That was part of the trip.

Cándida Smith: In 1962, there was a computer art show, or a show of computer-based art, at the San Francisco Museum of Art. Did you go to that at all? It was put on by the people involved in USCO, which was a group that was involved with the issues of technology and art, based here in the Bay Area. A neo-Dada group.

04-00:52:06

Rapoport: A computer show?

Cándida Smith: A lot of it was objects running off of computer programs that would do certain things

04-00:42:19

Rapoport: Oh, are you talking about Harold Cohen, from Southern California?

Cándida Smith: Gerd Stern was the main artist who was involved with it.

04-00:52:29

Rapoport: Who?

Cándida Smith: Gerd Stern. Based in Sausalito at the time. [pause] Well, if you don't know about it, you don't know about it.

04-00:52:41

Rapoport: Well, see, really, I mean, none of that—In '62, I was living in Brazil.

Cándida Smith: Oh, okay.

04-00:52:48

Rapoport: In '63, I came back, I had my abstract expressionist show at the Legion of Honor. So that's why I didn't see it, I was in Brazil.

Cándida Smith: Right. Well, maybe what I should've really asked was, were you following new developments in the new media—in computer art, video art? How did you become familiar with these things?

04-00:53:12

Rapoport: I didn't even know. I didn't even know there was such a thing.

Cándida Smith: Well, then, so let's move to 1970.

04-00:53:26

Rapoport: You know, I'm not very good at years.

Cohn: Maybe what he's asking is, maybe you could talk about your transition from being a painter to getting involved in working, you know, doing the survey charts.

04-00:53:40

Rapoport: Is that what you're—

Cándida Smith: Well, and whether other artists—were there artists who were coming from a very different background than you had been trained in, who were doing work in video or computer-based or digital art, that intrigued you?

04-00:53:59

Rapoport: What's interesting to me is, when I was running around New York—you know, visiting the galleries and showing there—I went into one gallery. I think it was the Franklin Furnace. I heard this from three galleries, that, “a woman who was getting her masters degree at New York University was looking for a computer artist. And the only one we could think of was you.” Then I went into another gallery and they said—Because I had shown all these

people all my computer stuff, starting—well, I started that—well, '76 is when I was interpreting these other things. It shows you how non-prevalent that was, that in New York, the only person they could think of was me, in California. That's when I had my Biorhythm show, and that went on to measuring people's biorhythms and an interactive installation. There was one technological show in Los Angeles sometime.

Cándida Smith: '69, 1969.

04-00:55:40

Rapoport: '69. I kind of felt I should've been in it. But remember, well, it was the old boy's club. And even one of my closest friends, which was Harold Paris, I think he exhibited in that show. But nobody would ever recommend a woman, you know, on the edge or anything like that. The Art Com took me in their fold, considered me one of them. And when the Tisch School in New York University—But that exhibition was later. Do you remember when the Tisch curated by Art Com had their first computer show? It was, like, books, HyperCard books that we sat there, It was all interactive—

Cohn: I want to say '76, but I can't be really sure.

04-00:56:47

Rapoport: No. But—[pause] Someone by the name of Stern? But no wonder I didn't see it, 'cause I wasn't in the country. What kind of computer things were they doing?

Cándida Smith: There were a variety of objects which were programmed to do—I want to say it's a form of chance programming, because they were not—the sequence of actions that the objects did were generated randomly, through the computer program.

04-00:57:27

Rapoport: Oh, random. Random, yeah.

Cándida Smith: You know, if you stood and watched it for a long time, you still wouldn't be able to predict what it was going to do. Stern, Gerd Stern.

[interruption]

[Begin Audio File rapoport_sonya5 10-04-06.wav]

Cándida Smith: I'm curious about your move into creating things on computer.

Cohn: It might valuable for Sonya to talk about her interactive installations.

05:00:03:04

Rapoport: Well, the reason why I got into the computer was because I could tell a story. There were layers. There we are. Layering with content. But then I went into the interactive, because I had the visitors, the participants *use* the computer. I never was a computer whiz. I did my—the first early things, I did myself. But I'm not a highly technical person, by any means. But the technology was so primitive at the time that I could handle it. So the reason why I went into the composition was because of the layering of information. You could tell so many things at the same time. You could have the form, you could have the interaction, you could have the content, all in one box. But to continue, the computer came first, and all the interactive installations were based on using the computer. The—Well, *Shoe Field* came before *Objects On My Dresser*. But do you want to continue this—the thrust here of—The Berkeley School was closer to the *Objects On My Dresser*, of where I went from here. See, this is a phase of *Objects On My Dresser*. Do you know what number phase it was?

Cohn: Eleven. That was a three part phase.

05:00:05:26

Rapoport: That was three, that's phase three. But the *Objects On My Dresser* became an interactive process. And these images, and the correlative images, were put on cards. And then here—So this was really how I went to the computer. These

are computer cards, with each object on them. [pause] But I guess it's hard to see.

And then these were put in a computer program that made a web, a net web. I made a net web of—there were six things. And six axes. These were discussed with a therapist, as to what were the themes of my objects. And then I put the cards, I have—along the axes. I don't know whether—[pause] And then where I placed those cards were programmed into a net web. And this was my self-portrait. I considered that the twentieth-century portrait. Okay. So that is using the computer for a content, for—Instead of a painting portrait, it was the subject matter. I went around the country with my little package of axes and cards, and this is a portrait of Sarah Lawrence College. And they emphasized (the flower card)—Here are the objects. And their specialty was this flower group. And this was their configuration. So that was a new idea of a self-portrait, or a portrait of a group. Again, taking the computer configurations and the layers, with an idea. Now, right here—[pause]

It turned out that I had law groups, art groups, and science groups move the cards around these axes. And this was a study of the different profiles of a law group, a science group, and an art group, and how they compared with each other. Now see, these are the card objects that they felt belonged to a particular theme. Like moving, eye, hand, chest, masking, and threading. Those were the six themes. And they had these picture cards of my objects, and they put them in which theme they felt they belonged. Okay. What is interesting about this is the law group was the most consistent within themselves. Oh, maybe there were thirty people participating. And they overlaid the same axis with the same picture over and over again. They were *very* consistent. And that's why it's barren. It's sort of a stark plot, not much deviation. Whereas the science group was really the most diverse. Can you see, compared to the art group, how they're more spread out? And—Well, they were almost equal. Interesting, I had the psychotherapist interview why these people put these in. And as an example, the theme eye, which is over

here, generally speaking, the law group put their pictures on eye because it alerted them; they were suspicious. The science people put their pictures on eye because they wanted to see what wasn't there. And the art group put their pictures on eye because it was a way to their mind. And that was so interesting, because they could've used hand. But the artists used the eye. Now, what I did was I did these—I'm looking for the—there was—Here. I had these printed out—do you want to just hold this?—this put into the machine at Berkeley, and had the CalComp printer print these. And then I gave them to the people who participated. So that was the process. First drawing them, and then printing them out on this paper, and coloring them in, and then just doing them on velum. So you could see very clearly the difference. But we have, let's see, law is over there, and science is—So that was the process. Let's see. {inaudible} I guess—[pause] So that was an interactive installation. I'm just thinking, I don't have—Oh, yeah. So I guess that—To end with the—Oh. Back to science. I put the objects on the periodic table.

Cohn: This is another phase of *Objects On My Dresser*.

05:00:14:45

Rapoport: And actually—Well, anyway. I have several versions of it. These are the cards that were put in. And these are the—The first two letters of the object went into where—displaced the first two letters of the elements. And to end up the objects, this is *Back to Nature*.

Cohn: This is yet another phase. It's, like, phase seven.

05:00:15:32

Rapoport: And there's my plot, with the objects. I recycled each object back to nature, with a photograph taken by a Sierra Club photographer, and used a plot that was relevant. And then this is the ending of it, how everything was resolved. These were objects, glass knobs on my dresser; this, I felt, was related to this photograph; and that was the net web. This is a revolving sort of thread holder—I don't know, it goes around with spools of thread on top. I related it

to that. And this was something from my biorhythm chart. These were my dancing—what do you call those? Cymbals. My dresser. This is the correlative object, and this is the object in the photograph. This is how I said goodbye. This was the flower that related—Yeah, I had this plastic flower. I don't know why I kept these things. This was the correlative object, and that was the image. And this was a metal box I got in Germany, I thought was so beautiful, related—the correlative object was the casket; at that time, my mother was dying. And this is the image. And there we go. Remember this? In the chelate of the overlapping. I have—going through the object and—So here we are. And this is the end. So anyway, that was—

Cohn: I have a question related to this. Well, kind of. That when you talked about the science group, it was your interest in that being related to what couldn't be seen. It seems like there's a connection back to, actually, the earlier work.

05:00:18:21

Rapoport: Oh, where I hid the lettering. The first one on the printouts, the found printouts, where I was writing all these stories from this alphabet template, where you couldn't really read. I was hiding what the story was—I finally have—I mean, I'm not hiding so much anymore.

Cohn: But I wonder if that relates back somehow to your experience, actually, as a student. You know, sort of the masking, and then the later unmasking of who you were, sort of.

05:00:19:05

Rapoport: You mean—

Cohn: There's a connection to that.]

05:00:19:08

Rapoport: Masking when I was an art student? I was pretty open about my frustrations—I'll have to think about that. You can give me the answer, maybe. But—

Cohn: I guess because you moved away from what you responded to, but moved away formally from what you were being taught there.

05:00:19:40

Rapoport: While I was there, I—Well, you saw the work. It was pretty conformist to what they wanted. Wouldn't you say? You had done the same.

Cándida Smith: You were a good student, yes.

05:00:20:01

Rapoport: But I irritated them. I was always fighting. Fighting for my rights. Fighting that system. I guess—They weren't compassionate about people challenging them. I guess they did me well, in the long run.

Cándida Smith: Have you ever taught, yourself, in classes?

05:00:20:33

Rapoport: No, I've given seminars.

Cándida Smith: You give seminars and that.

05:00:20:36

Rapoport: But just think if I—just in my seventies, I was offered two positions at San Francisco State. That's when everybody retired. I was offered a position at College of Arts and Crafts. I never would even think of teaching. I couldn't. Raising three kids, and being a chemistry wife, when would I have time to do my work.

Cándida Smith: And then I'm also thinking what the effect is upon one's creative process of having, then, to present it in some kind of schematic form to students year after year after year.

05:00:21:26

Rapoport: Well, it would be pretty stultifying. I presented my—Over there, the—Oh, I presented the work for the Table of Isotopes division of LBL, the mercury, a

long seminar at the Art Institute, on the printouts and the alchemy. They were so non-receptive.

Cohn: And what year was this, do you remember?

05:00:22:03

Rapoport: What?

Cohn: Do you remember when?

05:00:22:08

Rapoport: Well, it must've been the end of the seventies. The students just couldn't see it at all. They couldn't understand what I was getting at. They would—some of them were very well acquainted with alchemy, very mystical. And they challenged some of the pictures. Then I've given several seminars at College of Arts and Crafts. They were more receptive. But I'm against art schools for the mind, for people who want to use their mind. But art schools are changing.

05:00:23:24

[interruption]

Cohn: It's actually interesting, because you were doing work that was really simpatico with the vanguard of the day. You know, you were working as a conceptual artist, you know, in the time that that was happening, only you didn't know it. Which is kind of interesting. I wonder if it was related to the very formalist approach that, you know, UC Berkeley had. I'm making a projection about the formalist approach, based on what I know of your training; but also because I actually was going to Berkeley in the seventies, I know how art history was taught. But anyway, you went to school before that, but kind of interesting, just about the influences. But what I wanted to—I was interested to just have you talk a little more about that idea that you used the university as a playground. You know, the materials that were there. Or you took full advantage of it. And maybe you could speak about that, relative to your experience at the university there.

05:00:24:38

Rapoport: Well, when I was a student, I didn't really branch out to different disciplines. Then, you know, while the kids—When I got my degree I was pregnant, I had my first child, and three children in three years, so—But right after that, I *did* just love being a part of the university as much as I could. I joined the {section club?}. Professors' wives could join that. I purposely cultivated—Well, I belonged to the book club, and cultivated women whose husbands were from different areas. Different disciplines. I guess that was sort of divisive of me. But I just savored just being with people who could talk about things. And that I could use. I mean for my artwork. But I've already mentioned that an example was George DeVos. We became good friends, but—it was the wife Winifred that collaborated with me. She was the one that gave me the idea of—well, I mean, the experience of interactive, of interview. And all my pieces have an audio component, an interactive audio component. I feel that that's very essential. They have all—they're all mixed with the computer and the visual, the projection of slides. Yes.

I'm trying to think of other people. But my life was the university life, and just absorbing as much as I could. I met this Frank Whitfield, who was in the Russian department; I met Czeslaw Milosz, the poet laureate, through Frank.

Cándida Smith: Oh, Czeslaw Milosz?

05:00:27:19

Rapoport: Yes. I mean, I just met so many Nobel Prize people. One of them painted on my picture. That was a chemist from England. But I also—point is that I traveled around the world a lot, because my husband was involved in synthesizing indigenous plants. And whatever worked for them—It all comes from indigenous medicine. And we would go to that country, and he would consult, and use some of the work in his laboratory. So I became well acquainted with many different people from different cultures. And the work has always been cross-cultural. So there're all those dimensions that I absorbed.

Cohn: It seems that the university, as much as the art department. The art department was a microcosm—

05:00:28:37

Rapoport: Well, I was restricted in movement, being a student and then a mother, and—

Cohn: But that you still had that relationship to the university, intertwined with your experience.

05:00:28:49

Rapoport: Oh, without that, you wouldn't have seen any—It's amazing how the scientists—there were the different groups; my son was at Stanford at the time, and his pharmacology group participated in my husband's organic chemistry post-docs and docs—how the scientists were so receptive for my “objects” interactive piece for scientists. So, I really wanted to talk about my *Shoe Field* installation quickly.

Cohn: I think we should , because that was in the gallery, at one point.]

05:00:29:28

[interruption]

Cándida Smith: So you wanted to talk about *Shoe Field* and—

05:00:31:30

Rapoport: Well, another interactive installation—that involved the computer and—
Again, we're using an example of what I call a relevant printout, and Dorothy Washburn, the anthropologist who did her classification of patterns on pottery, which eventually were used to trace the tribe residences throughout the country. And this is an example of her printout and how I interpreted it with the commas that she used as a code. And these commas represented particular patterns, over here. And here is the shoe effigy that I found in the literature amidst all these shards. And here are the sandal examples. This is an extensive series. Then I investigated my own shoes. And where did I get them? Why did I buy them? I repeated this process with other people and their shoes. Now, as

I said, I was quantifying the qualitative information that the participants were giving to me about their shoes. And they were each, according to their information, they were given the two numbers; their entrance in lie to the exhibit, to the field, to the space; and their charge value. And the two numbers were put into an electric field theory program.

These are the individual charges that represent people's answers to their shoes. The information, the two numbers, were put into an electric theory field program. And this is the plot that came from it. And the colors of these charges are indicated on this small plot. Now, these charges, these configurations are a result of the interaction of seventy-six people. This was blown up to this seventeen-foot plot. Seventeen feet in length. And each person's shoes is represented by a tilde. There are seventy-six people here. And each one has a number, their entrance number into the exhibit. And these are the shoes that they wore placed on that particular number. Now, the next stage was putting this into an interactive installation, where people came, they—I'm looking for the shoehorn.

Well, they were given a shoehorn with a number—I had it here. Well, anyway, a shoehorn, and a number was on it to identify the pair of shoes that they took off, and answered questions to a computer. And then there was a whole floor of these, which are individual charges (plot designs). So they took off their shoes and put their shoes on the charge plot that they got from the computer, after answering the questions. Well, there was lots of things to do there. I think the final thing was that they went, without their shoes on, they went to a slide show of these shoes from the original "S HOE-IN," (first participation performance, 1982) and chose which shoe they would like to interact with, and went back to the computer and got a new plot with a shoe psyche reading of the shoe that they had decided they would like to interact with. Anyway, it was a very big, involved interactive installation. I think the significant thing in this installation was that the people were responsible for changing the work of art. There are many different ways of looking at

interactivity. The simplest one is just standing and looking at a painting. But they were responsible. By what they said, and where they stood in line here, they were responsible for making this plot. And so that was something that was very special in the computer community.

Cándida Smith: What are your criteria for deciding when you accept what the computer provides you, and when do you alter it, when do you work with it? Does that question make sense?

05:00:38:32

Rapoport: Well, you're not talking to a programmer. At this point, when I'm working with sophisticated computer programs, I have to tell the person who is programming what is acceptable to me. But first, I have to lay out the plan. So it isn't a question, to me, of what's acceptable, what's not acceptable—

Cándida Smith: But when does it fit your artistic vision? Maybe that's the question.

05:00:39:15

Rapoport: Oh, you make it. You make it. In other words, the computer doesn't come back and talk to you. First, you tell the programmer, "I want you—" Well, as an example, in my last piece, *Kabbalah Kabul*, I wanted the description—it's a narrative description—I wanted the description to be spoken. This is material terms, not conceptual. So how were we going to have the computer read this narrative? I wanted it read aloud. Because it was important to me that it came right through to the participant. So first, I had to have someone read it out loud. And then we put it—How was this going to show up under the image? So the discussion was, we put a light around it, and then you click twice on it. I mean, this is just regular technology. But it is a decision of how we're going to let the viewer know that there is a live audio component there.

And the important thing is, the viewer should be familiar with the little hand that shows up. And when the hand shows up, that means click. But computers don't work on their own and tell you. But this is a question of technological sufficiency and, you know, sophisticated—But that's the difficulty with

somebody who is not a computer technologist. It takes so many people to make a piece now. And you have to—I would have to plan what my expectancy would be. So that's a long conversation. And the computer person would say, "We could do it this way." You know, interestingly enough, I looked at my site the other day. And the very early ones just come down in a scroll, vertically or horizontally. And the last ones are very complicated. I really like the early.

I like the early, simple ones. Of course, the computer whizzes, they like the new ones that go into all this kind of technical gymnastics—like a net web of all kinds of components. You go back, you go this, you go that, it does this. But anyway, I've answered your question.

Cohn: One thing that I would want to just put in here is, you did work with a more responsive relationship with the computer, for instance, when you did this, because you were having the computer analyze the information, as opposed to tell you what to do.

05:00:42:51

Rapoport: That is when I used database programs and the graphics became the art work as well as told me something. Oh, well, this is what they call programs. This is an electric field program. This has to do with magnetism, magnetic fields. And what—This is what is used in electric field theory. And any engineer would understand. For instance, we have right here, here's the tilde. And this represents this pair of shoes. This person was a rather interactive person, because the program, the field program describes all these characters together around the tilde. So this engineering program was, if you got up, well, let's say—This was a very interactive person. But when you see here, well, where there are not many character around that boot over there. Let's see, the one, two, three, four up. You'll notice there's space around that tilde. See, each tilde is the shoe person. Oh, over there! There's no picture. See that space over there, where there's no picture, and there's a tilde right in the center of emptiness? That person was so non-interactive. He had such a low score, a

low charge. He didn't even want his picture taken. And his lack of interactiveness, his lack of social responsibility is indicated by the space around him, rather than having characters close up. But also, the type of characters that the computer chose—now, when I say the computer chose, I mean whoever made this electric theory program—chose the characters that meant higher interactivity or low interactivity. And apparently, the characters of the percentage sign and the number sign—do you see those around the empty?—are very different from, let's say, here, with the capital letters. So I have documented which characters were very low on the scale, which characters were high on the scale. But that has to do with the engineering program.

And that the computer was given two numbers, the charge—that a quantitative evaluation of qualitative questions: Did they like their shoes? Did they like the stand their shoes were on, the velvet cushion and so forth? One number was qualitative information reduced to one number. The other number was their entrance into the site, into the space. So we could locate them. I knew with those pictures that that was number seventy-six, and that he was the last one—it was a she, I think—the last one who came into the interactive site. So this was really early. I think this was done in '82.

This was very early. So the computer was always a tool for expressing a concept. It was never used to make a picture or—Randomly, I did play around. But there I was, in my systems that I didn't want. I wanted to control. I didn't want a random result, which—I guess for fortune telling and so forth. I did. That's right. I did—when I had books, and people played the computer for their shoe psyche reading—then I think I gave a choice. Oh, when Rabindranath Tagore gave his philosophy of life, according to how the people structured a poem on my—one of my pieces, *Digital Mudra*, there was a randomness as to one or two or three philosophies that Tagore would come out with. But I know that was a very big thing, that random computer play.

Cándida Smith: I think this is a nice place to end. It's a very nice example of how you've integrated different things—shall I use that terrible word?—"influences" into your work.

05:00:48:40

Rapoport: That's okay. I know, I found out a couple people I liked. They were language artists. Who's that one I—

Cohn: Joseph Kosuth.

05:00:48:59

Rapoport: Joseph Kosuth. Another one—I can't even remember, it was so long ago. Victor Burgin. These were language artists that I liked to read about and—As far as anything else—I don't know. But I think when you're an artist working with oil paint, you're isolated. You're alienated, you're working alone. I was alone. You know, computer people grow up and out now, everything is a big group. They're working with a designer, they're working with a conceptual artist. I'm still a cottage industry person. So I can't say—Well, I wish I were working, had been working with a group, it would've been more fun. So I guess—

Cándida Smith: That's it.

[End of Interview]